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GIVING MORE BLESSED THAN RECEIVING.

ACTS 20:35. *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

WHEN Paul uttered these words, his heart was full of sorrow. On his way to Jerusalem, he had sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus, that he might have the pleasure, and that they might have the improvement, of a parting interview. When they had come together, he faithfully warns them of the dangers to which as a church they were exposed. He commends them to God and the word of his grace. He reminds them that he had labored with his own hands, while with them, for his own subsistence, and for that of those that were with him. To convince them that he sought not their gold nor silver, but that he sought themselves; though he was justly entitled to the means of life and comfort, as the reward of his labors for their souls; he gives them an example of generosity and self-denial which he enjoins that they imitate. He then enforces the duty with the words of Christ: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The devotion, the purity, and sincerity of affection, with which this parting scene was marked, is worthy of universal admiration. He had told them, that "the Holy Ghost had borne him witness in every city that bonds and imprisonment awaited him." He had told them "that they would see his face no more." His heart was full of desire for their future welfare. On bended knees he pours out his soul before God on their behalf. "He kneeled down and prayed for them all." Their hearts gave full vent to sorrow. "They fell upon his neck and kissed him." How melancholy and affecting was the sentiment, "ye shall see my face no more." How could they bear the thought? Shall we never again see that face, on which all the anxieties of thy soul for our salvation were so strongly, and so faithfully represented? Shall we see that face no more, over which the tear of compassion so often flowed, while thy lips pronounced those solemn warnings by which we have been excited to escape from hell and sin? Shall we never again be blessed with beholding that brow expanded with the heavenly joy which thy heart felt, when our souls were brought from

sin to God? See the face of him no more, who was our light and our guide on our way to heaven? Solemn and affecting was the occasion! If ever words were spoken with honest seriousness by mortal man, these words were so spoken: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

To inculcate with success, this sentiment on minds of a certain description, I am well aware, is a vain pretension. Arguments, opposed to dispositions and habits long cherished and indulged, are thrown back upon their author, with all that violence of contempt which is due to an invader of rights and property. Persuasion, too, which seldom fails of success, with hearts where sensibility remains, or where humanity, through exorbitancy of passion, has not been converted into mere ferocity of temper, falls on them as unimpressive, as musical sounds on the deaf Calypso and her nymphs. The love of gain, their darling passion, is all their soul. They cannot be perceived to possess a different quality. Shrivelled and contracted, their minds perform their revolutions in an egg shell. But I trust, I do not address an audience, who never knew the pleasure of a generous action. I address those who know how to be charitable, and liberal, and kind; who have felt so much of human misery, as to take a share in another's wo. I address Christians, whose Master has taught them to feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked. They have heard and admired the benignity of Jesus in preaching the gospel to the poor. They need not be told, that Christians possessing the ability, are bound as instruments of Providence to perpetuate the blessing. In yonder cottage, you discern a little group; dark in visage through exposure to a burning sun; coarse their fare, and coarse their manners. Their chair and their table the rude earth. If not naked, they are covered with rags. The rude winter, regardless of their defenceless condition, assails them with unmitigated fury; half petrified with cold they cling to each other around their little ill-warmed hearth. Are they unimportant beings? Look within them! There lives a soul capable, through grace, of enjoying heaven! There dwells a spirit liable to the burning of eternal fire. Turn your eyes to the wilderness—consider the condition of the untaught savage. He reads indeed of God; but it is upon the surface of the cloud gathering storm! He sees of God; but it is in the glare of the lightning and the ruin of the storm! He hears of God; but it is in the roar of the thunder and the tempest's crash! The broad pages of the books of creation and providence, show no where written upon them the blessed name—Jesus Savior. The still, small voice that invites the lost and wandering home to heaven, the poor heathen has never heard. He has never breathed in the fragrant atmosphere; where are the pastures on which the Savior feeds his flock. Surely to give for their relief is more blessed than to receive.

The principle which my text embraces is materially the same with that which has been extolled in every age. It is this that inspires the patriot's breast, when he offers on the altar of public good his farm and his well-earned wealth; his home, and the companions of his youth; his wife, and the domestic circle; the faint, though only traits of an earthly

paradise, which have escaped the ruins of the fall. 'Tis this that inspires the Christian when he forsakes all, takes up his cross, and follows Christ. It is this that inspires you, when you give of the fruit of your labor to procure the means of salvation to the destitute.

Receiving, in the common use of the word, is the acceptance of the mere debt of sheer justice from the cold fingers that cannot help it; since he that gives, gives because he cannot withhold. And receiving in this case proceeds or can proceed by compulsory process. There is not a passion which a virtuous bosom would desire to cultivate, which moves on the occasion. The miser indeed may grin his smile over the glittering metal, as he lays it in his coffer for a long repose; but his very smile is a painting of the shrivelled soul that impels it. If this be blessedness, it is a blessedness which no heart governed by the laws of religion, or warmed with the love of Jesus, either desires or envies.

The receiving, of which my text speaks, is of an opposite description. It is receiving from the hand of charity what she freely gives. Receiving in this view of it, is connected with circumstances of a mortifying kind. It is the receipt of the pittance that allays the cravings of hunger, and resuscitates strength, declining through lack of food. Or it is the acceptance of warm clothing in exchange for rags, that they may be defended from piercing, pinching cold. How mortifying the abject condition which this indicates! How humiliating to hang upon the charities of men, whose tender mercies are so often cruel. How painful and depressing the thought, that when nature's demands are renewed, and hunger and cold again press, they may not find another benefactor; and that the present bounty may be but the suspension of woe. The gratitude which the needy express, by their words and smiles, will indeed bless the generous giver; and the gift received will serve as a cordial to drooping, fainting nature; but the poor man's condition undergoes no change; he still is poor! he still is dependent. To whatever the insolent, the haughty, and unfeeling may please to subject him, he must submit. He possesses neither the means of resistance nor escape. Besides this, the poor, who are the receivers in this case, are doomed to the common calamities of life, heightened and embittered by their destitute and unprotected condition. Humanity would seem to dictate, that poverty alone is a burden sufficient for man to bear. But no! The poor must feel disease; they must suffer, agonize, and die. Their scanty means will not furnish them cordials, nor healing balms, nor medical assistance. If there be a friend to sympathize and mourn, he is the companion of their poverty, who has no tribute, but tears to give. How distressing! how heart killing, a condition of this kind! If some heart seasoned with grace, and expanded with that noble generosity, which a saving relation to the infinite Benefactor inspires, should stretch forth to them the bounty which their case demands; behold, what blushes a sense of their low estate spreads upon their meagre countenances! Gratitude and mortification are mingled in their souls; and while they rejoice in the gift and bless the giver, their hearts bleed anguish. Contrast this with

the state of a generous giver, and answer me? Is "it not more blessed to give than to receive?"

Again: giving is a voluntary deed, and of course is pleasing. The motives to our choice are derived from the objects of beneficence. Poverty can make no demands on the principle of civil right or claim. The addresses which she makes are to humanity, where religion has not induced the pliant feelings of Christian charity. Nor are her addresses, to the honor of human nature be it spoken, in this case even in vain. The melancholy picture, which the lower grades of human wretchedness presents, often melts the human heart to tenderness and pity, when supported by resolution to the contrary. Importunity arising from necessity, has overcome hearts steeled with crime. The unjust judge and the importunate widow afford a case in point. The history of human miseries and human charities, presents many cases, in which the Author and Ruler of providence, has caused the wrath of man to praise him by prompting the wicked to help the needy.

Poverty, to the heart warmed with charity, tells the tale of wo, and sounds and enforces her plea upon the authority and example of the infinitely benign Giver. She asks for God's sake; and the righteousness of her claim cannot but be admitted. Or what is still more grateful; charity anticipates the call, and the wonted supplies are provided and conferred before they are asked for. Charity makes misery from whatever quarter it comes, her own; and with all the relief which she administers to others, procures relief. The comforts which she affords to others, bring her joy. Charity thou hast come down from heaven! Thou art, in the human bosom, the brightest feature of him who is love! If a trace of earthly origin appears upon thy blessed face, it is the shade which distinguishes finity from infinite. Charity put on thy beauty; expand every bosom, and thou wilt convert this exterior dungeon of hell, into the outer court of heaven; and thy breath shall fill this vale of tears within, with the fragrance of paradise.

Again: "It is better to give than to receive;" for giving improves the mind of the giver in the graces and virtues of godliness. What is there in man more amiable than the strong feeling of compassion for the unhappy; for the exposed to danger and misfortune! Can any thing else so clearly indicate a just sense of our own exposure to like evils, of our deserving them, or of God's goodness in preventing them. It is a sense of these things that begets and heightens that ingenuous sensibility which "mourns with them that mourn, and rejoices with them that rejoice." From this sympathy for the suffering, all our motives to charitable deeds arise; and while we yield to the impulse and give, we cherish and improve the virtue that prompts them. What will be more likely to mould our souls into the resemblance of him, "who maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and who sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust," than the liberality which my text inculcates. The soul inclined to relieve the miserable, surely possesses something of that mind that was in him, who while he might have laid upon us a heavy hand of vengeance, freely forgives our crimes, and raises us to a felicity as full and perfect as though we had

never offended. How godlike is it, to wipe away the falling tear! to stretch out the hand that sustains and relieves declining nature! and to shed the light of salvation upon those surrounded with the thickening shades of eternal death. To cultivate this divine generosity, is to employ the best means of preventing the world and the things of it, from rising into competition with God and the things of heaven. It attempts the soul to a love of the world proportioned to the good which is to be derived from enjoying it. The Lord too delights in a liberal giver. He will bless him in his basket and his store. "His barrel of meal shall not waste, nor his cruse of oil fail." In this life he shall receive an hundred fold, and in the world to come life everlasting. Is it not more blessed to give than to receive?

Did the pleasure of giving only exist during the short period of the performance of the generous action, the transitory nature of the enjoyment might be employed as an argument against it. But be assured this is far, very far from true. Reflection bringing the whole lovely scene in review before the mind, will at pleasure produce a repetition of the enjoyment. By this, the gloom of many a tedious hour in life will be dispelled. This will steal from the grasp of sorrow many a feeling of the heart, which otherwise it would most successfully wound. Take as a case in point the pious Job, properly called the afflicted. While he compares his former prosperous, with his present afflicted condition, his soul rises in triumph above his sorrow. The recollection of his prosperity, and of the overflowing of a generous and noble spirit robs his disease of more than half its bitterness. "O that I were as in months past; . . . when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me; when I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil; when I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street: the young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." Let us, dear friends, imitate this noble example of generous beneficence; and our deeds of charity will gather around us in our distressful moments, and sustain and comfort us.

Christians look towards yonder wilderness. Extend your thoughts beyond your cultivated fields and polished cities. Forget for a while the order and tranquillity of civil life, adorned and enriched with the spirit and prospects of true religion, and contemplate the inhabitants of the wilderness. What multitudes! Erect in form; marked with symmetry of proportion; of mien and majesty common and proper to man. Though thus adorned, and partaking of a rational and immortal spirit; yet they differ from the beasts of prey that prowl around them only in the possession of souls exposed to eternal wretchedness; and without

hope. Their utmost effort to construct the bow, to render the arrow obedient to the string, to direct its deadly flight, and to feed upon the victim of their art. His road to preferment is the murder of his species. Unconscious of the danger of eternal misery, and uninspired with the hope of immortality, unless an immortality to be spent in savage cruelty or brutal pleasure, he hastens to the brink of perdition endless, and falls to rise no more. Look again and behold the glory of our species the brightest piece of nature's work, in Christian places the help-meet of man, the tender female, subjected to the most cruel slavery by the man whose alliance to her implies favor and protection. Driven from the delicacy of her sex, she toils and labors for her husband. Scorched with a burning sun: shrivelled and exhausted she reaches eternity unheard of, unknown, where there is no rest for her day nor night: "For there their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." What a moral wilderness. There, nothing but the wrath of heaven revealed upon sinful polluted man, is seen. And are there means provided for turning this wilderness into a fruitful field? this desert into a blooming garden? Is there a hand that can be shown them that can change the lion into a lamb? Is there a course that can be pointed out, by which they may escape from hell and go to heaven? Who that feels as man should feel? who that thinks as man should think? who that hopes as Christians hope, will not give? And who that gives with the hope of saving souls so lost, so ruined, will not give vent to the good feelings of their hearts in exclaiming: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Christians fear not to give: you have present rewards, but how glorious those that are future? With what splendid crowns will your heads be adorned, who shall take your place in the heavenly kingdom with heathen by your side, who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb by means of your charities. Again I say, hold not your hands, stay not your liberalities, until the eternal Son shall obtain the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. Amen.