

The Forgotten Beatitude

ACTS 20:32-35 • PART 2

**Baxter T. Exum (#1619)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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It is good to be together this morning! After we study the Bible today, John/Aaron will be leading us in the prayers for the Lord's Supper, so I hope you have the elements for the Supper from the table in the entryway. Then, following the Lord's Supper, Michael/Caleb will be leading us in three songs before we dismiss [for class]. And if you are visiting with us today, we hope you will fill out a visitor card, online if you can, by following the QR code on the wall up here; it's also on the bulletin board and on the front of the bulletin. We would love to hear from you in that way so that we can follow up and so that we can have a record of your visit. Please also note that we have changed the wi-fi password here at church to make it easier for guests to connect. We've changed it to "followjesus" (all one word, with no spaces), and we have put this on the front of the bulletin. So, if you are unable to connect this morning, that might be the reason. You might need to update that.

We also have a note here from Bill and Norma Jean, "Four Lakes Church of Christ family: Thank you for all your prayers and words of encouragement. The money given to us is being saved to pay for things the future holds. We continue to allow God to guide us on the journey that He has chosen for us. Hospice continues to come to our house once a week to ensure Carson's comfort. We are greatly appreciative to belong to such a caring and supportive Christian family. In Christian love, Bill, Norma Jean, and Carson."

As we get started, we'd like to give the reminder that we are once again collecting commodities for Shults-Lewis Child & Family Services down in Valparaiso, Indiana. Shults-Lewis is a residential treatment facility for struggling teens and their families. We have done this many years, and this year they are asking us to collect canned soup. We also continue to collect old cell phones, used toner and inkjet cartridges, and we are also collecting funds for their "perishables" (milk, and meat, and so on). If you get a check to me (written out to Shults-Lewis), I will be glad to pass that along when someone from Shults-Lewis stops by during the week of December 5. If you can bring soup, that can be placed on the table up here.

Before we get to our text for today, we do want to make sure we invite you to obey the gospel if you have not done so already. We have sinned, but in his great love and mercy, God made a way for us to come back. He sent his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. In response, we believe the message, we turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Son of God, and we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism.

And once again, we have an example this morning. This one comes to us from the Lord's church down in Buford, Georgia. They posted a few days ago, starting with a quote from Acts 2:38-39, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.'" They go on to say, "Last night, Yoon-Jung Hong was baptized into Christ for the remission of her sins! She has been a student in our ESL class for the past 6 months, and last night during Bible study she wanted to obey the Gospel! Minku Chang, our Korean Minister, is effectively planting and watering and God is giving the increase! Praise the Lord; another soul has been saved!" That is awesome news! I had no idea we had a Korean congregation in Georgia! But, if you are here today or are joining us online, and if you have not yet obeyed the gospel as Yoon-Jung has, we would invite you to investigate and to study and to take that step yourself. Please let me know if we can help in any way.

This morning, I'd like for us to continue our study of what has sometimes been described as "the Forgotten Beatitude" (in Acts 20). We just briefly looked at this on a Wednesday evening a few weeks ago, as we've been making our way through the book of Acts. And when we came to this verse, I said I'd like to look at it in greater detail in sermon form at some point in the future. So, as I said last week, the future is now!

As most of us know, a "beatitude" is a statement of blessing, and we have a number of beatitudes in the Bible – in the Old and in the New – we have a blessing in Psalm 1, and in the New Testament we have the eight beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew 5), as well as seven more scattered throughout the book of Revelation. Most of these are at least somewhat familiar to us, but we do have one that is often overlooked, and it is found in Acts 20.

Just to bring us up to speed a bit – some of you may be here for the first time, and for the rest of us it has been a long week – but by way of review, Paul is on his Third Missionary Journey. He spends three years in Ephesus, but then he keeps going, traveling through Greece to pick up famine relief to take back to Jerusalem, and on his way back, he stops at the port city of Miletus, and as he is there, he calls for the elders from the church in Ephesus, to come meet him on the beach. He encourages these men to stay strong as they shepherd the church of God, and then toward the end of this passage, he reminisces for a bit as he gives some encouragement based on the time he spent in Ephesus.

This brings us back to Acts 20:32-35. We have Paul and his traveling companions, standing together on the beach, and he closes his comments with these words in Acts 20:32-35,

³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

As we look at that last statement, we find that it is a beatitude from the Lord himself (we have the words of Christ in red in this passage), with Jesus saying, ***"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*** And, as we learned last week, the context tells us that Paul is referring specifically to helping those who are weak (in verse 35). So, this isn't primarily about the weekly collection, this isn't about raising money for the building fund, or anything like that, but this is primarily about working hard so that we will be able to have the blessing of helping those

who are in need for some reason. This is something Paul demonstrated (in verse 35), ***"In everything I SHOWED you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak."*** Paul has demonstrated this.

Last week, I said we would be looking at two big ideas, and last Sunday we thought about the first big idea, that there is some blessing that comes along with RECEIVING. If it is MORE blessed to give than to receive, we noted that there must be some blessing in receiving. Jesus is not saying that it is good to give and bad to receive, but he is making more of a comparison than a contrast. So, there is some blessing in receiving. And as we noted last week, most of us appreciate being on the receiving end of a thoughtful gift. And not only that, but even with more serious help, there is a blessing in having friends, and family, and our Christian family who are willing to help us through difficult times. And the practical application last week was this: Generally speaking, if somebody offers to help us in some way, let's allow them to have the greater blessing of giving! If somebody wants to drop off a lasagna, let them drop off the lasagna! By being on the receiving end, we are allowing them to do what the Lord has commanded them to do. We cannot give if some are not willing to receive. So, there is a blessing in receiving.

II. **Well, this leads us to our second big idea in Acts 20:35, the reminder from Jesus that it truly is MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.**

Again, it's not that giving is good and receiving is bad, but as we pictured it last week, we could almost see this as being on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being sad and 10 being completely happy. Giving is a 10, and receiving might be a 7 or an 8 or even a 9. In terms of happiness, in terms of being blessed, receiving is good, but today we focus in on the fact that giving is even ***"more"*** of a blessing.

And we know this, don't we? We know this from personal experience. We feel good when we give to another person. When we give a can of soup to a child who would otherwise be hungry, we feel good about that! Giving has a way of bringing us a sense of happiness. So, we know this from experience, but we also know this based on what the word of God says elsewhere. Even God loves a cheerful giver. There is cheer in giving (at least there can be, if we are doing it correctly). We think of what Paul will go on to write in 2 Corinthians 9:7, ***"Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*** By the way, the Greek word Paul uses for "cheerful" in this passage is the basis for our English word "hilarious." In a sense, then, I suppose we could say that God loves a "hilarious giver." The point is: Giving has a way of bringing us joy. There is a blessing in giving, and it is, in fact, as Jesus says, ***"more blessed to give than to receive."***

For the next few moments, then, I'd like for us to notice some reasons why this is true, and then we will close with some practical applications of what the Lord says here. Before we get there, though, let's ask ourselves "Why?" Based on the word of God, why is it more blessed to give than to receive. I would suggest four reasons:

A. **First of all, it's more blessed to give than to receive, because if we are on the giving end of this equation, this means that we MUST HAVE RESOURCES TO SHARE.**

If I give you something, it must mean that I have something to give! This doesn't mean that we have to be wealthy before we can give, but to be in a position to give, we must have something that the other person needs. And yes, it might be a million dollars, but it might be something as simple as a meal. I think back to earlier in my life, and some of the greatest blessings that I have been given have been the most simple. I remember being invited into someone's home for a meal, and we were served a frozen pizza. Thankfully, it wasn't still

frozen when we ate it, but it was one of those \$3 or \$4 pizzas from the grocery store. It was probably all this young couple could afford, but they gave what they were able to give.

Or it might be something very practical. I think back to only having one car and walking to the church building down in Janesville every day. As I have mentioned before, one day my wife called me from the back of an ambulance. She was visiting one of the senior saints down there, and on her way home she was t-boned in an intersection, totaling our van in the process. We were expecting at the time. I said, "I will meet you at that intersection" (on the other side of town). She knew I had walked to work that day and had no way of getting there. But what she didn't know is that one of our members had just happened to stop by at that moment to make some copies to prepare for a Bible class. He gave me a ride to the scene of the accident. I show up, our van is on its side, and this Christian brother hands me the keys to his van, tells me to keep it as long as we need it, and then he walks away. I still have no idea how he got home that day. But we kept his van for a week or so, until we were able to get a new car. Now, in terms of a financial sacrifice, his gift wasn't huge, was it? Was it practical? Absolutely! My point in sharing this is to emphasize that this man gave what he had to give. He had a van. That van was a blessing.

Or, what we have to give might be an act of service, a call of encouragement, a note, a compliment – any number of things. If we give, it means that we must have something to give, and this is a blessing (to have resources). So, let's turn this around a bit. Do I have resources? Do you have resources? If so, then you have the ability to be blessed by giving. If you have a car, if you have a \$3 frozen pizza, if you have a home, if you have a phone, if you have a bank account, if you have the ability to bake cookies, if you have the ability to knit, then you have the ability to give.

I know we just briefly touched on this passage last week, but I would take us back to a parallel passage Paul wrote a bit later to the same congregation, to the church in Ephesus. In Ephesians 4:28, Paul says, ***"He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."*** We have tried to remind our own children through the years: You do not need to work full-time with the Lord's church to be pleasing to God in this life; but instead, whatever you choose to do in this life, use your skills to be a blessing to the Lord and his people (the church). The purpose of having a job is to help others. And this is Paul's point in sharing the Lord's blessing here, ***"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*** One reason for this blessing is that if we are giving, it obviously means that we have something to give, and this has a way of bringing us joy in this life.

B. Secondly, I would also remind us that it is more blessed to give than to receive, because of everything the Bible teaches about the GOD'S LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING.

This basic concept is repeated over and over throughout scripture. From the beginning, God established the seed principle. In Genesis 1:11, on the third day, God said, ***"Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them"; and it was so.*** Plants were designed to multiply by producing seed, and those seeds produce more seeds, and so on.

This principle is then applied to the concept of giving. In Proverbs 3:9-10, for example, King Solomon says, ***"Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine."*** When we give, God's law of sowing and reaping says that God has a way of multiplying our blessings.

This is repeated as a general truth in life in Proverbs 11:24-25,

- ²⁴ *There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more,
And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want.*
²⁵ *The generous man will be prosperous,
And he who waters will himself be watered.*

As a general rule in life, those who scatter seed have a way of prospering. This doesn't always work, there are certainly exceptions to the rule, but generally speaking, those who plant will have a harvest.

Jesus continues this concept in the New Testament in Luke 6:38 where he says, ***"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."*** God's law of sowing and reaping: The more we sow, the more we reap.

Paul says something similar in 2 Corinthians 9:6 (right before the "hilarious giver" passage), ***"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."*** He continues with a promise in verses 10-12, ***"Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God."***

He repeats this again in Galatians 6:9-10, where he says, ***"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."*** The point of all of this is to say that one benefit of giving, one thing that makes giving a blessing is God's law of sowing and reaping. When we give, God has a way of blessing us in return.

As Solomon says in Proverbs 19:17, ***"One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed."*** The "he" in this passage refers to the Lord. When we are gracious to the poor, we are lending to the Lord, and the Lord has a way of blessing us for that.

C. I would suggest a third blessing to giving, and that is when we give, WE LAY UP FOR OURSELVES TREASURE IN HEAVEN.

As Jesus says in Matthew 6:19-21, ***"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*** Paul repeats the concept in 1 Timothy 6:17-19, ***"Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."*** There may be other ways of putting this, but when we give, we remind ourselves of what is truly important. When we give, we establish priorities. When we give, we train our hearts. Years ago, I heard a Christian man describe giving as "the process of separating ourselves from the world." And I love that! Someone

else once said that choosing to give is the antidote to the limits of materialism, “Generosity is to materialism what kryptonite is to Superman.” When we give, then, we are reminding ourselves that this spiritual thing is more important than this material thing, and we are separating ourselves from the world. Helping this person in need is more important than this \$20 in my wallet. I am making a trade. I am laying up for myself treasure in heaven. I am converting something physical into something spiritual, and I am reminding myself of what is truly important in this life. I am storing up treasure in heaven.

D. And then, finally, at least one more blessing to giving is that in giving WE BECOME LIKE GOD.

God is a giver. It is God’s nature to give, ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life”*** (John 3:16).

As Paul introduced God to the philosophers on the Areopagus in Athens, he said (in Acts 17:24-25), ***“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.”*** God has given us ***“life and breath and all things.”*** James agrees in James 1:17 when he says that, ***“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”*** But what about bad people? Yes, God gives good things to them as well. In Matthew 5:44-45, Jesus said, ***“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”*** When good things happen to us, sometimes people today will attribute blessings to karma or luck, but I learned growing up that there is no such thing as luck. We do, though, believe in blessings from God.

God is a giver, and when we give, we are following his example, we are becoming more and more like God. When we give to someone in need, we are allowing God to work through us, and we become more like him in the process.

Conclusion:

So, as the Lord says in this beatitude in Acts 20:35, ***“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*** There is a blessing in receiving (let’s not forget that), but today we’ve learned that there is an even greater blessing in giving. I would illustrate with the soup up here:

- First of all, when we give, it means that we have resources. When I bring a can of soup, I realize that I have soup to share. Some of you are bringing one at a time, some of you seem to be bringing cases, but as we share, we realize that we are able to share.
- Secondly, when we give we prove God’s law of sowing and reaping. When I set aside something in my budget to help those in need, I am trusting God to take care of me. When I purchase that can of soup for somebody other than myself, I am like the farmer who takes good grain and throws it on the earth, trusting God for something even better, trusting that I will not starve this week, but that God will take care of me and even bless me for that sacrifice.
- Thirdly, in a similar way, when we give we lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven. We are swapping Cream of Mushroom for something spiritual. We are taking this physical thing and by giving it to someone else we are making a statement that stuff (even food) is not the most important thing in our

lives right now. By giving, we are separating ourselves from this world, we are keeping our priorities straight.

- And then, finally, when we give we glorify and honor God by becoming more and more like him. By giving food, we are doing for others what God has done for us.

In this passage, Paul quotes Jesus to explain his own behavior in Ephesus. Paul worked with his hands to support the weak, because of what the Lord says here. It truly is more blessed to give than to receive. To me, the way this is worded, it almost comes across as a challenge, as an invitation. And we are invited into it. Jesus has made this bold statement, and the challenge is: Do it! Prove the Lord right with this. It almost comes across as something of a test. So, our challenge is to follow Paul's example. How, then, do we demonstrate this in our own lives? How do we live this out? Practically speaking, how do we make this happen?

As we close, I would give two very brief and practical suggestions:

First of all, if at all possible, let's do everything we can to arrange our finances with a buffer, giving us some freedom to help others as we can. The pressure is on for us to spend absolutely everything we make, and even beyond. As God's people, though, we don't need to participate in that! In terms of helping the poor, I'm thinking of the Old Law (in Leviticus 19:9-10), where God's people were told to leave some margins for those in need. In the Law, God said, ***"Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God."*** Do we see how that applies here? I'm not making some new law here, but if a family is bringing in \$100,000 every year, they probably shouldn't be spending \$100,000 every year, but maybe we could build in some room to share in the annual budget. Or maybe we could find some creative ways of doing this.

Several years ago, a friend in Tennessee posted online about how she started saving by setting aside every \$5 bill that passed through her hands. Whenever she got a \$5 bill in change somewhere, she would stuff it in an envelope. Several years ago, I tried that, and at the end of the year I had somewhere around \$700 in that envelope. This was basically change from Culver's and the hardware store through the year. It sat there for a bit, and then I realized: This envelope is an unexpected blessing; maybe I need to share it. I now refer to that envelope as the "doing good fund." I don't say this brag in any way, but by way of encouragement, just as Paul spoke of what he did in Ephesus. Instead of spending everything we make, let's find ways of giving ourselves a bit of room where we don't harvest right to the edge of the field, where we don't check the vine twice for grapes, but that we leave some room in our finances for those in need. By necessity, this means that we should probably take an inventory, that we think through what we have coming in, what we have going out, how much we are giving right now, and then we give ourselves some freedom, a buffer.

The second practical suggestion is that we say this out loud as often as we can this week. I've mentioned setting an alarm on our phones before. What if we set an alarm on our phones for 6 o'clock every morning and titled the alarm, ***"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*** Or maybe at noon, or 10 p.m., or whatever works for you. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the word of God is ***"living and active."*** But it's only living and active for us if we read it, if we allow it to change us. And that starts by reading it. This is what today's bulletin article is about, the importance of reading the word of God. We don't need to yell this on a street corner, we don't need to say this in front of a huge group of people, but what if we just say it? If we can work it into a conversation, great. But let's focus on us. The key is that we allow the word of God to take root and grow in our hearts, that

we truly understand from experience that what Jesus says here is true, that it really is ***“more blessed to give than to receive.”***

With this in mind, before we partake of the Lord’s Supper, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are a God who gives, and we are eternally thankful for the gift of your Son, for the gift of salvation. This week, we pray that we would have the courage and wisdom to follow your example, and the example set by Paul, to care for those who are weak, to provide for people in need. We look around us and understand we live in a world where many are having a hard time. We ask that you use us to help in any way we can.

Thank you, Father! Increase our faith. Bless Carson this morning. Be with him and with Bill and Norma Jean. We come to you this morning in the name of Jesus, who gave his life for us. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com