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TO GIVE FOR NOTHING IS TO WAIT FOR SOMETHING!

Today's text: 2 Kgs 4: 8-44

Extracts:

"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed, and a table and a stool and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; What is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. ... And the woman conceived and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her" [2 Kgs 4: 8-16a, 17]

When my wife made the first attempt to set up her own business, she applied for a retail shop in a Lagos business mall, which had a long queue of applicants. On receiving an allocation, she was required to pay in advance the annual lease of 2,000 Naira (then about two hundred US dollars) within a week. I had travelled abroad and the family account did not have that kind of money. She put the matter to God in prayer and went to work. There, her office assistant was waiting for her with anxiety in his eyes. He needed a loan of 100 Naira from my wife to pay for his son's final secondary schools exams, the entry for which would close that day. She only had 100 Naira in her pocket, out of which she had planned to buy lunch. She gladly gave him the money, even though she knew that he would not be able to pay back. So, because she had nothing left, she had to skip lunch that afternoon. But during the lunch break, she received a phone call from a close family friend that he would like to stop by to say hello. He came in and handed her an envelope saying, "I was in the bank nearby for something else. I can't explain it but I got a strong urge that you may need what is in this package for an urgent purpose." He rushed out soon after. When she opened the envelope, it contained exactly 2,000 Naira!

Many of you have experienced a similar thing. Many others are praying for a similar thing. Was it a coincidence or a miracle? How can we make it a regular feature in our lives? In today's lesson, we shall demonstrate that the key to receiving can be found in giving without expecting any reward or gratitude from human beings.

1. Why you must give

To give is to part with something to somebody else that needs or deserves it. It could be material, such as money or supplies. It could be non-material, such as time or advice. Some of us hate giving because they do not believe in it. The matter is not helped by some people who are perpetually on the receiving end. If you live in a culture where beggars aggressively ask for alms, your willingness to give could be seriously discouraged. Nevertheless, we have to give because we are hardly self-sufficient in *everything*. We are all in a long chain of givers and takers! Among so many reasons, we must give because of the following:

a) *God owns what we claim to have!*

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein” [Ps. 24: 1]. Therefore, whatever we have, whether material or natural talents, belong to God and we are only holding them in trust for Him.

b) *We have no control over our place of birth*

God did not consult any of us before we were born white, black or mixed. Some people were born into royalty or wealth while others found themselves in poor homes. We did not choose to be born male or female in Trinidad or Turkey, America or Africa, New Delhi or New Castle. God Himself determined everything long before we were conceived [Ps. 139: 15-16]. Therefore, who are we to look down on those who are less privileged than we are?

c) *Promotion comes from God*

Yes, with our own efforts, we can overcome our natural disadvantages, but “a man receives nothing except it be given him from heaven” [Jn 3: 27]. Only God can change our circumstances [Ps. 75: 6-7]. That is why the word of God has warned us not to claim, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.” Rather, we are always to remember that it is the Lord our God “that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant” [Deut. 8: 17-18]. Clearly, “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all” [Eccl. 9: 11].

d) *Whatever goes up must come down!*

If you are tired of giving, one day you will also be in need and others will be tired of giving you, “for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” [Gal. 6:7]. Giving is a major investment in our future well-being

because “there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than meet, but it tendeth to poverty” [Prov. 11:24]. Interestingly, the poorer people tend to hold savings accounts while the richer people use chequing [checking] accounts! In the former case, you keep depositing more than you withdraw. In the latter case, you keep issuing out cheques [checks], equivalent to giving away, and you may enjoy overdraft facilities!

2. What it means to give for nothing

It is not every giving that counts as giving for nothing. *The following will certainly not count as such:*

- When you part with something you don't need or has no value. There are clothes, shoes and handbags that you have not used for years or that you may never use again. So, when you give them to the needy, you are actually getting rid of things that are worthless to you in order to create space for your fresh acquisitions! Many pharmaceutical companies give drugs to the developing world under the guise of charity. However, if you examine them, the drugs are close to expired!
- When you give to those who can reciprocate. Look at the list of people to whom you send Christmas or seasonal gifts. The likelihood is that these are people who are also preparing packages for you! When you give to charity and claim tax credits for it, you have only made an investment!
- When you give at your convenience. Most of us will only give when they have surplus, that is, more than they need to spend. Whether it is money or time, most of us will not make thanks offerings or pay their vows or even go to church unless it is convenient for them. Clearly, only a few have surrendered all aspects of their lives to Christ.

To give for nothing is to expect no reward or even gratitude from man. Rather, whatever you do is for the Lord for “he that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again” [Prov. 19:17]. At the Last Judgment, when we shall ask Jesus Christ when it was that we saw Him hungry and fed Him, thirsty and we gave Him drink, naked and we clothed Him, or visited Him in prison or hospital, He will reply, “in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of My brethren, ye have done it unto Me” [Matt. 25: 35-40]. And what will such givers for nothing get in return? They are blessed of His Father, “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” [v. 34].

In deed, those who give for nothing have something to wait for! It takes great faith in God to be able to give for nothing. For example, “by faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son” [Heb. 11: 17]. Those who relate to God by faith are the

only the ones who can please Him and when they diligently seek Him, He will reward them abundantly [v. 6]. Let us look at the case of the Shunammite woman.

3. The Shunammite woman gave for nothing!

During his pastoral work in Israel, Elisha and his servant, Gehazi, frequently passed through Shunem where lived “a great woman” and her old husband. She was childless. Why was she called a great woman? From the story, we know that she always invited the powerful prophet and his servant to dine with them each time they passed through Shunem. One day, she told her husband, “I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber on the wall and let us set for him there a bed and a table and a stool and a candlestick, and it shall be when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither” [2 Kgs 4: 8-10].

Why was this woman called great? She was generous and cheerfully gave food and drink to the prophet. She was perceptive, being able to determine the physical and spiritual needs of the man of God. She acted on her perception and spent her family’s resources to build an extension to their house solely for the propagation of the work of God. The bed symbolizes sleeping quarters. The stool and table are for study and meditation on the word of God. The candlestick is for worship. In essence, she built the prophet a church and a home.

Did she do all these to curry the prophet’s favour? No! When Elisha asked her what should be done for her, whether he should put in a good word for her before the king, she replied, “I dwell among mine own people” [vv. 11-13]. In other words, she needed nothing from him. Can you imagine that? If we had been in her shoes, we would have poured out our problem of childlessness to the prophet right from the day we provided him the first drink! Not this great woman. All she had done for Elisha, she had done for nothing. In that case then, Elisha referred the matter to God.

4. And she waited for something!

The prophet was anxious to reward this great woman even though she had said that she did not want anything. Gehazi informed the prophet that the lady was childless and that her husband was old [v. 14]. An old husband is likely to have an old wife! Therefore, we can assume that the woman had gone beyond her menopause. Elisha decided to give her something to wait for. He sent for her and told her, “About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son.” She was skeptical at first but then, she became pregnant and had a son [vv. 15-17]!

Faith is watered by miracles. She knew that her son was a miracle. The same God would also be with him to grow up and succeed his parents. When a great woman has great faith, what is there that can shake her trust in God?

Her son was now grown [v. 18]. One day, he was in the farm with his father when he suffered sunstroke. His father instructed that he be carried to his mother inside the house. There, the young man died on his mother's knees [vv. 19-20].

Did she raise an alarm to draw her husband's attention to the "tragedy"? Did she dial 911 for an ambulance to take him to the mortuary? Did she make any burial arrangements? Was she cursing Elisha and his God for "deceiving" her? She did none of the above. Instead, she put the dead child on the prophet's bed, shut the door, went out, saddled a horse and went in search of Elisha. When her husband asked why she was going to the prophet, she replied, "It shall be well" [vv. 21-23]. She believed that something good was coming!

She found Elisha on mount Carmel. Now, don't tell me she knew exactly where to find him. She had had to ask several people, miss her way several times, be vilified soon after leaving each group of people who could have wondered what she was looking for. She persisted until she got lucky to find the prophet on mount Carmel. On sighting her, Elisha sent his servant to ask if all was well with her, her husband and their son. She replied, "it is well" [24-26]. Her faith had climbed from hope ["it shall be well"] to reality ["it is well"]. In deed, it became well. The prophet went home with her and prayed to God to raise the child back to life. God did and the prophet handed the young man over to his mother [vv. 27-36]. The something that she had waited for really became well! Can you imagine her testimony to her husband and their neighbours?

5. Lessons

An important lesson to learn from that story is that what we need is always bigger than what we have or can ever provide for ourselves. Therefore, if we can help to meet other people's needs, God will line up other people to meet our needs. In His words, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is Mine, and the fullness thereof. Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the most High; and call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" [Ps. 50: 12, 14-15]. The clearest demonstration of your trust in God is to give to others for nothing, that is, *selflessly, cheerfully and generously*.

In case you have not formed the habit of giving for nothing, you will find the following steps helpful:

- a) Your life belongs to God because He created you for His pleasure [Rev. 4: 11]. Therefore, you have to surrender it to Him completely. How? By presenting "your bodies a *living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" [Rom. 12: 1]. Think of a live sacrificial lamb with its four feet tied up and thrown into the fire. That should vividly convey to you what it means to be a living sacrifice! You will not like it but you have no choice in the matter

either because the alternative is worse. After all, did God not give us His only begotten Son to die on the Cross as a living sacrifice so that we might be saved from eternal damnation?

- b) The advantages that you enjoy over the less privileged are by the grace of God, not your own effort [**Deut. 8: 17-18; Jn 3: 27**]. You also got them freely “without money and without price” [**Is. 55: 1**]. So, since you have received freely, you should also give freely [**Matt. 10: 8**].
- c) This selfless giving should extend beyond material things to include time and worship. Pay your tithes, vows and offerings without monitoring your church’s accounts. Leave God to handle those who fraudulently use His resources! Mentor young people and your own children so as to give them a head start in life. Show good example in all that you do [**Phil. 4: 9**]. That also is a form of giving!
- d) If you have done all the above, then wait for God to deliver through others whatsoever you have asked of Him in “good measure, pressed down and shaken together, and running over” [**Lk 6: 38**]! Isn’t that worth waiting for?

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us [**Rom. 5: 8**]. We can never repay Him for that. However, because He did that for us, His Father has “highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name” [**Phil. 2: 9**]. Make today, this moment, your decision day. First, offer your life to Christ *unconditionally*. Then, learn to give to the needy without expecting any reward or gratitude. Thereafter, wait and see what the Lord is going to do for you.

Those who give for nothing can always wait for something!