

July 28, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

The Lord Provides

5000 guys. Plus 12 disciples. And NO ONE thought to pack a lunch or bring a snack. I'm sure that thousands of wives asked, "Honey, do you want to take some food along in case?" but were told, "We need to hurry. Let's just go" So there they were – over 5000 guys, not counting women and children, with nothing to eat. All along, Jesus knew that they did not have food. He purposefully did not remind them. He purposefully let them stay until there was a problem. Then he provided. He wanted to teach them something important. He started with 2 fish and 5 small loaves of bread. He handed food to his disciples and did not stop until everyone was so full they had leftovers. Through this miracle, Jesus proved that he was true God. They could trust him. The Lord provides.

That's the point Paul wanted to make with the Christians in Corinth. The Lord provides. There was a famine in Jerusalem and the believers were starving. When the believers in Corinth heard about their trouble, they started a collection to help. At first, a lot of money came in, but as the congregation got sidetracked with doctrinal and personality problems, the fundraising effort stalled. The Apostle Paul was soon going to be visiting Corinth and then heading to Jerusalem with the financial aid. Paul wrote to the congregation to encourage them to complete the collection to help the believers in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is a masterful treatment of the believers attitude toward money. Paul does not yell at them because they did not collect enough yet. He does not threaten them or shame them or guilt them. He aims at their attitude, at their hearts, and builds up their faith. He reminds them that the Lord provides. We need this reminder too.

If you go to the doctor for a physical, he pushes, pokes and presses on your body as he asks, "Does this hurt?" If something does hurt he says, "It should not hurt there. Something's wrong." It's the same way when the topic of money comes up in the Scripture lessons and the pastor preaches on it. Our natural reaction is, "Ouch! That hurts. Don't talk about money." If talking about money makes you uncomfortable, then there might be something wrong because our attitude toward money is a reflection of our faith. As you read through your Gospels, you'll notice that Jesus talked a lot about money and our attitude toward it. He knows that the devil often uses money to take our eyes off of him. We all have to admit that there are times when money issues have led us to be greedy or to worry as if God wasn't with us. Many

of you might be thinking, "I'm content with how much money I have." That's great. Paul challenges you think if you are willing to give extra to those in need like Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to do? Do we want to hold on to "our money," forgetting that God is the one who has blessed us with what we have so that we can use it for useful things, including helping others?

St. Paul works on our attitude as he says (:8), "**God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.**" That's very comprehensive. The Lord provides. You have all you need and so much more. Let's consider some blessings that we might overlook.

- Did the sun come up this morning?
- Did you open your eyes?
- Are your lungs still breathing and your heart still beating?
- Did you have anything to eat this morning?
- Do you have food in your refrigerator?
- Do you have money in your checking or savings account, maybe even some investments?
- Did God give you another day to enjoy his forgiveness?
- Is God preparing a place for you by his side in paradise?
- Did the Holy Spirit bring you to faith and preserve your faith so that you are still in God's kingdom this morning?

I could give a million more examples. I know of many families - some of you – who faced financial struggles and were overwhelmed with stress. But a few months or years later, everything was good. The Lord provides.

It's clear that God is making all grace abound to you. We might wish that we had more money or more physical blessings, but God has a purpose and a plan for each one of us. By nature, we are stingy. We do not want to share what we have with others. By nature, we are never completely satisfied with what we have and always want more. Try going to the store, or a thrift shop or garage sale without wanted to buy more stuff. Left to ourselves we would be completely consumed with getting as much money as we could. We would turn our backs on the Lord and be doomed. We need help.

A chapter earlier, the Apostle Paul explained (2 Cor 8:9) that Jesus, who as true God had everything, gave it all up and was born in a barn to poor peasants so that he could lift you from the poverty of sin and death up to the riches of eternal life in heaven. Jesus sacrificed his life for you. He forgave you all of your sins. The Lord has already provided you with the most important thing ever, salvation – for free! Who could ask for anything more.

Because God has blessed us so abundantly, we can (:8), “**abound in every good work.**” This does not mean that you will give lots of money, simply that you will do good works. Again, Paul is focused on the attitude of the heart. Paul also says (:11), “**so that you can be generous on every occasion.**” The word “generous” doesn’t mean that you’ll always have lots of money to give. The word “generous” here really means single minded, or focused, without any ulterior, self-serving motive. You help others simply because you want to help. Now that you have Jesus in your heart through faith, your life has been changed. God has given you a new perspective on life. The unbeliever is only concerned about getting as much money as he can, then he spends a lot of it and dies. The Holy Spirit has given you faith to see that your goal in life is to walk with Jesus, to shine as a light in this sin-darkened world, to share the love of Jesus with others, to help others in any way you can. That is our focus, our goal in life. That gives your life meaning and purpose no matter how rich or poor you are. You get to be the hands and face and voice of God to help others. How cool!

There are a million ways each day for how you can show loving kindness to others as you reflect the love of Jesus to those around you – sending an encouraging note, praying sincerely for them, helping with the dishes, listening when someone needs to unwind, helping them with some problem, and on and on, including Paul’s focus here, giving them some money just like the believers in Corinth were giving money to help the believers in Jerusalem.

When we give money to help someone or some charity, or when we put our offering in the box here at church, it can feel like you are giving your money away. St. Paul encourage us to think of it as an investment in Christian kindness.

A farmer does not think he is giving away his seeds when he plants his fields. It’s an investment. And your gifts to help others can do amazing things. Paul explained (:10), “**They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor. Their righteousness endures forever.**” This is talking about believers, about you. As you scatter your gifts to poor – just like a farmer scatters seed – your righteous acts are remembered by God. It puts a smile on God’s face and helps others.

Certainly, we need to be careful as we distribute the gifts God has given us. If we give all of our money to our favorite charity then we won’t have enough to feed ourselves, and God wants you to do that. God did not give us a set of rules that “this percentage” of your income goes to your family and “that percentage” goes to help the poor, etc. He lets us decide. He gives us freedom to express our faith. How we divide up our money to care for ourselves and our families, to help the poor, to support the gospel ministry is a way that we express our faith, a way that we show God how much he means

to us. When that attitude of faith is there, God is pleased with all of your offerings, whether it’s \$2 million or 2 cents. As someone told me, “If you don’t feel it, don’t deal it.” If faith isn’t in your heart, it’s worthless.

I think it’s really neat that Jesus used a boy’s lunch to feed the crowd of over 500 men. Jesus could have simply made food appear out of nothing, like he did every morning for the 40 years the Israelites were in the wilderness. Jesus did not need 2 fish and 5 small loaves, but he used them. He gave that boy the joy of helping others. For the rest of his life, that little boy was excited to tell people what Jesus did with his lunch. God does not NEED our offerings to send missionaries around the world or to train the next generation of pastors and teachers. But what a joy it is to know that God is using our simple offerings to keep a ministry like St. Matthew going in a world which is increasingly hostile to the gospel, to send missionaries around the world and to help train the next generation of pastors and teachers. God uses our simple offerings so that his kingdom comes and his will is done. We get to help in God’s eternal plan to save people. How cool that we can be a part of it! We’re glad to help!

As you manage the resources the Lord has given you, you sometimes do things to upgrade your house. You might replace some old cupboards with something sturdier and more stylish. You might replace an old, stained and saggy couch with a new one. Such improvements certainly fit into a Christian’s money management plan while you continue to help others. I want to encourage you to consider improving God’s house as we move toward remodeling the fellowship hall. This is a neat opportunity to something special for God.

It all starts with salvation. You are headed to heaven. Alleluia! In addition, the Lord also provides us with so much that not only are we able to survive each day, but we enough to treat ourselves with extra things we don’t even need. (How many things fill our houses and closets that we don’t need to survive? It’s not wrong to have that stuff, but it does point out how rich we are.) Because the Lord has provided us so much, we have the joy of giving to charities, or others who are hurting, or even the church. We’re not worried if we give some money away, because God has promised to provide us with all we need. The Lord has not only given us wealth to distribute, he has also given us a heart of faith which is glad to help others. We are richly blessed. There is no need to worry. The Lord provides. Amen.