Sermon LXXXII: More Blessed To Give Than To Receive
By Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne in Dundee, February 4, 1838
From The Works of the Late Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne
New York: Robert Carter, 1847, p. 476-482.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."— Acts xx. 35.

These words form part of a most touching address which Paul made to the ministers of Ephesus, when he parted with them for the last time. He took them all to witness that he was pure from the blood of all men: "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

It is deeply interesting to notice that the duty of giving to the poor is marked by him as one part of the counsel of God; so much so, that he makes it his last word to them: "I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

These words, which he quotes from the mouth of the Saviour, are nowhere to be found in the Gospels. It is the only traditional saying of our Lord that has been preserved. It seems to have been one of his household words—a common place—uttered by him again and again; "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

I am glad of having this opportunity of laying before you this part of the counsel of God; for God knows there is no part of it I wish to keep back from you—that you ought to labor to support the weak; and the only argument I shall use with you is that of our blessed Lord: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

I. We should give liberally to the poor, because it is a happier thing to give than to receive. It is happy, because it is like all happy beings. All happy beings are giving beings; their happiness consists not in receiving, but in giving.

1. Angels. The whole Bible shows that the angels are happy beings; far happier than we can conceive.

(1) They are holy beings—ever doing God's commandments. Now, holiness and happiness are inseparable.

(2) They are in heaven—always in the smile of their Father. They "do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven;" they must be
happy—no tear on their cheek, no sigh in their bosom.

(3) They are represented as praising God—one crying to another, "Holy, holy, holy," and singing, "Worthy is the Lamb." Now, singing praises is a sign of mirth and gladness. "Is any merry? let him sing psalms." Now, I want you to see that the happiness of these happy spirits consists in giving.

1st, they all give: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation?" Upon the earth very few people give; most people like to receive money; to keep it, to lay it up in the bank, to see it becoming more and more. There are only a few people that give—these often not the richest; but in heaven all give. It is their greatest pleasure. Search every dwelling of every angel—you will not find one hoard among them all. They are all ministering spirits.

2d, They give to those who are far beneath them. They are not contented to help those that can help them back again, but they give, hoping for nothing again. There were some poor shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem; yet a great angel did not hesitate to visit them with kind and gentle words; nay, it would seem that there were many more that would fain have been allowed to carry the message; for no sooner was it done than a multitude of the heavenly host were with him praising God. You remember, too, how kind the angels were to the beggar Lazarus. The dogs were the only ones that ministered to him on earth; but the angels stooped on willing wing, and bore him to Abraham’s bosom.

3d, The highest love to give most. There is reason to believe that the highest angels are those who go down lowest, and give up most in the service of God. Jesus expressly says so: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant." The angels that see the face of God, stoop to serve the meanest children of God. It is the happiness of the happiest angel that he can give up more, and stoop lower down in sweet, humble services, than the angels beneath him.

Dear Christians, you often pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If you mean anything, you mean that you may serve God as the angels do! Ah, then, your happiness must be in giving. The happiness of the angels consists in this. If you would be like them, become a ministering spirit.

2. God. We know very little of God; but we know that he is infinitely happy. You cannot add to his happiness, nor take from it. We know
also many things that enter into his happiness. Everything he does must afford him happiness. As when he created the world, and said, "All very good;" God was happy in creating. But the Bible shows that his happiness mainly consists in giving, not in receiving.

(1) His giving food to all creatures is very wonderful—not one sparrow is forgotten before God. The whole world has been cursed, and God could justly cast the whole into destruction; but he does not, he delighteth in mercy. The young lions seek their meat from God. He feeds the ravens when they cry.

(2) He gives to the wicked: "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust." Just think for a moment how many thousands God feeds every day who blaspheme his name, and profane his Sabbaths. He gives them food and raiment; turns the hearts of people to be kind to them; and yet they curse God every day. Oh! How this shows that God delighteth in mercy. "Be ye merciful, even as your Father in heaven is merciful."

(3) But, most of all, he gave his own Son. God delights in giving. It is his nature. He spared not his own Son. Although he was emptying his own bosom, yet he would not keep back the gift. Now, some of you pray night and day to be made like God: "Blessed art thou, O God: teach me thy statutes." If you will be like him, be like him in giving. It is God's chief happiness, be you like him in it.

Obj. Would you have me give to wicked people, who will go and abuse it? Ans. God gives to wicked people, who go and abuse it; yet that does not diminish his happiness. God makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and pours down rain on the just and on the unjust. It is right to give most and best to the children of God; but give to the wicked also, if you would be like God. Give to the unthankful; give to the vile: "Give to him that asketh of thee; and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away, remembering the word of the Lord Jesus."

3. Christ. He was the eternal Son of God, equal with the Father in everything, therefore equal in happiness. He had glory with him before ever the world was. Yet his happiness also consisted in giving. He was far above all the angels, and therefore he gave far more than them all; "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He was highest, therefore he stooped lowest. They gave their willing services, he gave himself; "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be
made rich. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ."

Now, dear Christians, some of you pray night and day to be branches of the true Vine: you pray to be made all over in the image of Christ. If so, you must be like him in giving. A branch bears the same kind of fruit as the tree. If you be branches at all, you must bear the same fruit.

An old divine says well: "What would have become of us if Christ had been as saving of his blood as some men are of their money?"

Obj. 1. My money is my own. Ans. Christ might have said, My blood is my own, my life is my own; no man forceth it from me: then where should we have been?

Obj. 2. The poor are undeserving. Ans. Christ might have said the same thing. They are wicked rebels against my Father's law: shall I lay down my life for these? I will give to the good angels. But no, he left the ninety-nine, and came after the lost. He gave his blood for the undeserving.

Obj. 3. The poor may abuse it. Ans. Christ might have said the same; yea, with far greater truth. Christ knew that thousands would trample his blood under their feet; that most would despise it; that many would make it an excuse for sinning more; yet he gave his own blood.

Oh, my dear Christians! if you would be like Christ, give much, give often, give freely, to the vile and the poor, the thankless and the undeserving. Christ is glorious and happy, and so will you be. It is not your money I want, but your happiness. Remember his own word: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

II. *It is happier, because of the peculiar character of a Christian.*

1. A *Christian is a steward.* In every great house there is a steward, whose duty it is to manage his master's goods in such a way that every one may have his portion of meat in due season. Now you will see at once that the happiness of the steward does not consist in the receiving of more goods, but in the due distribution of what he has got. If there be any grieve or foreman hearing me, you will know quite well that your happiness consists not in the quantity of your master's goods which goes through your hands, but in the right distribution of it. The happiness of every steward consists in giving, not in receiving. Now, dear Christians, you are only stewards of all you possess. You have not one halfpenny of your own. "Occupy till I come," is written
upon everything. The reckoning-day is near; O that you would be wise stewards! You would be far happier. It is the devil that persuade you that it is better to hoard and lay up for yourself and your children. It is far happier to be an honest steward.

_Obj._ I am in very poor circumstances. _Ans._ Still you are a steward. Use what you have as a steward for Christ, and you will do well. He that used his two talents did not lose his reward.

2. **Christians are members one of another.** When we are united to Christ, we are united to all the brethren. It is a closer relation than any other, for it outlasts every other. The wife of your bosom will one day be separated from you. Father and child, sister and brother, may be separated eternally; but not so Christian and Christian, they are for ever and forever, branches of the same tree for eternity, stones of the same temple for ever. Now it must be the happiness of one member to help another.

(1) In the body, when one limb is hurt or is weakly, the others help it. It is their happiness to do so. When the left hand is wounded, the right hand will do everything for it, it supplies all its need.

(2) So it is in Christ's body. It is the happiness of one member to help another. It is just like helping one's self; yea, it is like helping Christ. If Christ were to come to your door poor, and clothed in rags, and shivering with cold, would you feel it an unhappy thing to supply all his need? Oh, then, you may do this whenever you see a poor Christian: "Inasmuch as ye do it to the least of these my brethren, ye do it unto me." Woe is me! How many of you turn Christ away from your door, with a rude and angry countenance. Are you not ashamed to call yourself a Christian?

Again, if Christ lived in some poor dwelling, with not enough of fire to keep away the cold, with not enough of clothes to make the bed warm, would you not seek him out? Would you stay till he sought you? Ah, woe is me! In how many dwellings does Christ dwell thus? And yet, there are Christians hearing me that never have sought him out. Change your plan, I pray you. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

III. **Because Christians will be no losers.**

1. **They shall be no losers in this world by what they give away:** "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to penury." I am going to say now
what the world will scoff at; but all that I ask of you is, to be like the Bereans. Search the Scriptures, and see if these things be not so. The whole Bible shows, then, that the best way to have plenty in this world is to give liberally.

(1) "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days." This refers to the sowing of rice. The rice in the East is always sown when the fields are flooded with water. The bread-corn is actually cast upon the water. After many days the waters dry up, and a rich crop of waving rice covers the plain. So it is in giving liberally to the poor out of love to Jesus. It is like throwing away your money, it is like casting seed upon the waters; yet fear not, you shall find a crop after many days, you shall have a return for your money in this world.

A word to Christians in humble life. You say, If I were a rich Christian, how happy would I be to give! But I am so poor, what can I give? Now, I just ask you to look at the man sowing seed. When he has but little, does he keep back from sowing that little? No; he sows all the more anxiously the little he has, in order to make more. Do you the same.

How little you believe God! He says: " He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord." Now, I believe there is not one in a hundred who would not rather lend to a rich man than lend to the Lord. You believe man—not God. In fact, it is but the other day I heard of a child of God who was in very reduced circumstances, her husband being blind, yet who contrived not only to live, but to give to others also. She wrought with her own hands that she might have to give. She gave largely to the poor, largely also to missions abroad. This was sowing the seed, all the seed she had, for she had no hoard. And did the crop fail? No: it appeared in India, a distant relative died, leaving £20,000 to her alone. God is able to do this every day. "God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

How easily God can give you, by the smallest turn of his providence, more than all you give away in a year! O trust the Lord! But the wicked cannot trust God. The world is an Infidel at heart.

Some will say: I will begin tonight; I will put your word to the test; I will give double what I ever gave, and see if I will get a return. Ans. No such thing; keep your money, I advise you. If you give, hoping for something again, you will get nothing. You must give as a Christian gives—cheerfully, liberally, and freely, hoping for nothing again; and then God will give you back good measure, pressed down: "Give, and
it shall be given to you." He that giveth to the poor shall have no lack.

2. **Christians will be no losers in eternity.** The whole Bible shows that Christians will be rewarded in eternity just in proportion to the way they have made use of their talents. Now, money is one talent. If you use it right you will in no wise lose your reward. Christ plainly shows that he will reckon with men in the judgment according as they have dealt by his poor Christians. They that have done much for Christ shall have an abundant entrance; they that have done little shall have little reward.

I thank God that there are some among you to whom Christ will say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Go on, dear Christians, live still for Christ. Never forget, day nor night, that you are yourselves bought with a price. Lay yourselves and your property all in his hand, and say: "What wilt thou have me to do? Here am I, send me;" and then I know you will feel, now and in eternity, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

I fear there are some Christians among you to whom Christ can say no such thing. Your haughty dwelling rises in the midst of thousands who have scarce a fire to warm themselves at, and have but little clothing to keep out the biting frost; and yet you never darkened their door. You heave a sigh, perhaps, at a distance; but you do not visit them. Ah! my dear friends!

I am concerned for the poor; but more for you. I know not what Christ will say to you in the great day. You seem to be Christians, and yet you care not for his poor. Oh, what a change will pass upon you as you enter the gates of heaven! You will be saved, but that will be all. There will be no abundant entrance for you: "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly."

I fear there are many hearing me who may know well that they are not Christians, because they do not love to give. To give largely and liberally, not grudging at all, requires a new heart; an old heart would rather part with its life-blood than its money. Oh, my friends! Enjoy your money; make the most of it; give none away; enjoy it quickly; for I can tell you, you will be beggars throughout eternity.