

An Anonymous Benefactor

by Denis Lyle

The sermon explores the theme of sacrificial giving and God's miraculous provision through the story of an anonymous benefactor who supports Elisha during a time of need.

Scripture: Exodus 23:19, Leviticus 23:20, Numbers 18:8, 2 Kings 4:42, Psalm 37:23, Mark 12:44, Luke 19:10, Acts 20:35, 1 Corinthians 16:2, 2 Corinthians 8:5, 2 Corinthians 9:6, Philippians 2:13, Philippians 4:19

Topics: "God's Provision", "Sacrificial Giving"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches about the story of an anonymous benefactor who generously provided for Dr. Barnardo's village for orphan girls and how God's provision often comes at the right time and from unexpected sources, just like in the case of Elisha and the trainee prophets at Gilgal during a famine. The sermon emphasizes the importance of sacrificial giving, following biblical principles like giving the firstfruits and giving generously even in times of scarcity, as demonstrated by the actions of the anonymous benefactor and Elisha. It challenges believers to trust in God's provision, be generous, and have faith that God can meet needs abundantly.

Transcript

2 Cor 9:6-15 2 Kings 4:42-44 AN ANONYMOUS BENEFACTOR In the nineteenth century, Dr Barnardo conceived the idea of putting London's homeless waifs and stray children into the safety and security of small cottages where they could be loved and cared for. Close friends tried to dissuade Barnardo on the grounds that this was a pointless and well-nigh crazy idea. Barnardo wavered, unsure whether or not this was God's will. At that time he attended a conference in Oxford, and settled into a small hotel in the town.

He had barely begun to unpack his cases when a knock came at his door. Barnardo opened the door to see a total stranger staring him in the face. The stranger said, "Dr Barnardo" "Yes", Barnardo replied. The stranger said, "You are thinking of building a village for orphan girls at Ilford, are you not" "Yes", the Doctor admitted. " Well, put me down for the first cottage", said his visitor, placing a cheque for a large amount of money in Barnardo's hands, and promptly left, closing the door with a gentle click.

The rest is history! Here was God's provision that came just at the right time from an unexpected quarter! My, have you not proved God in a similar way Have you not discovered that God's provision always comes at the right time and often from an unexpected quarter Try for a moment to put yourself in the position of Elisha and these trainee prophets at Gilgal. For seven long years famine had plagued the land (8:1) No doubt these were days were the faith of "the sons of the prophets", were being tested.

This little community at Gilgal had been delivered from the danger of unwholesome stew but their troubles were not yet over. Although this famine was drawing to a close food was still scarce and prospects for the immediate future were far from encouraging. Now in any climate of economic deprivation and shortages, the natural reaction is predictable... it is selfishness and covetousness! Ills: As the late Francis Schaeffer expressed it, "the priorities of a materialistic culture are personal peace and affluence", that is get all you can, can all you get and to put with the rest".

Now in the light of that, isn't it fascinating to see the generosity of Elisha and also that of this anonymous visitor to the college from Baal Shalisha Here was a man who appeared out of the blue, delivered his gift and then took the road for Baal Shalisha and vanished into silence! But God took what he gave and made it a blessing to many! (Matt 14:15) Now I want to talk to you this... about ... " An Anonymous Benefactor", Notice in this narrative: (1) A DONATION FOR ELISHA Look at (4:42) Now of this kind hearted stranger we know nothing other than what is told us in these verses!

But surely there is enough here to indicate that here was a man who had a heart for the Lord's servant in his time of need and who went to some trouble to minister to him in his season of distress! The Bible says: "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord", and so behind this Man's Steps were the Lord's Stirrings! (Ps 37:23 Phil 2:13) Indeed is this whole incident not an illustration of the Lord's loving care for His people The Bible says, "My God shall supply... need." (Phil 4:19) My, have you not discovered that when you have reached the end of your resources the Lord has unfolded the wealth of His Have you not discovered that when things have been at their worst the Divine Helper has appeared Well, that's what it was like here.

God moved this man to bring a gift to Elisha. Look at the gift that he brought. You see there was something: (a) SCRIPTURAL ABOUT IT: What did he bring "Twenty loaves of barley bread from the first ripe corn, along with some heads of new corn". (4:42) Now there was more to this man's action, than one of thoughtfulness and kindness to Elisha! Wasn't there something in the Scriptures about the firstfruits Indeed there was. Concerning the firstfruits we read, "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God". (Exod 23:19) So the "firstfruits", of a crop normally had to go the house of God (Lev 23:20) for the benefit of the priests (Num 18:8-13) But remember times had sadly changed!

Baal worship, idolatry was established in the land (3:3 1 Kings 12:28 16:31) To whom were the firstfruits now to be brought throughout the kingdom of Israel Well, this man boycotted the apostate official religious centre and the corrupt priests and personally delivered his gifts where he knew they would do most good! The important thing is this, in the midst of his changed circumstances he did not forget his responsibility to God! Have you Here was a man who sought to give in accordance with the Scriptures!

Do you and I do this Ills: Ron Blue a Christian financial counselor has calculated that "if all Christians were reduced to a welfare cheque from Social Security and they tithed on that amount, the church would overall double its receipts". My, have you been robbing God Does God get our tips instead of our tithes Some believers speak against tithing! Well, how much are we to give Paul says, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." (1 Cor 16:2) Out of what God has given us do we give.

How much is that Well, you are against tithing, lets start then with a 100%! Is this not what the widow gave " All that she had". (Mk 12:44) Is that too much What about 50% Zacchaeus gave 50% for a starter (Lk

19:10) Is that still too much Well, what about the Macedonians " They gave liberally out of their deep poverty". (2 Cor 8:5) Can I encourage the young of this church to start tithing! (Gen 14:10 Lev 27:30 Matt 23:23) (a) (b) SACRIFICIAL ABOUT IT: Here was a man who saw his responsibility to God in spite of THE FAMILY: You see if we are right in suggesting that this was the first harvest since the time of drought and famine (4:38 8:1) then this man gave his loaves and corn right at a time when there was not much in the cupboard to put on the table for his family!

Can you imagine the ground that had to be made up after 7 years of famine Can you imagine the gaps that had to be repaired in broken fortunes Here was a man who saw his responsibility to God in spite of THE FARMERS: For did you notice where he came from Baal-shalisha Some scholars reckon this was a village near Mount Ephraim, some distance from Gilgal. This village was originally called "Shalisha", but the evil power exerted by Jezebel had stamped upon it the name of her false god (1 Chron 5:23) There is no doubt that many of the farmers in this man's home village sacrificed to Baal, and would have brought their offering of firstfruits to the Canaanite deities and yet in this seat of idolatry there was at least one who was willing to sacrificially honour God!

Ills: a missionary who was watching the construction of a beautiful temple asked an Indian lady, "how much will it cost" "It is for the gods", she answered, "we do not ask what it will cost". What an indictment against our casual Christianity that wants to give God our leftovers: our second best, our hand me downs! My, around us the world devotes its treasures to its gods... the god of pleasure: of leisure: of passion: of ambition! In the midst of such wild abandonment to false gods are you willing to give sacrificially to the true God Here then was (1) But look at Elisha's response: " Give unto the people", you see grace will make you generous.

This was: (2) A DEMAND FROM ELISHA Now it would have been understandable if Elisha had not acted in this way! After all, times were hard! They were just coming out of a famine and Elisha could have reasoned, "I'm not obliged to share this". Some Christians talk like this, "I'll wait until I'm no longer on a student grant and I'm earning before I give to the Lord,"... "I'll see the children off on our hands then we'll really think about giving". My, resources were scarce for Elisha yet here is offering to feed the students from the Bible College!

Look at (4:42) You see this demand was: (a) CONVEYED TO HIS SERVANT: Probably Gehazi (4:12) What had been sacrificially given to Elisha was now sacrificially given to others! Do you know why God has prospered you Well, Paul says "And 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". (2 Cor 9:8) God gives us more so that we will have more to give! Have you recently received promotion at work Have you prospered in business Have you been given a substantial rise Do you remember what you pictured doing for God's kingdom if ever God prospered you My, will you match the desire with action You see the great peril for us as believers is to be receivers but not givers!

But the Lord said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive", (Acts 20:35) and Elisha said, " give unto the people... eat". (2:42) And the divine paradox is that they who give find themselves enriched! (Lk 6:38-41 2 Cor 9:11) Ills: Many years ago C.H.S. preached in the three largest Baptist churches in Bristol and he collected £300-00 for his orphanage! Retiring to bed on the last night of his visit, Spurgeon heard a voice which to him was the voice of the Lord saying, "Give those £300-00 to George Muller".

"But Lord I need it for my dear children in London". Again came the word, "Give us those £300-00 to George Muller". It was only when he said, "Yes, Lord I will", that sleep came to him. The following morning he made his way to Muller's orphanage, and found G.Muller on his knees before an open Bible praying. The famous preacher put his hand on his shoulder and said, "George, God has told me to give you these £300-00 pounds". "Oh", said Muller, " Dear Spurgeon, I have been asking the Lord for that very sum".

Spurgeon returned to London. On his desk he found a letter awaiting him. He opened to find it contained 300 guineas! Elisha said, "Give..." (a) (b) CHALLENGED BY HIS SERVANT: Look at (4:43) Was there a failure here to believe that the Lord could feed the multitude with the loaves and corn (Jn 6:7) Was there a fear here that there would be not sufficient for himself You see what Elisha had been given would only feed 10 people at the most! So Gehazi thought, "If we distribute this among the crowd, I'll have nothing left for myself".

My, are you like Elisha or Gehazi Have you a big heart or a tight fist I tell you man's philosophy is different from the Bible's theology. The Book of Proverbs tells us if we scatter we shall increase. It says "the liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." (Prov 11:24-25) Are you like the Lord Do you give liberally Elisha was for he said, "Give... eat". (a)(b) (c) CONFIRMED FOR HIS SERVANT: For look at what (4:43) says! What a man Elisha was!

A man who lives for others: "Give... eat". There's no thought of looking after himself! A man who trusts God for the supernatural: "They shall eat". My, there were a 100 men and only 20 loaves and some corn but Elisha believed that God could miraculously meet the need. Indeed here was: A man who anticipates the superabundant: "They shall eat and have some left over". (4:43) He anticipated not only a sufficiency, but a surplus. My, this is the confidence of a man who believes that God is always liberal in His giving (Jam 1:5) who believes that God gives us richly all things to enjoy. (1 Tim 6:17) What's your faith like in a time of crisis Is it strong Are you fully persuaded that what God has promised He's well able to do My, its when we step out in faith and faith at first... may be small that we find God doing the impossible.

Faith mighty faith, the promise sees And looks to God alone; Laughs at impossibilities, and cries, It shall be done". (3) A DISTRIBUTION BY ELISHA Did you notice how it all ends Well, the food was distributed by the instruction of Elisha! Look at (4:44) My, this distribution of the loaves and corn: (a) SUPPLIED THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE: For the crowd ate of the food and were strengthened. What to the servant was impossibility became a possibility, a reality as the food was handed around.

Here is the OT counterpart to the NT miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (Matt 14:16) My, is it not encouraging to know that as we go down this year, that "our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor 3:5) Spiritually: materially: physically: emotionally... God is more than adequate for our need. (a) (b) SATISFIED THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE: Not one went hungry! There was enough food for all so that all were satisfied and content. And My, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you: that ye always having all sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work". (2 Cor 9:8) (a) (b) (c) SURPASSED THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE: For "they ate and had some left over...

Lord". (4:44) Do you recall that the church at Phillipi gave to Paul and he wrote to them, "I have all, and abound: I am full have received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you". (Phil 4:18) You see God meets sacrificial giving with supernatural blessing! Do you think this anonymous farmer realised what he accomplished He came to feed Elisha and he fed a hundred others! Ills: When Robert Raikes began his S.School he thought only of the poor ignorant children of Gloucester: he didn't think that he would be

imitated and that there would be thousands of S.Schools today! But then God meets sacrificial giving with supernatural blessing! My, will you give what you have to the Lord For He will take it: bless it: multiply it: and use it to the blessing of others!

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