

The Blessing of Not Getting

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of gratitude for the blessings that come from God's withholdings, which often save us from unseen and unsuspected perils.

Scripture: Psalm 119:75, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 55:8-9, Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 7:11, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, James 1:17

Topics: "Divine Protection", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the often-overlooked blessings that come from what God withholds from us, illustrating that many of our disappointments may actually be divine protections from harm. He shares poignant examples of individuals who, after missing trains or opportunities, later realized that their frustrations were blessings in disguise, saving them from peril. Miller argues that God's denials and delays are often for our spiritual benefit, teaching us that true blessings may lie in the things we do not receive. He encourages gratitude for both positive and negative mercies, reminding us that God's ultimate goal is our sanctification and readiness for His service. The sermon concludes with the assertion that sometimes pain and loss can lead to greater spiritual growth than immediate pleasure or gain.

Transcript

There is one class of mercies and blessings, of which we are not sufficiently ready to take note. These are the things that God keeps from us. We recount, with more or less gratitude, the good gifts that we receive from him; but there are many blessings that consist in our not receiving.

In one of Miss Havergal's bright flashes of spiritual truth, she quotes these words of Moses to the Israelites: "As for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you so to do." Then she adds, "What a stepping-stone! We give thanks, often with a tearful, doubtful voice, for our positive spiritual mercies; but what an almost infinite field there is for negative mercies! We cannot even imagine all that God has allowed us not to do, not to be."

There is no doubt that very many of the Lord's greatest kindnesses, are shown in saving us from unseen and unsuspected perils, and in keeping from us things that we desire--but which would surely work us harm instead of blessing, were we to receive them.

There was a trifling accident to a railway train one day, which caused an hour's delay. One lady on the train was greatly agitated. The detention would cause her to miss the steamer, and her friends would be

disappointed in the morning when she should fail to arrive. That night the steamer on which she so eagerly wished to embark, was burned to the water's edge, and nearly all on board perished. Her feeling of grieved disappointment was changed to one of grateful praise to God for the strange deliverance he had wrought.

A carriage drove rapidly to a station one afternoon, just as the train rolled away: it contained a gentleman and his family. They manifested much annoyance and impatience at the failure to be in time. Important engagements for tomorrow could not now be met. Sharp words were spoken to the coachman; for the fault was his, as he had been ten minutes late in appearing. An angry scowl was on the gentleman's face, as he drove homeward again. All the evening he was sullen and unhappy. In the next morning's papers he read an account of a terrible bridge accident on the railway. The train he had been so anxious to take, and so annoyed at missing--had carried many of its sleeping passengers to a horrible death! The feeling of bitter vexation and sullen anger--was instantly changed to one of thanksgiving. In both these cases the goodness of God was shown in not allowing his children to do what they considered essential to their happiness or success.

These are typical illustrations. In almost every life there are similar deliverances at some time or other, though not always so remarkable or so apparent. There is no one who has carefully and thoughtfully observed the course of his own life--who cannot recall many instances in which providential interferences and disappointments have proved blessings in the end, saving him from calamity or loss, or bringing to him better things than those which they took out of his grasp. We make our plans with eager hope and expectation, setting our hearts on things which seem to us most radiant and worthy; then God steps in, and sets these plans of ours aside, substituting others of his own, which seem destructive. We submit, perhaps sullenly, with rebellious heart; it seems to us a sore adversity; but in a little while we learn that the strange interference, over which we struggled so painfully, and were so sorely perplexed, was one of God's loving thoughts--his way of saving us from peril or loss. If he had let us have our own way--pain or sorrow would have been the inevitable result. He blessed us--by not permitting us to do as we wished.

Who can tell from how many unseen and unsuspected dangers he is every day delivered? When a passenger arrives at the end of a stormy voyage, he is thankful for rescue from peril; but when the voyage is quiet, without tempest or angry billow, he does not feel the same gratitude. Yet, why is not his preservation even more remarkable in this case than in that? He has been kept not only from imminent and apparent danger--but also from terror or anxiety.

In a gathering of ministers, one of them asked the others to unite with him in thanksgiving to God for a signal deliverance on his way to the meeting. On the edge of a perilous precipice, his horse had stumbled, and only the good hand of God had saved him from being hurled to death. Another minister asked that thanks might be given also for his still greater deliverance; he had come over the same dangerous road, and his horse had not even stumbled. Surely, he was right--he had still greater cause for thankfulness than the other. Each of our lives is one unbroken succession of such deliverances. There is not a moment when possible danger is not imminent. Yet we too often forget God's mercy in saving us from exposure to perils. We thank him for sparing us in the midst of life's accidents--but do not thank him for keeping us even from the alarm and shock of accident.

Passing into the realm of spiritual experiences, the field is equally large. God is continually blessing us by allowing us not to do certain things which we greatly desire to do. He thwarts our worldly ambitions, because to permit us to achieve them--would be to allow our souls to be lost or seriously harmed. One

man desires worldly prosperity--but in his every effort in that direction he is defeated. He speaks of his failures as misfortunes, and wonders why it is that other men, less industrious and less conscientious, succeed so much better than he. He even intimates that God's ways are not equal. But, no doubt, the very disappointments over which he grieves are in reality the richest of blessings. God knows that the success of his plans would be fatal to the higher interests of his spiritual life. The best blessing God can bestow upon him, is to not allow him to prosper in his plan to gather riches, and to attain ease.

The same is true of all other human ambitions. To let men have what they want, would be to open the gates of ruin and death for them. What they hunger for, thinking it bread, is but a cold stone! The path that to their eyes seems to be strewn with flowers, and to lead to a paradise--is full of thorns, and leads to darkness and death. The things they crave and cry for, thinking to find sweet satisfaction in them, when gotten at last prove to be but bitter ashes!

Sometimes the ways of God do seem hard. Our fondest hopes are crushed; and our fairest joys fade like summer flowers. The desires of our hearts are withheld from us; yet, if we are God's children, we cannot doubt that in every one of these losses or denials--a blessing is hidden. Right here we get a glimpse into the mystery of many unanswered prayers. The things we seek would not work good for us in the end--but evil. The things we plead to have removed--are essential to our highest interests.

Health is supposed to be better than sickness--but there comes a time when God's kindness will be most wisely shown, by denying us health. He never takes pleasure in causing us to suffer; he is touched by our sorrows; every grief and pain of ours he feels. Yet he loves us too well, to give us things that would harm us, or to spare us the trial that is needful for our spiritual good. It will be seen in the end, that many of the very richest blessings of all our lives--have come to us through God's denials, his withholdings, or his shattering of our hopes and joys. "I know, Lord, that Your judgments are just, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me." Psalm 119:75

When we are called to be Christians, we are not promised earthly ease and possession. True, we are told that we shall be heirs to a great legacy, "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ," -- but our legacy is not such as men in this world bequeath in their wills to their children. To be "joint heirs with Christ" implies that we must first share with him his life of self-denial and sacrifice--before we can become partakers with him in the joys and glories of his exaltation.

We should never forget that the object of all of God's dealing with His children--is to sanctify us, and make us vessels fit for the Master's use. To this high and glorious end, present pleasure and gratification must oftentimes be sacrificed. This is the true key to all the mysteries of Providence. Anything that hinders entire consecration to Christ, is working us harm; and though it be our tenderest joy, it is best that it be taken away. This discipline that is going on all the while in the lives of Christ's disciples.

Prayer is not always granted, even when the heart clings with holiest affection to its most precious joy. Nothing must hinder our consecration. We should never think first of what will give us earthly joy or comfort--but of what will fit us for doing the service for Him which He wants us to render. Pain is oftentimes better for us--than pleasure; loss is oftentimes better for us--than gain; sorrow is oftentimes better for us--than joy; disaster is oftentimes better for us--than deliverance. Faith should know that God's withholdings from us, when he does not give what we ask--are richer blessings than were he to open to us all the treasure-houses at whose doors we stand and knock with so great vehemence. Our unanswered prayers have just as real and as blessed answer as those which bring what we seek.

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