

We Do Not Know Him to Be a Frugal Man

THE 11th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 5, 2018

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ **But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."** ⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ **And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴** so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Our world has sat in judgment over God and judged him to be a frugal and hard man.

God helps those who help themselves, is the judgment. Nowhere in Scripture, never out of the mouth of God, but there it is, the judgment about how God works: *God helps those who help themselves*.

This is a frugal, stingy God. He will help you, if you help him. He will give you success, if you play by his rules. Give him credibility, bow down to his rules, and he opens his hands to you.

You do your best, God will do the rest. Nowhere in Scripture, never out of the mouth of God, but there it

is: God is judged as frugally handing out success to those who have payed him with their best.

This God is a hard man of the quid-pro-quo.

We ourselves, in our sinful flesh, sit in judgment over God, and we, too, judge him to be a hard man.

He will bless me if I open myself up to him. He will give me great fruits in life, if I first give him my first fruits. As I align myself with him and his will, I will find success where before I was blocked.

That's the sinful flesh positioning itself over God, so that God has to respond to what we do in our flesh. It's the voice of the Law. For the Law is written on every person's heart, and the instinct of our flesh is always Law.

The Law is retribution. It is the quid-pro-quo. It is I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine. It is, you get what you deserve. It's the way our world runs and the way our world judges God.

God is judged to be a frugal, hard man intent on holding on to what is his, and letting it go only when it's paid for—whether paid for by good works, by good offerings, by sincere feelings, by the weight of guilt, by the covering of shame, or however else the sinner may try to write the check to buy God off.

For God is a frugal man, a hard man, and he expects much. That's the charge the worthless servant made against God. When Jesus told the parable of the three servants who received great wealth from their master who was going on a journey, Jesus told first of the first two servants, and then of the last servant who was worthless. He took the talent of wealth left to him, and instead of investing it or giving it away as a gift, or doing anything else proper to do with money, this worthless servant dug a hole in a field and buried it.

Why did you just bury it?

the returning householder asked him.

“Master,”

said the servant,

“I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.”

[Matthew 25:24]

The master of the house answered him,

“You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?”

And he cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[Matthew 25:30]

The Lord will not be known as a hard man. The judgment is false. It's from the kangaroo court of our sinful world and our own sinful flesh. It's from the Law, which knows accusation and retribution, but never the giving of gifts.

We already had the Law. Jesus didn't come for that.

Jesus came giving gifts. Without counting, with no stinginess, he gives gifts freely—to you, to me, to our families, to the church, to all sinners looking for relief, he gives gifts.

The Father gives gifts to sinners, giving the gift of his only Son. The Father gives gifts to his Son, giving the gift of you and me and our families.

The Son gives gifts for us, giving the gift of his holy blood to atone for our sin. Then, having ascended to Heaven, the Son gives the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives gifts, giving us the words of Jesus, by which our sins are forgiven and by which he is giving us Jesus' blood, making us holy.

Ephesians 4:11:

When he ascended on high, he gave gifts to men, ... To the church, he gave some to be Apostles, some to be prophets and evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers.

Apostles: witnesses of Christ Jesus in the flesh, witnesses of his crucifixion, then his resurrection from the dead, then his Ascension to the right hand of the Father—he gave some to be Apostles to witness all this face to face, and to testify of it, building up the church.

Prophets and evangelists, he gave to his church, to proclaim his Gospel, to speak this good news in Jerusalem and beyond, teaching repentance and forgiveness, giving the baptism instituted by Jesus, by which sinners stand cleansed and righteous, whole and restored before God the Father.

Pastors and teachers, he gave some to be as gifts to the church. As the generation of the Apostles faded, the Apostles laid their hands on men they had trained up, on the heads of men such as Timothy and Titus, ordaining these men into the office of Holy Ministry, as pastors, teachers for the church, bringing to the church the gifts of the Gospel and the Sacraments.

These pastors and teachers ordained to serve the church, they serve not on their own behalf, or else they would not have been ordained into the office instituted by Jesus. They serve on behalf of Jesus, who ascended on high in order to give gifts to men, to the men and women, the families of the church. And Jesus gives gifts by setting the pastors in the midst of his church to dispense them. Ephesians 4:8:

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

The “host of captives” led from captivity are all those captive to sin, death, and the demons. It’s you and me, and every person captive to guilt—he leads all out, calling us by his Gospel.

His Gospel he gives by his Word preached and his sacraments distributed.

So, the Word and the Sacraments the pastors are given to administer, this is hardly some ritual to make people feel good. It is the Word and Sacraments bestowing gifts to the sinner, leading out of captivity to grace and life.

It is the Word justifying the sinner before God. For it is the Word of Gospel bringing the gift of Christ crucified to the sinner. It is the Sacrament of water and the Word, cleansing all sin and joining the sinner to the crucified Lord, binding the sinner to the resurrected body of Christ Jesus; and it is the Sacrament of the Body and the Blood of the cross, brought now to sanctify the sinner.

Jesus gives gifts, without number, with no stinginess (he is not a hard man)—gifts to the sinner, leading us out of captivity.

We can count up many sins. From that, we can convince ourselves that our problem with God is our many sins, and if we just get them cleaned up, get ourselves to have better habits, to make better decisions, then, as a sinner now cleaned up and under control, we can be good with God.

But there remains the real sin, the chief sin, the sin causing it all. It is the refusal of gifts from the Lord who gives gifts. This refusal to receive gifts from our Lord, the insistence on inserting ourselves as the ones accomplishing the action and judging the Lord to be a hard man, this is sin against the Gospel.

So, Jesus comes again giving gifts. He sets pastors to proclaim his Gospel, to distribute his gifts. By his Word, he bestows faith. We are the sinners being saved, he is the one delivering from slavery; we are those led out of captivity, he is the one standing in front of us giving gifts.

We live either by works or by gifts—there is no middle way. By works of our own, or by gifts from him. The first is death, the second life. The first is under the Law, the second is under grace.

And he now gives gifts to his church. He gave the pastors, the teachers, says Paul, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.

Paul lists three things as the pastor's task—(1) the equipping of the saints, (2) the work of the ministry, and, (3) the building up of the church. In each, the Lord sets the pastor distribute his gifts.

Jesus ascended on high to the right hand of the Father, where he intercedes for to his Father for the justification of the sinner on Earth. From his office before his Father, Jesus sends gifts to his people on Earth, by ordaining men to proclaim his Gospel, his release of the sinner from captivity, to place his Name on sinners in Baptism, and to feed his church with his Body and Blood, cleansing his church, forgiving all sin.

As the pastor does this, proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments according to Christ's institution,

(1) the saints are being equipped with salvation, made complete in grace,

(2) the work of ministry is being done among the Lord's people as they are abundantly given his gifts,

and, (3) the church is being built up as the body of Christ, all her members sanctified and knitted together in love as the God's people on Earth—a people rejoicing in the Lord's forgiveness and in forgiving one another.

The Lord Jesus gives gifts. Without count, with no stinginess, he gives gifts freely—to you, to me, to our families, to the church, to all sinners weak and heavy laden and looking for relief. He gives gifts.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.