

Sowing And Reaping (2003)

Offertory

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 06-Oct-03; Sermon #634s

Everything that God commands us to do is done to ingrain these things with our life.

Now, we are here on the Day of Atonement. Even on this day we are not to appear before Him empty handed. This day is listed among the feasts and giving an offering is very much a part of each one of them.

Well, the importance of the amount given varies from person to person, but in the overall sense it is less important than the very act of doing it, combined with the attitude and the thought that has gone into doing it.

Now God wants the principle of giving—the generous offering of ourselves, or what is ours—to be ingrained in us so that it is first nature, rather than the fearful protecting of ourselves, which is the way that it is now in most cases.

Turn to Hebrews 2.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

One of the principles that can be extracted here is that for all of our lifetime much of our action is dominated by the fear of loss.

Fear is one of the most frequent and powerful triggers of what we do in life. And what we do in response to fear is not always justified. For example: We will protect our image of ourselves through lying. Does fear justify lying? Does fear justify the breaking of any of the commandments?

Now, less dramatic but still driven by fear is that we will seek to protect ourselves—our financial security—through fear that as a result of some misfortune after we have given, we find ourselves penniless wishing that we had not made the offering.

Psychologists, without any belief in the Bible, know that this approach generates some major bondage, and can even create paranoia. I know of a lady who became so fearful of germs that everything that she touched, other than food, had to be wiped clean before she would touch it with her bare hand. All her life was consumed with making sure that things were clean. Her bondage, that was her life, became so restricted that she accomplished little else, and was essentially wasted. She became a sort of female Howard Hughes without his financial resources.

Perhaps by looking at some extreme behavior like that woman, we can clearly see how restrictive and binding life can be if it is driven by a fear of loss.

God wants us to learn that there is reciprocity in life. That is, that we pretty much get out of life what we put into it. Reciprocity means, “to give and take.”

There are no magic bullets. We reap what we sow. The reciprocity principle is part of the larger reaping and sowing principle. The woman that was fearful of germs sowed extreme measures of security to protect herself, and she reaped being a prisoner in her own home.

Turn with me to Luke 6.

Luke 6:37-38 "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

There is reciprocity, clear and simple.

This is not saying that we are not to judge at all. It is not saying that we are not to form opinions of others' behavior. To be discriminating is absolutely essential for a Christian. It is, though, a warning against harsh, self-righteous censoriousness, and our judgment must never, ever be final.

Jesus follows with verse 38 in which He states the principle of reciprocity. If one judges without mercy, one will reap judgment without mercy. If one judges with kindness, one will reap judgment with kindness. The implication is pretty strong from other verses, which we will not go into, that more will come back than is ever sown. That can be either good or bad.

In John 15:17, Jesus made that famous statement that, “Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friends.” He is saying that to lay down one's life is another way of making an offering. It is a sacrifice. It is to make one's life an offering in service for one's friends.

Now Jesus is the supreme example. His entire life, beginning with His submission to the Father while still in heaven, as the sacrifice for men's sins, was an offering to God and to men.

If we were to look at this carnally, His offering really paid off in the long run, did it not?

Do you see the reciprocity? He gave freely and willingly not to get for Himself in His case, but simply as an act of love. It was the right thing to do, and it produced the right thing in huge amounts.

Let us go back to Proverbs 11, verses 23 through 28. These are really meaningful verses in regard to this principle.

Proverbs 11:23-28 The desire of the righteous is only good [which Jesus exhibited while in heaven], but the expectation of the wicked is wrath. There is one who scatters, yet increases more [a generous person]; and there is one who withholds more than is right [being stingy], but it leads to poverty. [Reciprocity is at work.] The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. The people will curse him who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it. He who

earnestly seeks good finds favor, but trouble will come to him who seeks evil. He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

I once heard a story about giving but I do not know if it is absolutely true, but when I heard it, it was given as true. The story ultimately came from *Leadership Magazine*. It seems that there was a Japanese farmer whose farm was on a high hill overlooking the ocean just outside the village that he lived in. And one day while he was working his farm, he gazed out into the ocean, and before his startled eyes, the water in the ocean began to recede from the shore.

Being acquainted with what was happening, he knew that a tidal wave [tsunami] was on its way, and his village was in grave danger, because it was right at water level on the shore. And so, he set his crop on fire to serve as a warning. The people of the village saw the smoke and rushed up the hill to help save his crop. And they were standing there on that hill when the tidal wave arrived. The village was destroyed. A portion of the man's crop was destroyed in the fire, but a large number of the people who would otherwise be dead were alive.

Two acts of sacrificing in that story. First, the farmer putting his income at risk, and then by the villagers who gave up their time and energy, rushing to what they believed was his rescue. These people indeed rescued him, because his whole crop was not lost; but he rescued them as well.

The result of all involved offering themselves was that they survived a tragedy that undoubtedly would have killed them. A blessing followed their generous giving. The principle of reciprocity was at work.

For a final scripture, turn to Ecclesiastes 11.

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who

regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know what is the way of the wind [spirit], or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

One of the lessons here is that much about life is uncertain to us. The phrase, “for you know not,” that Solomon used appears five times in these brief six verses. On each occasion it alludes to what is going to happen in the future. And what he is saying is that there is some measure of uncertainty every time that one sows.

Now moving from seeds to human relations, Solomon gives priceless advice in verses 1 and 2, essentially counseling us to live generously in our relationships with others. The inference is very strong that one never knows how kindness sown is going to be returned as kindness received.

He is not talking exclusively about being generous with money. It is general advice including being generous and kind with wise counsel from one's own experiences, encouragement, thoughtfulness, forgiveness, mercy, pity, and judging.

Giving an offering is a regularly occurring exercise that fits within the general parameters of learning this valuable lesson that “Sometimes when we sow, it is fearful, but it is a necessary part of receiving.

No seed sown, no gain received.