

## You Can't Outgive The Lord

Valley Center June 13, 2009

Last Sabbath afternoon quite a number of us enjoyed a trip to Presidio Park in San Diego for walking and relaxation. It was beautiful! Did you know that we are told that of the Sabbath hours, some time should be spent out of doors in God's great book of nature? I have to admit it was nostalgic for me, in that when I was young we met there often for Sabbath potlucks after church. Maybe some of you who are reading this right now were among those groups!

On our walk last Sabbath afternoon, in one of the far reaches of the park we came across something rather interesting. We found a rope that was hanging from a branch of a very tall Eucalyptus tree. It appeared that someone had tied this rope to the neck of a plastic water bottle, and then managed to toss it up and over a large branch about 30 feet above the ground and have it "caught" in the webbing of the branch so that it remained there, with the lower end of the rope floating tantalizingly, invitingly about 5 feet above the ground, at a place where the ground fell away rapidly.

Would you trust a rope tied to the neck of a plastic water bottle and swing out over the steep canyon, sprinkled with rocks and cacti? That obviously was the question! A few of us did just that, amidst the strenuous cautions of the others. I'm glad to say that the rope held, and those courageous enough to put their faith in the rope and swing out gained an exhilarating experience. The rest of us watched in admiration.



As I thought about that, I reflected on how that illustrates the principle of faith. Those who grabbed the rope and swung believed that the rope would hold and they would be safe. If we can trust a rope tied to the neck of a plastic water bottle, can we not trust in the Word of our God? Will He let us go? Will He drop us? Will He let us fall to perdition? No! He who has invested His own life-blood in our salvation will never let us go. Only we can take ourselves from His care and keeping, and why would we do that?

The more we experience faith, the greater our confidence will become. We will find Him to be a faithful and generous God Who watches out for our every need. He gives us much more than we deserve and when we trust Him with our talents and means, we discover that He finds ways in which to repay us in blessings we didn't expect. We discover that "You Can't Outgive The Lord." Do you know this to be true in your life?

Today we're going to take a look at a few stories in the Bible that illustrate this, as well as relating a few incidents that have happened within our church family alone

this line. The Bible stories are: “The Floating Pulpit,” “The Lunch That Came Back,” “The King Who Wasn’t Paid,” and “The Hungry Prophet.” First, let’s look at a few passages in the Scriptures that declare this principle. David wrote, “I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me.” Psalm 13:6, 7.

Paul exclaimed, “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful (from the Greek word ‘hilaros, from which our word ‘hilarious’ is derived) giver.” II Corinthians 9:6, 7.

Jesus taught, “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.” Luke 6:38. What is Jesus saying here? He’s saying, “You Can’t Outgive The Lord!”

Early in Christ’s ministry we read about the “Floating Pulpit.” “Now so it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.” Luke 5:1-3.

There were several names given to the body of water on which this incident happened. What we usually refer to as “Lake Galilee” (“Galilee” comes from a Hebrew root meaning “circle” or “circuit”) was also called the Sea of Chinneroth (See Joshua 12:3, for example. “Chinneroth” also means “circuit” in Hebrew), and the sea of Tiberius ( John 6:1), after Tiberius Caesar. In this passage Luke refers to it as the Lake of Gennesaret, which is the Greek way of saying “Chinneroth.”

Because of the crowd pressing upon Him, Jesus chose to step into the boat that belonged to Simon Peter and teach from it. It became a “floating pulpit.” Peter was more than happy to have what belonged to him be used in the Master’s service. Did the Lord “pay” him for using it? What happened when the sermon was over?

“Now when He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ But Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’” Luke 5:4, 5. Usually nighttime was the preferred time for fishing,

and Peter and his colleagues had labored the previous night with nothing to show for it. When Jesus invited him to launch out and put the net down, Peter's first reaction was to question the advisability of his Lord's instruction. Not a good idea! When the Lord speaks, it is always right, and for our best good to obey Him! Peter caught himself quickly and said to Jesus, "If you tell us to go fishing in the daylight after we caught nothing at night, we will do so." Was he ever happy he took that approach!

"And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am sinful man, O Lord!'" Luke 5:6-8.

So: what do we see in this story? Peter lent the Lord his boat to use as a floating pulpit so Jesus could teach the Word of God. Afterward, a net-breaking, boat-sinking catch of fish was theirs. What did Peter learn from this experience? "You Can't Outgive The Lord!"

"The Lunch That Came Back." Another time Jesus was teaching the crowds. Lunchtime came and went but the people were so interested in what He was saying, they didn't notice! "Then Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, 'I have compassion the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.'" Then His disciples said to Him, 'Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?'" Matthew 15:32, 33.

There are two things that are amazing about the disciples response. First, notice carefully the words in verse 33 and see if they don't somehow sound familiar. When you read it slowly and pause on three particular words, it is fascinating! The words are, "bread," "wilderness" and "multitude." Do those three words "ring a bell"? I wonder if, when the disciples said those words, they sounded vaguely familiar? For forty years, didn't the Lord feed a "multitude" with "bread" in the "wilderness"? Is the God of the New Testament weaker than the God of the Old Testament? Has He not promised to furnish our needs?

The second thing that is amazing about this reply is that it comes only one chapter after the feeding of the 5,000 recorded in Matthew 14! Has the memory of Christ's miracle of the feeding of the multitude faded so rapidly? Has the recollection of God's provision evaporated so quickly in the minds of the disciples?

Oh, when we find ourselves in what we think are conditions of extremity, if we would only look back to see how God has taken care of us in the past! How short-term our memory is when it comes to trusting in God. We can trust in a rope held by a plastic bottle caught in the branches of a tree, but can't trust in the love and benevolence of Almighty God?

“Jesus said to them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ And they said, ‘Seven, and a few little fish.’ And He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. So they all ate and were filled and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left.” Matthew 15:34-37.

The people left that day filled both spiritually and physically. I hope every Sabbath is that way for you! It will be if the one who distributes the “bread” has received it from the hand of the Lord. As I see it, this is the role of the pastor; to receive “bread of life” from Jesus and pass it out. Every pastor should be like the disciples on that hillside; receiving and distributing. As such, it “belongs” to God. All the credit goes to Him. All the disciples did that day was give out what had been given to them. They didn't make the bread! I wonder what Peter would have said if someone said to him, “Great lunch, Peter!”?

So what do we see in this story? Seven loaves were given and seven baskets were taken up. This was “The Lunch That Came Back,” wasn't it! They ended up with more than what they had when they started. How did Jesus describe the way God gives when we give to Him? “Good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.” They learned that day that “You Can't Outgive The Lord”!

These two stories in the Bible are probably ones with which most of us are familiar. Let's take a look at one in the Old Testament that might not be as well known. We'll look now at the unusual story of “The King Who Wasn't Paid.” I have to smile as I read this story. Ezekiel wrote, “And it came to pass in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, that the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to labor strenuously against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder rubbed raw; yet neither he nor his army received wages from Tyre, for the labor which they expended on it.

“Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “Surely I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; he shall take away her wealth, carry off her spoil, and remove her pillage; and that will be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor, because they worked for Me,” says the Lord GOD.” Ezekiel 29:17-20.

Nebuchadnezzar was a king of Babylon at the time, but God was using him to accomplish His purpose. Part of that purpose was to bring judgment and discipline against the nation of Tyre, which had become proud and wealthy through her extensive commerce. Located on the mainland and on an island just off the coast of Palestine, she felt impregnable. Her lifestyle and principles were such that they called forth the just judgments of God.

“The word of the LORD came to me again, saying, ‘Son of Man, say to the prince of Tyre, “Thus says the Lord GOD; ‘Because your heart is lifted up, and you say, “I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods, in the midst of the seas,” yet you are a man, and not a god; with your wisdom and your understanding you have gained riches for yourself, and gathered gold and silver into your treasuries; by your great wisdom in trade you have increased your riches, and your heart is lifted up because of your riches,’ therefore thus says the Lord GOD; ‘Because you have set your heart as the heart of a god, behold, therefore, I will bring strangers against you.’””” Ezekiel 28:1-3; 4-7.

King Nebuchadnezzar was the one God commissioned to do this work. “For thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, with chariots, and with horsemen, and an army with many people.” Ezekiel 26:7. The next verses depict the military efforts expended by Nebuchadnezzar in what history tells us was a 13-year siege against Tyre. Babylon was successful in completely destroying the city on the mainland, but without a navy was not able to conquer the part of the city that was on the island. However, an agreement was reached by which Tyre bowed to the authority of Babylon. It would later be vanquished by Alexander the Great.

In language that seems very humanistic, the Lord acknowledged the service rendered by Nebuchadnezzar in doing “His work,” for which the king apparently received very little, and therefore promised him the riches of Egypt as compensation. History tells us that the siege against Tyre lasted until 573 B.C., by which time Nebuchadnezzar would have become acquainted with Daniel and his God. It would be interesting to know whether Nebuchadnezzar had experienced his

conversion by this time or not. Did he go about his work with the understanding that his was a divine commission, or did he learn about his role in the plans of heaven at a later time? In any case, the Lord found a way to amply repay him for what he had done, whether he knew he was serving God or not. “You Can’t Outgive The Lord”!

“The Hungry Prophet.” Sometime when you’re on the other side, take the time to look up a lady who hailed from the little town of Zaraphath. She was not an Israelite. She will tell you that one day, during a time of famine, a visitor came to her home, dressed in a camel skin garment. His name was Elijah, and he asked for something to eat. She explained that she had only enough for one more meal for her and her son. They were going to have one last supper together. She was preparing that right at that time. The prophet requested that she feed him first; not as a selfish request, but for her faith to grow. To “test the rope,” so to speak. So she did, and what did she find out happened after she had given her “last meal” to the prophet of the Lord? She discovered that her flour barrel never lacked and her oil flask never drained till the drought was over. When you speak with this lady up in heaven, I’m pretty sure she’ll tell you, “You Can’t Outgive The Lord.”

Nor are these illustrations limited to Bible times. I’m sure most of you could relate some incident in your life that confirms this principle. One of our members was telling me recently that his wife’s car needed some repair work done. An estimate was prepared showing as part of the charges a “diagnostic test fee” which was about \$130.00. When the repair work was finished and the final bill presented, the technician was most insistent, with no reason being given, that the \$130.00 fee be waived. Most unusual! Praise God!

Another member of our church told me that when she and her husband, who own a business, made the decision to follow the Lord in keeping the Sabbath, they relinquished 70% of their income by so doing. Their lives changed dramatically, but God has always seen to their needs. Their dream had been to build their own home, but when the realtor showed them the lot that he felt would work for them, it already had a home on it. However, the home lacked a fireplace and cook stove, something they had deeply desired to have. Just last Sunday, when taking a walk with some other church members and their son-in-law, the subject of the desired fireplace came up, and the son-in-law said, “Oh, someone has given me a fireplace, and I don’t need it. You can have it.” Praise God! “You Can’t Outgive The Lord.”

The father of the young man who donated the fireplace was telling me that his in-laws wanted to move here, but they had to sell a home elsewhere and set about to purchase another home here. Of course, the real estate market is very depressed right now, so they wondered how long it might take to sell their home. Amazingly, as soon as it was put on the market, some people came by, looked the place over and said, “We’re going to buy your home. You have a tree in your yard that the turtle that belongs to our kids likes.” Praise God!

They had been in negotiation to purchase a home down here, one that was bank-owned. As they drew near the time for the final signing of the papers, the bank officer told them, “We think you’re overpaying, given the current market. You can have the house for \$40,000 less than what we agreed on.” Praise God!

One time when Jesus spoke about the dangers of trusting in riches Peter said, “‘See, we have left all and followed You.’ So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.’” Mark 10:28-30.

It’s true; “You Can’t Outgive The Lord.” But the stories we’ve related today, both from the Bible and these personal experiences, have focused on God giving things. Fish to Peter, loaves of bread, oil and flour to a widow, wages for a king, a fireplace and money. God wants to give us all these things. He made every thing! But He wants to give us Something much more lasting and important than things, which we know will pass away. He wants to give us His Holy Spirit.

It’s interesting to compare the writings of the Gospels, because many valuable insights are discovered when you do. Matthew records Jesus’ words about asking, seeking and knocking and states, “Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father Who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” Matthew 7:9-11.

Notice how Luke reports this instruction: “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much

more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” Luke 11:11-13.

The truth is that God want to give us good “things”. He is aware of our needs and gives us more than we even ask or think. He is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. James 1:17. But more than “things,” God wants to give us the best Gift of all, Himself! The Gift of the Holy Spirit, to mold our characters and prepare us for heaven is the best Gift of all!