

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. All right, let's start with the gospel lesson today. We have Jesus warning us not to listen to those who look like they're being successful. So in the world's eyes, we often look to those who seem to have it all together. They got their house in order, they seem to have everything they need, and at least in the world, we tend to think if you're succeeding, you're being blessed. If you got the material wealth, you're being blessed by God. But God on the other hand looks at that and says, "Maybe not so much." I mean, just because you're successful, just because everything is going well does not necessarily mean you're blessed by God. In fact, more often than not, it means you have fallen away. As oddly as they might seem to us but every time Israel started getting successful and having wealth and prosperity in the land, one of the first things they also ended up doing was starting to worship other gods, putting their faith in something else other than the Word of God.

And that's what we often as humans tend to do with our finances, with our wealth, with our money. We tend to believe if we've got enough money in the bank, if we've got a good IRA or something for retirement, if we've got a good job that is supplying everything that we need, then we're okay. Then we don't need to fret or worry. But here's the problem. When we do that, we tend to put our security, our identity, our hope in our bank account. And this is why God tells us that we are called to give a tithe back to Him, our first fruits back to Him. It's not simply because we need to pay for the lights and the building and quite frankly, pay my salary. It's not just because of that, that we give to the church, because we don't give all of our tithes to the church. It's not about how much you give. We're not checking the amount. Quite frankly, God doesn't care how much you give as far as the dollar amount goes. He does care about kind of how you decide what to give.

If you're giving because, "Well, I got some extra change in my pocket. Yeah, I'll give it back to God" as an afterthought, as something you don't really think about, that's not exactly the way God intends it. He calls it a tithe and a first fruit. The idea of the first fruit is especially like in the agricultural society, the first fruit is the first part of the harvest that you get, the first day's harvest that you receive. Usually there's a section that gets ripe first and you harvest it right away. And then the hope is that the rest of the harvest is going to go well, but you're still hoping. So the idea is give the first fruits to God, and why do we do this? Why is this what God expects us to do and to think about when we think about our finances and when we think about giving back to Him?

It's because He wants us to think about why we are doing what we are doing and where we put our trust. If we give from the first fruits, we're essentially putting our hope not in our success, but in the Will of God. We're basically saying, "God, I trust you. I trust you to give me what I need to support this body and life.

Therefore, I'm going to give first to you and trust that you are going to give me the rest." Because quite frankly, everything that we have, the bank account that we have, the job that we have, the skills and abilities, everything that we have saved up, all of that is a gift given to us by God, and we should consider it as such. We should not be focused upon how much is in our bank account, but rather what God has called us to do with that which is in our bank account. And He's made it very clear whether you have a lot or you have a little, it's still about trusting in Him.

And think about that. Last week we talked about, or I guess maybe a couple of weeks ago, I was gone last week, but a couple of weeks ago we read, "It's more difficult for a rich man to enter heaven than it is a camel to go through the eye of a needle." Why is this? Because when we have great wealth, we put great security in that wealth. But what does God want us to put our security in? His word, the blood that he offered as a sacrifice for our sins as the Book of Hebrews declares. Because no matter how much money you have in your bank, no how much, how confident you are of your retirement, no matter how healthy you are, none of that is going to solve the one problem that all of humanity has. We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Now, if Christ were a mere human and His suffering would pay for the sin as a mere human, it says here in Hebrews that He would've had to suffer since the foundation of the world and it still would not have been enough. You think our national debt is huge. The debt that we owe to God because of our sin is so massive our human debt pales in comparison. The debt that we owe God because we rebelled against Him is a debt that we could never repay. And yet because of the gift of the blood of Christ, the debt is gone.

And how do we receive that blood? In our baptisms when we are washed in the waters and in His blood and we are cleansed from our unrighteousness because He suffered once for us and it's done. And then He gives us His body and blood for nourishment every single week. It's free. It's a free gift of God. You can't pay for it. You can't buy it. Not enough money in the world can purchase that. So God's not concerned about how much you put in the offering plate. He's concerned of why you put it there and where you put your trust as a result.

All these scribes and Pharisees, they were considered the religious elite of the day. They were considered the people that obviously were blessed by God because they were doing it right. And the proof of them doing it right was they had all the finery, they were successful. That's not how God counts wealth. He's not concerned about our physical wealth in as much as he's concerned about our spiritual well-being and our spiritual wealth. I mean, look at who He praises. A widow who gives a penny. And yet that is the most spectacular gift that Jesus saw. Why? Because she gave

out of faith, because she gave out of her need, out of her poverty, not out of her wealth. She gave because she trusted that God would care for her.

And think about the other widow that we talked about today, the widow that Elijah comes in contact with. She's about ready to make her last meal for her and her son. I mean, this is a context where Elijah and the people of God are not worshiping God, they're worshiping Baal, and it culminates in this battle between Baal and Elijah and the God of Israel and having to sacrifice and whichever God lights the sacrifice on fire, that's the true God. Obviously, Baal couldn't do anything and the God of Israel did. But this is the culmination of this, and there's three years of drought before it. And in the middle of this, Elijah is going to this widow and she's been suffering. She has not received a whole lot of physical wealth in this world. She's literally preparing her last supper. She's going to eat it, she's going to die, and yet, and yet God is still with her and she's obviously not the only one. How many people suffered during those years of drought? How many people might've died in the years of those drought?

We need to remember this also. What does it mean when God says, "I will be with you always?" What does it mean that, "I will give you everything that you need to support this body and life?" It means that in a broken and fallen world when things are not going well, when you are facing your last meal, when you don't know where anything else is going to come from, where you have no hope left whatsoever, you still can rejoice in the Word of God. You can still give Him praise and glory and trust Him to care for you because quite frankly, He's not exactly concerned about your life and how long it lasts in the here and now. Only insofar as whether it leads to the new life that is in Christ for all eternity.

Even if we have nothing, we can still thank God that He has given us everything because we know our time here is temporary. We know that the suffering that we face, this trials that we face, the poverty that we have of body, mind, and soul, and physical well-being, the poverty that we have here is nothing compared to the riches that He gives us through His word. We will dwell in the House of the Lord for all eternity, celebrating the marriage feast of the lamb, which has no end, never thirsting nor hungering, nor feeling the scorching heat as we read a little bit earlier in the Book of Revelation a couple of weeks ago, and every care, every concern, every hurt and sorrow and pain is going to be wiped away by God Himself as he wipes the tears from our eyes.

This is why we can rejoice. This is why we give to God out of thanksgiving for the tremendous gift He has given to us. Not because He needs it or the church needs it or anybody else needs it, but because God desires for us to recognize where is our security? Where is our hope? It is not in the things of this world. It is in the Word of God that He gives to us so rich and so free. So may His grace, His mercy, His

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peace, His forgiveness of sins be in and abide with you always now and forevermore through every trial of this world unto life everlasting.