

THE PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY BLESSINGS OF THE LORD

One of the joys of a long pastorate in the same place is getting to know your church members in multiple phases of life. Mrs. Mable Diehl qualifies as one of those greatest joys. I pastored her as a great ladies' Sunday School teacher. I pastored her when her gracious husband J.D. was alive and observed a marriage made in heaven and lived out on earth. I pastored her when she led out in the Women's Missionary Sorority with an undying missionary spirit, having traveled to the foreign mission field of Thailand herself. I pastored her as a widow slowly losing her eyesight on earth, but gaining heavenly vision through intercessory prayer like few people I have known. Now that she is in heaven, I find myself missing her wisdom often expressed through quips. One of her favorite sayings was based on Ecclesiastes 11:1, "*Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.*" She would quote that verse to me and add, "Pastor, when we put our bread out on the water, it just doesn't come back to us the way we sent it out; it comes back to us with peanut butter and jelly on it." Then she would follow up with her cute laugh and I would join in rejoicing in the truth of her statement.

How does our bread come back with the proverbial peanut butter and jelly? You will find it is true in the matter of:

I. Giving

In the following verse that Mrs. Diehl quoted, Solomon said, "*Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth*" (Ecclesiastes 11:2). God is telling us to be generous with our bread, because there could be some days coming when we don't have the wherewithal to bless others with our giftings from God, therefore put the bread on the waters now. "*Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*" (Proverbs 27:1). Let us give now! "*Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it*" (Proverbs 3:27). "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest*" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Several years ago I came across the story of a man who owned a dry goods store. The old-fashioned store sold a little of everything, but he was losing business and he hoped to jump-start his personal economy by investing in some toy ferris wheels that were supposed to be best sellers at Christmastime. He made a big push, counting on the selling of this toy to give him the needed boost. Every day for three weeks a poor little boy in the neighborhood would come by to play with the sample on the counter. He was the only one who showed interest. On the night before Christmas Eve, the storeowner concluded he was going to lose his store. Early on Christmas Eve, the poor little boy came by and the storeowner smiled and gave him the ferris wheel. The little guy took it outside and couldn't wait; he began playing with it just outside the store. As other children were out with their parents shopping, they were mesmerized by the boy having fun with the toy. The parents observed and asked the boy where he got that ferris wheel. He answered, "Right in there!" pointing to the store. Before closing hours on Christmas Eve, all 300 ferris wheels had been sold. The store was saved! The storeowner, who was a believer, said, "I was familiar with the verse, '*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again*' (Luke 6:38)." Then he added, "but it never became real until that day."

II. Praying

Solomon said, "*If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be*" (Ecclesiastes 11:3). When clouds have become full of rain they empty themselves upon the earth they are hovering over. Rain affects the earth below helping to nourish and grow the vegetation below. In the process of time, trees grow and die and become fertilizer for other trees. As I meditated on this verse I imagined the prayers of parents and loved ones praying, at times with tears, over the children God placed into their lives. We are commanded to pray for those God puts in our lives. Samuel said to the children of Israel, "*Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way*" (1 Samuel 12:23).

When my mother prayed for me in my youth, at special times she would take my shoes and pray over them claiming, "*And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the*

gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15). Not only did God answer her prayer by calling me to preach, but he made me her pastor! Mom has told me on numerous occasions that she loves Christchurch Baptist Fellowship better than any church of which she has been a member. She threw her prayers on the water for her boy and it came back with peanut butter and jelly.

When my mother and father-in-law purchased a piano and sent my wife to piano lessons, they did so with much prayer. Today their daughter is the pianist of the church where they are members. From time to time I see them in their pew looking admiringly toward their daughter. That is bread with peanut butter and jelly!

III. Witnessing

God said through the wise man, *“He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good”* (Ecclesiastes 11:4,6). Verse 4 reminds us that if we let the weather (or circumstances) govern when we sow, we’ll never reap and have a harvest. Verse 6 admonishes us to go ahead and sow our seed now. It will be like the bread on the water; there is a promise it will return. *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not”* (Galatians 6:9).

Years ago while preaching a revival in Benton, Arkansas, I witnessed to a young man. In his front yard he prayed the sinner’s prayer inviting Christ to come into his heart and save him. He assured me he would be coming to church to profess his faith and be baptized. He did not come and to be honest with you, I thought to myself, he didn’t mean it. Ten years later, I was preaching in Garland, Texas, just outside Dallas. After I preached, I was praying by my chair when I felt a tap on my shoulder. When I stood, a huge young man literally picked me up and with tears were coursing down his cheeks he asked, “Do you know who I am?” Although I did not instantly recognize him, he began to explain, “I was 15 years old when you won me to the Lord in my front yard. I was going to come to church, but that afternoon my grandfather died in Dallas. We had to move immediately. As soon as we settled down in Dallas, I walked the aisle in a Baptist church and got baptized. Later I surrendered to preach and went to Dallas Baptist College and then I went to Southwestern Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. I am now the youth pastor of a church in Plano, Texas. I

said in a testimony a couple of days ago, a guy named Johnny Pope won me to Jesus. I had never seen him before or since, but if I ever find him, I want to thank him for winning me to Christ." After he testified, someone told him I was preaching across town and he was able to tell me thank you face to face. I give God the glory for his salvation! Not only did he get saved, but God called him to preach. This was bread on the water returning with peanut butter and jelly!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.