

Summary

In Paul's final blessing and admonition to the Ephesian elders, he almost off-handedly quotes Jesus' famous words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul's tone seems to connote: "Remember what Jesus was always saying..." Interestingly, the well-known quote never appears on Jesus' lips in the Gospels – but it does appear in virtually every one of the Messiah's teachings and in the totality of His mission on earth. The mystery of Jesus' words comprises the gigantic secret of joy in the Christian life. Utterly contrary to logic and to the allure of a materialistic age, Christ's words and life reveal a mystery: in the act of giving, blessing is released in our lives. It is much more than saying, "If you give, then a blessing will later come to you;" it is saying: "As you give, blessing is released in you."

Getting to Know Each Other

1. Can you think of a time when you felt deeply blessed as you were giving or serving? Share.

Getting Into the Bible

Read Acts 20:32-35

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' " (Acts 20:32–35, ESV)

Background

The book of Acts can be understood as The Gospel of Luke, part 2. This book of the Bible relays how Jesus continued to work in the world after His resurrection by sending the Holy Spirit; in this way the church would be empowered to carry out the ongoing mission of Jesus together with Him. Luke was evidently a traveling companion of Paul and an eyewitness of how Jesus worked through Paul and the church at large.

In this study Luke records Paul's final interaction with the leadership of the church at Ephesus. While Paul did not found the church in Ephesus he spent 3 years there teaching and watching God do extraordinary miracles. Luke makes a point to teach us that the gospel received a wide hearing during this time and the mission of Jesus expanded greatly. This was Paul's *past* experience with the Ephesians. In the *present* – our particular passage – Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem from Macedonia and called the Ephesian leadership (the elders) to meet him. He soberly warns them of *future* trouble they would face as a church. Our study focuses on the words Paul gave to help the elders shepherd the Ephesian church through trouble as she moved forward into the mission of Jesus. (See Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3; Acts 19)

2. What does verse 32 have to say about the word of God?
 - a. How should we understand the phrase, "the word of His grace?"
 - b. What power does the word bring with it?
 - c. How would this have been a timely word for the Ephesian elders?
 - d. How is this a timely word for us as a church?

3. Paul does not hesitate to use himself as an example for the Ephesian leadership. Review the surrounding verses to trace this theme.
 - a. Why might Paul be so self-referential in this passage?
 - b. How could the example of Paul's own ministry be related to the "more blessed" principle of verse 35?
4. Use this passage and the following quote to explore what Jesus meant when he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Read Matt. 6:19-24

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

"These particular words of the Lord Jesus are not recorded in the gospels themselves... It does not, of course, mean that there is anything wrong with receiving gifts or even receiving charity – just that if gifts are a blessing, as they can be, the act of giving is itself a blessing."¹ (D.A. Carson)

5. Based on this passage, who gets the glory and credit when someone lives by the "more blessed" principle?

Application

6. Share two or three of the greatest ongoing blessings in your life. Are those blessings connected to what you've given or how you've served? Explain.
7. Where might the Lord be calling you to live out this lifestyle of seeing generosity and self-giving as the blessing?
8. What do you think are obstacles to financial giving in the life of every believer?
9. How can we give our lives away, pursuing the "more blessed principle" without having our life taken from us?

¹ Carson, D.A. *Acts in New Bible Commentary*. Downers Grove: IL, IVP Academic, 1994, 1099.