

## Sermon for Pentecost 10

July 29, 2018

### “God Blesses Your Offerings”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from the Lord. Amen.

Dear Christians,

There was a famine in the land of Israel. Not enough food was growing to feed all the people. Many were in need. Some were starving and dying. Times were tough, and God had revealed through the prophet Elisha that it would last seven years. That’s a long, long time.

There was a school for prophets in Gilgal, near Jericho, somewhat close to the Jordan River. Things were tough at the school too – when there wasn’t a lot of food to go around, the prophets struggled to be supported too.

One day, a man showed up at the school. He loved God, and trusted God. He must have – he brought 20 loaves of bread, made from the first ripe grain in his fields – and donated it to the school of prophets to help them out a little bit.

That’s impressive, I think. That unnamed man was eager to give his first fruits to God, trusting that there would be more fruits coming, and that it would be enough.

It was a beautiful offering given out of love for God. Elisha then commanded that the 20 loaves of bread set out for supper. Elisha’s attendant pointed out the practical issue: there were 20 loaves of bread, and there were 100 men at the school. I don’t know how big the loaves of bread were, but they were clearly not large enough to feed that many men. Not even close.

But Elisha said, “Do it anyway, because the Lord has a promise for us: it’ll feed everyone, and there will even be leftovers.” So that’s what they did, and that’s what happened. The Lord blessed the offering of bread and used it to further his kingdom and even miraculously stretched its usefulness more than normal.

That’s a short little story, and it’s a fun, feel-good kind of story. You see believers being generous and trusting, and you see God come through with an obvious, clear blessing.

Is that how it works today? Do we have that kind of faith? Do we have that kind of trust? Do we have that kind of attitude? I especially think of the attitude of the farmer who donated the bread – his trust, confidence, and love for God and God’s Word was boldly evident.

That should always be our attitude when it comes to giving offerings to our God. But I will admit to you, that’s not always my attitude when I’m giving offerings to God. I’ll bet that you could all say the same thing.

In fact, sometimes we have the downright awful attitude that says, “God has so many rules. He makes so many demands. God just wants to squeeze me for everything I’ve got. God’s wringing me out like a cloth to get every last drop of my money, my time, and my worship.”

And there’s some bit of truth to that statement. God does want you to use the money he gives you to support his kingdom, and the same with your time, and your attention, and your worship.

But is it God’s attitude that he wants to use you for his own benefit? Is God like Ebenezer Scrooge and you are Bob Cratchit and all that God cares about is how much he can get out of you?

Of course not! What is God's attitude towards you? God wants to bless you! It's so easy to see because God has already done it.

Take a look at God's blessings for your soul! By grace, God wanted to bless us miserable sinners. He sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world, to save you from sin, to knock down the wall, so that you could be reconciled to him. By grace, God gave his Holy Word so that you can be connected to him and stay connected to him and remember his promises and revel in his love. By grace, God invites believers like you to join him in paradise, perfect, glory, and eternal rest in heaven. God loves you, and he wants to bless you.

Take a look at God's blessings for your body, too. The food that you eat, God provides in a variety of ways. Some you plant and tend in your very own garden. Some you buy at the local store – and they get the food from around the state, and around the country, and some even from other countries thousands of miles away. God gets you medical care. Sometimes it's from good advice passed down from your family or from a friend. Sometimes it's at the local clinic, and sometimes it's from a specialist at a large facility in a big city. God gets you rest as you sleep at night, or find some time to get out fishing, or even make your way down to Mexico for some R & R. God loves you, and he loves to bless you.

The farmer who came to the school prophets knew all that. You can see it by his actions. You know it all too. And so you can expose the devil and his lies for what they are when he tries to slow you down from expressing your love for God with generous offerings.

Sometimes the temptation is to lament, "My offerings are too small to matter." Twenty loaves of bread for 100 men? What's the point? \$10, \$100, what's the point? That's only a tiny dent in a church budget. And yet, even without the miracle God would have blessed some of the prophets with that offerings, and he uses our offerings too in the same way.

Sometimes the temptation is to say, "I can't afford to give anything at all." I don't think many people would have blamed the farmer during the famine from waiting for the end of the harvest to see what he could afford to give, but his trust in God didn't see any issue with the timing. The same with us – God has blessed us with more than we need – and our trust in God eliminates the need to wait and see if we have anything extra to give back.

You know, there's a passage in the Bible that encapsulates this whole discussion. It's from the prophet Malachi, and it summarizes well for us wrong attitude and the temptations, and contrasts it with God's wonderful, loving, gracious attitude:

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

Sometimes people view offerings like taxes. They feel like their tax money just disappears into a blackhole of bureaucracy and doesn't benefit them at all. And they feel like offerings work the same way – they just disappear into the offering plate and nothing ever comes of them. God says, "Don't fall for it. Think of your offerings like an investment." God uses your offerings, he says, in the same way he blessed and multiplied those loaves of bread.

And he does that. God loves you, he wants to bless you, and he blesses you through the offerings that you give.

He's blessed you with a nice church building that serves as a great gathering place for worship and Bible study and Sunday school and meals and events.

He's blessed you with a congregation, with other members of the church who make use of the building to gather together.

He's blessed you with pastor after pastor after pastor. In Our Redeemer's history, there have been 18 pastors in less than 100 years. I'm confident that there are other churches, who have also been blessed, but not with that many pastors even in 150 years.

And with those blessings - a church, a congregation, a pastor – what has God given to you?

Baptisms. So far, 692 baptisms. 692 souls that have been washed, cleansed, forgiven, and reborn by the power and grace of God.

523. That's the number of young people and adults who studied the Word of God and where confirmed in a ceremony and invited to the Lord's Supper, where a person gets to taste and see that the Lord is good, the Lord who forgives sins through his body and blood in the sacrament.

And I don't have a number for the last one. How many people, how many different people have sat at Rock of Ages, at St Paul's, at Our Redeemer's, and heard the Word of God convict them of sin and forgive them by grace?

God has certainly blessed us. God certainly loves us. God will certainly continue to bless your offerings, as he has clearly done in the past. Amen.

**Text:** *2 Kings 4:42-44*

*God miraculously feeds 100 men.*

<sup>42</sup>A man came from Baal Shalishah and brought the man of God some bread from the first ripe grain, twenty loaves of barley bread, and some new grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Set it before the people so that they can eat."

<sup>43</sup>His attendant said, "How can I set this before one hundred men?" But he said, "Set it before the people so that they may eat, for this is what the LORD says: They will eat and have some left over." <sup>44</sup>So he set it before them. They ate, and they had some left over, just as the LORD had said.