

God is the Great Giver

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Jesus in Matthew 5:48 says some rather startling words. He says, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

The purpose of this sermon is not to go into a theological explanation of what Jesus means when He speaks of perfection. I will leave that to the theologians. However, it seems clear there are certain character qualities that God has which He expects to be duplicated in His people.

God is a loving God. Therefore, He expects His people to also be loving. God is a forgiving God. Therefore, He expects his people to also forgive others. God is holy. Therefore, we should strive to be holy as well. God is meek and humble. Therefore, we need to be meek and humble in our interactions with others. God is gracious, and we need to show grace to those around us. I could list many more characteristics of Christ which need to be more fully developed in our lives today.

GOD IS THE GREAT GIVER

But the characteristic of God I want to emphasized today is God as a Giver. I want for us to look at the salvation story and see the character of God as a **Giver**, contrasting it with Satan’s character as a **Taker**.

God is a giving God. He loves to give! And, if we are to be more like Him, we need to be giving, just like He is.

But I would be remiss if I did not share the other side of the equation as well. God is the Great Giver. But there is another force alive in our world today, and the evil one is just the

opposite of God. While God is the Great Giver, the devil is the Great Taker. The question which remains for us today is which one will we be like, **the great giver or the great taker?** As we dive into our sermon today, let's be clear that Bible Stewardship teaches us to be givers and not takers.

Let's go back to the beginning of the Bible where we see God at work as the Great Giver. Genesis chapter 1 tells how God took a formless and void universe and created a wonderful place to live. He created light, separated water from land, and put the sun, moon, and stars in the sky. He made vegetation to grow and created a variety of animals. And then, at the pinnacle of the creation story, God made man.

Let's pick up the Creation story in Genesis chapter 1 and verses 29 and 30. It says,

And God said, "See, I have **given** you every herb *that* yields seed which *is* on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have **given** every green herb for food"; and it was so.

What did God do? He had given the man everything he needed for his survival. God is introduced in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible as One who gives. He had given the man food to eat. And He had given food to every animal and every bird of the air.

God had not only given just what man needed to thrive, but He had given life itself. And what a precious gift is the gift of life. We can be thankful and grateful that God has given us life, and did not make us as a stone where we could not experience the joy of living.

But that is not all. God had given Adam a perfect environment in which to live. If the sun were too close to planet Earth, Adam would burn up. If it was too far away, Adam would freeze to death. It had the right amount of oxygen for man to thrive. Pure water was abundant

through rivers and streams and it would spring from the earth to water the plants and greenery through a natural sprinkler system. God had provided everything for man to do well.

As we go into Genesis chapter 2, we read in verse 8:

The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.

Why did God plant a garden in Eden if there was plenty of food for Adam to eat? Let's read verse 15 to see:

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

God gave man an occupation, something constructive that he could do. God knew that idleness was not best for man's interests, so the Lord gave man a job to do. But it was not to be a job that was unproductive. It was a job which would be rewarding for the man.

And finally, we come down to Genesis chapter 2 and verse 18. Notice what else our Giving God gave to man. Verse 18 says,

And the Lord God said, "*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

God gives Adam a companion. Not only was the Lord willing to walk with Adam in the cool of the evening, but God gave Eve to Adam, a mate to help him, someone with whom Adam could learn to understand the importance of relationships.

So, to summarize the first two chapters of the Bible, God is portrayed as the Great Giver. He gave Adam and Eve life. He gave them good, healthy food to eat, He provided a perfect environment for them to live in. He gave them something constructive to do with their lives. He provided companionship for them.

Why did He do this? Because He loved them. When you truly love someone, it is natural to want to give to them. You do not have to grit your teeth and force yourself to give something to someone you love. You do it naturally. It may take some effort to give something special to someone you love, but you do not regret the effort, not if it is for someone you love. And God gave to Adam and Eve out of a heart of love.

And when someone senses that you love them supremely, they learn to trust you. Adam and Eve initially trusted God and His Word naturally as they sensed His love for them.

SATAN, THE GREAT TAKER

Up until now, we have focused on the nature of God as the Great Giver, but as we move into Genesis chapter 3, we are going to shift gears and look at the devil as the Great Taker. I do not take any pleasure in looking at the work of the evil one. I would rather ignore him.

However, we need to be aware of how the devil works so that we do not become ensnared by his traps. Because, if we fall into his snares, we lose everything God gives us. And, if that is not bad enough, we could become like him. So, let's go to Genesis chapter 3 and verse 1 and read what the Bible teaches us about this. Genesis chapter 3 and verse 1 says,

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

The devil is the Great Taker. Assuming the form of a serpent, he strove to take away the trust that Eve naturally had in God. The evil one wanted her to doubt God's love for her. So, he began to question what God had said. He tried to take away the Word of God from Eve. He took away her trust, and he took away her sense of God's love for her.

Let's read Genesis chapter 3 and verses 2-4:

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Again, the evil one is trying to take away Eve's trust in God. He is trying to take away God's word from her. If she trusts in God and His love, if she holds fast to God's Word, then she would be safe. And the evil one knows that, so he strives to take those things away from Eve.

And he wants to take away Eve's life. God wanted to give her life eternally, but the evil one wants her to experience death. He wants to take away that precious life that God has given. We even see that today when someone commits suicide. The devil persuades them to take away the wonderful gift of life that the great Giver of Life has given them. That is what the evil one does: he wants to take away whatever God has given to a person. That is an important point to remember.

So, the serpent takes of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a fruit that was not his, by the way. He takes the fruit from the tree and gives it to Eve. God had already provided Adam and Eve with all the nutritious food they needed to live a vibrant life. But in the place of good food, Satan takes something bad and offers it to them. He knows that if they unlawfully take what was not theirs, like he did, they will become more like him. They will be takers and not givers, like God Himself.

God had never given Adam and Eve permission to eat that fruit. He forbade them to take it because He knew how destructive the results of taking it would be. He wanted to give them what was best for them. He never wanted to give them anything which was harmful.

THE RESULTS OF BEING TAKERS

But Eve, and later Adam, became takers and took the fruit which was not theirs. Sad to say, they had become like the evil one.

And what was the result? Let's read Genesis chapter 3 and verses 16-19:

To the woman He said:

“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;
In pain you shall bring forth children;
Your desire shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you.”

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’:

“Cursed is the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat of it
All the days of your life.
Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field.
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return.

The evil one was successful in taking away the precious gift of life that God had given them. He was successful in taking away the natural trust that our first parents had in God. Now it is more natural to doubt God's love than to believe it and trust Him.

The evil one had taken them away from their perfect environment, and instead of it voluntarily producing good things to eat as God had originally given them, they would now have to toil and sweat to overcome the thorns and thistles with which the land around them would become spoiled. Satan had taken away that perfect environment that God had given by his mischievous evil deed.

And instead of having the loving companionship God had given, now Adam blames Eve for his sin, and division resulted in the relationship which God intended for love. One beautiful thing after another which God had provided for Adam and Eve had been taken away by the evil one as a result of his dastardly deed.

GOD THE GIVER OF GRACE

As we proceed through the Bible, we see time after time when God as the Great Giver provides something special for His people, but the devil tries to take it away.

For instance, in Genesis chapter 6 and verse 5, we find the story of the patriarch, Noah. And the Bible paints the picture of what the world was like after the evil one took away the Word of God and the sense of God's love from the descendants of Adam and Eve.

Genesis chapter 6 and verse 5 says,

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

So, when sin reigns supreme, what does God do? What does He give? Let's read

Genesis 6:8:

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

God, as the Great Giver, grants grace to Noah. And this same God will give grace to me and to you, too! It is His nature to give, and it is His nature to give grace.

But that is not all God gave Noah. The rest of this chapter tells how God gave Noah specific instructions on how to build an ark of safety for the coming destruction. And God gave Noah a message of salvation which Noah preached for 120 years. God wanted everyone to be saved, but the devil once again took away the Word of God from their ears.

That is what the devil does. In Luke chapter 8 and verse 12, Jesus, speaking of what the devil does, says:

Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and **takes away the word out of their hearts**, lest they should believe and be saved.

The devil planted doubt in the minds of those who listened to Noah preach and took away the word he spoke from their hearts, and in the end, only Noah and his family were saved from the flood. God is the **Great Giver**; the evil one is the **Great Taker**.

And the devil did not give any protection from the flood. That is not his nature. He only takes lives and takes things. He does not give or provide. That is not his nature. And so, those who became like him perished in the waters of the flood.

GOD THE GIVER OF A GREAT PROMISE

We go a little further in Genesis and see the story of Abram in Genesis 12:2 where God says,

I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.

Again, God the Great Giver is giving. He is giving Abram a **Great Promise**. He promises to make him a great nation. He promises to give Abram a great blessing. He promises to make his name great. God continues to give wonderful things to Abram, and he becomes rich and respected throughout the land. And Abram eventually receives the gift of a son from God. The gift of children is one of the most amazing gifts the Lord can give to us.

Of course, the evil one was also at work, trying to take away all that God had promised. He tempted Abram to lie about his wife. He tempted Abram to trust in himself rather than God.

He wanted Abram to doubt God's love and to take away the trust he had in God. And he was hoping Abram would take the life of his only son. Imagine the devil's disappointment when the angel held back the hand of Abram from killing his son.

And we could look at Isaac's life and Jacob's life and David's life and Joseph's life; all through the Old Testament are stories of God giving and the devil striving to take it away by causing doubt in God's love.

But I want to focus on the life of Jesus in the New Testament. John chapter 3 and verse 16 is the favorite verse of many people, and it says,

For God so **loved** the world that He **gave** His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For God so loved that He gave. Loving is such an important part of giving. That is why the Apostle Paul says that God loves a cheerful giver. If we give grudgingly or reluctantly or because we feel pressured, then that is not out of love, and it is not how God gives.

And it says in John 3:16 that God gave His only begotten Son. He gave everything away that we should not perish whereas the evil one takes away everything so that we will perish. The contrast between the two of them is greatest when we look at the life of Jesus.

INCARNATE JESUS GIVING WHEN HE CAME TO EARTH

Christ came to this earth, not to a kingly palace, but to be born to a peasant family, born in a crude stable, born among the barnyard animals. None of us could complain if the King of the Universe had been born in the finest and most luxurious setting, but Jesus was not a Taker. He never demanded the best for Himself. Matthew 8:20 tells us that He did not even have a place to lay His head. Jesus was not about taking; He was always about giving.

When we look at the life of Christ, we see Him in the midst of the crowds giving healing to others who were afflicted. When we look at the life of Christ, we see Him giving words of wisdom from the Mount of Blessing or from the seashore or wherever the multitudes could gather. When we look at the life of Christ, we see Him giving attention to the little children.

Jesus was always giving, giving, giving to others around Him, never taking for Himself. Even if He was at a wedding feast or at a banquet or invited to someone's house, we find Him giving way more than He received. That is His nature. He is a **Giver**.

In contrast, the evil one is a **Taker**. For the devil, it is not about others; it is all about him. Maybe you know someone who is that way where it is all about him or her, never about you.

So, when Christ and the devil meet in the wilderness of temptation in Matthew chapter 4, we see that all of the temptations the evil one brings to Jesus are coming from the perspective of a taker, not a giver.

I mean, look at it in Matthew 4:3 --

Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

Jesus WAS hungry. He would have enjoyed some bread to eat. But Christ was a Giver, not a Taker. He was more concerned with those around Him than His own needs. It was never about Him. He was more concerned with every Word that proceeded out of the mouth of God than He was His own physical needs.

But the devil, being a Taker, could not understand why Christ would not use His power for Himself when He had the power to command the stones to turn into food. To deny this was beyond the comprehension of the evil one because his nature is that of a Taker.

Matthew 4:5-6, says,

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:

‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’

and,

‘In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’

But Jesus was a Giver, not a Taker. He was more apt to give something good to the angels of heaven than take assistance from them, especially if He were to be reckless, like the devil suggested that He be. But it was difficult for the evil one to see why Christ would not fall to this temptation because the devil’s nature is that of a taker, and he would gladly take advantage of the kindness of others.

And then we come to Matthew 4:8-9:

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”

If you are a Taker, this is the greatest temptation of all because all the things in the world would be given to you, and you could take it and have it all. What an enticing temptation for a taker! But Jesus was a Giver; His whole life and ministry was focused on giving, not taking. So, He was able to say in verse 10:

Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

You see, worship is an act of giving, not taking. A lot of people do not understand that today, and the devil certainly did not understand that two thousand years ago. He was focused on taking the glory of the world, not on giving worship and praise to God.

But perhaps the greatest example of Christ being the Giver is on the cross. Matthew 27:50, speaking of Jesus on the cross, says this:

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

What does “yield up” mean? It means to “give.” Jesus gave up His spirit. Jesus gave His life willingly for us, to pay the penalty for our sins. He was not coerced into it. He was not forced to do it. He gave of Himself willingly.

John 19:30 says it a different way:

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

Romans chapter 5 and verse 8 says,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The cross is the greatest demonstration of God’s love for us: He gave up His only Son to die for you and for me.

JUDAS, THE TAKER OF MONEY

The cross is also the greatest demonstration of the devil as the Great Taker. He took the life of the Son of God. It was not simply Judas Iscariot and the Jewish leaders who crucified Jesus. John 13:2 is clear when it says,

And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him.

Satan had entered the heart of Judas and into the hearts of all who crucified our Lord. That is what happens when someone is demon-possessed. It means that the devil takes control. And it is because the evil one takes. He takes possession of one’s mind and heart. He takes

control. He is a taker. Judas, instead of choosing to have the heart of a **Giver**, became a **Taker** of money in exchange for the life of the Son of God.

CONCLUSION

In light of biblical stewardship, we have two options: we can be Givers, or we can be Takers. The Bible is full of stories of people who dedicated their lives to giving. They gave up everything for the sake of the gospel. Hebrews 11 is about those people in the **Hall of Fame**, or the **Hall of Faith**; their stories tell us about people who were Givers. But we also have stories of **Takers** like Achan, Judas, Ananias and Saphira.

In the story at Calvary, we have the contrast between the one who **took** the life of the Son of God and the One who **gave** His life for you and for me. The only question that remains today, my friend, is: Who are we going to be like? Are we going to be like God or are we going to be like the devil? Are we going to be a **Taker** or are you and I going to be a **Giver**?

It is my prayer that we may become so close to God that we will be like Him in all things, and that we will be giving, just as He is. “Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” And one day we will hear the words of Jesus, “Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:23).

The End