

## Provision

Over the past few weeks, as my family and I have struggled through the difficulties of the suffering, the sickness, and eventually the death of our dear son, more than ever before, we have been able to see God's loving Hand intervening within our circumstances and making provision for our needs.

And as He usually almost always does, He has used people, most of whom we knew, but also people that we had never met before. But all of them working towards a goal of helping us and helping our dear son.

And I was reminded all over again of how God has put within His provision to those of us who love Him, a "special Body" of people whose calling it is to reach out to people who are in need, and to meet their needs.

And then, as I began to study through these first few words that I'll read for us in a moment from Luke chapter 8, I was able to see how, during those beginning days of the new church that Jesus was forming, that He would eventually arrive at forming that "Special Body" of believing helpers who would be the "Body of Christ" that has been such a blessing to us in our time of need.

And throughout this whole experience, I have been reminded that our loving God is "Big", very "Big", "big" in ways that our minds can't imagine. Though my own mind is too small to fathom the whole concept of Him knowing about everything, everything that is, and everything that takes place, He does. He knows it all, those things that have already happened, those things that are taking place right now, and also even all those things that are yet to take place.

And He is ever and always near to us, at every moment, right up-close, knowing everything that is taking place, even every thought we think. And He is so "powerful", He is able to cause anything to take place that He desires to happen.

And amazingly, everything He does is "good", so very, very good. Our God truly is amazing.

And again, in most all of the things that God does for each of us, He does it through other people, especially through that special "Body of Christ" that He

has formed within the hearts of those who have received Him as their Savior and Lord.

And again, here in these first few words of our scripture passage for today, we can see how the Lord Jesus is beginning to form that special "Body of Christ". And how that special "Body of Christ" will be doing its very special work of helping Him and helping others within the larger body of believers within the church.

Here, in this passage, we will begin to see how, through the Holy Spirit, God gives people within the "Body of Christ" special gifts and talents, how He equips each of us to be able to reach out and to do things we have never done before, helping and meeting the needs of not only the other people within the body of the believing church, but also, even often to reach out to help those out beyond the "Body of Christ", those even within the unbelieving world around us.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, God describes this special "Body of Christ", and how each member of the "Body" goes about interworking to accomplish His special purposes.

Listen, and note carefully how each part of the "Body of Christ" is to care for its other members, but is, at the same time dependent on the other parts of the Body. And here, God wisely uses the examples of our own physical bodies to help our understanding of what He is doing.

**14** . . . the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? **18** But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19** If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. (1 Corinthians 12:14-20)

Isn't God so wise and so ingenious, in the way He reaches into and meets our needs. Each person taking up the role God has assigned to them, with everyone then being able to prosper in their purposes.

Here in today's scripture passage, we see an example of how God was doing this very thing, each person equipped for their part in the "Body of Christ", and each person being faithful to carry out those purposes. Listen!

This is Luke chapter 8, beginning in verse 1.

<sup>1</sup>Now it came to pass, afterward, that He (the Lord Jesus) went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, <sup>2</sup>and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, <sup>3</sup>and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance. Luke 8:1-3)

First, may we note that though it be contrary to the prevalent belief within our culture today, there really is no shame, in being poor, in owning nothing of the riches of this world. In reality, it is more often a blessing when a person is not bound by the demands and the necessities of ownership.

The Lord Jesus understood those things, and He knew that it was best that as He dwelt among us here in the flesh, He remain poor, neither owning nor possessing anything. He knew that it would gain Him nothing to have man's wealth. Jesus was already the great and mighty King of Glory who had in ages past created and owned everything that man could see.

With only the word of His mouth, Jesus had spoken into existence all the things that men would count as being so important to them. Listen to those words given in John chapter 1,

<sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (John 1:2-3)

Folks, Jesus had created all things and all things belonged to Him, but He Himself had no desire to own or to possess any of it. So, with great humility, He laid it all aside to come among us, to minister to us and then to die for our sins.

Jesus' only need for the things of this world was in the nourishment necessary for His human body. All flesh needs that, and so did His. But beyond that, Jesus knew that it would be a better thing, for him to own nothing.

In His great wisdom, Jesus instead placed the possessions and the wealth of this world into the hands and the watchcare of His creation. In that way, men and

women could, if they were so inclined, use that wealth for the care and benefit of others.

And that was the very special circumstance and situation that we see in our scripture passage for today. In His providential plan of creation, Jesus had both created the things of this world and also created the need for them, food, clothing, shelter and protection. But He did it all with the special purpose in mind of drawing men and women to Himself, and to each other in oneness, oneness of purpose and oneness of salvation.

Is not God a masterful genius in His plans and purposes. His plan was then, and is now, for each man and each woman to have fundamental needs that require the personal involvement of other people, their personalities, their talents and their gifts, all coming together for the common good of each other.

But even on beyond that, on beyond the meeting of fleshly needs, God's plan of "oneness" and unity would also meet deep spiritual needs. It would serve to draw men and women out of the sinful condition of their nature into a salvation relationship with Him.

Listen to these words about "oneness" that Jesus gave to us in John chapter 17, <sup>20</sup>"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; <sup>21</sup>that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. <sup>22</sup>And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: <sup>23</sup>I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:20-23)

Of all of the special blessings of God, "oneness" surely is a most precious and helpful blessing. And "Oneness" is the central element within the "Body of Christ". We think very little about the value and worth of oneness, until we are alone and in need. And then someone comes along side and offers to help us and to share their provisions with us. It is then that oneness proves most precious and dear to us!

It is that kind of oneness that is being spoken about in these words of Jesus, and the oneness that is being demonstrated in the sharing of provisions from these women.

Folks, a very important truth is being shown to us in these few words about the gracious and giving spirit of these women who were traveling with Jesus, and that important truth is this. . . . If, and to the degree, that we as believers surrender ourselves into the perfect plan that God has put into place, that will be to the degree that His plan is truly able to come together and begin to work for the common good of everyone else.

The simple truth is, Jesus could have done just as He did during creation. He could simply have spoken all of the provisions He and the disciples would need into being. But He didn't. He knew that it would be far better for the Body of Christ to reach forward and to meet those needs.

And that is also true for us in our day. As we mentioned a moment ago, through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit, God gave us, you and me, very special "Spiritual Gifts" to equip us so that we can reach forward and meet one another's needs.

Yes, you and I have many talents that are born into us at birth, given to us as a common grace from God. But in addition to those talents, God has also given us special "Spiritual Gifts", "Gifts" that can do things that natural talents can never do.

Those special gifts are described for us in several places in these scriptures, but especially in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Romans chapter 12, and in Ephesians chapter 4. Listen as I read about some of those special gifts given in Romans chapter 12.

4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if serving, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who gives of their finances, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:4-8)

Within the special Spiritual Gifts that God gives to us are found all the provisions and abilities that any of us could need for life and Godliness. And if we will only join into oneness with God and with each other, then through these special gifts all of the needs and desires of life can and will be met.

Think again with me for a moment about what we have just said. First of all, in our natural birth, God fashioned all of us with basic physical, emotional and spiritual needs. At the same time, He generously equipped us with many special talents and abilities so that we could, to some degree, cope with not only our own needs, but also many of the needs of others.

And then, as we received “new birth” in salvation from Christ, God went a step further. In our new birth, He endowed us with even more gifts and abilities, this time with gifts and abilities directly from His own Holy Spirit, “Spiritual Gifts” . . . and all for the specific benefit of blessing other people.

The idea being that if we will, in loving oneness, selflessly busy ourselves with giving out blessings and benefits to others, and they, in the same way, selflessly busy themselves with giving out blessings and benefits to us, then each of our needs and desires will be met with bountiful supply, all of us giving and none of us left lacking in anything.

Here, in these scriptures, as Jesus traveled about the countryside teaching and preaching, He was endowing and equipping His disciples with “Spiritual Gifts” that they would need to carry His ministry of salvation on forward after He was gone, the “Spiritual Gifts” of “teaching” and “preaching” and “leadership”.

And in the others who were traveling with Him, especially these dear women, He was equipping them for their part, both for those days, but also for the days to come. In them, we see the “Spiritual Gifts” of “giving” and of “serving”.

And folks, as we become “givers” we need never be concerned about our own needs being met. We see that special promise in Philippians 4:19 where we are told,

<sup>19</sup>And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

In these words, the Apostle Paul was saying to the givers in Philippi “because of your generosity in giving to meet my needs, my God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”.

When oneness of Spirit and of purpose bind people together, with each other and with Christ, then all manner of plans and activity can go forward.

Look again at these words of our text today. Here, we read very simply that there were people, these three women in particular, but others also, who traveled along with Jesus in His ministry, making provision for Him and for His disciples out of their own personal finances.

And as I mentioned a moment ago, these women seem to have been given the “Spiritual Gift of Giving” and the “Spiritual Gift of Serving”. And they responded to those Spiritual Gifts by giving to the needs of Jesus and His disciples and of serving them as they traveled about the country, “selfless giving”, giving of themselves, giving of their time, their energies and their wealth.

And that was exactly as it should have been. That was the reason God endowed them with the money and with the Spiritual Gifts, so that they could join in and complete their part of the plan and purpose in the Body of Christ.

Folks, make no mistake. It is an integral and well-orchestrated plan, that God is putting into place here in the earliest beginnings of the church, each person having a part to play within it. But it does require each of us to follow on through on our part. These women had a vital part to play in ministering daily to the needs of the group.

As Jesus and His disciples went about preaching and teaching, they needed to be free of many of the common requirements and distractions that so often plague a ministry. They especially needed food to eat and other provisions.

Yes, again, Jesus could have simply done as He did in feeding the 5000, but had He done that, He would have deprived these dear women of the privilege of doing their part.

And that is a very important matter to consider. We often probably go too far to spare our loved ones or our neighbors from having to do one thing or another. We jump instead to take up their load or burden. Though well

intended on our part, in doing that, we may be preventing them from doing something that God actually intended for them to do. And that can be most unfortunate, because we may also be robbing them of a special blessing that God has intended for them?

You and I are an important integral part of God's great plan and of the special "Body of Christ". And each of us needs to seek out and to know what our part is within His Body.

One or more of God's Spiritual Gifts is ours and those gifts are intended for our use for the benefit of others around us. Are we doing that? These women did. Some of them had money that they could give and they gave it. Others of them, no doubt served in other ways. That was their parts and they were diligent in doing their parts.

Again, are you and I doing our part? What is our part? We might say, "but I don't have much money". Perhaps these women didn't either, but they gave anyway and God made it be plenty enough to meet the needs of Jesus and His disciples.

The question for you and me is, "Are you, am I, giving to meet the needs of Jesus?" Or are we simply using our time and our money to meet our own needs.

Folks, even though you may think that you don't have enough money or abilities to do as these women did and provide for the needs of Jesus, let me assure you that you do. The guarantee is found in those words I read to you a few moments ago, from Philippians 4:19. These words promise you and me that if we will be generous in providing for the needs of Jesus, then

<sup>19</sup> . . . my God shall supply all your (and My) need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

May we pray.