

Sermon 8

Topic: God Provides Food in Abundance, Part 2

Theme: God's Provisions

Scripture Reading: Psalm 136:25

Introduction

As a child going to school one of the hymns we would sing at the beginning of the day was "Thank You". It was a fairly simple song with a seemingly uncomplicated melody. Each line begins with "Thank you" and that is followed by a particular thing to be thankful for. Some of the things mentioned included the morning, the day, family and friends, among others. It represented a wholesale expression of gratitude for the kindness of God in providing for humanity. The sentiments expressed in the song and the invitation it gives to us to be thankful, are most appropriate for us at this time as we contemplate and reflect on the abundant provision of food that God, the Creator, has made a part of our lives in the beautiful islands of the Caribbean that we call our home.

Like the song I used to sing back in primary/elementary school, the Psalm that forms the basis of our text is similarly a musical rendition that carries a refrain that is often repeated. Whilst in the case of my song, the repeated line was "Thank you" (an expression of thanks), in the case of our Psalm, the repeated line is "His love endures forever" (a statement of fact that gives the reason to be thankful). Psalm 136 is a liturgical psalm that expresses praise to the Lord God as Creator and Redeemer of His people. It recounts God's mighty deeds in making the world (136:4-9) and God's redemptive act in rescuing the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt (136:10-15). In addition, God settled the people in the Land, having led them through the wilderness experience (136:16-22). As the Psalmist comes to the end he makes this declarative statement of God's kindness, "**[God] gives food to every creature" (136:25)**. It is this absolute and unambiguous declaration that serves as the foundation of this sermon. If/Since it is a fact that God has given food to every creature, what does that mean for us? How should we live in light of this reality?

Proposition

In response to God's abundant provision, which is an expression of God's grace, we should be grateful to God and generous to others in our treatment of God's gifts.

Main Points

1. God's Abundant Provision is an Expression of God's Amazing Grace

The grace of God is a central and recurring theme in salvation-history as recorded in the Scriptures. From the beginning to the end, and at all points in between, the biblical records point us to the kindness/grace of God. This has been expressed using various terminologies including mercy, loving-kindness, steadfast/unfailing love, grace, love, kindness. All of these point to the nature and character of God as one who always acts in the best interest of his creation and as one who will not be deterred in doing good for us. In that regard, God's grace is unrelenting and irresistible. The God revealed in scripture is a God of abundant grace who provides for His people and his world.

- **Abundant Grace At Creation – (Ps. 136:5-9/Gen. 1:20-25) General Food**

In causing the world to be, God acted out of love and gave life to all things living. Genesis 1:11-12 states, ***“Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.***

These verses identify God as the ultimate source of the vegetation on the land. The passage also indicates what God thought of his creation: ***“it was good”***. These two things are also true about the rest of the creation including creatures in the seas, in the sky and on the land (Gen.1:20-25). They were all created by God and they were all created good. The summary statement at end of the creation is this, ***“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good”*** (Gen. 1:31). All the fruits and foods, livestock, sea-food and poultry in all their various kinds were created by God and enabled by God to multiply themselves in order to fill the earth. It is through these provisions that we are able to find food to eat. The creation of the earth and all that is in it are expressions of God's abundant kindness to us.

- **Abundant Grace in the Wilderness (Psalm 136:16/Ex. 16:4) – Emergency Food**

In the on-going and ever-evolving relationship with humanity, God invited one people into a covenantal relationship with Him. God's intention and design was that the Israelites would become a light to the people and nations around them. Through them God intended to call and bless all nations. The Israelites' deliverance from Egypt was to serve as the beginning of them becoming a nation. Unfortunately, as soon as they left Egypt they started to complain and yearn for what they had left behind (not remembering to include the enslavement). In response to their situation, God provided for them.

In Exodus 16:4 we are told, ***“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day’...”*** Following that, Moses, in speaking to the people declared, ***“You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning” (Ex. 16:8).*** Both of these verses point to the fact that in a time of crisis, desperation and great need, God provided what they needed. Although the people were grumbling and seemingly ungrateful for the deliverance from Egypt, God acted in kindness towards them and provided for their need. God provided manna (starch) and quail (protein) for their need and having deliveries in the morning and in the evening. Thus, they were able to enjoy food that was both timely and balanced. This was an expression of God's grace.

- **Abundant Grace in Jesus Christ – (Ps. 136:23-25/John 6) Spiritual Food**

Within the teachings of the Christian faith perhaps nowhere can we see more clearly the kindness of God than through the person and work of Jesus the Christ. In the Gospel of John, Chapter 6, we see both a demonstration and an explanation of the goodness of God to a hungry and hopeless humanity. Through God's miraculous power, Jesus of Nazareth feeds over five thousand people (5000) by multiplying five loaves and two fish (John 6:1-15). In so doing he responded to their physical and material need. Moving on from there, Jesus proceeds to invite them to come and experience him as the bread from heaven, as the One sent to satisfy the deep longings of the human soul. In that respect, Jesus becomes, to all who believe, the bread of life. (John 6:35). In

His grace, God provides for physical and material needs of humanity as well as the spiritual food that we need in order to live and become connected to God. Jesus saw himself and his ministry as the means by which God would provide eternal and spiritual food for his people. As with the Israelites in the wilderness, this action of God in Christ is not dependent upon or determined by our deservedness. Rather, it is in response to our need; an abundant expression of God's grace.

2. God's Abundant Provision is an Invitation to Sincere Gratitude

From the foregoing examples highlighted we have some clear evidence of the grace and kindness of God towards the world that He has made. In addition, as believers in Jesus Christ we may have our own personal stories, our testimonies even, of how God's grace has been experienced in our lives. This then begs the question: since God has been so good to us in providing food for us, how should we respond? The answer to this question lies in the repeated first two words of the three first verses of the Psalm, as well as in the concluding verse. Verses 1-3 of Psalm 136 has the clear injunction: ***Give thanks...!*** And as the Psalm comes to an end the Psalmist commands: ***Give thanks to the God of heaven...for his love (grace/kindness) endures forever.*** (Ps. 136:26)

- **Give Thanks in Anticipation (Philippians 4:7)**

There are going to be times when we may not have all that we want or need; the temptation is to become anxious and to start worrying. Writing from a Roman prison, the Apostle Paul encourages the believers at Philippi not to worry, but instead to pray. He asks to make their request known, to place their petition before the heavenly Father. This heavenly Father is the same One who is the Creator and Provider of what we need. The believers are told to present their requests, ***with thanksgiving*** (Philippians 4:6). The implication here is that they should say thanks, even though they are yet to receive what they are asking for. This approach suggests a life of thanksgiving or what some have coined as "thanks-living". Such a life embodies an attitude of gratitude in every situation and built on the conviction that the God who has provided in the past can and will provide again. It is a life that understands that the God who provided food for the birds of the air and clothes for the lilies of the field will also provide for His children (Matthew

6:26-33). Therefore, we can live lives of thanksgiving as we wait and anticipate how God will provide for our needs.

- **Give Thanks in All Situations (1 Thessalonians 5:18)**

Expressing gratitude will become a part of our nature when we engage in “thanks-living”. Hence, on reception of good gifts from God we can break forth into spontaneous expressions of gratitude. As the Apostle Paul comes to the end of his first epistle to the Thessalonians, he makes a statement that is worth contemplating at this time. Paul says, “**give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**” This is an invitation to a life of thanksgiving whatever situation one may be in or despite the circumstances that one may be facing. So, we are to be thankful when we receive from God and we are to be thankful when things may not be going in a positive direction for us. Before we eat our meals, we should always thank God for providing for us. When we go to the grocery or the market to get our supply of food, we should be thankful. In short, it is God’s desire that we be people of thankfulness whose lives are devoted to being grateful to God.

In our own country we have so much to be thankful for. Year-round provision of foods and fruits; wonderful, livable weather; ocean breeze and year-round sunshine, are all available to us without our labour or effort. These are given to us by God’s mighty hand and from God’s loving heart. These and so much more should evoke a life of thanksgiving from us.

3. God’s Abundant Provision is an Opportunity for Extravagant Generosity

Thanksgiving represents a response that is directed toward God, in light of God’s kindness. A second response is required, however, and this is towards our fellow human beings and towards the rest of God’s creation. We must express gratitude to God for all that has been provided for us and we must demonstrate generosity to others because God has given so much to us. In other words, whatever we have received must not be hoarded and stored away in a selfish manner and without thought of others. It may seem contradictory but the best way to store God’s blessings is not to keep them to ourselves. It is by giving to others that our gifts make a more lasting impact. Whatever we share with others in the

name of Christ we do not lose. Because God has given, we have received; and because we have received, we should give. That is how we complete what I am calling the “triangle of grace”.

In the New Testament, the believers in Macedonia can serve as a model for what Christian generosity looks like. In describing their approach to giving to the needs of others, this is what the Apostle Paul wrote, ***“In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. 5 And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.”*** (2 Corinthians 8:2-5)

Mindful of how tremendously blessed they had been on account of God’s kindness, these materially poor believers demonstrated an eager willingness to share in the work of the Lord by giving to help others. The sequence of their response began with an acknowledgement of who God is and what God had done, and so ***“they gave themselves first to God”***. This initial act then served to influence everything else they did thereafter. In giving themselves to God they came to realize how “rich” they were. And so, despite their economic and material poverty they had a well-spring of generosity. Out of this flowed a sacrificial spirit that prompted them to go beyond what was expected because they saw it as giving to the God. So, they gave liberally, sacrificially, freely and eagerly.

Like the believers in Macedonia, we in the Caribbean may consider ourselves materially poor. If, however, we take a thorough look at our situation we might discover how “rich” and how “blessed” we are. Out of that realization should well up a spring of rich generosity that prompts us to share with others from God’s bounty, what has been bestowed upon us. We may have different fruit trees and food in our yard that we can share with others. In seasons of excess, we can preserve fruits by juicing or turning them into puree and freezing or we can make jams and jellies that can be shared with others. Herbs and spices can be pickled or mixed with fruits to make chutneys. These are just some of the ways that we can share God’s blessings with others. What is most important is that we have a generous heart and a gracious spirit. Even though God has been so generous in providing for His creation, some people waste

while others are destitute; some use food to control and manipulate. As people of God, we must become advocates; the voice of the weak and vulnerable, in championing the cause of justice for those who are left out or pushed out to the margins.

Conclusion

I don't think that anyone of us should be in doubt as to the goodness and kindness of God. What may need some adjustment is how we respond to God's kindness. We must acknowledge that, like the children of Israel, we are not always as grateful as we ought to be. In fact, at times we are simply ungrateful. Notwithstanding, God, by God's nature, remains loving, patient and generous to us. May this reflection stir us to engage or increase our **gratitude quotient**. Can we turn thanksgiving into "thanks-living"? Ours is the challenge to always give thanks in all circumstances for all that God has so freely given unto us. We must seek to live with a constant awareness of the blessings that we have received and the ones we are anticipating; in all situations let us give thanks...for God's love endures forever. Finally, let us strive to be more generous. Instead of trying to keep and preserve for ourselves may we seek to give to others and pass on that which we have received. Out of his abundant grace God has given us so much. In response, let us cultivate grateful hearts that are full of gratitude and may we demonstrate a generous spirit as we give liberally, eagerly, freely and sacrificially to others. The God who has provided for us abundantly wants us to live thankfully and to share generously with those in need.
AMEN.