

Text: James 1:1-8

Title: "Living and Giving"

Introduction: The world we live in today is not in the condition I think it should be. I know that "it is what it is" because of the choices that human beings have made, but I don't like it.

As we learned last year, the problem of starvation in the world today is not about production, it's about distribution. Studies show that the earth produces enough food for every human being (6 billion) to have plenty to eat and more. Yet, Thousands of children die each day of starvation. Millions of human beings live on rations of food and water and do not have the medical care needed to survive.

Let me say this again: God is in charge of production, we are in charge of distribution. God has supplied, we have *not* distributed! That's our job!

These past few weeks we have been talking about how Jesus wants each of us (that's ALL of us) to experience deep joy in all areas of our lives here on earth. Jesus says that He came that our joy might be full / complete / total. I don't know about the rest of you, but I want that! I want to experience TOTAL JOY in this life!

Not only do I want that for me, but like we finished up with last week, I want that for the people around me... SOZO = a rescue mission in all areas of our lives. I hurt when other people hurt; and if we don't see other people hurting and we don't hurt for them, I believe that we have lost our humanity. If we don't look at other people who are in need and start to search out ways to help them, we are not better than the other selfish animals that walk this earth! I believe that we are created in the image of God and that God wants what is best for each one of us! **PRAY!!**

Alright, off of my soapbox now... Last week we talked about how if we are going to experience SOZO in our lives, God will do God's part and we have to do our part. Our part has to do with being OBEDIENT to God! One of the things we learned about living life God's way is that we HARVEST what we PLANT!

When I think about harvesting and planting, I cannot help, especially this week, but think about the Pilgrims and that first Thanksgiving Feast. What an amazing bunch of people... They traveled into unknown territory, meeting an unknown people, risking life and limb to discover a new place to worship God. That first Thanksgiving in 1621 was an act of faith, a religious worship of God in desperate times. In the previous year, the pilgrims had lost over half of their population to disease and starvation and knew they would probably lose many more. Yet, they took time to thank God for all that God had blessed them with.

In the difficult times we live in, I think that we too need to be proactive in thanking God for all that God has blessed us with! When we do, we are investing in what God has planned for the future. When we give thanks in difficult times it is a reminder to us and to God that *we trust Him* even if we can't see how things are going to turn out—that's called *'faith'*.

Today we are going to find out THREE WAYS that we can reinvest all that we have in God's Future plan. **God has a plan for you and it's better than yours!**

First, I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other is a brief outline of what we will be covering as we pursue God's Promise of "SOZO". In that outline, there are some blanks that I would love to have you take time to fill in. We will give you all the answers... its okay. Then, take this paper home and refrigerate it for further use this whole week. We believe that if we take more than one hour a week in scripture, it will sink in more and affect our lives. For those of you listening on our website or are IPODing, you can download our program and fill in the blanks too. I would hate to have any of you to feel left out.

Now that you have that in front of you, let's get right to our Scripture for today. This, again, comes from the Book of James. James was the half-brother of Jesus writing somewhere in the years right before 50AD. And in our Scripture for today, James tells us who he is and who he is writing to.

READ JAMES 1:1-8 NOW!

As James opens this letter, he tells us who he is and who he is writing to. First, it's from James (a half-brother of Jesus who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah until after Jesus was resurrected) who calls himself "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." James tells his readers that he is no longer his own; life is no longer about him, but about God and God's Kingdom. James claims that he lives for one thing ... to SERVE his Lord Jesus Christ!

Then, James tells us who he is writing to: "the 'twelve tribes'—Jewish believers scattered abroad." Now, remember that the Christian Church was started some 10-15 years before James is writing this letter. James is writing as he serves as the leader of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. The Christians were now, not only being oppressed by the Roman Empire that ruled over Jerusalem and Israel, but they were also hated by the traditional Jews. Remember how Jesus had so many run-ins with the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law? Now it was Jesus' Follower's turn! They still despised Jesus and His claim to be the Messiah!

The result was that many of the Jewish Christians had fled Jerusalem and were living in other surrounding countries. When they went, they could probably only carry what they had on their backs...

These people that James is writing to were suffering in two ways: 1) *economically* they didn't have much and 2) they were being *persecuted* and ridiculed! Life was hard for the people who received this letter from James. BUT, here's what James said...

I. Live and Give Thankfully

- A. BE THANKFUL! "When troubles come your way (not 'if', but 'when'), consider it an opportunity for great joy!"
 1. What?!? That doesn't make any sense if we are living for ourselves ... trouble coming our way = PROBLEMS, NOT Joy!
 2. The problem is that most of us are pretty near-sighted! We think in terms of this life, while Jesus is pointing us to eternity!

3. Be thankful when you are tested, because that will prepare you for serving the Kingdom well! Testing builds Endurance. And “when your endurance (maturity) is fully developed, you will strong in character and ready for anything.”
 4. Jesus goal was to change the world for good. As followers of Jesus, our goal needs to be to change the world for good! God needs MATURE people in order to “Change the World for Good”.
 5. I don’t know too many athletes who thank their coaches for drilling them hard in practice; but, when you win that close game or match and it was because you were fully prepared physically and mentally = “thanks Coach!”
- B. I don’t know about you, but I sometimes think that my life is hard... anyone else? BUT, in the U.S., I was born into one of the most fortunate countries in the world!
1. I have a roof over my head and there is food on my table.
 2. 2/3 of our world deals with necessities; I deal with wants and desires... The things that might keep you and I awake at night is not even a possibility for some people.
 3. Going on a mission trip of some sort is a great eye-opener to what people, even in the United States, have to live with and go through...
 4. You know, God made sure that I was born into this country and the family I grew up in and made sure I had a roof and food ... I had nothing to do with where I was born and neither did you.
 5. I invite you to Live and Give Thankfully in response to how God has blessed you!
 6. It is easier to Live and Give Thankfully when we have the perspective that God made sure we were where we are and that all that I have came from God and is God’s!
 7. It’s God’s anyway, why wouldn’t I give it to God’s other kids who are in need.

II. **Live and Give Faithfully**

- A. Some of us have a hard time living by faith. We are not sure what we can believe and what we cannot believe (and that’s okay). James gives us some insight here about how to know what to do with ourselves...
1. (5-8) = “If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask Him, and he will gladly tell you.”
 2. Wow! If I’d known it was that easy, I would have asked a long time ago! Right?!
 3. How many of you have wished that God would just tell you what to do next, so you didn’t have to try to figure it out?!?
 4. Here’s your answer: Just Ask! BUT, (v.6) “be sure that you really expect him to answer”. “Do not waver...”

5. If you still doubt God or that God will answer, DON'T EXPECT AN ANSWER! James talks about us being "double-minded" ... In other words, wanting to trust God and NOT Trust God at the same time ... It does NOT WORK!
 6. "God, I don't really trust you, but would you please tell me what You would like me to do?" WRONG!
- B. Here's the Problem: Some of us don't really want God to answer!
1. Why? Because we already know the answer ... "God, what do you want me to do?" Answer: "The same thing you've known to do or NOT DO that we've already talked about one hundred times!"
 2. It's hard to Live and Give Faithfully when we are not being faithful to Who we know God to be! We don't want that answer!
 3. "God, please bless me financially." Okay—Tithe! That's not the answer I want to hear!
 4. "God, please bless my marriage." Okay—Invest some time into it! That's not the answer I wanted to hear ... I'm busy!
 5. "God, please help my children." Okay—Take the time to teach them My ways! Not what I wanted to hear!
 6. "God, please help me at work." Okay—be honest and full of integrity and stand up for the RIGHT THING in the workplace! Not really what I wanted to hear!
- C. Live and Give FAITHFULLY is about our WHOLE lives ... Totally devoted to God! Want Sozo? Be faithful to God's Word and Ways in all areas of your life!
1. I understand that some of the things that God says we should do does not match up with what our culture says. I know that what God teaches sometimes makes no sense to our brains...
 2. But, we are to live by FAITH, not by sight. Trust that God knows what God is talking about!
 3. God will not bless us (SOZO) when we are outside of God's boundaries.

III. **Live and Give Sacrificially**

- A. Sometimes we forget who we are, don't we. As followers and disciples of Jesus Christ, we are the living, breathing BODY OF CHRIST.
1. Jesus left us with instructions to carry on what He had done ... to make disciples ... to "Change the World for Good!" Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth...
 2. We are God's Hands and Feet and we are God's bank account / distribution department!
 3. I hate it when pastors say, "God doesn't need your money."
 4. You know what? God does need your money. And your time. And your talents. And your energy. And your car or truck at times. And maybe your house!

5. That's why you have all that stuff ... so that it's at God's disposal when God needs it!
- B. When we Live and Give Sacrificially to God's Kingdom, it's all about bringing people to a faith in Jesus Christ.
1. BMZ Church exists so that over-churched, un-churched and de-churched can become deeply committed Christians.
 2. Do you know what "a deeply committed Christian" looks like? It's someone who Knows God, Loves People and Serves the World day in and day out!
 3. Life transformation is the reason we exist as a church; whether that is here in Boscobel or on the other side of the world ... lives need to change toward Christ.
 4. We are called to Transform the World. That's not small potatoes. If we are going to Change the World for Good, we have to Live and Give Sacrificially ... it might hurt us a little to expand God's Kingdom.
 5. Individual's eternities hang in the balance...

IV. **What We Did**

- A. Last year, we were challenged to Change the World for Good through InterHope Missions. InterHope has seven orphanages across the world ... Cambodia (2), St. Vincent, India (2), Bosnia, and Croatia.
1. We here at BMZ were challenged to come up with school uniforms for 80+ children in India.
 2. We were challenged to come up with money to put in a water tank and pump for one of the orphanages in Cambodia.
 3. Last Christmas we met the challenge and then Thad (missionary) had someone match-gift what we gave...
- B. Here's what happened, because of you! (SHOW VIDEO)
- C. After video = That's what you did! You changed the world for good ... Not only that, Thad used the extra money from the "match-gift" donor and another donor to finish other projects at each of the orphanages.

V. **100 in '10**

- A. They've added room for 100 more beds in their orphanages. Now, they need the children to fill them.
- B. In order to get those children into their orphanages where they can be educated and introduced to Christ, those kids have to be rescued ... drug rings, gangs, child labor situations, brothels, etc.
- C. In order to rescue them, it costs to pay informants and sometimes releases. Our part is to give \$50/rescue for 100 kids. Here's how: We are going to sell \$50 t-shirts (SHOW SHIRT).
1. Buy them outright.
 2. Go in with someone else to rescue a kid and split the t-shirt.
 3. Take a pledge sheet and invite others to help you rescue a child. Bring the money back and get a t-shirt!

Let's Pray!!

Outline and statistics taken from Mike Slaughter's book, "Upside Living in a Downside Economy" among other resources...