*Introduction*

Last time I was speaking with you, I spoke about eating from faith and challenged you to start, if you were not doing so already, to give thanks for your food.

The bible made it clear that by giving thanks our food was sanctified and would do us good.

I, for one, have been trying to do it, and although not remembering every time, I have noticed a difference. It has done me good spiritually just to 'give thanks'.

It has certainly made me more aware of God's provision and it is good for us to acknowledge this.

This morning, for a short while we are going to look at 'Faith for finances'. We need to learn to apply the principle of faith for our financial and material provision.

The Bible abounds with both assurances and examples of God's ability to provide for His people's needs, even in situations where there is no human or natural source of supply.

Nowhere in scripture is this more emphatically states than in 2 Cor 9:8

***And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.***

It is hard to see how it could be put more forceful, that God is able to provide abundantly - everything we need.

Before we move on, it is worth noting that all of us live in one of three levels of provision.

Insufficiency, sufficiency and abundance.

Let me illustrate what I mean, using a simple everyday example.

A person needs to buy £15 worth of groceries, they have £10 in there purse, they are shopping out of ***insufficiency*** - they have not got enough!

A person needs to buy £15 worth of groceries and has £15 in there purse, they are shopping out of ***sufficiency*** - they have just enough!

A person needs to buy £15 worth of groceries and has £20 in there purse, they are shopping out of ***abundance*** - they have more than enough!

Although this simple example is about having enough money, abundance does not necessarily depend upon money or material possessions.

Abundance means simply that God supplies all that we need - with something to spare for others.

Notice what I said then, He supplies all our needs, with something to spare FOR OTHERS.

The perfect example of this abundance is seen in the life of Jesus. He had no permanent house to live in, no possessions, no money (obviously Judas carried the money bag), yet Jesus never lacked anything for Himself or for those who were with him.

When Peter needed money at short notice to pay the temple tax, Jesus didn't say to Peter, "go and ask Judas to pay the tax", instead he sent Peter to the Sea of Galilee and fish.

***Matthew 17:24-27After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?” “Yes, he does,” he replied.***

***When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?” “From others,” Peter answered.***

***“Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. “But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”***

On another occasion Jesus found himself surrounded by about 12,000 people who needed feeding. All they had was 5 loaves and 2 fishes that a young boy had brought with him.

Jesus gave thanks to His father, and as a result was able to feed them all and have 12 baskets left over

THAT IS ABUNDANCE.

Later in his ministry when he sent his disciples out to preach the good news he told them not to take extra supplies with them

***Luke 9:1-3When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, 2and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. 3He told them: “Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt.***

later when he reminded them of this

***Luke 22:35Then Jesus asked them, “When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?” “Nothing,” they answered.***

The key to abundance was not money or material possessions. It was faith!

When we look at these stories we could be tempted to say "Well that was Jesus! we cannot expect to be like Him!"

But Jesus said otherwise

***John 14:12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.***

The Apostle John also stated

***1 John 2:6 Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did***

Jesus set the pattern for the walk of faith, and we are invited to follow.

If we hesitate to accept this challenge to walk in faith, it may be it is because we do not understand the scope of God's grace.

In 2 Cor 9:8 the key word is bless (grace)

***And God is able to bless you abundantly***

The basis of our provision is not our own wisdom or ability, its God's grac or blessing.

In order to avail ourselves of His blessing/grace, we need to understand 2 key principles that govern the operation of grace.

Principle 1.

***JOHN 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.***

Grace has only one channel - Jesus Christ.

Grace is not received through the observance of any legal or religious system of rules, but solely through Christ.

Principle 2.

***Eph 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.***

Grace goes beyond anything that we can ever achieve or earn by our own abilities.

Therefore the only means by which we can be saved is grace through faith.

If we limit ourselves to what we deserve or what we earn, we are failing to exercise faith, and therefore do not enjoy God's grace to the full.

How do these principles apply to the area of finance?

Firstly, I must emphasize that God will not bless dishonesty, laziness or financial irresponsibility.

***Prov 10:4 Lazy hands make for poverty,  but diligent hands bring wealth.***

Paul says:

***Eph 4:28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.***

God expects us, according to our abilities, to engage in honest work, not merely to have enough for ourselves, but also to have something leftover to share with others who are in need.

Paul says even more emphatically

***2 Thess 3:10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”***

However, it may be that, when we have honestly and conscientiously done everything in our power to provide for ourselves and our dependents, we still find ourselves on a level of bare sufficiency, or even insufficiency.

The message of grace is that we do not need to accept this state as being God's will.

We can turn our faith to God through Jesus Christ and trust Him to lift us - by ways of His own choosing - onto a higher level of provision than we could ever achieve merely by our own wisdom or ability.

We also need to recognise that God's provision for His people is corporate.

God never treat us simply as isolated individuals, but as members of a single body, bound to one another by strong ties of mutual commitment.

In Ephesians, after presenting Christ as the Head of this body, Paul described how God intends it to function:

***Eph 4:16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.***

Paul emphasises her the importance of the joints. They serve 2 functions, first, they hold the body together, second, they are channels of supply.

The joints represent the relationship amongst the various members. If the joints are in good shape, God's supply is able to reach every part of the body, and no member suffers, or is in need.

But if the joints are not working properly, then parts of the body of Christ will suffer and be in need.

This happens, not because God's supply is not abundant, but that our wrong attitudes and relationships hinder His supply from those who need it.

When the children of Israel were in the wilderness and had no provision God sent manna. They were told how much to get. An omer for each person.

***Ex 16:15-18 Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. 16This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.’”***

***17The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. 18And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed.***

The people gathered, and when it was measured and shared out, everyone had enough.

God could have just let them get on with it, every man for himself. But God was showing the Israelites that they had a responsibility for each other, and so do we.

This same principle is shown n the NT, Paul writes about a special collection by the churches in Macedonia for the Christians in Judea, and he explains in 2 Cor 8 that this is God's way of providing equally for all parts of the body.

We are to share. In the book of Acts, when the Spirit of God was poured out on the early church, it was their sharing of everything they had that was such a witness to the bystanders and neighbours, and along with the preaching of the gospel, brought the church from 120 to 3000 in a matter of a few days.

There were three things going on in the book of Acts

1. The apostles were witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus

2. The abundant grace of God was upon them all

3. There was not a needy person among them.

This is what the world needs to see demonstrated by the Church today. To see a company of believers who are so related to God through faith in Jesus Christ, and to one another by mutual commitment, that all their needs are met.

*Conclusion*

Where ever you are sitting this morning, whether in insufficiency or abundance, whether knowing Christ Jesus as Lord or not, there is no alternative to faith.

Our relationship with God has two sides, the Scriptures are emphatic about both.

On the positive side - as we have seen, God makes His abundant grace available to us on the basis of our faith

On the negative side - God rejects any other basis on which we might seek to approach Him.

Nowhere is this more forcibly stated than in Hebrews

***Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***

We must come to him in faith, firstly believing that he exists, then believing that he is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Unbelief is sin

***John 16:8-9 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me;***

Are you still in your sins this morning because you have not believed in Jesus Christ and His saving work of Grace?

Without Jesus you have nothing of worth that will last, you may have what the world wants, but you will lose your life and your soul the Bible states.

But with Christ, you have the abundance of God for everything in your life and the Psalmist said it so well when he said:
***The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord  forever.***

Amen.