



PERFECTION OF LOVE

A B L E S S U S A N E W S L E T T E R Vol. 12 No. 1

Giving out of one's need

For the last year, the nonprofit industry has been rife with discussion on the impact of the weakened economy on giving and the nonprofit sector. For every seminar, there are hundreds of articles or publications advising social service organizations on how to survive an uncertain economy. They advise streamlining programs, rationing aid and downsizing projects in the face of a need that is increasing even as, and for the same reason, resources are decreasing.

In November 2008, a group of BLESS USA servants traveled to Egypt¹ to serve with BLESS and gather additional information on the programs administered by the Agape Charity Department. As part of their service, they were invited to accompany BLESS field servants on their visits to remote villages where BLESS had implemented a number of its programs. The servants witnessed firsthand the indescribable hardships endured by the Brethren of the Lord and the effectiveness of the programs put in place by BLESS to assist them. What was more noteworthy, however, was the faith and humility that characterized this community and instilled in the Brethren the conviction that their Heavenly Father would attend to all of their needs.

For the members and servants of BLESS USA, this atmosphere presents a special opportunity and reinforces that belief held so firmly by the Brethren of the Lord: that nothing will ever prevent our Lord from sustaining and preserving His Brethren. Thus, while we are not immune to the circumstances in which the nonprofit industry and, indeed, the world, now find them-

¹ Each servant financed his/her own trip entirely.

² Even as this newsletter is going to print, the media is reporting additional losses in major industries throughout Egypt and the impact on its poorest citizens.

selves, this has been a time of renewed blessing for the service. Your continued support of the programs of BLESS USA even in these times is a reminder of God's abiding love for His Brethren and the mercy He so generously bestows upon us who have an opportunity to act as intermediaries between our Lord and those in need.

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Therefore, as we continue in our efforts to respond to the needs of the Brethren of the Lord in the midst of this challenging economy², our contingency plan is not one derived from nonprofit media, but from the words of Our Lord Himself who, in addressing this very situation, commended the blessings that come from giving of one's need.

The Brethren of the Lord - those who live thousands of miles away and will never know of your service - are not merely recipients of a contribution from those of us who are fortunate. Rather, we and them, together, are members of the body of Christ and are, for that reason, linked to each other in a way that no economic difficulty or success can effect. It is this value that charts our course in these difficult times and broadens our understanding as to how we ourselves are the true beneficiaries of the service of the Brethren of the Lord.

Detailed accounts of the BLESS USA's servants' November 2008 trip to Egypt will be featured in upcoming editions of this year's newsletter.

Dear Member

Through God's Grace, the 2008 Contribution Summary statement was mailed out to you, our members, on January 31st. Please review your statements and make sure they are accurate and complete.

Also, included with your statement is a "Contribution Authorization Form." This form allows for automatic withdrawals each month from your checking account or credit card. Electronic monthly contributions allow us to respond to the needs of the Brethren of the Lord more efficiently. If you would like to participate, complete and return this form in the enclosed envelope. May the Lord remember your faithfulness and continue to grant you His blessings.

Spiritual Message

Reverend Fathers and beloved brethren, friends of BLESS USA,

The peace, love and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. I am incredibly grateful for your generous hearts my dear brothers and sisters. In this past period I have received all of your generous loving gifts to the Brethren of the Lord in Egypt.

Let us continue my beloved on our contemplation of:

The Blessings of Mercy to the Merciful

The blessings of mercy are countless in the lives of the merciful. In the preceding messages we contemplated on twenty-seven of these blessings, and now we shall begin our contemplation on the twenty-eighth blessing:

“The Lord sustains the merciful in their weakest state and prepares for them a bed of rest in their sickness”

This blessing is one directly experience by those who are merciful. Our teacher David the Prophet praised, saying: “Blessed is he who has regard for the weak...the Lord will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness (Psalm 41:1,3).

My beloved, we have mentioned before the beauty of this blessing, how the Lord will sustain and support the merciful as they are on their bed of illness. Many of the sick suffer and perhaps cry out in pain, but the Lord will sustain those who are merciful on their sickbed.

David the prophet reminds us of this reality when he sang: “You have prepared his place of rest in his sickness.” God has prepared and paved all things for he who is sick. God prepared and paved his ways from every side as he lied in bed in his sickness... He prepared and guided all his ways spiritually, psychologically, physically, and financially. He has also prepared those who will serve him. Lastly, he prepared for him a place of rest as he lies on his bed of sickness.

In the previous message, we contemplated my beloved about our teacher David the merciful Prophet who wrote this amazing psalm. We also spoke about Tobit the Righteous and how he was very merciful all the days of his life. He was merciful before losing his sight while yet prosperous, he was merciful after losing his sight while in need, and he was merciful after regaining his sight while wealthy once again.

The righteous and merciful Tobit experienced the blessing of the sustenance of the Lord as he lay on the bed of weakness when he lost his sight, and the Lord prepared him both spiritually and mentally during his sickness. “For whereas he had always feared God from his infancy, and kept his commandments, he repined not against God because the evil of blindness had befallen him, But continued immovable in the fear of God, giving thanks to God all the days of his life. For as the kings insulted over holy Job: so his relations and kinsmen mocked at his life, saying: Where is thy hope, for which thou gavest alms, and buriedst the dead? But Tobias rebuked them, saying: Speak not so: For we are the children of the saints, and look for that life which God will give to those that never change their faith from him.” (Tobit 2:13-18)

In this message my beloved brethren we will continue speaking about the Lord's preparation and guidance of Tobit in everything. When Tobit was blinded, God prepared him, not only spiritually and mentally but also:

Financially, and He prepared someone to take care of him

Tobit the Righteous says “[I remained four years blind that all of my brethren became saddened] then Ahikar supported me [for two years] then my wife Anna worked for hire at what women do. She would send her work to the owners and they would pay her.” (Tobit 2:10-12)

The Lord not only prepared for him all that he needed, but also prepared it for him in the same hour of need. Tobit experienced this in his life many times, he commanded his son Tobias (during his blindness) saying “Do almsgiving based on the quantity of your possessions. If you possess only a few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. You are storing up a good treasure for yourself in the day of necessity.” (Tobit 4:8-9). All that you provide for the poor my son will save you a treasure in heaven, “The Treasure of Almsgiving.” When you are in need, the Lord will give you this treasure in the hour of your need. I have experienced this many times, for I have given the poor much in the days of prosperity, and these days I have become blind and poor, yet the Lord gives me in the day of my need, from the Treasure of Almsgiving. I have yet to experience this in all the days of my life, yet our fathers experienced it, as our father Solomon the Wise says “He who gives to the poor shall not be in want” (Proverbs 28:29)

Assuredly the Lord prepared and managed the financial needs of Tobit the Righteous during his blindness. What is amazing my beloved is that he still gave alms even during this period as we hear Archangel Raphael (whom the Lord sent to cure Tobit) saying “And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee. And now the Lord hath sent me to heal thee.” (Tobit 12:13) Tobit did not forget the Lord his God even during the tribulation and did not cease from doing good, although he was desperately in need.

Thus Tobit the Righteous experienced the sustenance of the Lord while on the bed of illness. The Lord managed for him his spiritual, mental and financial needs and prepared for him he who would sustain him and serve him during the trial of illness and blindness. This is one of the blessings of Mercy in the life of the merciful.

And thus Tobit grew very old and called his son Tobias and said “My son...I have grown old and I am departing from this life. My son...keep the law and the ordinances. Be merciful and righteous, that it may be well with you. Observe my son he who shows mercy was saved from the trap of death that was set for him. Observe what almsgiving does, and how righteousness delivers us. After he said these things, his soul departed as he lay on his bed. He was one hundred and fifty-eight years old and Tobias buried him gloriously.” (Tobit 14:3-11)

Contemplate my beloved, what was Tobit's being as he lay on the bed of death. Contemplate how the Lord managed and prepared for him a resting place not only during his trial but also as he lay on the bed of death. This is one of the blessings in the lives of the merciful.

Until the next message, my beloved with another example of the merciful whom the Lord sustains as they lie on their bed of weakness and prepares for them a place of rest in their illness. May our Lord compensate you with the incorruptible instead of the corruptible, the heavenly instead of the earthly and the eternal instead of the temporal.

Bishop Youannes



General Bishop and Secretary of H.H. Pope Shenouda III