

Buzz King

buzz@BuzzKing.com

<https://BuzzKing.com>

1 Corinthians 15:50–53 ESV

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

Genesis 3:19 ESV

*¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.*

Acts 3:2-6 ESV

A man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. ⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

2 Corinthians 9:6–7 ESV

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

The honor walk.

A while back, there was a patient at the hospital where I am a chaplain who died while on a ventilator, giving that patient a rare opportunity – to donate his internal organs. Most patients who die in the hospital are only candidates for donating tissue, like bone, skin, and corneas. Rarely does a patient pass away with their organs still viable. But, indeed, this patient turned out to be a candidate for donating his kidneys, liver, lungs, and heart. To honor these special donors and their families, the hospital holds something called an Honor Walk, where hospital employees line the walls of the corridor leading from the patient's ICU room all the way to either the OR to have their organs removed, or to the exit, where they are taken to another hospital to have their organs removed. The employees of the hospital show their respect by standing still as the patient's bed is rolled down the corridor. As the patient goes down the hall, and as the family follows behind, the employees remain at attention, almost military style. All of this is timed very carefully. They can't just remove the donor's organs whenever they want. In order for the organs to be as healthy as possible, they need to be taken just before they are flown or driven away to be surgically given to recipients. As a result, this particular Honor Walk occurred at about 2 A.M. I was

given about thirty minutes notice that the Honor Walk was going to happen, so I drove in. I was told that someone in a neighboring state, maybe Wyoming, was due to get the patient's heart very early the next morning, just a handful of hours later. I believe that the other organs were given to people in Colorado, and that these surgeries happened just a few hours later, as well. As always, I am changing some details of this story to protect the family's privacy.

I was called in, by the way, not only to be with the family, but to be with the nurses who had been caring for the donor. It can be very stressful, taking care of a patient for days, while doctors decide if the patient is brain dead. Then, after the person is dead, a couple more days can pass while appropriate organ recipients are located, and all the while, the nurses care for a patient who is brain dead. The nurses are caring for them as if they are completely alive, in order to preserve the person's internal organs. During this period of time, the nurses are also responding to the emotional needs of family members, who tend to cling to the hope that a miracle will occur, and the patient will wake up and fully recover.

My point today isn't to give sermon about organ donation, but let's begin there. Consider our first Bible passage. It says: *⁵⁰I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* Taken out of context, this passage says that we can't take our

bodies with us when we die, and so it would seem to argue for organ donation. But the point of the chapter as a whole is somewhat different. What Paul is telling the church in Corinth is that because of Christ's sacrifice, we will all go to be with him after we die. And like Christ, we will then receive imperishable, eternal bodies like Christ's. And yes, this does mean that we won't need the ones we have now. The next quote is from Genesis, and it, too, seems to support the notion of organ donation: *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.* This is of course a very famous passage, and it is often used during funerals and memorial services. But again, the context of the passage is actually a bit larger than might be evident. This is when God is casting Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden; our passage seems to say that because of their sin, they are going to face biological death, an end of life on Earth. It would then seem to make sense to conclude that because they sinned, they – and so we - no longer have use for earthly bodies after death. But in truth, and despite what many people think, the Bible does not say that Adam and Eve were created as immortal beings and were punished by having to die one day. It actually implies the opposite, that we were always meant to die. In the bigger picture, in fact, our passage about Adam and Eve really refers to a spiritual death, a separation from

God, not a physical death. Still, if we do indeed return to dust, we hardly need to hang onto that dust after death. So, organ donation does make sense.

I'd like to get to the real point of my message today, and that is illustrated by our third and fourth passages. But first, I'd like to return to that Honor Walk. We have them periodically at the hospital, and I love being present, either to be with the family, or talk to stressed staff members afterward, or to simply be standing along the corridor with the other hospital employees, offering my affirmation, showing respect for the donor and the family that is doing the unselfish thing. In this case, there was an extended family present. One of them was a man about my age, the father of the donor, the young man who had been declared brain dead after a high-speed car accident. The father had had two children. His daughter was already dead. His wife had died just weeks before the car accident involving his son. While the rest of the family was gathering in the donor's ICU room, waiting for the Honor Walk to begin, I stood in the corridor with the father. He had looked stunned for days, but this night, he was simply looking worn out and sad. There wasn't much I could say to him. I put my hand on his shoulder and he talked about how his two children used to play together so nicely, even when they were little. He said they never fought. They were so good to each other as brother and sister. He said his son, just days before the accident,

had converted some old film photographs of the two of them as little kids to digital. The father pulled his phone out and showed me the pictures. The kids really did look sweet together. The father smiled and his eyes teared over. He said that donating his son's organs meant something to him; it helped, just knowing that his son's heart would keep beating for years to come.

Our third quote is from Acts. We're in series of stories where, after Jesus has left Earth, the Apostles are performing miracles and spreading the faith. Peter is asked for alms, for a donation for a man who is disabled. Back then, people earned their livings with their bodies and there was no social security, no Medicaid. If you couldn't use your body, and if you didn't have a family to care for you, you found yourself begging for a living. There were many people living on the street, asking people who passed by for money. Jews considered it an obligation to give to people asking for alms; it was part of their religious duty. But Peter declares that he is poor, that he has no money, which is true, because he is a fisherman who has given up his work to follow Jesus. So, instead of giving cash, Peter says this: *"I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"* The disabled man got a lot more than what he was hoping for. Importantly, the miracle is not only evidence of the power of God: it's also a metaphor for spiritual healing. The idea is that

just as this disabled man didn't have to do anything to be physically healed, we don't have to do anything to be spiritually forgiven and healed by the Holy Spirit. This passage also tells us that Peter is a creative giver. Instead of just telling the man he has no money, he finds a different, and unexpected, and in fact, much better way to give. When Peter cures this man, he is showing us that someone who has giving in their heart will always find a way to give.

Our last quote is from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. As an aside, there is some strong evidence that this letter is actually two different letters that were later edited together by followers of Paul, or perhaps by Paul himself. In this passage, Paul is encouraging generosity. He says the following: ⁶*The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* ⁷*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* This metaphor, of using planting and harvesting to represent giving, would be particularly powerful to the people Paul is addressing, as they lived in a largely agrarian culture. They understood that just as we cannot survive on fields that reap only sparingly, we cannot survive on hearts that give only sparingly.

These two passages together, one saying that sometimes we give in very unexpected ways, and the other that we should give as generously as possible,

describe what the family of the man who was killed in that car accident did. It certainly wasn't the way they wanted to give. They certainly gave far more than they would have ever imagined. And in fact, they cured multiple people of deadly medical conditions. But you know, there's another passage about giving, one that I often use at collection time. It's from the Gospel of Luke and it quotes Jesus. The passage says this: **21** *Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, ² and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³ And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. ⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."* Jesus is noting that we can give generously, even when we give very little, because God does not weigh the raw size of our gift. Those who have very little but give anyway, those are the people who are often sacrificing the most. Our opportunities to give are not always huge. What's important is that we always keep our giving hearts alive and that we are always open to new ways to give. Once we stop looking, once we let our hearts grow cold, we won't see that incredible opportunity that might arise.

Looking at the greater context around the story of Jesus and the woman with the two small copper coins, it turns out that Jesus isn't just complimenting the poor widow. He's comparing her to the Scribes, the religious leaders of the

day. Just before looking up and noticing this woman with the two small coins, Jesus says this: *“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁷ who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”* He’s pointing out that they live selfishly. When they give, they don’t do it because they genuinely want to; they give so that they will be noticed. They actually take advantage of people like this woman, by taking money from her and then using it to live well. Please pray with me.

God, we thank you for not just forgiving us, but for regenerating us, making us better people who live not just for ourselves, but for others. Let us always be searching for ways to make the lives of other people better, so that they can enjoy life, and so that they, too, learn that they will grow ever closer to you by having hearts that are always open. May we remember that when we have nothing physical to give, we can always give our presence, our peace, our love, and our graciousness. For we know that just as the Holy Spirit touches us every day in ways that are not at all tangible, we can touch people in ways that are equally intangible and equally powerful. Amen.