

Giving / COB / 02.21.16

Introduction

† **[Slide 1: \$]** *[Invite the teens up; have dollars ready; ask them to do various things for a dollar each.]*

- What was that about? Everyone wants money; that is what makes it valuable; it is so valuable that most of us are willing to work for it; yet money doesn't do us any good until we hand it over to someone else. Did you ever think about that? If you want to buy something or invest to make more or help someone with your money, you need to hand it over to someone else.

† **[Slide 2: Tithing]** Last week, we learned about tithing. In Israel, God set a standard of each person giving back to him ten percent of their income, giving back to God ten percent of what God had provided to them that year, which they did by giving it to the religious leaders. The Mosaic Covenant which God had with Israel contained commands and promises about tithing.

- These commands and promises are not part of the New Covenant which guides the church. Nowhere in the New Testament or other earliest church writings do we find instruction for believers to tithe a specific ten percent to the church. Most of the New Testament teaching on giving isn't about the church at all, it's about you helping people when they have needs.
- On the other hand, we can see that the purposes of tithing remain with us. We still want to show reverence to God, to remember our dependence on God and celebrate God's provision, to help the needy, and to support full time religious workers and the other expenses of ministry.
- What we want to discuss today, then, is what the Bible says about giving in the Church age, in our dispensation, as we call it. Let's pray about that, and then we will get started.

Stewardship

† **[Slide 3: Luke 16]** Let's begin with a passage that shows us that God takes this issue seriously, even today. **Luke 16.10-13 NET:** [Jesus speaking] **"The one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and the one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you haven't been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will entrust you with the true riches [of Heaven]? And if you haven't been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."**

- We have heard the two masters teaching before, remember? At the start of the year, we heard Jesus teach on that from Matthew 6. The choice is whether to live for God or live for worldly material things; to use money for God's purposes in ministry or use money strictly for consuming more and more for yourself. It is a question of who will own your heart and mind: will you dwell on God and the things of God or will you dwell on material things of the world?
- This also is a question of stewardship. Right from the start, God created people to be his image bearers, his stewards on Earth, reflecting his character, representing him, reproducing his image, and ruling over the rest of creation in his name. People always have a choice, will we act as good stewards for God or will we take what he has given and go our own fleshly way with it.
- You and I do not have a Garden of Eden to tend, nor do most of us have much power over anything beyond our own yard, but we still are to be God's image bearers, God's stewards. He has entrusted us with a certain set of blessings, including spiritual gifts and natural abilities, life experiences, personality and passions, health and energy and time, and some amount of money

and other material things; maybe you have a house, a car, maybe a cow, a piano, a disc golf set, and surely much more. Everything good in you and in your life is a gift from God. Now what will you do with it all? Will you be a faithful and trustworthy steward over those resources for God or will you claim control over them for your own purposes?

- † **[Slide 4: highlights]** This life is in many ways a test of your faithfulness, your willingness to learn to walk on the top line by God's revelation, instead of on the bottom line by the impulses of the flesh.
- If you are not trustworthy to do as God directs with what God has given you, then you cannot be trusted with more. In the deepest sense, Jesus is saying that if you are not faithful and trustworthy with the material wealth God has given you, then you would not be faithful if entrusted with even better blessings, like spiritual power, influence, divine insight, and real responsibility for God in ministry. If you aspire to grow into really being God's man or God's woman, his representative and steward here, then you have to be honorable in how you handle even the smallest amount of worldly wealth.
 - In another sense, this teaching might explain why those of us who do devote our resources to ministry often are given more, because God knows we will use them correctly. I stress that it is not a reward. Prosperity doctrine preachers will tell you that if you give ten percent of what you have now, God will reward you with riches. That not only misuses the verses about the tithe, it misses the whole point of stewardship: God's intent is not to make you wealthy so you become self-indulgent with consumerism! Instead he wants to develop you into a mature disciple and steward who uses every blessing to do the work of Christ.
 - I would not want to be found untrustworthy by God, would you? No. So we need to understand what he wants us to do. Today we will look at what the Bible says about how we use our money, but the same principles hold true for everything else God has given us: he wants us to use all of it for his purposes, not our self-indulgence. So let's talk about giving.

Giving

- † **[Slide 5: 1 Timothy 6]** Back in January we saw in Paul's letter of 1 Timothy that the love of money could take us down that wrong path of fleshly consumerism, away from God and his ways, but that by pursuing godliness – by pursuing God's righteousness – we could find contentment with whatever God chose to give us. Just a few sentences later in that letter, we find the following:
- **1 Timothy 6.17-19 NET: Command those who are rich in this world's goods not to be haughty or to set their hope on riches, which are uncertain, but on God who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous givers, sharing with others. In this way they will save up a treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the future and so lay hold of what is truly life.**
 - The beginning of this is similar to what we said before: don't put your trust in wealth or material things, don't base your sense of security or your self-validation on wealth. That path is empty, it leads to discontentment, materialistic lust, anxiety, and sin.
 - Instead, trust in God's provision, not only that he will provide what you need, but that whatever he chooses to give you – the whole set of blessings from the thinness of your hairline to the fatness of your wallet – trust that whatever he chooses to give you is for the best.
 - If you trust in God and use his blessings for his purposes, you build treasure in Heaven, build relationships here on Earth, and you lay hold of what is truly life: that is, you learn to have an intimate relationship with God, and to live by his revelation in faith and obedience, and thus to

experience true spiritual life and growth and freedom within, and you will have true spiritual life in the world by being God's stewards, reflecting and representing and reproducing, with all the spiritual blessings that come along.

- Now how do you take the blessings God has granted you and use them for good which also will bring you to lay hold of what is truly life? Paul says, be rich in good deeds and be generous givers, sharing with others. Take the blessings you have, and find ways to do ministry with them, and to share them with others or even give them away.
- But wait, you might say, this was for those who are rich; loophole! Ok, but consider two things. First, while the rich have more to work with and are more likely to be influenced by their wealth, these principles hold true for everyone. And second, you *are* rich by historical standards and even by worldly standards today. Half the world's population reportedly lives on less than \$2.50/day, about \$900/year. According to UNICEF, about 3,000,000 children under the age of five die every year from undernutrition. Inflation adjusted per capita income in our country is twice what it was when I was born, and then it was much greater than what it was centuries ago. Believe me, almost everyone I know is wealthy in biblical terms.

† Even so we do know some are better off than others. Let's suppose Michael is a multi-millionaire and his salary is \$200,000/year and he gives 10% to follow the Old Testament standard because he missed our sermon on tithing, so he is giving the church \$20,000/year. And let's suppose his best friend Lloyd has no assets really and is living off his disability from the VA which amounts to about \$10,000/year, and he also tries to give 10% out of a good heart, so he gives \$1,000/year. Which is more generous if both give 10%, the one who gives \$20,000 or the one who gives \$1,000?

- **[Slide 6: Mark 12]** Let's look at a scene from the life of Jesus: **Mark 12.41-44 NET: Then he [Jesus] sat down opposite the offering box, and watched the crowd putting coins into it. Many rich people were throwing in large amounts. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, worth less than a penny. He called his disciples and said to them, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the offering box than all the others. For they all gave out of their wealth. But she, out of her poverty, put in what she had to live on, everything she had."**
- Generosity is relative to what you have, not measured by absolute amount. Sacrificial giving is more generous than any amount of giving that requires little sacrifice. It would be good that Michael gave \$20,000 – it certainly would help the church's budget! – but it is only generous on his account to the degree that he has to sacrifice to give it. If Michael gave up owning a boat to give, but Lloyd gave up having lunch every day, which was acting more generously?
- **[Slide 7: John 13.34]** We can think about generosity in theological terms. In **John 13.34 NET**, Jesus said, **"Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."** What terms come to mind to describe the kind of love we get from Jesus? I think of "sacrificial" and "unconditional."
- What would unconditional love in the form of giving look like? Giving to those in need, you would not discriminate by gender, race, friendliness or anything else, right?
- There might be certain situations where you need to set boundaries and take care not to enable bad behavior. For example, you don't want to keep giving cash to someone who spends it on drugs; instead, you insist on that person getting help before you extend more money. But that's another issue; and even in that situation you would give despite the sinful, hurtful, and destructive behavior that happened before, once they were willing to get real help. But generally speaking, unconditional love means you give unconditionally.

- In terms of the church, it means you don't alter your giving based on how much you like the pastor, you don't withhold money when he gets in your face about sin instead of flattering your ego, you don't base your giving on how much you use the church's ministries or how much you enjoy church that year. No, you give based on your conviction that you should. And you now know that you should give sacrificially.

† **[Slide 8: 2 Corinthians 8.1-4]** Let's look at a passage that speaks to that. This is Paul writing in **2 Corinthians 8.1-4 NET: Now we make known to you, brothers and sisters, the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia, that during a severe ordeal of suffering, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in the wealth of their generosity. For I testify, they gave according to their means and beyond their means. They did so voluntarily, begging us with great earnestness for the blessing and fellowship of helping the saints.**

- Paul was writing about a collection they were taking to help the impoverished church in Jerusalem. Here Paul commends the churches in Macedonia, because even though they themselves were experiencing a severe ordeal of suffering in extreme poverty, they gave generously, sacrificially, to help the church in Jerusalem.
- **[Slide 9: 2 Corinthians 8.10-12]** Skip down to v.10: **2 Corinthians 8.10-12 NET: So here is my opinion on this matter: It is to your advantage, since you made a good start last year both in your giving and your desire to give, to finish what you started, so that just as you wanted to do it eagerly, you can also complete it according to your means. For if the eagerness is present, the gift itself is acceptable according to whatever one has, not according to what he does not have.**
- Our giving should be voluntary and out of eagerness to help and do good. The church does not compel you to give, there is no 10% tithe rule to enforce today. But God wants you to eagerly volunteer your resources to the church.
- Just as with the widow who gave two copper coins, here again we see that the amount we give in absolute dollars is not important, what is important is how much of a sacrifice it is for us, how much it reflects generosity. We give as we are able; we give based on what we have.
- **[Slide 10: 2 Corinthians 8.13-15]** Let's read on: **2 Corinthians 8.13-15 NET: For I do not say this so there would be relief for others and suffering for you, but as a matter of equality. At the present time, your abundance will meet their need, so that one day their abundance may also meet your need, and thus there may be equality, as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."**
- One feature of Christ's church is that we take care of each other. This is so important as a concept that it even extends outside of our local church to other local churches all around the world. Like the Corinthians and Macedonians, we send some of our budget overseas, to promote the gospel mission in places where the church cannot survive without help, where they need our resources more than we do.
- It should be even easier emotionally to help those we know well in our own community. If one of us loses his/her job, I hope we would rally to provide the necessities; if one of our families was temporarily homeless, I hope we would take them in. Some of our general giving to the church is available for benevolence help, both inside the church and beyond into the greater community, and we periodically take up special collections like the coat drive or food drives.

- While it is praiseworthy to give sacrificially, and our generosity is measured by how great the sacrifice, we see here that God does not expect us to go without what is necessary. The quotation is from Exodus, when the people were collecting manna. Though some had more and others less, each had what they needed. The hope is that those of us with more than we need today will help those who have needs today, and then some time in the future when the situation is reversed, they will help us.
- There have been times when I was poor. The worst of those times, I had no money and no income, so I had to accept help from family and friends. Other times, I had a little coming in, but not enough, so I could not give much to the church, but after I started walking with God I did give up some meals so I could give a little, and I tried to make up with labor what I felt I lacked in cash. Now, with two incomes and no children, I can give more, and I delight in it. When we have much, we give more; when we are needy, we receive. This is part of God's economy.

† **[Slide 11: 2 Corinthians 9.6-11a]** We have one more passage to consider today, in the next chapter of 2 Corinthians. Paul was still talking about the needs of the church in Jerusalem. He said in **2 Corinthians 9.6-11a NET: My point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. Each one of you should give just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace overflow to you so that because you have enough of everything in every way at all times, you will overflow in every good work. Just as it is written, "He has scattered widely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness remains forever." Now God who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your supply of seed and will cause the harvest of your righteousness to grow. You will be enriched in every way so that you may be generous on every occasion...**

- Paul intertwined two thoughts with an alternating pattern of ABABA. Let's take them in turn...
- **[Slide 12: 2 Corinthians 9.6, 8, 10-11a]** **2 Corinthians 9.6, 8, 10-11a NET: [Point A:] My point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously... And God is able to make all grace overflow to you so that because you have enough of everything in every way at all times, you will overflow in every good work... Now God who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your supply of seed and will cause the harvest of your righteousness to grow. You will be enriched in every way so that you may be generous on every occasion...**
- In the Mosaic Covenant, God said that if the people of Israel honored him with the tithe and obedience to his other commands, he would always provide for them, with fruitful harvests and multiplication of their animals. Here we have a similar promise, but with important differences.
- First, what is it we reap in this passage? The metaphor is from the farm, you sow more seed so you can reap more grain, but what does the metaphor represent here? I contend this is not saying if you give more to the church, God will bless you with more wealth. Rather, it is saying if you invest more into ministry, you will have a more fruitful ministry.
- We want to reap a harvest of people coming to faith in Christ and then growing to have Christ's character such that they live like Christ. We want to help people who are lost, despairing, sinfully fleshly to grow to be true, mature, multiplying disciples of Christ! As we sow, so shall we reap. Even individually, **"The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously."** If you want to get to Heaven and find out that you made a real difference for Christ, you need to invest in the ministry; that means

committing your time, effort, money, and other blessings to pursuing evangelistic outreach among non-believers, edification ministries for believers, and exaltation in our worship.

- Ah, but there is more to this promise. **“God is able to make all grace overflow to you so that because you have enough of everything in every way at all times, you will overflow in every good work.”** Certainly this implies that God is able and willing to bless you financially so you can give more. Whether with money or spiritual and natural giftedness or any other resource, if you are a good steward of his blessings, he might decide to invest more in you. But why? so you can invest more in the ministry, so you can overflow in every good work.
- Putting these two thoughts together, Paul concludes by saying that the God who provides both the seed and the harvest **“will provide and multiply your supply of seed and will cause the harvest of your righteousness to grow. You will be enriched in every way so that you may be generous on every occasion...** Now don't miss the ending: God will bless you so that you may be generous on every occasion! He wants you to be generous, sacrificial even, in your giving!

† **[Slide 13: 2 Corinthians 9.7, 9]** Ok, let's look at the other point. **2 Corinthians 9.7, 9 NET: Each one of you should give just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver... Just as it is written [in Psalm 112.9], “He [the man of integrity] has scattered [gifts] widely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness remains forever.”**

- As I said earlier, the church should not try to compel you or guilt you into giving, nor should you let yourself be so compelled. Rather, God wants you to be a cheerful giver, who is giving out of your own conviction that it is the right thing to do, your own eagerness to contribute.
- One problem is that many of us who give do it grudgingly. We gripe and complain, at least to ourselves, that this is unfair, it is hardship, we don't want to give up control of our money or give up some of what we could consume or save for ourselves just to give to the church.
- The answer to this is what? That God provided 100% of what we have, so if he asks us to give some back we should not complain. And if he asks us to give some back so that he can use it to minister to us, to our fellow believers in the church, to our fellow believers around the world, and to those who still need to hear the gospel, we certainly should not complain! No indeed, we should cheerfully give to a church focused on evangelism, edification, and the exaltation of God!
- The other problem is that many of us don't bother to give or we give far less than we could. Sometimes this reflects the same selfishness as the grudging giver; sometimes it reflects ignorance of God's expectations. Dave told me last week that he and Jennie give Caleb money and then ask whether he wants to keep it or give it to someone. What do you think is a three-year old's response, grounded in the flesh? Keep it. Yet Caleb brought in a bottle for the pregnancy center with coins in it; he is learning God's ways. Now you know God's expectations. He wants you to be spiritually led to be generous, sacrificial even, and to be cheerful about it.
- It's not that God needs your money, he doesn't! In fact, he doesn't even need you! He can fulfill his plans without any of us, but he grants us the privilege of working through us, he grants us the privilege of being his image bearers, reflecting his character by being generous and selfless, representing him by imitating the generosity and sacrifice of Christ, reproducing his image by investing in the church that carries out the Great Commission, and ruling as his stewards by using his resources for his purposes.
- God wants to bless you, not necessarily with financial wealth, but certainly with spiritual and emotional wealth, so that you can experience the joy, peace, and hope that comes from

intimacy with him, living by faith and obedience, and so that you can experience him working in you to grow you and working through you to bless others. So we give because God commands it, because we want to bless others and make an eternal difference for Christ, and because ultimately this is the path that lead to our own greater blessing.

† **[Slide 14: 2 Corinthians 9.11-15]** Now let's read on to see more happy results of our giving. **2 Corinthians 9.11-15 NET: You will be enriched in every way so that you may be generous on every occasion, which is producing through us thanksgiving to God, because the service of this ministry is not only providing for the needs of the saints but is also overflowing with many thanks to God. Through the evidence of this service they will glorify God because of your obedience to your confession in the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your sharing with them and with everyone. And in their prayers on your behalf they long for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown to you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!**

- Our giving meets the real financial needs of others and of the church's ministries. Our giving encourages others in faith, resulting in praise and thankfulness toward God. Our giving helps promote the gospel mission, making it visible and credible. Our giving bonds us with the others in the church, resulting in greater prayer support and fellowship. An earlier passage in this letter says that our giving also encourages others to give.

† **[Slide 15: Acts 20]** In **Acts 20.35 NET**, Paul said, **"...remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"** I am sharing all this with you, not to compel you or harangue you into giving more to the church, but so you can walk with God, living life on the "top line," responding to his revelation with faith and obedience, so that you can reap the blessing of being in his light! If the church had more money, we could do more ministry, but God has provided what we need for fifty-two years. This sermon is about your health, not the church's.

- So, how much should you give? There is no New Covenant standard. LeeAnn and I give over 10% of our income to this church, and then we give more to missionaries, seminary students, and local Christian charities. But we have a two income household and no children.
- The median household income in our county is about \$86,000. I think you could give ten percent at that income level and still have a fine life. But then the poverty threshold is about \$6,000 per person, so it depends on the size of your household. If you are struggling to get by, you might give a lower percentage of your income. We are not under the Mosaic Covenant system of tithing. It is ok to start giving what you can, and then try to give a little more, a little higher percentage next year.
- If you have much, then maybe you should ask whether ten percent is enough. LeeAnn and I give a lot in absolute terms, but it would be hard to make the case that we are sacrificing. That implies we are not actually as generous as we used to be when we were poor! Maybe God is calling us to up that percentage a little, and maybe he would say the same to some of you.
- The key is to be prayerful about it. You now know the biblical teaching. So pray and let the Spirit guide you into cheerful and generous giving. There is a lot more we could do here if we had more money. We as a church will reap what we sow into the ministry. So please seriously pray about this issue and then give as you feel led, guided by the teaching of giving cheerfully and generously. Let's pray about this right now . . .