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Sermon

Worship as Giving

Genesis 14:11-20, 2 Corinthians 8:7-15, Mark 12:41-44

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Giving from the Heart

I want to start by talking about love and some ways we express it. When we love someone we want to give to them. In your family do you give gifts to express your love for each other? If you are married, do you express your love in gifts?

You probably know of the book, *The Five Love Languages*.¹ The author, Gary Chapman, explains that there are different “languages” of love. He lists:

1. Words of affirmation: praise & thanksgiving
2. Quality time: Giving focussed attention
3. Giving gifts: Tangible expressions of love
4. Service: Love shown through helping
5. Touch: Embrace & feeling the other’s touch

It seems to me that most of them apply to our relationship with God. We express our love to Him through words of affirmation, giving him focussed attention, giving gifts and serving him. We all have a preferred way of expressing love, but that does not mean we never use any other means. So too towards God, we all need to express our love of him by worshiping him in praise and thanksgiving, focussing our attention on him in prayer or meditation, giving gifts to him and serving him. These are expressions of our love for him. It was the famous Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, who said, “Giving is true loving.”

Did you know that the English word, *worship*, comes from the Old English *worthship* meaning acknowledgement of worth. It is expressing what worth something holds for us. So then, what worth does God have for you?

Paul said to the Philippians that their financial support of him was “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”² He was making reference to Old Testament worship. He likened their offering to the giving of a sacrificial lamb on the altar which was the normal form of Old Testament worship. Giving is worship.

I want to look now at three examples from the Bible of “giving as worship.”

Abraham

We often think of Abraham as a bit of loner – it is easy to get the impression that he and Sarai set off by themselves to Canaan when God called them. Later we learn there he has a servant and of course, Sarai has

¹ By Gary Chapman, published by Strand

² Philippians 4:18

maid-servants. However, in today's Genesis passage we learn there is a considerable body of people who follow Abram. Abram was able to lead 318 men into battle! They were all born within his household – they were not slaves. And these were only the men of fighting age. That suggests that Abram's encampment could easily have numbered 2000 people allowing for wives and children. He was a very significant tribal leader!



The five kings of the Dead Sea Plain had been conquered 12 years before by a coalition of Mesopotamian city-kings. For the previous 12 years they had paid tribute money but then they refused, so their overlords in the East made a punitive raid. They are from the regions now called: Iraq, Iran and Eastern Turkey. They raided down the East side of the Sea of Galilee working their way all the way down to the Gulf of Aqaba and then back up to the Dead Sea region where Sodom and Gomorrah were. They had taken prisoners and property before heading north again. Abram's nephew Lot was among the prisoners.

Abram went about 180km after them, defeated the raiders and drove them another 100km north. He rescued Lot and recovered much which had been stolen – both people and wealth. Now he was effectively the new overlord – he had beaten off the aggressors and rescued the local kings.

The King of Salem came to meet him. Salem was later called Jerusalem. The word means peace. His name, Melchizedek, means King of Righteousness; he was also a priest of the Most High God. Abram the victor was met by one called King of Righteousness and King of Peace and Priest of the Most High God.

Melchizedek brought bread and wine to Abram and blessed him. He also blessed God for the victory given to Abram. Abram recognized Melchizedek as a worshipper of the God he knew.

In spite of the fact that Abram was now the hero and deliverer of the hour, he gave a tithe, a tenth, of all he had captured to Melchizedek as a priest of God.

It was an act of worship. Abram in his gratitude and love for God, gave back a portion of what he had won with God's help.

Principles of Giving

In the epistle reading, Paul referred to the offering the church was taking up for the needy Christians in Jerusalem. There had been a famine in Judea and he asked the other churches to help their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. They had already promised to help and he wrote to encourage them to fulfil their promise.

It is not dissimilar to our relationship with our Tanzanian friends. Back in December we learnt there was a serious food shortage and we took up a collection to help them while they waited for the harvest to come in. Before Christmas we were able to send \$3000 and just last week we sent a further \$2300. I emailed Bishop Given to tell him and this was his reply:



“Thank you so much for your very kind email. St Stephen’s church is taking Kondoa very seriously in their church life! I feel so encouraged by your love! I feel St Stephen’s to be part of Kondoa’s life. We praise and thank God because of St Stephen’s exemplary model of the early church. When they heard their fellow Christians in Jerusalem were in difficulty, the Christians in the Macedonia church decided to act, to help their fellow Christians in Jerusalem. For more than five years, St Stephen have adopted Kondoa mission as their mission field; they have walked alongside us in so many ways. I feel so humbled to be loved by the people of St Stephen, who tirelessly have always given sacrificially in order to support us.

“Ian, thank you very much for all that our dearest friends at St Stephen are doing for my people here in Kondoa! God bless you. I do not have the words to thank our dearest friends at St Stephen’s.

“I assure you, that to the very best of my pastoral heart, I will use the fund to help those desperate pastors and evangelists in need of food as they wait for their crops to produce food for them. You have made my ministry to the pastors practical and meaningful!”

Well done on your generosity. In giving to our brothers and sisters in Kondoa, you have helped them in their need but also given to God.

Here are some principles we can learn from Paul’s letter.

1. Give according to your means

“... if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.”³

God is reasonable. He does not expect us to give what we do not have. He expects us to give according to our means.

2. No compulsion

Notice that Paul does not command the Corinthians. He says this explicitly,

“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.”⁴

He is not commanding them to give – we are in the New Covenant which is a grace-based covenant rather than Law. However, he does want them to excel in giving as he says they do in faith, speech, knowledge and love.⁵ When we have received so much from God all freely given to us, we should be even more ready to give than if we were under compulsion. Does not grace call forth at least as loving response as obligation? Might it call forth even more?

3. The Cross is our motivation and provision

Our motivation lies in the self-giving of Jesus. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”⁶

The ability to give comes from Jesus too. Did you register the exchange of the Cross there? On the cross, Jesus exchanged our negatives for his positives. Not just righteousness exchanged for sin, but in this case, riches for poverty. By faith in Jesus’ provision for us we can give generously knowing that he will provide for us to be able to keep giving.

³ 2 Corinthians 8:11-12

⁴ 2 Corinthians 8:8

⁵ 2 Corinthians 8:7

⁶ 2 Corinthians 8:9

A Widow's Gift

That brings us to the Widow's gift in the Gospel story. Here is a fascinating insight I heard a few years ago which explains some of this story.

In the temple there were 13 *shofar*-chests for receiving offerings. The *shofar* is a trumpet made from a ram's horn. These chests had bronze funnels like trumpets into which people threw their offerings. The thirteen chests were labelled for different purposes like Temple dues, Bird Offerings, Frankincense and Free-will offerings.⁷

With collection chests fitted with trumpet-like funnels do see why Jesus would think of saying that his followers should not announce their giving with trumpets to let everyone know how much they are giving? ⁸ He sat and watched the rich throwing in large amounts. How can anyone know they are large amounts? Because the manner of giving was designed to let everyone know. Coins crashing on the bronze of the trumpet. Ostentatious gestures, dramatic actions so everyone sees how much has been given.

Then along comes a poor widow. Pity the old or young without someone to provide for them! She puts in two of the smallest coins. A penny was a day's wage for a labour. Those coins each had a value of 1/64th of a penny! At today's minimum wage, each little coin is equivalent to \$2. So we could think of her gift as about \$4.

That gift would only have qualified for the free-will offerings – the other offering boxes had minimum contributions associated with them. But Jesus saw what she did and he honoured her. He told his disciples that she had given more than the wealthy. Her little was all she had and therefore far more valuable than the offerings the rich made out of their surplus. "She out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on." Jesus saw. She showed a radical trust in God to provide for her and gave everything to God, trusting more would come.

What is our attitude. God sees. He knows the true value of our giving and what it indicates - the state of our hearts. While we can give to impress people or because we feel obliged, the best giving springs from love and appreciation as an expression of worship.

God's nature is generous and he wants us to be like him. He promises that as we follow him, he will provide so we can be generous. Jesus is our source! All things flow from Him!

In two weeks time, we will have an opportunity to review our giving and renew our pledges. During these next two weeks, would you hold that question before God? What would he say to you about your giving? - and what would you say to him?

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⁷ David Garland, NIV Application Commentary on Mark, p480

The full list is: *New shekel dues* (this year's temple dues); *Old shekel dues* (last year's temple dues); *Bird offerings* (purchase of turtle doves for whole offerings); *Young birds for whole offerings* (young pigeons for whole offerings); *Wood* (for burning on the altar – minimum 2 faggots); *Frankincense*; *Gold for the mercy seat* (minimum 1 dinar of gold) and six others as *Free-will offerings* (used to buy whole offerings – the flesh for God, the hides for the priests).

⁸ Matthew 6:2

