

TRI TERRITORIAL PLANNED GIVING CONFERENCE

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Preaching Notes





I. PRESENTING OURSELVES

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12: 1)

Visual Introduction – Images of various kinds of presentations – Queen, Pope, Commissioning, Civic, etc...

The notion of presenting one's self before God is not something that is foreign on the biblical scene.

- In the transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua – *"The Lord said to Moses, "Now the day of your death is near. Call Joshua and present yourselves at the Tent of Meeting, where I will commission him. So Moses and Joshua came and presented themselves at the Tent of Meeting," (Deuteronomy 31: 14).*
- The dedication of the people of God under Joshua at the end of his life – *"Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves to God." (Joshua 24: 1).*
- The selection of the first king of Israel – *"But you have rejected your God, who saves you out of all your calamities and distresses. And you have said, "No, set a king over us." So now present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and clans", (1 Samuel 10: 19).*

It seems that it is God's way of dealing with the issues that arise between him and *his people*.

I am caused to think about this appeal of Paul's to his fellow believers in Rome, that is, that they ought *"to present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice...to God."* The notion of presenting is there, but how is it to be understood? It bears thinking about!

It is fair to say that Paul was well aware of the sacrificial system of the Jews, and even the pagan sacrificial practices of long ago. It would be very easy to align Paul's appeal to the believers at Rome with the religious practices that they were witness to. However, I think he has something completely different in mind as he pens his thoughts.

I believe the key to understanding Paul's request is to focus on the concept of *living sacrifice*. We cannot quickly move over the two words or we will miss what Paul is alluding to. While the reality of sacrificial systems was present, I believe Paul was drawing attention to something of greater significance.

Paul most likely had in his mind two biblical examples of 'living sacrifices' as he wrote. Our minds might readily recall the first, namely, Isaac (Genesis 22). Abraham was commanded by God to, *"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and... offer him as burnt offering."* Isaac willingly put himself on the altar and would have died in obedience to God's will. However, the Lord provided a ram to take his place. Isaac 'died' just the same - he died to self and willingly yielded himself to the will of God. When Isaac got off the altar, he was a 'living sacrifice' to the glory of God (Wiersbe).

The second example is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The Lord Jesus actually died as a sacrifice in obedience to his Father's will. But he arose again! And today He is in heaven as a 'living sacrifice' bearing in His body the wounds of Calvary (see Hebrews 4: 14 - 16, (Wiersbe).

It is these two biblical examples that help us to understand what lies behind Paul's plea. His plea is not a random thought, focusing merely on ancient sacrificial practices, but draws upon the real life situations of Abraham's *only son* (Genesis 22: 2) and God's *only son* (John 3: 16), who were offered as living sacrifices.

The two biblical examples offered are shadowed in the text. Paul by drawing attention to God's divine mercy underlines God's goodness and grace; it is not only extended to Israel (Romans 11), but also for all. God's goodness and mercy enables us to present our *bodies as living sacrifices*. When we think of presenting our bodies – we are speaking of the total person – body (12: 1), mind (12: 2a), and will (12: 2b).

Paul suggests that offering ourselves to God is a *spiritual act of worship*. Other translations state that it is not merely 'an act of spiritual worship', but it is something that it is logical, intelligent, reasonable, and true (it makes sense) in the light of what God has done in Christ Jesus. The presenting of ourselves to God is a 'called for' response and acknowledgement of his goodness and grace.

Moreover, it is *pleasing to God*.

Paul elsewhere writes concerning another 'act of worship' in his letter to the Corinthians (Corinthians 8: 1 – 5) - the giving of the Macedonian believers towards their fellow believers who were in need in Judea. Paul acknowledges their *rich generosity*. The Macedonians gave out of their *extreme poverty*. Paul testifies, "...they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service."

But what struck me most in Paul's commendation of the Macedonians was what Paul goes on to state next concerning the Macedonians, "And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord..." The Macedonians gave themselves firstly to the Lord before they gave their gifts. We could quickly gloss over this point, but we should not do so. It is quite a poignant action on behalf of the Macedonians. There was a 'self-giving' before there was the act of 'self-sacrifice'. They had turned 'a gesture of economic relief' into 'an act of Christian devotion'.

"You can't give your substance until you first give yourself' (**Wiersbe**).

It would seem that at the beginning of this Tri-Territorial Planned Giving Conference it is right that we should first of all give ourselves to the Lord.

Salvationist songwriter Brindley Boon composed the song '*I would be thy holy temple*'. The second stanza states:

*Time, health and talents presenting,
All that I have shall be thine:
Heart mind and will consecrating,
No longer shall they be mine.*

*Take thou my life Lord, I pray;
In deep submission I pray,
My all to thee dedicating,
Accept my offering today.*

The words were written for his commissioning – the 'Standard Bearers' Session' in the Royal Albert Hall, London, 12th May 1950. His words seem so fitting!

Let us present ourselves to God in an act of worship, knowing that it is *pleasing to God*.

II. GRATITUDE AND GENEROSITY – THE TWO MARKS OF CHRISTLIKE LIVING

A quote:

“Gratitude and Generosity are indivisible”

GRATITUDE

THE ONE WHO WAS THANKFUL

Read: Luke 17: 11 – 18.

“One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back, praising God,” (Luke 17: 15).

The story of the ten lepers is well known. We have heard it so often that its familiarity causes us to give it superficial treatment. We know its overriding teaching – to be thankful or in other words, we ought always to express gratitude to others when a kindness is done to us, and moreover to God.

However, there is much more to the story than a quick reading of the text might show. Luke, the writer of the story, is interested in several things as he relates this incident, which is found nowhere else in the other gospels. Luke focuses on Jesus as the one who brings salvation, but he views that in a particular manner; Jesus is the divine healer, and this redemption is universal. These are great themes that are underlined throughout Luke’s gospel. We need to read his gospel through this lens.

THE SETTING

One of Luke’s favourite signatures in his writing is the phrase, “On his way to Jerusalem”, (v. 11), referring to Jesus’ movement from place to place. Every opportunity for ministry in the towns and villages must be seen in relation to Jesus’ last place of ministry – Jerusalem. As far as Luke is concerned Jesus’ future suffering and death always overshadows his present ministry wherever it might take place. Thus, the passion of Jesus that he will soon experience ignites now his compassion for those who are in need. There is always urgency in Jesus’ ministry to people. If we fail to see this overshadowing in the text we fail to see something of the greater significance of the story of the ten lepers.

Actually, I like the simplicity of the story!

Tension is raised in the story when Luke makes the notation that Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee, (v. 11). We know something of the religio-political issues that created caution for Jesus as he travelled, skirting the border area and finding himself in what is described as a certain village, (v. 12), (the details of the religio-political differences need not detain us now). What we need to take notice of is that Jesus’ ministry takes place somewhere on a back-road in a seemingly unimportant place that is not named. The obscurity of the place lends itself to the unfolding incident.

Not only is Jesus forced to journey along a back-road to a village, but also the ten lepers are on that same back-road. They met as Jesus is entering the village. Jesus and the ten lepers meet on the same back-road. How interesting is this that Jesus meets people in journey of life in unexpected places – obscure villages and back-roads. Jesus encounters the ten lepers as he is going along.

THE SICKNESS

As we know the ten men shared the same disease, (v. 12). Leprosy was a disease that ostracised them from living in the community. Obviously, they knew something of Jesus by their calling out to him (v. 13a). They stood the required distance under Jewish law from Jesus, as outcasts from society due to their illness. They acknowledged Jesus as someone in authority – ‘Master’, (v. 13b). Their prayer is full of pathos – “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” With an economy of words the ten lepers told their need. They wanted to be well. If the opportunity was there, they were going to take advantage of the opportunity. Why not – being who they were, despised and diseased.

Interestingly, Luke tells us that Jesus takes recognition of the ten lepers – he saw them, (v. 14). We can be assured that Jesus always sees our every need and us.

Jesus’ authoritative word to the lepers was sufficient for them to understand that they were to be healed, but that healing would be soon evident and pronounced by the priest, (14). Jesus was aware of the Jewish health and community laws and he acted within those laws for the benefit of those who were healed. Only the priest could pronounce the lepers clean, so that they could re-enter society. Jesus’ words were the answer to their prayer. The faith of the ten lepers saw them cleansed while they went on their way to the priests.

True to his word we know that the ten were healed (v. 17). However, the focus in the narrative moves to just one of the lepers – the Samaritan. While Jews and Samaritans did not normally mix together – here we see that sickness became the common denominator that bound the ten lepers into a fraternity – “misery loves company” - with leprosy nationality ceases to be a barrier to friendship and support within the group.

THE SAMARITAN

The lone leper realising that he was healed came back, (v. 15). Before he went to the priest he returned to Jesus. Why? To glorify God! The Samaritan knew who Jesus was – the Son of God. He returned to the healer and praised God. No doubt the Samaritan was healed, but he knew from whence came the healing. He sought not only the healing, but also the healer. Here is a lesson to be learnt.

We should not be surprised that the Samaritan threw himself at Jesus’ feet, (v. 16). What should capture our hearts and minds is the thanksgiving that is commented upon in the narrative. It was something that was not expected from a foreigner – he was a Samaritan. Jesus himself marvels at the response of one who could be considered an outsider (v. 18).

The narrative shifts again when Jesus asks, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Surely the questioning of Jesus suggests that he expected a similar response from the other nine lepers - the expressing of gratitude. However, Jesus is grieved at ingratitude of the Jewish lepers. Indeed, the Samaritan surpassed the Jews in praise and thanksgiving.

While the miracle took place, the real emphasis is on the manner in which only one leper returned. That is what amazes Jesus. They all received the blessing of God, but only one expressed his gratitude. When God is good, we ought to show or gratitude – praising and thanksgiving. Notice it is not done quietly (v. 15).

William Hendriksen gives this insight. He offers that the possible reason that the Samaritan left the others on the way to the priest is that the other nine having realised their healing separated themselves once again from the Samaritan because of the religio-political differences. Jews looked down on Samaritans’

therefore it is possible that the old hostility re-emerged now that they could return to their communities. The nine lepers separated themselves from the one who was now different – another nationality. Whether Hendriksen is right or not and there is the possibility that he is right, it is worth pondering why the Samaritan left the group as they went on their way to the priest.

THE SALVATION

The concluding words of Jesus to the grateful leper are significant, “Rise and go: your faith has made you well, (v. 19). The grateful leper’s gratitude leads to another blessing being pronounced, namely, his faith saved him, not merely the cure from bodily sickness, but he was saved in the fullest sense of the word - not only the salvation of the body, but also of the soul. The gratitude of the leper caused a shift in the relationship between himself and Jesus. The other nine although healed had no more connection with Jesus, and here lies the sadness of the ungrateful lepers. There was a connectedness between the one grateful leper and Jesus that would always remain. Jesus above anything else is on about relationship. Relationship with him brings an even greater blessing – not only temporal, but eternal healing.

The Lukan narrative gives instruction in what is important – gratitude. Can there be any argument that the aim of the story is to underline a principle of the Kingdom of Heaven. How grateful are we to God?

GENEROSITY

THE WIDOW’S OFFERING

Read Mark 12: 41 – 43 (also Luke 21: 1 – 4).

There are two classes of people that God has a particular concern for always – orphans and oppressed. The Psalmist writes, “You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and oppressed...”, (Psalm 10: 18). Also, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling,” (Psalm 68: 5). Here we have a story that highlights this truth. Personally, I am grateful for the promise that comes from scripture that God cares for orphans (I spent the first eight years of my life in institutional care in Northern Ireland and Australia (see biographical sketch)).

Here is a great story and again we know it very well! However, in recent days I have been caused to look to it again and thoughtfully consider it for today. I looked at the story with new eyes as it were.

HE SAW

First of all we notice the action of Jesus – he “*sat opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury*”, (v. 41). He had just had discussions with those who were against him and he probably sat down because of tiredness and weariness in speaking to those who were dismissing his teaching. In weariness Jesus sat observing! Jesus was in the Court of the Women seated on a bench watching what people were bringing. Apparently, there were thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles for the purpose of receiving money from the people. The receptacles were placed against the wall of the Court of the Women. Apparently, each one of the receptacles was labelled according to the purpose for which the money dropped in was to be used, for example, tribute, sacrifice, incense, wood and so on. All sorts of people came and threw money into the containers. You can just imagine the sound as people threw in their offerings. I am almost certain that the rich who came would have delighted in the noise their offering would have made. Jesus saw how the rich came. He still sees what we bring as an offering.

HE STATED

However, he also noticed how a widow came as she placed her very small offering (v. 42). The two coins did not amount to very much in value. But, just as much as Jesus took notice of the rich people's giving, he saw the widow's offering as well.

So much so that he called the disciples over to him to see too. "Come on, Come and see." Then we hear those immortal words, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others" (v. 43). Jesus observes and makes a distinction between 'much' and 'meagre'. He could not help doing so, because it is possible that as the offerings were thrown into the containers, that the treasury officials might have yelled out the amounts that were given. The disparity between the offerings would have been heard to be very different. How would you like your offering to be announced as it was given – embarrassing, it could be for us? It is not the size of the offering that causes Jesus to call his disciples to take note, but the generosity of the offering that the widow gave. She had two coins, and she could have kept one, but she gave everything (v. 44).

HER SELF-SACRIFICE

The disciples were called upon to witness the total commitment to God that this widow showed. This is borne out by the words of Jesus, "*she out of her poverty put in everything – all she had to live on,*" (v. 44). This story of the widow's offering is strategically placed in the narrative sequence of Mark's gospel. The previous chapter records the misfortune of widows at the hands of the teachers of the law – they devoured widow's houses (Mark 11: 40). The following chapter records the destruction of the temple (Mark 13: 2). How significant then that Jesus commends the action and attitude of the widow in between the knowledge of abuse and the time of destruction that was coming. When Jesus calls attention to the offering of the widow it seems that her livelihood is under extreme threat. The widow is totally reliant on God for his provision, now and in the future.

Illustration

Ian's story...

John Wesley commenting on the widow's offering states, "...how acceptable is the smallest which springs from a self-denying love."

Wesley also stated, "Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can."

Generosity - yesterday we were reminded of the Macedonians who out of their extreme poverty which overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part (2 Corinthians 8: 2).

Brian Kluth has introduced the "40 Day Spiritual Life Journey to a more Generous Life" as a means to re-focus our attitude to giving. On Day 4, he gives the title of the day's reflection 'The Lord watches over your giving'. I ask the question: 'Is Jesus interested in our giving? From the story of the widow's offering there comes a resounding 'Yes!' (See Page 12).

Reflection

GRATITUDE AND GENEROSITY clearly are the two hallmarks of Christian living. They emerge as Jesus engages with those who come across his path in ministry. The two stories concerning a leper and a widow demonstrate that for us. Attached to the two stories is simplicity of the teaching that Jesus wants us to imbibe. Have we made it more complicated than we ought to have? Gratitude and generosity seem to be unforced and natural responses of people who have experienced the very goodness of God. God is looking for these graces of gratitude and generosity in our lives.

ACTIVITIES

Activities

Split the delegates into groups.

1. Discuss one of the following statements: Gratitude and generosity are indivisible,
2. Present a creative play, mime, or rap about either of the two biblical stories.

Sit the delegates in a circle and ask...

3. What was an insight you gained from the either of the two stories? Please share that insight.
4. Watch a video of the two biblical stories as a reminder of the facts. Who do you identify with most?

III. THE CHALLENGE OF GIVING

Martin Luther said, “People go through three conversions: The conversion of their head, their heart and their pocketbook. Unfortunately, not all at the same time.”

“Giving 10% isn't the ceiling of giving; it's the floor. It is not the finish line of giving; it's just the starting blocks.”

“Give to God what is right, not what is left.”

“Your use of money shows what you think of God.”

“If everyone in your church followed your pattern of giving would your church receive a token, a tip or a tithe?”

Without a doubt one of the greatest challenges placed before Christians is their attitude towards giving. Even in Blacktown City Corps where we have used the “Generous Life” material by Brian Kluth, there is still resistance to the overall thrust of his teaching. While our Corps is financial, it is not financial by internal giving – the giving of the people.

AN OLD TESTAMENT STORY - GIFTS FOR THE TABERNACLE

I love stories! They are one of the greatest teaching tools one can have. Lets read one that comes from the life of God's people – the Israelite community.

Read Exodus 25: 1 – 9, 35: 1 – 29.

While travelling recently on Long Service Leave in Europe, our return journey saw us having a stopover in Seoul Korea. Under normal circumstances we would not have been walking up this particular street (There is a long story why we were, which I can tell over a meal break). As we were walking long I noticed a Christian bookshop (I am drawn like a magnet to bookshops). I was looking in the window of the shop, surveying the stock, when a model of the Tabernacle caught my attention. I was transfixed by what I saw. I have always wanted a model of the Tabernacle as a means to teaching its significance in the worshipping life of the people of God long ago, but more importantly the foreshadowing of our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9). I was glad to buy it. It is before you today.

The passage before us tells the exciting story of how the materials for the first Tabernacle were gathered. I love the way in which the chroniclers unfold the story. There is much to consider.

THE LEADER'S ROLE

MOSES

The narrative simply says that Moses the designated leader of the people assembled the whole Israelite community (v. 1), because the Lord had something he wanted them to do (v. 4), that is provide materials for the tabernacle (v. 5). Moses relays the command of God to the people. God had earlier said to Moses that he wanted the tabernacle so that he could dwell among them (25: 8). God wanted the people to have a physical reminder of his continued presence with them. Moses instructs the people – to take or

to bring an offering (v. 5). Moses could not abdicate his responsibility as leader before God to challenge the people. The challenge was given to everyone (v. 5). No one was exempt from God's command.

THE PEOPLES' ROLE

PEOPLE

Everyone who was willing (v. 5).

Moses is to receive an offering for the Lord from everyone (25: 2). No one is excluded from the request of God to give. Everyone from what they had could bring something:

- gold, silver, and bronze – precious refined metals;
- blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen – fine fabrics;
- goat hair, ram skin, animal hides – animal products;
- acacia wood, olive oil, spices – plant products;
- onyx stones and gems – products of the earth (35: 6 – 9).

A vast variety of natural resources were available from which the people could choose and bring. God lays before the people the opportunity and the resources and allows the people to respond to his invitation.

All who were willing, men and women alike came (v. 22). There is no inequality or lines of demarcation in the roles of men and women.

However, leaders brought particular gifts – precious stones (v. 27). Leaders have particular responsibilities. Interestingly, God's word to pastors is, "set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity", (2 Timothy 4: 12). Again, "*In everything set them an example by doing what is good*", (Titus 2: 7). By the very designation leaders must lead by example. It is interesting that Commissioner Linda Bond has written just recently to the officers of this Territory in regard to giving, that officers should lead the way.

PROCESS

The whole Israelite community had to withdraw from the presence of Moses (v. 20). They had to go away and think about what they should bring. It was a considered gift. It was a thoughtful gift. It was a significant gift.

It was a gift that came from the stirring of their devoted hearts (v. 21).

It was a freewill offering from their substance (v. 29). These people were willing donors. They did not have to be begged or urged to give.

It seems that those who were able and had ability, the skilled people among them, brought the efforts of their hands, for example, the women – "*Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun*," (v. 25). God who is the Creator, received from the creativity of the skilled craft-persons.

PRESENTATION

The narrative states, that the people – men and women who presented gold, presented it in an unusual way – they presented it as a wave offering (v. 22). The wave offering occurred several times in the worship practice of Israel. It generally means that the thing offered is a special offering to the Lord and

once it is waved it becomes holy unto the Lord. This gift is consecrated to the work of the Lord. It becomes the special possession of the Levitical priesthood for the purpose it was offered.

I remember doing this – a wave offering, the offerings of the congregation - once at the time of the Planned Giving Renewal at Blacktown City Corps. I invited the congregation to wave their offerings – envelopes and open plate offerings. At the moment of waving they became holy unto the Lord – set apart for his purposes.

Above all we need to understand the principles of giving

- Voluntary, not forced
- God's grace will prompt men and women to give
- Then men and women will give their most precious gifts to God

Interestingly, the people had to be restrained from giving and there was no lack – “*The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done*”, (Exodus 36: 5). There was a generous response by the people.

THE ROLE OF GOD

The purpose for which the tabernacle was made is fulfilled – “*I will dwell among them*”, (Exodus 25: 8). The last words of the book of Exodus, “*Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle*” (Exodus 40: 34). The filling of the tabernacle is the greatest expression of God's presence, promise and power to the Israelite community. The giving of the people showed their commitment to God. The filling of the tabernacle reveals God's commitment to the people.

The Psalmist wrote, “*Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel*”, (Psalm 22: 3). The authorised version states that God inhabits the praises of his people. Is it too much to say that God inhabits the giving of his people? Surely not!

A NEW TESTAMENT STORY - THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

Read 1 Corinthians 16: 1 – 2, 2 Corinthian 8: 1 – 12

EMBARRASMENT

The Corinthian Church was the first church to respond to Paul's request for funds for the needy believers in Jerusalem. A year had elapsed since they had pledged their gifts, but they had failed to fulfil their obligation (2 Corinthians 8: 10). They had been eager to help towards the need, but they were a bit too slack in getting around to the completion of the task of raising the funds as required. Therefore, Paul encourages the Corinthian believers to finish the work (2 Corinthians 8: 11). Paul wanted their willingness to give to be matched by the completion of the task.

Failure to make good on the monies promised can be traced to the Corinthian believers' disregard of Paul's earlier advice. The Corinthians had not heeded Paul's instruction on securing needed monies. That is, “*On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections ought to be made*”, (1 Corinthians 16: 1 – 2). Paul had clearly instructed the Corinthians on a methodology to collecting funds.

The points Paul made were these:

- Regular – first day of the week
- Systematic – set aside a sum of money
- Proportionate – in keeping with one's income
- Stewardship – saving it up

What Paul was looking for in the giving of the Corinthian believers was they were consistent. He is not interested in their mere intention, side-tracked by other issues, but desires a strict accountability. Indeed, Paul above all wanted them to excel in this grace of giving (2 Corinthians 8: 7). Isn't that interesting! It seems that grace and generosity are entwined together.

EXCELLENCE

Paul recognises that they excelled in everything else – the grace gifts (1 Corinthians 1: 5, 7). These are listed as follows:

- In faith
- In speech
- In knowledge
- In earnestness
- In love

However, Paul indicates that they are deficient in one area that is excellence in the grace of giving. It is fair to say, that God wants all Christians to excel in everything – every grace-gift. Included in that list of grace-gifts is excellence in giving. How might they do this? Simply, by organising their finances immediately, not out of guilt, not out of compulsion, but a renewed willingness (2 Corinthians 9: 2). Both the 'Tabernacle Story' and the 'Corinthian Story' highlight the significance of willingness. The two stories also promote that excellence in giving is what is desired. The two stories allude to the need for a system to be in place for the materialising of gifts or monies. It just doesn't happen!

"For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have", (2 Corinthians 8: 12). Again the two stories point to any appropriate gift. The size of the gift is not under examination. It is always the motivation behind the giving.

Paul had lived amongst the Corinthian believers for at least a year and a half (Acts 18: 11). He was convinced that they really wanted to be generous people.

EXAMPLE

Therefore, Paul gives reasons why the Corinthian believers should be generous. These examples in turn become models.

- The Example of Christ - *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might be rich", (2 Corinthian 8: 9).*
- The Example of the Macedonians – *"And now brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches", (2 Corinthians 8: 1).* It is interesting to note that the eagerness of the Corinthians for the Jerusalem project had spurred the Macedonians into action in the first place (2 Corinthians 9: 2).

- The Example of others – “...but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others”, (2 Corinthians 8: 9). The churches that comprised the Macedonians were Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

Illustration

Daughter

Quotes

“For the Macedonians Christians, giving was not a chore but a challenge, not a burden but a blessing. Giving was not something to be avoided but a privilege to be desired” – George Sweeting.

“The Macedonians had no need of commendation whereas the Corinthians had every need of stimulation” – John Calvin.

ACTIVITIES

Activities

Split into groups

Discuss the implications of Brian Kluth's project (Third Week) - 'WHAT DO YOU HAVE!' – “From what you have, take an offering for the Lord”, (Exodus 35: 5).

Share one of the most financially generous things you have ever done for the Lord's work.

Have you ever given away a possession to help the Lord's work or help a person in need? What did you give away? How did it make you feel?

IV. SACRIFICIAL GIVING

An Old Testament Perspective

The Levitical Model

Read Leviticus 1: 1 – 17

Anyone

Moses as the leader of God's people is called upon by God to speak to them. He relates God's instruction, "When any of you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as an offering an animal from either the herd or the flock." (Leviticus 1: 2).

God permitted his people – the Israelites at any time to bring an offering as they were prompted to do so - anyone. The offering that was presented had to be burnt. It is not suggested why someone would bring an offering, however, later in the text there is an indication that the bringer of the offering may have been prompted by a need for either forgiveness or reconciliation for unintentional sin – "it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement", (v. 4). Two great themes of Scripture! Or it could be simply an expression of thanksgiving. Or it could be a desire for a renewed fellowship with God – a deepening of the spiritual life. Whatever the reason, the bringing of the offering by anyone was voluntary – it was a freewill offering. The voluntary nature of the offering could also be the expression of devotion and commitment to God - a surrendering to God! While the offering of the animal was freewill offering there were some stipulations attached to the presentation of the animal for sacrifice.

Appropriate

The offering had to be:

- an animal from the herd or the flock (v. 1)
- male (v. 3)
- without defect (v. 3)

Attitude

The individual had to be personally involved:

- The individual must present the animal at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (v. 3)
- The individual must identify with the offering by laying a hand on the animal (v. 4)
- The individual must personally slaughter the animal (v. 5), whether, bull, sheep, goat, dove or pigeon, (vv. 5, 10, 14). I don't know how I would go about this one, if it were today.
- The individual had to skin and cut it into pieces (v. 6).

- The individual had to wash the inner parts and legs with water (v. 9). The removal of excreta.

Acceptable

- By fire (v. 9) – the offering is totally consumed. The fire makes the offering holy unto the Lord.
- An aroma pleasing to God (v. 9).

Sacrifice is at the heart of Israelite worship. David uttered, *“I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing”* (2 Samuel 24: 24). Only the best is good enough for God and it should come at some personal cost. The prophet in a later time would challenge the Israelites that they offered second-rate animals and because of this they were despising of the Lord's name and polluting his table; *“You sniff at me, you bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick...”* (Malachi 1: 7).

The Lord is not visible, but the colours, sounds, and smells provided a worship experience. There is no mention of speaking; however, there must have been exchanges of conversation or instruction between the individual worshipper and priest – words of confession and reassurance.

Allowance

As already noted the sacrifices for the freewill burnt offerings allowed for a variety of animals, according to the circumstance of the individual. The wealthier gave a bigger animal, the poorer were allowed to bring a pigeon or dove. It is not the size of the offering that was important, other than it should be appropriate, what is significant is that there should be an ‘equal’ sacrifice made. No individual was disadvantaged. No individual was penalised. No individual was embarrassed by their own personal situation or circumstance.

The words of a song that emerge from the holiness movement of the early nineteenth century - the camp meetings, which are associated with the holiness teacher Phoebe Palmer and are penned by a close friend of hers is:

My all is on the altar,
I'm waiting for the fire;
Waiting, waiting, waiting,
I'm waiting for the fire.

Quite a well rehearsed song in Army circles.

The clear message of Leviticus is that the people of Israel were to give sacrificially and it was their sacrificial freewill offering that was pleasing to God. Of course the passage for consideration has great New Testament significance – the eventual perfect sacrifice, Jesus, that need not detain us here.

The revival camp meeting song suggests – my all is on the altar. However, we can draw an equal parallel that not only speaks to the idea of our total self-surrender to God of our lives, but also draw the relationship to our giving. Our giving needs to be sacrificial – proportionate to our circumstance.

I have in my imagination that as we give our monetary gifts from our hands, and they are placed on the Holiness Table and the prayer is offered, at that moment our monetary gifts (that which is common to all of us) becomes holy and becomes that which is pleasing to God. In a spiritual sense it is consumed and becomes that aroma that is pleasing to God. This understanding should change how we view the taking

up of the offering – it is very much an act of worship that aligns us with the very purpose of God. The freewill offering that was burnt on the altar of the tabernacle gave expression to the relationship that existed between the worshipper and God. Does our giving reflect the nature of our relationship with God? We might well ponder that question!

SACRIFICIAL GIVING

The New Testament

The Corinthian Model

Read 2 Corinthians 9: 6 – 15.

Available

Any farmer knows that if he sows seeds sparingly, he will reap a small harvest, Conversely, if the sower seeds generously, he will reap an abundant harvest. Paul uses the agricultural experience to illustrate Christian giving. How insightful! This analogy must be carefully interpreted and applied. God does not measure the seed by how much is actually sown. Rather, He measures the seed by how much is available to be sown. That is, our giving is measured by what is available to be given. The Macedonians did not have much but they gave out of their poverty to the Jerusalem project. It is not about quantity but quality of the seed or gift.

As a cautionary note we need to carefully interpret Paul's teaching on 'sowing generously' and 'reaping generously'. It is not to be understood or confused as some have done to equate to a 'prosperity theology'. Nowhere in Scripture are Christians taught to give in order that they may gain.

Giving is always motivated by an unselfish heart! Note what Paul says to the Corinthian believers, "*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver,*" (v. 7). Firstly, Paul clearly focuses on the attitude of the giver – the right heart - the happy heart – the cheerful giver. Secondly, he points to that which is available – the considered gift.

We have already discussed that generosity includes both proportionate giving and sacrificial giving. Here Paul suggests that every Christian is ultimately responsible to give to God on the basis of his own heart decision. Paul's intention was not to introduce a 'quota scheme' or to conduct a 'means test', but to allow for liberality in giving among the Corinthians.

Assurance

Proportionate and sacrificial giving engages God to respond with generosity measured in blessings. How do we understand this blessing of God? Again firstly, if the Corinthians were faithful and helpful in helping others, God would take care of them. They would have all they needed – "having all you need at all times". (v. 8). Therefore there is an assurance that their needs would be met, both temporal and spiritual – "make all grace abound to you" (v. 8).

However, that assurance is not merely for our continued benefit, but for the benefit of others. Paul cites Psalm 112: 9, "*He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever*". Righteousness here means benevolence. So the intention of Paul is to relate to the Corinthians that their benevolence is a means to ongoing benevolence - the generous-hearted person will never lack the means to express generosity. We are blessed so that we might bless. Benevolence is the evidence of righteousness.

Note the whole verse - “*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all you need, you will abound in every good work,*” (v. 8).

Agricultural

Our God who gives us seed to sow, gives us more seed to sow. The bountiful God who gives “seed to the sower and bread for food” will abundantly increase your resources that you may ‘scatter’ abroad acts of benevolence, as a sower scatters seed (v. 10). He increases your store of seed, not to stockpile, but to give again and again in sowing into the Kingdom. The seed possesses the potency for life and increase.

We are blessed so that we might be generous (v. 11). We are not to be attracted to selfish gain, but attracted to solely doing that which is good. We are not to focus on what we receive but what we can give.

Abundance

The outcome of continual generosity will be an “overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God” (v. 11). The Jerusalem believers touched by the generosity of the Corinthian believers would;

- Praise God for their service of kindness and generosity (v. 13).
- Pray for them (v. 14).
- Understand that it is a result of grace-giving motivated by obedience to Christ (v. 13).
- See that the blessing of God was not only on the recipients’ lives, but also upon the givers’ lives as well (v. 15).

Acclamation

Paul gives a perspective that we cannot ignore – “*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift*” (v. 15). Paul is referring to the unique gift of God, his only son, who is the Saviour of the world – “*the divine gift which inspires all gifts*” (**Tasker**).

“*Freely you have received: freely give,*” (Matthew 10: 8). Here is the punch line of all Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to do.

Phillip Hughes describes giving as an exhilarating experience. I hope it is for you!

Illustration

Daughter

V. INVESTING INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

OLD TESTAMENT STORY

THE MEMORIAL SCROLL

Read Malachi 3: 6 – 18

Relationship

I suppose you have read or heard something about this passage of Scripture at some time or other. What an interesting passage it is, with its strong indictment of the people of God – the Israelites. They had been used to coming under God's scrutiny at many times in their history as this passage clearly shows. The scene is set! God spells out the relationship that exists between himself and Israel. All God can say is that in the covenanted relationship he is the one who has not changed at anytime in their relationship (v. 6). However, the people of Israel - the people he had brought into being have shown themselves to be inconsistent in the relationship – they are the ones who have *continually turned away from my decrees* (v. 7). They had been disobedient to his commands. There is an overwhelming indication that God's people had continually fractured and broken the covenanted relationship, which had been entered into so long ago by their forefathers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God was always proved steadfast in his love towards them, but Israel had proved too often that they were fickle in their love towards him. This is the nature of God's complaint against the people of Israel – the descendants of Jacob (v. 6). The fracturing of the relationship so often meant that Israel deserved destruction. However, God's way was very different. He always remained gracious towards them. Why? The answer is simply this, God never changed towards them - he continued to be merciful. The unchangeable nature of God is paramount in the unfolding story related by Malachi.

Repentance

What God required of his people was that they repent of their disobedience – “*Return to me and I will return to you,*” (v. 7). Obviously, the waywardness of the Israelites had created distance between them and God. Sin always creates a barrier. Yet sin's remedy is repentance – a returning. As already noted there had been a long history of rebellion concerning God's people. The question is, ‘Can they be different?’ This is the hope!

Response

We don't have to wait long to hear the Israelites' response - a response that shows that they were puzzled by God's charge against them, or even maybe they were in denial concerning their behaviour. It could be that God's straight talking with them causes them to be pessimistic about the possibility of a restoration in the fractured relationship, that indeed that there was no way back – they have strayed too far – they asked, “*How are we to return?*” (v. 8) Whether it was puzzlement, denial or pessimism, they knew that something was very wrong. Malachi announces a litany of things that the Israelites had done that impaired the relationship. They are listed in the previous chapters. The priests and the people:

- Offered defective animals upon the altar (Malachi 1: 8).
- Defective teaching was entertained (Malachi 2: 8).

- There was the condoning of divorce and intermarriage (Malachi 2: 11).
- They embraced foreign gods (Malachi 2: 11).
- They worshipped God by adopting pagan rituals (Malachi 2: 13).

As if this wasn't enough, the Israelites were engaged with a variety of other practices (see Malachi 3: 5):

- Sorcery
- Adultery
- False witness
- Fraud
- Oppression
- Injustice

No wonder the Israelites faced with their behaviour before God are in doubt how to reverse the damage that they had done, not only to themselves but also the nation.

Robbing

Of all the sins that could have been chosen by God to highlight the measure of the Israelites' movement away from all that he had stipulated, just one is focused upon, that is, the robbing of God in tithes and offerings (v. 6). How interesting that God would use this issue as a summary of his dissatisfaction of the Israelites. By this one charge God states that his people have missed the mark in their calling into nationhood. Yet, the very thing that is the epitome of their sinfulness becomes equally the means of their restoration. They had asked, "How are we to return?" What God reiterates is that tithing and offerings are central to obedience, the reversal of disobedience. Their robbing of God had brought a curse upon them. The renewal of the giving of tithes and offerings would bring blessing rather than a curse. The passage indicates that there would be no longer famine in the land! The land would become a delightful land (Malachi 3: 12).

The challenge of God is now made to Israel, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse," (v. 10). The whole nation had robbed God (v. 9); now the whole nation had to bring the whole tithe so that there might be food in my house (v. 10). The whole nation had to act. If the whole nation responded much blessing would eventuate in the nation (v. 10). The blessing of God is not for the mere benefit of the individual, but the nation as a whole, the individual received as the nation was blessed. Not only will the nation of Israel be blessed, but the other nations will recognise the blessing of God on the nation in a very tangible way and call you blessed (v. 12). The land of Israel had become a place that was undesirable to live in. Righteousness – the giving of tithes and offerings would make the land a joy to inhabit. God says, "See if I will open the floodgates of Heaven..." (v. 10).

Remnant

God hears the harsh things that the Israelites utter against him (v. 13). However, there is always the faithful remnant who when confronted with their disobedience begin to fear the Lord and respond appropriately (v. 14). In turn, God responds to the repentant. He hears their conversation about their situation (v. 16).

Remembrance

The great message of Malachi is that the faithful remnant will be remembered – “A scroll of remembrance was written,” (v. 16). The faithful remnant is honoured by their names inscribed upon a scroll. How amazing is that! The faithful remnant will be remembered (v. 17). There is a sense of judgement that pervades the scene - the wicked and the righteous will be separated (v. 18). The day is coming when you will see God act against those who ignore him. However, God make a reassuring promise to the faithful.

It is of extreme significance that God places the giving of tithes and offering in this manner. Giving is a barometer of spirituality. Giving has an eternal promise and hope attached to it. The connection between the two in the life of Israel cannot be overlooked or discounted. At least it is worth thinking about.

THE NEW TESTAMENT STORY

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

Read Matthew 6: 19 – 21, Luke 12: 32 - 34.

A Command

Jesus issues a command, “*Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth...*” (v. 19). He made the statement to the people as he was teaching on the mountainside about the values of the kingdom. ‘Don’t do it!’ Don’t be focused on gaining wealth – storing up for yourself. Surely, it is evident that Jesus is primarily concerned about selfishness – there is a difference between enough and excess. Being selfish is not a value of the kingdom. What is excess? There is no firm answer to that question because people’s circumstances are very different. A clue is given – ‘What is the heart more focused on – the selfish accumulation of possessions or the unselfish use of them?’ The heart cannot be in two places at once – it is an either /or proposition.

Yet we need to understand and balance Jesus’ command alongside other scripture, so that we don’t misinterpret his instruction. Other scriptures relate that:

- A person is required to provide for his relatives (1 Timothy 5: 8).
- A person is commended for working and making provision for the future (Proverbs 6: 6 – 8).
- We are encouraged to enjoy the good things that the Creator has given us (1 Timothy 4: 3 – 4, 6: 17).

We have to make provision for everyday living; however it is not to be for selfish reason. The people must not lay up treasure for themselves.

The Contrast

Jesus simply tells the disciples that there is a dichotomy that exists between treasure/wealth – treasure on earth and treasures in heaven. The dichotomy points to a division between the temporal and eternal. Are we focused on earth or are our eyes lifted to a greater horizon in heaven? How we view life will show our preoccupation.

The contrast between earth and heaven is dramatically presented:

Earth

- Deterioration – moth
- Destruction – rust
- Devaluation
- Defalcation – thieves

Heaven

- Preserved
- Reserved

A Context

The teaching given by Jesus in Matthew – The Sermon on the Mount is given a different context by Luke – The Sermon on the Plain. The Sermon on the Mount was to a crowd of people gathered to listen. The Sermon on the Plain was to his disciples, therefore it is a personal word to them.

The context is that Jesus is comforting them concerning their lives, “*what they will eat – what you shall wear,*” (Luke 12: 22). The disciples are not to worry!

To reduce their anxiety Jesus says again, “*Don’t be afraid,*” (v. 32). However, he uses an affectionate term in addressing them – little flock. The term highlights their relationship with Jesus. The disciples’ future is secure – “*The Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom,*” (v. 33). The disciples had to be totally reliant on God – “*Sell your possession and give to the poor,*” (v. 33). They had to use their possessions as gifts to others less fortunate.

The disciple’s focus – their heart had to be on the kingdom (v. 34).

Their total surrender to the value of the kingdom meant that they had treasure in heaven (v. 33).

Their treasure in heaven would not be:

- Exhausted
- Eroded
- Extorted

The little flock that needed to be fed and defended will one day inherit the kingdom with all its benefits.

Lay up treasure in Heaven,
Life will pass away;
Lay up treasure in abundant measure
For the great accounting day;
Lay up treasure in Heaven,
Though men count you poor
Thou shalt reign with the sons of God
For evermore.

