

GIVING

I heard the story of a young man who was hired as a switchman on the tracks. As part of his training a supervisor took him to the area of the track that he would be working. The supervisor asked him if he understood the switch and knew how it worked and he assured him that he did. Then the supervisor asked him a hypothetical situation. He said, "Let's say you have a train coming from the north at 80mph and a train coming from the south at 50mph on the same track – and you were standing here at this switch and it was jammed, what do you think you would do?" The young man thought for a minute and then said, "I would run and get my Uncle Jed!" The supervisor couldn't believe his ears and repeated the situation, "You have two trains coming at each other at a cumulative speed of 140 mph, you are standing at this switch, and you are going to run and get your Uncle Jed? Why would you do that?" The young man said, "Well sir, because my Uncle Jed has seen it all, but even he has NEVER SEEN A WRECK THIS BIG!"

Why do I tell that story? Because mankind is on a collision course with God. Every person who has ever lived is on a collision course with the God of creation. One day we will all have to stand before God and give an account of our lives. There is an eternal heaven and an eternal hell that stands before us. What we do in this life will determine where we spend the next.

We are continuing in our series on Authentic Faith. We have looked at lordship, repentance and fruit. Last week we talked about love. Today I want to talk about something that flows out of love. You have probably heard the old expression before that you can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. Today we want to talk about giving.

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

The bible says that God so loved the world that he GAVE... Our God is a giving God. Jesus modeled this for us when he walked the earth. He gave all He had for others.

1. The TEST – give

The verse that we have read this morning starts with the word GIVE. It is used in the imperative, meaning that it is something that is expected of us. Giving is like love in that it is not optional. Jesus expects us to give.

Mat 6:2-4 So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Jesus does not say here IF you give. He says twice WHEN you give. It is an expectation.

Here in Canada, we live in a democracy. The word means 'rule of the people', as opposed to aristocracy which means 'rule of the elite'. In a democracy, everyone gets a say. Everyone gets a voice in what happens. As believers in Jesus, we are part of the Kingdom of God. A Kingdom is run differently than a democracy. There is no parliament, no representatives. There is no election. There is only the King, and he controls the Kingdom.

He makes the rules, and when those rules are broken the King has the power to enforce those rules. Again, this is the concept of lordship. I say that because, as people, we generally do not like to be told what to do. Especially with our money.

One time a skeptic said to a preacher, "I can't stand this Christianity business. All I ever hear from you Christians is give, give, give." The preacher thought a minute and said, "That's about the best description of Christianity I have ever heard!"

Mal 3:8-10 Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse -- the whole nation of you -- because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

Sometimes, Christians get swept up in a debate over whether or not we're required to tithe, when that's not the real question. The real question is this, does the promise that we just read in Malachi still apply today? I do not find a passage in the New Testament that has rescinded this promise. Just as I have found no New Testament passage that ever rescinded God's rainbow promise about a flood. Do you believe God will never destroy the earth by water again? How do you know? Your confidence is based on the promise found in Genesis 9.

This promise does not have to be restated in the New Testament in order to be valid today. A few weeks ago we were looking at proverbs. Here is a promise from the book of proverbs;

Pro 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Do you believe that promise still applies to us today? This promise about guidance did not have to be restated. So if it does not have to be restated, than what about 3 verses later where it says;

Pro 3:9-10 Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; 10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

This is also a promise. God's promises in regard to tithing are no different than His promises about guidance. Our decision to give 10% of our income back to God reflects our reliance on him as the source of all our blessings. This kind of faith pleases the Lord and brings abundant blessing.

I don't want us to fall prey to legalistic righteousness and require the New Testament to command us to tithe before we use this simple measure as a generosity standard. We could miss many of God's richest blessings if we refuse to take him at his word. Both biblical principles and practical experiences demonstrate the power of tithing in a Christian's life. Since God's word repeatedly uses the sowing and reaping illustration to encourage giving back to him, it's a powerful exercise to see what will happen when we take him at his word and tithe as a starting point for giving. What will we reap?

Jesus taught his followers to live by a higher standard than the one given in the Old Testament. Obviously, we too, want to please him and be faithful to his call. Jesus contrasted the requirements of the Law with the plan for his followers. Which is the higher standard, the Law of Moses or the way of Christ?

OT: Do not murder - NT: Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.

OT: Do not commit adultery - NT: Anyone who lusts commits adultery in his heart.

OT: Do not swear falsely by God's name - NT: Do not swear at all.

OT: The entire tithe will be holy to the Lord - NT: Give as you are prospered.

An exhaustive study of Scripture reveals this often overlooked truth: The way of Jesus always calls for greater faithfulness and commitment than was required in the Old Testament. Can giving possibly be an exception? It follows clearly that no one who wants to be faithful to God would ever think of doing less than the Old Testament believers. When it comes to tithing, we all too often think that Christ didn't come to fulfill it, but to destroy it. That isn't the case. Hebrews 10:1 says, "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-- not the realities themselves."

Jesus told us to give. It is a test to see if we really trust Him. It is a test of our faith. Paul understood this;

2Co 8:8-9 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 9 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.

Paul says that giving is a test of the sincerity of our love. It is not commanded, because then it would not be from the heart but out of blind duty. It is expected. It should be a part of the life of every Christian. God's standard for us is generosity. His expectation is that we give. It is a test. A test of whether or not we are connected to Christ.

At the beginning of the lockdown, I came in to the church one day and saw a drone sitting in the middle of our parking lot. It was just sitting there. Mark Bish had found it sitting there like that when he had come in a few hours earlier. We waited all day to see if someone would come and claim it, but no one did. So now it is sitting in my office. This particular model of drone has an issue with it. If it is flying and goes beyond the range of its controller, it just keeps on going. Without someone telling it what to do, it just does its own thing. It keeps going until it runs out of power and then has to make an emergency landing.

Sometimes we are like that drone. We just do our own thing. Patrick spoke a few weeks ago about the importance of staying connected to the vine. Without that connection, we wither and perish. Without God's control in our lives we just do our own thing until we crash. God says GIVE.

2. The TREASURE – and it will be given to you

When we give, Jesus says that will then also receive. The verse continues;

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap...

Notice that it says here that when we give, we do not simply receive back WHAT we give, we get back MORE than we give. This is the principle of multiplication. One of the truths of planting and harvesting is that you reap more than what you sow. Farmers could not make a living if there was no increase - if they only got from the ground what they put into it.

Matt 12:8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop -- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

If you sow a seed, you receive back many times more seeds than you plant. I like the picture of popcorn. You pour a little cup full of kernels into the pan, but then when it starts to pop it grows and overflows the container. A little cup of kernels makes a huge bag of popcorn. When we give, God takes what we have given and multiplies it.

God says to us “Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” The blessings just spill out. There is so much of it that you do not know what to do with it. When the girls were little we stayed on weekend at a bed and breakfast. It was bath time, so one of them was in the tub with the bubble bath. They realized it was a water jet tub so they turned it on. The bubbles started to multiply and soon the whole room was filled with bubbles. That is what happens when we give. God multiplies it so that we do not even have room for the increase.

I could give so many different testimonies of this, and I am sure that there are people listening to this that could also testify to it. That they trusted God and he was able to take what they gave and multiply it. Not in ways that they could even understand.

Deut 28:1 If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God: 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock--the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. 6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. 7 The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. 8 The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

Obedience to the Lord means blessing. We receive an abundance and produce more than expected.

3. The TRUTH – with the measure you use

The verse ends by saying, “For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” That means that we get to decide the blessing. One of my favorite verses in the bible is the story of the widow’s oil found in 2 Kings 4:1. Basically, Elisha tells the widow to collect as many empty jars as possible. When she starts pouring out the oil it kept flowing until the last jar was filled, and then it stopped. God filled according to her faith. If she brought 5 jars, there would be 5 jars of oil. If she brought 5000 jars, there would be 5000 jars of oil. The blessing was tied to the faith of the one being blessed.

This is another basic truth about sowing and reaping. The more you plant, the more you harvest.

2 Cor 9:6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

If you plant two fields of corn you will produce more than if you plant one field of corn. That is just common sense. Likewise, in relation to giving, the more you give the more you get.

When you give, you sow seed and it produces a crop. Am I saying that if you start tithing that you are going to instantly become rich and never have another problem in your life. No. What I am saying is that you cannot out give God! If you provide Him with the seed, He can bring a harvest in your life and in the life of His church.

Any fool knows how many seeds there are in an apple, but only God knows how many apples there are in a seed -- Robert Schuller

It is one thing to read, study, hear a message, and know God expects me to give. It is one thing to know that God has promised that if I give, He has said He'll bless me. But the truth is, giving generously is something else entirely. When I think about all that Jesus gave for me, my most natural response is to give Him the treasure of my life. What is the 'treasure' of your life? Your time, your energy, your talent, your family, your job, your money; what is it? Where your treasure is, that exposes where your heart is.

God's word tells us that we are simply stewards of all we think we possess. If it's His to begin with, why is the tithe such a big deal? People love to give to special projects, to things they see as important. When a need arises, you rise to the need.

I am so grateful that during the last few months, God's people have continued to give. So many learned to use electronic giving for the first time. I was so blessed to see people driving into the parking lot to drop off their envelopes in the church mailbox. I want to be honest with you, there were people when the lockdown began that were talking doom and gloom. They were calculating how long we as a church were going to survive without giving. I was not one of them, because I know and love the people of this church.

Having said that, I know that we can do even more. To the generous out there I thank you for your faithfulness. You have passed the test with flying colours! Well done, I pray that God will continue to richly bless you.

To others who have not yet learned this concept, what are you waiting for? Can you really afford to miss out on God's blessing in your life? What is authentic faith. It is a giving faith.

This is our daily challenge. Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan story. There are many different perspectives on what it means to give in that story.

The first was the perspective of the robbers. What is yours is mine and I will take it. This is the attitude of a thief. In the church, there are those who expect everyone else to give so that they can receive. You give, I get. I am not going to give anything towards the new gym, but you can expect that I will be the first person in it after it is built.

The second perspective was that of the Priest and the Levite. What is mine is mine, and I will keep it. I do not really care or agree with this ministry so I am not going to give anything towards it. They saw the man who was robbed, but they were not willing to help because they did not see it as their responsibility.

The third perspective was that of the Samaritan. What is mine is HIS and I'll share it. Everything we have belongs to Jesus, and we give not because we have to, but because we want to.

For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. A small-town baker bought his butter from a local farmer. After weighing his butter, he concluded the farmer had been reducing the amount in the packages but charging the same. Therefore, the baker accused the farmer of fraud. In court the judge asked the farmer, "Do you have measuring weights?" "No sir," replied the farmer. "How then do you manage to weigh the butter that you sell?" The farmer answered, "When the baker began buying his butter from me, I thought I'd better get my bread from him. I have been using his 1-pound loaf as the weight for the butter I sell. If the weight of the butter is wrong, he has only himself to blame."