

7.7.2024

**Hilarious Generosity**

Sandwich

1Chron. 29 v 1 – 20

2 Cor. 9 v 8 – 15

**Introduction**

I read our Old Testament passage a few weeks ago in my Quiet Time and was struck by the willing generosity of the people as they brought their offerings for the building and furnishing of the new temple which David's son, Solomon, would build.

I was reminded that a similar thing happened in the desert when the tabernacle was being built. On that occasion, the people, who were living in the desert on their way from slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land, gave so generously that there was more than was needed and Moses had to tell them to stop bringing contributions.

Anyway, it set me off thinking about giving, so I thought, this morning, we'd have a look at the Biblical guidelines.

I want to emphasise that this is not an appeal for funds, nor a guilt trip. I have no knowledge of the state of your church bank balance. I am not, in any way financially astute and I have no axe to grind. So, you can relax and explore the scriptures with me, this morning.

**2 Corinthians 9 v 6 – 15**

You perhaps wondered about the title for my talk. It comes from the Passion Translation of our New Testament reading this morning. Other versions speak of a 'cheerful' or 'joyful' giver, but the thought of 'hilarious generosity' really appealed to me! I love the idea of us laughing with joy as we fill out the cheque or do a bank order as we give.

Here is part of that passage in The Passion Translation:

**'A stingy sower will reap a meagre harvest, but the one who sows from a generous spirit will reap an abundant harvest.'**

*Points: Giving brings blessing – God is no man's debtor. But not giving in order to receive and NOT the so-called prosperity gospel.*

*Generous spirit – some have a naturally generous spirit, or their upbringing nurtured it ... some of us need to ask the Lord to develop it in us.*

**TPT: 'Let giving flow from your heart, not from a sense of religious duty. Let it spring up freely from the joy of giving – all because God loves hilarious generosity.'**

This is what strikes me about the people bringing their offerings for the building of the Tabernacle and then for the Temple – they came with such joy and generosity of spirit. God loves a cheerful giver. He looks at our heart-attitude and He loves it when we give with joy motivated by love.

In fact, **1 Cor 13 v 3** says that even if we give all our goods to feed the poor, but don't have love, we 'would gain nothing of value' (TPT)

So, as we look at different scriptures, look out for this emphasis on love-based, joyful generosity.

## Tithes and Offerings

The scripture refers to tithes and offerings. So, let's start with tithes and see what the scriptural principles are:

When the Promised land was divided up among the various tribes, the tribe of Levi was set aside to serve in the Temple and was not given a parcel of land. Consequently, the Levites had no way of supporting themselves. So, In the Torah, the Levites were entitled to take a tenth (or 'tithe') of the offerings brought into the Temple. That tenth was then to be tithed by the Levites and that portion given to the priests. All offerings brought into the Temple were offerings primarily to God, so there is our first principle:

Our giving is to God, for His work.

Secondly, all offerings were to be of the best quality, not the damaged crops or sick or deformed livestock. They were to give the best to God. Similarly, the tithe given to the priests was to be the best of the best.

In 2 Chronicles 31 v 4, 5 we have the record of how King Hezekiah restored Temple Worship:

*'And he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, that they might give themselves to the Law of the Lord. As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the first-fruits of their grain, new wine, oil and honey and all that the fields produced.'*

So, here we see that by this time the principle was that the people should give a tenth of the first-fruits of their produce i.e. the first and the best, not the left-overs. In fact, the people of Jerusalem and surrounding countryside brought in such an abundance of the tithes of their crops and livestock that it all piled up over four months and the Levites were well catered for.

**So, another principle is that we give the first tenth, not whatever is left over or not of consequence.**

The revival of Hezekiah's reign didn't last and the devotion of Israel to the Lord, waxed and waned a good few times..

Malachi 3 v 7 – 12      A warning and a promise to Israel

*'From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?" Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. But you say, "How have we robbed You?" In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And thereby put Me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down a blessing until there is no more need.'*

The warning is clear. The people had forgotten that the tithes and offerings were to God and in failing to bring them into the Temple storehouses, they weren't just depriving the priests and Levites, they were robbing God of His due.

But note the blessing here: when the people give the whole tithe, they will be blessed and will not suffer any lack themselves. Not necessarily all they want. Do you remember the old song, 'O Lord, won't you give me a Mercedes Benz? My friends all have got one.' No, the promise is to supply our need.

Note: this is not the so-called 'prosperity gospel' propounded by some preachers and ministries who say, "Sow \$100 into this ministry and God will reward you a hundred-fold – you will receive \$10,000 from Him". That sort of thing. NO! I'm sure you are all too wise to fall for such money-grabbing tactics. We give to God because we love him and we are grateful for what he has done for us, not in order to get something back from Him – He's already given us salvation and all we need to live godly lives in Christ Jesus.

However, there is the promise here in Malachi, that if we bring all our tithes and offerings into His storehouse i.e. the work of His kingdom, we will be blessed and provided for.

Well. That's all Old testament and a bit legalistic, isn't it?

Firstly, remember the encounter of Abraham with Melchizedek, centuries before the Law was given. Melchizedek was a mysterious King of Salem (later called Jerusalem) and Priest of God Most High. He can be seen as a type or pointer to Christ – a King and a Priest (not allowed in Israel, later) and we know nothing of his background or lineage. He gave Abraham bread and wine!!! And blessed him !! and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.

So, the principle is set there in a fore-shadowing of our worship of Christ.

#### **Still O.T. though. What about the N.T.?**

Even though it is clear that we are not under compulsion, as Gentile believers in Jesus, to keep the Torah, there are principles for us. A tithe is a good place to start. If a tenth seems an awfully high proportion, here is a visual aid:

***Produce a clear bag of ten cakes – take one out – check it for blemishes – that's for God's work. I am left with 9!***

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul argues that full-time evangelists should be supported by the believers, just as the OT tithes supported the Levites. Although, he was able to earn his living – and often did, he would be freer to preach and plant churches if he was supported by the church.

A testimony to encourage you. Many years ago, when I was a young Christian, I had been taught to tithe my income. This was not a hardship to me – I was single and employed and have never lived extravagantly. One year, I was on a Beach Mission Team with a young couple – Michael and Esther Ross-Watson who would soon be going out as missionaries to Indonesia with WEC – faith mission – they didn't ever mention need or ask for money but look to the Lord to provide. In my Quiet Time, one morning, I felt the Lord tell me to double my tithe to twenty per cent. 'What shall I do with the extra 10%?' I asked, and the answer came back, 'Give it to Michael and Esther. So, I did. They were over-joyed because until I gave them that money, they hadn't got the money for the petrol to get home. I tell you, that blessed me more than it did them!

I remained friends with them for many years, and Michael had many stories of God's miraculous provision. I particularly liked the time when Michael was preaching by invitation at a convention in Ireland. He'd had the money for a single flight there, but no money for the journey home to Oxfordshire. He didn't mention this to anyone. At the end of the meeting, a farmer came up to him and said, 'Michael, God has told me to give you a cow.' And he handed Michael a cheque for the value of a cow. It covered Michael's journey home. Do you think God blessed that farmer?

We read in Paul's letters how the early churches, on hearing of financial need in other churches, made special collections to send to them.

So here is another principle:

Our tithes should be to support full-time ministers, missionaries and others in what we call ‘full-time-work’ for the Kingdom. On top of that we should be willing to respond to particular need among God’s people, prayerfully considering what we should give. And, of course, we should also consider alms to the poor and needy.

It is important that we do not impoverish ourselves, so that others have to help *us* out. But, as Paul says, we should carefully consider, from how God has prospered us, how we can help others. In 2 Cor. 9 v 8, just after the bit about hilarious generosity, Paul writes that ‘God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all-sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.’ And in V. 11 ‘You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way.’ In other words, He will provide our needs and more, so that we can give more to help others.

Jesus, Himself watched the rich people putting their large tithes and contributions into the offering box in the Temple in Luke 21 and commended the poor widow, who couldn’t give much but had sacrificially given all she had.

Here is another principle – God isn’t looking so much at what we give, but at our hearts – do we love Him enough to give even though it is costly to us?

In Matthew 6, Jesus gives a warning: there were some religious people who made a big show of their giving – even sounding trumpets to let everyone know that they were going to give a nice fat offering to the needy. Jesus said that they have their reward in the praise of people, but they won’t get any reward from God!

Jesus said that when we give we should keep it so quiet that even our left hand doesn’t know what our right hand is doing! Father sees and He will reward us.

Connected to this is another principle: There should be no strings attached to our giving. We do not give in order to receive praise, to receive a favour back from the recipient nor to get a favour from God. It has been known for people to use their giving to the church in order to get their own way in some issue. This is not acceptable.

So, I think that’s enough. Let’s end with a run-through of the principles we’ve seen:

- Our giving is to God, for His work.
- We should give the best to God: we give the first tenth, not whatever is left over or not of consequence.
- There is no compulsion. This is not legalistic. We give to God because we love him and we are grateful for what he has done for us, not in order to get something back from Him.
- If we bring all our tithes and offerings into His storehouse i.e. the work of His kingdom, we will be blessed and provided for.
- Our tithes should be to support full-time ministers, missionaries and others in what we call ‘full-time-work’ for the Kingdom. On top of that we should be willing to respond to particular need among God’s people, prayerfully considering what we should give. And, of course, we should also consider alms to the poor and needy.
- As we give, He will provide for our needs and more, so that we can continue to help others.
- God isn’t looking so much at what we give, but at our hearts – do we love Him enough to give even though it is costly to us?

- There should be no strings attached to our giving.
- When we give, we should keep it so quiet that even our left hand doesn't know what our right hand is doing! Father sees and He will reward us.

To conclude and put everything into perspective, God loves us so much that He gave the ultimate in order that we can be forgiven and be with Him. We cannot out-give God

**Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift! 2 Cor. 9 v 15**

Amen