

“Hard Times, God, and Seed Giving”

I want to talk today about *money*... and *giving*. I already see the look of joy on your faces! Not so! More like, “If I’d a known this I would have stayed home.” “Here we go again – the church is always asking for money.” It seems that whenever a preacher talks about money, people get upset. As I’ve mentioned a number of times, I’ve had people leave the church over this. I’ve had people get up and walk out of the worship service once I started the sermon.

Here’s the thing: Do you want me to preach what it’s in the Bible or not? Do you want me to skip what Jesus and the Bible says about our possessions and money, because it might not suite our tastes or views? Butter you up! “You work hard for your money. It’s yours to do as you please.” “I understand you have a lot of bills to pay, don’t worry. If you have anything left over, maybe you could give a little bit to the church.” “Don’t sweat it. Our giving to the Lord’s work has no connection at all to our relationship with Christ and our spiritual condition. These represent our *human* way of thinking, not what *God* has to say on the subject.

A lot of people – including Christians – are messed up money wise. Sinking in credit card debt, consumer loans. Our way of handling money leaves little room for us to give to God and the work of the gospel. So maybe God does know more about handling money wisely than we do! *I believe if we’re willing to follow what God says in the Bible about giving, that we will always be assured that our needs will be met! Wouldn’t you like that assurance!* So, what does God say on this subject?

First of all, remember, we are stewards, not owners. (Last week’s sermon dealt with that). Remember what the Bible is teaching us when it says we are stewards? It means God owns everything. We are only managers, caretakers, of what God has entrusted to us for a little while. We brought nothing into this world, and we’ll leave this world with nothing!

A girl wrote a letter to Ann Landers about her aunt and uncle. “My uncle was the tightest man I’ve ever known. All his life, every time he got paid he took \$50 out of his paycheck and put it under his mattress. Then he got sick and was about to die. As he was dying, he said to his wife, ‘I want you to promise me that when I’m dead you’ll take my money from under the mattress and put it in my casket so that I can take it all with me.’” The girl’s letter continued: “He died, and his wife kept her promise. She went in and got all that money the day he died and went to the bank and deposited it, and wrote out a check and put it in his casket.”

No, we can’t take it with us! Nothing we have is ours – it’s all on loan from God. Death is the final proof of that Biblical truth!

Here’s another thing God says in His Word about money and our giving: God’s work in the world is made possible because God’s people give.

This was true as we look at God’s people, Israel. In the Old Testament, the Hebrews supported the ministry of the priests and the temple by taking offerings. They had all kinds of offerings: burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings, drink offerings. But the basic offering in the Old Testament was the *tithe* (one-tenth). The people of Israel gave

one-tenth of their harvest or substance back to God as a way of saying “thank you for what You’ve given”, and “we realize that *all the rest* belongs to you also”.

The work of spreading the gospel costs money! Printing Christian books and literature. Supporting missionaries. Providing relief when disasters strike. Funding Christian radio stations and other evangelistic outreaches.

Ministry through the local church costs money! Churches don’t run on air and good will! You may not believe it, but this church has to pay utility bills in order to heat the church in the winter and keep it cool in the summer. The electric company doesn’t give the church free electricity simply because we’re a church! Those who mow the grass in the summer and plow the snow in the winter don’t do it for free! (Some churches are lucky to have someone do that!).

I think sometimes we believe somehow our money goes further here in the church than it does elsewhere. (*Take out a \$20 bill.*) How far does this go? Can you buy a dinner for 2 at a restaurant or diner? Can you fill your gas tank up for that? How far does it go at the grocery store? When we were visiting our daughter and family in the spring, I took one of our grandsons out to eat. We had done some really nice restaurants, so this time I thought I’d just do a fast food place. Went to Wendy’s. Spent over 20 bucks, didn’t get that much, and the food was awful!

\$20 doesn’t get you much these days, but somehow when we put in in the offering at church Jesus multiplies the 20 bucks like He did the loaves and fishes, and that 20 bucks buys us a lot more channeling it through the church treasury! I think you get the point!

For the Israelites, the “tithe” was where their giving began. At one point in their history, God’s people were neglecting to give the tithe, and the prophet Malachi bluntly tells them, “You are robbing God!”

If the tithe (or a tenth) of one’s income was the standard, the starting point, for giving in the Old Testament, what about the New Testament? Actually, the New Testament says little about tithing. There is one passage where Jesus comments on tithing. Jesus’ words in Matthew 23:23, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others.” Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of religious leaders who would tithe small garden herbs (cut up in ten pieces), but ignore important things like justice, mercy, faith. Note Jesus says, they need to focus on the justice-mercy things, *without neglecting the tithes!*

So, in the New Testament, rather than being legalistic about how much we should give, the emphasis is on giving *from the heart, giving sacrificially*. It’s been said, if the Hebrews gave a tenth and more, *under the law*, certainly Christians can give at least that much, *under grace*.

I want to challenge us all to tithe! To set aside that tithe *first*. (That belongs to God). To give

regularly, in proportion to our income (we can't all give the same because our income and our financial resources differ). And if we don't have enough faith to tithe – to work up to the tithe as our goal. If we're not giving 3% of our income, raise it to 5% or 6%. If we're now giving 6%, raise it to 7% or 8%.

Some ask, does all my tithe have to go to the church? No. There are other works of God and other ministries that need support. But if our church is nourishing us spiritually from week to week, it certainly deserves our faithful, generous giving.

Perhaps you are thinking, "This is a bit annoying, asking us to give (even tithe), when everything is so expensive these days!" So many people are struggling just to put food on the table. I have been preaching for over 60 years – times when the economy was great, other times of high inflation, or a recession. But our approach to giving should not be based on the *economy*, but on *the promises of God!*

Let's look at a Scripture that's a firm promise for hard economic times. Turn to 2 Corinthians, chapter 9. The background of this Scripture is that the Apostle Paul is taking an offering among Gentile churches for believers in Jerusalem, who are in dire need. Christians in Corinth promised to give, but somehow they were dragging their feet. Tongue in cheek, Paul says he has bragged about their generosity to others. So, now he hopes they will follow through, so he won't be embarrassed after bragging about their great generosity.

Then he lays down some principles about giving: "The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6). Giving is like sowing seed. Sow a little, you reap little. Sow a lot, you reap a lot. One of the parsonages we lived in was in the country, in the Pocono Mountains. A parishioner offered to till a nice big spot for a garden. Never had a garden before. I planted (I think) 18 tomato plants. Had tomatoes coming out of our kazoo! This year I planted 4 plants. We had plenty of tomatoes, but not nearly as many as what we planted in Cherry Valley. You get back what you sow!

The next verse says this: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). In our giving to the Lord's work, we must make up our own mind. But we should give with the right attitude: willingly, and cheerfully!

Here's a tremendous promise in the next verse: "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work" (verse 8). See what this is saying? If we give generously, and joyfully, *God will provide for us*. We'll have enough for ourselves, even in hard economic times. And we'll have enough to continue to give for God's work! *God is looking for generous givers who can be channels through whom God can provide for others, as well as ourselves!*

The same idea is expressed in verse 10. "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food

will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

Some years ago a well-known evangelist popularized a concept he called “Seed-Faith Giving”. He used 3 “keys” that unlock a new dimension of an exciting, positive lifestyle marked by generosity.

Key No. 1. God is my Source. Philippians 4:19 promises: “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” We are accustomed to think only of our employer as our source, or maybe the interest from our investments, or the government (Social Security). But *God* is our true source. God has plenty of money! And God can open doors and bring people across our path to help meet our needs if we only trust Him and yield our lives to Him and His will.

Key No. 2. Seed for a miracle. Jesus said, “Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Luke 6:38). Now the motive for our giving should *not* be to get back! But Jesus is apparently giving us a spiritual principle. Think of our giving as *planting seeds*. The more we give, the more seeds we plant, the greater the return.

Key No. 3. Expect a miracle. Trust that our giving will be multiplied to do good for others, but also that God will give back to us to provide our own needs. This truth is emphasized again in verse 10: “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

God will supply and *multiply* our seed for sowing! God is looking for people to give generously and abundantly, so He can continue to give them more to give away!

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