

STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY October 26, 2008, Tryon FBC

Giving to God is a puzzle for all of us, one that we all have to settle one way or the other! We pursue any instructions wherever we may find them, or we create our own plans the best we know how.

\*\*A chicken and a pig were walking down the street when they stumbled onto a sign offering a delicious breakfast of sausage and eggs, pancakes and coffee. *"Hey I think we should go inside for a good meal,"* said the chicken to the pig!

To which the pig answered, "Yeah! That's easy for you to say. It is just a onetime contribution for you chickens, but it is a life sacrifice for us pigs!"

We all have to work out our means to give to God! Each of us!

But the Bible does tell us much about giving to God, and has plenty of instructions, challenges, inspirational and real life stories on this subject. In fact, one writer has indicated that **Jesus spoke 3x more about money**, possessions and giving than He did about sin! That is why I want to speak to you about this subject. How else could I be true to the whole gospel message without preaching the subject of our giving as the Bible addresses it for us? Georg Kummel said, "The whole story of Jesus is the whole story of the Will of God for us." If this is not a popular subject, it certainly is vital to our peace and happiness. God wills our joy and fullness of life and offers the means to make that a reality.....if we will listen and trust Him!

This is a subject like every other area of our lives as we submit them to God's plans that we might experience the fullness of God's blessings! Luke 6:38 says *"Give that it may be given to*

*you, shaken, pressed down, full measure and running over!"*

Remember Jeremiah 29:11, God's promise, *"I have plans for you, plans to prosper you, not harm you, to give you hope and a future!"* Proverbs 28:29 says, *"He who trusts in God will prosper."*

If you have discovered God's economy by this time in your life, you have discovered the sheer miracle of **God's giving plan-that we just cannot outgive God!** If you have not yet discovered or trusted Him on this, it will be a timely word.... if you will allow yourself to explore these truths with God as your guide.

1. First is the call to **WORSHIP** from Psalms 96:8: *"O worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness. Bring a offering and come into His Presence!"*

Never in the days of the Temple worship would anyone have dared to enter without a worthy sacrifice, something of true value to us personally, in order to express an acceptance of God's ultimate value to our life as a community. WORSHIP was the community's way to acknowledge God as the source of all health, strength, and provisions that sustain life! The value of the sacrifice was perfectly regulated to be a worthy sacrifice, such as the largest first fruits of the harvest, or a prize, unblemished lamb, calf or turtledove. Our gifts are a confession of faith!

Some who tried to slip by with bringing the leftovers of their month's produce or flocks often found disasterous results! Such was the story in Acts 5:3 of Annanias and Sapphira, who promised big, yet brought only a portion of the promise. They lied to the Lord and the church about their possessions and fell dead at the door to the church. The whole church realized the seriousness of commitments, follow-through and giving as expressions of faith-that God can do as he said, to bless us.

The point is this, that true worship, which our souls desperately need, as much as the air that we breathe and the food that we eat, requires the genuine sacrifice that tells of our ultimate love and dependence on the Lord our God.

One treasured moment was captured in the scriptures as Jesus watched the **poor widow in the temple** giving her meager offerings. Others made a big deal and a big noise of their large amounts, while she haltingly slipped by the coffers and quietly slipped in her few coins. *"Watch and learn!"* Jesus told the disciples. *"They gave of their abundance, but she gave of her poverty! She will be remembered!"* He said.

That is real **WORSHIP!!** That is what it takes, and that is what we were created to enjoy and benefit from as we please God with our gifts of joy and sacrifice! WORSHIP is a GIVE-GIVE situation... if we will just trust Him! He calls upon us to give, and gives to us that we may have the joy of giving back again! The only real question for His followers is this, *"How much joy do we really want?"*

2. The second part I wish to bring to your attention is the **HOW-TO**, the instruction part. God has given us a means to participate confidently and effectively for the thriving success of His Church. This is God's Word to us, as direct as God has ever spoken.

It all started as the children of Israel began their journey through the wilderness to God's promised homeland. God's instructions for a right kind of worship would properly HONOR God and properly PROSPER His people. In Leviticus 27:30, God said ***"The Tithe is Holy! It is mine!"*** Give of the best back to me-that meant the first portion. Give it as a witness that you believe it all comes from God. Then the remaining 9 tenths is yours to use anyway you wish!

The Lord said in Malachi 3:10, *"Try me, test me on this, says the Lord, and see if I do not pour out a blessing to you that you cannot hold it all!"* It was God's economic plan in simple terms, then and now. It provided for the temple life of worship, teaching, benevolence, priestly duties and families, and the facility. It was an equal sacrifice for everyone. There was always enough for good times and for tough times. God was HONORED. His people were BLESSED. FAITH was the heart of their lives. They BELIEVED, and God REIGNED!

There was joy in that kind of purposeful WORSHIP!

\*\*You may have heard of the man who enjoyed tithing when he was a man of small means. However when he became a wealthy man he went in honest humility to the preacher, confessing his struggle. *"I just cannot afford to keep tithing now that I make a totally different income! My gift would be exorbitant! I confess I must give it up! Would you pray for me?"* Of course the pastor was willing to pray, and as he did it went something like this: *"Lord you see this man is unable to live in obedience to your Word any longer. So I ask that you would help him to be able to do so, since I know it is your will for him to be happy. I pray that you would reduce his income back to his original figure, that he might be able to give again, as you have instructed!"* That man had something to think about!

The genius of tithing is that it satisfies the questions we have about God's ways. Tithing is the portion God said belongs to Him. Tithing is three things according to I Corinthians 16:2: It is.....

1. Systematic
2. Regular, and
3. Proportionate.....giving to God.....

1. First, Tithing is a means and a plan of giving...one that we have to decide upon...it is **systematic**, God's plan not ours!

2. Second, Tithing is an ongoing means of our coming into God's presence...it is **regular**, not whenever we think of it, or whenever we happen to attend church. It is every week, whether we attend or not!

3. And Third, Tithing is a precise amount, it is a tenth of our income. It is a simple figure that we all can tally from our children's ages through our silver years....it is **proportionate**, a figure that represents what God says is enough! It satisfies that huge question that any serious worshiper and follower of Jesus will eventually ask, "*How much is enough?*"

Tithing is SIMPLE. Teach it to a child and the blessed habit of honor and worship of God as Lord and Provider will stay for a lifetime. Delay or deny that teaching and it hangs over the heads of worshippers, threatening to confuse faith. It fools us into dabbling all our days with the possibility that we can have it our way!

My favorite instruction comes from Jesus, Matthew 6:33, The Sermon on the Mount. (often called Jesus' SERMON ON THE A-MOUNT!) "*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you!*" What a word of truth. Today we might say, that if you want to follow Christ, you must make Him Lord of all, or He will not be Lord at all. If we want to discover and live in God's richest blessings, God must be our **PRIORITY**. Put anything else first, and we are on the path of confusion and compromise.

III. I know this is a hard message and a hard subject. If your giving plan is not where this message suggests, if it is sporadic, or if it is something you reasoned through years ago but never revisited, there is a suggestion I think is in line with this scriptural challenge. I think this good church family needs and would call on every one of us to **go back to the drawing board**. Study your

own giving to the Lord at this exciting time in transition. Your own commitment to Christ depends on your willingness to keep this updated. Certainly your church depends on your faithfulness for her ability to fulfill its ministries as God leads. I suggest that you reconsider what amounts and percentages your giving represents and pray sincerely through these measures that have been given to us in God's Word.

If you find your own offerings do not represent God's call, then let me suggest something specific to you. Try a given percentage as your regular commitment. I suggest you **look at a 5% giving** as a place to start. Pray through this, then offer to the Lord your conscientious offering of love and devotion. That is all God asks of each of us, an honest attempt at reaching toward Him in love and faith. God will receive your honest approach to REAL WORSHIP in making these sacrifices of love. God wants to bless His people, and that is his plan-to bless the peoples in our community and all over the world **through us**.

God's economy is simple. We are blessed to be a blessing.

This is the word of God for the people of God!

END 1<sup>st</sup> DRAFT, 1830 words (reduce by 500)