

Stewardship

November 6, 2022

I Chronicles 29:10-20:

“Let’s Think About It”

- I. He Owns.
- II. He Tests.
- III. He Sees.
- IV. He Gives.

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I Chronicles 29:10-20

Dear Friends in Christ,

Every year on our Stewardship Sundays I'm drawn to our sermon Hymn, "Upon The Cross Extended." I'm especially drawn to the fourth stanza: "I caused Your grief and sighing/ By evils multiplying/ As countless as the sands./ I caused the woes unnumbered / With which your soul is cumbered,/ Your sorrows raised by wicked hands." That's where "I" really stand out. The words, "Chief of Sinners" hit!

And here we are, another round of stewardship sermons. It's about giving money to support the work of the church (support our work) to glorify Jesus. Not exactly a favorite subject for some in light of what we're paying for a bag of groceries, a gallon of gas, and observing the increase of violence and observing the many who don't want to work, but just want. I don't know who said it, but it's correct: "Money will buy: a bed, but not sleep. Books, but no brains. Food, but not an appetite. A house, but not a home. Medicine, but not health. Amusement, but not happiness. Finery, but not beauty. A crucifix, but not a Savior." Well....

LET'S THINK ABOUT IT

I. He Owns.

Most everyone here has been in this congregation long enough to know that as God's people in Christ we own nothing of this world. As David said, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers (Ps. 24:1,2)." As far as gold and silver investments are concerned God said, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts (Haggai 2:8)."

We know where this takes us. Giving is a response to God's love for us. To put it bluntly, it is a response to the worth of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection to redeem us from sin, death and hell. Of course, many don't want that to get in the way of their worldly expectations. Isn't that right? David's words from our Old Testament text are very important:

But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided in building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own (vss. 14-16).

Those words are fitting for every generation of Christians - no matter the time, or comforts, or difficulties. We can't skip over the words David says of God's claim on everything: "(it) is all your own." The early church father Chrysostom said it well: "Men are nailed to the things of this world." Who really wants to gain whatever they can get out of this world only to have God say to them, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be (Lk. 12:20)?"

II. He Tests.

I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you.

O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you (vss. 17-18).

There are four words that stand in front of every one of us: “you test the heart.” He tests the very core of our thinking, our feelings. And we must understand this: He does not test the heart so He can see where we are; He tests the heart so we can see where we are in our thinking and understanding.

I’m thinking that most here are familiar with the words the Lord gave Peter: “...if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (I Pt. 1:6-7).” “If necessary...grieved by various trials.” Maybe we do get a bit carried away by this world - its glitter - its promises - the chase - and, with it, the danger of a fading faith! God tests us so we can see where we are, where we’re going, what’s important.

If we know God’s Word, we know He never promised us an easy journey through this world. He promised a homecoming of eternal joy and comfort. He calls us from the Proverbs: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths (Prov. 3:5,60).”

III. He Sees.

It would be difficult to recall a time of stewardship concerns when we haven’t been directed to the account of The Widow’s Offering and Jesus’ words, “...but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on (Mk. 12:44).” But there’s another insight deserving of our hearing: “And he (Jesus) sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box (Mk. 12:41).” It’s the word “watched” that should get our attention.

The Proverbs state, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good (Prov. 15:5).” His eyes are “in every place,” and that includes the entire creation. His eyes are everywhere at the same time. We can’t comprehend that, but, as the Proverbs also say, “For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths (Prov. 5:21).” A man’s ways, each person, yet all at the same time.

And just in case we ever think that we’re thinking and saying and doing something that’s hidden - secret - the Scriptures teach, “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:13).” Brothers and sisters, these words of David leave us without excuse:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me (Ps. 139:1-5).

IV. He Gives.

So, let’s carefully think about the words: We give in proportion to how we individually understand God as the Giver. If we understand God as the Giver, we think of His bloody sweat at Gethsemane. We think of the soldiers beating, mocking, and spitting on Him. We think about His flesh being torn open by the whip, and the spikes being driven through His flesh into a criminal’s cross. We think on His willingness to suffer the agony of the Hell we deserve. It sharpens the focus, don’t you think: “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.”

And then we come back to the simple truth: the struggle with sin continues. As has been said so many, many times, we cannot excuse our sin. To wantonly pursue sin is a journey to eternal loss. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (I Jn.1:8).”

For the heart broken by and struggling with sin, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I Jn.1:9). Our Confessions state, "Forgiveness is needed constantly, for although God's grace has been won by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God's Word in the unity of the Christian church, yet because we are encumbered with our flesh we are never without sin (Tappert, The Book of Concord, 417.54)." And also this, from The Book of Concord, the Solid Declaration:

When we teach that through the Holy Spirit's work we are reborn and justified, we do not mean that after regeneration no unrighteousness in essence and life adheres to those who have been justified and regenerated, but we hold that Christ with his perfect obedience covers all our sins which throughout this life still inhere (exist) in our nature. Nevertheless, they (God's people in Christ) are regarded as holy and righteousness through faith and for the sake of Christ's obedience...Nor, on the other hand, does this mean that we may or should follow in the ways of sin, abide and continue therein without repentance, conversion, and improvement. (543.22)

And so, He gives us Word and Sacrament to assure, guide and comfort us through a world broken by sin and death. You know, it's quite clear: The Almighty God owns, tests, and gives us everything for life here for life and salvation. The question is: How will we respond to serving Him with the time, the abilities and the money He provides for us; the things that are not ours in the first place?

How about this? Let's not just think about it. God help us to make the commitment - and keep it.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott