

Stewardship 2024

November 10, 2024

I Chronicles 29:10-18:

For All Things Come from You, and of Your Own We Have Given You?

- I. Let's Face It
- II. Test of Faith
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Dear Friends in Christ.

It doesn't fit with the time but you might remember that old story about the man who wanted to divorce his wife because she was always demanding money. At the hearing the judge found himself somewhat sympathetic toward the husband after he described his wife as horribly manipulative and abusive.

While the judge tried to remain impartial he decided it was time to bring everything into the light. He asked the husband, "And just what does she do with the money you give her?" "Well, nothing," said the husband. "I haven't given her any, yet!"

That's often the way many see it when it comes to the church; always asking for money - which we don't! For some, church membership is important because it will get them points with God . . . so they think. But when the church asks for money to keep it functioning, well, that's the end!

In light of the blood Jesus gave for our forgiveness and heaven and the blessings we receive together here from Word and Sacrament can we say with David . . .

FOR ALL THINGS COME FROM YOU, AND OF YOUR OWN WE HAVE GIVEN YOU?

I. Let's Face It

Well, let's face it: Giving is a response to the love of Christ. It's a response to Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection to redeem us from death and hell. David's words are absolutely correct

"But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus 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 for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own (vv.14-16)."

"For all things come from you," David declares; "All this abundance...comes from your hand...". We own nothing of this world. Our life spans are His. Job says, "Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass...(Job 14:5)." These are statements fitting for every generation of Christians, no matter the time, or the difficulties, or ease of life. Everything rightfully belongs to him.

We give in proportion to our understanding of God as the giver! We remember His giving: Drops of blood at Gethsemane - soldiers beating, mocking and spitting on Him; driving the crown of thorns into His head - His flesh being ripped open by the whip - spikes pounded into His flesh - forsaken by God - suffering Hell - death. This should have been you and me on the cross! Seriously, how we serve Him is truly a measure of our faith, and thanksgiving for what He did for us.

II. Test of Faith

It is the love of God for us that changes everything; how we see others who are in turmoil with guilt. It is also a test of faith. God tests us. David writes:

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 (vv.17-18).

There is no dancing around the issue: "I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness." It would be beneficial for us to recall this Word of God Moses spoke to Israel:

And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor your fathers know, that he might let you know that man does not live on bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Dt.8:2-3).

Did we hear that? He had them travel through wilderness with its difficulties for forty years. He let them hunger in order that they learn to look to God's Word; tried them; testing their trust in Him. And this wasn't so the Lord would discover where their faith rested. He already knew that. This was so they would discover where their faith rested. It's this: "...that man does not live on bread alone (the stuff of this world), but every word (not bits and pieces or what we pick and choose)...every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Going to the New Testament, the Apostle Peter writes: "...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). The Lord God is leading us through this world and keeping our focuses on the eternal issue: "obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (I Pt.1:9)." This world and its stuff are not the goal!

III. The Goal

Again, the goal of life is the eternal life Jesus purchased for us with His blood. We have received the miracle of faith in Christ to know this.

In this time that's moving everything to its end, we see the thinking of modern, so-called "Christian" that the church is not necessary. That's because "the modern church" is mostly like the world in its thinking and doing. However, the Scriptures teach:

"Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day (the Day of Christ's return) drawing near (Heb.10:23-25).

Pilgrim is God's congregation and the care of it is our responsibility. Please listen, once again, to these words of David: "...I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you...keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people (vv.17-18). Listen again: "Offering freely and joyously to you." The reasons? David understood the coming cross and empty tomb.

I've kept the account of a marriage in which the husband was horribly demanding and gave his wife a list of do's and don'ts she was to keep without error. In time, the wife began to hate him. And then he died. The account stated the following:

Some time later, she fell in love with another man and married him. She and her new husband lived in a perpetual honeymoon. Joyfully, she devoted herself to his happiness and welfare. One day she ran across one of the sheets of do's and don'ts her first husband had written for her. To her amazement she found that she was doing for her second husband all the things her first husband had demanded of her, even though her new husband never once suggested them. She did them as an expression of her love for him and her desire to please him.

I know that account would not set well for any of us - the husband was a monster! But begin to realize the incomprehensible magnitude of Christ's love and forgiveness of every sin. You realize the miracle, power, and blessing of the written Word and the visible Word of Baptism and The Lord's Supper. Again, David prays "...direct our hearts toward you." And he does - in many ways.

And David prays, "of your own we have given you." It's called the tithe. For us, it's joyfully setting aside a percentage of what God has given us, namely, our faith and this church. The offering is what we give above what is promised. It's what you have to decide. We say with the Psalmist:

What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord, I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people...I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord (Ps.116:12-14; 17-10).

So, what are we doing with what isn't ours in the first place? What's our faith and our church worth?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott