

May 6, 2018

Lesson 10: Giving From a Generous Heart

Scripture: Exodus 35: 20-29; 2 Cor. 9:6-8

Context:

There are several texts mentioned in our study today. The major Old Testament passage comes from the book of Exodus, the book that chronicles the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Most of the book details the wilderness experience and God establishing a covenant with the Israelites, the chosen people of God. Most prominent in the book is the tabernacle, the wilderness sanctuary for the people to worship. Over one-third of the book looks at the construction of the tabernacle, the ritual paraphernalia, and the ritual procedures for the priests in carrying out its ministry.¹ For the Israelites the tabernacle was to be a place where worship and rituals could help sustain them as they made their way to the Promised Land. God used the tabernacle to remind the people of the obedience that comes with belonging God. As long as the tabernacle is there, the people are reminded that God is with them and that the idols of the world around them are not to be worshipped.

What follows in today's scripture is the formation of the tabernacle, which was commanded by God for the Israelites to build. Everyone was to be involved, bringing gift offerings. They were to bring jewelry, gold, fabric, silver, acacia wood, gems, spices, and oil for the tabernacle. They are labeled as "spontaneous" gifts meaning that they looked at what they possessed and brought it. Anything that could be used for the tabernacle was brought forward so that it could be transformed into something useful for the Lord.

The second scripture lesson of the day comes from the New Testament with Second Corinthians. The writings to the Corinthians are some of the most profound in the New Testament as Corinth was the chief church in Achaia.² In this letter, there are messengers coming their way, but before they arrive Paul wants the Corinthians to get their ducks in a row. While Corinth is mostly praised for its ministry and seen as a strong church, the letter draws attention to some events that have taken place within the body. While the larger of churches in the early church world, Corinth has not been as faithful in their giving as the Macedonians.³ As the messenger Titus and others are coming to Corinth to visit, it is important for the Corinthians to give just as everyone else is giving. When they arrive, the Corinthians are not to embarrass Paul and the other early church leaders with their lack of enthusiasm towards giving.⁴ This is a spiritual issue for the church in Corinth.

Thus, our text comes with the allusion about a farmer and seeds. The one who sows a small number of seeds will have a small crop. Those who sow multiple seeds reap a more generous crop. All are to give as they are able to give financially. Everything they

¹ Terrence E. Fretheim, "Exodus," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1991), 263.

² 2 Cor. 1:1-2, NRSV.

³ 2 Cor. 8:1-6.

⁴ Ernest Best, "Second Corinthians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1987), 84.

have belongs to God and that means they cannot claim every item as their own. Thus, they are to be cheerful givers sharing what they possess and giving their fair share. As they give like the other churches, Corinth grows in ways they could not do on their own.

Application:

If anyone ever says that preachers shouldn't preach on money, they haven't read these texts, or the Bible at all for that matter. Here we are reminded that financial giving is essential to being a member of the church. The fact that both the Old Testament and New Testament addresses God asking people to give back to their body of faith reveals that these are not isolated events for people thousands of years ago. To be faithful to God today, we are also called to give back with our financial and material gifts. When we are stingy or make excuses, we are telling God that we do not care what has been asked of us. Instead, we are becoming consumers who expect God to do things for us and bless us so that we may fulfill ourselves.

After reading these texts, I couldn't help but think back to the scene in the Exodus. The people joyfully gave their money as well as their material possessions. There was a sense of expectation and excitement about how they could be a part of God's story. The text recently reminded me of a conversation I had with two members of our church in the fall during our stewardship campaign. When I revealed that some people complained about even having a stewardship campaign and the audacity to offend people by talking about money, they told me about their perspective. As a young married couple they are not wealthy. They have budgets and work hard at their jobs.

However, when it came to filling out a card for the next year, they took it like the Israelites as a time to be excited. They prayed over the card and discussed how much they could give and prayerfully marked places where they can serve in the coming year. To them, it was exciting to think about how their money and their gifts could glorify God and help our church continue in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. They were not bragging about themselves but instead told me how they saw it as part of their walk with Christ. I still give thanks to God for that conversation because that came from younger members of the church who understand the joy that comes from the Lord and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

As we read the scriptures today, we are reminded that giving with a generous heart is part of our call as disciples. Just as God has been generous with us with life abundant, we are called to give back with our tithes and gifts. We are called to be excited about how giving back could lead to ministries that transform lives and reveal God's love. As we give eagerly, others lives are changed and God uses us for good in this world.

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