

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Stewardship Sermon 1

18th February 2024

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Exodus 35: 20-29 and 36: 2-7

Acts 20:32-35

Matthew 14:13-21

At the start of this series of Stewardship sermons our selected readings are set to challenge us.

What is within our faith which stirs our hearts?

How do **we** respond to God's Word in this place and time?

Do we see ourselves as Kingdom builders?

How are we blessed – and how are we a blessing?

Moses was commanded by God, to build a permanent Tabernacle. This was to enable God to dwell intimately with His people. The Tabernacle was to be the epicentre of the Jewish faith and identity developing in time to become the Temple of Zion where the people would gather obediently and worship God *the way that God expected and loved*.

To build the Tabernacle Moses appealed to each Israelite to contribute to the task.

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Paul is making a keynote speech to the Church elders and concludes first, with his own *personal* example of being freed from greed and covetousness through his faith in Jesus Christ and, second, he commits the leaders in all that they are doing to build up the Church, its internal relationships and mission to the poor to the grace of God, quoting Jesus' teaching: *it is more blessed to give than to receive*.

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In the Roman Empire, social status, (power, wealth) determined access to food ~ survival. The rich had the best food; the poor didn't. The feeding of the five thousand recognises this harsh reality for the multitudes, being the only one of Jesus' miracles that is recounted in all four gospels.

The disciples' question Jesus' command to feed these people: "*But ... we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.*" (i.e., we are resource poor!)

Jesus responds “*Bring what you have here to me*” and the text closes with the disciples moving through the crowd’s distributing food to the people ~ and there is more than enough to go around!

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Moses’ invitation is to the people goes to very heart of their faith identity ~ who they are. The request for assistance to build the Tabernacle was a **freewill offering**: everyone with a **willing heart** could give as much or as little (or none) **as they decided**. Yet the people gave of themselves, their time, muscles and energy, their skills ~ all to God’s glory *not* their own: using the many gifts God had so generously given them.

God clearly wanted the tabernacle built and moved the people to give obediently and generously ~ in fact, there was such an outpouring of generosity that Moses had to issue another order for everyone to stop giving!

How does this challenge our sense of giving?

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**“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”**

The building of the Tabernacle foreshadows the role of the faithful (**us**) in building God’s Church **now**, in the Kingdom present, and in the hope of Christ’s Kingdom to come. The gift is all God’s!

**1:** In order to build the Church today, in order to be **Kingdom builders**, we need to work with the grain of **God’s gracious generosity**, and through the God’s Word ~ Gospel Power to achieve all that God is calling us to do.

**How does this challenge our sense of giving?**

**2:** To Paul, it is clear that giving and sharing as Kingdom builders is not about wealth or status; it’s a matter of principles and values (what Paul calls **ethics**). Counterculturally, greed, the hoarding of wealth, is seen by Paul to be a Sin, and a BIG sin at that, a corrosive Force within the human heart and society where “*the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil*”.

Paul is clear, in conforming to the image and Gospel of Christ, givers in the faith are **liberated** from such corrosive attitudes and are blessed in order to be Kingdom builders.

**How does this challenge our sense of giving?**

**3:** Moreover, the economy of God is not about investments **today** ~ what we can make or take or profit by, rather, the economy of God is the storing up of treasures in heaven as we invest in the building, work and outcomes of God's kingdom now!

In the earliest church "*there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.*"

**How does this challenge our sense of giving?**

How do we respond to Jesus' daring command to offer **our** limited resources ~ **whatever they may be** ~ for God to bless **and** multiply and to trust Jesus when he says the people **will be**, not might be, fed ~ that the resources will always be there so that we can invest in the building of the Kingdom

**How does this challenge our sense of giving?**

Giving should be a burden .... but it should not be grudging or make us feel guilty for surely giving, in its widest sense, should be a joyful response to all that God has gifted us?

And doesn't this not get to the heart of the issue?

Are we not the **co-builders** of His Church, in which case every person's gift is needed as the Body of Christ precisely because no one person has all the gifts ... but **together** our gifts can achieve so much more ....

Yes, this is **sacrificial giving** ... but aren't we called to give in such a way ~ after all, Christ gave himself as a sacrifice for us, so, we too are called to give sacrificially in order to accomplish, not our plans, but God's plans?

**How does this challenge our sense of giving?**

Amen