

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

October 2, 2016

“Freewill Giving”

Together We Can Do More, part 3

1st Chronicles 29:10-20

I love to give. Don't you? Especially when (irony alert) my gift is completely involuntary and paid at my own personal expense. For example, I am sure most of you at some point have made an involuntary donation to a government agency. A few years ago, I paid Calhoun County \$100 in a compulsory donation to their law enforcement agency. A very kind police officer noticed that I failed to completely stop at an intersection. My involuntary donation was compensation for the fact that I got to see his pretty disco lights on the top of his cruiser.

(More irony!) And I am sure, every April 15th, you all love to make your mandatory donations to the federal and state governments. I'll bet you cheerfully mail your check with a little thank-you note to tell them what a great job they are doing. If you had time, I guess you would personally drive your money to the US Treasury at 1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20220, and put a little extra in as a tip, right?

OK, enough with the sarcasm. Truthfully, as Christians, we absolutely should respect the government, pay our taxes, and obey traffic laws. But my point today is that there is a huge difference between freewill giving and giving under compulsion. There is no law in our church that says you have to give. We do not charge a pew tax. But did you know that some churches used to? In fact, in Germany, today, if you want to be a member of a state-affiliated church, you pay a mandatory 12% of your income. That's right, on your 1040's, if you check

the box that you are a Lutheran or Catholic, the government automatically takes 12% of your adjusted gross income.

Our churches in America, including this church, operate on freewill offerings. Our ministries and missions are funded completely by whatever people are willing to give. So today I want us to ask ourselves, what is freewill giving? And what is our attitude when we give to the church?

Think about the last time you received some money, a present or a paycheck, perhaps. What did you do with it? If you're like me, you probably put it in the bank or spent it. You used it on yourself, because, after all, it's your money, right?

It is a common belief that our money belongs to us. After all, we earn it. We deserve it. We identify money as a possession under our control.

I want to challenge that assumption today. Do we really own our possessions? Is that a biblical value? Or does God have a different idea?

Two weeks ago, we started looking at the story of David, Solomon, and the temple in Jerusalem to ask ourselves, "What does joyful, obedient, freewill giving look like?" We read the first part of 1st Chronicles 29, in which King David called the people of Israel together to explain his vision of building a house for God, a permanent place where all of Israel could worship and call on God's name. David told the people that Solomon was too young to do this on his own. He needed help. And David gave from his own personal wealth to get the temple started. Then he challenged the leaders to follow his example. The leaders also gave extravagantly, and as a result, the people rejoiced. They were encouraged. They supported this vision, and they were excited.

So what did David do next? Look at 1st Chronicles 29, verse 10. David prayed to God. An amazing prayer. To be honest, I don't pray often enough when I receive a gift, or even my own paycheck. And yet, look how David prays.

¹⁰ Praise be to you, LORD,

the God of our father Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.

¹¹ Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.

¹² Wealth and honor come from you;
you are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power
to exalt and give strength to all.

¹³ Now, our God, we give you thanks,
and praise your glorious name.

Those are some powerful words of praise. "Wealth and honor come from you, God." It sounds like David has his priorities straight. He acknowledges God for who God is and what God has done. God is the source of all wealth.

But it's the second part of the prayer that really challenges me. David asks rhetorically, "Who am I, who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you..." This is almost identical to James 1:17 - "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights..." Freewill giving starts with the biblical truth that Everything belongs to God. Not us. Not the bank. Not Bill Gates or any other millionaire. God owns it all. God created it, and God bestows it onto us. This

runs contrary to what the world says. We are not owners of our possessions. We are stewards, only.

David even goes on to say, they don't even belong in the land where they live. Look at verse 15. "We were foreigners and strangers..." That sounds like someone who is simply grateful to be alive. "Our days were...without hope." David is overflowing with gratitude because of how God has allowed the people to freely give.

After these expressions of praise, thanksgiving, and humility, David makes his request to God, his petition. He asks that God would keep this desire in the people's hearts: to always be joyful, obedient, and generous. David is desperate to make this giving not just a one-time shot, but a complete lifestyle of obedience to God.

I think we fail to understand that giving is a critical part of complete obedience to God. Giving is part of our worship. And worship is our reaction to understanding who God is and what he has done for us. David was in awe of what God had given him. Are you also in awe? Do you worship the God of Israel, the God of our nation, who freely gave his own son, Jesus Christ, to die for us?

Think about it. If God gave Jesus to us the way we usually give, the story of the cross would be totally messed up: God the Father comes to Jesus and says, "[Sigh.] Well, I guess I have to let you go down to earth and save them. But there had better be at least a thousand people who start worshipping you, otherwise this is a terrible investment." NO! Jesus gave his life freely for us. I am convinced that had there only been one unrighteous person in the world, Jesus would have died for him or her. If you had been the only sinner, he would have still sacrificed himself for your forgiveness. But the truth is, we all have sinned, and Jesus died

without demanding anything from us in return. He only offered his love and chance for us to respond.

In view of that kind of generosity, what will be our response? “Oh well. Nice story”? Or will we raise our voices like David and praise God, and say, “We’re not worthy!”

Everything belongs to God. That truth sets us free. Free to love. Free to give. Free to take responsibility for the things God has given us because we know he is counting on us to make a difference!

How is your giving making a difference? Your giving is what enables us to reach our goals and visions for this church. Do you know what they are?

We are here to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. That’s a bold vision. That’s a God-sized project. And the truth is, people give to vision, not need. There is a difference in saying, “I need a new car,” and “I need a vehicle to transport myself and my family to the events that matter to us.” As your pastor, I could say, “Your leadership has determined we need \$3000 each Sunday.” Or, “\$3000 a week will fully support our ministries, missions, facility and staff, so that God’s name is honored and people outside our four walls can know his great love.”

Why do you give what you give to the church? Is it just another thing on your to-do list? If you think the church is just another organization asking for money, then your giving won’t reflect anything special. If you think your money belongs only to you, you might still give, but it will be uninspiring, resentful, and dull giving.

But if you are connected to God and God’s church, your giving will be much different. You will be involved, you will serve, you will have a heart for what God

is doing in this place, because you are excited about the vision. You will support it the best that you can.

Freewill giving is not forced, not demanded. It is giving from the heart, because you ultimately recognize that God owns everything. Freewill giving meets the goal of expanding God's kingdom. Freewill giving shows that you love and will invest in the things that God loves.

Jesus said in Matthew 13:8, "Some seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-a hundred times what was sown." In banking, that is 10,000%. I don't care where you bank, you can't get that good of an interest rate anywhere else on earth. So I encourage you to give. Give to God what is God's. Give with your whole heart. Give because you believe that God will bring about mighty things in your life and in this church.

As we continue in our worship, please watch this short video about World Communion Sunday, a special opportunity we have during our offering today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bzTWbMvuDg>

Memory verse

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2nd Corinthians 9:7

Reflection questions

1. When has someone demanded something from you? (Money, time, other resources.) Did you give it to them? Why or why not?
2. Do you truly believe that God owns all of your possessions? What difference does your belief make?
3. What most excites you about giving to a church? What least excites you?
4. What percentage of your income do you give to the church? What would it take to give a tithe or increase your giving?
5. How do you think God feels about your giving? What does it tell God about the status of your heart?