

“Infected with Grace”
Luke 19:1-10
February 2, 2003
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Three weeks ago I began this short series of sermons by asking you to reassess your understanding of charitable giving.

I summarized the point of an incident in the life of Jesus recorded in Mark 12 this way: “Generosity is measured not by what one gives, but by what one has left.”

I wanted us to never again measure our giving by some incomplete standard of the tithe, 10%.

I wanted to shake us out of our old way of thinking about money and giving.

Last week I wanted to emphasize what I called a radically different approach to our possessions.

Our old way of thinking was that 10% belongs to God and 90% belongs to us to do with as we choose.

What I hope you saw and were convinced of is that the OT and NT alike declare that all (100%) of what we have belongs to God – not just 10%.

For the true Christian, the correct question is **not how much should I give to God.**

Instead there must be a complete paradigm shift – we must think of the resources entrusted to us completely differently.

It is not a matter of how much should I give to God **but how do I use all that God has entrusted to me to accomplish his purposes.**

I gave a definition of stewardship that better fits Jesus’ new model:

Stewardship is God’s people using God’s resources to accomplish God’s purposes.

That means I ask God how he would have me use all of the money and other resources he entrusts to me, not just how would he have me use some percentage.

So Christian financial stewardship is **not a matter of giving 10%** or even of giving more – **it is a matter of using 100%** for God's purposes.

I went further last week and tried to show you from Scripture what are some of the proper ways to spend God's money.

Today I want to go a little deeper than just how we think about stewardship.

I want to talk about **how we feel about it.**

Last week I talked mostly about **WHAT** we do if we rightly understand God desires.

Today I want to talk about **WHY** we do it.

This is the issue of what motivates us in our use of money.

Our conduct springs more from our wills than from our knowledge.

If we are going to live as God's people using God's resources to accomplish God's purposes, our knowledge must be accompanied by a true change of heart.

I want us to hear two stories this morning and I want each of us to ask ourselves, "Which story describe me?"

Luke 19:1-10

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a `sinner.' " But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house..."

And the second story:

Luke 12:15-21 “Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’ And he told them this parable: ‘The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’ And I'll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool!’”

The stories illustrate two distinctly different uses of one's resources and, I believe, two distinctly different motivations.

Before proceeding with my question about which story best describes each of us, I need to make a comment about the use of these texts in this discussion of the use of our possessions.

The story about the rich fool is definitely set in the context of Jesus' teaching on the use of our resources and is obviously appropriate for this discussion.

The use of the story about Zacchaeus is not quite so obvious.

We usually think of this story in reference to the Gospel and the gospel being available to everyone, even social outcasts or scoundrels like Zacchaeus.

But it is not just coincidental that Luke mentions Zacchaeus' **response** to the Gospel.

Through Zacchaeus, Luke shows the proper response to the gospel: humbly accepting it AND Luke shows us what that gospel does in a person.

The NT always describes “faith” as something far more than an intellectual agreement with certain truths – faith is belief in action – faith lived out in conduct.

Faith changes our conduct or it is not faith.

Paul spoke to the same issue to the Corinthians when he said, again speaking of money and particularly the giving of it:

2 Corinthians 8:8 “...I want to test the sincerity of your love...”

And later when he wrote regarding their offerings:
2 Corinthians 8:24 “Therefore show these men **the proof of your love...**”

Real faith changes us and it changes us in the most practical of ways, even in the use of our resources.

I think it may be true that more can be told about a person's faith by looking at his/her check register or credit card statement than by looking at the handwritten notes in the margins of his Bible.

It is Zacchaeus' use of his possessions in contrast to the Rich Fool's use of his possessions that form the contrast I want you to see today.

More importantly it is the motivation behind the actions of each the men that I want us to consider.

Succinctly put, Zacchaeus is moved by grace and gratitude and the Rich Fool is controlled by covetousness.

I want you to look at the Rich Fool first.

The first thing I notice is the many times he refers to “I” and “my” (11).

There is no doubt that even if this is a religious man, he thinks of his resources as belonging to himself.

Even if he gives to charity, even a percentage to charity, there is no doubt who decides how the rest is used.

Secondly, in contradiction of Jesus statement that “life does not consist in the abundance of possessions”, this man believes life does consist in the abundance of his possessions.

From looking at his financial decisions you can safely conclude three things about him. For him:

1. The purpose for living is to meet his needs.
2. The incentive for living is to accumulate a little more.
3. The reward of living is to enjoy the pleasure and security which, he believes, his possessions will provide.

Writing over 300 years ago Thomas Watson said there are six signs of covetousness:

1. When we think mainly (or only) of the things of this life and little or none of the Kingdom to come or God's work on earth.
2. When we invest far more in getting earthly things than heavenly things. A covetous person will lose sleep, work himself weary and turn every stone to get ahead in this life but give only passing attention to his own soul or the souls of others.
3. When our conversation is always of worldly matters and we can hardly speak of spiritual issues. Bernard of Clairvoux said "The words of a man are the mirror of the heart." What has our attention?
4. When our hearts are so set on earthly things that we give up heavenly things. When asked to choose between work and Christ, work always wins. When like the rich young man of a different NT story we would rather part with Christ than with our possessions.
5. When we overload ourselves worldly business. When we have so many irons in the fire we can't serve God. When we scarcely have time to eat much less pray.
6. When accumulating wealth or position is so important that we will resort to unethical means to get it. A little lie here, a little exaggeration there, to gain the advantage.

I wish to add a 7th: When our vacations, eating out, entertainment, and payments for bigger, newer and better items steal our ability to generously meet the needs of others, covetousness has taken over.

And remember Jesus taught that generosity is measured not by what one gives but by what one has left.

Covetousness, maybe more than any other sin, hides itself in virtue.

We say we are providing for others, such as our families, when the real motivation is our own need for more.

In sharp contrast with the Rich Fool, we have the response of Zacchaeus.

In my opening remarks about these two stories I said that the Rich Fool is characterized by covetousness but the story of Zacchaeus is characterized by two things: grace and gratitude.

My appreciation for this story of Zacchaeus has been forever altered by a children's book.

Many years ago there was a series of Bible-story books called Arch Books.

I don't remember much about the book except what I think was the last page.

There was a picture of many people with puzzled looks on their faces and a picture of Zacchaeus, grinning from ear to ear, handing out money.

Why does Zacchaeus respond the way he does?

That question takes us back to the two words that I said describe the Zacchaeus story: grace and gratitude.

Zacchaeus was so moved by grace that it overflowed in gratitude and generosity.

Grace to him produced grace by him.

Most of us are appealed to many times a year to give to things.

The appeal usually comes with an overt or underlying motivation.

The one appealing to us assumes that we will give *if* they can tap into a reason for us to give.

- And so we hear from one organization that things are in **crisis** and if we don't respond, the organization will "go under".
- We hear from KCFR or our church or another organization to which we belong that we have a **duty** – after all we SHOULD help pay the bills.
- We hear from World Vision or other agency that children will starve to death if we don't give and so **guilt** about how much we have coupled with **pity** for starving children motivate us to give.
- Sometimes our **pride** is appealed to. We hear that such and such a church or organization, smaller than our own, has given a certain amount and surely we can do better. Or surely you want our buildings, staff and programs to be the best in the city.
- Sometimes it is just **fear** that is appealed to. If you don't give, don't expect God's blessing.

If things are going well you'd better give to insure that things continue to go well and if things aren't going well it's probably because God is punishing you. Repent and you will prosper.

What moves Zacchaeus? What put the grin on his face?

What changed his perspective on his possessions?

Guilt, fear, pride, duty? NO! GRACE!!!

Zacchaeus had experienced love, real love, no-strings-attached love, unearned love, pure love and **he mimicked the experience.**

A love relationship distinguishes between the gifts and the giver.

Gratitude that is tied to the gifts is moralistic.

Shame on you. How can you not give after you have been given so much?!

But the Scripture points to the Giver.

The actions of the Savior are the indications of HIS LOVE – it's not the gifts, it's the Giver.

It is not just that since he does good for you – you **should** do good for him BUT that **He loves you.**

He calls us to a relationship not built on our ability to give but built only on his love – it is all grace!

The closest we get to that in human relationships I think is a parent's love for his child.

The child doesn't earn it.

They are just loved, not for what they do but just because someone decided to love them.

Do you know that you are loved?

Do you know that you are loved in spite of your sin, your stubbornness, your self-centeredness?

Have you received that love?

When we understand and believe God's love, when we accept the unconditional relationship to God purchased by the death and resurrection of Christ, then gratitude follows.

Grace produces grace.

- I can appeal to your sense of duty or fear.
- I can try to make you feel guilty.
- I can show you pictures of starving children.
- I can tell you inspiring missions stories.

But they generate only short-lived responses.

But if you hear again and again the story of your life:

How God sought you, forgave you, turned you away from death and gave you life, and how God made you his very own – that grace generates grace.

Every appeal to giving and service in the NT is based on this motivation of grace.

- Romans 12:1ff “...I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.”
- I Corinthians 19:20 “You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.
- II Corinthians 5:14 “For Christ's love compels us...so from now on...”
- II Peter 1:3ff “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to...”

Watch it in action in Acts 3:1-8

“One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer--at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.

Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”

The motivating power of Grace, that you are loved, forgiven, and accepted changes the “I should” into “I can.”

T.A. Kantonen wrote, “The enthusiasms which are drawn from people’s emotional resources are soon used up. (You can only be told “you should” and “try again” so many times). Then the only alternative left is the legalistic “you must”. The flagging will is flogged with “you must do better” and “you must try harder.”

It is easy to clobber people, to ride them and to tell them they must do better because it is their duty.

It is easy to revert to a legalistic 10% tithe.

But grace doesn’t allow the adoption of some 10% code.

Stewardship isn’t a matter of meeting a standard.

NT stewardship is the overflow of gratitude out of the experience of grace.

The Chicago Tribune (12/24/95) ran a story about George White.

He lived in a rented room at the YMCA, wore clothes that were given to him, had shoes held together with rubber bands and spent his mornings napping in a metal chair in the 18th precinct police station.

Two officers took an interest in the old man and learned that each morning Billy the Greek over at the G&W grill gave George a free breakfast.

The two officers and their families decided to have George over for Christmas dinner.

Then they gave him several gifts, which he opened very carefully.

As they drove him back to the “Y” that day George asked if the presents were really his to keep.

When he was assured they were, he asked if he could stop at the G&W grill.

And with that he began re-wrapping the gifts.

When they walked into the grill, Billy the Greek was there and George said, "You've been good to me Billy, (and as he handed him the gifts) he said, "now I can be good to you - Merry Christmas."

Why do we give? Because we've been infected with GRACE?

I'd like to suggest an experiment:

I'd like us to stop giving for any reasons other than a response to grace.

- No longer giving just because we think we ought to,
- to pay our "fair share",
- to pay for services for ourselves and our families,
- to make an impression on anyone else,
- to keep God happy with us,
- to do the socially acceptable thing when the offering plate is passed,
- to pay for the seat on Sunday morning as if we were at some ball game or theatre performance.

But instead giving because we are loved,
because we can't help but respond to God's grace,
because we want others to experience that love,
and because we enjoy the experience of being like God – being a giver.

On Wednesday of this past week I had a first-hand reminder of the truth of what I speak today.

A person asked to see me; and the main reason was to tell me what God had done for them through the years.

And what they meant was the joy God had given them, as a couple, in being able to give.

They live on what you and I would consider a very, very small income but one of the greatest pleasures of their lives is to give money away.

They spoke specifically of the joy of giving to the church to provide for missionaries and for staff.

They spoke of the reward they sense in being part of furthering the kingdom of God.

They also specifically spoke of the satisfaction they receive from being able to help with the construction of facilities – as they said it, “buildings that help make it possible for people to learn more about Jesus.”

They said they wanted to add their testimony to the truth that giving is not about duty but about privilege – the joy they experience in giving is one of the great pleasures of their lives.

I asked how they make “ends meet” when they give money away.

The response was immediate and strong: God makes what is left over stretch in ways we can’t explain.

At one level of reasoning, giving money away makes no sense.

For those of us who have more than we need, we wonder if those to whom we might give money really need it or will maybe even misuse it.

For those of us who have little, we can’t imagine how we can meet our own needs if we give money away.

To that point I received a letter this past week in which a widow of our church, with very little income, wrote,

“As I listened to the recent sermons on giving, my thoughts went back to the days when I thought the money was ours and we would only give after we had first paid all the bills. Most of the time there was nothing left... About ten years ago the Lord finally got through my stubbornness...and I started to give first... Since then the Lord has provided enough to pay all the bills every month. I praise him for opening my eyes and making life easier financially... If only we had (realized this earlier), our marriage would have been much smoother.”

There are many in the room who can testify to God’s provision and to the joy of giving.

Have you been infected with Grace?