

## “Giving Matters”

Philippians 4:14-20

August 22, 2004

Dr. Jerry Nelson

Which do you trust more, God or money?

Maybe I should be more specific:

When it comes to what happens to you after your death, which do you trust more, God or money?

If I understand it correctly, the ancient Egyptians put the material possessions of the deceased in the tomb with the body for the dead person’s use in the afterlife.

Most of us don’t believe you can take it with you and so we say there are no pockets in a shroud and hearses don’t have trailer hitches.

No, when it comes to what happens after death, most people are either taking their chances or they are trusting in their God or gods.

But let me ask a different question: “In this life, today and tomorrow, which do you trust more, God or money?”

I know this is church and therefore the right answer most likely is, “God,” but consider it a little longer.

- When thinking about retirement do I trust God or my pension fund and my 401k?
- When it comes to making the mortgage payment do I trust God or the balance in my checking account?
- When it comes to paying for college do I trust God or my ability to earn money?

I know that in some ways that is a false dichotomy, but I say it that way to help us gain perspective – ultimately, what do we trust more, God or money.

I have intentionally chosen an ambiguous title for the sermon today.

From the biblical text before us today I want to speak both to the issues, the matters, of giving money, in other words, “GIVING! matters” and I want to speak to the fact that giving money is important, that is, “Giving MATTERS!”.

I know there is a built-in resistance to preachers talking about money. And I think that exists for at least two reasons.

First of all there are “Elmer Gantry” shepherds who misuse the Bible to fleece the sheep.

Even if their motives are pure, it is appalling to see the way some preachers and evangelists misuse the Bible to get people to part with their money.

This past Thursday, a friend of mine told me what he heard while surfing television channels just this week.

The preacher on a religious program was telling his own story of giving \$250,000 to another well-known televangelist and how God had returned the favor many-fold.

The not-so-subtle implication was that the television listener could reap the same returns if he or she would invest in that preacher’s ministry.

Misguided hucksters or just plain frauds exist in every area of life. But to accuse the Bible of such tactics is like accusing Bill Gates of shoplifting.

Neither Bill Gates nor God needs the money.

But a second reason why we are leery of sermons on money is because we trust money more than God.

And when the Bible speaks to the issue of money, it contradicts our trust in money and that makes us nervous if not angry.

Now having stirred the pot of our thinking a little, let’s go to the text for today but also begin with our text from last week.

Philippians 4:10-13

“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,

whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

In a still earlier text, Paul had encouraged the Christians in the Roman city of Philippi to not be anxious about the things of life but let the peace of God rule in their hearts through prayer and thanksgiving.

As we saw last week, from verses 10-13, Paul used his own experience to teach them to be content regardless of the circumstances of life.

He speaks of their gifts to him in prison but tells them that he didn't really need the gifts because he has found contentment not in changed circumstances but in his relationship with Jesus himself.

That was last week's sermon.

But as we resume reading Paul's letter in verse 14 we find that Paul apparently didn't want them to think he was ungrateful for their gifts.

Philippians 4:14-20 "Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. <sup>17</sup> Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

- He writes in Philippians 4:14 "Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles."
- He also writes in Philippians 4:18b "I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent."  
He was in prison and he was in need and they met that need.

But as he expresses his gratitude, he teaches a very different perspective on money than most people have, than even many Christians have.

Let me attempt to capture, in one long sentence, Paul's thesis here:  
**Trusting God to meet my needs, and grateful for his grace,  
 I can give away a sacrificial portion of the material  
 resources entrusted to me, to my benefit and God's glory.**

There are five parts to that promise.

Let me show you how they come from this text:

Quite obviously the first clause is drawn from verse 19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

The fourth part of the promise is drawn from verse 17 "Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account."

And the last part of the sentence is drawn from the latter part of verse 18 "the gifts you sent... are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."

But before looking more closely at those phrases, I want you to see how the second and third parts of the sentence come from these verses as well.

Verses 15-16 say it this way, "not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need."

The historical context is important to our understanding.

When Paul left Philippi, after preaching the good news of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, he went on to preach that same gospel in other places.

In our text, Paul says the Philippian Christians were the only ones who kept sending aid to help him in his ministry.

The combination of his working and their gifts enabled him to keep spreading the good news.

But it is Paul's letter to the Corinthians that gives us greater insight into the generosity of the Philippians and by implication adds these words to the thesis: "Grateful for God's grace, we can give away a sacrificial portion of the material resources entrusted to us."

There we read in 2 Corinthians 8:2-4 "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."

Probably due to discrimination against them as Christians, the Philippian church was dreadfully poor; Paul called it "extreme poverty."

But "they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."

They not only gave from any surplus they had, they gave what they couldn't afford to give – meaning, I think, they gave sacrificially, or as we might say it, "They gave until it hurt."

They gave until it affected not only their desires but also their necessities.

The attitude toward money that Paul commends is quite obviously very different from the prevailing attitude of our day.

Shaped by our insecurities, our greed and our culture the relationship that we see between God and money is that God is there to help us achieve our goals.

After all "God loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life," right?

In 1728 an English pastor by the name of William Law wrote a book entitled, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life...

It was arguably one of the primary instruments bringing about the Great Revival of Evangelical Christianity in England and the American Colonies barely 10 years later, the revivals for which

Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield and the Wesleys are better known.

Learning from Jesus who said, “Where your treasure is there will your heart be also,” William Law knew that the way we spend our money tells more about our spiritual life than anything else.

“Every exhortation in Scripture to be wise and reasonable, satisfying only such wants as God would have satisfied; every exhortation to be spiritual...pressing after a glorious change of our nature; every exhortation to love our neighbor as ourselves...is a command to be strictly religious in the use of money.” (William Law, vi,53 Eerdmans, 1966)

But writing of his own day with words that describe ours, he said, the values of the secular world “with its passions of sensuality, self-love, pride, covetousness, ambition and vain-glory had infiltrated the nominal Christian world.” (Law in Hafemann, 352)

As Jesus said in Matthew 16:26 “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”, William Law wrote,

“Now this is truly the case of riches spent upon ourselves in vain and needless expenses; in trying to use them where they have no real use nor we any real want (need), we only use them to our great hurt, in creating unreasonable desires... in indulging our passions, and supporting a worldly, vain (kind of thinking)... So that money thus spent is not merely wasted, or lost, but it is spent to bad purposes, and miserable effects, to the corruption and disorder of our hearts, and to the making us less able to live up to the sublime doctrines of the Gospel. It is like keeping money from the poor to buy poison for ourselves.” (Law, vi, 52-53 in Hafemann, 355)

Contrary to our great temptation to hoard and squander our material resources on ourselves, Paul commends the Philippian believers as those who knew **how** to give – sacrificially!

And they also knew **why**.

Earlier I said Paul thesis is: **Trusting God to meet my needs, and grateful for his grace, I can give away a sacrificial**

**portion of the material resources entrusted to me, to my benefit and God's glory.**

They gave away a sacrificial portion of the material resources entrusted to them **because they were grateful for God's grace.**

Also earlier I quoted from Paul's assessment of them:

2 Corinthians 8:2-4 "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."

The good news of a right relationship with God by grace through faith had totally altered their view of life.

They were so grateful for God's love for them, so filled with joy at being his children now and forever, and so captured by the God's mission in the world that they pleaded with Paul for the privilege of giving.

This is consistent with what Paul wrote to the Philippians earlier, in Philippians 1:5 we read, "I always pray (for you) with joy because of **your partnership in the gospel** from the first day until now..."

I think many of you know that the English word "fellowship" is a translation of a Greek word transliterated as "koinonia".

That's the word translated "partnership" here in Philippians 1:5

That word "koinonia" is the root word for "sharing" in 2 Corinthians 8 and for the words "share" and "shared" in our text, verses 14 and 15

In the NT the word "fellowship" is so closely tied to how we use our money that the same root word is used.

Their joy in their fellowship with God and his people and their partnership in the Gospel logically and naturally overflowed in generosity.

In the book of James it is stated negatively this way,

James 2:14-17 “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

Great grace results in great generosity.

To be sure discipline is often required in giving because our feelings wax and wane.

But never let it be said that God’s children give because they are buying God’s favor or that they will be punished if they don’t.

Giving is not a price paid but a gratitude expressed.  
Christian giving flows out of gratitude.

Let’s hear Paul’s full thesis again.

Trusting God to meet my needs, and grateful for his grace, I can give away a sacrificial portion of the material resources entrusted to me, **to my benefit and God’s glory.**

I want us to attend now to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> parts of Paul’s thesis.

Here Paul speaks of the results of their generosity.

He certainly acknowledges that their gifts have met and exceeded his immediate need.

But much more importantly, for Paul, their generosity accomplishes two other things:

Here’s the way Paul wrote it, Philippians 4:17-18 “Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”

There are two other results of giving; it is beneficial to the giver and it gives glory to God.

You might say cynically, “Yes, I’ve heard **that** before.”

“I give my money to you and I get some reward later on, pie in the sky bye and bye.

“Great trade that is - you get my purse and I get your promise!  
Again I grant that there are charlatans who abuse God’s word but put them aside to hear from God.

If we trust money more than God in this life, here and now, we cannot help but see giving as contrary to our best interests.

If we see the accumulation of assets and indulgence in those assets as essential to our well-being we can’t imagine **sacrificial** giving.

Oh, maybe we can imagine “left-over” giving that is, giving from our surplus (if we ever get any), but not **sacrificial** giving.

But if our goal in life is the kingdom of God,

- if our greatest interest is God’s glory,
- if our desire is to become more like Jesus in our character and values
- and if our temporal as well as eternal security are in God’s hand and not in our savings account or retirement fund
- we will have a whole different attitude toward money.

Paul wrote in Philippians 4:17 “I am looking for what may be credited to your account.”

I know this is the language of commerce, of credits and debits, but it is a metaphor for that which is beneficial to them.

This is quite similar to other passages of the NT.

Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 16:27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. (cf. Eph 6:7 and 2 Tim 4:7)

What’s the reward, the treasure, the credit to your account?

- Is it mansions in heaven, gold crowns, wealth, or ease of lifestyle in heaven in exchange for generosity here and now?
- Is Paul just advocating a delayed gratification better known as delayed indulgence?
- I’m self-disciplined in my spending and giving now so I can be self-indulgent after I die?

Hardly!

To understand what Paul means when he speaks of their generosity being credited to their account we need to look elsewhere in the letter to see what it is that he desires for these Christians – what he truly wants them to have more than anything else now and eternally.

Very early in the letter Paul prayed for these believers.

Philippians 1:11 He prayed that they might be “filled with the **fruit** of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ...”

Philippians 4:17 is translated literally this way: “I seek the **fruit** increasing to your account.”

The “fruit” that Paul wants credited to their account is not some kind of religious “chit” that they can cash in some day.

The fruit is righteousness, holiness, and Christ-likeness.

Our generosity maybe more than any other thing not only indicates our gratitude for grace but in fact shapes our character.

- Nothing will break the back of greed in our lives faster than giving our money away.
- Nothing will push us to trust more in God than money than giving money away.

Do we dare give enough away that money no longer provides our security?

Scott Hafemann, in his commentary on this passage writes, “What could possibly be more fanatical in our day than to live below one’s level of income for the sake of giving away as much money as possible.” (Scott Hafeman, 2 Corinthians NIV Application Commentary, p351)

Paul says, “I love to see you giving your money, not because I need it so much, but because I know what it does in you and for you.”

**But Paul also says, I love to see you giving your money away because I know that God is honored by it.**

Philippians 4:18 “...the gifts you sent... are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Paul uses the language of OT Sacrifices and says your sacrificial gifts are pleasing to God, just as the best sacrifices in the Temple and even the death of Christ were; Ephesians 5:2 “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

They are “fragrant, acceptable and pleasing” to God.

God is honored by the gifts – And honoring God is our chief reason for giving.

We may give to meet needs (just as the Philippians did to meet Paul’s needs), and as Paul said, we may give to increase our own Christ-likeness (in the same way that many other spiritual disciplines do), but **chief among the reasons for giving is to honor our God.**

And God says your sacrificial gifts are “fragrant, acceptable and pleasing to him.”

We’ve probably all received the slapped-together Mother’s or Father’s Day gifts our kids were forced to make in Sunday School before they could go out to play.

We “oohed and aahed” over them to try to encourage selflessness in our kids but we weren’t overly impressed.

And then we’ve all received those spontaneous gifts that our kids labored over for hours all because they wanted to please us and show their love for us.

We could hardly restrain the tears of joy over such gifts, given out of love and given at great sacrifice.

Sacrificial gifts, given in response to grace, bring pleasure to our God.  
Think about that the next time you write a check to charity, to the church, to some other ministry.

Only **now** are we ready for the one verse in this passage of Scripture that we usually focus on exclusively:

Philippians 4:19 “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

I have attempted to put that promise in the greater context of the passage:

**Trusting God to meet my needs**, and grateful for his grace, I can give away a sacrificial portion of the material resources entrusted to me, to my benefit and God’s glory.

Paul is saying that you can give in a way that the unbeliever can never give.

Jesus said, “Matthew 6:31-33 “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and **your heavenly Father knows that you need them**. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

The economic issues that cloud the horizon of unbelievers’ minds do not distract the believers’ minds.

I am not saying that these promises are only of a spiritual kind.

I think the context both in Philippians 4 and in Matthew 6 demands that we see material needs being met as well.

But notice that in both passages they are a secondary issue.

Meeting my physical needs is a by-product not a goal.

God truly knows what we need and we can leave that in his wise hands.

Does this mean that God will never let us go hungry?

No, that is not the promise.

The promise is that God will meet our needs.

The old instruction to **distinguish between needs and wants** is good advice.

God doesn't promise to meet all our wants but our needs.

We are tempted to say, "Oh, great! If I leave it up to God, I'll be hungry and unhappy!"

Do we really think of God that way?

That wasn't Paul's experience.

Listen to him: Philippians 4:19 "And my God will meet all your needs **according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**

God will meet our needs **not** "**out** of" his wealth, in the sense of dipping into them.

If I give **out** of or **from** my wealth I can give any amount.

God will meet our needs **according to** his wealth.

If I give **according to** my wealth, I give proportionately –  
If I have much, I give much.

God has much and gives accordingly, even lavishly.

Do we really think God is stingy?

Ephesians 3:16-20 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge -that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.<sup>20</sup>

Now to him who is able to **do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine**, according to his power that is at work within us to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

So I end with the same question with which I began, "**Which do we trust most, God or money?**"

**Trusting God to meet my needs, and grateful for his grace, I can give away a sacrificial portion of the material resources entrusted to me, to my benefit and God's glory.**