

## Worship (27)

## Corporate - Giving

We come tonight to one of the very important parts of corporate and, for that matter, individual worship – that is giving.

It can be hard in today's health-wealth-prosperity Gospel context to preach on giving. I take comfort though that Paul faced a similar kind of apprehension and assured the Corinthians in **2 Cor 12:14**, *I seek not yours, but you*. He was not seeking what belonged to the Corinthians, He was seeking their hearts. And I say here to you, as I preach on giving, 'I seek not yours, but you. I do not seek your substance; I seek your hearts to find fullness of love for Christ.'

It's obvious that giving is part of worship. It always has been. We find it at the very dawn of the human family – with Cain and Abel presenting offerings to God. And we find it at the very end, in Revelation – with the saints casting down their crowns before the Lamb.

Now, very early in the Bible we find out that not all giving is worship that God accepts. The brothers Cain and Abel come and present their offerings. The Bible doesn't explicitly say why God rejected Cain's offering; we assume it was because it was not a blood sacrifice. Whatever the reason, God was not impressed simply because Cain gave. There is more to giving as worship than simply giving.

What kind of giving pleases God? Throughout the Bible, from beginning to end, it is clear that the kind of giving which pleases God is sacrificial giving with a right heart. Sacrifice.

In fact, when you think about it, God tied the whole faith of the ancient Israelite to sacrificial giving. All the Old Testament sacrifices – the burnt offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the peace offering, the Passover Lamb - meant the Israelite had to give up one of his own livestock or, if he didn't have any, to spend his own money to get one. God wasn't teaching the Israelite that they could buy their salvation; He was teaching them that the life of faith is a life of sacrificial giving. He was teaching the Israelite the great cost of sin, the great price of atonement, the value of reconciliation and atonement. The act of faith and the act of sacrifice are bound together, because what costs you requires trust. And, when it kept costing the Israelite in everyday tangible ways, it drove home to him the weight, the value, of God's glory, and the need for trust and faith.

We've lost some of that. Because of Christ's great offering for us, we tend to think there is no longer any cost to us. And if we do not learn sacrificial giving, we will become careless, frivolous and even regard God's glory lightly. Sacrificial giving has to arrest our attention in significant, tangible ways, like it did with the Old Testament saint. And, because Christ is the fulfilment of the sacrifices and the offerings, our sacrificial giving will not be found in bringing animals, but in bringing ourselves and our substance. Our sacrificial giving will be to give of our own time and abilities and to give of our monetary resources. And when it is done Biblically, it is a great source of pleasing worship to God.

I want to show you a few texts which show how giving, when done correctly, is an act of worship, pleasing to God. It is the equivalent of those Old Testament sacrifices presented with the right heart. Thirty-seven times in the Law the sacrifices are described as a sweet-savour to God, a well-pleasing sacrifice.

**Heb 13:16** *But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

**Philippians 4:14-19** *Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.* <sup>15</sup> *Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church*

*shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. <sup>16</sup>For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. <sup>17</sup>Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. <sup>18</sup>Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

A short definition of sacrifice might be, ‘*to offer or give up something at great cost to self*’. A sacrifice is only a sacrifice when it hurts, when the loss is noticeable, when what is being given up is valuable and could otherwise be used.

George Mueller put it well. He said, ‘God judges what we give by what we keep.’

Now let me give you two contrasts to sacrificing with a right heart.

The first is what I call *leftover giving*.

Leftover giving is when you first use your time, abilities and substance on yourself, and having done that, you look to see what is leftover for God. You draw up your budget and you do not include God at all – you simply list all your expenses, and compare it with your income and see that there should be a little left over to give to God. That is leftover giving. It is when you shape your schedule and use of time around the demands of the job and the various responsibilities and, having done that, you see where you can fit in some time for God? ‘Can I squeeze in a Sunday morning service? Oh, maybe this week; or maybe next week – but this week, I’m too busy.’

Leftover giving is when I prioritise myself, and then give God what remains. It is what I can spare for God without it really costing me in any significant way.

It is much like what was happening in Israel. Look in Malachi 1.

**Mal 1:7-8** You offer defiled food on My altar. But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.' And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

**Mal 1:13-14** You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the LORD of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" Says the LORD. "But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished; For I am a great King," Says the LORD of hosts, "And My name is to be feared among the nations.

What was being offered to God? Animals that were of no use to anyone! Lame animals that could not be used for ploughing; blind animals that were a nuisance to a shepherd anyway, sick animals which could not be eaten and it was more convenient to get rid of them. And God rejects this. Sure they were giving – but it was leftover giving. It was what they didn’t want anyway. That is not sacrifice, and it is not worship.

When we give God money we would maybe have used on a few refreshments; or money we might have used on a little bit of entertainment that we could go without anyway – we’ve missed the heart of giving as worship. When we give God time, which we would have been bored with anyway, or would have had nothing better to do – we’ve missed the heart of sacrificial giving.

A sacrifice is a sacrifice because you give of what is precious to you.

The second contrast to sacrificial giving is *insincere giving*.

This is when we give to God, possibly even in a way which costs us, but our hearts are not in it. Look in Isaiah 1.

### **Isaiah 1:11-18**

<sup>11</sup> *"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD.*

*"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle.*

*I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats.*

<sup>12</sup> *"When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?*

<sup>13</sup> *Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me.*

*The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.*

<sup>14</sup> *Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.*

<sup>15</sup> *When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you;*

*Even though you make many prayers ,I will not hear.*

*Your hands are full of blood.*

<sup>16</sup> *"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.*

*Cease to do evil,*

<sup>17</sup> *Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor, Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.*

<sup>18</sup> *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD,*

*"Though your sins are like scarlet ,They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.*

God was not satisfied, even with good sacrifices, if the Israelites were not seeking to actually please Him. They were living for themselves, pleasing themselves, breaking His commands, and still going through the motions of giving sacrificially. This becomes a stench to God, because it is like treating giving like a transaction. God wants not an amount, as if He needed it – He wants the heart of trust and love and honour which is supposed to accompany sacrificial giving. Remember what He says in Psalm 50?

**Psalm 50:7-14** *Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:*

It is an insult to God to give money to Him without your heart in it. It suggests you are the benefactor, and God is the poor, grateful beneficiary. It suggests God is like the pagan gods – put the berries and the fruit on the altar, and we'll have good weather and no volcanoes this year.

This is why we are firstly to give ourselves to God entirely (**Romans 12:1**). When we have given ourselves as a whole burnt offering to God, He will have our hearts, and the act of giving will not be insincere.

The giving which is true worship is neither leftover giving, nor insincere giving. Let us see three things which describe sacrificial giving in Scripture.

### **I. Your Giving is Worship When it is a Sacrifice with Love**

See **John 12:3-7**, **2 Cor 8:8, 24**.

Mary comes and breaks open a very costly box of ointment. Three hundred pence was about a year's salary. Imagine for a moment a bit of perfume worth one whole year of your salary, tens or even hundreds of thousands of rands. And she breaks it open, and in one go, pours it on Jesus. Her giving is sacrificial, of that there is no doubt.

But what is motivating her to do this? Was she commanded to do this? Did Jesus hint at it? No. She loved the Lord. He had predicted His death and burial, and she poured this on him in advance as an extravagant act of love.

It is no coincidence that this act of love sent forth a fragrance – because sacrificial giving rises up to God as a sweet scent.

People criticised her, people did not understand her act of sacrifice. But she did. Her heart was filled with love, and nothing short of this generous, costly act of love would satisfy her own heart.

Sacrifice which pleases God is *loving*.

Do you realise, sacrifice is the heart of God's love? For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. God's love sacrificed. **Ephesians 5:2** says, '*And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*'

At the heart of God-pleasing sacrifice is love for Him. Sacrifices for God in the Old Testament were often associated with rejoicing, cheerful hearts. That is why we are told in **2 Corinthians 9:7** we should give not grudgingly or out of mere compulsion, but willingly, cheerfully.

This is the test: A selfish heart still set on its own things resents the sacrifice. In fact, it thinks anything which takes away from itself is a sacrifice. The more selfish you are, the more you will think giving God five minutes is a great sacrifice.

When our hearts are right, we recognise the cost, but do not begrudge it. When we are motivated by love, we know the cost, but we rejoice to so show our value for God.

Paul could say that he had suffered the loss of all things – that's what I call a sacrifice. But what did he say about his loss? **Phil 3:8** - '*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.*'

To illustrate - when a young man loves a lady and knows she is the one – he does not resent the cost of the engagement ring. In his state of love and desire, he recognises the cost, he may even swallow hard at the cost, but he does not begrudge it, because he loves.

## 2. Your Giving is Worship when it is a Sacrifice with Honour

A terrible thing has happened in Israel. David numbers the people against God's wishes. God sends a plague through the land – the angel of God killing 70 000 men – a sad but fitting judgement on a king who was trying to glory in the large number of men he could field in an army.

The angel stops his destruction on the threshing floor of a man named Araunah and the prophet Gad tells David to go and set up an altar there (**2 Sam 24:19-24**).

Notice David understood sacrifice as a way of honouring God. He knew that sacrifice showed he respected and revered God, and it would not do to give something to God which cost him nothing, or I might add, next to nothing.

Sacrificial giving says, 'God I honour you, I fear you. And I do not dare patronise you with leftovers.'

When we sacrifice so as to give God first place in our lives, it is pleasing to God.

Now, no amount can ever be enough, but when we are giving in order to honour God we have put thought into it. We have purposed in our heart, we have prayed, we have said, 'This amount shows that I honour my God. This costs me, and so it should.'

When the Magi came to see the baby Christ, they did not say, 'Well, He doesn't know any better, He's just a baby.' Instead, they gave costly gifts to emphasise their honour for the Messiah, the King of the Jews – gold, frankincense and myrrh. They knelt and presented those gifts in reverence and honour.

The ancient practice of tithing was actually a system of honouring a king. When Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek, he was showing honour to the King-Priest of Salem. The Bible says in **Hebrews 7:4** '*Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.*'

Ancient tithing was a form of honour to a king, a way of expressing loyalty and devotion. I don't believe tithing is bound to God's people today as an amount. The spirit of tithing – showing honour - should still be in our giving. But we are not commanded to give exactly 10%.

Part of the problem with that is that it keeps you back from sacrificial giving. We can all budget in a 10% amount to God monthly, and if we are disciplined, we can do fine. Sacrificial giving is free not only from the tithe; it is free to go beyond the tithe.

Our giving is to honour Him. But let me just add a practical note here in this day and age of electronic banking. I have nothing against Christians choosing to give to God through electronic means. Carrying cash can be a nerve-wracking thing. But I will say this. Christians should not set up automatic stop order or debit orders when it comes to giving to the Lord. That takes the heart of honouring God out of it. There is nothing about giving that is supposed to be automatic, mechanical, unthinking and taken care of by computers, as if God is one of

your monthly expenses. That is not worship. That does not show you give God weight in your life.

If you do an electronic transfer; do it personally, standing there in front of the machine and pray a silent prayer of thanksgiving, of adoration of dedication.

God is worshipped when our sacrifices are mingled with love, when they are mingled with honour, and thirdly:

### **3. Your Giving is Worship when it is a Sacrifice with Faith**

While this teaching of faith giving has been abused by false teachers, we must not throw the baby out with the bathwater. God is worshipped when our giving reflects trust in Him.

Take God's command for the Israelites to give Him their firstfruits. When an Israelite took the very first crops and brought them to God, what was he displaying? Faith – trust that God would supply him with more.

Sacrificial giving forces faith. When giving is a leftover, it requires no element of trust, no sense of God – '*Give me today my daily bread.*' But when sacrifice enters, there is a level of uncertainty – How will we make ends meet?

Look in **Mark 12:41-44**. The widow could not give out of her abundance – she did not have in abundance. She gave out of her poverty, and the act of faith counted as a mighty sacrifice of honour to God. By giving her very last amount, what was she saying to God? I look to You!

Turn over to **2 Corinthians 8:2-3** :*for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will,*

The Macedonians gave out of their poverty, not just according to their means – but beyond it, with great joy.

That's the joy of faith - the joy of knowing the promise of **2 Corinthians 9:8** - *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.*

The joy of knowing and believing what God promised the Philippians when they gave to Paul: **Phil 4:19** *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

The old farmer said it this way: 'I keep shovelling into God's bin, and God keeps shovelling into my bin, and God's shovel is a lot bigger than mine!'

God is no man's debtor. Even David said in **I Chronicles** – '*For all things come from You, And of Your own we have given You.*' Giving sacrificially is really like pouring some water into a bubbling fountain. We are saying, 'We can do this, because You are our Source, our supply.' That's why sacrificial giving is not dependent on how much you have. Sacrificial giving is possible for all of us.

Sacrifice leaves dependence on money and forces faith. It breaks the chains of materialism, covetousness and says – in reality – ‘God is my God.’ I am literally putting my money where my mouth is – I trust God.

The overflow of the sacrifice of God’s people, has always been the prospering of God’s work. The fulltime priests/pastors taken care of, missionaries cared for, tabernacle/church expenses taken care of, congregational needs taken care of, further development and expansion of ministry. Those things are not the main reason we give, but they are the good by-product of God’s people’s generosity.

Giving to God is really returning to God. God has given us more than we could give Him in a thousand lifetimes. Our giving is pouring out a love offering to Him in faith to show our honour for Him. In a way, sacrificial giving is like an echo. We allow God’s sacrificial giving to resonate within us and echo back to Him. We could never sacrifice like He did. But we can offer all of ourselves back to Him, recognising His worth.

As David put it in **Psalm 96:8** – *Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts.*