

## Giving Generously through Grace

Dan Knapp - 29 May 16

Good morning,

We are taking a break from our sermon series going through Mark's Gospel to look at the subject of money and specifically giving and tithing: what that means, why we give, what we give, why we give to the church, why money has such a hold on us etc.

A couple of weeks ago, during our series in Mark, I spoke on "The Extravagant Worship of the King", where we looked at Jesus coming to a house to share a meal with some friends, and Mary, a woman who was there, brought a jar of perfume to Jesus while he was at the table. This perfume would have been very expensive, it would have been the equivalent of a year's wage to the average worker, and she comes before Jesus and she pours it on his feet. She pours it all over him and we see she values Jesus so much more than the value of anything that she could have - so much more than the money she'd spent on the perfume. The perfume itself would have been seen by others to have such worth and value, but she sees Jesus as being the thing that is worth so much more. And so she worships him by giving everything that she has to him. She uses what she has to worship Jesus.

What we are going to look at this morning is not whether money is in and of itself good, or in and of itself bad, but we are going to see how we can use everything that we have been given as an act of worship to God; not that money is evil, not that money is the thing that we have to hold on to above all else, but how we can use what we have to worship Jesus. How we can be like Mary, holding nothing back, using everything we have to worship, and to count Jesus as the thing that is higher than anything else.

Giving and money is not something that the Church in the modern era has come up with, I remember thinking this when I first became a Christian, when I first started going to church, when I would hear people talk about giving and tithing and money. The church we were in would take gift days, and I thought, 'well surely this is just something the church has come up with in order to make money, maybe the pastor needs a pay rise, maybe the church needs a new roof,... Surely Christianity is about loving others and being good to other people and loving your neighbour, it's not about giving money to the church, surely that's something that they have come up with in order to get paid.'

Well, money is something Jesus spent 15% of his time talking about, tithing and giving to the church goes back to the Law of Moses, and in fact it goes beyond that, it goes further back than that, in Genesis 14:20 Abraham wins a victory over another tribe, and the things that he gets from them, he gives a tenth, he brings a tenth to a guy called Melchizedek who was a priest. So even Abraham brought something it says he gave a tenth of what he'd won from this victory and gave it to Melchizedek in the temple. It also says in Genesis 28:20-22, where it talks about Jacob, that Jacob made a vow, saying, *"If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again*

*to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."*

So I want you to know this morning that giving and tithing to the church is not an idea that we've had, we're not saying, 'I know how we can make money'... our elders meeting the other day when we decided to talk about money was not us sat around going, 'How do we get more money for us? How can we get the church to give us more money?', this wasn't something we came up with. Giving as a response to everything God has done is a biblical principle, not just in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament, not just in the time of Jesus but in the Law, and not just in the Law but before that as well, for Abraham and Jacob were giving a tenth of what they had as a response to what God had done.

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### **Why do we give?**

So that's why we're going to start this morning with the question "Why do we give?", why do we give to the church, why does the Bible say that we should give what we have to the church? This morning we are going to dip into the New Testament and the Old Testament as well, I want you to see that this is not just a New Testament thing, this is not just a Law thing, this is a biblical thing, to give to the church. So we are going to look at both testaments and we are going to pick passages out of all of them, but the first question I want to ask is "Why do we give?"

If you're not a Christian this morning, if you're visiting, if it's your first time with us, if you wouldn't consider yourself to be a follower of Jesus, you wouldn't say that you know him or that you're living for him, maybe this is your first time in church? Like Tim said this is a bit of a strange Sunday to be at, but the thing I don't want you to hear is that what the church wants is your money! If you're not a Christian here, if you're not a member of this church, I don't want you to give to this church. I don't want you to give because that's not why we give, the reason we give is not a membership fee for us to keep coming, it's not a thing that we do in order that God would see us and bless us, a thing that we do in order to get right in God's eyes.

No, the reason we give is like Jacob said in Genesis 28, '*and of all that you've given me, I will give a full tenth to you*'. We give as a response to all that has been given, we give our money because of everything that God has given us.

It says this in Romans 8:32, '*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*' You have been abundantly blessed, God has given us all things. God gave us that which was of highest value, God gave us that that He valued above all else: His Son, His only Son, He gave Him up for us. The reason we give is out of a response of being given everything in Christ. If you're not a Christian here today I don't want your money, I want you to see Jesus.

The reason we preach the Gospel week in and week out is because the most important thing, the thing that we value above anything else, is that you would see Him. The reason that we

worship, the reason that we serve, the reason that we love, the reason that we give, is because we have seen Him [Jesus], that we have been given everything in Him, we have been abundantly blessed with grace and mercy. Our giving of money comes out of a response to everything that Jesus has done.

In Exodus 13, the Israelites have come out of Egypt, they are in the wilderness, and Exodus 13 is where Moses starts writing about how the firstborn of a flock of sheep is to be consecrated to the Lord. When an ewe has its first lamb, the firstborn of that sheep is to be sacrificed and given to God. In verse 14 Moses pre-empts a question everyone will have '*when in times to come your son asks you, what does this mean?*'. You can imagine eventually, if you carried on doing this for a while, you'd get this question, and Moses pre-empts it.

The farmers in the desert, those that have come with Moses out of Egypt, are in the wilderness and they are starting to farm, they are starting to raise animals, and the sheep is about to have its first born lamb, and the farmer's son sees that the lamb is about to be born, so he goes running to the house to get his father, and says, 'Dad the lamb we've been waiting for is about to be born, it's the first lamb!'. So the family runs out into the field, the sheep gives birth, and the son says 'oh that's amazing this is the first lamb we've got!'.

Then the dad bends down, picks it up, slits its throat, and takes it to the altar to sacrifice it to God. The son is sort of shocked, and after a while the son grows up and realizes that his dad has this strange habit of doing it every time a sheep has its firstborn lamb the dad gets his knife and kills it and sacrifices it to God, and eventually you'd get this question that Moses is talking about, what does his mean? His says, say to your son 'By a strong hand, the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery'.

When the son asks the father 'why do you sacrifice the first lamb to God?', the dad says "well, we weren't always here, we weren't always in this land that we own, we weren't always free to farm, we used to be in slavery, we were slaves under the rule of Pharaoh in Egypt, and God, by a strong hand, redeemed us out of it, so do you know what, I gladly give the first lamb to God, not out of duty, not out of guilt because I think I should, no, I gladly do it, because you know what, He redeemed me out of Egypt".

That should be our attitude with money. My tithe to this church comes out of my bank account, it comes out by standing order every month, when my sons get older, they'll see that every first Monday of the month, this money comes out of the bank with *Christ Central Church* written next to it, and they'll ask 'Why do you give this money to the church?' and I'll answer, 'by a strong hand, the Lord brought me out of sin, out of the house of slavery. I wasn't always a Christian, I was in bondage, I was in slavery, and do you know what, God rescued me out of that, so I gladly give, I gladly give to God what is His, not out of a sense of duty, not out of a sense of guilt, not because I should or because I'm trying to work off a debt, no, because He rescued me, because He redeemed and saved me out of that by a strong hand so I gladly give to Him.'

That's why we give, because we've seen Jesus. Because we've seen the One Who gave everything for us, and we gladly give to Him.

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## What do we give?

Abraham and Jacob gave a tenth of what they had to the temple. The Law says “10%”. Some of you might be thinking, because it’s what I thought as well, that we are not under the Law. ‘Why do I need to give 10%, I’m not under the Law, that was Old Testament, I’m freed from the Law, surely God gave us grace, we are grace church, we’re New Testament Christians, we don’t have to abide by the Law’.

Very true, all true, you are not under the Law, you have been freed from the Law so we wouldn’t have to live under it. You do not have to give 10% of your salary to the church. Nothing is going to happen to you if you don’t, we’re not going to find out and kick you out.

The Law said “10%”, however grace says “everything”. Grace says you give everything to Him. You give everything you have, every aspect of your life. Grace doesn’t require us to fulfil the Law, it equips us to go above and beyond. It doesn’t require us to fulfil the Law, but it changes our heart, so that we want to do so much more. Jesus comes to fulfil the Law, but he challenges us to be even better than the Law, and not just challenges us to do it, he equips us so that we can.

In Matthew, Jesus is going through the Sermon on the Mount, and he is addressing these ideas that are brought up in the Law and then challenging them with a new way of thinking. He says that “*the Law says ‘do not murder’, but I say to you that anyone who is angry with his brother has sinned.*” Did Jesus say, ‘you’re not under the Law anymore, it doesn’t matter if you murder, that was Old Testament, you’re under grace now’? No, He says the Law says do not murder but grace equips you to live at peace, not even being angry with your brother, it challenges us to go above and beyond.

He says, “*You have heard it said, ‘you shall not commit adultery’*”. He didn’t respond with ‘it’s fine you’re under grace, go, if you find somebody attractive don’t worry about your marriage it’s fine you’re under grace!’ No, he says “*If you even look at a woman with lust you’ve already sinned in your heart.*” He doesn’t say ‘it’s fine you’re under grace’. He challenges the heart, He equips us and enables us to go even further than what the Law required, to live abundantly, to give generously. You can’t say that we’re not under the Law therefore you don’t have to give, look at all you’ve been given, grace equips you to go above and beyond.

In Acts 4:34-35, this is talking about the apostles coming, the start of the early church, the New Testament grace-filled church, and it says this, this was their response, this is what the people did: “*There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*”

That’s generous New Testament giving, they sold what they had and they brought it to the church so that there would be no poor among them, so that everyone would have exactly what they needed. They sold land, they sold houses; leading up to that passage it doesn’t say that they understood the Law and therefore they sold what they had; it says this in verse 33:

*“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace came upon them all.”* The people didn’t understand the Law, they didn’t want to fulfil the Law, they understood grace, and they gave abundantly, they understood all that had been given to them, they understood the grace and the mercy of God and they overflowed with generosity.

2 Corinthians 8:3-4 says this, this is what the people did: *“For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints.”*

Paul goes to this church in Macedonia and the people there are in poverty, they are struggling with everything to pay for, they are a poor church, and yet they are begging Paul to take their money for the churches elsewhere, they are begging Paul to be able to give, they are giving not only according to their means, but above their means.

Now what it says at the beginning isn’t that they understood the Law, it says this in 2 Cor. 8:1-2: *“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 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.”* No, we are not under the Law, but when we see the grace of God, we give generously, we give above and beyond, we give back everything that we have.

Now I’m not saying that we all need to go and sell our houses, and sell everything that we have, because then we’ll have to be the ones being given money, but what I’m saying is, we shouldn’t hold anything back, we should be willing to use everything that we have, we shouldn’t use the fact that we are not under the Law as a reason not to give to the church. If you understood what that meant to be under grace, if you grasped the grace and the mercy of God, like they did in Acts, you’d be like those in in Macedonia – they gave above and beyond, they gave beyond their means, they overflowed with generosity, even though they were so poor they begged Paul to take their money, because they just wanted to give back everything that they had received from God.

That’s what we give, I’m not going to say a figure, the New Testament doesn’t, it doesn’t say ‘you should give 10%’, it says ‘you should give everything’, lay down your life for the sake of the Gospel, give all that you have, hold nothing back. Why? Because we’re responding to everything that’s been given to us.

### **Give first to God**

There’s a challenge in the Bible to give and in terms of what we give, it says this in Proverbs 3:9: *“Honour the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce”*. The Bible challenges us to give *first* to God. Now what does that mean for us? It means that we need to think about the priority that we put on our money.

For me, I get paid on the last Friday of every month, so the last Friday of every month my pay goes into my bank account; on the first Monday of every month, my tithe to the church comes out, because God calls us to prioritise Him above anything else. God calls us to give our first

fruits to Him, He calls us to give *in faith* to Him, He calls us to give generously to Him *first* and rely on Him for the blessings for everything else to fall into place. What we are challenged to do biblically is not to see what we have at the end of the month, to see what we might have spare after paying a few bills, to see what we have spare after a few nights out, after a few dinners at the end of the month, 'well whatever I have left after let's say the 25<sup>th</sup>, well that's what I'll give to the church'. No, God calls us to give our first fruits to Him.

In Exodus it says '*give the firstborn to the Lord*', we can see some of the objections coming to Moses, 'what if it never has another lamb?', well, trust that the Lord will provide. Where does your provision come from? It comes from Him. Who can we trust to be abundantly faithful, blessing us with everything we need? Him. We give our first fruits and trust that God will bless us after that. He's given us everything, He's given us Jesus, why would He hold anything back from us after that?

It says in Exodus 23:19: "***The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God***". Maybe the challenge here for some of us is priority, where do we prioritise our giving, do we see what we have left at the end, or do we trust God to be faithful and give to Him first? Give Him the first fruits, make Him the first thing that we give to, knowing that He is just and merciful and faithful in everything that we have, knowing and He will provide, that being obedient to Him above anything else is the most important thing. Bring the first fruits to Him, honour Him with our wealth.

So what do we give? We give everything. We hold nothing back. We bring the best to God. We come to Him first. "***Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all else will be added to you***". If we trust in Him first, worship Him first, all else will be added to us.

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### **Why Do We Give to the Church?**

Thirdly, 'Why do we give to the church?' Why are we saying that the biblical principle is to give to the church?

There may be some of you out there who give to charities on a regular basis, who give to the work of Christians all around the world, who give to Christian charities who are doing good. I'm not saying that they are bad. And I'm not saying to stop doing that. I'm saying in the abundance of your generosity continue to support them, but we give to the church first.

It says in Exodus 23:19: "***The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God***". We bring our tithe to the house of God, we support the church that we are part of, we bring to Him first. He calls us to be generous, He calls us to live abundantly. Absolutely, we should support children and we should support the work of charities that are doing good around the world, charities like Compassion, they are good things, they are doing good work, but first, we should support the house of the Lord, that's where our first fruits go, that's where our tithe goes, to the church.

I think it's interesting as well that verse 19 in Exodus 23 where it says "**bring** to the house of

the Lord” doesn’t say “give” into the house of the Lord your God. We quite often talk about “giving”, well, I was challenged when I was thinking about this, actually you can only give what is yours, I can only give someone something if it belongs to me. The passage in Exodus says “bring” to the house of the Lord your God. Your money isn’t yours, ultimately; you can’t give it, it doesn’t belong to you. “*The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it*”. Everything we have is because He’s given it to us, therefore what do we do with our money? We don’t *give* it, we *bring* it, as an offering, as worship, we bring it back to the One Who gave it to us, we *bring* it to Him, it’s all His.

We are simply stewards of what He has given us, that’s all we are, with everything that we have in this life; with our money, with our possessions, with our things, with our time, we are simply stewards of what God has given us. And we have the chance to use everything for His glory, and His worship. With all wisdom, we can sow in what God is doing, we can give to Him, we can bring all that He has given to us, to worship Him.

So why do we give to the church? We give to the house of the Lord. Why do we give? We don’t, it’s not ours to give, we bring it to the One Who gave it to us.

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I want to finish with this, I thought about it this morning while I was going through this, I was thinking it’s a lot to ask, to stand up here and say ‘I want you to bring your money’, because ultimately it’s the four of us Elders that will steward it, you won’t see it go to God, you’ll see it go to us. So I thought the final thing that I’d talk about is what *we* will do, as Elders, and I promise you this: we’ll steward your money wisely, we will prayerfully seek Jesus to where the money goes, we will seek Him first, we will hold Him above all else, we won’t be rash or make quick decisions, we will prayerfully seek Him, we will always use what is brought to this church for the glory of Jesus, and for the advancement of the Gospel.

If we don’t, if we’re not honest with you about where your money is going, if we’re shifty in answering questions about what we are spending our budget on, then I want you to challenge us! We’ll always be open, we’ll always be honest as to what we’re spending our money on, why, because it’s not ours, it’s His.

What do we want to see done with the money that you tithe to this church? We want to see the lost come to know Jesus. We want to do things in this city to make His Name famous, we want to run courses, we want to put things on, we want to equip you to go and to share the Gospel with your friends, with family, with co-workers, we want to raise you up and we want to see the lost coming.

That’s what we want to do. That’s our promise to you. That we will steward your money by leaning on God first. By being led by Him, by trusting in Him, by seeking Him for everything we do, by not being rash but by seeking Jesus, and by always working for the advancement of the Gospel and the glory of Jesus in Portsmouth. That’s what we want to see done.

It says in 1 Chronicles 17:16, David is building the temple, and he is giving so much of his money to it, he is giving so much of his possessions to it, and his attitude is this: “*who am I,*

*and what is my house, that you have brought me this far?"* That's what I want our attitude to money to be, 'who am I, and what is my house that You allow me to give into Your work, that I get to give generously into what You are doing in this city? Who am I and what is my house that You have blessed me that I can bless others?'

Maybe for some it's just about a realigning of priorities, that you give *first* to God. This morning isn't about a one-off, this is about continual faithful tithing to the church, giving back after everything that has been given to you.

My challenge is this, we could all give something, we've all been blessed by Him, we could all give, we've seen the grace and the mercy and the wonder of God, giving is a response to all that He has done.

*Father I thank you for the blessing of Jesus, Lord I thank you because You held nothing back, You gave all things to us, You gave us Him, You gave that which was most valuable to You, so that we could know You, so that we could come before You, Lord I pray that we would value nothing above You, that we wouldn't hold tightly to anything, that we would bring all that we have in worship of Your Name, Amen.*