

An Example of Giving, Part 3—Romans 15:25-29—3/24/2013

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Today we remember Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt being hailed as the Jewish Messiah.

The crowds laid palm branches down before Him as a symbol of hope in the victory the Messiah.

In our Scripture reading earlier today, we read Luke's account of that Triumphal Entry of Jesus.

And we read to the end of Luke 19 to something that about the next day that is not often commemorated in special celebration.

It was something Jesus did in the Temple both at the beginning of His earthly ministry and there at the end of His ministry.

In a very bold but not very popular move, Jesus drove out the sellers and moneychangers from the Temple.

Those merchants provided a service for people who traveled from far away and could not bring their own animals for sacrifice.

And since some came from other regions, their money currency needed to be exchanged for the local currency.

With that money, they would buy the bred, prepared animals and offerings for sacrifice in the Temple as they celebrated the feasts.

But the problem was that the Jewish leaders had made those money-changing and animal-providing services into a method for massive robbery from people.

Rather than providing a service for reasonable cost, the leaders were ripping people off, basically stealing by the huge sums of money they demanded for trading and buying.

That had made the whole Temple scene like a den of robbers, which did not make Jesus happy, did it?

Though His Father's house was to be a house of prayer for the nations, it had become a trap for thieves to pad their pockets preying on people.

And since the Jewish leaders were rich from such schemes, they did not like it when Jesus confronted them.

But Jesus cared how they conducted business.

So He displayed righteous anger and cleaned house, both at the beginning of His earthly ministry and at the end.

If you've been with us for the past two weeks in our ongoing study of Romans, Jesus' intensity about money issues should not surprise you.

Jesus cared about money in relation to worshipping God.

He cared because our money matters, as we've been learning as we near the end of Romans 15 and tie up our thoughts on that topic today.

As we think about money and giving on Palm Sunday, let's examine ourselves again and keep that image of Jesus in mind.

I've encouraged you to sit down and do some serious budgeting and evaluating how you give to God and what your heart is behind it.

I said that not because I have any idea what people give, but because the next verses address this topic.

We have plenty of needs and I want us to respond to those, but our motives and perspectives for giving are far more important.

And that's what we've been seeing as we've examined the pervasive NT mention of this collection of a gift to send to the saints in Jerusalem.

That gift and Paul's delivery of it are what he mentions in Romans 15:25-29 where we pick up our study today in verse 28.

So turn with me to Romans 15 and let's get back into our study by reading Romans 15:22-29. [READ]

We've taken a while to walk through this because of how needed it is for our times in our affluent, materialistic culture and how important this was in Paul's times and in all of his writings.

We've seen from verse 25 that Paul delayed his pursuit of frontier missions westward and went 1000 miles in the opposite direction to take this gift to Jerusalem first.

And we made our 1st point of application from Paul's serious stewardship of this gift that our giving matters.

Point #1 was that your giving matters.

Then verse 26 mentioned the example of giving by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia and we learned a 2nd point from them.

That 2nd point was that your attitude about giving matters.

The Christians in those regions were pleased to share, meaning they actually liked the idea of giving and embraced it gladly.

The Macedonian churches are described further in 2nd Corinthians 8-9 as begging to giving, giving sacrificially, and overflowing with joy to give despite being poor.

So we read some from 2nd Corinthians 8-9 to expand on the depth of what's said in those few words of Romans 15:26.

And 2nd Corinthians 8-9 further explained that the right attitude about giving is anchored in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The infinite grace of Jesus Christ to leave heaven and become a man and pay the debt of sins' penalty for us is the greatest gift of all.

So 2nd Corinthians 9 ends in verse 15 with that exclamation—
“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

Thanksgiving to God for the gift of eternal life should flow from the core of our being if we have received grace from God through Christ.

And receiving that grace transforms us into gracious people who want to give and are even cheerful givers.

So 2nd Corinthians 9:7 says we should give freely & not begrudgingly because “God loves a cheerful giver”.

Giving is a Gospel issue that makes our attitude about giving vitally important for our hearts and for others.

Then 3rdly, verse 27 taught us last week that this delight in giving is not separated from giving as a duty.

Giving is a joy and it is also an obligation and a duty.

It is a debt that we owe to others in response to spiritual ministry and in outreach to the lost world.

Verse 27 twice uses the word for indebtedness or obligation to describe the responsibility these Gentile churches had to give.

Yet they embraced that responsibility with joy because verse 27 repeats that they were pleased to do so.

So they remind us that we can delight in our duties.

We can joyfully obey what God has commanded of us because we believe His Word is for our good.

And last week we saw that the idea of returning material things for spiritual things also appears in 1st Corinthians 9 where Paul described his right to be paid for preaching.

1st Corinthians 9 and 1st Timothy 5 and other verses give us the reasons why pastors and preachers are paid.

The idea is to free up gifted leaders to do that work full-time and to support them in the work.

So Christians must embrace that responsibility for giving.

Point #3 was that your responsibility for giving matters.

Our responsibility for giving matters in the people we support and the facilities we use and in missions & outreach here & around the world.

Verse 24 in Romans 15 gave an example of seeking church support when Paul came through there on his mission to Spain.

And similarly, we owe it to the lost world to share the Gospel with them and to send the Gospel through missionaries.

We dove deeply into those 1st 3 points over the past two weeks, but I trust that brief review brings you up to date.

We've seen #1, your giving matters, #2, your attitude about giving matters, and #3, your responsibility for giving matters.

Now let's move on to point #4—your fruit of giving matters.

Point #4—your fruit of giving matters.

Read verse 28 again to see where we get that point. [READ]

We learn from this verse that our fruit of giving matters because Paul categorizes the gift of this Gentile as this fruit of theirs.

And what do we mean by fruit?

Kids—when we talk about biblical fruit, we're not talking about apples and bananas, are we?

We're talking about things like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

By spiritual fruit we mean what our lives produce, what grows out of our hearts and is on display from our lives.

And the point here is that giving is an important spiritual fruit that is produced when God saves a person.

Obviously a person can be unsaved and still give to others.

Some unbelievers give to charities & support needs and we're glad for that kind of common grace in non-Christians.

But that's not what we're talking about here.

Christian giving is distinct because it's done with faith in God as the One who provides and with faith in Christ as the One who gave us the greatest gift in Himself.

And Christian giving is also distinct because it reflects that our hearts are set on our heavenly home rather than earthly treasures.

The fruit of Christian giving is important because it shows what's in our hearts and whom we trust and what we treasure and where our ultimate home and hope is.

In verse 28, Paul wrote that he was going to complete or finish the delivery of this gift and put his seal on this fruit.

Paul wanted to officially seal this as spiritual fruit from Gentile churches who had embraced the Gospel.

He wanted to frame up this gift as the result of the Gospel changing Gentiles from hating Jews to trusting their Jewish Messiah.

These diverse ethnic groups were showing the fruit of appreciation for the Jewish heritage of their newfound faith.

That would be a powerful evidence of God's grace in the lives of the Gentiles and Paul wanted to seal that perspective personally.

Putting a seal on something was marking it as authentic.

It was like a king imprinting the special emblem of his ring into the hot wax of a scroll that was rolled up and fastened with that wax.

That hot wax seal was proof that the king's hand had sealed a scroll and it could be trusted as the real thing from the king.

It was authentic and verified and that was even done with sacks of fruit at times in biblical times.

And that's what Paul was saying about his delivery of this gift—he wanted it verified before the Jerusalem saints that God had indeed established churches that were loyal to Christ.

That loyalty was proven by their concern for the poor and for fellow Christians and by their care for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

It would not make sense to send financial aid to Jews unless something had changed between these opposing ethnic groups.

This family concern between such diverse peoples was not normal.

But God had done the abnormal—God had saved enemies and brought them together into one new diverse people of God.

These different local churches were then connected as brothers and sisters in God's family as part of the universal church.

That was a majestic shift in God's dealings in the world and Paul wanted to personally stamp it with that right perspective.

Their fruit of giving mattered then and our fruit of giving matters now and we need to think about that.

What does our giving say about us?

What shift or change is evident from the way we give as Christians?

Did you used to be stingy and now you want to share?

Or did you to hate certain groups of people and now you care about them and want to reach out to help them?

Did you used to have only contempt for the poor or for people trapped in various sins and now your heart is changed to have compassion and be willing to sacrifice to reach to them?

Did you formerly think always about what you could buy for yourself and all about your image and your stuff and now God is transforming you into someone who strategizes about how to give away more?

What does your giving say about what has happened or is happening in your heart by God's grace?

Or sadly, does your lack of giving raise questions about what has or maybe hasn't happened in your heart?

Do you see how your fruit of giving matters?

I've heard John MacArthur say many times, "show me a person's checkbook and I'll show you a clear view of their spiritual health"

Of course, we need to update that analogy to say show me a credit or debit card statement or whatever tracks our money.

Seeing where the money goes helps to show what's in our hearts, what we love and treasure and live for and invest in and care about.

And it shows where our focus is and where we're headed and whom we serve and trust.

Turn to Luke 12 to see a parable warning us to examine the fruit of how we handle our money.

Follow along in Luke 12:13-21. [READ]

That has to be the one of the most needed parables of our times.

I mean, how many closets do we need for stuff we accumulate?

And how many bank accounts or investment portfolios do we need for all the money we hoard?

Jesus said life is not in the abundance of our possessions.

He said what matters is our readiness for heaven for life forever.

It's not that having food and clothing are not important, but that God takes care of those things when we seek Him first for faithfulness in what He says matters.

Read on in Luke 12—read Luke 12:22-34. [READ]

Jesus was not saying that we should never plan or save because He mentioned planning elsewhere and Proverbs commends it.

But He was saying to plan first for heaven, first for right responses to His Word so we live the truths of His kingdom here on earth.

And that prepares us for His kingdom in heaven.

As Randy Alcorn sums up in *The Treasure Principle*—you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.

You can't take your money and stuff with you because moth and rust and crashing stock markets and broken appliances and other things will always drain away our earthly accounts.

And none of that can go into the grave to enter life after death.

But Jesus did say we can send treasure to heaven for later by giving today's money to His purposes.

Jesus really did say that—He gave the best investment advice available for a portfolio that will always get the best rates of return.

And note the connection that comes together in verse 34—for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

That is—your heart will follow your wallet—so if you give toward heavenly treasure, then guess where your heart will be.

And in context, that also means your heart will not be anxiously worrying about what you will wear or what you will eat or afraid of the next big bill or financial crisis.

You will be set free from slavery to such things because your faith will grow in your loving heavenly Father who is bigger than all those little things that He already does even for birds and flowers.

So listen—do you struggle with anxiety?

Do you worry about money or your home or other needs?

We all do at times, I'm sure.

Could it be that we worry because we've never given to God enough to stretch our faith beyond what we can see or control?

Could the reason we worry be that our treasures are not in heaven & so we lack experience trusting God for lesser things?

Note the connection in Luke 12 that you can also find in the parallel passage in Matthew 6.

The way to fight anxiety is with faith that trusts God enough to put Him first & invest in His treasures in heaven.

Giving is an antidote to anxiety.

Giving builds faith to fight the tight times of worry.

The temptation with worry is to hoard and not to give.

But that just makes it worse and worse because it deepens the slavery to stuff and to living by sight rather than by faith.

Instead, giving sets us free to live by faith in our heavenly Father who will always provide what we really need.

Like we saw last week in Ephesians 4:28 that the way to fight stealing or greed is to work and give, so the way to fight worry is by giving.

It may sound contrary to worldly wisdom, but that's why it's a heavenly investment strategy with spiritual power.

As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24—"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

If you love money and live for money and serve money, you will not love God and live for God and serve God.

So we must train ourselves away from the temptations & commercials and sales and ads telling us we need this or that or whatever else.

And we need to train ourselves on the path of freedom by seeking God's kingdom first and investing in His eternal rewards and trusting Him to provide.

I encourage you to read and study that parallel passage in Matthew 6 in addition to these words of Jesus in Luke 12.

Your fruit of giving matters—that's point #4.

And before you turn back to Romans 15 for our next point, let's take one more detour to read Philippians 4 where we find similar truths.

Follow along with me in Philippians 4:6-9. [READ]

Paul is basically saying the same thing about anxiety Jesus said, that we should focus on what God has revealed & leave the rest up to Him.

Then read on to Paul's example in verses 10-13. [READ]

Paul had learned through different times to be content and empowered by Christ's strength no matter what.

And he was thankful that the Philippians were learning the same lessons as evidenced by the fruit of their giving.

Read about that in verses 14-19. [READ]

Their gift supplied Paul's needs, but it really was not a gift for him alone—it was a gift to God in worship and faith and it added to their account of assurance and heavenly reward.

That's what excites me most in preaching on this topic.

Certainly I'm excited to think about what we could do as a church if we all gave more faithfully and sacrificially.

But I'm most excited about what it will do as we grow in faith & store up treasures in heaven & free ourselves from this world's worries.

I'm excited because giving grows our faith.

And as our faith grows, so does our confidence in God's goodness toward us no matter what we face.

I want us prepared for whatever we may face as Christians in a country that is growing increasingly intolerant of Christians.

We will probably face financial difficulties, but we may also face persecution for our faith and we need to be ready.

Kids—following Christ may get harder and harder to do in this country without being treated badly and facing suffering.

So I want you to be ready.

And the way to be ready is to train for growth in faith now, to make the radical, heavenly-minded decisions now that teach us to step out in faith to depend on God.

And that leads us to a last point in this section about giving, but this last point is about God's giving to us.

Point #5 is this—your faith in God's giving matters.

We've seen #1, your giving matters, #2, your attitude about giving matters, #3, your responsibility for giving matters, and #4, your fruit of giving matters.

Now point #5—your faith in GOD'S giving matters.

Let's read Romans 15:29 again to get this point. [READ]

How did Paul know this?

How was he assured of the fullness of Christ's blessing?

We have to confess that Christ had appeared to Paul and God had shown him heavenly visions and given him inspired Scripture.

Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles for the foundation of the church who was affirmed by signs and wonders.

So God's dealings with Paul were special and not normal for all times.

But I do not think Paul was referring to a special revelation of blessing here in Romans 15:29 about his arrival at Rome.

I say that because Paul did not give details and did not seem to know when his arrival in Rome would be.

And the fact is that Paul did not arrive in Rome in peaceful travel with outward worldly blessings that we might imagine.

No—if you read the final chapters of Acts, you find that Paul arrived in Rome after he'd been arrested, mistreated, sat in prison waiting for years and then only arrived after a shipwreck nearly killed him.

So we need to view verse 29 rightly in contrast to our comfort-loving times that equates blessing with worldly ease.

Paul did not believe or teach the false prosperity gospel that says God wants us to be healthy and wealthy and never have any problems.

In contrast—some of our problems are the biggest blessings God can give us because they free us from faith in ourselves and love for the world and focus us on heaven instead.

So worldly comfort and ease are not what Paul was necessarily expecting when he finally got to Rome.

But he was expecting that God would be for him, that Christ would be working for his good, and that he would experience blessing in serving Christ in the ministry of the Gospel.

He was assured of what he had written earlier in Romans 8:28 that God was working for his good in all things and therefore he could live with confidence in God's goodness for his future.

That's what he meant in verse 29.

And therefore, he had deep, anchored faith in God giving him what was good for each day of his life in each place that he went.

He was sure Christ was with him whenever he went.

So he knew he would enjoy the fullness of Christ's blessing whenever he finally was able to get to Rome.

And that's where I get this final point of application for us today—that our faith in God's giving matters.

You see, Paul had endured a lot to follow Christ and he had given up a lot and had seen God provide for his needs.

He had risked his life and would risk it again, but he had always grown in the assurance that Christ was with him.

So he was ready for what was ahead because he had faith in God's giving him what he truly needed in each day.

And he had faith in God's giving him entrance into heaven finally because of all Christ had accomplished for him.

So his faith in God's giving prepared him for the road ahead.

And this 5th & final point that our faith in God's giving matters really gets at why we can give and why we can go to hard places and do hard things.

It reminds us why we can take perceived risks or steps of faith.

We can do it because we know God will meet us there, we know He will give grace and provide what we need.

Do you trust Him for that?

Do you trust Him to work all things together for your good?

Do you trust the ways He wants to provide & how He wants you to give or are you trying to do things your own way instead?

What do your finances show you living for anyway?

That's really the bigger question that gets to the heart of it all.

The heart of it all really is the Gospel.

God has come in Jesus Christ to pay the debt of sin and give the eternal treasures of His presence forever.

So the question is this—have you received that gracious gift of God and turned to follow Him as your loving heavenly Father who will provide for all of your needs now and forever?

If you have not, then start today by turning from yourself and all the world offers and trust God's grace in Christ.

We'd love to talk with you further about that afterwards.

And if you do trust Christ, then are you training for growth in faith?

Are you setting your heart free from this world by giving to Him and enjoying His eternal investment strategy?

If Jesus came into your center of worship today like He went to the Temple the day after Palm Sunday, what would He clean out?

Gladly invite Him to do that work today.

And let's pray that we'll all grow in the fruit of giving and the faith that God will always give what we need.

Pray with me as we close.