

The Joy of Freely Giving

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on January 1, 2023

Introduction

- ❖ Happy New Year, Church. It's a rare but welcomed experience to celebrate both Christmas Day and New Year's Day as a church family. As we turnover a new year, we want to reflect on the goodness of God and his faithfulness through all the highs and lows of this past year. **And as we begin 2023, we look forward, in hopeful anticipation, of how he'll meet us in both the joys and the pains that we're sure to face this new year.**
 - Now if you're following the schedule on the sermon pew card, you thought we were starting a new series going through 1 Corinthians. And that is our plan this year, Lord-willing. But we're going to push back the start of that series for two weeks, and we'll dedicate this Sunday and the next to a short series on generosity.

- ❖ I'll be upfront with you. We're timing this with the Pledge Campaign for the current building project. Our campaign will go on until the end of this month. So we wanted to dedicate two Sundays, in the middle of this campaign, to lay out a biblical theology of generosity.
 - **We want you to generously give towards this building project – not out of guilt or pressure or a sense of obligation – but because your view of God (his greatness and his goodness) has so reoriented your affections that now you're the kind of person who rejoices to give.** It's now your joy to be generous. Only theology can do that. No marketing campaign, no sales pitch, will move the heart like good theology.

- ❖ So I've chosen two texts for us to study today and next week. One out of the Old Testament and one out of the New. **I hope to demonstrate that the people of God, under both covenants, were motivated towards generosity by the same thing – by their experience of the goodness and grace of a great and sovereign God.** And the whole point is that a personal encounter with the same God and his same goodness and grace is the one thing that's going to free your heart to generously and joyfully give.
 - Today, we'll look at a passage out of 1 Chronicles 29 and next week we'll be in 2 Corinthians 8. **What you'll notice in today's text is that the people of God – towards the latter reign of King David – are engaged in their own building project.** Like us, they're in the early fundraising phase, collecting donations from the people, from their leaders, and from their king. And what's so striking is that their staggering generosity in giving is only outmatched by their surprising joy in rejoicing.

- ❖ Now the figures that we're given of how much they gave are so astronomical that some have suggested they can't be taken literally. This must be hyperbole. This must be an exaggeration. **But what if the reason why we consider these amounts so unbelievable is because we find their joy so unfamiliar?** Maybe – because we haven't experienced that kind of ceaseless joy – that's why we have such a hard time taking these figures seriously.
 - **So friends, my goal in this sermon is to boost your joy by building up your theology.** I'll try to put you in the shoes of David and the people of God as they gave beyond their means – as their abundance of joy overflowed in a wealth of generosity. So to get in their shoes, let's consider (1) the scope of their building project, (2) the sacrificial example of their king, and (3) the source of their joyful generosity.

The Scope of Their Building Project

- ❖ Let's start by considering the scope of their building project. What was David trying to build? **It was the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem.** 1-2 Chronicles are two parts of one complete work that literally chronicles the various reigns of Israel's kings. 1 Chronicles begins with chapter after chapter of genealogies before getting to Saul, the first king of Israel. But he only gets one chapter. Because most of the attention is given to David. From chapter 11 to the end of 1 Chronicles, we're following the rise of David to the throne.
 - By chapter 29, the last chapter, we're towards the end of David's reign, and he's making preparations for his heir, Solomon, to fulfill his ambition to build a temple in Jerusalem – the capital city of Israel that David himself established.

- ❖ What becomes apparent when you read 1 Chronicles from start to finish is that this temple that David has been dreaming about for years is the final step in a bigger plan of his to establish the centrality of God within the nation of Israel.
 - That had been his ambition from the start of his reign. **And David recognized that the most symbolic way to emphasize the centrality of God was to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.** The ark, if you're not aware, was a sacred chest that represented the earthly presence of the LORD. During the wilderness years, as the people wandered, God's glory cloud would rest upon the ark, which was housed within a tent known as the tabernacle. Every time Israel arrived to a new location and made camp, the tabernacle would be set up directly in the middle of the camp.
 - **But now that Israel's wandering days are over – now that David has secured their borders and established Jerusalem as their capital – now the king wants to secure a permanent residence for the ark of God directly in the heart of the nation.** Notice, in v1, how the temple is described as a palace. He says this building project that he's preparing for his son is a great work, *“for the palace will not be for man but for the LORD God.”*

- ❖ David's point is that this building they're building is not just a place where God's people can get together and fellowship. **No, this is a sacred space where you go to be in the presence of God.** That's the purpose the temple was intended to serve. It was a palace for God.
 - But don't misunderstand him. **David knew better than to think he was building an actual house for God.** As if the LORD would actually resided there. David's theology was sound enough to know that God is spirit. That he's omnipresent. David authored Psalm 139, which starts by exalting the LORD as an omnipresent Spirit.
 - **But while David understood no structure could ever contain the infinite God, he did believe this temple would be a sacred space where the LORD would uniquely manifest himself as his people gathered to worship.**

- ❖ Friends, that's how we view a church's building. **This is where we gather to worship and to be together in the presence of God.** But let's be clear. We are *not* directly equating our church building with the temple of God. I'm not even comfortable with calling this place God's house. There's a big difference between the temple and a church's building.

- ❖ For example, for worshippers under the Old Covenant there was only one authorized place where they could go to worship God. And after it was eventually constructed, the temple was it. Try to worship God anywhere else and you're risking idolatry.
 - But for worshippers under the New Covenant, the worship of God takes place in Christ – who is the new temple (Jn 2:21) – and our worship is not limited to one location or to one type of space. **Churches can worship in any location where two or three or more are gathered in Jesus's name.** And it can take place in a variety of spaces – in a dedicated building, a rented theatre, a local school auditorium, or under a tree. **Because Christ is the ultimate temple of God – that is, you go to him now if you want to be in the presence of God – then Christian worship is very mobile and very adaptable.** Just as long as you're gathered together in Jesus's name.

- ❖ So I don't want to give the wrong impression. **I wouldn't want you to make a direct correlation between the temple in Jerusalem and our building.** But at the same time, the two are similar in the sense that a church building is designed to house the corporate worship of the church. **And in the church's corporate worship, the Lord's presence is uniquely manifested in a manner not found outside of corporate worship.** As Jesus said, in Matthew 18:20, *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*
 - **It's that particular manifestation of our omnipresent God that we long for every time we gather as the church around Word and sacrament.** We want believers and unbelievers alike to fall on their faces in worship, declaring that God is really among us (1 Cor 14:25). That's what we hope happens in our church building all the time.
 - This is what makes a church building important. **They're definitely not essential for corporate worship to take place. But a building is certainly helpful.** It's why we allocate resources to the renovation and expansion of our facilities. Because we want to maintain a sacred space where the Lord uniquely manifests himself whenever his people gather to worship.

- ❖ And there's more we could say. **Think about how the temple in Jerusalem was not just a building where sacred rituals took place. It was where ministry took place.** It's where the ministry of the Word took place – where the preaching and teaching of the Law happened. The temple is also where ministry for the poor was conducted. Where alms were given and distributed. Where the poor and needy came to find mercy and compassion. **So my point is that when David encouraged the people to give towards the construction of the temple – they were ultimately giving towards the advancement of ministry.**
 - Friends, in the same way, when you give to our building project, don't look at it as merely giving towards construction of a building. That's too narrow of a vantage point. **Look at it as giving towards all the various ministries – including the ministry of the Word and ministries for the poor that will be better facilitated by a newly expanded and remodeled building.** It's not just about a building – it's about all the ministry that can take place in and through a building.

The Sacrificial Example of Their King

- ❖ So we placed ourselves in the people's shoes by first considering the scope of their building project. Now let's consider the sacrificial example of their king. **When the people witnessed the abundant generosity of their king, they were moved to give freely and wholeheartedly.** That's the power of sacrificial generosity. It can change hearts.
 - Look with me at v2. David says, *“So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones and marble.”* That's what he already set aside in the royal treasury, earmarked for this building project.

- ❖ **Then, in v3, the king goes on to say that in addition to that, he practically empties out his personal treasury.** He says, *“I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God.”* That Hebrew word for “treasure” is a technical term referring to the king's private reserve fund. It served as insurance for the royal family against unforeseen political misfortunes or national calamities. So you normally wouldn't touch it. You wouldn't draw from it for normal projects.
 - And the amount of gold and silver mentioned in v4 are so astronomically large – estimated in the billions in modern currency – that it means David likely emptied out his personal treasury. This was not like a billionaire donating a million dollars. For that guy, a million would be a drop in the bucket.

- ❖ **That's why the size of your giving is not as important as the significance of your giving.** A million would be a hugely significant donation for most of us. But it would be insignificant for a Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk. Coming from them, it would be considered a weak donation.
 - **That's why Jesus could say, without exaggerating, that the poor widow who donated two small copper coins gave more than all the rich people who were dumping bags of gold coins into the offering box (Lk 21:1-4).** It's because they were merely giving out of their abundance, while she gave out of her poverty. Their donation was greater in size, but her's was greater in significance.

- ❖ **Well, when it came to David's donation to the temple building fund, it was great in both size and significance.** When he gave, he made a true sacrifice. He took a big risk. He gave away his safety net. His generosity was so great that it actually affected his life.
 - David essentially sacrificed the kind of lifestyle that was viewed as a divine right for any Ancient Near Eastern king. No one would've expected David to give to such a degree. **When the people saw his sacrificial example – which came at great personal cost – it freed them to likewise give sacrificially.**

- ❖ In vv6-9, we're told that the leaders and the people were inspired to make extraordinary freewill offerings. Considering the amount of gold and silver, bronze and iron, and precious stones donated – there's no question that their national GDP would've lowered significantly.

- ❖ So David wasn't the only one willing to sacrifice his lifestyle. All the people followed in his steps. Listen to v9, *“Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.”*
 - Notice how it says they gave freely. **Meaning there was nothing mandatory when it came to giving to this temple building fund.** This was not a tax. Taxes are mandatory. No one has ever freely given to a tax. But this was different. People were freely and wholeheartedly giving – and giving a lot.

- ❖ I think it's particularly interesting that the people are described as freely giving. The terminology there implies that they were freed from something. **The people were liberated to give. Which means something had been holding them back.** But after they witnessed this sacrifice by their king, that bondage was broken and they were free to freely giving.
 - What was their bondage? What was holding them back? It was the love of money. **Previously, they were enslaved to the love of money.** Perhaps not because they loved to spend a lot of money living a lavish lifestyle. They could've been rather frugal with their money, but what they loved was the security that lots of money provided or the status it gave them in the eyes of others. **Big spenders and big savers can both be enslaved to the love of money.**

- ❖ **But once they saw David freely sacrifice his personal security and spurn the status of a typical Ancient Near Eastern king, something in their hearts changed.** They were liberated to freely give in like manner. Their hearts were no longer torn between love for God and love for money. Now they had whole hearts – wholly devoted to the LORD – so they freely and wholeheartedly gave to the temple building fund.
 - Look back at v9 and notice how this effort to raise enough funds to build the temple felt nothing like a guilt-inducing push or a high-pressure campaign. **Talking about money – talking about giving away a significant portion to the LORD – it wasn't an awkward task. It was a joyful task.** It was cheerful. There was lots of rejoicing. *“Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.”*

The Source of Their Joyful Generosity

- ❖ So let's dig a little deeper and try to figure out where their joy came from. **Why was their experience of a fundraising effort so different than what most churches go through?** Pastors usually feel awkward and sound apologetic when the subject comes up. Members feel uncomfortable or annoyed. No one assumes that congregational rejoicing would be the first response to a fundraising campaign. So what was happening to the people of God in 1 Chronicles 29? What was the source of their joyful generosity? This leads to our third point.
 - The simple answer, of course, is God. God is the source. **The generosity of David and his people towards God was made possible by God himself.** David makes that abundantly clear in his prayer – when he tells the Lord that we're only giving to you what already belongs to you.

- ❖ Look at v14. *“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”* **We know David and his people donated a great amount of resources, but they knew they had absolutely nothing to boast about.** They didn’t deserve any praise or congratulations. That’s why David humbly asks, “Who am I? Who are we, Lord, that you’d enable us to give to you this freely and this generously? We don’t deserve the honor of experiencing such joy.”
 - **But the Lord, by his grace, abundantly blessed them with wealth and riches so they could turn around and give it back to the construction of a temple, to the advancement of ministry, and to the provision of a sacred space where God is uniquely present.** Listen to what David prays in v16, *“O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.”*
 - Church, we find ourselves in the same position. **Everything we have to give to God already belongs to God.** So when you give generously to the Lord, the last thing you should feel is pride. It should be gratitude – a humble gratitude for the privilege to experience a joyful generosity.

- ❖ What David is giving us in this prayer is some practical theology. He’s highlighting an attribute of God and drawing out practical implications. He knows, as well, that only good theology can move your heart and enable you to sacrificially give and to do it joyfully.
 - Look at his prayer. **Before he draws the conclusion, in v14, that everything we give to God already belongs to him – notice what he’s been highlighting – the sovereignty of God.** *“¹¹Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹²Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.”*
 - **David is emphasizing the fact that God is the Ultimate Sovereign.** Which is why he possesses absolute sovereignty over all things, including all your money and resources.

- ❖ **What are some other practical implications of the sovereignty of God?** Look at v15, *“For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding.”*
 - It’s surprising to hear David describe himself, along with his fellow Israelites, as sojourners. By now he’s secured Israel’s borders. He’s established Jerusalem as their capital. The nation is at the peak of its glory. **And yet, when David reflects on the sovereignty of God – on God’s infinite greatness and power – he acknowledges that his sovereignty as King of Israel pales in comparison.** Next to the LORD, David is but temporary sojourner on this earth. He is but a passing shadow.

- ❖ In other words, reflecting on God's sovereignty reminds us of our transient nature. That our time on earth is short. **And that, of course, reminds us of the transience of our treasures on earth.** Here moths and rust will destroy. Thieves will break in and steal. So only the fool is going to spend his passing days storing up his money and being stingy with it.
 - Sound theological reflection has that ability to loosen your grip on your earthly treasures. Especially if you're a child of God with heavenly treasures in store. **If you know the inheritance of heaven is securely yours in Christ, then why would you grip so tightly to fleeting treasures on earth?**

- ❖ Imagine a child prince who found a few small coins and goes around clinging so tightly to them. Unwilling to share them. Crying his eyes out when he loses one of them. That prince is going to grow up and one day come into possession of his royal inheritance, and then he'll realize how foolish his behavior was as a child.
 - Christian, do you see? **We would be acting even more foolishly if we cling to our money and fail to freely share it during our days on earth – since our inheritance is the kingdom of heaven itself.** In Christ, we are far richer than we think! We have no reason to be stingy.

- ❖ **And that's because we worship a God who is the complete opposite of stingy.** And he's like that because he's absolutely sovereign. If all things ultimately belong to him – including all our money and resources – then whenever you're in the middle of a fundraising campaign for a building project (just like the Israelites), it's important to remember that, in the end, God doesn't need your money. And he doesn't need a temple. Much less a church building.
 - **What God is after – is not a fancy new building – but your heart.** The Lord wants to free your heart. He wants to change it and conform it after his own.

- ❖ And how exactly is God going to do that? How is he going to change your heart? **How is he going to liberate you from the love of money, so that you can joyfully give with free hearts and whole hearts?** It'll happen the same way it happened for the OT people of God.
 - Through another sacrificial example. Performed by another king. But not just another ancient king far removed from you. But by *your* King – the King of Kings, the Ultimate Sovereign – who reigns over you. The One who deserves your highest allegiance. But the One to whom you've been utterly disloyal. But instead of giving you what you deserve, he showed you amazing grace.

- ❖ Like David, this King set aside his divine rights. Like David, he didn't just give out of his abundance. Like David, his gift was great in both size and significance. This King also made a huge sacrifice.
 - **But unlike David, this King didn't just sacrifice his lifestyle. He sacrificed his life.** Jesus gave away the most priceless treasure in all the universe – his own life – in order to win your heart and to free it from the love of money.

- ❖ **Friends, when you see, through eyes of faith, such an amazing sacrificial example – and this one done on your behalf – it cannot but change you.** Your loves and priorities are reordered. Your attitude towards money is different. You're no longer anxious when you hear exhortations to give it to the Lord and to his work. It becomes your joy. You become a cheerful giver. Just like Jesus.

- ❖ **So let me conclude with a clear and direct exhortation to our members to give – and to give generously – to this building project of ours.** Go visit the table in the lobby to learn more details. Or visit our website. Sign up for a slot to pray each week for our pledge campaign and pick up a pledge card. And go before the Lord in prayer. Perhaps even use David's prayer as a model and guide for what to pray.
 - And then determine how much of God's own money – that he has given over to you to faithfully steward – **how much does he want you to give towards the renovation and expansion of this church building, to the advancement of all the various ministries that take place here, and to the provision of a sacred space where the Lord is uniquely present whenever his people gather in his name?**