

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

How valuable are you? I don't mean, "How much money do you have?" I mean: How much are you worth? Last Sunday I presented a price tag that could be hung on you which said, "Equal in value to the blood of Jesus." God paid a lot to buy us. It cost him the life of his Son. He owns us, and that's a really good thing. Now he wants us to live for him, live as if we are his happy and willing slaves—because we are, ...to live as if he is our loving Lord and marvelous Master—because he is.

Part of living for God involves a wonderful activity called "stewardship." Stewardship is about who we are. As God's stewards we manage his stuff for him. We may refer to his stuff as 'our homes, our bodies, our church, our cars, our financial accounts,' but Psalm 24:1 says: "*The earth is the LORD's and everything in it.*" So he's the real owner. What a privilege to be trusted to manage God's things for him! We have control over everything God has entrusted to us. We can do anything we want with his stuff. Of course, God holds us accountable for our decisions. After all, he's still the owner. And we're his redeemed, forgiven, loved stewards.

Knowing this can help us fight the flesh. Our sinful flesh is always trying to get us to use God's stuff in selfish ways, as if there is no other concern except what makes us happy. But our

new self gets it. Our new self is always looking for ways to give God excellent service as we happily take up the responsibilities he has assigned to us. Our new self understands that the goal of all our stewardship is to GIVE GOD THE GLORY. | But our sinful flesh hates to glorify God. Our sinful flesh hates to learn about giving offerings to God. Our sinful flesh thinks of our offerings as a way to control what goes on at church: "If I give less and influence my friends at church to give less, I can keep the church from wasting money. Besides: what do I get for all those dollars I waste into the plate? Words, promises, yada, yada from God." Our sinful flesh sure is ugly, isn't it? | But our new self loves to ponder the truth, for instance, that God gives us more than we need—such grace! Your new self is the part of you that thinks about taking a less expensive vacation so you can be generous with God. Your new self is the part of you that works toward getting out of debt so that you can be more generous toward the hungry and especially toward people who need to know Jesus better. The new self smiles about how, in a hundred years most of the things we buy won't be around. But in a hundred years the souls of those we reach with the gospel—they'll be in heaven thanking God for putting it into the hearts of us to spread the gospel to them. Our new self sees offerings for how much they are worth in God's eyes because our

offerings make it possible to share the good news about Jesus, which makes people wise about salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). The new self says, “See? It’s not about the money. It’s about using money to GIVE GOD THE GLORY.”

I’m really glad that we get to talk about our giving today. It’s exciting to share what the Lord teaches about giving. Part of what makes it joyful is that I don’t know how much you give. I don’t want to know. Then I can treat all of you the same. And then there’s no undue pressure about your offerings from your pastor. The amount you give stays between you and your Savior. As the Bible says, “*Let each of you decide in your heart what to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves it when you give cheerfully*” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Those of you who give cheerfully have already experienced the joy of generosity. And you now realize the only way to experience that kind of happiness is to give generously from a cheerful heart.

One of my favorite things to think about when it comes to giving is the fact that God doesn’t need us or our offerings. He created the whole world in six days. To put that in perspective, consider day six, when God said, “Let there be,” and all the land-based creatures sprang up from the soil. Do you know what that works out to mathematically? Reflecting on just the land creatures that

have not yet gone extinct, we know that God had to design and bring into existence 1024 pairs, male & female, of distinct kinds of animals and insects—1024 pairs every second for 24 hours straight. That’s how many kinds of animals God created on day six just by saying, “Let there be.” So if he wanted, it would be a small thing for God to say, “Let there be \$100 bills stacked from floor to ceiling inside St. John Lake City.” If my calculations last night were correct, that would be at least \$80,000,000,000. It costs only \$800,000 to operate our entire ministry for a year—that’s 7 full-time and 5 part-time workers, plus programs, utilities, and repairs. I wonder if your sinful flesh is saying what mine is: “Okay, God. Go ahead. Do the miracle. Heh, heh, I’ll never have to give another offering.” Silly sinful flesh. It’s not about the money. It’s about GIVING GOD THE GLORY (see Matthew 23:23). He doesn’t need you or me. He could do this ministry all by himself if he wanted.

But let’s look at this from God’s perspective. He’s like a mommy who is baking cookies. Her six year old child wants to help. Letting the child help will definitely slow down the process. But the mommy loves her child, wants the child near, wants the child to enjoy baking cookies.

When God decided to rely on people to spread the gospel through their

offerings of time, ability, and money, he knew this would slow down the process of building up the Church. But he loves his children, wants us near, wants us to enjoy making disciples, wants us to want the things he wants, such as rescuing people from sin through faith in Jesus, which comes when they hear the good news, much of which is paid for through offerings.

And so God waits patiently while we figure out that he knows what he's talking about when he says, "Don't be afraid. Put me first. Show that you're putting me first by giving the first part of your income as your offering." Think how the farmers used to give to the Lord before there was money. If a field was going to yield 100 bushels of grain, the first 10 bushels they took out of the field went to the Lord. This put the remaining 90 bushels at risk of wind and rain and rot. But whenever the people put God first, they found that they had more than enough for their own needs. God protected them and rewarded their faith.

Imagine if we all brought generous offerings to the Lord. The joy that our generous givers already know would spread to all. We would all have joy in the participation, joy in the results, joy in the glory God gets. God wants us all to have this kind of joy. That's why he asks us for offerings—firstfruits, generous, regular, planned. When

God's people give joyfully, not only is there enough money to support the gospel ministry, we get to see a miracle each week: God's people practicing their faith, saying, "God rescued me through Jesus. He trusts me. So I trust him." Now that's a miracle God still likes to work in our day!

It's happening here at St. John's. Many of you have already adopted the idea that the Lord gets a planned percentage of your income, rather than a random dollar amount. This fits what God reveals in Holy Scripture. I did a study of all the Bible passages that teach about giving. In every passage where the Bible teaches about giving, it does so in terms of percentages. Here are a few examples.

Even before the Lord commanded his Old Testament people to give 10%, the patriarchs were already doing so.

**Genesis 14:17-20** *Abram returned from defeating...the kings...<sup>18</sup>...Melchizedek...was priest of God Most High. <sup>19</sup>...Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. **Genesis 28:20-22** Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "...the LORD will be my God <sup>22</sup>...and of all that You give me I will give You a tenth."* So it's okay if we New Testament believers give 10%. It's ok if we give more. It's okay if we give less. As long as your offering is generous, God is going to bless you.

When Jesus saw the poor widow putting two small copper coins into the offering box at the Temple, he got really excited. It wasn't the amount—her gift was worth less than one penny. But the percentage she gave showed how much she trusted the Lord! **Luke 21:1-4** “...*she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.*” The Lord isn't teaching us to give him all we have but to trust him, like the poor widow did. I can't wait to get to heaven to find out what God did for that believing widow in the years that followed her gift.

One way to achieve giving a generous percentage is to give an offering each week. The apostle Paul talks about this in **1 Corinthians 16:1-2** where he encourages the believers to remember how the famine was affecting the poor people in Jerusalem. “*Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. <sup>2</sup>On the first day of every week, let each one of you set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*” So when you can't be here for a Sunday or two, set aside your offerings anyway and bring them the next time you come. Think about it mathematically for a moment. Let's say you make \$20,000 in a year. You have decided to give the Lord \$40. If you attend once a month and give that \$40 only when you attend, your total offering is \$480 for the year, almost 2½

%. If you bring that same \$40 offering every other week, your total offering surpasses \$1000 for the year (5%). If you set aside your offering every week, your total offering surpasses \$2000 for the year (10%). See how giving a modest offering every week results in a big percentage for Jesus?

The world knows how to raise money. Think how the world bands together to raise money for breast cancer. So many volunteers. So many donations of time. Such a big amount for research into a cure. It's wonderful! If we wanted to, we could employ all the devices the world uses to convince people to give. In our St. John's school during spirit-week recently, the children played a game called “coin wars” and raised over \$500 in just a few days. If offerings were about the money, we could have coin wars for all the members of St. John's: “And this week those who live south of Lyon Ave are taking on those who live north of Lyon Ave.” But God has a better way. When he convinces his people through his Word to give a generous percentage of their income as an offering to spread the good news about Jesus, even a small number of people can fund an ample ministry which **GIVES GOD THE GLORY**. It's never been about the money. It's always been about **GIVING GOD THE GLORY**. Let's do that with cheerful hearts.