

WE PARTNER WITH GOD WHEN WE GIVE**Exodus 25:1-8; 2 Corinthians 9:6-14****(Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-14)**

INTRO: Last summer a pastor called me and wanted to take me to lunch. I took him up on it for two reasons. The first reason you can figure out with very little imagination: I like lunch . . . and supper . . . and breakfast. I generally take people up on meal invitations – as you can probably tell.

The second reason was that I really enjoy and appreciate this young man. I have known him since he was a pre-teen and I have seen him grow into a man of God and the Brethren in Christ are extremely blessed to have him as a pastor. He served in the same town I did in PA. We actually served together in the local Ministerium, and in fact he succeeded me as president of that group. I loved watching him minister and interact with people. I knew the future was in good hands with the likes of him.

For this reason, I looked forward to catching up with him. As we sat down in the booth at Buehler's he got right to the point of why he'd asked me to lunch. He wanted to thank me. He told me he attributed some of the success he's had in ministry to me. He thanked me for encouraging him when he was a new pastor and for a particular bit of advice that he often recites to himself to this day as a reminder of the calling of a pastor. I was blown away. I had no idea. I was extremely humbled. And I was very grateful to have been one to add value to his life.

I had been an unwitting partner with God in helping Greg Starr to grow as a shepherd of the people of God. That's what happens when we give. We partner with God in the grand and perfect plan he has for humanity. And notice it's not just about what we give monetarily – giving is giving no matter what is given. As we finish out this series, let me point out how we partner with God as we give.

First, what we see in both texts we have read this morning is the fact . . .

You don't HAVE to give. You are ALLOWED to give

- While that is very true, maybe it sounds better this way, we don't have to give, we GET to give. In other words, it's our honor and privilege. It gets us in on a grand adventure and mission. It's all about partnership in the ultimate endeavor.
- I think I've said this before over the past month but let me remind you, giving is supposed to be from the heart and not out of obligation. Karen read earlier, *You are to receive the offering for ME FROM EVERYONE WHOSE HEART PROMPTS THEM TO GIVE*. Exodus 25:2. This means literally, everyone whose heart makes them willing to give. Paul makes a similar claim, *Each of you should give WHAT YOU HAVE DECIDED IN YOUR HEART TO GIVE, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*. 1 Corinthians 9:7. Is Paul being manipulative? Maybe a little. After all, he's Paul. But he was being mostly spot on. He is not saying God hates a grudging giver – he is saying, in Peterson's words, *God loves it when the giver delights in the giving*. 2 Corinthians 9:7 (The Message). That's why it is extremely true that "*The source of giving is the heart and not the purse.*" P. E. Hughes.
- And another can proclaim that genuine giving is exhilarating. We can attest to that, can we not? It is exhilarating when you look around this room and see what your giving has done. Look at your bulletin – look at the loan balance. Two years ago, we were nearing completion of a project that ended up costing \$82,700 to renovate a large part of this well-worn facility. That's a lot for a little church. But not for one with a big heart. Because of your visionary giving, we had enough cash right from the start that we only needed to borrow about \$52,000. Now, two years later, you can see right here in Pat's report to us in the bulletin that we only owe \$13,716 of that \$52,000. And we project, Lord willing, we will have that paid off by the end of this year. That's exhilaration!
- But it's not just money. Twenty-five or more years ago, this congregation was in on the ground floor of an effort to reach the Bondo people in India. They were a remote, unreached people group that we knew about, I believe, because we had a Brethren in Christ in India Church leader as a part of our congregation while he attended Ashland Seminary. ABC began praying for that people group and the Bondo began turning to Christ in great numbers. We were not on the ground there in India to personally witness to those people, but our prayers and no-doubt, our giving, helped a breakthrough happen with an untouchable group. Its proof positive that generosity is far-reaching.

- It's a rush when you see the smiling face of someone you have influenced with the Gospel. It's a blessing in the extreme to partner with God in our giving whether it's monetarily or spiritually or of our time or anything else we contribute to the Kingdom. It hardly gets better than that.
- That's why, sad to say, if you are not willing to give, you will not realize the blessing of it. You miss the pure joy of seeing what God does through his giving people. I'll say it again for the gajillionth time . . .

You cannot out-give God

- Paul points this out with his agricultural illustration, that the one who sows sparingly reaps sparingly and the one who sows generously has an abundant harvest. In short, God supplies and you give.
- It's important to realize that Paul wasn't asking for himself – his teaching was not for personal enrichment. If you go back a chapter you'll know a collection was being taken up, probably for the church in Jerusalem which was struggling because of severe persecution. He was not like a slick TV preacher making empty promises, he was testifying to the fullness of reckless generosity.
- You see, God enriches FOR generosity – not so we can be enriched. I've noticed over the years that the people who are given much by our generous God are the ones who can be trusted to distribute it in a God honoring way. God amply provides for those who give generously.
- That's why Paul's words in verses 6 and 7, talking about sowing generously and without compulsion, imply that people in partnership with God never ask "How little will do?". Also, his words in verse 9 referring to "freely scattered" of gifts implies a randomness which shows an almost indiscriminate attitude of generosity. That's what I mean by giving recklessly. Let me just assure you, I'm not talking about giving stupidly, which requires little or no thought, I'm saying that reckless giving requires great faith in God.
- In fact, *And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.* 2 Corinthians 9:8, would definitely show that God makes our remaining funds adequate for what we need. All things are from God and for God. God's grace stirs up generosity.

This is the promise from El Shaddai – "The God who is enough"

- Exodus 25:1 begins with "*The Lord said . . .*" It is literally, a word from God. When the Israelites heard that, they sat up and listened. We must as well. He was calling for His people to partner with him the construction and the outfitting of the Holy Sanctuary. The promise was, "Make a sanctuary and I will dwell among you." (Exodus 25:8)
- In the same way Paul called for voluntary and joyfully given donations to the cause, that was the call for this. It was true in the Wilderness, it was true in Corinth, and it's true today, God inhabits our giving.
- And then Paul makes note that our partnership with God at the very least brings great joy and praise to God, and very likely it rubs off on others. As we wrap this talk and this series up, I want to make sure every one of you knows this . . .

What you do for ABC matters

- Do you realize that what you do here is a partnership with God? It's not just what you put in the offering basket – EVERYTHING! When you teach the kids on Sunday morning, or serve in the nursery – it matters GREATLY! When you take a meal to a person who is shut-in, you are in partnership with the living God. When you come in two weeks for Spring Clean-up. God is delighting that you delight in caring for his property. When you serve with VBS in July – God inhabits your ministry. When you give to the Baby Bottle Campaign you are breathing life into a world bent on death. You matter! Your service matters! Your giving matters! It is not unnoticed ABC!
- This is your partnership with God. What we give is an investment in eternity. Have you ever thought about that? Our stuff will be lost in the end, but what we do matters forever. Not everyone goes to Africa or India or some other exotic place, but know this, our giving and our serving is a partnership to make it possible for those who are called to do so. And besides, we have an incredible and growing mission field right in our own backyard.

Conclusion: Here's the take away: When we give, ALL of Christianity is strengthened. You see, because of our generosity the Gospel goes further. We are part of something huge because we are in partnership with God. AND we are in partnership with all the people of God, because we have a common mission and a united calling. Let's partner with God and his people.

A fitting end to this talk and this series comes from the end of the little booklet I've used as an inspiration and a resource over the past five Sundays. "*God sees. God knows. And he is glorified. The Church is furthered. The mission is advanced. And you are a part of it.*" That is what happens when you give. Amen.