

Sermon Reading: 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should 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.

Sermon Theme: First and Proportional

There are a number of different issues that individuals have with church and organized religion in general today. One is that many see church as not being practical enough for their daily lives. There's talk about the eternal, heaven, and spiritual things and not enough for me and what I face right now today. So one might think that a good place to start being more practical would be a focus on using the gifts God has given to us and how to use them in a God-pleasing way. But the problem is that, included with those gifts, is money and, in general, people don't like talking about money. They especially don't like talking about money in the church. And we really, really don't like hearing about how we should be using our money. So a series on stewardship—being a good manager and caretaker of these gifts from God—isn't usually one where people are jumping up and down in excitement to talk about it. (If this is starting to wear you down, rest assured, after this Sunday, there is only one left in this series. But again, it's an important conversation to have.)

So far we have looked at Psalm 24 that the earth is the Lord's and everything in and how that affects how I view my life. Next we learned how our God is a God of abundance which again affects how I view my life. Third we spoke about where your treasure is in Luke 12:34 and learned there is a close connection between your heart and your money. Last week we heard about generosity. Remember how David gave about 5 billion dollars to the building of the temple. Such joyful generosity! Now, I'm guessing you don't have 5 billion dollars sitting in your bank account; and yet, we too can be joyfully generous. In 1 Corinthians 16 the apostle Paul helps us with that and gives us some very practical giving advice. **Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should 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.**

Evidently the church in Jerusalem was struggling. What exactly caused it, the Bible doesn't tell us. But because of these struggles Paul was gathering a collection to help support the church. This collection in 1 Corinthians was a special jointed effort with the churches in Galatia—in the area of modern-day Turkey—to whom Paul had given these same instructions.

These words directly apply to this specific collection that is being gathered. But don't think these instructions only apply to this situation. As we read in Deuteronomy 26,

gathering of offerings is something God expects from his people and the principles Paul gives still apply to us today. So if someone asks, why do we give offerings? To a point you could simply say, God says so, and that would be good enough. But God gives us more.

Paul writes in v.2: **“On the first day of every week, each one of you should 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.”** From what it seems Christians already were gathering on Sunday. And when they were gathered, Paul tells them to set aside money for the work of the church. And by doing it at the beginning of the week it would give them the opportunity to look at what they had and, before spending it anywhere else, they would set a specific amount aside. So, they were to give to God first.

This ties back to the offerings of God’s people in the Old Testament. With the Israelites they were to give God their firstfruits. When they started harvesting their crops, they gave the first crops—fruits—to God. They didn’t give all their crops to God, but they said, “You first!” When animals were born, they didn’t sacrifice every one of them to God, but they always gave the firstborn. “You first.” Even the first born child, obviously they didn’t offer their child, but they gave a special offering for that first child. “You first.” Not all, but first.

It’s the same for us today. When we give offerings to God, “You first.” This shows God is the priority in your life and praising and thanking him with your offering is the top of your list before spending it anywhere else. It shows your love for God that carrying out his will goes before your own will. It’s a demonstration of your trust in God’s promises where you trust that God will provide enough later after you given your offering. Giving an offering, setting aside money isn’t just about the action or putting the money in the plate. It’s a confession of your faith and a fruit/product of that faith to say and to live, “You first.”

But then life happens and “You first” becomes second, third, sliding into whatever is left over. Life can overwhelm us—the house payment, the grocery bill, the insurance payment, retirement savings, school payment, clothes, bills, etc. We can start to doubt whether or not we are going to have enough. Following God’s will means saying “no” to me more often than I would like and can feel like a burden. We know that God should be the number one priority in our lives, but then we need all these things right now, my busy schedule starts to fill up even more, that check doesn’t seem to stretch as far as we would like. And then, without realizing it, what’s left? Sometimes it seems to equal out so what you have left over is a decent amount and it seems like it is just fine. But even if, in the end, it might be the same, it’s not. You can tell a difference between something that is fresh and something that is left over. Fresh vegetables aren’t even on the same playing field as those same vegetables that have been cooked and left over in the fridge for a

couple of days. “You first” and “leftovers” are worlds apart when it comes to your giving as well.

What’s truly amazing is that our Father in heaven never gives us leftovers. He gives to you first. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3:16). He gave you his firstborn Son. It doesn’t make any sense especially when we think about how we too often give God our leftovers. But that’s grace. We don’t deserve it. And still God says, “You first.” Not holding anything against you God gives you Jesus so that you have forgiveness of your sins and life with him. Even that forgiveness isn’t whatever is leftover; he abundantly pours out his love so your cup overflows. The reason we are able and willing to say, “You first” is only because God put us first. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Because God put us first with giving us his Son, we have his love. Because we have His love, we are able and want to say, “You first.”

But how much? Paul says in v.2 **each one of you should 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.”** The amount you give is going to be different from someone else. And it should be. God has blessed each us differently. But each of us has been blessed, so each and every one of us has something to give. Paul doesn’t say at what point this is supposed to start. He simply says, do it. He doesn’t say to wait until you have reached a certain financial status. He simply says, in keeping with what God has given to you. Paul does not give a dollar amount. You figure it out. He doesn’t say this is your percentage you need to give. You pick it. Those who have more aren’t to excuse themselves from considering what they give because they already give so much in their offerings. Those who have less aren’t excused thinking that the smaller amount they give might not seem to make as much of a difference. Each of you should set aside a sum of money, Paul says.

But again, how much? In the Old Testament God’s Law required his people to give 10% of their income. That Law has been fulfilled in Christ and we have been set free from that required set amount. You have been set free to decide what you will give. You are not obligated or forced by God’s Law. Paul isn’t even saying you have to give every single Sunday. He’s not saying that it has to be the same amount every time. But we are to give God first. We are to give our best from what God has given us.

But won’t this hurt the giving? Won’t our offerings go down and the budget suffer? I’ve heard it said before, “Thank goodness we don’t have to give to that much—that ten percent of my income. I couldn’t possibly afford to give that much. I have so much else that I need to spend that money on.” When you hear that you don’t need to give ten percent, what do we often think? Sadly, it’s, “I don’t have to give much at all!” But that’s not faith. That’s your sinful nature talking. God doesn’t force you to give a certain percent. Instead, he

says, "Give me your best from your heart." The truth is, if you don't want to give, don't give at all. God isn't interested in the financial statement or fulfilling a budget. God doesn't want your money without your heart.

But I know God has your heart. He claimed it as his own in baptism when he made you his child and alive in Christ. You want to give back to God because that's what God's people want to do. Faith produces works and one of those works is offerings to the Lord. So how much? I don't know. Remember: God first; My best. I can't tell you what that amount is; again it's the heart. God wants you to look at everything that he has given to you, everything that is in your life, and decide what percent you want to give to him. Consider whatever you give right now and ask yourself: am I giving to God first or is it my leftovers? Is it my best?

The best for King David was five billion dollars. The best for that widow in Luke 21 was two small copper coins. In God's sight, both amounts were equal. God doesn't want us to compare how much we give with anyone else. He's blessed us all differently. But remember he has blessed each us so everyone has something to give. God first. My best. Because God gave to us first. It's really quite fitting that we meet on Sunday for worship. Remember that it was a Sunday morning when the stone was rolled away to reveal an empty tomb. It's there where we see death swallowed up in victory, forgiveness guaranteed, and life given to us. It's there at the tomb where we are assured that God's promises had been and always would be fulfilled. It's from Jesus' rising in the grave that you too have been made alive with him. God gave Jesus first. Jesus gave his best for you. And so every Sunday we continue to celebrate what is ours through faith. And with that we have that opportunity to say to God, "You first. My best." Amen.