

Missions 3 - Partnering with Missionaries

Before Thanksgiving we examined two aspects of missions work: not only were we to take the Gospel to the world, but that the Gospel outreach is not just something to add on. Winning the world to Christ is job number one. That *starts* here at home. Then we had a little interruption as Thanksgiving came – or so it would seem.

1. The blessing of stewardship.

The question to ask before we move on to this last message in this short series on missions is, "How thankful are we?"

Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

All that we have we have by the grace of God. In our sense of thankfulness, we acknowledge our debt to God. A gift received does not create an obligation except in the heart of the one who is blessed. When you give a gift, you do so with no strings attached and no expectations to receive anything in return. This applies most specifically to salvation where there is nothing expected in return for the salvation. In our gratitude we offer ourselves up to God. Things are slightly different when it comes to all the blessings of God. We receive the blessings of God in stewardship. We are given His blessings to enjoy in order to glorify God. This is why Paul felt himself a debtor to Greek and Barbarian, to the cultured and the Cretan, to high and low.

Rom 1:14-15 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

Our blessings are given to us to bless others.

2. The missionary's plight.

It is a phenomena of modern missions that they are restricted from local support of their mission field. In another day, the ability to work was more fluid. Although Paul was free to work, he often depended on support that he received.

2Cor 8:1-8 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

2How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

3For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves;

4Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

5And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

6Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.

7Therefore, as ye abound in every *thing, in* faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and *in* all diligence, and *in* your love to us, *see* that ye abound in this grace also.

8I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

Today there are visa requirements for those who want to work. Paul depended on the spirituality of the Macedonians, but today the missionaries depend on our spirituality even more so.

3. The nuts and bolts of partnering.

As we look at our role in supporting missionaries, there are a few things we have to make sure we understand about the stewardship of the resources God gives us.

- Stewardship

We are careful to use the word *stewardship* because stewardship is foundational to all of the blessings of health, wealth, talent, and ministry. I referred to this at the beginning of the sermon but I want to make sure to emphasize this concept. A steward was one who was put in charge of his master's business. Joseph is an example of such stewardship. As a slave, a falsely accused prisoner, and then in service to the Pharaoh, Joseph was ultimately used to bless all of Egypt and preserve his own family through his stewardship. Although a steward could have great leeway in how he managed his master's business, he could be charged with mismanagement his business. He was responsible without having actual ownership. He acted in the interest of his master.

Sometimes immature Christians don't realize how significant stewardship is and their prayers reflect that. At first, they discover that God wants to bless us and so they begin to ask God for things. I don't mean to imply that it is wrong to ask for things, it's just that there is a little more to it. The purpose of prayer for God's provision is not just so we can have our fantasies fulfilled. God wants to bless us...for a purpose.

Eph 3:20-21 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,
21Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

He wants to bless us exceedingly above all that we ask or think but, as you continue reading in vs. 21, it is for *His*

glory. The idea of asking for God's blessing is not to fulfill your lusts and *your* agenda, it is for God's purposes to serve Him.

Jas 4:2-3 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

3Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts.

This mentality plagues our culture today which is filled with people complaining and comparing themselves to others. We *are* free to enjoy the blessings that God has for us.

1Tim 6:17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

However, you can tell there is something wrong when you have planned more for enjoying your blessings than you have planned for your responsibilities and service to the Lord.

God has given us not just our wealth, but our health, our talents, our friendships, our ministry. They are *not* just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of our service to Him. When Nancy was a little girl, her father heard her pray and give thanks for her meal. Her father said, "*I* worked hard for the money to put food on the table. You should be thanking *me!*" She replied, "Who gave you the strength and the job to earn the money." We have to remember that God gives us every breath, every heartbeat, the ability to get out of bed on our own two feet and it's all for serving Him.

- Whose money is it?

We have been blessed, but who do the blessings belong to? For the Christian, they belong to God. Our talents are, as it has been put, are on loan

from God. Our health, our family, our friends are *all* on loan from God. He lets us enjoy them. This is the theory behind the jubilee when debts were relieved and lands were returned to the original stewards of the land:

Lev 25:23-24 The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land *is* mine; for ye *are* strangers and sojourners with me.

24And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land.

When the Jews gave offerings of sacrifice to God, they could not boast about how much they had given. They only gave what God had given *them* to give to *Him*.

Ps 50:10-14 For every beast of the forest *is* mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills.

11I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field *are* mine.

12If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fulness thereof.

13Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

14Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

Pay special attention to vs. 14. He speaks of the sense of thanksgiving, which is the obligation we *feel* when we are thankful. Next, He tells us to pay attention to our responsibilities as stewards. *That* is what is meant by paying our vows.

We do not make a big deal about money, always pressing upon people to give. Passing the offering plate is fine, but we have gotten into the habit of using the collection box and Paypal which emphasizes the voluntary nature of giving. I have noticed how people, as a rule, can actually be generous for special needs, but it is different when it comes to our faithful stewardship on a regular basis. If talking about money makes

someone nervous, then *that* indicates a problem. There might always be a problem to some degree since we are still in the flesh, but it is baffling how many people let this get completely or greatly in the way of their stewardship. It's probably the most apparent way to see this problem revealed.

When you ask the question, "Whose money is it?" you begin to realize the severity of the problem of the church's spirituality. When you bring up the Biblical principle of tithing, or giving 10% of what God has given them, people say, "But I can't *afford* to tithe." So many Christians don't advance in their spirituality because they hold back on God.

Matt 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Malachi puts this problem into perspective:

Mal 3:8-11 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

9Ye *are* cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, *even* this whole nation.

10Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

11And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

Imagine if I were to come to dinner and then you were to see me rifling through your purse afterwards and taking money out. After giving me such a nice meal, wouldn't it be the height of

ingratitude if I proceeded to steal from you? Would you accept my excuse that I just needed what you have?

God asked the question of the Jews "Will a man rob God?" They answered "Wherein...?" God's response is "In tithes and offerings." This would be like if you asked me to hold your wallet and I just walked off with it saying, "I don't want to give it back, I need it."

All of this comes under the consideration of stewardship. God has given us blessings so we can carry out His work. How cheap we are with God when we stop to think that He gives us the larger portion, 90% to use to maintain ourselves, and only asks that we be faithful with a smaller 10%. As we grow in faith we find that God takes care of us and that we can't out give Him. But all of what we give *back* to God is for the maintenance of His work through the storehouse. In the Old Testament, the storehouse was the Temple. In the New Testament it is the church.

- It's a matter of faith.

Tithing was a principle that was established before the Law was given to Moses and it extended after age of the Law gave way to the Age of Grace. The principle of the firstfruits is all over the Bible where the first part of what we receive from His hand is given back to Him in faith. When it comes to the work of the Lord in this dispensation, we recognize that *all* belongs to Him and what we give depends on our growing faith and confidence in Him.

2Cor 9:1-8 For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you:

2For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many.

3Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready:

4Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting.

5Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as *a matter of* bounty, and not as *of* covetousness.

6But this *I say*, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

7Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

8And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may abound to every good work:

1Cor 16:1,2 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

2Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

The Corinthians were challenged to lay up in store for the work of the ministry. What they gave above the tithe was left up to them not as a matter of grudging covetousness. They were to give according to their heart. Tithing, as commended by Jesus, was just the beginning.

4. Partnering with missionaries.

We have to remember that *we* are responsible for this work. The government is not. The government doesn't have a slush fund to bail us out.

The government does not give us a stipend for carrying out the ministry. The church was not eligible for any payroll guarantee by the government. There are not businesses who pay us to do our work. We don't hold bake sales, car washes, bingo, raffles, carnivals, etc. to make the *public* pay for the Lord's work. We pay our own way to carry out the work of the Lord. Of course, when I say we pay our own way, the nice thing is that we use God's money to pay our own way.

It is in this way that we partner with missionaries.

Phi 4:10,17 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

17Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

When we give by faith we are supporting the maintenance of *this* ministry so that we can be here to extend our ministry through the missionaries. As we support them, their work is laid to our account. We can serve here, but when we give to missions we are effectively serving all across the world. We have maintained our obligations to the missionaries through our prayers and our giving. The point of this message is to not let our missionaries slip from our attention. We need to be reminded to commit a portion to give *faithfully* to missions to maintain that our commitment to them as a church. On our offering envelopes, you can designate an amount in addition to your tithes to make sure we can meet our obligation to them. We don't just have them come in and present interesting stories from the field, but we are there with them in a real and tangible way.

God has given His Son completely on the cross to secure our salvation and eternity. It is such a small thing to give ourselves back to God and there will be eternal rewards to follow.

Rom 12:1,2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.

2And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

1. The blessing of stewardship. Jas 1:17, Rom 1:14-15
2. The missionary's plight. 2Cor 8:1-8
3. The nuts and bolts of partnering. Eph 3:20-21, Jas 4:2-3, 1Tim 6:17, Lev 25:23-24, Ps 50:10-14, Matt 6:21, Mal 3:8-11, 2Cor 9:1-8, 1Cor 16:1,2
4. Partnering with missionaries. Phi 4:10,17, Rom 12:1,2