

The Church Community – Part Two - Giving

This morning, we are going to talk about the second voice in our trio called giving. The church is a giving community motivated by love.

Acts 2:45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

WOW! That is quite a mouthful! When I think about this verse, it kind of makes me uneasy and a little nervous. I start thinking about how many times I have said, “We want to be like the first church! We want to be like the church in the book of Acts!” Then I read this verse and think, “Well, maybe what I am really saying is that I want the power of the first church, but not the sacrifice of the first church!”

I mean, after all, I can’t think of a time when I ran out and sold something I had in order to meet the need of someone else. There have been times when I have sold something to meet a need within my family but not for someone else. So I guess reading this account of the first church makes me feel as if I have not lived up to what God is asking of me.

What about you? Can you think of the last time you sold something to help someone or to help the church with a need? Like you, I have a list of reasons why I do not sell and give:

People are always trying to get something for nothing! Right!
I go to work! I earn my money and I get what I want why should I give it to someone else who is not even trying to get a job or work?
Why should I give away the things I have worked hard to get?

These reasons seem valid and they seem to be in the best interest of preserving what we have obtained in this life. After all, you may think, I have paid my dues and I am earning my rewards.

Is this verse in Acts 2:45 commanding me to sell my possessions? Am I sinning against God if I do not give to help others? What does it mean to give to anyone?

Well, let's take a look at how the Word of God would answer these questions and possibly a few more...

First, we need to put this verse into the proper context. Remember where we are in the scriptures? The church has just been born of the Spirit at Pentecost. About 3000 believers had been added to this new community called "the church" and now they are attempting to kind of figure out how this is all going to work.

Now before any of you get too nervous about this portion of scripture, let me put your mind at ease about something. This is not a direct command that we must obey or we will have committed sin (everybody breath). Again think about what is happening in the 2nd chapter of Acts.

The people were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost (Jewish festival celebrating God's goodness in the harvest). While they are in Jerusalem the Spirit is poured out on the waiting disciples. These newly Spirit filled believers can be heard speaking in tongues and people begin to question what is happening. Peter preaches the message of salvation to the crowd that had gathered and about 3000 are added to the church. It is likely that most of those who were added to the church had come to Jerusalem with a plan of only staying for the feast and then returning home. The scripture tells us in Acts 2 there were at least 15 different countries or parts of the world represented at this Feast of Pentecost. Most of them had only come to participate in the feast and then go home.

God, on the other hand, had other plans. He used this gathering of the world to launch the greatest thing on earth; the church. Now the feast is over, but the newly born again believers want to stay so they can learn more about their new life. That is why the scripture tells us in Acts 2:42 that the believers, devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching and of breaking bread and prayers. It is then quite possible the reason people were selling their goods and pooling their resources was so they could stay in Jerusalem and be established in their new faith. No one would go hungry, no one would be without and everyone pitched in.

Consider what is happening here. These new believers were not commanded to sell their possessions and give to anyone who had need. So why are they giving? Why are they doing this thing? Can I give you a really simple answer? **They are doing this from the motivation of LOVE!**

Paul tells us we should be cheerful givers. Ladies and gentlemen giving is more about attitude than amount. If all you can give is 50 cents, you should not be embarrassed, but you should be thankful the Lord has made it possible to give. On the other hand, if you can give 50 dollars, but you grudgingly hand over the 50 cents then you might need to check your attitude!

God is concerned about how a person handles their resources. Stop for a moment and think about what all God has given you. He gave you life and breath. He gave you strength to be here today. God has given us more than we could ever give back. If you have a difficult time letting go of your money it may reflect ungratefulness to God.

Mark 12:41-44

41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

43 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

First, you should notice that Jesus watches the offering. The rich people threw in large amounts, but Jesus said they only gave out of their wealth. The widowed woman put in 2 copper coins, but Jesus said she gave out of her poverty.

Jesus does not condemn the rich for giving out of their wealth, but he does want us to notice that sacrifice is a part of giving unto the Lord.

We cannot have harmony with just the voice of togetherness. I know a lot of people who gather in the same place, but they are not together. In order to have harmony, we need the second voice of giving.

The Church is a community that works together and is a giving community motivated by love.

No one stood up in front of the crowd and said, “Hey everyone here is a new commandment; sell your possessions and give us the money!” No.

Giving is an act of love! When I use the word give, I am not just speaking to you about money, but of giving of your time, your talent, and of your treasure. Too often we want to just think about money when it comes to giving, but there are many times we need your time more than your money. Many times we need your talent more than your money. In the end, giving any of these things must be motivated by love!

What about you teenager? Can you give away some of your time to help? What about granny? Would you be willing to give away your talent or share a skill you have learned with someone else so they can be blessed? I know some of you single mothers are strapped and working hard just to make ends meet, but could you make that sacrifice of your income so that someone else could hear the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Why not make the sacrifice of 20 minutes after church service to be a part of a tidy-up team? I know you are wearing your Sunday clothes, but we are not asking you to scrub the floors but simply straighten the chairs, pick up paper, run the vacuum if necessary and tidy the toilet. That is all!

Why not make the sacrifice of coming EARLY to church in order to help with the music, the sound, ushering & greeting. I know it's Sunday and you want to sleep in, but God is calling each of us to make the sacrifice so we can bless this community.

There are a lot of you here today who were kind of like those people who went to Jerusalem; God got a hold of you and you've stayed around awhile. You just began hanging around us here at (insert church name), but eventually you surrendered your life and heart to the Lord. Now God is asking you to give up some of your possessions in order to help others find Jesus...

He is asking you to sell your time. What is the return? Your time invested will help others to know Jesus.

He is asking you sell your abilities. What is the return? You get the blessing of knowing God is using you to bless others.

Today I want us to imagine a church (by that I mean YOU) willing to give because they love!

Can you see it?

Can you imagine it?

Can you see a church that comes together and when there are needs presented the church responds by sacrificially giving whatever they possess so the need can be met?