

## Whose Is It? And Why It Matters!

1 Chronicles 29:10-22

Pastor Mark Kremer

Well, we've been rejoicing and celebrating in the great news this morning in the gospel, and it's a little hard to shift gears from that. But I do want to share with you, as we start this morning, some more good news on a very different kind of level—but nonetheless, good news! In June of every year we let you know what our financial need is in order to finish our fiscal year the end of July, and the place we want to be—and we always put a year-end goal there. We came up just a little bit short of what we had hoped we were going to get in terms of our income but we do want to report how the year turned out. With missions and all of our ministry fund, you see that our income exceeded expenses by almost \$86,000—so we ended up in the black by a good amount. So it's a reminder—and we always say this—that it's whatever God leads you to do; you give what He tells you to give.

Then, on the other hand, we have to be good stewards, just like you are of what we are given and so we try to manage those things. I just want you to know when we end up with a surplus like that, we don't go, "Oh goodie, now we can spend a whole lot more money!" That's not how it works. Over the years we've sometimes been in the black by \$500, sometimes by amounts like this. We have saved that way a rainy day fund because we don't ever want to be presumptuous on God, and sometimes things happen and you need a little extra. So that's what we've done over the years, and that's what will happen again this year.

I want to celebrate one more thing with you. A year ago this weekend we had just about \$200,000 remaining on our mortgage. You'll remember that in November we celebrated being debt free, and today in that fund, which is our future development fund, we have over \$625,000. That's in addition to the general fund! And one of the things this is saying is, "*Hey, God, where do You want us to move forward in the future? What are the things You want us to be involved in?*" One of the things that's so important to us around here is our investment in our youth. One of the great things we did back in 2004 when we built this youth complex—30,000 square feet of space, which is pretty amazing for our youth ministry—we had 6000 feet of unfinished space on the upper level. We had a need for small groups and if you put a whole bunch of kids up there with concrete floors and steel roofs, it's just like living in a tin box, and really not much good can happen. So we took those funds and carpeted and bought things so there are twenty small group meeting spaces that our youth are going to start to enjoy this Wednesday. And that's what has happened with at least some of that money that has come in! (*applause*)

Now we're very excited about that but you know we get asked all the time, "What do you attribute or what's the reason why Lincoln Berean is able to do so many things? Your people are so generous? Why are they so generous?" I mean, it really is one of those things where if we ever say there's a need or there's an opportunity, almost instantly there's a response of, "Hey, let's do this," and contributions and generosity have become a distinction of our church. I actually added it to our Discovery Class list of *distinctives* about our church for our new folks because over the course of these last fifteen years, this is no doubt one of the *distinctives* of our congregation. You are sitting among very, very generous people this morning. But the question is: what is the foundational principal behind that generosity? Where does it come from? What's the starting point of leading a generous life? It happens to be the very same starting point for leading a life of joy and peace as well, and that's what we wanted to rediscover or remind ourselves of this morning.

For some of you this will be review, okay? This is something you've known; you've understood it; so it's just a reminder because we need to be reminded. For others of you it may be brand new like it was for my wife and me twenty years ago when we came to Lincoln Berean. The very first class we took was a Crown Ministries class and it was all about finances. On the very first week of the very first class, the very first thing we did was memorize two of the verses we're going to look at this morning. They were brand new concepts for me—to really think and ponder what God says is true, and when we embrace this truth, it radically changes our lives. So let's look at it. This is found in 1 Chronicles, Chapter 29. If you have your Bibles, I encourage you to turn there, or your smart phone. Last night people pretended to be looking at the Scripture on their smart phones but the sound booth reported there were people live-streaming some kind of an athletic event. (*laughter*). I thought I wasn't hearing too many "Amen's" - just some strange yells at different points!

We're going to do verses 10-22, which is a prayer of David's, and in this prayer the core principle is contained, the foundational principle of generosity and peace and joy. But first I want to set the context for it. This is the very end of David's life. We're literally in the last chapter; he dies at the end of this chapter. But David was a man, we know, after God's own heart. He had this deep, passionate relationship with God. As we've been describing how much God loves us this morning, David was relishing in the love of God for him, and so he's described as this man with this deep passionate relationship with God.

One of the things that was on David's heart was to build a temple, a dwelling place for God among His people. This was something David wanted so badly so that God would have an appropriate place to dwell permanently among His people. But God said to him, "*No, I'm not going to let you do that. You're a man of blood and war. I'm going to let your son Solomon build the temple.*" And David accepted that. It's a good reminder that sometimes our visions and our ideas of things we'd like to see happen, while they may be great ideas, maybe we're not the right person at the right time to actually fulfill those things. So David accepted that he wasn't going to be able to do it, that Solomon would do it, but he decided that he would make all the provisions so that the temple could be built. He would get it all set up so all the materials, everything that was needed, would be available to his son Solomon.

What that meant for David, we read in the beginning of chapter 29, the first nine verses, that David poured out his own personal wealth toward the building of the temple. I mean it's recorded in tons, okay? There's 113 tons of gold, 214 tons of silver. I mean we're talking extraordinary amounts of wealth that David contributed out of his own personal possessions toward this project. And then he challenged the people to also contribute, to get a vision for this place where God could dwell among His people, where God's name could be exalted, His reputation could be enhanced. And the people responded with tons and tons and tons of their own assets—188 tons of gold, 377 tons of silver, 679 tons of iron and bronze, and wood and precious gems. As this offering was taken, I don't even know if a room like this would hold all of that. Imagine the volume of that! And at the conclusion of this offering, with everybody bringing these gifts, this is the prayer that David prays. And contained within it is his acknowledgement of these core principles that formed the life of a generous person. We pick it up in verse 10:

**So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, (the kingdom) and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor *come* from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is**

**power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name.**

(\*NASB, 1 Chronicles 29:10-13)

What is he really getting at here? What's the foundational thing that David is acknowledging before God? He says in verse 11—the first word is **Yours**; it's a possessive—and then he goes on to describe everything that belongs to God. In verse 12, he says **in Your hand**. It's another way of saying *what's in Your hand is what you have, what You possess*. He says **everything** describes material and immaterial things that are in God's hand; in summary what would you say God owns or possesses? **Everything...Everything!** God owns everything. He's the owner of it all. It's in His hand; it's in His power, both immaterial things like glory and honor and privilege and position...majesty! His own, and whatever anyone else has, whatever honor, whatever privilege, whatever position, whatever anyone has that falls into that immaterial thing...talents, abilities...God owns it!

And all material things, right? Wealth...assets...everything in heaven and on the earth...it all belongs to Him, and it belongs to Him by due right because He made it. He created it and He sustains it. Right? Nothing would exist without Him. He sustains all things, He created all things, and, therefore, they are His. He is the rightful owner of everything. How far does God's property line extend? Where's the edge? It includes **everything**. He owns it all.

But herein lies one of the biggest challenges for mankind, because man, from the very beginning, when Satan tempted him and said, "*Hey, you know, you can be your own god, right?*" He's challenging and tempting them with this idea that *you* can be an owner. "*It can be yours!*" And this is what mankind has been doing, contesting God's ownership ever since. And so we get confused about this. We start to think that my assets are mine...that my talents are mine...that my body is mine. It's, "*I can do what I want with it.*" But that's not true. God owns it all, even our time, our money, our house, our retirement funds, our relationships, our family, our associations, our friendships, my body. All things belong to God! But we're very tempted to say, "*I saved; I invested; I worked; I earned; I studied.*" But where did the ability to do those things come from? It came from Him. Everything flows from Him. He owns it all. Paul said to the Corinthians, "*What do you have that you did not receive? So why do you boast as though you did not receive it, as though you earned it...as though it's yours?*"

Now when you hear the word *disillusionment* you tend to think of it as a negative word. But it's a really positive word, because what we need in this realm is some disillusionment. We need to "dis" the "illusion" and that's what it is—that we own it. Right? We don't own it. God owns everything!

Now that will come to you either as great news or as something that you will fight and resist and resent. And your response to this truth that God owns it all is dependent on one thing. What is it? It's your view of God. Because if you see God as loving and gracious and merciful and full of justice and lovingkindness, then that's exactly whose hands you would want to have everything in, wouldn't you? Who better to be the owner of everything than a good, gracious, loving, just God? But if you see God as vindictive, controlling, manipulative, out to get you, then you're going to resist and fight this truth. But it, nonetheless, is true.

You know I had to learn this lesson about the boundary of ownership about twenty-five years ago. I was invited by a family to become the manager of one of their businesses. They owned about five or six different businesses. I dealt with the wife who managed and oversaw a few of those businesses and she told me, "You run this like an owner," and so I did. And one of the things that I began to realize was that all of their businesses were in big trouble financially. One

of their practices was a lady in their central office would call every one of the businesses in the morning and say, “Do you have any cash?” And then if you had cash in your business, she would come and get it and take it to float something in some other business. Well I said, “I can’t manage a business like this.” So I was gone for a week on a tour around the state of Minnesota promoting the business. I took our checkbook, locked it in my desk drawer and I had the key so nobody would take the cash. When I came back, I found out that the husband was not happy with me. He wanted the cash and I wasn’t doing it. And I learned the lesson—he was the owner! We parted ways; he didn’t like my management style and I didn’t like his ownership. That was the end of that. But he was the owner; he was the rightful owner to it, and so the owner needs to be consulted.

But this isn’t the end of the story. This isn’t the end of the principle that God owns it all. There’s more and it involves you and me. Pick it up in verse 14, and David says,

**“But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? (going back to the offering) For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours. (Vs. 14-16)**

Again David affirms God’s ownership of everything, but now David is in awe of another very important part of this truth. God puts in our hands *to steward His resources*. David begins with this statement, these questions of awe. They’re not real questions, but he’s just absolutely dumfounded! **Who am I and who are we?** There are two things that have David awestruck, and this offering revealed both.

The first is that the offering revealed how much of God’s resources He had entrusted to them to manage. They didn’t even realize it until this offering was taken. They are saying, “Oh my goodness! Look at everything that God has entrusted to us...to manage on His behalf.” And not only has He entrusted us, but we’re just passing through. We’re just like such temporary vapors here on earth. I mean, we’re sojourners; we’re just tenants; we’re renters. But he’s given us all of this to manage on His behalf...to steward. Wow! What an awesome thing!

This was God’s heart and design from the beginning. Back in Genesis chapter 2, when God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in this beautiful garden that He personally designed. Then He gave them this mandate, right? “Go out, fill the earth, cause it to flourish and teem with life...have dominion over it. You take what I started and gave you here in the garden; you take it and fill the whole earth with it on My behalf.” That’s always been God’s desire to be in partnership with us, for us to join Him as managers of His resources and make something really good out of it: Make something that will enhance His reputation. Make something that will advance His purposes of lovingkindness and righteousness and justice. Take what He’s given us and do something beautiful in the world with it. That’s what He’s invited us to, and David is in awe of what God has entrusted to them.

Now you may sit here this morning, and you say, “You know I don’t really have all that much.” Or you may sit here and say, “Yeah, I have a lot.” Either way you have more than you really think. You have time; you have talents; you have opportunities. You have assets; they belong to God but He’s entrusted them to you and to me to manage on His behalf. And that means not just Sunday is an important day, right? when you come to church and sing and worship. It means every single day of your life is a day of mission and purpose...stewarding what He’s put into your hands for His glory.

The second thing that David is in awe of in these verses is: he is absolutely in awe of the fact that what they were able to accomplish—the size of this gift—is just mind-blowing to David. This small band of people will be able to build this magnificent temple that will be one of the wonders of the world, and will enhance God’s reputation. It will be a place of worship, a place of joy and celebration...a place of instruction. This is going to be magnificent! And look what we’ve been able to be a part of! Look at what God has allowed us to do! He is absolutely in awe. Who are we...who am I that You would give me the privilege of accomplishing Your purposes here on earth with my resources...the resources You’ve entrusted to me! Absolutely awesome!

And when we acknowledge God’s ownership and we really latch onto this idea that we are managers and stewards, it really is exciting to think: what can I do with what I have? And this extends so much beyond when I came up in June and said, “*Hey, pray about what God wants you to give.*” This extends way beyond just your giving to the church or to a charitable organization or a Christian endeavor. This extends to how you use those resources in every facet of your life because a huge percentage of what God wants to accomplish in the world isn’t accomplished through organized religion or churches or non-profits. It happens in the workplace, in your profession, in your neighborhood and in your family when your talents are poured out and used in all kinds of places around the world and around the community.

And we’re stewards of it all. What can God do if we take seriously our role of manager of His resources? If every morning, we got up and said, “*God, today I’m going to count all that You’ve given me and I’m going to try to the very best of my ability to do what it is You want me to do with what You’ve given me to manage.*” Wow! What could be accomplished!

An interesting thing to think about is what Jesus said very clearly in Matthew chapter 6—“Because I love you and you’re My child, you don’t have to worry about what you’re going to eat or what you’re going to wear, what you’re going to drink, where you’re going to sleep because I will take care of that. I’ll provide enough,” and because you and I don’t have to worry about that, we can do what He said next. “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In other words, my attention and focus can be on stewarding His resources for His purposes, because I don’t have to spend my whole life worrying about me. He said He’s got that. He’s going to take care of us.

Now you might be tempted to say, “You know what? It sounds to me like God just wants my money; He wants my assets, but that’s not what God wants.” That’s not at all what God wants. God doesn’t want your money; He’s already got it. God doesn’t want your talents, your career; He’s already got it. God doesn’t want your body. He’s already got it. He’s actually not sure if He really likes what He got, (*laughter*) but He’s offered a free trade-in for a much superior model that will last forever. He’s got it! But David celebrates in the last three verses of this prayer what God really wants. David says in verse 17:

**Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these *things*; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make *their* offerings willingly to You. O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You; and give to my son Solomon a perfect heart to keep Your commandments, Your testimonies and Your statutes, and to do *them* all, and to build the temple, for which I have made provision.” (Vs. 17-19)**

There's one thing that God wants more than anything else. That's your heart. Actually I misled you earlier in the message because I said God owns it all. There is one thing that God never takes ownership of by force—and that is your heart. God only comes and possesses your heart when you invite Him. He so cherishes and values you as a person made in His image that He will never cross the line to forcefully take your heart. He wants you to offer that willingly to Him, because He loves you so much.

This is very important because this is why there is a hell. Hell is not the place God sends bad people. Hell is the place where when people say no to God, "I don't want God; I don't want Your lovingkindness, Your justice, Your mercy; I don't want You at all," then God says, "Okay, I'm going to give you what you asked for—a place where there will not be a trace of My goodness, My lovingkindness, My justice, My righteousness—and that is hell.

These people, at this moment in history, had a heart for God. David had a heart for God. David had a relationship with God. These people had a relationship with God, and it was because God had their whole heart that they were so excited about their role of stewarding and managing God's resources, and why they gave so generously! And David has one request in this prayer of acknowledgement and praise and thanksgiving, and his prayer is this: "God, just preserve this heart in us forever. Don't let us lose our passion, our affection for You." He prays that his son Solomon would have **a perfect heart**. That word **perfect** is a derivative of the word *shalom*. It means a flourishing heart, an undivided heart, a peaceful heart. See what God wants more than anything for you and me is to be at peace with Him, with all of His creation, in our heart. In a world full of conflict and chaos, we can be at peace if our whole affection is set on Him. We know that in the case of Solomon, he didn't pass the test when God tested his heart of affection.

There are two ways that God tends to test our hearts related to our management of His resources. One is by giving us *more*. "Will you still love Me most when I bless you with more?" That's what Solomon's test was. And you know what? He began to love the stuff. He began to think, "I'm something. I've done this myself." He failed the test and he had a divided heart and it had huge consequences in his life and the life of his nation. Sometimes God tests us with more. When you get given more, when you have talents and abilities and opportunities, and more resources that come your way, what happens to your heart? Sometimes God tests us the other way, by taking things away. Sometimes we have *less*. And again the question is: what will you do when you have less to manage? Will you still love Him when everything is stripped away?

My friend Brad had cancer a couple of years ago, and came to the place where, as a man his identity had been in what he did, and all the things he was able to accomplish, and then he found himself lying on a bed, able to do absolutely nothing for months on end. And his question going in to that was: will God be enough when I've got nothing? And he said the greatest joy from coming through that experience was to say, "Yes, God is more than enough. And while I wouldn't want to go through it again, I would...to have that kind of intimacy with God." He tests us in both directions.

So the question this morning is: does He have our hearts? Because if He has our hearts and we know His great love and we're experiencing that, then it is not hard at all to say, "God, you own it all, and I am more than happy to be a manager to the best of my ability of everything You've entrusted to me, whether that be a lot or a little. I joyfully accept that responsibility.

There's an epilogue to this prayer when David concluded verses 20-22:

**Then David said to all the assembly, "Now bless the LORD your God." And all the assembly blessed the LORD, the God of their fathers, and bowed low and did homage to the LORD and to the king. On the next day they made sacrifices to**

**the LORD and offered burnt offerings to the LORD, 1,000 bulls, 1,000 rams and 1,000 lambs, with their drink offerings and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel. So they ate and drank that day before the LORD with great gladness. (Vs. 20-22)**

You see when God has our heart, it produces joy and peace, and it produces more generosity. You want to give more; you want to be more involved in being a part of what God's doing in the world. You just can't stop yourself; it's so exciting to be a part of what God is doing. And you have this deep sense of joy and satisfaction that my life is not being wasted, my resources are not just these things that I have to manage that are His, and I get to use them for His glory, and the enhancement of His reputation—and I get to do that every single day of the week. My life has purpose.

There are many, many people in this room, and this truth has transformed their lives. That's why we as a church have been able to accomplish so much. It's why there are people around you who are doing amazing things in their businesses, in their work, in their neighborhood, in their families. They are stewarding these resources. They accept that God owns it all and they are doing amazing things. If that is not where you are, I would invite you to embrace this truth.

First I would invite you to come and give your heart wholly to God. This isn't a one-time thing; it's something we have to do every single day. Right? "God, take my heart today. Here I am. Here are the resources You've entrusted to me. Use them today; use me today as a good manager.

I also can't help but think in closing: what could we continue to see God do with all the resources that have been entrusted to us if we manage them well? What good, what beauty, what enhancement of God's reputation could come in the years to come if we embrace our role as a steward well? That will be amazing and exciting to watch!

*Father, thank You for this truth and the freedom it brings to us to allow You to have Your rightful place as owner. Thank You for the privilege You've given us as Your children to be managers...stewards. Lord, we give You our hearts this morning. We want You to possess us fully. We don't want to be divided, torn in our affections. So grant to us a perfect heart, an undivided heart, a flourishing heart that loves You as much as You love us. In Jesus' name.*

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