

LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR (PROPER 29), NOV. 22, 2020 (STEWARDSHIP) Rev. Roger A. Erdman

Lectionary Readings: 2 Chronicles 1:7-8a, 10-12; Psalm 95:1-7a; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Matthew 25:31-46

Sermon Title: *Following God's Counsel*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for The Last Sunday of the Church Year, and too, as we conclude our stewardship sermon series is from: 2 Chronicles, chapter 1.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, what if God came to you and told you that you could ask for one thing? What would you ask for? What do you want? What would you say?

In all probability, the responses might include:

- Asking for help with our children. Of course, we want our children to lead faithful, happy, and successful lives. Which is an appropriate response.
- Asking for money. Money to provide for our needs and to do good for others. Which is also an appropriate response.
- Asking for good health. Life without good health is tough.
- The want of some sort of power and influence in our lives.

I. In our Old Testament Reading for today, Solomon was asked by God to ask for anything he wanted. He chose wisdom. Why was asking for wisdom so important? With wisdom, he could be the leader that God wanted him to be.

Though God doesn't come to us in immediacy as He did to Solomon, He does come to us through His Word to give us wisdom and counsel. Therefore, some questions come to mind regarding wisdom and counsel:

- In what area of life do you believe that you need the most counsel?
- What causes the most tension, anxiety, stress, and problems within families, marriages, communities, churches, and governments?

Well, the answer is a no-brainer. It's money. We are blessed, though, because God's Word gives us some wonderful wisdom and nuggets of truth about money. Some of these we will discuss today.

For example, it seems that daily we get requests for donations. So, we have to decide whether to give and then how much to give. And so, it seems, we're in a constant state of planning how to spend our money or worrying about not having enough money. Indeed, so much of life revolves around money.

In the Bible, there are over 2,000 verses that relate to money and possessions. Some of those passages contain warnings about the misuse of money. I'll give you a couple of examples from our Lord Himself:

- Jesus said: *“If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?”* (Luke 16:11 – NIV).
- Jesus also said: *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions”* (Luke 12:15 – NIV).

Additionally, the wisdom that Solomon asked for and received is shared with us in the book of Proverbs. In the third chapter of Proverbs, Solomon tells us that a generous person is filled with wisdom and that wisdom is *“more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold”* (v 14 – NIV).

Therefore, the Lord blesses the hands of the generous. Jesus tells us: *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35).

As you can see, God's Word is full of wisdom regarding money.

II. God's Word gives us counsel regarding the importance of giving of ourselves and our money to the Lord. One of the first stories in the Bible deals with giving. Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve. They were to return an offering to God from what God had already given them. (Genesis 4:1-16).

Abel gave his best and his firstfruits to the Lord. The New Testament tells us: *“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain”* (Hebrews 11:4a). Therefore, the Lord had told Abel that He was pleased with his offering.

In contrast, Cain gave some of his crops, but he didn't give his first and best. He gave leftovers. Outwardly Cain offered his gifts to the true God, but his motivation wasn't from a heart toward God. The reason Cain's gift was displeasing to God, was because God regarded it coming from an unbelieving heart.

So, Cain was angry when his sacrifice was not accepted. And, because of Cain's hatred and jealousy toward his brother, he killed Abel and lived a life of misery and pain.

As we consider the giving of firstfruits, I want to tell you this story: There was a boy in Africa who gave his one fish to the missionary for his tithe. The missionary thanked the boy for giving his fish. Because the missionary didn't see any other fish, he asked the boy where his other nine fish were. The boy responded by telling the missionary that he was going back to the lake to catch the other nine with God's help.

This is an example of firstfruits giving. In many ways, the trust of that boy for his tithe, the giving of the tithe is the flexing of your faith muscles.

However, many don't feel they can't give so generously. God has an answer for those of us who feel we can't give generously because we have too many bills. So, hear what Jesus says in Matthew 6:

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (vv 31-33 – NIV).

III. In another aspect of the wisdom and counsel of stewardship, let me pose a question: *“What if St. James/St. Paul's had just received a check for 10 million dollars?”* Because of the large contribution, the decision is made not to take an offering for the next 25 years.

What would you say? Would you be disappointed or upset? Would you miss giving an offering to the Lord? I'm sure the answer is: *“Yes, I do want to give.”*

You see, out of love and gratitude for the Lord, we will always want to give to Him. It's Love in Christ Jesus that compels us to give (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Therefore, to those we love, we give.

Unfortunately, in our giving it seems that oftentimes people give to the church only for a project or cause. However, that's not what God wants. It is God's plan for us to give. Giving is not an option. Jesus said: *“Freely you have received, freely give”* (Matthew 10:8 - NIV). Therefore, in our giving, we express our gratitude for all that God has done and gives to us.

You see, whether or not our church needs our money, we have a purpose and a need to give. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians: *“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a certain sum of money in keeping with his income . . .”* (1 Corinthians 16:2 – NIV).

Therefore, we are to give on a regular basis as we are blessed. A person filled with God's wisdom will give his best to the Lord.

However:

- Very few of us give as generously as we could.
- Very few of us follow all of God's counsel in any area as we should: Bible study, prayer, using our spiritual gifts, serving and loving others.

Yet, God still loves us.

However, in spite of our wrong choices and sinful ways, as God loves us, He doesn't love us any less. You see, in God's ultimate love for us, He sent His eternal Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Sacrifice. As our Sacrifice, Christ died for our sins. That includes our lack of generous giving.

Because of Christ's sacrifice, each day we receive a clean slate. The Bible says: "*God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8 – NIV). Yes, Christ effected the redemption of all mankind in that act of sacrifice.

Therefore, we now count ourselves "*dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 6:11 – NIV). And the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament continues His work of sanctifying us.

And so, as we grow as disciples who seek to follow God's counsel:

- We understand more and more what God has done for us in Christ.
- We see the infinite love of God that would allow the death of His Son on the Cross.
- We are prompted by the Holy Spirit to respond to Jesus, Who gave Himself, by sharing the resources that God has given us to help meet the needs of others.

Conclusion: Dear friends in Christ, as we conclude our stewardship sermon series, we keep in mind, it's because of Christ:

- We are able to control our sinful natures.
- We are different and transformed people who live to give.

May God give to you and me the joy of giving to Him by giving to others.

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!