

What is Christian Giving?
Luke 19:1-10

Introduction

Here at the beginning of the new year I'm doing a couple of topical sermons before we launch into a series on the Laws of Love next week. I should say, the 10 Laws of Love, and by that I mean the 10 Commandments. So blow the dust off the pages of Exodus or Deuteronomy and get ready to see how those ancient commands relate to us today as we seek to love God and others.

A new series is a good time to invite folks, so if there is someone you've been waiting to invite, then do so next week. Just tell them that we're doing series on the 10 Laws of Love, and leave it at that. You can confess that misrepresentation when we get to Law 9 about "false witness/lying". Last week – prayer; this week Money/stewardship. Why?

Before I answer that, let's start with a funny story. Always a good idea, right

EX: Paul Harvey tells of woman who after finding a Butterball turkey in a deep freezer of home they purchased called the company – "we found a turkey frozen for 20 years; is it still edible?"

"Likely, but I wouldn't eat it"

"that's ok we were going to give it to the soup kitchen."

Ouch. Does our "generosity" reflect a generous heart, or is it merely a convenience, or a way to make us look good or feel better about ourselves?

Maybe it wasn't so funny after all..

How many resolutions for 2017 included issues of health, weight, exercise, spiritual growth – pray more, read the bible more, go to church more; join a small group, etc relationships, a "key word" for the year, read more, serve more, etc??

How many included "give more"?

I don't think I've ever heard that one.

Maybe it's because it comes at the heels of Christmas and we feel broke, or because we know that tax time is coming and we're not sure where we stand, or because we just really struggle with the idea of giving away what we think is ours.

Back to the question, "Why start the year talking about prayer and money?"

Both indicate where our hearts are, and honestly we need to be called to self-assessment from time to time- NOT TO PROVE SOMETHING TO God OR EARN MERIT OR FAVOR, but to keep our hearts in line with how God has designed us.

The reality is that we're prone to wonder, lord if feel it. That is part of our fallen world.

Scripture gives us some good markers or even guardrails that help us – and one of those is our view of and relationship with money.

EX: Luther quote on 3 conversions
conversion of the mind to gospel truth;
conversion of the heart to embrace the Lord Jesus as Savior and Master;
and conversion of the purse, wallet, or pocketbook, the laying of one's money at Christ's feet.

Luther may not have originated that, but he certainly knew that getting sin out of the driver's seat in relation to our money is one of the most difficult dimensions of the sinner's repentance. Today, many pastors note that when people become Christians, the last thing in their life to be touched by God's transforming grace is regularly their wallet. When directed to commit their time,

talents, and treasure to the Lord, giving him financial control starts later, goes slower, and takes longer than does the forming of the other two habits, presumably because the inner resistance is stronger.

Talking about giving is awkward because the Bible tells us that, one of the ways we really know where our own heart is in relation to the Gospel, is what we do when it comes to giving and stewardship.

Since money is an awkward topic, I'll ease into it by starting with something more comfortable, like politics.

There are two obvious traits that the recent presidential candidates had in common:

- They were both disliked/ hated/ repulsed by a majority of the American people
- They were both very RICH. Trump claimed 10 Billion. Some mock that and say, "He's only worth 1 billion at most." Hillary's worth was seen as between 100 - 200 million. A big gap, but compared to all of us, and 99.9% of the world's population, they are RICH (but compared to most of the world's population, most of us are rich).

They were hated, and they were rich. Some people hated either, or both because they are rich.

So, what do we do with someone who is filthy rich and really despised?

What is your attitude toward them?

How would you address someone like that?

How would Jesus address someone like that? What would he do for someone like that?

Luke 19:1-10

We'll look at the big sinner, the big savior, and the big financial reorientation, and then answer the question, "What is Christian Giving?"

He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:1-10 ESV)

THE BIG SINNER – Zacchaeus –

He may have been a "wee little man", but he was a big sinner. That was the verdict of the crowd- v. 7

By his own admission in v. 8 we know that he was corrupt.

In the NT you often see the phrases "tax collector and sinners" put together.

You may know that tax collectors were very unpopular in Israel (and everywhere in the Roman world). They purchased the "franchise" to collect taxes from Rome, so they were seen as collaborators. Then they collected what they wanted. The amount demanded by Rome was known only to them, so they would get what they could. Their practice would often involve fraud – v. 8. Zacchaeus was the "chief" tax collector, so he likely had a pyramid scheme under him.

He goes to see Jesus, but is certainly concerned about being in a crowd, because someone might want to harm him. So, he decides to climb a tree. This would be highly unusual for an adult man to be doing. But he is an outcast – “up and out”.

If he were a respected business man the crowd would have made room for him, but this tells us that he was desperate, so he climbed the tree. He knows that worse things would be said about him than, “Did you see Zacchaeus climb the tree?”

He wanted to see Jesus. Why? We don’t know his motivation, but he wanted to see Jesus as he passed by. The surprise came when Jesus saw him first, and said, “you come down, for I’m coming to your house today.” V. 5

THE BIG SAVIOR

At this point, Jesus becomes the object of derision – v. 6-7. Jesus is the one the people focus on; he is the one who is suspect.

** Gospel alert **

Salvation comes to us because Jesus takes the condemnation upon himself. He takes our sin upon himself.

As is always the case, Jesus initiates the saving relationship with sinners. Even the worst, most despicable sinners like Zacchaeus, and me and you.

Jesus and Zacchaeus are joyful about the arrangement, but not so the crowd. The people were praising God at the end of chapter 18 when the blind beggar Bartimaeus was healed, but when Jesus comes to this tax collector, they turn on Jesus.

THESE ARE NOT THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS, who we usually see as the self-righteous ones. This is the crowd of normal folks, who are also self-righteous. They don’t understand their own need for salvation.

Deep in the heart of everyone is the thought, “Oh God, I thank you that I’m not like him, or her, or them.”

That is how the crowd thinks of Zacchaeus, and now they are suspicious of Jesus. His understanding of salvation is that it’s big enough for even the worst of sinners, like the chief tax collector. How BIG IS YOUR view of salvation? Does it extend to those you think are beyond hope? How BIG is your view of forgiveness? Does it extend to those who have sinned against you?

Notice v. 8 – **FINANCIAL REORIENTATION**

This exchange likely took place after dinner; he “stood” up after reclining at table to eat.
Zacchaeus announces a BIG FINANCIAL REORIENTATION

This was a response initiated from within. There’s no record of him asking Jesus “what must I do?”. Nor did Jesus say, “Give everything away and come follow me.”

Zacchaeus, moved by the grace he had received, is transformed. This is very typical in the gospel of Luke. The example of Zacchaeus underscores the kind of openhanded generosity that characterizes those whose hearts have been transformed by the gospel.

What we see in the Bible and in church history, is that the Gospel makes us generous. To the degree that we see that “he who became rich, became poor” for us, we are motivated to become generous.

Being generous calls for a PLAN, and Zacchaeus lays out his plan. It is not prescriptive for all believers, but it is a good idea to have a plan. A good intention to give without a plan usually ends up like this:

“I want to give more, or start giving, BUT I didn’t set a budget and a plan and got to the end of the month and had no money left.”

SO, WHAT IS Christian GIVING?

I like what J.I.Packer says about it.

1. Christian giving is both a spiritual gift and a discipline to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Some people have the gift of giving; like some have the gift of mercy, or helps, or teaching, administration, etc Those people usually know how to make money and how to give it generously and wisely. And even if they don’t make a lot, they give it generously.

“All spiritual gifts are types of disciplines, and if we are not actively traveling the path of generous giving, it will have to be said of us straightway that we really are weak and deficient in our discipleship to and dependence upon Christ Jesus our Lord – which means that we need, urgently, to change our ways.” PACKER

For the rest of us, Christian giving is a discipline, as unto the Lord.

2. Christian GIVING is Management of God’s Money

The first thing we must be clear on is that the money we have to manage, is not ours, but God’s. It is loaned to us, and one day we will have to give an account for what we’ve done with it.

3. Christian GIVING is a Mind-set regarding God’s Money

It is an attitude and deep desire to glorify God in every area, and not settling for second-best. In Matthew 25 Jesus tells the story of a servant who simply held onto the money given him by the master so he could return it back to him. The description given of that servant is “wicked, slothful, and worthless”. That is a sobering parable if we too are displaying a lack of biblical wisdom when it comes to stewardship.

EX: a couple is in church and the wife is holding a squirmy fussy child. A Friend asks, “What the trouble with the baby?” She turns to her friend next to her and says, “Oh, he’s teething.” The friend then asks, “And your husband?” (who is sitting with a look of agony on his face). The wife responds, “Oh, he’s tithing.”

That may be too close to reality for many in the church at large (but then again, the majority of people don’t tithe, even in “evangelical circles”).

But we get the point- giving can feel painful, whether one is tithing, or giving for the first time. Is there a way out of that painful experience so we can move toward what the Bible says, “God loves a cheerful giver?”

Yes, Remember that we too were like Zacchaeus – big sinners in need of a big savior, and Jesus came and took our place, our guilt, our shame on Himself. He became poor so that we might be rich in God. To the degree that this Gospel Good News is BIG in our hearts and minds, we’ll be cheerful givers.

If giving isn’t your gift, cultivate it as a part of discipleship unto Christ.

Take a step of faith from where you are:
Non-giver — start giving

Random giver (what's left over) – become a priority giver – i.e. giving comes first Priority
Percentage giver (it's already built in to your budget and lifestyle to give a % - maybe a tithe, maybe less or more) ---- **prayerfully consider how you can grow in giving.**

How much should one give...??

This is how C. S. Lewis was thinking when he directed a correspondent who had put the question to him, "Give till it hurts."

Jesus is the ultimate model, and He didn't tithe his life or his blood.

Closing STORY

Luther's 3rd conversion – our money isn't ALWAYS the last change to happen in our lives...

EX: (Tommy Allen) I heard one pastor tell of a man who came to faith in the church and within a few months had joined a Crown Ministry group. Six months in, he walked into the pastor's study and gave a check for \$10,000. When asked why, he said, "I realized that that for the past 6 months I haven't given anything. So, this is my tithe for that period.

When we realize how Jesus gave all for us; we know we can be generous for His kingdom.

The ABC's of coming to faith –

A - Admit that you're weak and need grace and strength – That means there is GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

B- Believe that Jesus is the only savior who can heal your heart.

C- confess to God that you want to trust Jesus as your savior and Lord.

--	--