

Giving

Last week Dave took us through Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount about not judging. Luke records Jesus giving a very similar teaching in quite a different context. He says, *"Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* Luke 6:37-38

We are probably all familiar with his words about giving, but perhaps not so aware of the context of "not judging or condemning but forgiving & giving." He finishes with another of his common sayings *"For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* In Mark's gospel Jesus says this same phrase along with some other common phrases: *"Consider carefully what you hear... with the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."* Mark 4:24-25. Jesus uses this last phrase in Luke 8:16-18 where he says, *"No-one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. So consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."* Notice the slight difference on this occasion, But does that sound like Jesus' teaching? What on earth does he mean by this, *"even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him"?*

We get a clue when the disciples ask about parables in Matt 13. He tells them *"The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."* Matt 13:11-12 and *"He who has ears to hear let him hear."* Mark 4:23 Jesus is actually talking about those who receive revelation from God and those who don't.

When we think about giving we automatically think about money. Jesus has already addressed this theme: *"lay up treasure in heaven. You cannot serve God and money. Don't worry about anything, but seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness and what we need will be give to us."* Jesus says that citizens of God's Kingdom are not preoccupied with temporal material things but with eternal spiritual things. We've been given this most amazing thing of all *"the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven"*.

There might well be someone thinking to themselves, "Big deal!" But what about how I struggle with my finances, here and now. Laying up treasure in heaven! That's just

'pie in the sky when I die,' which is all very well but what about here and now; Isn't God 'Jehovah Jireh, my Provider', today?"

My wife Sandy recently spoke at the Community Bible Study from Gen 22, which is the account of Abraham being challenged by God to offer up Isaac, his son, who could not been much more than 10 years old as a sacrifice, a burnt offering! This is where the phrase '**the LORD will provide**' comes from. Sandy discovered it has nothing to do with wealth, even though God had blessed Abraham with much wealth. Jehovah Jireh is about the Lord providing a substitute sacrifice so that Abraham didn't have to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. It was a prophecy about Jesus the Lamb of God who would actually be sacrificed on that very same mountain 1900 years later to provide forgiveness and salvation for us. God's greatest provision was his own Son Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin!

The Judge of all the earth does not judge us, because his Son died in our place. So for those of us who believe in Christ, there is therefore now no condemnation. This is why we don't judge or condemn others because we have so wonderfully been released from all judgment and condemnation for our own sins. Rather we forgive because we have been so freely and generously forgiven from all our sins and the terrible debt we owe God. That is also why we give, because we have been given everything we need for life and godliness. What do God's children give? We give everything we have been given. Our love, our time, our energy and particularly the wonderful truth revealed to us, to those who do not know the Lord. We have an amazing secret to share, a story to tell and good news to pass on to others. So when we read give and it will be given to you, don't think only of finances. It applies to everything.

Next month there is going to be a conference in London called "Everything". It is at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Parliament Square. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." In earlier generations this was a common view; everything belongs to God and he is relevant to every part of daily life. But with a massive shift away from a Christian worldview nowadays God is considered to have no place in everyday life, except in a religious compartment limited to an hour on Sundays. God is considered irrelevant. But Scripture tells us 'that God placed all things under Christ's feet and appointed him to be **head over everything for the sake of church**. That is some massive deal! What does it mean? What are the implications? How are we to take part in redeeming our society and communities? Well as Dave shared last week it is no use bemoaning the loss of Christian values and taking a critical view of society and being judgmental and regressive. No! There is another way for us to be salt and light in society that blesses and increasingly brings everything under the headship of Christ – but of course it has to begin with us. God created man as head over all things on this earth, on God's behalf. But man usurped

God's delegated authority and taken it to ourselves and we rule on our behalf, for ourselves with worldly values and principles that exclude God. This conference explores ways in which we can play our part in bringing everything under the headship of Christ. The conference costs £25 on the door but only £17 if you book online now.

1. The first thing to understand about giving is the **principle of grace**.

We have been amazing spiritual riches, which we do not deserve and could never earn and God loves to pour out his blessings upon us in abundance. He calls this 'life in all its fulness'. When we understand the grace of God we put the K of G and his righteousness above everything else and treasure heavenly things more than earthly things. Realising God's grace to us makes us full of grace to others. Because we have been so blessed, we want to bless others. Grace turns us into givers, like God is The Giver. Grace motivates us to give and give and give: our love, our time, our energy, our testimony and our money. We find ourselves wanting to share what we have and what we know with our brothers and sisters and also with those who don't have what we have and don't know what we know, not in a condescending way, out of superiority or pride, but out of love and great gratitude to the Lord. Grace is the antithesis of judging and condemning and is shown by forgiving and giving. Please read Matt Hosier's article in the Nf magazine, (<http://bit.ly/gFFR4e>) if you haven't already read it. It is very important that we are serious and ruthless with sin but are completely free from criticism, judging and condemning. Instead we can be 'full of grace and truth'.

2. The second is the **principle of measures**.

As recipients of abundant blessing, God expects us to abundantly bless others. Grace gives us all different measures. We cannot say why some believers have what seems to be a much easier ride in life while others face incredible challenges. God entrust us with a measure, like the servants in the parable of the talents. Some have 5, some 2, some 1 talent. We are to rejoice in whatever we are given, much or little. We all have something to give. No one is disqualified, although like the man in the parable we do sometimes bury our talent instead of using it. As we use our talent and give our measure God ensures that others will pour into our laps "pressed down, shaken together and running over. If our measure is small, we get what we gave in return with a little extra and the result is that our measure grows. The more we give the more our capacity and our measure for giving grows. So if we choose to ration our giving, we do ourselves a disfavour. And also we deprive the person to whom we did not give generously. If we ration our love, our time, our care, our friendship, our words, our money, our homes, our lives, what return can we expect? Of course as we read the principle of measures also applies negatively. Judgement, criticism, condemnation, complaining and things like that also come back to us with interest! The measure with which we criticise will be the measure we get criticised and more!

So lets major on giving and forgiveness and avoid judging and criticising and condemning.

3. Giving Finances

We are most familiar with this principle of measures when applied to giving part of our income. Many of us set apart a tithe, 10%, of our gross income and see that as 'the Lord's'. I have done this for most of my life since I was at school! But in recent years Sandy and I fixed a monthly sum to give to the work of the church that was rather more than 10% of our income and we give other gifts and offerings in addition to this. We saw that tithing was an OT law, but under NT grace everything we have belongs to God and giving to God is about faith, not just a fixed 10%, or what we think we can afford. To be honest it has been very tight at times, managing on a considerably reduced income, but God never fails to make things up to us in some way or another. I'm sure many of you could give testimonies of how the Lord has provided for you financially over the years.

When people come and talk to me about financial difficulties I will usually ask them about their giving. They may feel – I can't afford to give – but the truth is we cannot afford not to give. If our giving is good but we are still in difficulties and it seems like we earn money to put it in a purse with holes, then we have to look at a second question. Do we focus on building our own lives while 'the house of God' needs building? Do we do what we can to build up the body of Christ at ABC? Where do we serve? Do we live as a witness? Do we follow the leadership and get behind what God is saying to us, such as coming along to prayer evenings to be part of the community of prayer God has told us we are to become? It is important for each one of us to be involved in some way in building up the house of God, the local church. When we do that, financial constraints may often suddenly get released.

Giving financially is clearly a very important application of this principle of giving. I doubt that anyone who does not cheerfully give a generous portion of their income to the Lord will be very unlikely to be giving anything else such as their time, their love and their energy in serving others.

But don't only think of giving applying to finances - it applies to everything we give. We might say 'I can't afford the time' or 'I am so tired after a busy day at work'. But I want us all to know this: that in every way we serve and give and love and help and serve and work for God's Kingdom and for the local church - God will give it back to us in some way pressed down shaken together and running over. Brothers and sisters, we can never out-give God, because God loves us and will never be indebted to us.

Phil Rogers
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