

Text: I Chronicles 29:9-18

Theme: Insights on Stewardship from an old King

Date: November 11, 2007 (Stewardship)

Dear Friends in Christ,

A great deal of time is spent by the pastors at Faith in counseling with members. This counseling is always directed by the Word of God. Some times this counseling has to do with marital matters such as faithfulness and forgiveness. Other times such as pastoral counseling has to do with financial matters in a marriage. Sometimes this is difficult to talk about because of our sinful nature. Our sinful nature doesn't like to be instructed about where our earthly blessings come from and whose they really are or how we are to use them. And yet, unless these issues are resolved in a marriage on the basis of God's Word, there can be no common joy in managing God's gifts among us.

The whole matter of joyfully managing God's gifts to us is certainly not limited to our marriages. It is a part of our congregation's spiritual life. Sometimes the spiritual life of our congregation needs counseling from the Word of God when it comes to our financial responsibilities and privileges. I say this as we are approaching the last few months of our budget year and our offerings have fallen behind our expenses in excess of \$79,000 and behind our budget by almost \$125,000. This is not what we like to hear because our sinful nature doesn't like to be reminded that all our earthly blessings really belong to God. He's just asking us to faithfully manage them. Our sinful nature doesn't like to be reminded how God wants us to joyfully use of earthly blessings to spread his Word and bring glory to his name.

Someone who had a good handle on the whole subject of financial stewardship was the man who is central to our text for today, King David. At the time of this event he was coming to the end of his days, so we have the benefit of his years of wisdom. Let's turn to this portion of Scripture now, which we might entitle: **INSIGHTS ON STEWARDSHIP FROM AN OLD KING**. God teaches us that 1) Stewardship begins with recognition of the ownership of all blessings, 2) Stewardship reveals itself with response of faith from God's people, 3) Stewardship that pleases God is motivated by joy that comes from the forgiveness of sins.

Setting the Stage

Let me set the background for our text. You may be familiar with that Old Testament nation of God's chosen people that we call the Israelites. As we read through the pages of the Old Testament we don't always see the Israelites in a positive light. They were the ones, for example, who worshipped the Golden Calf so quickly after God had miraculously delivered them out of Egypt. They were the ones who whined and complained so much about how God was mistreating them on the way to the Promised Land that He banished them to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Sometimes we remember the great individual heroes of faith in the Old Testament (Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Daniel, etc.), but as a body of believers, the Israelites seem to be defined more by their spiritual failings than their faith.

But it wasn't always that way. They did have their shining moments when they exemplified everything that is right about a healthy relationship with God. Our text is one of those times. It takes place at the end of great King David's reign. His days are numbered, and he knows it. What he really wanted to do in the twilight of his career as King was build a magnificent temple for the Lord. But the Lord told him that privilege would not be his. That honor would go to his son, Solomon. However, God did give David permission to gather all the materials and finances necessary for what would eventually become one of the great architectural wonders of the ancient world. So David goes about the gathering. He starts with himself, dedicating a lifetime of accumulated wealth for the building of this temple. He wasn't interested in constructing a pyramid or a sphinx to his glory like his counterparts in Egypt, and he wasn't interested in trying to take it with him to the grave so no one else could have it. He understood that his wealth could serve a high and noble purpose, so he gives it to the Lord.

David's actions of devotion and faith did not go unnoticed. His leaders follow suit, giving generously of their personal wealth. And that didn't go unnoticed either. Here's where we pick up our text: "The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly." Everybody gave willingly – and all of a sudden they had everything they needed. As a result of this our text tells us "David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly..." And he offers up a heartfelt and at times very personal prayer, which contains some significant insights on the believer's life of stewardship.

1. Stewardship begins with recognition of the ownership of all blessings

The first of which is this: Proper stewardship begins with recognition of where all our stuff comes from in the first place. Listen again to portions of his prayer: "Praise to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours... Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things... Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand... O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you"

It comes through pretty loud and clear, doesn't it? David understood and recognized that God is the owner of all things... and so must we. I think we do. At least intellectually. But it's one of those Bible truths which, functionally, we struggle with. Because it's one of those Bible truths which God's people have always struggled with. Centuries before our text took place another great hero of faith, Moses, had this to say to the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land: *"When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you... You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth..."*

What's Moses telling us here? He's warning us against seeing ourselves as owners, rather than managers. He's zeroing in on the tendency to see ourselves, rather than God's grace, as the cause for what we have. And when we see ourselves as the cause, we tend to become a little possessive because, after all, it's my house, my money, I earned it, etc. With these words God is calling us to repentance over our sin of claiming ownership of the blessing God in his goodness has given us to manage.

David sure didn't see things that way in our text. His first insight for us, once again: **Stewardship begins with recognition of where all our stuff comes from in the first place. It all comes from God.**

2. Stewardship reveals itself with response of faith from God's people

A recognition of where our blessings come from leads to our response. That's the second insight we can glean from our text. **King David and his people responded to the goodness and grace of God by generously giving back to God a portion of what He had first given to them.** David could very well have composed the well known stewardship hymn with which we'll close our service today: *"We give thee but thine own, whatever the gift may be, all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee."*

Let us note that when King David and his people responded to God with their generosity, they did not see it as simply providing for a need (the Temple), but something deeper. This was a way in which they could honor God. David said, *"Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things... Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name."*

Why do you think God asks us to give back to Him? Is it because He needs the money? Is it because God needs to meet and provide for the bottom line? Is it because He is demanding by nature? No to all of the above. Everything is his to begin with, remember? Then why? Why do we give back to him? Giving to God is one of the opportunities He gives us to honor Him during the time we have on earth. David and his people understood that. Do we? Do we honor the Lord with our wealth? Do we honor the Lord with our offerings? Are my offerings coming from a checkbook that is full or are they coming from a checkbook that just got done paying all the other bills. Using our wealth, not our poverty, to honor God is a response of faith. How are we honoring our God?

3. Stewardship that pleases God is motivated by joy that comes from the forgiveness of sins.

When David and his people responded in faith it led to a joy in their heart. And, this is the third insight, **David and his people derived great joy from giving to the Lord a portion of what he first gave to them.**

One of the joys that come to us through practicing Christian stewardship is the simple contentment it brings to our hearts knowing that we are following our Lord's will. Jesus lived, died and rose again so we might live forever. Until He takes us to heaven He promises to be with us and strengthen us throughout the ups and downs of our earthly journey. He asks that while on this planet (and note that in our text King David comments on the brevity of our lives by saying, *"Our days on earth are like a shadow"*) we live for Him. He asks that we manage our lives with Him at the center. And He promises to bless us as we do that. Pretty good deal, wouldn't you say?

To live for Jesus, therefore, brings us joy. To honor Him with our gifts also brings us joy. Giving to God, whether in time, talents or treasures, will not be considered a burden or an intrusion into our lives when we focus on what He has done for us.

Our sinful nature, however, sometimes views stewardship in terms of giving things up. King David and his people certainly didn't see giving to the Lord as a "downer." Rather there seems to be a lot of joy and rejoicing that is going on. It's the joy of knowing their gifts made a difference. It's the joy of knowing that in some small way they were honoring God. It's the joy of confidence in knowing that they couldn't possibly out give the God who richly and daily provides for them – and most importantly, provides them with the forgiveness of sins and eternal life...

Let's end this morning as we began – by listening to the counsel of God's Word. We'll close with the final thoughts of David's prayer: *"O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for you in building a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I see with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. O Lord, God our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you."*

May God grant us loyal hearts which recognize, respond and rejoice in the meaning of true Christian stewardship. To God alone be the glory! Amen.