

A Note on Cheerful Giving from Rev. Ben

I don't enjoy fundraising, and I am always suspicious of religious "huckster-ism." Once, when I was a hospital chaplain, a patient living on welfare told me that she had donated her last \$400 to a charming television preacher who touted prosperity and healing. I have learned over the years to be skeptical of fundraisers and to avoid talking about money at all costs.

The Scriptures, however, challenge my cynicism. **Jesus and his apostles preached about money, accepted financial support, and asked followers to give to the work of ministry.** We learn in Luke 8:3 that Jesus' followers "provided for [his ministry] out of their means." Likewise, Acts 4:32-37 tells us that the earliest Christians sold their possessions and "laid them at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need." Apparently, the early Church required capital and did not shy away from the difficult task of stewarding resources.

The Apostle Paul was no different. His letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and Philippians contain appeals for money and practical instructions for giving. Most missionaries raise funds from home to support their ministry among foreigners, but Paul did it the other way around. He asked Gentile Christians abroad to contribute to the urgent need of Jewish Christians in his homeland. **This capital campaign of sorts served a practical purpose, but it also had theological significance.** Paul writes:

By their [the Jewish Christians'] approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others... (2 Cor. 9:13)

Paul's vision was that Gentile Christians would use their money in such a way that it told the story of God's grace in their life. Paul shows us that **Christian giving demonstrates the power of the gospel.**

For this reason, he urges everyone to "give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). God doesn't need our money. The whole world is His, and He can do with it as He likes (Psalm 50:12). God wants us to be "cheerful givers" because he wants our hearts, and our hearts are always found where our treasure lies (Mt. 6:21).

The practical purpose of our building campaign is to better equip our congregation for the work of ministry through much-needed renovations to the worship and teaching spaces that we all use. This is important, but the theological purpose of our building campaign eclipses it:

We are raising money for the work of ministry because our generosity and our stewardship demonstrates the power of the gospel.

We serve a Savior who made us rich by taking on our poverty (2 Cor. 8:9), who can supply everything that we need (2 Cor. 9:8). We are free in Him to spend our money in a way that tells the story of His power and love. My prayer for our church is not only that we would give generously, but that we would give *cheerfully* – giving thanks to God for his inexpressible gift (2 Cor. 9:15).