

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Giving to Church: A Royal Waste

I. Introduction: Why Worship?

Have you ever wondered why people come to worship? There are so many other options. People could be watching TV. That is more entertaining than church. People could stay at home eating a bagel, sipping coffee and reading the newspaper. That's more relaxing than church. They could start a Sunday morning book club. That might be more intellectually stimulating than church. They could work on Sunday morning. That would be more financially rewarding than going to church.

Why would anyone bother to go to church? I believe the answer has to do with receiving and giving. First, we receive from God. Then in response to his giving, we give back to him.

At this point, you might be starting to think, "Here he goes again. This is about money." The truth is that my sermon does touch on money but it is not primarily about money. This sermon is primarily about giving yourself, something even more frightening than giving money.

II. God Gives Life

Let's begin with the Bible. Let's go all the way back to the second verse in the Bible:

Genesis 1:2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

We learn from this verse that nothing existed before God created the world. We would not be here if he did not want to make us. God could have continued being God without us. God could have continued receiving worship from the angels without us.

But God wanted you to exist. That is why you are here. Your life is God's gift to you.

III. God Continues to Give

Even after humanity rebelled against him, God continues to give. He gives us his word through prophets like Moses and Isaiah. He gives his word through evangelists like Matthew and John. He gives us his promise of forgiveness through his son Jesus Christ.

He also gives us the physical things we need. Luther explains this well when he discusses the meaning of the first article of the Apostle's Creed in the Small Catechism:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean?

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.

He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

Do you remember that from your confirmation days?

Everything you have comes from God. Therefore, you can not out-give God. God will give and give and give until you have more than you need. The only time God will not give to you is when it would be harmful to you in some way. Then, not-giving is his gift to you.

IV. No Demands

God does not demand anything in return for his gifts - period. Take as much as you want from him and he doesn't expect anything back. If you never want to give another penny to God, I want assure you that it will not hurt him. If you do not want to give anything to help the proclamation of the Gospel, then don't. It will spread without you.

If you are giving grudgingly, you should not be giving anyway. Giving grudgingly is worse than not giving. If you are upset because you feel "have" to give to the church, keep your money. God doesn't want that kind of money.

Just so that you don't think that this is my opinion, let me quote Scripture.

2 Corinthians 9:7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Don't give reluctantly. Don't give under compulsion. If you do not feel cheerful when you are giving, don't give. God doesn't want anything that doesn't come from the heart.

V. How, Then, Should We Give?

For those of you who do want to give, this is how your giving should be done. Do you remember the first time you had a crush on someone? Do you remember the joy of buying little things for him or her? Maybe it was just a candy bar or a Coke. The point isn't *what* you give. It is *to whom* you give.

When you love someone, you give just because you can. That is what giving to God is about. If you love God, you give to God.

There is a certain recklessness in it. There is a certain abandonment in it. There is a desire to see the gift burnt in the fires of love.

Look at how giving was done in the Old Testament. Animals were wealth in those days. They were given and burned up. Expensive wines were poured out, wasted, all for the love of God.

Take a New Testament example. Look at the sinful woman as recorded in Saint Luke's gospel:

Luke 7:37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

She wastes this expensive perfume out of love for Jesus. It is a waste, a royal waste. In fact, it is a waste fit only for a king.

That is how we should give. Give as a royal waste – not as a way to manipulate God or this congregation, not as a way to buy your way

into heaven, not as a way to pay our bills. Give with abandon. Give with passion. Give in a way suitable for our King.

VI. Conclusion: Worship Is Giving Yourself

I began this sermon by asking why people worship at all. The answer is that we *need* to worship. Not because our mothers make us do it. Not because our neighbors make us do it. We need to worship because we need to give ourselves to someone higher than ourselves. Deep down, we all feel this need.

Our highest act of worship is giving ourselves to God. We give him our time. We give him our love. We give him our thoughts. We give him some of everything that is important to us. Is money part of that? Of course it is. God has given you everything. Will you give him a royal waste?

May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.