

## Freely Received, Freely Give

There's an old joke about four people called Everybody, Anybody, Somebody and Nobody. The story is called "Whose job is it anyway?" There was an important job to be done. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

That's true in the workplace. It's true in the home. It's true in civil society. And unfortunately, too often, it's true in the church. Fallen human nature, left to itself, wants to do as little as possible, give as little as possible, work as little as possible, but simultaneously get as much as possible, have as much as possible, and keep as much as possible.

It's for this very reason that the world richest nations have understood, people are motivated by their own stomach. Promise a man a free lunch, and he won't work for it, he will take it and expect another one tomorrow. Tell a man he must produce so as to eat, and he becomes creative, industrious and diligent. The penalty of poverty, and the reward of riches motivate people to work, and contribute and do their thing.

When it comes to the church of God, we have a very different economy. In the first place, it's based upon a free gift. God gives the gift of eternal life to those who do not work in their own strength, but who come to Him empty-handed and freely receive what is freely given. And from there, the responses of God's people are to be free, uncoerced responses. We give to God of ourselves, and of our money, because we are free to do so, and freely want to.

But the only way this economy of freedom works, is when God's people understand how this freedom works. When understood rightly, you have churches flourishing with people serving, and people giving, and full of joy. When understood wrongly, the church begins to look like communist countries during the Cold War: everyone expecting, a very few working, very little happening, and a great deal not getting done.

Exodus chapters 35 and 36 provide us with a good example of how it is supposed to work.

This is a very special time for Israel. They have just been delivered from Egyptian slavery. They have come out of Egypt, and are headed to the land promised to them by a covenant with their ancestor, Abraham. But what defines Israel is nothing less than their God, Yahweh. He is the one they have entered into a kind of marriage with, Exodus 19 really records a wedding ceremony, where Yahweh pledges Himself to the nation, and the nation pledges itself to Yahweh. And now that they have the very basics of the law code that will govern them, the very first thing that God commands them to do, is to essentially build their King a palace.

This will be where Yahweh the King lives, and where they must go to meet Him. But there are two different things about this palace. First, it has to be portable. Israel is not yet in the land, and yet they need to have their King in their midst while they travel. So this palace has to be one that can be set up wherever Israel sojourns, and when they march again, it can be folded up and carried. The second thing is that because their King is holy, this palace has to have a special system that allows for worshippers \*\*\*\*\*

But because this King is Holy, there is a special system of construction to prevent anyone who is unclean or defiled from just barging into God's presence. There is a protective barrier, then there is

an outer bronze altar, and a basin, then there is the Holy Place, with the Golden Lampstand, and the Table of Shewbread, and finally, sealed with a curtain, is the Most Holy Place, with the Ark of the Covenant, and the Mercy Seat.

To make a palace like this will require a lot of unusual material: gold, silver, bronze, special kinds of woods, special kinds of skins and leather, precious gems and stones, and plenty of material and cloth. Now here's the thing: where are they going to get all this material? They are in a desert. Deserts are not places rich in wood, animals, or minerals. And besides, Israel is not here to stay. They are not going to start digging, and mining and smelting, and growing trees.

So where will this come from? Not only that, but what has to be made is fairly complex. Special furniture, decorative jewellery, priestly garments, ornate engravings, sturdy and portable structures. Who's going to make this? There is no market nearby to buy this stuff. They're in a desert.

4 And Moses spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, "This *is* the thing which the LORD commanded, saying: 5 `Take from among you an offering to the LORD. Whoever *is* of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the LORD: gold, silver, and bronze; 6 `blue, purple, and scarlet *thread*, fine linen, and goats' *hair*; 7 `ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; 8 `oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; 9 `onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate.

10 `All *who are* gifted artisans among you shall come and make all that the LORD has commanded: 11 `the tabernacle, its tent, its covering, its clasps, its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets; 12 `the ark and its poles, *with* the mercy seat, and the veil of the covering; 13 the table and its poles, all its utensils, and the showbread; 14 also the lampstand for the light, its utensils, its lamps, and the oil for the light; 15 `the incense altar, its poles, the anointing oil, the sweet incense, and the screen for the door at the entrance of the tabernacle; 16 the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, all its utensils, *and* the laver and its base; 17 the hangings of the court, its pillars, their sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court; 18 the pegs of the tabernacle, the pegs of the court, and their cords; 19 the garments of ministry, for ministering in the holy *place*-- the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests.'" (Exod. 35:4-19)

So what was the result? Here is the good result, when people understand God's economy.

## I. God's People Gave Willingly

20 And all the congregation of the children of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. 21 Then everyone came whose **heart was stirred**, and everyone **whose spirit was willing**, *and* they brought the LORD'S offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments.

22 They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart, *and* brought earrings and nose rings, rings and necklaces, all jewelry of gold, that is, every man who *made* an offering of gold to the LORD.

23 And every man, with whom was found blue, purple, and scarlet *thread*, fine linen, and goats' *hair*, red skins of rams, and badger skins, brought *them*. 24 Everyone who offered an offering of silver or bronze brought the LORD'S offering. And everyone with whom was found acacia wood for any work of the service, brought *it*. 25 All the women *who were* gifted artisans spun yarn with their hands, and brought what they had spun, of blue, purple, *and* scarlet, and fine linen. 26 And all the women whose heart stirred with wisdom spun yarn of goats' *hair*. 27 The rulers brought onyx stones, and the stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate, 28 and spices and oil for the light, for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense. 29 The children of Israel brought a **freewill offering** to the LORD, **all the men and women whose hearts were willing** to bring *material* for all kinds of work which the LORD, by the hand of Moses, had commanded to be done. (Exod. 35:20-29)

Even though they were in a desert, Israel had at least two things. First, they had their own personal possessions, which they brought with them out of Egypt. Second, they had the skills and abilities they had learned while slaves in Egypt.

But look what Scripture emphasises in verse 20 and 28. The ones who gave did so because their hearts were stirred. They were willing. They were desirous. They were zealous. They wanted to give. They were not reluctant, begrudging, or unhappy. Israel did a lot of murmuring, but there is no sign of it here. The ones that gave, gave happily, cheerfully, willingly.

Since they were not being forced to give, since they were giving voluntarily, what was motivating them to give? Since this was an internal motive, why did they give?

Israel gave for the same reasons we give. First, because we are grateful for what God has done. Second, we are excited for what God will yet do. Israel was thankful for deliverance from Egypt. And Israel was excited and zealous for what lay ahead: communing with God, entering the promised land.

You need both a past and a future mindset to give willingly. Thankful for what God has done, but eager to see more. I think many Christians are lacking in the second. They feel they should give to God because of salvation. But they don't think of giving out of faithful expectation of what God may yet do. So their giving becomes more like paying back a debt, than like what the Israelites were doing here.

Let me tell you what the Prosperity Gospel gets right. A false teaching like the health-wealth and prosperity Gospel can only be as successful as it is because there is an element of truth in what is otherwise a bunch of lies.

The prosperity Gospel quite rightly teaches that when God's people give to God, God meets their need. When God's people give generously, God generously repays them. Now this is taught in so many places, it is hard to miss.

Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine. (Prov. 3:9-10)

**Pro 19:17** He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given.

**Pro 22:9** He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor.

**Luk 6:38** "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

7 So *let* each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work. (2 Cor. 9:7-8)

17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:17-19)

Now the Bible doesn't teach that you give a seed offering and God will give you a hundredfold back. The Bible doesn't teach that you can command God or control Him with your faith. The Bible doesn't teach that Christians have to be rich to display that they are more than conquerors. But the Bible does teach that God's people should expect that when they give to God, God will more than meet their need. In other words, the reason you can give freely, is because there is a promise attached to your giving.

God's people should have a forward-looking faith that says, I want to give to God, because I am expectant of God doing great things.

Now this is how it goes wrong. Some Christians get the idea that because giving is supposed to be voluntary, that it is therefore optional. But that is not what the Bible teaches. It is supposed to be willing, motivated by gratitude and forward-looking faith.

But when Christians give in either to worldly stinginess, or to self-protective fear, and stop giving, the Bible likewise issues some warnings. Once again, there is a grain of truth in what the prosperity Gospel teachers teach.

24 There is *one* who scatters, yet increases more; And there is *one* who withholds more than is right, But it *leads* to poverty. 25 The generous soul will be made rich, And he who waters will also be watered himself. (Prov. 11:24-25)

**Hag 1:6** "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes."

**Hag 1:9-11** "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house.

8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, *Even* this whole nation. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you *such* blessing That *there will* not *be room* enough to *receive it*. 11 "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the LORD of hosts; (Mal. 3:8-11)

6 But this *I* say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Cor. 9:6)

When God's people refuse to give, chastening may result, often financial chastening.

You find the immature Christian who thinks that because times are tough, he needs to stop giving. But when times are tough, what we cut back on is our spending, not our giving. And we can make all necessary exceptions, and all the necessary special cases, and qualify it this way and that way, and correct all the nonsense that comes from the prosperity teachers. But when all is said and done, there remains a broad biblical truth: God's people give freely, because of **promises**: they know God will richly meet their need, and they know failing to give may bring scarcity and chastening.

They were willing. Gratitude and promises.

What controls your giving? Faith in God, or the fear of man? Does your giving say, I want to see more of God? Or does it say, I want to worry less at the end of the month?

There is a second reason why this voluntary venture was successful:

## **II. God's People Gave Sacrificially**

Think about these people. All of them are giving away fairly costly items, which they would find useful, or even precious, for personal use. But they gave them away, because they wanted to be part of what God was doing. They were honoured at the thought that their gold jewellery might form

part of the Ark, that their leather might be a curtain in the Tabernacle, that their wood might form part of the altar. So they gave, and it cost. And not only did they give their possessions, they gave themselves.

25 All the women *who were* gifted artisans spun yarn with their hands, and brought what they had spun, of blue, purple, *and* scarlet, and fine linen. 26 And all the women whose heart stirred with wisdom spun yarn of goats' *hair*. (Exod. 35:25-26)

**Exodus 36:1** "And Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whom the LORD has put wisdom and understanding, to know how to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, shall do according to all that the LORD has commanded." 2 Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work. (Exod. 36:1-2)

It is possible to give God some leftover money, and never give Him yourself. But these people gave of themselves. Sacrifice begins with giving up your time, your convenience, your comfort, your ease, so as to serve God and others.

David refused to give God what didn't cost. Why didn't he give what cost him nothing? Because he understood what the priests in Malachi did not understand: when you give God leftovers, when you give God what hardly touches you, you don't exercise faith, and you don't experience love.

The Bible gives us a beautiful example of people who understood this very well.

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God. (2 Cor. 8:1-5)

Here were some churches in Macedonia. They were going through trials. In fact, one of their trials was a lack of money. They were in poverty. But what does Paul say they did in verse 3? According to their ability, in other words, they couldn't give much, but they gave out of their lack, and in fact, Paul says, they went beyond their ability. They were the last people who were able to give, but they did.

Now if you've ever received a gift from someone who was himself or herself financially struggling, you want to refuse it. That's what Paul seems to have done. But look at verse 4: these poor people begged Paul to let them give.

Why? Because verse 5 was true in their lives: they had given themselves to the Lord. They wanted it to cost, because when it costs, it makes the gift more special.

And look at the fruit in verse 2- the abundance of deep joy.

Let me tell you why some Christians have little to no joy, why some are spiritually dragging, and waiting for something to jumpstart their Christian lives. Because they have not learnt that the posture of a Christian is one of sacrificial giving. When you give yourself to service, to giving of your time, to ministering, and to financially giving, you are being like God, who so loved the world that He gave.

Some Christians spend year after year, taking, and taking, and receiving. They've received enough sound doctrine to feed a small army of Christians. But they are bloated, stuffed, and miserable. If you do not give yourself and give from your substance, you will not experience faith. You will not be expressing love. You don't give an opportunity to see God at work. The result is a lifeless,

dreary, dead, academic Christianity.

You see, if the account of the widow giving her last mite teaches us anything, it's this- we always have something to give God. In Exodus 34:20 God commanded Israel, "And none shall appear before Me empty-handed. (Exod. 34:20). In other words, when we worship, we come to offer: our selves, our time, our abilities, our money.

God doesn't need your money. God wants your heart. And God will only have your heart when you embrace giving sacrificially.

When a church goes the opposite direction of this, you see two negative trends. The first is that people start to wear out. If you have too few people doing too much, and too many doing too little, soon the sacrificial minority start wearing out.

You see, I believe if you are faithful and sacrificial, God will meet your need as an individual. But I believe as a church, if the majority of the church is not faithful, we will experience chastening.

God's people supply God's work. The unsaved know nothing of grace, they don't have gratitude or faith in promises. We do. It's our special privilege to sacrifice for God. Moses didn't look to the Amalekites or Edomites or go asking Pharaoh to help build the Tabernacle. God's people met the need.

If you want to know the joy of the Lord, give to God sacrificially. If you just come every Sunday, and take a sermon, the food will turn to worms in your mouth before you're a mile down the road.

They give willingly, because they were motivated by thanksgiving and promises. They gave sacrificially because they wanted to exercise faith and love.

### **III. God's People Gave Abundantly**

3 And they received from Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of making the sanctuary. So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning.

4 Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, 5 and they spoke to Moses, saying, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded *us* to do." 6 So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing, 7 for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done-- indeed too much. (Exod. 36:3-7)

Here is a great problem. God's people gave more than was needed. God's people were too willing to serve, and supply. They were oversupplied, and had to actually call for a halt. Now here's a problem we'd like to see in Christian churches.

In fact, it does happen, but it only happens when the majority of God's people in a church do the first two kinds of giving: willing giving, motivated by gratitude and promise, sacrificial giving, getting joy out of the cost – that's when you get abundant giving. It's simple, you sow bountifully, you reap bountifully.

Freely you have received, freely give.

