

Who am I to Give to God?

I Chronicles 29:1-2,10-18 (NIV)

¹ Then King David said to the whole assembly: "My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God. ² With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God—gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble—all of these in large quantities. ¹⁰ David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, LORD, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. ¹¹ Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. ¹² Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. ¹³ Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. ¹⁴ "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. ¹⁵ We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. ¹⁶ LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. ¹⁷ I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. ¹⁸ LORD, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you.

To date, I have yet to be a part of building a church from scratch, but I know it's not cheap. I checked with Pastor Wayne Uhlhorn, a Mission Counselor for our national church body - the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod - to give me an idea of how much money it costs. The WELS Church Extension Fund recently approved \$2.5 million for the land and new facility of Good News Lutheran Church in Mt. Horeb, WI. Just over \$2 million was approved for the land purchase and facility construction of The Way Lutheran Church in Fredericksburg, VA. These are for churches for about 200-300 people. How much more it would be to build a church for a nation of several million people! This is the context of our first Bible reading today.

For about 500 years prior, the house of the LORD was a tent, a mobile church, the Tabernacle. David had the desire to build a permanent structure for honoring, praising, and worshiping the LORD – a temple. However, God told David through the prophet Nathan that David would not be allowed to build such a house because he was a warrior king who had shed much blood. Instead, his son would.

Although David was not allowed to build the temple to God, he was allowed to give for the building of the temple, and he eagerly took from the royal treasury as well as his own personal wealth. He also invited the congregation, the people of Israel, to give with him. You heard all the materials that were mentioned – things from gold to silver to precious stones to marble. It's hard to calculate just how much these precious materials would equate in modern day figures, but we're talking billions of dollars.

What did King David and the people think about such an exorbitant offering? Maybe that they were helping Solomon out because he was young and inexperienced or giving the building project a strong start. But that's not what we hear. David is overwhelmed with praising God for the offering that was given! "Praise be to you, LORD, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all." (verses 10-11) He didn't take credit or pat himself on the back because he and the people offered so much. Instead, he's humbled that God is so great and had given them so much. "Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?" (verse 14a)

What do you think when we take time in our worship to pass around the offering plates? Maybe for our new people here today, you haven't even seen it yet. Maybe you didn't even know that we take an offering. You might see this thing that looks like a golden casserole plate being passed around with little slips of white paper being put into it and you may wonder if you missed the memo. You might be wondering if this is the fee to attend worship here. Or you feel like you have to give because other people are giving, which will force you to scramble around for what you can add to the plate. For others, the passing of the offering plate brings a pang of guilt because you can't give much, maybe nothing at all. Maybe you feel guilty because you forgot to bring your offering envelopes or to even set aside something to give to God. Maybe the passing of the offering plate brings a little anxiety because some of you are not physically putting anything in – myself included; yet you are giving your offerings electronically. Will people think that you don't give, that you're stingy to God? Will some look down on you? Others maybe hate the passing of the offering plate because

it proves to them that “the church” is all about getting my money, almost as if this is a holy form of panhandling. Then I guess, still for others the passing of the offering plate doesn’t even give you pause because you’ve never given it a second thought that you should give any of your money to God.

Why might our attitude toward giving an offering to God be different than David’s? Is it because David has more to spare? Is it that our giving is focused on ourselves and not on God who has given me everything I have? Are our thoughts more on what we can spare instead of how overflowingly God has blessed me? Are my thoughts more on how people will evaluate my giving rather than being amazed at what a giver God is? Do I not even realize that everything I have is a gift from God? Do I feel entitled to the wealth that I have – whether great or small? Who are we to focus on ourselves when we have an opportunity to give to God? Are we serving God and others with our gift of wealth or only ourselves? Who are we to despise or dread giving an offering to God?

David knows who he is. His sin was always before him, just as he was sinful from birth. He had done evil in God’s sight. But he also knew that by God’s mercy and compassion, all his sins had been blotted out, washed away, removed from him as far as the east is from the west. He is purer than freshly fallen white snowfall. He is right with God because God out of his riches paid the price for David’s sin and covered him with God’s rich perfection.

This richness for David was done entirely by God’s promises and God’s actions, actions that gave David a descendant even greater than Solomon who built the temple to the LORD. All of this was done by Jesus Christ, God made Man, who came down from heaven and lived perfectly under the law for us in our place and paid the price for our sins with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. By doing so, God gave us a lasting inheritance with no strings attached, no debts to repay. David, us, we are cleansed and made rich by God’s actions for us. As the Apostle Paul would later write: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9) Who am I? I am rich in the LORD!

David recognized this. He was rich spiritually from God and also rich in terms of earthly wealth. He is astounded to give to God since God had given him everything first. “Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand... LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.” (verses 14b,16) David put this rich offering of money and material in its proper place. This was all from God. They got to use these temporary treasures to bring glory to God, serving God with money instead of serving money itself.

The truth is that God doesn’t want your money, and he definitely doesn’t need it. But he wants you. He wants you to be rescued from your spiritual poverty, of a life that turns inward, of a life that trusts uncertain and temporary riches instead of him, a life that ultimately would leave us poor, separated from his riches and his goodness. He instead wants you to be rich forever. He paid that price so that you could have those riches. We didn’t earn or deserve the riches of the forgiveness of sins, being covered with perfection, an inheritance of the forever joy of heaven. It’s all what God has given us, in spite of what we have done. This changes our attitude toward giving an offering to God. David said in worship, “And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.” (verse 17c)

I’ve been blessed to see that here with you, my brothers and sisters in Christ at Light of the Valley. I don’t look at individual giving reports, but Brian and Eric - our Financial Secretary and our Treasurer, respectively – they can give you the concrete numbers better than me. What I have been blessed to see is how generous you are as a group, as the body of Christ, just like David and the Israelites were. No, the next financial report won’t have that we received \$2 billion in offerings, but you are giving generously so that you have a called worker here working full time to reach people with the riches of God, so that we have a place to praise his name and thank him for all he gives us.

This is why we keep the offering as a part of our worship service. It’s not because “the church” just wants or needs your money and not for someone to show off their wealth and for others to be shamed by what they can or cannot give, but because it’s an opportunity to use the riches that God has given us to praise him and thank him, to remember where it all comes from. It helps us to realize who we are, that we are rich in God and that we want other people to have those same riches in him. So, we say with David, “I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. Keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you.” (verses 17-18)

Who are we that we give as we do? We are rich because God paid the cost of my sins, for all my selfish and greedy desires regarding money, rich because he covered me and you with the incalculable wealth of his perfection. Because we are rich in God and what he has done for us, we are rich in our giving to God, thanking him and praising him for all he gives us. Amen.