

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Title: Kingdom Building

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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We are wrapping up our stewardship campaign today. Although our stewardship continues in every arena of our lives. For instance, do you vote? If not, why not? Are you comfortable letting secularist make the decisions for our country? People quip “religion & politics don’t mix” but it has been Christians getting involved that has led to justice being established and the betterment of humanity all throughout history. We are called to make a difference in our society for Jesus and there are a number of important issues that need a Christian perspective. This is stewardship of responsibility.

There is the stewardship of time. For those of us who are workaholics; are you investing yourself in your family and marriage? Do you bring spirituality & cultivate the faith of the primary people in your lives? Living merely for the advancement of one’s own interests is a trap. A friend of mine hob nobs with the rich & famous. He has pictures all over his wall of various celebrities. He caught the impressed look in my eye & said those are some of the most unhappy people.

The stewardship season has proven annually to be the most provocative in my faith journey. A spiritual test do I put my money where my mouth is or more specific—where my heart is? It is a measure am I willing to obey God in this most difficult area—my finances. We have to tithe this amount!!!

The breadth and scope of our stewardship is seen in the fact that God is not only concerned about whether we give Him 10%, but He wants us to think about how we allocate the other 90%. We don’t get to say God here is your cut and now I will live however I want with the rest.

Don’t get me wrong you are free to enjoy life as your heart leads you, but Christianity is about the totality of our being lived with and for God. Not a disconnected compartmentalized religious side of me and my personal side.

This brings us to a type of Christianity—by the book. I have to forgive you because God says so. I have to give this money because it is biblical...

We follow the rules as we are supposed to like the owner’s manual for the car...we read it so that we know how to properly operate the vehicle. But this kind of Christianity misses out on the heart and Spirit of the author. Christianity is about the Living God moving through us, sharing His heart with us—which in turn affects our decisions—so that we bring grace and compassion to every situation we encounter.

When God gets personally involved in our hearts we become different people, no longer constrained by greed or lust, pride or ambition, but we become a people after God’s own heart.

However, if you want to do Christianity by the book & do what we’re supposed to because it is mandated, a cosmic transaction; God I give you this, now hold up your end of the bargain- It works.

Gandhi carried out the non violent principles of Jesus Christ as he led India out from under the British rule. God's ways do inherently work.

I know Christians who claim their success is a direct result of their tithing. Where did you get such a nice house? I tithe. How come your business is doing so well? I tithe. I should have been killed in that car accident as the cab of my car was caved in, but I survived because I tithe.

I would have never associated tithing to determine others areas of my life...but for these folks it is the simple reward for obedience. A woman came into my office seeking spiritual advise about her career & during the course of the conversation informed me she was hoping to get her boy friend back but she explained she was sleeping with another man to get his attention and also had still another guy on the side...so Pastor can you give me spiritual counsel about God's will for my career? What would you have said? Get your sins under control & start obeying God in the immoral areas before expecting Him to answer your prayer requests? While stop blatantly sinning is obvious to us—yet we freely ignore God in our financial areas and still expect Him to bless us and guide us.

Giving is not the same as taking on the vow of poverty. The vow of poverty means you are trying to make the statement money is not the most important issue in your life. But historically wealth seems to be a byproduct of Christianity. In Uganda when the brutal reign of Idi Amin was over, (he killed 1 out of every 6 people in his country). The nation experienced a spiritual awakening bringing about a 92% Christian populace. A noteworthy ramification of the Christian explosion in that country was an economic boom. On a continent defined by utter poverty, we see Christianity brings an elevated lifestyle. This is a historical pattern...

Don't take this the wrong way and correlate Christianity equates to material success. Yes God tells us throughout the Bible that belonging to Him is accompanied by His blessings.

Realize that in Uganda the goal was not to acquire wealth, but rather the church began taking care of the Aids victims, the homeless, the families devastated by the violence, taking care of the poor and needy. As they addressed what was important to God the blessings began to flow.

In Ezekiel 34: The Shepherds measuring stick is set forth: the sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost. This applies not only to me as a pastor, but to every Christian because we embrace the priesthood of the believer...all of us are expected to pursue God's agenda if we call ourselves Christians.

Our giving is about caring for others in whatever form of brokenness we find them in.

Materialism is a problem to Jesus because it interferes with us being redemptively involved with other people. Martin Luther said many things I have held in my hands across my life and lost them all. Only that which I placed into God's hands do I still possess. John Dennison commented, What you can't give away you don't possess it possesses you.

The novelist John Grishom said, My wife and I measure the success of every year by how much we've given away.

There's a story of a traveler in India who comes upon a monk and asks for some spare change. The monk reaches into his bag and pulls out a precious jewel the size of a golf ball, this is all I have take it. The traveler thanked the monk for his extravagant gift and continued on his journey. The next day the traveler returned gave the monk back his precious jewel asking please give me what you have that enabled you to give me this jewel?

This is the kind of change that occurs when Christ takes up residence in our hearts. We give away extravagantly. There comes a moment in the life of the Christian when we have to ask ourself: Is my faith about me or am I about God? Do I share my faith with anyone? Do I hold a grudge against others? Do I give intentionally to finance ministry?

What exactly do we do for the Lord? I try to live a good Christian life. Wait a minute clean living is not the goal. A godly lifestyle is for our benefit so that we avoid the consequences of sin. Yes we are obeying the Lord but that is more like a parent instructing a child don't play in the street so you don't get hit by a car.

Besides, in Matthew 5:16 it states: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven." Even our good deeds are merely a tool to open up conversations for us to talk about the Lord.

Talk about God to people? & come across like a holy roller? We don't want be a fanatic. We don't want to take this Christianity too far & let it interfere with our life style.

You know...the kind of Christian that housed Jews when the Nazis said they'd kill you if you did so? Some Christians would smuggle themselves into Auschwitz in order to share the gospel with the Jews! You hear about Christians like this and suddenly whether or not we give a small portion of our income to the cause of Christ seems ludicrous.

A child was eating at a restaurant with his family and asked why do we give the waitress a 15% tip and God only gets 10%

Yet we hold onto God's material blessings so tightly...I'm sure you heard about the gentleman who decided he was going to take his wealth to heaven so he converts all his assets into gold and takes two suitcases full up to heaven's gates. St. Peter asks what's in the suitcases? The man opened them and St. Peter said, "you brought payment?" For those who didn't get it heaven has streets of gold.

Biblically God uses money and possessions to show us who we are and to reveal the true nature of our spiritual health. Henry Ford once said Money doesn't change men, it merely unmask them. If a person is naturally selfish or arrogant or greedy, money will simply show who we really are.

Our money is a spiritual test. Are we more worried about our stocks, bonds & retirement or our souls? Are you more worried about stuff or other people's souls?

Thomas Tewell tells about a time he met a Benedictine Monk. Tewell visited the monk's dorm room at the seminary and noticed there's nothing in his room. So he asks the Monk where is your stuff? The Monk replies, my stuff? Tewell says yeah your stuff--your valuables. The monk says come with me tonight and I'll show you my stuff. That evening the monk takes Tewell to Trenton NJ to referee basketball games for the inner city kids. It's so tough that no one comes back after referring one game. But this Monk has made a commitment to these kids. Not only does he referee their basketball games, but he helps them through the many difficulties that accompany street life—so he can introduce the kids to Jesus.

Tom Tewell went home and looked around at all his stuff, his T.V. & electronics, his furniture, clothes, silver...and asked himself if Jesus was to put a value on my stuff or the monks stuff whose would Jesus value more? It's the same with our lives are we focused on our collectables, or are we about people meeting Jesus Christ through our ministry?

Let's build the kingdom of God together...this is what it means to be a Christian to invest in eternity. This is what our stewardship is all about.

Rodin the sculptor of the Thinker was out walking one day and he saw by a rubbish heap a discarded crucifix. Rodin got some companions and they dragged it to his house. He wanted to take it inside, but realized it was too big for his home.

Rodin had to make a decision, would he widen the doors and raise the roof to make room for the cross or would he simply discard the cross. Rodin did widen the doors and raise the roof to make room for the cross. The cynical side of me says yeah sure do you realize the financial investment of rearranging the house Rodin would have to make to accommodate the cross?

It is the same decision you and I have to make about the cross and it is a costly decision. We have to do some remodeling of our lives to accommodate Jesus Christ. & yes it will require a financial investment. But realize as we live for Christ and try to expand His ministry, He will finance any project we pursue for His Kingdom. & as we seek 1st His kingdom—all these other things we care & worry about will be added unto you.

The call I received to this church...during my first interview they mentioned we are \$2 million in debt. So that night I said to the Lord I must not have been clear about the church I hope to pastor...when I said I want a \$2 million budget I meant in the black not the red. So the next day our family takes off for vacation. While on the Cruise, I said God how can I raise \$2 million? & then HE said...you won't--I will. That was the first of many miracles that confirmed God was appointing me here to be with you.

The Lord has big plans for this congregation. He intends for us not merely be a church by the side of the road, but a church with a significant impact for His kingdom—a force for Christ.

This is what our stewardship campaign is all about: going on an adventure with Jesus Christ to see how God is going to move through our faith. Let's build His kingdom together!