

Date: October 18, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 22:15-22

Title: GIVING!

Let's talk about leadership for a few minutes. It's an important subject in today's world. There's a professor from University College London who has written many books on personality and leadership. And he has some strong views concerning incompetent leaders. He says incompetent leaders, create a toxic corporate culture, that drags everybody, in their sphere of influence, down. And he claims, that the number one trait, that incompetent leaders possess, is arrogance. According to this professor's studies and experience, an arrogant leader is a toxic leader.

This professor put together a simple, but amusing, 10-question quiz to measure a leader's level of arrogance. Some of the questions he asks are: "Do you have a special gift for playing office politics? Are you blessed with a natural charisma?" and my favorite, "Are you just too talented to fake humility?"

I thought of this professor, and his quiz, when I read the Bible passage for today. The Pharisees wanted to make Jesus look like, an incompetent leader. They wanted to trip him up, make him less popular, in the eyes of the Jewish people. So they asked him a loaded question: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

The Pharisees thought this was a no-win situation for Jesus. Whichever way he answered, he was going to make somebody angry. The Romans demanded, heavy taxes from the Jewish people, while at the same time, oppressing them. We understand taxation without representation. That's the reason we rebelled against the British.

Zealous Jews believed that paying taxes to Rome, was not only a burden to them, it was dishonoring to God, because it was to God, they owed their ultimate allegiance. If Jesus wanted to make himself popular with the Jewish people, he only had to say, it was against God's law, to pay taxes to Caesar. But, if he advocated publicly against paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus would certainly get in hot water with the Roman authorities. We all wish there was some way to skip paying taxes.

This conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees was full of red flags. The Pharisees really didn't care about Jesus' opinion about taxes; they only cared about ruining his popularity with the people. But, Jesus didn't care about his popularity or even his own safety. He cared about only one thing: doing the work of God. So Jesus didn't have to struggle with his answer. He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Now if you want an answer that's unpopular with everyone, this is it. Just as some people resent paying taxes, some would rather not give God, that which is God's.

Pastor Brian Kluth, tells of a friend's four-year-old daughter, Amanda, who was determined not to put her quarter in the offering plate one Sunday. Amanda's parents were trying to teach her to be a faithful and cheerful giver. But Amanda wasn't having any of it! Her parents were embarrassed that they had to pry the quarter out of her little hand and drop it into the offering plate.

Later that afternoon, Amanda's mom heard her playing on the backyard swing.

Every time Amanda got the swing up to its highest point on the swing set, she would shout at the sky, “God, I want my quarter back! God, I want my quarter back!” Some people would rather not give God, that which is God’s, including Amanda.

Jesus was trying to teach us, an important spiritual principle, which is: **Giving is the ultimate sign, that we trust God.**

If you want to know, what you really believe about God, examine your checkbook. Your level of giving toward God’s work, matches your level of trust in God. Do you believe, if you invest in God’s work, God will always provide for your needs? This is where the rubber meets the road, when it comes to faith. Do you trust God enough, to give a portion of your resources, to do God’s work?

Let me tell you about a Christian couple named Jerry and Muriel Caven. The Cavens had started numerous successful businesses over the years. But, as they reached retirement age, they realized that accumulating wealth, wasn’t what life was all about. They believed God, was leading them to participate in a new venture. That venture was overseas Christian missions.

Instead of protecting their retirement savings, the Cavens decided to give away larger and larger portions of their income, to God’s work. Jerry Caven says that their generosity was stoked, by the realization, that God was the true owner, of all they had. As he says, “Once we understood we were giving away, not our money, but God’s money, to God’s work, we had a peace and joy, we never had, when we thought it was our money!”

It’s interesting, how trust in God, automatically leads, to greater peace and joy. If you don’t have much joy in your life, it’s probably because you don’t trust God.

Trusting in money and material things, for our security, or status, or identity, is a sure path to misery. Trusting in material things leads to anxiety, fear, greed, conflict, all the qualities, that are out of alignment, with God’s will, for our life. The path to joy, lies in sharing with God, **and** in the work of God’s Kingdom.

God wants to save us, from the empty, frustrating, meaningless insecurity, that comes from putting our trust, in material things. The life of greed, is a bottomless pit. There’s never enough to satisfy. But giving to the work of God, gives your life meaning and purpose.

That brings us to the second thing, Jesus was teaching us, in today’s Bible passage. First, giving is the ultimate sign that we trust God. **Second, giving is the ultimate opportunity we have, to impact the world.**

We look at giving money to God’s work, and we see a loss from our bank account. We see a minus sign in our balance sheet. And that’s where anxiety and greed kick in. But, what if we looked at giving to God, as an opportunity? Because, our giving to God’s work, is the greatest way to impact the world, in a concrete way.

Pastor W.A. Criswell told the story of a man who was asked, “What did you do yesterday?”

The man said that yesterday he taught a class in a church college. On Tuesday, he was down in the Rio Grande Valley working in a Vacation Bible School. On

Wednesday, he was operating in a church hospital in Nigeria. On Thursday, he was teaching the Word of God in the Amazon jungle. On Friday, he was building a church house in the Philippines. On Saturday, he was preaching in Tokyo, Japan.

The friend stopped him, “Man, even in the jet age you can’t do all that!”

The fellow said, “But I do it every day. I give a tithe to my church, and it goes all over the earth, doing good for Jesus.”

Think about it. You may never physically go to Haiti, to feed a starving child, or dig wells in Honduras, or provide after-school activities, for needy kids in Boston or share the good news of Jesus with hurting people in our community. But through your giving, you can do all these things and more. Your money can fuel ministries that save lives. Ministries that change lives.

You may be unsure about the ministries God is calling you to. You may be super-busy, and not know how you can fit ministry, into your schedule, especially during this time of the pandemic. You may not have much money, and feel that your giving wouldn’t make an impact anyway, but, you would be wrong. Every little bit helps. Through giving what you can to God, you can be in ministry, all over the world. You can bring hope, resources, life, and salvation, to people everywhere, not because you have superhuman talents, and a fat bank account, but simply because you trusted God, and gave what you could. Every dollar we give to the work of God is an eternal investment in sharing life and hope.

Giving is the ultimate sign that we trust God. Giving is the ultimate opportunity to impact the world. And finally, Jesus is teaching us: **Giving is the ultimate pathway to joy.** Every hard teaching of God, results in a blessing for those who believe and obey. When Jesus taught, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it,” (Matt. 16: 25), he was teaching a profound and eternal truth. Jesus was teaching us, to live in faith, rather than in fear.

Fear tells us, that we need to maintain control, over our lives. Fear tells us that happiness is found in comfort and certainty. Fear is the little voice in our heads that says, “I’ll start giving to God’s work, once I get a new job, or I pay off my car, or when the kids are grown.” But joy, peace, and fulfillment, are *only* found in following Christ, and aligning our priorities with God’s will, for our lives, here and now. Chances are, if you keep putting off making God first in your life, it will never happen.

When Johnny Jennings was eighteen years old, he visited a children’s home associated with his church. He tells how moved he was, when three little boys at that home, ran up to him, begging to be adopted.

Johnny was too young to consider starting a family at that time. But he knew God was calling him to do something to help. So, at 18 years of age he began collecting money to give, to that children’s home. Since he didn’t make much money, he started gathering paper and aluminum scrap on the side, and recycling it, then he gave the recycling money, to support the orphans, at the Home. This became a lifetime act, of faithfulness.

That’s why recently, at the age of 88, Johnny Jennings was honored by the state of Georgia for giving more than \$400,000 to the Georgia Baptist Children’s Home,

through his recycling work. When asked why he dedicated his life to this mission, Jennings says, “The meaning of life, is to find your gift. The purpose of life, is to give it away.”

It all comes down to a matter of trust. Do you want to maximize, the positive impact, of your life, *and* experience more joy in life? Giving to God’s work is the surest way to do it. There’s nothing else you can possibly spend your money on, that can offer you a better return for your investment. But, you will never experience the joy, that awaits, all those who take that step of faith, until you give sacrificially, to the work of God. So, render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. But, much more importantly, render unto God the things that are God’s Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transforming of the world. Amen.