

2 Corinthians 9:6-12 and Luke 21:1-4

9am & 10.30am SMAS Service

(16.10.2011)

A £50, a £20, and a £1 coin met up down the back of an old settee on the rubbish tip. The £50 says, "I've seen the whole world during my lifetime: Caribbean cruises, African safaris, casinos galore and I've paid for gallons of champagne" The £20 says, "Well, I've not done quite as well, but I've been to Disneyland, Starbucks and paid for gallons of beer. " "How about you?" they ask £1. Not wanting to be outdone, he says, "I've seen the whole country as well. I've been from church to church to church..." The £50 asked, "What's a church?"

I don't like talking about money, anymore probably than you like hearing about it! But nearly 30 years ago I listened to a sermon about giving money to the church which made a dramatic change in my life.

The vicar asked everyone to review their giving, but not in the light of how much we could afford. He said it was going about it in the wrong way if we first worked out how much we needed to live and then gave what was left to the church. Instead we should start by looking at how much we wanted give to the church the rest would follow.

I was shocked. Not because I thought he had a cheek, or was wrong but because I'd never of thought of it that way. I'd always thought it sensible to work out how much we needed to live and then given what was left. But he made me realise that I was giving God the leftovers in my life. God, who is the source of everything we have, including our life, is not to be 'paid off' with remnants of our time or the small change of our lives. I found this poem called Leftovers:

*Leftovers are such humble things,
We would not serve to a guest,
And yet we serve them to our Lord
Who deserves the very best.*

We give to Him leftover time,

*Stray minutes here and there.
Leftover cash we give to Him,
Such few coins as we can spare.*

*We give our youth unto the world,
To hatred, lust and strife;
Then in declining years we give
To him the remnant of our life.*

In 1 Corinthians 16:1 Paul says similar to that vicar: take the money you give to support the church out on the first day of every week i.e. before using it on other, even essential, things! Then he went on to talk about tithing – giving 10% of our income to God's work – I'd never heard of such a thing. But sure enough the Bible tells us to do it. (He did offer a little softening of the blow by saying that with tax, N.I. and other charitable calls on our money some decide to give 5%).

However, thinking about what Jesus did for us made me realise that I had to put him first in all of my life. So, although we had three children and no spare cash, I knew that in order to love God with the whole of my life it meant that I had to give my all to Him too. I decided to try giving 10% of my income to God even though we were hard-up then.

I can honestly say that it's been the greatest of blessings. When we give sacrificially God blesses us in return. When we give Him control of our finances He gives us what we need. And He REALLY has, not that we should give in order to get back but I've been 'better-off' since I started tithing.

J.D. Rockefeller said, "I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week."

I heard of someone training to be a vicar. She decided to try and tithe the housekeeping, her daughter had just started school and her son was a toddler. It was already near the end of the month, and the amount she had left was almost a tenth of the monthly housekeeping. With still about a week to go she decided to give it. Then her daughter asked if she could invite a friend home for tea. Normally this meant buying something special to eat - she had nothing suitable.

Then she got an embarrassed phone-call from the child's mother to say the only things she would eat was white bread & butter and Ritz crackers! Bizarrely she had a box of Ritz in the cupboard!

Then the Dyson vacuum cleaner broke down. This wouldn't have mattered if she'd recently hoovered and wasn't expecting her in-laws for the weekend. Her tatty carpet looked dreadful! She rather crossly suggested to God that if He did this healing stuff, perhaps he could heal the Dyson! She switched it back on, nothing happened and she felt silly.

Next day a man knocked on the door. 'You've got a Dyson that needs fixing?' he said. She stared at him trying to remember if she'd phoned somebody and forgotten? 'Mrs X?' he said. She explained that Mrs X was her next-door neighbour but the reason she was looking so stunned was that she did have a Dyson which needed fixing but it was out of guarantee and she hadn't phoned anyone about it. 'Oh, well,' he said, 'I might as well have a look at it - I'm a bit early anyway.' Not only did he fix it for free, but also replaced the long hose which had split months ago.

If you want a job done ask a busy person. Its similar with money - if someone needs money ask someone who doesn't have much. A recent church survey in Hull showed that the smallest, struggling congregations in the poorest areas gave the most generously!

The woman in the gospel today basically had two coins to rub together and she gave both of them to God. Afterwards: she didn't have £100 left over: she didn't have 100 pennies left: she had nothing.

The two coins the widow put in the collection wouldn't have paid for a loaf of bread. Compared to those before her who put in great amounts of money she put in nothing and yet Jesus says she gave everything. The others gave out of their riches: she gave everything she had. Her response to the love of God for her, was to give everything back to Him and Jesus commended this.

Money can be hard to give. Someone going into a supermarket with £5 in their pocket thinks what can I do: I've only got £5.00. If they go out for lunch in the pub and find they've only got £10 it will be Oh no! I only have £10! If they walk into Church with £10 in their pocket they think

Oh no that's far too much! St Paul told the early-church their starting point for giving is what God has done for us. The gift of Christ himself for us for "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor."

Another blessing from tithing is that we discover the joy of being set free - which is how God wants us to live. I don't worry about money anymore because its in its right and proper place – in God's hands.

Martin Luther: I have tried to keep things in my hands and lost them all, but what I have given into God's hands I still possess.

Conventional wisdom says if you want to have a lot, keep everything that's yours and add to it so you can enjoy the good life and prosper. But God says the more we give to others, the more we will receive. If we want refreshing in our lives it will come from being generous with our resources and investing in OTHERS. What we sow is what we reap. Our lives will be enriched when we give.

When it comes to sharing our resources with for the work of the Kingdom, God says give generously because we are his hands and feet in this world and it takes money to get things done. When we give money to the church we might think of it as money gone. But instead, think of it as an investment. You will see it again, and it'll be multiplied many-fold. That makes it a little easier to give and with God, there's no risk, but there's a high return. God asks us to give to a cause greater than any other and one whose work will last forever as we help others come to know Christ.

The Bible makes plain that giving to God should be costly to us personally. Its not about holding a jumble-sale because that seems an easier way to raise money. (Its not anyway!) Its about us recognizing that it is OUR responsibility and we should WANT to support the work of the church. It should be funded by believers. I don't want to support the building or work of another faith, and St Paul tells us that those who don't believe shouldn't be funding Christ's church.

How do we decide where our giving should go when there are so many worthy causes about? Well, other charities do have bigger pools of givers to collect from - Christians are often in a minority and your giving is needed. A big thank you to all who came along and gave on Friday,

your gifts will help us keep our heads above water. If you haven't yet been able to give please do consider it – there are several ways: ways to give: envelopes; Direct Debit; Gift Aid!

Have you ever watched Secret millionaire? They go incognito into a difficult area and have to live on minimum wage. They start off miserable and finding it hard. But the sacrifice they make soon begins to bring them a happiness they've not known for all their money. "The mind grows by what it takes in; the heart grows by what it gives out." (Warren Wiersbe)