

XI. Gospel Worship in Biblical Perspective
Worship God!
“God’s Desire and Your God-Exalting Giving”
Acts 20:17-38
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November 3, 2013 – Morning Sermon

We are in Acts 20 in this study. I love this text and I will actually bring out a half of a sentence from this text but I want to read the whole text because this is the heart of a pastor. Here is a founding pastor of three years with his people, his leaders and elders and I to some degree have tasted the joy of this in my own life at Christ Covenant and now so much wonderfully here at Briarwood. Here you can kind of peer into a pastor’s heart and the relationship with his elders and also his desire for his church.

Acts 20:17-38 says [17] *Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. [18] And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, [19] serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; [20] how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, [21] testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. [22] And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, [23] except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. [24] But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. [25] And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. [26] Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, [27] for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. [28] Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. [29] I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. [31] Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. [32] And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. [33] I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. [34] You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. [35] In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

[36] And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. [37] And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, [38] being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

Acts 20:17b says "...he himself said, *'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*" I want to give you a question and then answer the question. So here's the question; why does God persistently and insistently focus on teaching us the issue of Christian stewardship in general and financial stewardship in particular? Why does He want us to learn, engage, embrace in generous, Gospel-driven, saturated giving? There is no doubt He does do that. There are three reasons I will give you why they are not the reasons He does that but there is one reason why He insistently, consistently and persistently wants us to learn, embrace and engage in stewardship in general but financial stewardship, even to the point of generous, sacrificial, joyful giving. Why does He hammer away at that throughout 66 books of the Bible?

I want to put in a parenthesis here. I always feel indebted to the past leadership as well as the present leadership of this church and our founding pastor, because fifty plus years ago they embedded in the life of this congregation and annual stewardship every member commitment where we work through stewardship. Not only do members make a commitment financially but they do it in prayer and ministry as well through their commitment of their time and spiritual gifts. One way of looking at it is how you spend your time, talents and treasure. How will I use my intercessory prayers through the work of the Kingdom and through the church the Lord has planted me at? How will I use my spiritual gifts and how will I engage in ministry to be equipped for it? What about my tithe, my regular giving, as I worship the Lord in bringing the tithe into the storehouse to give Him praise?

That has been in the life of this congregation for many reasons. There are many people who work on this in our church who put together the budget for every year. They do this in terms of ministry opportunity and also what they receive through the commitment cards that will be turned in today. They use these commitments to gain insight into how God will use the church to do its mission which is for God's glory. Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians who worship God and to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. It helps them to undergird everything with prayer so that they can take that and work from it to bring it back to you where you then in a few weeks will receive the budget under the oversight of the elders, developed by the deacons and that whole process is put into place. I am so grateful for that and love the elders and deacons for that process and your commitment to sacrificial, faithful, generous giving and watching it every year.

I love how we enter into that season from our National Mission's Conference because fifty percent of the resources that come into Briarwood leave it for benevolence, mercy, church planting, church revitalization, world missions, evangelism and discipleship, national missions, local missions and regional missions. That budget is put together to make sure that happens as closely as we can. This fifty percent is invested in our ministry in Fairfield, adoption, mercy care, financial literacy, board directed ministries and I could just go on and on about how the Lord uses all of this. I am grateful for the leadership that has said to take the time to do this and how they make me deal with it every year, lest I think of myself so spiritual as to not to deal with it. I think I'm being very un-Christlike if I don't deal with the issue of money for there is nobody who addresses it more in the Bible than Jesus. I don't think I can be more spiritual than Jesus.

I am really excited this year because our deacons made a proposal and every year we take a ministry theme. Next year our giving will enable us to embrace a theme in fulfilling our mission of 'contending for the faith.' We will learn how to contend for the faith without being contentious. That is really important where our society is right now. We will be looking at a lot of issues this coming year to equip God's people to contend without being contentious and to be effective.

This year our theme has been 'worship God' and so I did those ten sermons and have referred to it throughout the year so why don't we tie in our commitment season to this matter of worship God through joyful giving. That opened up the door for me to preach on a statement in the Bible that I want to get to you in a couple of thoughts here in this study and that is this verse found in Acts 20:35. Think of this as sermon number eleven on our series of worship God. This one is worship God in this matter of joyful giving.

Our theme on 'Worship God' was that we are on a journey to grow in our ability to give God-glorifying, Christ-centered, Bible-shaped (not personal preference shaped), Holy Spirit-empowered worship of the Triune God of glory. Now where does joyful giving fit into that? This opens up for me the opportunity to answer for you what I believe is a driving question. Why does God persistently, insistently keep bringing up back to this issue in His Word? Jesus deals with this issue more than any other. In the Sermon on the Mount He says you can't serve God and money. He has all kinds of warnings about this.

Paul picks this up. Money is amoral. A dollar bill is not evil or righteous. It is a dollar bill. It's not intrinsically so if you don't have much of it you're holy or if I have a lot of it I'm sinful, no. This prosperity Gospel says if you have a lot of it then you must really love Jesus because Jesus is making me prosper in the things of this world. No! Paul says it's the love of money that's the issue. Why is it that we would love money? The reason He is bringing this out is because money, either the lack of it or the presence of it, can become idolatry or the avenue to your idolatry. I am nobody until I get a raise or until I have money or a bigger house or until I have these possessions. No, if you're in Jesus Christ the Bible says you who are in adversity and in poverty boast in your exaltation and your only boast is in Christ for you are a joint heir with Jesus Christ. Let the rich man boast in his humiliation. Everything I have I received from Christ and therefore I am what I am by the grace of God.

Why do we love it? It is because we think it insulates us. We think it makes us significant. We think it provides our security. We think that there is our hope and by the way we love Jesus. If you follow Jesus He'll coach you up and get you a lot of that money. Just find your seven steps to financial success from Jesus. So Jesus becomes the latest financial guru. The reason we love this money is because we think it's the avenue to making us somebody because if I have that it is either my idol or it becomes the means to purchase my idol, what I need to have to be somebody.

That is why the Bible is constantly warning us. Sixty five percent of Jesus' parables deal with money and then God puts this thing in the Bible called the tithe. That is God's precious gift to get us started in the matter of Christian stewardship. Tithing is not giving yet because the Bible says that if I don't bring the tithe in worship and praise then I've robbed God. You don't rob somebody by withholding a gift, you rob by withholding what belongs to them. So that tithe, the tenth, the first fruits, belong to the

Lord and like one preacher said it becomes training wheels. It gets us started in this matter of the joy of Christian stewardship. So there are all these offerings in the Old Testament. There is this warning not to neglect to bring the tithes and the offerings to the Lord. There is all that Jesus taught and then the Apostles picked up on it. Paul even gave three chapters in one epistle talking about it. Clearly the Bible is dealing with this and God insistently and persistently is addressing it with us.

Now why is He doing that? I think a key is found right here. The Apostle Paul founded the church at Ephesus and he is about to leave it after three years of ministry. It was a compelling ministry, a consistent ministry and a compassionate ministry for Paul was crying all the time. Paul is going house to house. He has large group worship and small group discipleship going on. He has this special relationship with his elders. He has a Gospel of grace ministry. He is calling everyone to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ. He says "I'm innocent of the blood of all men because I've not only given you the core of the Bible message, the Gospel but I have given to you the whole counsel of God, everything that radiates from the Gospel and so in my ministry I'm innocent of your blood because I've laid my life out. I didn't go into ministry to be fulfilled but I went into the ministry to fulfill the ministry, to pour myself out and finish my course. Now I have to leave you and I'll never see you again so I want you to finish the course."

Then Paul turns to these leaders and first gives them a warning. Satan has a twofold assault where he likes to come from the outside with persecution and the inside with penetration. From among yourself will arise false teachers and leaders who will lead the flock astray. Don't be led astray. Take heed to yourself. Then Paul comes back to himself as an example and gives them an illustration of ministry fulfillment. When I was with you even though I had the right to be supported, (the only church he let support him was Philippi) I did not let you support me because I went to work. I was a tent maker and I worked hard. I worked hard not only in the ministry but I worked hard to support myself in the ministry and to be able to give away to the poor, the needy and to you. The reason I did that was because I wanted my life not to conform to the world but to conform to the Word of God and then he gives a quote from Jesus.

In Acts 20:35b Paul quotes Jesus saying, "...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" This isn't Paul saying I distilled from Jesus' teachings this notion. He is also not saying this is the conclusion I came to after thinking about what Christ taught. Jesus Himself said this quote that Paul is now quoting so now in my (Paul) life and my ministry life I have attempted to some degree to conform to that because He said it, it's true and I believe it.

What is it that Paul is saying in this text? It is pretty unique because this is the only time in the Bible where an Apostle quotes Jesus that you can't find the quote in one of the four Gospels, at least as far as I know. I'm not willing to stake my whole life on this thing. Usually when the Apostles quote Jesus you can go back and find all the quotes, except for this one. Paul gave this as a quote so how did Paul know that Jesus said this? Paul wasn't around for Jesus' ministry. Paul was an Apostle, untimely born.

Here are three possibilities. One is that the Holy Spirit just told him that Jesus said this. The second possibility is that Jesus did tell him directly. There are two times we know that Paul had intimate dialogue with Jesus in a teaching setting. Galatians tells us that for a period of years He took Paul out in the wilderness to teach him and it could have been possibly up to three years that he could have been out in the wilderness. Paul

tells us in the book of Corinthians that he was caught up to the third heavens at one time. So maybe that's when Jesus taught him. Here is the third one which is probably it. I'm not sure this is but this is what I think it is. I think when Paul was converted and was brought back to Jerusalem to spend time with the Apostles I think he was given a debrief on the life ministry of Jesus and they gave him this quote. The Holy Spirit now inspires him to include it in his farewell sermon to the Ephesian elders.

The thing I do know is that Jesus said it or either Paul made a mistake. Do you think Paul made a mistake? Paul didn't make a mistake. So Paul is telling us something that Jesus actually said. Have you ever heard someone say 'Jesus said it, I believe it'? Do you believe this quote from Jesus? Every day we get to find this one out. We get to find out whether we think it's more blessed to give than to receive or we get to find out the rationalizations why we believe Jesus can't be trusted.

Some say I will be more of a giver when I am one who is more receiving. Basically when I get more I'll give more. My pastoral warning at this one is that no you won't because if you can't be faithful in little you can't be faithful in much. I just found out this statistic in my study these past few weeks. Among professing Christians those who make \$20,000 or less give 4 percent of their income. Those who make \$100,000 or more, among professing Christians, give less than one percent of their income. When you have more you just have more reasons not to. So where I am in my status of life can I be faithful at this point and do I really believe Jesus?

Why is it that Paul is making this point? The word blessed is very interesting. Two Greek words are used for the meaning of blessed. The idea has two things to it – worship and joy. You'll find that in passages like Ephesians 1:3 that says *[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed (Greek doxa) us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.* We get the word doxology from this Greek word for blessed. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name. Giving is blessed, worship but it not only means worship but it also means joy. Sometimes you'll find the word translated happy and that doesn't quite get it because happy actually comes from the convergence of happenstance and joy is something more than that.

Joy is a settled view of life. James says consider it all joy when (not if) you encounter various trials. In other words, God is doing something. I'm receiving a trial from the Lord therefore I will give joy to the Lord because the Lord is doing something. Consider it all joy is also in Psalm 1. Psalm 1:1-2 says *[1] Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.* That is the be-attitudes of the Old Testament. Then we have the be-attitudes of the New Testament in the Sermon on the Mount that says blessed are you when...etc. It means joy unexplainable by the circumstances, joy beyond the circumstances, joy abounding, joy astonishing, joy inexplicable, joy beyond definition, for it is a joy of a person right with God with absolute trust in the intimacy of God in all the affairs of life including the changes of life. How worshipful, joyful is the man. It is more worshipful, joyful, blessed to give than it is to receive.

Jesus told us three things. One it is blessed to receive. This is doxological receiving. What are some of the good gifts of life? For some it is sitting around the fire talking with your kids that is so enjoyable that you're not even thinking of throwing them

in the fire right then. That's a great blessing of life. For some it's the joy of conversation, fellowship and our salvation. I have a new heart, a new record, a new family, a new home and a new life. I've been saved by grace. O the joy of Jesus and the joy of salvation. There is the joy of being right with God through the grace of God, the blood of Christ and the righteousness of Christ. There is the joy of receiving God's indescribable gift, His Son Jesus Christ. There is doxological joy and worship in receiving the good gifts from God, even those of trial and adversity. Will I not receive that which is adversity from the hand of the Lord as well as that which is blessing from the hand of the Lord? Is it not a blessing also?

The second thing Jesus is teaching is it is blessed to give. This is doxological giving. We've all known the taste of that, haven't we? We see this at Christmas time or at a birthday gathering or a surprise gift out of the blue. Jesus loves it when we do random gifts of kindness. Wrong! You can be far flung in your gifts. No, do thoughtful gifts of kindness in the name of Christ. Be purposed in your giving. God loves a cheerful giver. It is more blessed to give. I almost can't contain myself when I talk about this when God's people have given their gifts of their tithes and offerings and we stand and sing some hymn of praise to God and those gifts are brought before the Lord at that moment. I just love that moment. Bring to the Lord what you have purposed to give on the first day of the week or that thoughtful gift in encouraging our mercy ministry. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

The third thing Jesus is teaching is it is more blessed to give than to receive. This is doxological living. It is a blessing to receive with worship and joy. It is a blessing to give with worship and joy. It is even more blessed to give through doxological living where we are lives of givers, living with generosity, giving with all of our heart. In the Jerusalem room in a place called Westminster in London at that moment in the 1500 and 1600s the Westminster Divines got it right when they put all of this great confession of faith together by saying "Why did God make you? Why did God save you? Why did God sustain you? Why did He give you life and why did you receive life? Why did you receive salvation?" The chief end of man is to glorify God (worship) and enjoy (joy) Him forever. There is my treasure to enjoy Him forever. Why does God insistently keep driving this stewardship home? It is to keep reminding us where our heart ought to be, our true treasure.

Here is the takeaway. Why does God desire for us to learn, embrace, and engage in doxological receiving leading to the supremacy of doxological giving? It is because God delights in your worship and longs for your abounding joy in doxological living from Him, of Him and unto Him. Here are the three not reasons He is teaching you stewardship. He is not insistently teaching you stewardship because He needs your money because one God doesn't need it. If we don't give then God will do it another way. He is giving us a chance to participate for our joy in worship. How did you get your money? God gave it to you through your work that He gave you the strength to do. So if God needed your money and you're not going to give it then why didn't He just keep it? If God needed it then He'd just keep it and cut out the middle man. No, it's more than that.

Here is a second thing. You don't do this to buy salvation. What is back at the core of the Reformation? It was Martin Luther finally being moved on what he had already been dealing with. It was when Tetzl said "When in the coffer a coin rings, then

from purgatory a soul springs.” You can’t buy your way into heaven and you can’t buy anybody else’s way into heaven. Our giving doesn’t get us our salvation.

Thirdly, is you can’t bribe God. God if I give then You’ll have to give me a lot more money, right? You are not bribing God. So why do we do it? There are all kinds of reasons. God will use the money through evangelism, discipleship, church planting, mercy ministries and many more. The reason God is persistent is because God delights in your worship and God longs for your abounding joy in doxological giving and receiving that leads to more joy of doxological living for Him because everything is from Him, to Him and unto Him. He is our joy.

Anyone else that you put before Jesus, above Jesus or alongside of Jesus and if I don’t have it then I can’t have life, whatever that is will one day enslave you, disappoint you and in a final day destroy you. There is a treasure that is incorruptible, unfathomable, and that is the treasure of Christ so that where our treasure is there will our heart be also. The Lord is insistent in this and wants you to receive from Him His grace and mercy and in doxological receiving you give worship and it’s an avenue for your joy. In doxological giving you are now giving praise to God and you’re not only engaged in giving in an act of worship but you are engaged in a highway trip to the unsurpassed joy of doxological living. Anything else is only nipping at the edges or death.

I want to close with this thought. When I get the privilege to take people to Israel there is one thing that astounds me. I can be at Mount Hermon where there is snow skiing and in seven hours I can be in the desert at the Dead Sea. When I come down from Mount Hermon I get to the seven headwaters at the River Jordan that converge and empty into the Sea of Galilee. From the Sea of Galilee they empty down into the Dead Sea. Two thirds of the drinking water of Israel comes from the Sea of Galilee and there are thousands of thousands of fish that get pulled out of that sea after all these years. It’s fresh water, people frolic in it and life is just abounding all around it with life emanating from it. Then I go down to the Dead Sea. Drink that and see what happens to you.

Right in this land of Promise that God made that was the down payment for the whole world He gives us an illustration. Here is a sea that’s living and here is a sea that’s dead where nothing can live in it, no life can come from it. The same river feeds both of them. What’s the difference? One receives and gives, one only receives and doesn’t give. The one that receives and then gives is living – doxological joy in worship, a life of giving where I get the chance to pull a little trigger in this study. Over here is death because it is only receiving. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, I’m so grateful to You for being insistent so that, that instrument that I would use as a highway to death to purchase the treasures of this world that lead to my enslavement, my disappointment and my destruction can be challenged so that I can learn to live for You and that You are my treasure and here’s my heart. I confess to you that I’m so easily turned aside so thank You for the insistent, persistent teaching of Your Word that I might learn what it means to give You praise for the receiving of all good gifts in great joy, to give You praise for the privilege of giving gifts with joy and to give You even more joy and more praise for not only doxological receiving and giving but doxological living with worship and joy un-abounding. O abound in me Jesus that nothing can place a boundary around me, I pray in Jesus’ Name. Take a moment to think through what this means in

our life and how the Lord will use this in our life and pray He'll multiply all that we do in this next year beyond anything we could think or imagine and then ask the Lord to fill you with praise and joy where takers become receivers of grace and gracious givers with hearts of joy. Jesus we make this prayer in Your Name. We make these commitments for the glory of grace that has come down and the grace of glory that rises up, in Christ our Lord, Amen.