

Jesus Raised the Bar To 100%

This week we have two people lined up to share their hearts with you about a missionary organization that they 1) feel burdened for, and 2) from which they each derive a lot of joy in supporting (Carolyn Carson shared about the current Jews for Jesus “Behold Your God” campaign in Israel and Jon Navy shared about “The Persecuted Church” ministry of “The Voice of the Martyrs” ministry and magazine. You can hear both Carolyn’s and Jon’s testimonials on our website: claytoncommunitychurch.com.

The resumption of this *Treasure Principle* series has taken a turn I didn’t expect—and I don’t mean the possibility that I am really becoming *engaged* in preaching on giving for the first time in the 36-year history of our church. Neither is it the *possibility* that some people are laying low until I change the subject.

If you know of anyone like that tell them that I’ll be speaking to our graduates on the virtue and integrity of the Lord next Sunday. Then Pastor Charlie Bethel will speak on June 7 and 14, and then, after Father’s Day, I will end this series with two final messages, which will finish the last two chapters of the book, *The Treasure Principle*, by Randy Alcorn.

I especially encourage you not to miss Charlie’s two sermons. He has something to say that he feels strongly about which will benefit all of us (This sermon is being sent out after Charlie’s two sermons and prior to the last two “Giving” messages).

*The reason I am as engaged like never before is because the little *Treasure Principle* book you each received inadvertently convinced me that the New Testament teaches “Grace Giving,” not opposed to, but in contrast to, Old Testament Tithing.*

Alcorn says tithing is neither commanded nor rescinded in the New Testament. If you want to stay with the 10% tithing approach to giving it is certainly Scriptural; it’s just that almost all the Scriptures on it are in the Old Testament. When I compare the emphasis on tithing by modern preachers, teachers and book writers with the absence of any command, and the de-emphasizing of, tithing by the New Testament writers, I am fairly stunned!

At the very least there is a great disparity in emphasis.

Tithing has been a tremendous aid in giving to many, and I do not underestimate that. We are free to disagree on this, and even if “grace giving” is right, and 10% is not the New Testament floor nor ceiling for dutiful giving, you have the liberty during this age of grace to follow the tithing model. I preached one whole sermon showing from a ten year statistical study by the esteemed Rand Institute that the practice of tithing has literally fostered the generosity of our country and has revealed “Who Really Cares” (book title by Brooks) when it comes to both church giving and charitableness of all kinds.

One Hundred Percenters

My goal is not to discombobulate faithful givers but to possibly open up to you the “100 PERCENTER” concept for dedication in all aspects of the Christian life, something that I believe I am seeing more and more clearly.

The concept of a wide open field for growth in giving, from 1% (or less) to 100%, has generated an excitement in me that I feel may have been hampered by a 10% psychological “lid” or “cap” on my giving.

My job is to get you excited about your own stewardship for the time we have left before we each appear before the judgment seat of Christ, individually, to give a personal accounting to Jesus. But I do not want to wrest the Scriptures to do it. I am excited, but cautious.

We Portrayed the Courage of Our Convictions

Last week I suggested that, if the 10% rule is not a commandment for New Testament Christians, neither could we dictate to you that such a tithe should all go to your local church. Apparently, my sermon was successful because our giving *plummeted* last week! (Note: Happily, the giving recovered fairly well after that.) At the very least this should inform you about the sincerity of our motives before God and the willingness of your pastors to exercise a little faith.

But of course, the whole idea is to stimulate all of us to exercise more faith in this grace of giving.

Either I am wrong about all this, or we may have uncovered a truth that has been obscured that could improve all our lives for the rest of our lives, and which could enhance our individual experiences in our future eternal state, which will begin before you know it!

“All” and “Everything”

In preparing for this morning I looked up all of the places in the New Testament where the words “all” and “everything” are used. Here are some verses or portions using “all” and “everything” in sequential order starting in Matthew so you can follow along with me in your Bible:

Matthew 13:44, 45: ⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold **all** he had and bought that field.” ⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.” – Verse 44 is the parable that our “Treasure Principle” book is based on. Verse 45 reinforces it.

Matthew 19:26-30 – We have left everything: ²⁶Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” ²⁷Peter answered him, “We have left **everything** to follow you! What then will there be for us?” ²⁸Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when

the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Matthew 22:37-40 – The Law of Love: ³⁷Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with **all** your heart and with **all** your soul and with **all** your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Mark 12:41-44 – The Widow’s Mite: ⁴¹Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴²But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. ⁴³Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in **everything**—**all** she had to live on.”

Luke 5:27, 28 – Levi: ²⁷After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, ²⁸and Levi got up, left **everything** and followed him.

Luke 18:21-23 – The Rich Young Ruler: ²¹“All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. ²²When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell **everything** you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” ²³When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth.

Acts 2:42-47: ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵**Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.** ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

These first Believers in Jerusalem may be a good indication of what they and the Apostles considered consistent to be with the teachings of Jesus, who had only recently ascended up into Heaven. They seemed to be the “100 Percenters.”

Acts 5:1-4: ¹Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ²With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the

money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. ³Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

Ananias and Sapphira were *not* rebuked for *not* being "100 Percenters" but for saying they were when they weren't. Based on Peter's words, they were free to go in on the 100% communal living or to a lesser degree or percentage. They wanted to appear to be more generous than they actually were. The rest of the passage is very scary.

Acts 5:5-11: ⁵When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. ⁷About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." ⁹Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." ¹⁰At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

I get a few messages from this passage:

1. Money is serious business to God.
2. Never misrepresent your generosity. People dying in this way did not become the norm in the New Testament—thank God!
3. Notice that the Apostles did not say, "Okay folks, we appreciate your love for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, but don't go overboard here! A good place to begin your giving is 10%, and then you can build on that, or perhaps occasionally give both your tithe and extra offerings."

This extreme practice of redistribution did not persist in the early church, either because of the persecution that scattered the Jerusalem Believers away from Jerusalem, or for practical reasons, or because their zeal waned. We are not told. Some say they were willing to divest themselves of their properties because they thought Jesus was coming back really soon. Still, when the young church was living in the shadow of the risen Christ, their predisposition was to share all they had, and they laid their money from the sales of their sold properties at the feet of the Apostles. The Apostles' participation and cooperation may indicate that this practice seemed to them to be consistent with the teachings of Jesus.

I have more passages on this to show you. I am certainly, and totally, not being political here. Give me a free-market economy every time. I am not even talking about the government. I'm

talking about a community of Believers. **My only point is that Jesus set the bar at 100% rather than 10% for the “Church Age” or the “Age of Grace.”**

Not Law, But Kingdom Preaching

John the Baptist and Jesus came preaching the Kingdom. They were fulfilling the Old Testament prediction of a “New Covenant” or a New Testament time that would be a departure from the Old Covenant Law given by Moses during the Exodus (on your own, read Jeremiah 31:31-35). Tithing was a prominent part of that “Old Covenant.” When the Jews rejected Jesus nationally, Jesus (as He saw the obvious trend) began to speak of the church (read Matthew 16:18), which I believe has much more to do with Kingdom thinking than Old Testament Law thinking.

Would you join me in some “possibility thinking” and in a few weeks we’ll revisit this subject for two last sermons.

In the meantime, take ownership of your giving because you only have one Lord, and He isn’t any of your pastors, Bible teachers or book writers.