

INTRODUCTION

It has been a few weeks since we last studied the book of Philipians. We had an outside speaker, Easter and then baptism. We will resume the study next week. For today we will discuss an important topic – money. We need money to pay for daily expenses. Money can provide a sense of security. For Christians, money should not be our only source of security. Ultimately, we rely on God. King David in the Old Testament could testify that God had been the Protector and Provider all his life. When David was senior at his age, he still had two big items on his to-do list: preparing for his successor and preparing for God’s temple. In 1 Chronicles chapter 28 when he delivered his farewell speech to his government officials and military commanders, David announced God’s decisions on both matters in **verses 5 to 6**: 5 “Of all my sons - and the Lord has given me many - he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. 6 He said to me: ‘Solomon your son is the one who will build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.’” Then David said he wasted no time to gather the materials needed for the temple. He set aside gold and other precious metals and gemstones from the national warehouse. On the top of that, David also donated some of his personal treasure for the project. David then motivated his officials to follow his example. And did they give a lot! Everyone was filled with joy as they offered their gifts to build the temple. They saw the needs and they gladly contributed their parts. Whether we are rich or poor by the world’s standard God gives us freedom to use our money. The way we spend money reflects our values and priorities. We shall learn from King David that a sincere offering that pleases God includes commitment of both our wealth and our hearts.

EXPLANATION

1. Everything is from God 一切都是從神而來

David and his people committed their wealth with joy because they knew that everything was from God. David said in **verse 14**: “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.” David knew that all that the people did was just giving back a portion of what God had entrusted them. When David saw the enthusiastic response from the officials he thanked God, rather than thanked people, for their generosity. Let us read David’s praise in **verse 11**: “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.” David poured out all the attributes he could think of about God – His greatness, power, glory, majesty and splendor. We should learn from David’s prayer. Besides asking God for our needs, we should also praise God for who He is. When David realized how mighty God was, he humbly admitted how unworthy humans were. He said in **verse 15**: “We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.” Compared to the eternal God, David understood that people were temporal. David knew that it was a great privilege to enjoy all the wealth God gave him. But with blessings come responsibilities. Brothers and sisters: we cannot be joyful givers if we do not

realize that everything is from God. I came across a true story about a wealthy man named Jean Paul Getty. People called him J. Paul. In the early 20th century J. Paul's father made a fortune in the blooming oil industry. J. Paul subsequently followed the same foot-steps. Acquiring wealth soon became a hobby for Getty. He routinely put in an 18-hour work-day, even on weekends and holidays. That may explain his five divorces. J. Paul struck gold in the 1940's when he discovered oil in a piece of land he leased in the Middle East. Prosperity did not buy J. Paul any happiness. He always suspected if his friends were going after his money. He wore crumpled old clothes. He even installed a coin-operated phone in one of his mansions to prevent his guests from racking up his phone bill. In 1973, one of J. Paul's grandsons was kidnapped in Italy. The gangsters asked for a \$17 million ransom. Finally, J. Paul grudgingly agreed to pay a small portion of it, lent the rest to his son, and demanded him to pay it back later with interest. Getty passed away at an age of 86. He left most of his \$4 billion fortune to a trust fund, which supports the world's wealthiest art collection. J. Paul thought he owned it all, yet he lived a miserable life. Most of us are far from rich when we compare ourselves with J. Paul or King David. The question is not how much we have. But it is whether we firmly believe that all that we have is from God. Have you thanked God for giving you intelligence to acquire knowledge, good health to make a living and opportunities to pursue your career? Also, it is God who puts you in the 21st century western world, rather than 2 centuries ago, or in one of those financially poorer countries. If everything is from God, then why are we so tight-fisted when it comes to money offering? Is there joy or grief when you drop your contribution on the offering plate, or do you simply ignore the collection altogether? Someone said it wisely: give God what is right, not what is left. No, it is not about the direction. "Right" means appropriate, and "left" refers to what is remaining. Here is my suggestion: whenever your paycheck comes in set aside an amount for the Lord first. Just do it without even thinking about it. For the young people among us, you need to start building a habit of offering when you do not have much. It may be from the allowance your parents give you, or a part-time job you have. Some people use 10% as a guideline. I do not want to make it sounds like an obligation. It is something between you and God. I don't know, and I don't want to how much you give. The key is to give with joy. If there is no joy then you have better keep the money in your wallet, and work on your relationship with the Lord first.

2. Everything is for God 一切都是為神而獻

A sincere offering that pleases God includes commitment of both our wealth and our hearts. David knew that everything was from God. He also understood that everything was for God. He did not ask to name the future building "David Memorial Worship Center" because he was the biggest donor for the materials. David knew that it was God's temple for people to gather and worship the Lord. That is why David asked God to examine his heart to make sure that his conscience was clear. He said in **verse 17**: "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you." Remember this is part of David's public prayer. Everyone heard it. David made himself completely transparent before God and His people. That drove people to give joyfully. Continue to read David's prayer in the **next verse**: "O Lord, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you." David prayed that his people would continue to commit their hearts to God. Not only did David pray for his people, he also plead on behalf of the future king. David asked in **verse 19**: "And give my son Solomon the

wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, requirements and decrees and to do everything to build the palatial structure for which I have provided.” David knew first-hand how much responsibility would be on Solomon’s shoulders. The success of an Israel king did not depend on economic or military power. The most important thing was whether the leader had the heart of a servant before the Lord. Later God blessed Solomon beyond measure with great wealth and exceptional wisdom. God also protected Israel from enemies. Sadly, prosperity and stability led to complacency. Solomon became a bad example of those who were too wealthy, too early and too easily. To maintain good international relationship, foreign kings gave away their princesses to Solomon as wives – lots of them. These gentile queens brought in the idols they worshipped. Israel thus went down a slippery slope. Solomon failed to see that everything he had should be for God. God wants our heart more than our money. We need to ask ourselves if we have a desire to let God’s blessing flow through us. If so, then we should gladly allow God to use all that He gives us for His purpose. I have been praying that God will use our next home as a channel of His blessings. Since the beginning of the year we have been looking for a house. The market has been quiet and there are not many available selections. Nice houses within our budget were sold in a matter of days. One day I asked our agent about buying a “For Sale by Owner” property. I told her that if she does not get any commission at the end then I will not even consider the option. She is a sister-in-Christ. Those who work will get their wages, that is a Biblical principle. I said: if we honor God in all we do, He will bless us. We went to see 2 houses the next day. I was about to make an offer on the second one when my wife asked if we should go back to see a house we looked at before. Our agent confirmed that the house was still on the market. For some reason, the house was not sold since last September. It was a nice home. We decided to try a lower offer. I was so surprised that the seller responded with a counter-offer later that afternoon. They showed interest to negotiate. We raised our offer a little. A few hours later, our offer was accepted. We got the house! On the listing the seller just lowered the price for \$500 for all this time. It was amazing that they were willing to slash over \$10,000 for us. Why wasn’t the home sold earlier? The only explanation I could come up with is God had reserved the house for my family. I cannot wait to see how God will use this property for His purpose.

CONCLUSION

We should commit our wealth and our hearts to God. Everything is from Him and for Him. How much should we give to a God who owns it all? A church in Charlotte, North Carolina, received an anonymous donation in an envelope. The pastor was stunned by the words written on the outside and the amount. The message read: “Please don’t be mad. I don’t have much. I’m homeless. God bless.” There were eighteen cents inside the envelope. Every Sunday that church welcomes homeless people for breakfast. Many of them often stay for the services that follow. The pastor commented that it was truly a sacrificial gift from that person. It could have been all that he/she had for that day. At one time we are all homeless people too. God welcomes us in and prepares an eternal home for us in Christ. Our Lord deserves everything from us. It is not only how much we give, but also how much we keep, that reflects our relationship with God. Our church needs to pay utilities just like your home. There are many other big and small expenses. Yes, your offering helps support your pastor’s livelihood too. I say all this not to give you pressure. Most Chinese are very sensitive about money. If you think that your money belongs to you then you always want more. However, if you understand that your money is a tool on-loan from God, then you will gladly use it in ways that pleases God.