

FIRSTFRUITS 2024
INTRODUCTION – 28 JANUARY 2024

INTRODUCTION

Next week we celebrate our Firstfruits Thanksgiving Offering – we come to acknowledge it as a highlight of our year. As usual we will teach so you will understand why we do what we do. However, before we examine the specifics of the Firstfruits Offering I thought it important to review the **basic foundation concerning giving - 6 Principles that undergird our Giving to God**. Thereafter, I will close by addressing the structural disorder to our giving. Something amiss in the order of our giving as Church.

But first a disclaimer or two. **Disclaimer #1**. TSC is not a commercial business - our bottom line is not money. Therefore, we do not coerce, cajole, manipulate or blackmail anyone to part with money. **TSC is a ministry - bottom line is people**. Having said that, though, all of life on earth including ministry, needs money to operate. As a church we do not get free diesel for our generator, or free fruits from foodlovers. When there is a kingdom project, we give people an opportunity to partner on their own will – no obligation. We use the currency of the day – rand. But we are not just an earthly people but heavenly also...keep that in mind as we progress.

Disclaimer #2. **God has no need and is not a debtor to anyone**. The earth is the Lord's and its fullness - silver, gold, platinum, uranium, lithium, diamonds and pearls are His. He is not a taker but a giver and heaven is never bankrupt. God says even if I was hungry, I will not tell you. If these are true - that Church is not a business and God has no need - then, why is there an expectation for the people of God to give or sow a seed? An important question that Christians & Churches do not answer adequately!

Firstly, because of the **Heart-Money Connection**. Jesus said, 'where your money is, there will your heart also be.' You spend money on what is valuable to you – right! For some it is education, family, houses, cars, clothes and holidays. That which is valuable, inadvertently, attaches to you and becomes an extension of yourself – 'my' education, 'my' career, 'my' house. **As our Portfolio expands, we become addicted to More**. I once saw a lady who watched her car being slammed from behind and literally bend in two. Thank God she and her family were not in the vehicle – my initial response. But she fainted!!! To live with material attachments is dangerous – your heart will fail you. Have you ever read of wealthy people commit suicide because of the collapse of their empire? God knows the heart – giving releases one's grip on material things. Potential for greed is enormous!

Secondly, because **God expects us to be Stewards not Owners** - caretakers of what is in our hands. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord says Job who had everything and in one day lost everything! Paul teaches us this important principle when he says, 'all that we have, we have received from God's gracious hand.' This includes our children – who are a heritage from the Lord. If you make that child, no matter how wonderful he or she is, the centre of your world you have come into idolatry. God tests Abraham to see if he would give up Isaac which means laughter. **If Isaac is God's property, then what right does Abraham have to withhold him from God**. We are made to believe it is ours!!!

Thirdly, in giving we acknowledge that **God is the Source of the entire Creation**.. God is clear about this in Matthew 6: I feed the sparrow and clothe the lilies. We carry this notion that we made it on our own. We worked hard, and we deserve every reward that comes with it. Where did you get that mind from to think, contemplate and calculate or the hands and feet to create and construct or ability to procreate? **In which laboratory did you design and engineer the breath to live?** In giving we step out of pride & arrogance and express our total dependence on Father. Businessman does audit and is impressed with himself. Thou Fool!

Fourthly, giving to God ensures our entire being is **Underwritten by the Heavens**. Why do we pay insurance for the car or house? To protect our assets! How do you protect yourself from the unseen DEVOURER? Read Malachi – like a locust it consumes your harvest. **Matthew 6:19-21**, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth [inflation] and rust [depreciation] destroy and where thieves break in and steal [fraud]; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” [NKJV]. We must conclude that there is a wealth of the earth but also a wealth of the heavens. **Mark 10:21-22**, ‘Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” ²² At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad [Poverty] because he had great wealth’ [NIV]. Can I ask a question? What if the young man said, ‘Yes, Lord.’ What then? Would he have been impoverished? Abraham gave a son and became the father of many nations!!!

Is it wrong to have wealth on earth? **Mark 10:24-31**, ‘The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” ²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!” ²⁹ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.” ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first” [NIV]. People without houses invested in this land...

Fifthly, giving operates on the principle of **Sowing and Reaping**. Sow a mealie seed and reap a mealie harvest. Sons of God are never motivated to give in order to get more. That is a lottery approach to giving and churches capitalize on the greed of the soul. However, the principle remains in force in all areas of life. Give and it shall be given to you, ‘pressed down, shaken together and running over.’ Not just money but love, mercy, forgiveness!’ A lady who is a secret believer does not attend our church but has learnt of the miracle of the tithe. She brings the tithe to God monthly without fail! There is increase but I want you to see a more significant increase...

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Sixthly, the Money-Grace Connection. The currency of the heavens is not money but Grace – the commodity of the heavens. When there is a dual currency there must be an exchange system. **Is there any indication that our Rand can be exchanged for Grace?** Yes – show you shortly. Whenever, you place something in God's hand it becomes infused with Grace. It is no longer an earthly commodity only but a heavenly substance. It, therefore, operates under a different system – not natural law but divine grace. There are many such examples in Scripture but let me give one NT and one OT. What happened when the young man gave his 5 rolls and two sardines to Christ? It multiplied – is that natural or normal? No! What is going on? It is now subject to the heavenly economy of Grace. It feeds 5000 men only – not to mention women and children! **When we look at our income and then at our expenses, we freak out!!! You say to yourself I cannot afford to give – the math does not add up, I will be in trouble!** We all feel like that as human beings but when we bring the Firstfruit, Tithe and Offering and place it in God's hands, it is laced with GRACED! Moses had this Shepherd's staff in his hands and God says offer it up! He did and it turned into a serpent. He picked it up and it became the 'rod of God' and with it he performed 42 miracles – name a few. Can an ordinary stick do that? Never! What turns an ordinary stick into the rod of God? Place it in the Master's hands! Can you see why communion is so powerful? That ordinary bread and wine is graced – a sacrament!

2 Corinthians 9:6-12, 'Now I say this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows generously will also reap generously.⁷ Each one must do just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.⁸ And God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;⁹ as it is written: "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever."¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness;¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.¹² For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God' [NASB].

Thamo Naidoo, probably the most Grace-Filled individual I have ever met in my lifetime with Helen Haag a close second would testify openly about His measure of Grace. He would confess that it is not his bible knowledge, prayer life or fastings because they are not his strengths.. However, it is his spirit of generosity!

Conclusion

Next week we will bring our Firstfruits Offering to God and in so doing we place the custody of 2024 into the Father's hands. Why? Because we want a Year filled with the Grace of God. Before we teach on Firstfruits it is important to address one concern – we have placed the cart before the horse. **Preachers have emphasized Giving at the expense of the Giver.** Scripture is very clear that the Offering must be an extension of the Offeror.

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The offering must reflect the posture of our heart or the state of our being. Otherwise, our giving becomes a monetary transaction and God, a banker. You are better off taking that money to a financial institution and invest. Bill Gates gives millions of dollars as a donation but never an offering. When you give to God you make an offering and you become the offeror.

2 Corinthians 8:1-7, 'Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.² that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.³ For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing.⁴ imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.⁵ And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.⁶ So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.⁷ But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also' [NKJV].

Beloved giving to God is not 'a get-rich-quickly' scheme. Many have tried that and have been disappointed when there were no returns. **It is not about your money but your heart first.** If God is not God in your life – your offering will not be accepted. I will show you why God rejected Cain's offering and accepted Abel's only. Instead of the intended blessing it resulted in murder – the killing of his brother! Does God mean anything to you, do you honour Him, when you make decisions do you consult him, does He direct your life, etc.? **If God is a delight to you then offering will be a duty but an act of worship.** Next week we worship God with our Offering.