

1 Timothy 6:6-10
Godliness with contentment



Exodus 35 and 36
Content in God's love = willing hearts



Luke 21:1-4
Widows mite = content

In the name of Him who was rich, yet for your sakes become poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich!

All this talk of monitoring our heartbeat led me to get my blood pressure checked this past week and it was high, very high. So I listened to the one who loves me most and decided to do something about it:

- First, I took a long shower using fancy soaps and sweet smelling shampoos and finished it off with some nice cologne.
- Next, I decided to go with a new look with my hair and parted it in the other direction.
- Then I took the Kohl's 10% off coupon on the front of the newspaper for their once a year sale that comes every week, and I bought a new suit and tie and wardrobe.

I looked and smelled great and so I checked my blood pressure again and guess what? The top number dropped two points – never mind that the bottom number went up 15 (but you take what you can get).

And you are thinking to yourself, fool. You don't take care of the heart by cleaning up the outside. And you're right. Then why do we try to clean up our living for God, our serving him and the people he has placed into our lives and today, specifically, our giving our offerings to his work, by focusing on the outside???

We do need money. We want it. We earn it. We invest it. It can be stolen, saved or stashed for a rainy day. It can be worshipped or wasted. The love of it can lead to all kinds of evil and it can be a tool for all kinds of good. It's an object for good or bad, for service or sin much like electricity or even a brick. We use a brick to build buildings and churches but we can also throw them through windows. And if it is just a tool, the way we use it, or view it, or give it is not something that should be addressed on the outside, but on the inside – it's a matter of the heart.

So the problem doesn't come just from the way I budget or the amount of income or the many expenses I have. It's not a matter of being more disciplined, that will help us use our possessions in a way that pleases God. It's a matter of the heart.

And that's true of our church budget too. We are not going to get our budget out of the red by focusing on income and expenses or thinking that if we raise tuition or get more King Soopers cards or have more bake sales, everything will work out. Those things have their place perhaps, but the solution to carrying out our ministry together will always be a matter of the heart.

You see, the heart of the problem, when it comes to our giving, is the problem of the heart.

Israel learned that lesson today in God's Word. Did you hear how they gave? "Everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them." Our English translation emphasizes giving flows out of a willing heart and it mentions the heart one time. But in the Hebrew, just in this chapter of the Bible, the word heart comes up six different times. Every time it says they were willing or brought a freewill offering, the Bible says it flows out of the heart. You see the solution to giving willingly, joyfully, for the work of the Lord, always starts in the heart. And that means what takes place here in Exodus 35 and 36 is nothing less than a miracle... because these people had hearts like ours, hearts that were far from God at times.

You can figure that out from the context.

- This takes place in the book of Exodus and you know what the Exodus is about. We have an Exit sign over the door leading out of church. The Exodus is a going out – God’s people go out of slavery, out of Egypt, out under Moses’ leadership to freedom. You would think their hearts would be filled with joy and excitement and for a time they were, but then they complained. “Moses, there is nothing but wilderness here, desert, death. Did you bring us out here to die?” Hearts belonging to God? Not yet.
- And the people of Israel left as a wealthy people. God moved the hearts of the Egyptians to hand over their wealth and silver and gold, just to get them out of there. They were rich. Their future was secure. Their hearts would belong to God now, right? Wrong. They come to a sea and they are trapped because Pharaoh wants his wealth and his people back and he is riding down on them with armies of chariots and the people complain, “Moses, did you bring us into this wilderness to die?” You know the result. Moses strikes the Red Sea with his staff and the water splits and the people walk to safety on dry ground. Now their hearts are ready and willing, right? Not yet.
- They complain about having no food or water. How are they going to survive? So God gives them Manna or bread from heaven – every day, and he provides water in the wild of the desert and now their hearts will be right. No.
- The next event takes place at a mountain called Sinai and this will be the glory of Israel. God is present on the mountain with thunder and lightning and glory. This is the time he will give his covenant to his people, when Moses will come down the mountain with the tablets of stone and life will be good and right... until Moses sees them worshipping a golden calf, a stature, a lifeless god that has taken their hearts. And God is ready to start over, to abandon these people as he always has that right when people give their hearts to someone else or even something else such as gold or silver or green paper.
- But what does God do? He listens to Moses’ cry for mercy. He hears Moses appeal to the promises He has made to take these people to a promised land. .. And he forgives them! He has mercy and compassion on them and grants them his grace. And just two chapters later, in Exodus 35 & 36, the people’s hearts belong to God and they give willingly and joyfully. Their hearts were content in God’s forgiveness. Their hearts were content knowing God’s promise to care for them. Their hearts were content in finding their value and sense of worth in nothing but God’s love! And so they gave.

It’s a lesson the Israelites learned and one they would have to learn again and again, just like we will have to learn that lesson again and again on this side of heaven: that the problem of our heart is taken care of in the love of God.

You did catch what they were building, didn’t you? It was called a sanctuary here or a tabernacle or a tent where God would come and dwell among his people. This would be the place where Moses would speak with God and leave the tent with his face shining as bright as the sun because of the holiness of God. This would be the place where they would come and worship. This was the heart of Old Testament worship.

In the New Testament, the Gospel writer John would tell us that “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” That word dwelt literally means tent or tabernacle. The Word tabernacle among us. You hear what John is telling us? The Old Testament tent of worship, the one built with all the gold and silver and colored yarn from the people, finds its reality in Jesus. He came and set up his tent among. He is the one where we meet God for he is the very Son of God who gives his heart to us – in life and in death. And that heart that stopped beating on the cross is the source of forgiveness for all our selfishness, our lack of willingness to give, our greed, our worry, our anxiety and our lack of trust in God’s promises. All of it forgiven and then Jesus comes back to life to guarantee that forgiveness and remind us that we too will dwell with him in the promised land of heaven, enjoying the riches of his blessings forever and ever.

Initially, this was going to be a three part sermon and I was going to point out some principles of giving from this lesson, but then I thought, we need to get at the heart of it as Jesus did for us.

But allow me briefly to point out three parts of giving that flow from a heart belonging to God:

1. God's people delight in God's command – to give. (v.4,29)

Commandments, rules, laws, don't always sound so joyful, but when our hearts belong to God, we delight in doing God's will. The Psalmist tells us that God's commands are not burdensome (Psalm 119). We recognize that God commands us to give because giving is good for us. It is a reflection of the love he has for us, when he gives us His Son, when His Son gives his life for us. Giving is good simply because it is what God wants for us.

2. God's people delight in worship of God – by giving (freewill, contributions, wave offering).

The people of Israel brought offerings, freewill offerings and what is called wave offerings. They all have the picture of lifting up offerings to God, perhaps even waving them back and forth in the air or passing them forward to the priest who hold them up to the Lord. Clearly their giving was an act of worship.

There is a reason then, we take the offering where we do in our service. We don't take it at the beginning to get it out of the way or at the end as an afterthought, a necessary duty. We take it after we hear God's Word and love and forgiveness. Martin Luther once said that the last part of us to be converted is our purse or pocketbook. Our offerings are meant to say that this gift God, this small gift, is a token that says our entire heart and soul and life belong to you. That's worship.

3. God's people delight in joining in God's work – by giving (36:3-7).

"Everyone who was willing," comes up again and again, and could sound like some were not so willing, but it is clear all of God's people, from the least to the greatest, participated in bring an offering – why? To do the work of the Lord.

We do the same through our giving – the work of the Lord. So this past week Lord of Life members brought 3 garbage cans full of candy and donated time and their trunks and reached out to our community with our Trunk or Treat event because we rejoice in the work of the Lord. Here is one way we meet people and perhaps win the right to share the message of God's love and forgiveness, a message that changes hearts and people's eternity.

And God continues to rewrite the Scripture today: "Then the whole Lord of Life congregation withdrew from Pastor's presence, and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the church and the school and for all its ministry. All who were willing, men and women, boys and girls alike, came and brought their offerings of all kinds." Amen.

VVV – PDS