*DEVOTIONAL*

October 30 – November 4

*Stewardship: The Farmer Knows*

**Monday, October 30 2 Corinthians 9:6-11**

*“The Lord loves a cheerful giver”*

The agricultural illustration is used by Paul to make a very important spiritual point: a person who continues to be preoccupied with accumulating material things and does not develop a spirit of generosity will fall short of realizing any true joy related to their possessions. In contrast, equally successful people who are generous will find joy both in what they give away and in what they retain - they are becoming the “cheerful giver” that the Lord loves. Further, Paul makes it clear that this principle will only work when people are free to make their own purposeful and deliberate decisions about giving.

Paul must have anticipated that someone might argue, “If I give to help others all it’s going to do is make me a poor person who will need to be helped.” Paul’s answer is simply that the God who gave you what you have right now is the God who will continue to provide you with enough not only to meet your own needs, but also with enough to help others. When we insist that we are not able to give cheerfully to the cause of Christ, we end up contradicting God’s promises to us.

*Create in me, Lord, a spirit of cheerful generosity. Amen.*

**Tuesday, October 31 2 Chronicles 31:11-15**

*“They distributed the gifts made to the Lord”*

King Ahaz ruled Judah for sixteen years, from about 732 to 715BC. He was a king who “did evil in the eyes of the Lord” including idolatry, child sacrifice, and participation in the false worship associated with the Canaanite high places. King Hezekiah followed Ahaz, reigning from about 715 to 687BC. He was a king who “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord” by restoring proper worship of God in the Jerusalem temple. This included reinstating the system of tithes and offerings designed to both worship God and financially support the ministry of the priests and Levites, a system that had been abolished when Ahaz closed God’s temple.

The response to the king’s command to bring the tithes and offerings into God’s temple is overwhelming. It not only allows for the restoration of the work of the priests and Levites, but is a sign of the people’s repentance. In our passage, the Chronicler carefully reports that the bounty of goods received is inventoried, properly stored and maintained, and distributed with fairness.

*May the gifts we give you, Lord, be well cared for and used for your glory. Amen.*

**Wednesday, November 1 Malachi 3:6-12**

*“You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me”*

The God who does not change is the God who loves Jacob and his descendants and, because of God’s love, they continue to exist. But is has been an existence of sin “ever since the days of your ancestors.” The specific charge against the descendants being addressed in Malachi is concerned with failure in the payment of tithes; the “offering” in verse 8 is a technical term for the one-tenth of the tithe given to the Levites that they in turn gave as their offering to God (see Numbers 18:25-32). This failure is a direct offense against God and it brings them under a curse.

But, the passage does not end with the curse. Rather, it goes on to develop a rich portrayal of the blessings promised upon payment of the full tithe. Thus, the people have a choice to make. Will they continue in their sinful ways and live under God’s curse, or will they confess their sin and repent of their ways by offering the tithe to God? If they confess and turn back to God, not only will they be blessed, but the nations of the world will be blessed through them.

*Lord God, you bless me with good things so I can be a blessing to others. Amen.*

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**Thursday, November 2 Luke 16:19-31**

*“There was a certain rich man . . .”*

The Pharisees thought they were entitled. They had the strange idea that their money was deserved, a sign that they were blessed by God, whereas poverty was the result of God’s curse. Jesus clearly disagrees and tells the parable to make his point. The larger context for the parable is the biblical principle of stewardship which teaches that we are all stewards of what we have, and we are to use it to bless others, to bring them health and hope and joy.

The parable suggests that if you have the resources to help and choose not to do so, you are judged. And the poor are judged as well. The poor are to be stewards of what they have as much as the rich or middle class. The parable also points to the fact that arrogance often accompanies wealth. The rich man seems to arrogantly assume that even in hell he can still summon service. And, his seeming concern for his brothers is a form of self-justification: “If I had had more understanding, I would have acted differently.” Jesus makes it clear he had enough understanding and yet missed the obvious truth.

*Thank you, Lord, for what I have. Help me to use it to bless others. Amen.*

**Friday, November 3 Luke 14:31-33**

*“No one can become my disciples without giving up everything for me”*

Jesus warns us to count the cost of being his disciple. To give up everything for him in order to follow him seems a strange message. What we need to realize is that if God and His Kingdom are to be of ultimate importance in our lives, then all other loves must become far less by comparison. To “give up everything for me” does not mean getting rid of everything. It means considering “everything” to be of such limited importance that we will gladly use it however God directs.

Jesus calls us the salt of the earth. Salt has two important qualities. It flavors and it preserves. When you and I live without attachments other than to our Lord, then we can use what God has blessed us with to flavor others’ lives – at home, at work, in the church, everywhere! We become the preserving element, those who use what they have been given by God to champion his love, justice and mercy despite the corrupting influences of the world.

*Heavenly Father, may the salt of my life “season” the lives of others. Amen.*

**Saturday, November 4 Mark 14:3-9**

*“She has done a beautiful thing to me”*

Jesus is enjoying a meal with a friend when a woman does something extravagant. By custom, she would show hospitality and honor to a distinguished dinner guest by sprinkling his head with a drop or two of nard, a pure and expensive perfume imported from India. Her gratitude to Jesus does not fit within these boundaries. Breaking the neck of the alabaster flash, she pours all the perfume over Jesus’ head.

Most of our love is channeled through routines of duty and standard patterns of expression – and well it should be. On rare and grand occasions, however, the spontaneity of love breaks out of the everyday in a spectacular display. A child, for instance, catches a mother by surprise with a clean room or a bouquet of dandelions. Mother’s typical reaction is, “What have you done wrong?” The child answers, “Nothing, this time. I just want to say I love you.” The woman didn’t have to break the flask and pour the perfume over Jesus. But, when ordinary acts do not suffice to express one’s feelings, an extraordinary show of love is in order.

*Jesus, you have saved me from my sin and I love you with all my heart. Amen.*