

Giving More Than You Got

July 16, 2017

I Chronicles 29:1-2, 10-19, Romans 12:14-18, 21

The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights

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*To hear this sermon as preached in worship, please visit
<https://castyournet.files.wordpress.com/2017/07/sermon07-16-17.mp3>*

So, how do you want to be remembered when you're gone? And, in a related question, how do you want to go? What's the last story you want people to tell, or hear, about you?

Jim Heseldon, the inventor of the Segway, died when he accidentally drove his Segway off a cliff. The first man to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel died fifteen years later after complications resulting from a fall when he slipped on an orange peel. Then there was the lawyer in Toronto who was so fascinated by the safety ratings of the windows in his skyscraper that he used to hurl himself against them, demonstrating to anyone who cared that the glass was unbreakable. In July of 1993 he threw himself at the window in his 24th story office and, sure enough, the glass did not break. The frame, however, popped out and the man fell to his death.

You and I can think of a million ways that we'd NOT want to die, and we hope that if we get caught in some embarrassing situation, *that's* not the last story that gets told.



¹Last week, we read the last story about David that gets told in the books of Samuel. I'm not sure that David – or the rest of Israel – wanted people to remember his pride and the ill-conceived census he ordered as his final achievement, though. For that

¹ "Study of King David", 1866 photograph by British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron

reason, we move today to the book of I Chronicles. I and II Chronicles contain many of the same stories that we find in the books of Samuel and Kings. They are written by a different author, and to a slightly different purpose. The name that these books have in the Greek translation of the Old Testament may give us some insight into that purpose: they are called *paraleipomena*, which means “the things that were left out” or more literally, “the leftovers.” It’s as if the authors are saying, “Look, don’t forget that *this* happened, too!”

For almost a year, we’ve walked through David’s life. Here, I’d suggest that even his “golden years” are behind him and he is making plans for his own death. Of utmost importance to him, as it is to many kings and politicians, is the line of succession. Who will replace him? In no small part because of his own sinfulness and failures as a parent, the normal process of naming the first-born as king is not available to this family. Adonijah and his brother Absalom have already been killed in family warfare. It will be one of his sons, but it won’t be the “leading candidates.”

Furthermore, perhaps as an acknowledgment of his own brokenness and sinfulness, David is increasingly concerned about providing the nation with a legacy of faith and worship. He wants to build a grand and glorious temple as the site for worship of YHWH.



²The authors of Chronicles tell us in chapter 21 that David had a vision wherein he was told, firstly, that the Lord would not permit him to build the temple himself because he had too much blood on his hands, and secondly, that his son

² “King David Presenting the Sceptre to Solomon” (detail) by Cornelius de Vos (17th c.)

Solomon should succeed him as king. Solomon, not David, would build the temple that would glorify the Lord.

And so in the reading you've heard from today, David addresses these two issues publicly. He names Solomon as the one who will replace him and he charges Solomon to build the temple to the Lord. He further states that he's providing Solomon with the financial and material support necessary for such an undertaking.

Where did this come from? I mean, where did David learn this kind of stuff? His life had been so messed up in so many ways for so long... plucked from the fields as a mere boy and anointed as king in a secret ceremony; resented by his older brothers; mocked by his peers and his adversaries; threatened, persecuted, and then hunted down by Saul, his predecessor as king...

And his own ascendance to the kingship was simply horrible! After Saul and Jonathan were killed, most of Israel looked at David and said, "Him? No thanks..." It took another seven years for the nation to unite under David's leadership.

This man, now seventy years old, who has been raised in uncertainty and surrounded by those who question his authenticity is doing anything he can to seek to save Solomon and the kingdom from all the grief that he himself went through. In publicly declaring Solomon's ascendancy and praying for his rule and providing him with the resources necessary to gather the people together in worship of YHWH, David is clearly giving to his son and to his people far more than he ever got from those who preceded him.

In some ways, this is not surprising. You saw how David sought to provide the vulnerable with protection and

security even while he himself was on the run. You know how he sought out Mephibosheth and honored him for his father's sake. So on the one hand, you might have seen this coming.

But on the other hand, the notion of going above and beyond, of giving more than you got, goes against the norms of David's day and ours own.

We are much more likely to live by creeds such as "You get what you pay for" or "You get what's coming to you..." We say things like, "Well, what did you expect? After all, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, does it?" What about, "You can only play the cards that you've been dealt, right?"

Now listen: there is a nugget of truth in all of these old adages. I've said them all, for crying out loud. But they are NOT, thanks be to God, the Word of the Lord.

David, for some reason, got more than he paid for. He was an apple that fell a long way from the tree. And he demonstrates here that on at least some occasions, he was able to play way better cards than he was ever dealt.

How is this possible? Because of an even greater wisdom and greater truth that we know simply as *grace*. David knew that the world would love to operate in a simple math problem: garbage in, garbage out. An eye for an eye. That's all neat and tidy.

And deadly. It's an equation nobody can live with. As a man who has sinned so frequently and so publicly, David realizes that he has *not* gotten what he deserved, and that he will therefore seek to give to others better than what they've earned.



³In the first century, a follower of Jesus named Paul wrote to a small group of Christians in the city at the heart of the Roman Empire. These women and men, who met in secret for fear of persecution and betrayal, were told in no uncertain terms that the life of faith means following the example of both Jesus and David in giving more than you get.

I want to point out the fact that Paul was writing to a group of people who were persecuted because that is a sentiment shared by an improbably increasing number of Christians in the USA. In a recent survey, 57% of white evangelical Christians said that they sense discrimination against Christians in America. Only 44% of those same people feel as though Muslims are discriminated against. And an amazing 75% of whites who call themselves evangelical Protestants say that discrimination against Christians is as great or greater than that which is leveled at blacks or other racial minorities.⁴

If those statistics are accurate, then I would have to assume that there are those in the room who identify with that – who feel threatened or persecuted. And if that's the case, then the words of Paul and the context in which he uttered them are of great significance to the church in the USA. Do you think you face discrimination because of your faith? Are you feeling worried about the negative repercussions that could arise should someone discover that you're a Christian? Then let's listen to the man who writes to people who are facing the reality of being thrown to the lions in the Coliseum, or public floggings in the square. Let's pay

³ St Paul the Apostle. Claude Vignon (1593-1670)

⁴ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/perceptions-discrimination-muslims-christians/519135/>

attention to the man who would himself be beheaded because of his faith in Jesus Christ. What does Paul say?

Live graciously.

Give better than you get.

I'd like to suggest that there are three concrete ways in which everyone in this room can respond to the charge of Paul in light of the example of King David.

We can do this financially. What do you have? What can you anticipate? Where did it come from? Where is it going? Too often we think of our spending and consuming as aspects of life that are just not going to go away. I *have* to make this car payment; I *need* the new smartphone; I *can't stand* to stay home and cook again tonight... And yet we think of the gifts we bring to the Lord as afterthoughts. We look in the wallet when the plate is being passed and hope that we've got something small to toss in.

David gave his wealth for the building of the temple; he set aside a significant portion of his material well-being so that the people of God would have a place in which to encounter God's truth.

Do you have a will? Does it include provision for the Work of the Lord? I can tell you that I have a will and then when it's my time to shuffle off this mortal coil, there's something in it for this church. I should also warn you that there's probably not enough in it to warrant anyone tampering with my brakes this week, though...

How does your discipleship determine your spending? If the answer to that is "Um, I don't know..." or "It doesn't", let me encourage you to take some time this week thinking

about what it means for you to be a follower of Jesus as a citizen of the wealthiest society this planet has ever known.

Another area in which we can easily give more than we've gotten is that of investing ourselves in future generations. In a few moments, we'll be baptizing little Karalynn. You're going to like it. I'll probably cry. Her parents are going to make a few promises, and then it'll be your turn. You'll be asked whether you intend to live a life of faith on which she can model her own. You'll be asked whether you intend to make available to her resources that will allow her to grow as a follower of Jesus. We'll ask you all of these questions in the context of the baptism of Karalynn.

But here's the deal: this particular little screecher lives in Akron, Ohio. So when you're asked these questions, you might be tempted to think, "Sweet! There's no way I'll be asked to really follow through on these. She's not my problem!"

Except, of course, that you're not only speaking for yourself in these moments. You're speaking as an agent of The Church of Jesus Christ. Her parents are promising to put her in a place where The Church can see her. You, on behalf of The Church, are promising that there are believers who are interested in and concerned for the lives of babies who have been baptized elsewhere – or not at all.

You are saying that a part of being a Christian means that we take an active role in the spiritual nurture of other people's children. And, to be honest, with the ministry of the Preschool and the Open Door, this congregation does this better than most... but what is *your investment* in this practice? How are *you* blessing the next generation as it

seeks to learn what it means to be fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God?

And finally, each of us can give more than we've gotten as we seek to live lives of grace and gratitude. In our every day decisions about how to invest our energy, what to get excited about, where to put our worries... can we just be thankful? David thought about his death, and then turned around and thanked God for life. Paul saw the conflict and fear that faced early Christians throughout the Roman Empire, and said, "Well, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone."

You, beloved – you can do this. Don't take yourself so seriously. When the yahoos cut you off in traffic, let them in. Buy someone else's lunch. That little thing that your spouse does that just gets under your skin? *Let it go*. Turn off the social media and the talk radio and news every now and then. That horrible thing that happened to you? Don't make that the *most important* part of who you are.

About fifteen years ago, modern American poet Scott Cairns penned this brief verse entitled "Imperative", and I keep it in my Bible to remind me of the call to live a life of grace. Listen:

The thing to remember is how
tentative all of this really is.
You could wake up dead.

Or the woman you love
could decide you're ugly.
Maybe she'll finally give up
trying to ignore the way
you floss your teeth as you
watch television. All I'm saying
is that there are no sure things here.

I mean, you'll probably wake up alive,
and she'll probably keep putting off
any actual decision about your looks.
Could be she'll be glad your teeth
are so clean. The morning could
be full of all the love and kindness
you need. Just don't go thinking
you deserve any of it.⁵

Beloved, we're getting close to the end of David's story.
We may be close to the end of mine or yours. At any rate,
let us commit ourselves to being people who give freely what
we cannot keep forever in the hopes that in so doing, we'll
learn how to hold on to that which we cannot lose. Thanks
be to God! Amen.

⁵ From *philokalia*, ©2002 by Scott Cairns. Used by permission of the author.