

When You Discover That It's Free...

2 Samuel 24:18-25

October 11, 2015

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You are going to get a packet of information in the mail this week. It is an invitation to make a financial gift to the church in support of our ministry and mission. There is a link to a video we have put together for this year's stewardship campaign – complete with a cartoon rendering of your Senior Pastor.

All of these materials tell a story about how God has been active in our life and where God is calling us to invest ourselves next year.

What I hope you will do when you receive these materials is recognize that your decision to support the church is different than the way you make decisions to support other charities, or schools, or non-profits. When you and I make a decision to give to the church, it is an act of faith. More than simply supporting an organization of which we are part – we give to the church as an expression of trust and thanks. We give because we trust that God will use our financial offering in the same way Jesus took bread and fish and fed a hungry crowd: that God will amplify our gifts for the sake of the Kingdom. We also give to thank God for the gift of our life, of our salvation, and of our world (near and far) – gifts that we have received from God freely and only by grace.

The Stewardship Committee has asked that you prayerfully consider your gift – and that you would make your pledge by our Commitment Sunday, November 1st. What I ask is that you join Lindsey and me in making the church your number one giving priority.

There are lots of things worthy of our commitment – but none of them are as important as what God does through the church.

For those who might be wondering, don't worry: we are not going to spend the next four Sundays talking about pledging or trying to fund a budget. Instead, we are going to focus on the gift of grace that motivates us to respond with gratitude. And today we are going to reflect upon the story of David.

You know some of David's story. Erika read the Scripture where David comes on the scene. Samuel was sent by God to find one of Jesse's sons who would become the King of Israel. David was seventh in line. He actually wasn't even in line – he was in the field, tending sheep. But when God saw David, it was clear. David was made of the stuff of kings.

You know David, because he faced Goliath. He was brave. He trusted God to provide what was needed to fight on behalf of the Israelites because he trusted that God was

serious when God said he would make the Israelites a great nation.

You know David because he was a great king. He won battle after battle. He united the Southern and the Northern kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

You know David because he let his power and his prestige go to his head. He saw a beautiful woman named Bathsheba – and when he found out that she was married, David sent Bathsheba’s husband to the front lines in battle so that David could get what he wanted. It worked – but David’s sin was made known to God. And David had to face the consequences.

Sometimes there are self-made men – men who work and struggle and strive to make a name for themselves. David was not one of these men. David was anointed. His life, his role as king, his success, his family, his power – all of it was a gift from God; free, like grace.

The second scripture I am going to read is one you may not have heard before. It is from the very end of the book of Second Samuel – it takes place when David is very old. David has committed another mistake in the eyes of God and his assistant, Gad, has made it known that David must atone for his sin by building an altar and making an offering. Near the end of his life, the old King demonstrates some perspective – some perspective from David’s story that lends itself to our story. Listen with me now for the word of God...

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That day Gad came to David and said to him, ‘Go up and erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite.’ Following Gad’s instructions, David went up, as the Lord had commanded. When Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his servants coming towards him; and Araunah went out and prostrated himself before the king with his face to the ground. Araunah said, ‘Why has my lord the king come to his servant?’ David said, ‘To buy the threshing-floor from you in order to build an altar to the Lord, so that the plague may be averted from the people.’ Then Araunah said to David, ‘Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him; here are the oxen for the burnt-offering, and the threshing- sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king.’ And Araunah said to the king, ‘May the Lord your God respond favorably to you.’

But the king said to Araunah, ‘No, but I will buy them from you for a price; I will not offer burnt-offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.’ So David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings and offerings of well-being. So the Lord answered his supplication for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.

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I have always been affected by stories about people who don't have much, and yet stretch the little that they do have in order to make a gift or an offering to support something that they believe in.

I consider these kinds of gifts to be honorable – full of integrity – and deeply faithful. And I used to think that making a commitment to something without a clear picture of your own financial security must be harder than the way most of the rest of us give - out of our disposable income – with a sense of security about our financial future.

But now I am not so sure.

I am beginning to think that the hardest gift to make is one for people who have enough, or, even, a lot.

At the core, an offering to God is an acknowledgement that the things we have to offer aren't even ours. An offering is an acknowledgement that we are dependent upon the one who gives us our life.

I think recognizing this is a harder leap for people who have lots of things to offer than it is for people who have fewer things to offer – because many of the people I know who are of more meager means have a deep understanding of how dependent they are upon God and God's grace.

And it has been my experience – as a person who has more than enough – that even when I give something, I can still live the illusion of a life where the only person I really depend on is myself.

“I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing,” David said.

I wonder how many times in David's life he made a gift that didn't cost him anything? Just to satisfy the obligation; just to check the box; just so people recognized that - as a leader - he was participating in the events around worship.

But for whatever reason - this time David knew that his offering had to matter. And not because of what his offering would do - that wasn't the issue. David wanted to make sure that his offering would matter - that it would make a difference in **his** life - because he finally understood that beneath his blessings, and his status, and his reputation, and his second-and-third chances - David finally saw that beneath all of that was the source - the Creator - the God of Israel - who freely chose to shower him with grace.

An offering is about recognizing the gift.

And - no, the offering doesn't have to be money. In fact, it is usually more than money.

The offering we usually make - when we find ourselves overwhelmed with gratitude and an awareness of the gift of grace - is our life...lived with purpose, and in joyful service to God.

This morning I have asked Milt Childress to share a part of his story about recognizing and responding to the free gift of grace. I am grateful to Milt for his willingness to offer his testimony in order that we might hear how the good news of the gospel is alive in our brother in Christ.