

“Why ‘*Begin Again*’?” // Exodus 13:11–16 // *Begin Again # 1*

[North American Church Planting Video]: What an incredible testimony, Amen? About 13 years ago, God gave us the vision to plant 1000 churches in a generation. By God’s grace, we are almost halfway to that number, as we have planted 460 total churches. About 75 of those are here in the US, and another 400 overseas.

This year, in our North American Church Planting pipeline, we have *ten* new teams that are going to be planting—that’s right, I said 10—which is the most we have ever planted in a single year. 9 out of the 10 planters come either from out of our church or have been raised up by one of our church plants. Four of them are granddaughter churches--which means that a church we’ve planted is planting them. I’ve had grandparents here tell me that grandkids are the best, way better than kids--all the fun, none of the commitment. It’s that way with church plants, too. But what I want you to realize is the multiplying movement is happening.

And let me just say: Maybe something stirred in you as you heard Pastor Jonathan talking about Charleston, SC or Pastor Phil talking about Greenville, SC, or maybe you know someone that might be interested—I want to ask you go to one of their interest meetings on Monday night (Note: It’s an INTEREST meeting, not a *commitment* meeting!). Yes, they are both in SC... so SC, buckle up, your better looking, more athletic, more intelligent older brother to the North is sending you a couple of their best.

To date, we’ve sent out close to 1500 of our members to be a part of one of these church plants. Maybe you and your family could be next. Your CP’s will tell you more details about that at the end of service, but I hope you’ll prayerfully consider it. That’s not because I want you to leave; we love having you here, but we know that this is how God completes the GC—God doesn’t just want you to sit and soak; he wants us to move and multiply.

So, God is moving in our church planting, but he’s always moving right here in RDU. Let me give you a quick little report from this Fall:

- Our college staff reported to me that they have shared the gospel in personal conversations more than 500 times since the start of the semester, and they’ve seen 25 students already come to Christ through these conversations. Just a couple of weekends they had nearly 600 at their Fall Retreat this year. We now growing growing, thriving communities on 6 college campuses here in the Triangle (UNC, NCSU, NC Central, Duke, Wake Tech, and Meredith)
- Our N Durham campus is getting closer to opening (PIC). So, N. Durham, we love you!
- We’ve also had great response to the two interest meetings we held for potential next campuses--one in Fuquay Varina and another in the Western Wake County area--North Cary. There were about 100 at each of these meetings.

- We've had a couple of businesspeople from the Summit who started a home gathering there that has somewhere near 80 people involved, and they have baptized several down there.
- Maybe best of all, we've baptized almost 80 people right here in RDU over the last few weeks.

So, we are going to take a pause in our study of 1 Corinthians and talk about what God is calling us to in the days to come.¹ We're right at the halfway point of 1 Corinthians, so we're going to take a short break and talk about "Beginning Again." And we're going to do that mostly from the book of Exodus, because that book tells the story of Israel emerging from 400 years of slavery and beginning a new chapter in their walk with God. We're emerging from lockdown; they were coming out of slavery. Their situation is much worse, of course, but there's some principles we can learn about how to begin again.

So, Exodus 13, if you have your Bibles. While you're finding your place: I've heard it said that many of the most creative minds in the entertainment industry aren't in movies or television or music production, but in advertising. Skilled advertisers find ways to get their products seared into our minds. Right? All I need to do is hum, "Bah duh bum bum bummm" and your mind goes, "I'm lovin' it" and you start craving a cheeseburger or some fries. Or, "Give me a break, give me a break, break me off a piece of that... What is it? Applesauce. Football cream. Chrysler Car." (that's from the *Office* in case you're lost.)

I've tried to explain to my kids that advertisers usually don't sell a product as much as they do an experience they want you to associate with the product. I was so proud of my daughter the other day because we were walking into Harris Teeter and they had some sign with a family on it laughing and looking at each other, and she said, "Dad, do you think that if we shop at Harris Teeter our family will love each other and all get along like that?" **Well, one of the advertisements I remember from the 90's is "Corn Flakes—taste them again for the first time."** What they are selling there is nostalgia--eating Corn Flakes can take you back to those simple days of eating cereal in your kitchen, watching Saturday morning cartoons. Life was so much simpler then. So, eat them, and *begin again*.

I don't know if that works with Corn Flakes or not, but **that's what we're going to do with Exodus 13.** Again: *Israel is coming out of 400 years of captivity*, and so Moses wants to lay out some first principles for them in this new chapter of their walk with God. And so he says, vs. 11: **"When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your ancestors, and gives it to you, 12 you are to bring to the Lord every firstborn male of the womb. All firstborn offspring of the livestock you own that are males will be the Lord's.** (IOW, you are to offer up the firstborn of each flock each season as a sacrifice to God. But) **13 You must redeem every firstborn of a donkey with a flock animal, and if you do not redeem it, break its neck.** There were two classifications of animals in Israel: There were clean animals, like a lamb or a cow, and the firstborn of those was to be sacrificed to God. Then there were unclean animals, like a donkey--those couldn't be sacrificed (because they were unclean); so they had to be redeemed by the sacrifice of a clean animal. And if

¹ Works consulted: Robert Morris, "The Principle of First," preached at Life Church on March 1, 2020; Mark Dever, "Tabernacle," sermon preached at Capitol Hill Baptist Church on August 05, 2012; James MacDonald, "Offering My Gift," sermon on Exodus 35:4-36:7; John Mark Comer, "Generous," sermon on Genesis 1:29-31, 2:15-17, 3:1-7, 12:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 9:6-11.

you couldn't do that, you were supposed to just kill the animal. Either way, the firstborn of every flock belonged to God.

And watch this: **13 You must also redeem every firstborn among your sons.** In Israel, the firstborn of every family belonged to God, too. The firstborn son had to be redeemed by a sacrifice. Remember, there are two kinds of animals, clean and unclean. The clean was offered in sacrifice; the unclean had to be redeemed by a sacrifice. What does this show you about how God regards humans--does he regard us as clean or unclean? Unclean. Every kid comes into the world with an unclean, sinful nature, and we have to be redeemed by the sacrifice of a clean one. We've talked about this before, I never had to teach my kids to sin; I never had to send them to selfishness camp; they came by all that instinctively (they inherited that from their mother, of course). So just like with the other unclean species, we had to be redeemed by the sacrifice of a clean offering. See how God through this teaches them about their need for Jesus?

Vs. **14: "And in the future, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'By the strength of his hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. 15 When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of humans and the firstborn of livestock. That is why I sacrifice to the Lord all the firstborn of the womb that are males, but I redeem all the firstborn of my sons.' 16 So let it be a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead, for the Lord brought us out of Egypt by the strength of his hand."**

When your son asks you, "Why do we offer the first of our flock back to God?" You answer, "Because we were slaves; hopelessly and helplessly stuck in captivity in Egypt, and God saved us, all by himself. And we know that if he SAVED us like that, we can now trust him to take care of us. If he saved us when we were helpless slaves, we can trust him to provide for us now that we are beloved children. And the offering of our firstborns to him acknowledges that we belong to him and we trust him.

Three things I want to point out about this offering:

1. They were to bring their *firstborn*, not their *tenth-born*.

- **God said to bring the first one out of the womb, not the second one or the fourth one or the 10th one.** Why? Well, you know why. First, when you give God the firstborn, you are saying that God gets your first and best, even before you! And second, you are saying that you trust God to provide for your future. When the firstborn comes, you're not sure what's going to come after it! So, giving it to God declares that you trust God to provide for you. If you wait until the end to make an offering, after the whole flock comes in--well, that takes no faith. You can see that you are provided for. But our giving is supposed to be a declaration that "I don't know what's coming next, but God I trust you to take care of me!"
- **This is the most consistent giving principle in the Bible. Give to God the first and the best.**
 - It was the primary principle taught in the very first offering ever recorded--Cain and Abel's! Both Cain and Abel both brought an offering to God. Cain was a farmer, and so he brought God an offering of fruit. The problem was that he waited until AFTER the full harvest had come in to make the offering. **Gen 4:4 says this: And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the *firstborn* of his flock.** The only stated difference in the two offerings was that Abel brought his to God *first*, before the

rest of the flock came in, and Cain waited until the end. And... The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry?...7 If you do *what is right*, will you not be accepted? Notice, specifically, **vs. 5**: It says God did not look with favor "**ON CAIN AND his offering.**" There was something about Cain's *heart* that was out of whack. It wasn't the offering per se that displeased God; it was the fact that he had put God second and given him an offering that required no faith. It may have been a generous offering—it doesn't tell us whether it was or not—the point is that God will not, and cannot, come second. **If you're going to belong to God, he has to come first.**

- **Think of it like this:** Say I have a female work acquaintance, and for Christmas I buy her a handbag. I also get my wife a similar one. But the one I buy for my work acquaintance is a vintage Louis Vuitton, and the one I buy for my wife is off the Clearance rack from Walmart. Things will not go well at the Greer house. My wife cannot come second in a situation like that. She has to be first. It's the same with God. **If you're going to be in a relationship to God, he has to come first.**
- Moses said, "Give God your first and best, give him your firstfruits, and then trust him to provide for you."
- This principle is repeated over and over in Scripture. **Prov 3:9 Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the *first* produce of your entire harvest; (and what will happen?) 10 then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine.** (grape juice for us Baptists). He'll take care of you. ABUNDANTLY.

2. They *brought* their first and best, not *donated* it

- The language in Exodus 13 is of bringing, not donating. See vs. 12? **12 you are to bring to the Lord every firstborn male of the womb. All firstborn offspring of the livestock you own that are males will be the Lord's.**"² Bring, not donate. You say, "What's the difference?" Well, you donate something that belongs to you that you want someone else to have. But you can't *donate* what already belongs to someone.
 - Think of it like this: If you borrowed my car, when you were done with it you wouldn't *donate* it back to me, you'd *bring* it back to me. That's because it already belongs to me. That's how God feels about the firstborn, the firstfruits. They already belong to him. You don't donate them, you bring them.
- It's maybe even clearer when Moses says this again later in **Leviticus 27:30: "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees (or investments in the stock market), belongs to the Lord; it is holy (set apart) to the Lord."** Those firstfruits *BELONG* to him.
 - By the way, that word "tithe," literally means 10%. With things like land or grain or money, the first 10%, the firstfruits, belong to me, God says. You can't donate it; it already belongs to me. Hanging on to it is like *stealing* from me.
 - **This reminds me of a story I read—a true story**, about a woman who said her favorite moment of the week was on Tuesday morning where she'd go to the Food Court in the mall and enjoy a cup of coffee and a bag of Mrs. Field's cookies. She had 4 kids, and so once a week on Tuesdays she hired a babysitter and took the morning to just go have some "me" time, some sanity time. So one morning, she gets to the mall, buys her coffee and cookies, and sits down at a table. The place was pretty crowded so she had to sit down at a table across from an older man that she didn't know. He nodded and acknowledged her and went on reading his newspaper. She said after a few minutes she was

² See also Exodus 23:19: "Bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to the house of the Lord your God."

SHOCKED to see the man reach out across the table to her bag of Mrs. Field's cookies, take one out and eat it. She thought, "I don't believe that. Of all the nerve!" So, to make a point, she locked eyes with him, reached her own hand into the little paper bag, took out a cookie and ate it. Never took her eyes off of his. He kind of smiled at her, curiously, but went back to reading the paper. A few minutes later he reached back out his hand, took a cookie, and ate it. She could NOT believe it! "The gall of this guy!," she thought, and so she did her things again—locked eyes with him, took a cookie—visually disciplining him with her eyes. A few minutes later, he did it again. And then there was just one cookie left, and she said this guy had the nerve to reach in, take her last cookie, break it in half, and offer her half! She was outraged! She stood up in a huff, grabbed the empty bag, balled it up and threw it on the ground, then she grabbed her stuff and stormed off. She got to the next store, still seething, and she reached into her pocketbook for something where she found a bag of Mrs. Field's cookies, COMPLETELY uneaten. The bag she had bought. The whole time she had been dueling with him over his own bag. Kind of changes your perspective on the story, and on that man, doesn't it? He's not an audacious imposer, he's actually quite generous. **When you and I resent bringing the tithe to God, we're like that woman:** It's not ours we are sharing with him; we're giving back to him what he says already belongs to him.

- God makes this crystal clear in **Malachi 3:8:** "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me!" "How do we rob you?" you ask. "By not bringing the tithe and the contributions. 9 You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are still robbing me. 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house." (the storehouse was a Jewish institution under the control of the Temple; out of that they funded the teaching and worship ministries of the Temple and it was also a collective fund to take care of the poor). When you fail to do this, God says it is like *robbing* him. Stealing from him! How do you think God relates to people who rob him?
- But look at the **positive side of this verse**, though. "Test me in this way," says the Lord of Armies (bring the tithe to me first, and...). "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure." (Test me! I love that. This is the same principle we saw in Prov 3, '*Honor me and then your barns will be completely filled!*'). I, along with many other believers, have experienced God's faithfulness to this promise. In fact, I had a defining moment on this back when I was in college. I had this down payment due for a mission trip I wanted to take to Belize, Central America. Well, the first installment due was like \$186, and I had just enough money in my bank account to cover it, BUT I hadn't paid my tithe yet on my last paycheck. If I tithed, I wouldn't have enough for the down payment and I might lose my spot on the trip. So, I was like, "Surely God would understand... What if I counted the downpayment for the mission trip *as* my tithe--I mean, after all, it was a MISSION trip?" (Come on, you've thought the same way. And I'm not trying to judge you if you've ever done that, but I prayed about it and wrestled with God over it and in the end felt like the Spirit of God was saying that this wasn't right and that I should just trust God and tithe.) So I mailed my tithe off to my church, but now I didn't have enough money to make the payment. Two days later--and this story sounds made up, but I promise you it's not--I got a check from my OLD employer who said they were reviewing their records and realized they hadn't paid for me for some work, and they sent me a check for... get this... \$186.32. The exact amount I owed—\$186. You say, "Well, what was with the .32?" Well, that was about the cost of a stamp at the time, and I figured God, just

because he's God and has a great sense of humor, threw in .32 to cover the cost of the stamp just to make a point. And it's a point I've never forgotten: **You can't outgive God.**

"Test me in this way," says the Lord of Armies, and see if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure." And in Vs. 11, God gives the negative side of the promise:] 11 (If you give me the firstfruits, he says) I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not ruin the produce of your land..." (The implication being that if you don't, he won't stop the devourer.) He may frustrate your efforts so you don't experience the abundance of God on this part of your life.

3. What THEY had as *precedent*, WE now have as *pattern*

- Sometimes people object here, "Oh, but J.D., this is all OLD Testament! And we're not under the law anymore—Christ has freed us from the Law—we're under grace now." And I agree.
- But here's the question: In the NT, what does Jesus do with the OT laws? Does he raise the stakes or lower them?
 - **He raises them!** For example, he says: "The law just says 'not to kill;' but I say to you not to look upon someone with hate in your heart." (It's not enough to not kill, you should love your enemies!)"
 - Or, "The law says not to steal; but I say to you if someone takes your jacket, offer them your shirt and your bag also in love." The law says not to commit adultery; I say not even to look at someone else with lust in your heart."
 - Jesus said, "The law is like the minimum. If you understand love, it will compel you to go even farther."
- **The same would be true with generosity.** We would expect that Jesus' love wouldn't take us backwards into less generosity, but forward into more. And sure enough, if you want to be technical about it, the smallest percentage for a gift in the NT is 50%. People like Zaccaheus or the woman with the alabaster flask of perfume got so overwhelmed by Christ's grace they couldn't help but give extravagantly and they quit counting.
- A lot of people think Jesus never talked about the tithe in the NT, but he did. Check out **Matthew 23:23**: "Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees! You tithe mint and dill and cumin, (--these guys tithed their spice rack; that's serious when you are pulling off spices and saying, "10% of the ground pepper for God") but you neglect... mercy and faithfulness... These (first things) you ought to have done you were right to tithe!, but don't without neglecting the others." **Matt 23:23** (IOW, you were right to tithe, but that's only the beginning of generosity. **For the Christian, tithing is not the ceiling of generosity, it's the floor. The starting point.**)
- So don't hate on the tithe. Jesus didn't. Think about it, friend: Jesus is, in a way, God's tithe to us--he gave his first and his best so we could be saved. So far from seeing the tithe as an OT law to be discarded, shouldn't we joyfully offer our first and best back to him?

So, that's what we learn from Exodus 13. Now, I love you people, but I've been here close to two decades, and so I know some of the objections you give to this. So let me deal with some of those. We'll call this the "Yeah, but" section of the message...

“Yeah, but...”

“...I can't afford it”

- Well, let me ask you this: Based on what I've shared today, can you afford not to?
- I mean, listen: I understand: some of you are in financial situations that are pretty difficult. The last thing I want to do is put some God-tax burden on you. In fact, if this is you, if you're in financial emergency, we'd love to be a help to you if we can. If you are in a really bad situation, please let your campus pastor know or your small group leader know what your need is and we'll do our very best to help, I promise.
 - Maybe you are just living paycheck to paycheck and not sure how you can start to give. We have a Stewardship Ministry that can help. We have trained volunteer financial coaches that will sit down with you and talk through your financial situation. For many of you, that's a great next step. Go to summitchurch.com/coach to learn more.
- But God's commands to give the firstfruits are not directed only to people with excess money. They are for everybody. No matter what your financial situation, you can still give your first and best to God.
- Jesus once very famously looked at a poor widow putting in two half pennies into the offering at the Temple, it was an incredibly small offering—and Jesus said to his disciples that her giving of those two pennies was more meaningful to God than all the money given by all the rich people that day, because they were giving out of their excess, money they wouldn't really miss, while hers represented her first and best, given in faith, trusting in God to provide.
- **So, even if you have very little, you can still give your firstfruits, your firstborn**, in faith to God, trusting that if you do so he'll take care of you, like he's promised.
- **One of the best applications of this comes from David Jeremiah**, who tells the story about a young couple who heard him teach on these things and came to him, really struggling to obey it... (twinkle in his eye)

Second, you say, “Yeah, but...”

“...I feel like this is all a manipulation ploy to get my money.”

- **Some of you are thinking that**, so let me go ahead and just verbalize it for you.
- Let me address this in a couple of ways. First, I want you to know that my wife and I see serving here as one of the greatest privileges of our lives, and we see ourselves as first givers to this church, not receivers from the church. Every year, we want to lead in how we give and sacrifice. For years, our giving goal has been to double-tithe. And sometimes we've been able to go beyond even that. So, please understand that my primary goal is not to get money from you, but to lead you in giving like Jesus, a giving I want to model. I love to say it this way: **“You don't give to the church as much as you give *through* the church.”** You are not giving to me or the other pastors; we are all giving to the mission of God through this church.
- **Second, I want you to know that we have a very open and accountable process at this church.**³ I am under the authority of a group of congregationally appointed elders; they are not staff members who work

³ Here are a few of the things we've done to promote transparency and safeguard our church: We have become an ECFA certified church; we utilize a robust budgeting process with our staff and Directional Elders; and every year we voluntarily undergo an independent 3rd-party audit. By God's grace, we have met the high standards of scrutiny for these audits every year. To read more, you can see our financial policies at summitchurch.com/give.

for me, but lay members appointed by the congregation. They oversee all that we do with money. They don't work for me; they don't report to me; I report to them.

- But finally on this, let me say this what I always try to say here: *If obeying this command of God is hard for you because you can't shake the idea that I'm trying to manipulate you and get rich off of you—maybe you had some bad experience in a previous church—I understand, I really do. I'm going to ask that you obey God's command to be generous, but give it somewhere else. If you can't get over some bad experience... you've seen someone use this manipulatively and you are associating that with me... I want to take away that obstacle for you, and I want to ask you to give somewhere else. It is more important to me that you learn to be obedient to Jesus than it is for you to give here. You can't be an actual disciple of Jesus if you don't give generously, and it's more important to me that you learn to give than that you give here. We'll be fine. God will take care of us. But you, for the sake of your soul and your walk with God, give somewhere else. Now, I sincerely hope, that if this is the church God has led you to, that one day you learn to trust us and be able to give here, but for the time being, give somewhere else.*

Alright, here's a question I get a lot...

“...Should I tithe off of the gross or the net?” (IOW, pre-tax or post-tax?)

- I get this question a fair amount, and it's usually asked in the right spirit, and sometimes I struggle to answer this because I don't want to imply there's a bunch of technical rules about giving. That's just not the NT way.
- So, don't hear this as a divine rule, but I'll at least tell you how I think about it. Veronica and I have always tithed off of the gross, our income Pre-Tax, because we know that it is God's before the government's. Plus, I want God to bless the whole, not just the net, so I want to give to him first. We want to honor him with the firstfruits not the post-tax second-fruits. So that's how we think about it.

Then there's this question:

“...Where should I give the tithe?”

- Do I just pick out my favorite charity? Can I be my own charity? Again, I don't want to get too legalistic, but like showed you a moment ago from Malachi (or Malach-i, the only IP in the Bible) in every age, God has always established a central institution to be the hub of his work in the world. For the Jews in Malachi's day, it was the Temple. The Temple oversaw the teaching and worship ministry and their distribution to the poor.
- In the NT, that institution is clearly the local church. We do the same things the Temple did—we lead in worship and teaching and missions and help support the poor in our city and around the world.
- That's not to say you shouldn't give outside the church, just that the biblical pattern is that the tithe itself goes to the institution God appointed, which in our case would be the local church.
- Beyond the tithe, I think there's more flexibility in following the Spirit's guidance in your life.
- FWIW, my wife and I give a minimum 10% off of the gross to our local church, and then we support a number of extra mission things with another 10%. At least that's our goal. Now, for us, even some of that additional 10% goes to the church, because we feel like the best mission and justice work is happening

through this church. We think the local church is the best investment of our money; BUT, we do have a few things we give to outside the local church--like Compassion and some campus ministry missionaries and other things that we support.

Alright, how about this one?

"Tithe: Check! Am I done?"

- A lot of Christians are like, "Alright, 10%! Check. God-tax is paid, duty is done. Now I can go on and enjoy my money guilt free." (A lot of people wouldn't say it that bluntly, but that's basically how they think.)
- But remember **Matthew 23:23**: Jesus said that in giving the tithe, you haven't even gotten to the weightier realities of Christlikeness--giving motivated by worship and mercy and compassion. Experiencing the **extravagance of God's generosity** in the gospel should lead you to extravagant generosity toward others.
- **After all: Jesus didn't save you by tithing his blood, did he?** No, to save you, he gave all of it. So, someone who has been truly impacted by the gospel is not asking, "How much do I HAVE to give so I can go back to my self-centered life of material pursuits without guilt?", but "*How can I leverage more of my life for others like Jesus did for me?*" So, I'll say it again: **For someone impacted by the gospel, tithing is not the ceiling of giving, but the floor.**

"...I tithed once, but no big payoff ever came through."

- You are like, "Well, I tithed once, and I didn't have a cool 'random check in the mail for the exact amount of money as my mission trip plus the stamp' story like you did."
- Sometimes people hear these stories and assume that bringing the tithe works like some kind of spiritual-rebate program, where God says, "Do this and I will guarantee you a check in the mail."
- But, you get that God's blessing in your life doesn't always come in financial forms, right? In fact, many of his greatest blessings are not financial.
- For example, in Tim 6:6, Paul says **"...godliness with contentment is great gain!"** What's a greater gift? More money, or the ability to be happy and secure and content with what you have? You know, some of the unhappiest, greediest, most shriveled up people are wealthy. More money does not always mean more happiness. (Ask the rapper, Akon, has been in the news this week cuz he said he was "happier when I was poor." People called him on it and he's sticking by it!) So God might say, "Instead of more money that won't make you happy either, what if--in response to your generosity--I give you a gift greater than money--the ability to be happy and content?"
- **In the rest of that verse in Timothy**, Paul says it is **"People of corrupt mind...(who) think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain."** **The belief that if you give to God he'll make you richer** is called "the prosperity gospel," and it's a false, dangerous gospel, even though a lot of people in America believe it and a lot of pastors in America get rich off of preaching it! Paul says to reject it!
- **Maybe through your generosity he'll wean you off dependence on things of the world**; or maybe he'll enlarge your heart of love for others and teach you the joy of Christlikeness! Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The Greek word for blessed is "Makarios," and it literally means "happy," or "blissful")—it is happier to give than to receive." God may teach you that through your generosity.

- Listen, every study ever done on this—secular or Christian—shows that THE happiest people in the world are generous people. I love how in the Grinch movie Dr. Seuss depicts the Grinch as someone whose heart is small and shriveled, which makes him not just selfish but deeply unhappy. Remember this great quote about why the Grinch was so grumpy? *"It could be his head wasn't screwed on just right. It could be, perhaps his shoes were too tight. But I think that the most likely reason of all, may have been that his heart was two sizes too small."* You think the reason you're unhappy is because you need new shoes or a new job, but what you really need is an enlarged heart. A God-like heart. And God uses generosity to produce that in you.
- In whatever way he enriches you, and he will, he promises—it will be his best *for you*. It will lead to your joy. As we often say, *"Generosity is not something God wants from you; it's something he wants for you."*

MUSIC/VAMP

So, that's my attempt to deal with the biggest objections I hear to this teaching on giving your firstfruits. And, again, if hearing me talk about money in church is an obstacle, please, give somewhere else, just give. Because you can't be a real disciple of Jesus and not give. Jesus talked about money more than any other subject, because he knew money gets to the heart of what we really love and trust.

To circle back to Exodus 13, here's my favorite part of giving: *14 "In the future, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'By the strength of his hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the place of slavery...'"*

When my son sees me give--and I want to do it in front of him--and asks me, "Why?"--and I should give in a way that makes him ask, "Why?"--**I get to tell him**, "Son, I give like this, in an extravagant way, because I was a slave to sin, and God saved me." *Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow!* **"Son, I was nothing without him. Hopeless. Lost.** So, of course he deserves my first and my best. I owe him everything!" In fact, *'Were the whole realm of nature mind, that were a present far too small; love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all!'*

"And son, see, if that's how much he loved me, if he loved me enough to come to earth to pursue and save me, *I can trust him with my future.* He'll always take care of me and provide for me. So, I give to him first.

I learned this from my dad. My dad was always very generous, and he always explained to me what he was doing. I've told you before that whenever my dad got a yearly bonus, we'd sit around at the dinner table and talk about what Kingdom thing our family was going to give it to. And when I was a kid, I thought that was so cool, but then when I got in my teenage years, I was like, *"Hey, we're giving away what we could be spending on a nicer car for me!"* But my dad and mom gave me something far greater than a nicer car. They gave me a deep trust in Jesus. That's worth all the cars in the universe.

Watching my dad and mom GIVE taught me that I could trust him in a way that their words never could. When we give in front of our kids, we are saying *with our actions* that THEY CAN TRUST HIM. Talk is cheap, you know

that. But when I give in front of my kids, I can say, “Son, I literally am putting my money where my mouth is. Watch what I give to, and learn to trust the God that I trust.”

Parents, let me ask you: If your kids’ future trust in God is based solely on what they observe of your giving, what kind of trust in God will they develop? Because, you know this, regardless of what you say, what you do with your money says far more to them about what you really trust than your words do, and your kid, I guarantee you, see that. I know that certainly was true with my parents. And singles, you too. How you give demonstrates your trust in God for the future for others to see.

Summit, it’s time to begin again. God has brought us through a difficult season--COVID. We’re emerging. Time to begin again. Time to renew our commitment to the mission.

EVERY HEAD BOWED

- Are you willing to go on a journey the next few weeks? Will you say, “God what you ask of me, I’m ready to say yes to. I’m saying yes now before you ask the question.” Can you say that to him?
- Maybe he’s already convicted you of what you should do. To start tithing. To give some gift, even beyond that, into his kingdom. Maybe if you can’t financially jump to the tithe, just to start somewhere?
- Are you willing to honestly and openly ask God what he wants from you the next few weeks? We’ll have time at the end of his journey for you to act on this and respond...
- How about this—I never want to skip it—do you know Jesus yet as your Savior? The core of Christianity is not something new what God wants from you, it’s a gift he wants to give you. You and I stood condemned in our sin and God couldn’t stand to see us perish so he gave his only Son to redeem us from our sin. The gospel is a gift God in his love wants to give you. That’s where the Christian life starts. Everything else flows from that. Have you received it? Do you want to? Pray with me... **TEXT READY TO 33933**