



Giving in Uncertain Times

I don't think anyone here this morning would disagree with the statement that we live in uncertain times. Our nation is on the brink of war. A day doesn't go by that we don't hear debates and discussion over whether there is a need to disarm Iraq. But it's not just Iraq. If we do go to war with them, when we're finished up, there is the whole question of North Korea as well as the continued threat of terrorists. All of this has a huge impact on the domestic scene as well. Our economy continues to stumble. Most of us have seen our retirement savings dwindle. Many are out of work. Even yesterday's Space Shuttle tragedy reminds us that even science and technology can't save us. These really are uncertain times.

When times like this come along there is a tendency in all of us to kind of grab onto all that's important to us and hunker down. We sort of climb into our emotional bomb shelters where we hope that we can just wait it out and not lose the things that matter the most to us. We become conservative. It's a time to hunker down and hold on. Uncertain times are not a time for risks.

But what about those of us who call themselves followers of Christ? Throughout the history of the church uncertain times have come and gone, threatening not just our prosperity but our very existence. What was it like to be a Christ-follower when the Roman Empire fell? What was it like during those days our own nation was torn apart by Civil War? What did the people of God do when the market crashed in 1929 and soon the unemployment rose to over 30 percent?

The Bible is full of uncertain times. 1 Chronicles 28 and 29 describes one such time for the nation Israel. It was the end of an era. King David's time was just about up. If you were a 40-year-old man or woman living in southern Israel at that time David would have been the only one you had ever known as King. He was on the throne when you started school as a youngster. He was there when you entered into the adult world and got your first job. He was there when you got married and when your first child was

born. David was just always there! He had led your nation through its own Civil War and brought you victory over the Philistines. His reign was anything but peaceful, but through it all, David had been there to hold onto.

But now David was leaving and he knew it and it was time to prepare the people for his departure. David's words and actions at this juncture tell us a lot about how to live as God's people in uncertain times, and not just how to live but how to give.

1. Their giving was directed.

The primary thing David is concerned about is the worship of God. David knew that the only way to survive in uncertain times is to put God at the center of your life. It had been his desire for some time to build a house, a Temple, for the Lord to dwell in; a place where the people could come and meet with God (v. 2). Up until that time, the Lord's presence was manifest through the tabernacle; a portable worship center (a tent) which had within it the most holy place where the ark of the covenant stood. But now that the people had settled in the Promised Land he wanted to build a permanent place of worship in Jerusalem. In chapter 28 he tells the people about that desire, but he also explains how God told him that he didn't want David to build it (v. 5). Instead, God told him he would make his son, Solomon, the new King and Solomon would build the Temple (v. 6). So David took the plans for the construction of the Temple, which the Lord had revealed to him and he presented these plans to Solomon in front of all the people (vv. 11-19). Then he told Solomon to be strong and courageous and to do the job the Lord had called him to do (vv. 20-21).

And then David turns to the people of Israel. He is about to charge them with the responsibility of providing, out of their own possessions, the materials needed to build the Temple. But before he does that he reminds them in 29:1 of why this is so important. Look what it says, **"Then King David said to the entire assembly, 'My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is still young and inexperienced and the work is great; for the temple is**

not for man, but for the LORD God.”

He reminds them that this is not about him and it's not even about his son; it's about God. The offering he was asking them to make and the Temple they were going to build was for God.

In uncertain times, we're not to hunker down and hold onto all our stuff. Instead we are to direct our resources into the one thing that will give our lives stability and security, and that of course is God. And for the people of the OT that meant building a Temple; a place that would be the centerpoint of true worship. But today we're no longer people of the older covenant. We're people of the newer covenant and now the Temple of God in Jerusalem has been replaced with another temple. It's not a physical building but rather it's a spiritual building called the church. The church is not a building, it's a people. And in uncertain times we're called to continue to direct our resources into that which the Bible tells us is "not for man, but for the Lord God." Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it." Notice it is his church. By the way, he is still building it, and we who gather together here on Sunday and during the week in homes throughout the Peninsula are a part of that ongoing building project.

You and I are pinched every day by all kinds of organizations that plead for our money. Many of them represent very good causes. And there are a lot of things that we would like to give to. This reminds me of the little girl who came up to the pastor after church and said, "When I grow up, I'm going to give you some money." The pastor said, "Well, thank you, but why?" She replied, "Because my daddy says you're one of the poorest preachers we've ever had!" Regardless of all the different things tugging at us, God says, "I want you to direct your giving to the centerpoint of your own spiritual community - the place where you worship, where you put your children in Sunday School, where you are fed the Word of God, where you rejoice in getting married, where you grieve in saying good-bye to a loved one."

2. Their giving was generous.

The first thing David does in encouraging the people of Israel to give is tell them about his own giving. In vv. 2-5 he tells the people of the gold and the silver and the bronze he had given out of his own treasury. He sums it up pretty well in v. 2 as he says, "**with all my ability I have provided for the house of my God.**" That's about all a person can do, isn't it? And this set the stage for the people

to give with the same kind of reckless generosity. At the end of v. 5 David says, "**Who then is willing to consecrate this day to the Lord?**" And then in v. 6 we're told that the rulers and the princes and the commanders and the overseers "**offered willingly.**" He even goes on and tells us what they gave - 5,000 talents of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of brass, and 100,000 talents of iron. That doesn't mean much to us, but the point is that's a lot. They gave generously. They gave with all their ability. In v. 9 it says "**they made their offering to the Lord with a whole heart.**" Their giving was generous.

For centuries Christians have wrestled with the question of how much we should give. Some of us grew up in homes where the most we ever saw our parents give was whatever they could find in their pocket when the offering basket came by. Others grew up in the tradition where a tithe (a tenth) of their income was given because that's what was expected of the people of Israel.

Some of you can relate to the little boy who came skipping into his house with a big lollipop in his hand. His mother asked him, "Where did you get that?" He replied, "I bought it with the nickel you gave me." She said, "The nickel I gave you was for Sunday School." He nodded, "I know, Mom, but the pastor met me at the door and got me in free."

The fact is, the NT doesn't tell us how much to give. But what it does tell us is that whatever we give it should be planned, and it should be regular, and most of all it should be generous and sacrificial; it should cut into our lifestyle. There should be things in our life of which we say, "I can't buy that because that would cause me to compromise in my giving." A good example of that is found in 2 Cor. 8:3 where Paul holds up the Macedonians as an example. He says, "**For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints...**" So they went beyond David! David gave with all his ability, but they gave beyond their ability! Now they couldn't give what they didn't have, but I think that means we should have a sense of being stretched in our giving, of being compelled to give with such abandon that other areas of our life are affected.

But these are uncertain times. Well, remember, these were uncertain times in David's day as well. Their tendency would be to think, "David's on his way out. We have no idea if his son will be able to keep this thing going.

It's not a time to invest, it's a time to conserve." But David saw it differently, and so did the Macedonians. They looked at the landscape of their lives and said, "These are uncertain times, and uncertain times call for unusual commitment and generosity."

Now it might seem that that kind of giving is pretty hard. To give like that we would have to grit our teeth. I mean, it's a sacrifice, right? The whole idea of sacrifice is that it hurts.

3. Their giving was delightful.

But that's not how it has to be. Look again at v. 9, **"Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the LORD with a whole heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly."** It doesn't sound to me like these people were gritting their teeth. This is like someone preparing to compete in the Olympic Games. They go through this agonizing process of preparation. They sacrifice their time and their comfort, but somehow they rejoice in the midst of it. How could they do that? There might be a clue in something David said up in v. 3. He said, **"...in my delight in the house of my God...I give to the house of my God..."** David and the people could rejoice in their giving because they delighted in the house of God more than they delighted in their fat bank accounts. That's the only explanation. That which they gave to was of more value than that which they gave up. And somehow they had this sense of being privileged and honored just to be a part of that. It was an "I get to..." kind of thing, rather than an "I have to..." kind of thing.

We can give with a smile rather than a frown because we know that which we are giving to is worth more than that which we are giving up. There is an obscure passage in the book of Hebrews that speaks to this. In Hebrews 12:25ff the writer says,

"See to it that you obey God, the one who is speaking to you. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, how terrible our danger if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven! When God spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but now he makes another promise: 'Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also.' This means that the things on earth will be shaken, so that only eternal things will be left. Since we are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, let

us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe."

Do you see what he's saying? He's saying there's a kingdom which is shakable and there is a kingdom which is unshakable. By the way, uncertain times remind us of that. Uncertain times remind us of that which is shakable. Remember "Shake and Bake?" That's what's going to happen to this world! This world is going to shake and then it's going to bake. Which would you delight to invest in - that which is shakable and bakable or that which is unshakable? Which one of those would put a smile on your face to have in your spiritual stock portfolio? That's why we give delightfully with a smile on our face.

4. Their giving was humble and thankful.

So they've taken the offering. They see all that has been given and they're excited. The next thing that happens is that David prays. This is one of the great prayers of the Bible. There's been more needlepoint made out of these verses than John 3:16! But don't let the familiarity of these verses numb you to their impact.

At this point, if I were David and the people I would be patting myself on the back. I'd be thinking, "Man, we did some good here! Look at all this gold and silver. It looks like we just broke into Fort Knox! God must be pretty proud of us. It's a good thing he's got us on his side." But, as you might have guessed, that's not what David prays. Instead, David's prayer is filled with humility and thankfulness that they were even allowed to give.

As a matter of fact, the first thing he does is acknowledge that the last thing God needs is for us to give him anything. Look at vv. 10-11,

"So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, 'Blessed are you, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and you exalt yourself as head over all.'"

David knew that God doesn't need our offerings because he has dominion over all. Everything in the world belongs to him, and so everything we have comes from him in the first place. Look at v. 16,

"O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build you a house for your holy name, it is from your hand, and all is

yours.”

David takes this even a step further. He recognizes that not only did God give them the resources to give but he gave them the ability and the strength to give. Look at vv. 12-13,

“Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all, and in your hand is power and might; and it lies in your hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank you, and praise your glorious name.”

When you give, don't forget that God is not the beneficiary of your beneficence. When you give, you're not meeting God's needs. How could a stream fill the spring that feeds it? God is not an entrepreneur who depends on investors to make his business go. God is not dependent on us; we're dependent on him...even in our giving! We give to him but he gives both the supply and the strength to give. Peter writes, **“Whoever serves (gives) is to do so as one who is serving (giving) by the strength which God supplies.”** Why? He tells us, **“...so that in all things God may be glorified...”** (1 Pet. 4:11). So who gets the credit for our giving? Who gets thanked? The same one David thanked.

After Lynn and I got married my parents sent us on our honeymoon. They were so generous. They paid for the flight and the hotel. And then they gave us a credit card. While we were gone, we thought it would be nice to buy them a thank you gift. So we found these wonderful gifts, but of course we didn't have the money to buy them, so we used the their credit card! It felt kind of funny giving them these gifts that they had paid for, but we did anyway and they were nice enough to thank us for them. But, really, who should have been thanking who?

David knew that before we can give God anything we must first let him give to us. He knew how weak and poor we are. Look at vv. 14-16,

“But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from you, and from your hand we have given to you. For we are sojourners before you, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.”

David knew how weak and frail and temporal we are.

There is a kind of giving that does not honor God; to the contrary, it dishonors God. Jesus said **“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve”** (Mk. 10:45). Think about that. Another way to put it is that he came not to be the recipient but to be the giver. Before you can honor God in your giving you must learn to receive something from him. Jesus said, **“Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners”** (Mk. 2:17). All that a patient can offer their doctor is their need. We honor God in our serving and giving when we stay needy and continually look to him for grace and mercy.

The good thing about uncertain times is that they remind us that we're frail and weak. They put us in that position where we know that we are not in control and we continue to look to God to supply us with what we need. And that, beloved, is the BEST time of all to give.

CONCLUSION

These are uncertain times. Who knows what will happen in 2003. But what better time for all of us to give to the centerpoint of God's work on earth - the church. What better time to give generously and joyfully, knowing that we are contributing to an unshakable kingdom. What better time to humbly thank the One who gives us the supply and the strength to give in the first place.

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