

Sermon for Sunday, October 24, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"HOW TO GIVE AND ENJOY IT"

Text: "but she, with less than enough, has given all that she had to live on."
Mark 12:44

This morning I want to talk about money and about giving it away. This may seem crazy to most of us because nobody gives money away! As a matter of fact the reverse is true - most of us are bent on accumulating money, on saving it, on hoarding it. Yet, one of the greatest enjoyments of life can be to give money away and I want to talk with you about some things that can help you to give and enjoy it. I am reminded of the story of the colored preacher who was told by the leading Deacon of his church that he was always preaching on "give, give, give." The Deacons said, "If you don't stop preaching on giving you are going to kill the church." The preacher got up the next Sunday to preach and announced his text and said he was going to preach on giving. "I'se been told that I'm gonna' kill dis church preaching on givin'. But I ain't never seen a church yet that been killed by givin'. And if any one here this morning knows of a church that done killed itself by givin' itself to death, I wish he would let me know. I'se gonna' go to dat church, climb up on its roof in the moonlight, and I'se gonna' cry out loud as I can, "Blessed am de dead dat die in de Lord."

Well, I guess that preacher had a point because I have never known a church that gave itself to death. As a matter of fact, it seems to work the other way. The church that is the most alive; the church that is the most dynamic; the church that is having the most fun and enjoyment, is the church that is giving. It is giving of its time and talents; of its resources and of its money. You show me a church that has a great stewardship and I will show you a church that is not only vitally alive, but I will also show you a congregation that is enjoying itself, that is having a great time serving the Lord.

One of the first rules for giving and enjoying it is to give off the top. One of the problems all of us has is getting our lives in proper relationship to God. If I asked you if you wanted God first in your life this morning you would probably say "yes." Yet, the fact is this is one of the hardest things that any of us can do. It is not easy to put God first. There are simply too many things that get in the way. Now, I would not tell you that it is going to be easy to put God first in your life. That would not be honest to you. It is one of the most difficult things you will ever do. Yet, I can tell you how to make a start. I can tell you how to make a beginning. You can begin to put God first in your life by giving off the top of your income to him. In many ways money - and all it represents and all it can do for us - is the most important thing in our lives. And if we can put God first there, it will help us put him first in some other things and in some other ways. So here is a place to start. You will enjoy giving and it will mean a great deal to you. It will be enjoyable because you are doing what you know in your heart you should. And that is always enjoyable, isn't it? It is always joyful to do what we should. Also, it will be enjoyable because it will help us to put God first in our lives. It will bring us joy to know that we are making a start at the most important thing we can do,

that is, putting God first. So then, you can give and enjoy it if you are giving off the top. It is negative psychology for our religion to give off the bottom.

By the time we get to the bottom part of our income there are more things demanding our money than there is money. By then we are making God compete for other things that seem important at the moment. That makes us even resent God. We know we are expected to give and when we have to do it grudgingly off the bottom, when we give it really wanting other things that the money will buy, it is not much fun to give. It is hard to give that way. We are weak people, you and I, and we ought not run the risk of making God compete in our lives with other things if we can help it. So, to give and enjoy it, the first thing we have to do is give off the top of our income. We will enjoy having God first in our lives, of making this start toward putting him first, and we will enjoy doing what we know is right. It is so much easier to give and so much more enjoyable, when we are not making God compete for our money by putting him at the bottom.

The second rule to help you enjoy giving is closely tied in with giving off the top. It is giving systematically. The Bible tells us that on the first day of every week each man ought to lay by in store as God has prospered him. You can't enjoy your giving if you don't do it regularly. We are creatures of habit. Most of the things we do have been ingrained over a long period of time. When I come to work each morning I come a certain way. I drive that route by habit without thinking about where I am going. As a result, no matter where I start, if I don't watch myself, I end up at the church. One day my wife sent me to the store for something. The next thing I knew I was 9 miles away, parking at the church. Habit is like that. So not only must we give off the top, we must give regularly. We don't enjoy doing those things we have to think about and worry about. Psychology tells us we sometimes develop mental blocks about things we don't like or don't want to remember, or don't want to do. Sometimes a person has psychic amnesia. Some memory has become so painful, some experience so unbearable, that he simply blocks it out. He can't remember any more. Some of our church members are like that! To give is so painful - such an unbearable experience - that they just forget to do it. So if we are going to give off the top, we must do it systematically, we must do it regularly, week by week. Your giving will be more fun, it will bring you more joy, if it is done regularly.

And then there is another side to giving regularly. Suppose you forget to give one week. Then you skip a second and a third time. Soon, you are so far behind in your stewardship you can never catch up. It becomes a burden to you and you begin to resent the task of catching up. I know many people who have simply quit coming to church because of this. They meant to give a certain amount but they fell behind. The farther they fell behind the harder it was to catch up. They felt so conscious-stricken and guilty that they simply quit coming to church. Giving was no longer a joy to them. So, if you want to give and enjoy it you must give off the top and you must give it regularly.

The third thing I would say to you about how to give and enjoy it is to give with a grateful heart. You know, I love young people, but there is one thing about the young that always distresses me. It is their disrespect for tradition, their lack of a sense of history. Now, I know that one can become so steeped in tradition

and history that he can't move. I know as well as you that the person or institution or organization that is tradition-bound is dead. Yet, we all need a sense of history, a respect for the past. Let me put it another way: we need to be grateful for what has been done for us. For example, we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. In the field of science we are indebted to those men who made bumbling, faltering experiments. Without their efforts we would not be where we are today. In the same sense of the word, we need to be grateful to God. We need to be grateful for the gift of his only Son.

Most of us are like the hired hand who told his boss he was quitting. The boss said he couldn't understand why the man would leave. "After all," he said, "two years ago when your wife was sick I paid her hospital bill. Last year when your house burned down I helped you get another place to live. Six months ago when your car broke down I paid for the repairs." "Yes," replied the hired man, "but what have you done for me lately?" That is the sin of ingratitude - the sin of a poor memory. Do you remember how the psalmist put it? "Bless the Lord, O my soul," he wrote, "and forget not all his benefits." And then he goes on to add what the Lord has done for him, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Psalm 103) Yes, "Bless the Lord ... and forget not all his benefits."

Gratitude must find an outlet or the very soul withers. The story is told of a lake in Central Africa. When first discovered it had no outlet and its water was brackish. When Cameron and Stanley visited it, the water was just beginning to find an outlet into the Lukuga and thence into the Congo. Later, the tiny stream had cut itself out a full path. Today that lake is said to be pure and wholesome. Fish abound and vegetation now grows around it. If you do not have an outlet to your gratitude - if your heart does not find expression of its gratefulness, surely it is brackish and no lovely thing can live there. So, if you want to give and enjoy it, you must give from a grateful heart. A heart that responds to the goodness and mercy of God, a heart that forgets not all his benefits, a heart that is responding its gratitude is a heart that is giving and enjoying it.

Finally, if you want to know how to give and enjoy it, you must also give yourself with your money. What is money? Is it not an extension of your personality? It is an extension of you that can go out and accomplish great things. Your money represents the labor of your hands. And your hands can go into a new suburb and start a new church; your hands can produce literature for boys and girls in Church School; your hands can perform an operation in Japan or feed a hungry child in Korea; your hands can play the organ, hold the hands of a dying person, and build a place of worship; your hands can teach a farmer how to make better crops in a primitive land or clothe the naked, feed the hungry; your hands can teach a Brazilian native through Don Kaller to share Christ with another Brazilian, and give light to those who are in darkness. Yes, your hands can do those things because your money is an extension of your personality, your abilities, your energies.

What an upthrust of power it brings us when we know that! To know that our

hands are doing the work of Jesus as he commanded us - what greater joy can there be? So if you want to give and enjoy it, remember that you are giving yourself. Through money you are extending your personality and fulfilling the command of Jesus to go to the ends of the earth to make him known.