

Sermon for Sunday, November 9, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
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"HOW TO AVOID HEART FAILURE"

I Chronicles 29:1-13

Text: "Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord; David the king also rejoiced greatly."

--I Chronicles 29:9

A country preacher was once asked what makes a great church. He replied that it took three books to make a great church--the Good Book, the Hymn Book, and the Pocketbook. Most of us love the Good Book and most of us enjoy the hymn book. But when we come to the pocketbook, we hit a very sensitive nerve. The pocketbook nerve is the most sensitive nerve in the human body. We are much like Farmer Applegate's cow. When asked how much milk she gave, the good farmer replied, "If you mean by voluntary contribution, she doesn't give any. However, if you get her pinned in a stall where she can't kick, a good milker can get four gallons a day."

Today we are going to make our commitment to the Lord and to Central Church for 1976. What is our motive for giving to the church? In a little while when you sign your pledge card, what is your motive for giving? Now, let me suggest some poor motives for giving. For example, some people may give to the church to impress others. I read a story not long ago about a man who got out a five dollar bill to put in the plate. However, as the usher approached, he recognized him as an important businessman with whom he had been trying to make a business contact. Wanting to impress him favorably, he substituted a fifty dollar bill for the five. Now, that was a poor motive for giving. I once had an Elder who never made his pledge until everyone else had pledged. Then he made his pledge slightly larger than the largest pledge. You see, he wanted to be known in the church as the largest contributor. Well, that is a danger all of us run in giving to the church and we need to examine our hearts as to our motives.

Another bad motive for giving is to give a little so you won't have to give very much. See how it works! Suppose this morning I fill out a pledge card (I know that if I don't someone will call on me this afternoon!) but I only put down a small amount. That way I don't get called on and nobody comes to me and says, "Look, this pledge is far too small. You make a great deal of money and this little pledge is only a fraction of what you should give." No, nobody says that. I have given a little in order to keep from giving what I should. In the process, I have salved my conscience, silenced the church, and retained my position in the community and the eyes of the world as a contributor to the church. However, my giving has not begun to approximate anything Christian. My motive is wrong.

Another bad motive for giving is the profit motive. We give, expecting to receive something from God in return. We read in the Bible that God says, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over." We preachers are guilty of promoting that idea. Just this year a man in Florida sued his Baptist church because he was persuaded to give with the idea that he would receive. When that didn't happen, he sued the church to get his money back. But we preachers promote that concept. We tell stories of people who gave and something great happened to them--they got a big raise that more than made up for their gift, or they struck oil, or Great Uncle Joe died and left them a fortune. Now, I don't mean we were lying to you--sometimes those things do happen. As a matter of fact, you will always get from the Lord more than you give, although it may not be in the form you expect. The only problem is, if our motive for giving is to get in return, then our motive is wrong. God simply does not bless wrong motives that way.

Another bad motive for giving is our gullibility. We Americans are a soft touch for anybody in need (except maybe New York?). Remember the story of the man who called a repair shop and asked them to pick up a window blind at his home and repair the cord which had broken. When the repairman called at the home, the lady answered the door and the man said, "Lady, I've come for the venetian blind." She pressed a quarter in his hand and said, "Well, I want to help them, but this is all I can afford." Some years ago a reporter for one of the Memphis papers went out to prove a point about soft-hearted Americans and their gullibility. Within an hour he had collected about \$15 on behalf of the widow of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington! We give because we feel we ought, because there are people in the community who need the church, even if we don't. We give because we think the children in the neighborhood need some religion, even if our's don't. And that is a poor motive for giving.

Well, so much for bad motives for giving. What are some good motives for giving? Look at our text for this morning. There we read, "Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord..." In that verse we see the motive for giving, the method of giving, the manner of giving and the consequence of giving. Let me point them out to you.

First, the text says they gave with a whole heart. Their hearts were right towards God. How is it with your heart this morning? Are you satisfied with your relationship to Jesus? Are you content with who and what you are? You see, if your heart is right with God, then your stewardship will be right, too. I know not all of us are right with God. Some of us are suffering from "heart failure". There are some of us this morning who need to get some things straightened out with Jesus. There are some things in our lives we are not very proud of. There are some things we are doing that we need to surrender to Jesus. Yes, some of us are experiencing a sort of spiritual cardiac arrest. I hope that all of us this morning will make our stewardship right with God and in the process that we will recommit ourselves to the Lord and make some other things right in our lives as well. In our scripture for this morning the motive of the Hebrews was a heart right with God. That should be our motive for giving. God grant that this morning you and I don't suffer a heart failure.

Notice secondly in our text the method of giving. The Bible says they gave freely. The Hebrew word there means generously, with abandon, lavishly. Do you give to the Lord that way? Do you ever, just spontaneously and lavishly do things for the Lord? In less than two weeks I'll be celebrating my first wedding anniversary. The other day I went out and bought Sydney an anniversary present. That was a mistake! I am so happy and love her so much I couldn't stand having the present and spontaneously gave it to her. I guess I'll have to get another one now. But that is how the Lord wants us to feel about Him and give to Him--just out of the abandonment of our love and the wholeness of our hearts to give to Him.

So, the motive for giving is a whole heart; the method of giving is freely. Notice thirdly the manner of giving. Our text says that the Hebrews gave willingly. Now, I suppose King David could have forced them to give. He could have levied a tax for the building of the tabernacle. But David didn't want his people to give because they had to. Instead, the Bible tells us he said, "Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the Lord?" What is the manner of your giving? Do you do it because you must, or because you feel guilty if you don't? The manner of our giving should be willing--giving because our hearts are whole towards God and we generously and freely respond to His love for us. When we do that we give willingly.

Finally, notice in the fourth place the consequence of their giving. The Bible says, "Then the people rejoiced..." Do you want to leave here with joy in your heart this morning? Would you like to have a deep inner joy, a sense of being in tune with God? When you get your stewardship with God right, it will bring joy to your heart. If you don't get your stewardship right with God, there will be something missing in your life--you will miss the greatest blessing of all, for Jesus Himself once said, "It is more blessed to give..."

Is there joy in your heart over your giving? Do you remember our opening hymn this morning when we stood and sang, "Joyful, joyful we adore thee." Are you joyful in the Lord? And remember our second hymn? "Have thine own way, Lord." Are you joyful that the Lord is truly having His way in your life today?

If you want to experience the joy of the Lord, start working towards the tithe if you are not already there. If you give five hundred dollars or less, raise your pledge at least 20 percent. If you give between \$500 and \$1,000, raise your pledge at least 15 percent. If you give more than \$1,000 but are not tithing, then give at least 10 percent more. It will give you joy to know that you are working towards God's will for you and your family--a tithe. My family and I give more than a tithe of our salary. But we are so blessed and God has given so much to us that we are going to increase our giving 10 percent. It gives us joy to do that.

There are a lot of Christians today who are suffering from heart failure...they do not have a whole heart towards God. My prayer for us here at Central is our text for this morning, "Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord;". When your heart is whole towards God, you give freely, lavishly and you give willingly. When that happens, the people always rejoice. God grant that each of you may leave here this morning with joy in your hearts.