

Sermon for Sunday, November 13, 1977, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"BALANCING THE SCALES BETWEEN GIVING AND LIVING"

St. Matthew 23:16-24

Text: "...these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."

St. Matthew 23:23

This morning all of us will make our commitment to the work of the church for 1978. In my sermon last week I talked about some of the reasons our budget for next year has gone up and why our needs are so large. Then this week you received in the mail a brochure that explained in some detail the various parts of our budget. I want to talk about our relationship to Jesus. Bob Denckhoff, our Budget Chairman this year, has kept saying one thing over and over that all of us need to understand. He keeps saying that stewardship--our giving--is not a financial matter but a spiritual matter. He says that what we give is a key to our relationship to God.

And, do you know, I think he is absolutely right! When my relationship to Jesus is right, how I live and what I give gets itself straightened out. Over seven years ago I was a part of a lay renewal team that went to the First Presbyterian Church of Florence, South Carolina. That was one of the most dramatic experiences I have ever had. On the final night of that meeting I invited everyone who had made a commitment to Jesus for the first time that week, or who had totally rededicated his life to Jesus, to come forward. I told them, "We are not going to sing 'Just as I am.' As a matter of fact we are not going to sing anything. I don't want anyone to look back later and say that they got carried away by the singing or that it was a momentary emotional experience. But everyone who means business with Jesus, you just get up out of your seat and you come stand here at the front. It is your way to saying to God and everyone here that you belong to Jesus and you intend to live your life for him." Well, the people began to come literally by the hundreds. They stood there with tears running down their faces. They were tears of joy because of what was in their hearts. That was over seven years ago and that church is still on fire for Jesus. Just the other week I was with a family from that church and they told me that the first year after that lay renewal that the giving of that congregation went up over forty percent! Yes, when your relationship to Jesus gets itself straightened out, the giving and the living take care of themselves.

The first thing I want to say this morning is this: what you give to the Lord is no substitute for how you live for the Lord. How are you living for Jesus this morning? I suspect few if any of us are totally pleased about the way we have lived. Not many of us have even lived up to our own expectations of ourselves, let alone the requirements of God. So, for some of us, giving to the church will be almost a relief. Because we have not lived as we know God wants us to, it is almost a relief to give something to the church to make up for it.

Yet, giving is no substitute for our living. For example, go back and read the 36th chapter of Exodus. There is recorded the instructions that God gave Moses for building the temple in which the Hebrews were to worship God. Moses, like any good Presbyterian pastor, started a building campaign. And Moses was astonishingly successful. The Bible says, "So Moses gave command, and the word was proclaimed throughout the camp, 'Let neither man nor woman do anything more for the offering for the sanctuary.' So the people were restrained from bringing; for the stuff they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more." (Exodus 36:6,7) I suppose that was the first Every Member Canvass and there hasn't been one as successful since! Yet, in spite of this generosity, their giving was no substitute for their living. Those same people who gave so much of their money and goods, were destined to wander in the wilderness for forty years and perish there without seeing the promised land. And why? Simply because they were a wicked, sinful, rebellious

people who, by the way they lived, brought the wrath of a righteous God down upon themselves. Their giving was no substitute for their living.

No, it is not enough to give to God, you must also live for him. Isn't that what the prophet Amos meant when he said, "Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream." (Amos 5:22-24) No, their offerings were not enough. God expected right living--he expected justice and righteousness.

On this commitment Sunday, let me ask you, is the way you live right with God? If it isn't that's the first thing each of us should get straight this morning. As Jesus said, "for you tithe...and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith..."

But having said all of that, lets turn the whole thing around and say it the other way:how we live is no substitute for what we give. Just as giving is no substitute for our living, so living is no substitute for our giving. That's the second thing I want to say this morning. Wasn't that the problem of the rich young ruler? The Bible says he came to Jesus and said, "What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" Jesus said to him that first he must live right. He must not kill or commit adultery or steal, and so forth. When the young man said that he had done all those things--that he had lived right from his youth up, Jesus told him that just living wasn't enough. He told him about giving, too. He told him to take what he had and give. That is, to your right living, add right giving and that's how you have eternal life.

Does that make sense to you? Being a Christian not only involves how we live, it also involves what we have. Wasn't this the profound insight that Zacchaeus had into the Christian life when he gave his heart to Jesus? Do you remember the story, how Zacchaeus, a small man, climbed a tree to see Jesus when he went by? Jesus went home with him and there Zacchaeus gave his heart to Jesus. And when he did, two things happened to him. First, he said, "Lord, if I have taken anything from any man falsely, I restore him fourfold." That is, Zacchaeus was saying that as he had cheated people and lived badly, he was changing his lifestyle. He was going to make amends for the way he had lived and for the future he would do better. But how he lived from now on was not enough. His conversion involved not only who and what he was, but it also reached down into what he had. Do you remember how Zacchaeus put it? He said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give..."(St. Luke 19) No, there is simply no such thing as Christian living apart from Christian giving. And, do you know, when Zacchaeus got his living and his giving in order, Jesus said to him, "This day is salvation come to this house."

That brings me to the third thing I want to say this morning. How you give and how you live will impact your home. When Zacchaeus got his giving and his living right with Jesus, salvation come to his home. So many parents are wondering today what has gone wrong with their children. In almost every case I deal with, the problem is not with the children, but it is with the parents. Their giving and living are not what they ought to be. I tell you we parents have a tremendous impact on our children. As the Bible puts it, we eat sour grapes and it puts our children's teeth on edge. It is awfully hard for God to bring salvation to the children of a home when the parents are blocking God's Spirit by their living and their giving.

One of the great evangelists in our Presbyterian Church is a man named William Hill. Dr. Hill tells the story of one of his members who came to him one day and said, "You know that sermon you preached on tithing last Sunday really got to me. I went home and I talked it over with my wife and we got out all of our bills and all of our papers and figured up all of our finances--our income and our bills--and we worked out a schedule by which in one year we will pay off all those debts that we owe. We'll be absolutely square with the world, and we made up our minds that one year from now we are going into partnership with God and we are going to start tithing." Bill said to him, "But the Bible says 'prove me now...' "Yes," said the man, "I know it says 'now' but I just can't. One year from now I am going to do it." "But Carl," said Dr. Hill, "Don't you think God can make your nine-tenths work out to meet your obligations and do what you have to do if you will trust God and do what God tells you to do?" Carl said to his pastor, "I do trust God, but I can't do it now. A year from now, I promise you, we are going into partnership with God." And in spite of Dr. Hill's pleading, Carl failed to act when God was touching his heart. Here is what Dr. Hill sadly tells us, "Well, forty years have passed since then, and I've watched Carl. He never did it. And I've watched his children, four of them. There's only one of them who even makes a pretense of being a Christian." Yes, it is awfully hard for God's salvation to come to a man's home, to his children or his grandchildren, when his giving and his living are not right with Jesus.

Dr. Hill goes on to tell this little story. A Jewish priest was offering a sacrifice at the altar. A great mother eagle was noticed circling above. That eagle smelled the good meat cooking on the altar and circled closer and closer. Suddenly the eagle swooped down in a blaze of speed and sinking her talons into the meat on the altar fire, she rose on her mighty wings. She flew to the craigs of the mountain to the nest where her little eaglets waited for something to eat. The mother eagle did not know that some of the hot coals from the altar fire had stuck to the bottom of the meat. She dropped the food down into her nest and the little eaglets began to devour it. But suddenly the nest began to smoke and then it burst into flames and all the baby eagles died. Dr. Hill concludes this way, "you can steal off God's altar if you want to, but don't be surprised at what happens to your home. Don't be surprised at what happens to your family. Don't be surprised at what happens to you."

No, our giving is no substitute to our living, any more than our living is a substitute for our giving. It is only when we have them both--our giving and our living--in balance with Jesus that God can truly and freely bless us and our homes. God grant that for you and me that our living and our giving may be such that Jesus will say to us, "this day has salvation come to this house."