

Sermon for Sunday, November 4, 1979, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"THE UNFINISHED DECISION"  
II Corinthians 9:1-9

Next Sunday is a big day in the life of this congregation. Next Sunday we will be asked to make our financial commitment to the Lord and his church for 1980. 1980 begins a new decade for the world, but it also begins a new decade for Central. What does this decade hold for us? When the decade of the eighties comes to a close, surely Central will be different from what it is this morning. Our young people will be grown up. They will have finished college, started their careers, gotten married and made a lot of us grandparents. Some of us will have seen our careers change, some going on to success, others perhaps faltering and failing to achieve their dreams. Some of us will have moved on and will be living in other places. Some, like myself, will be nearing retirement. Some of us will have passed on, having made that last, final one-way journey to the cemetery. Where will you be when the decade of the eighties comes to a close? Will you be alive then? What will have happened to you--to your loved ones--to your family? Yes, when the decade of the eighties ends and 1990 arrives, what will be the most important thing in your life then?

So, next Sunday you and I will be making our first commitment for the coming decade. As we begin that decade, we cannot know what the future holds. We cannot image what life will be like by the time that decade comes to a close. Let me ask you this question: when the 1980's come to an end, what kind of a person would you like to be then? What would you like for your relationship to Jesus to be when 1990 arrives? How much closer would you like to be then in your relationship to God? Do you want to be a better person than you are now? Do you want to be closer to the Lord than you are now? Do you want to have a deeper walk with Jesus than you have this morning? If you do, let me ask you this: How do you plan for that to happen? Do you have a plan to make those desires and wishes come true? How will it happen that you will achieve your hope or dream for a deeper, closer relationship to Jesus?

You see, for that to happen in your life you will have to make some decisions. A deeper walk with Jesus will not happen automatically. Our relationship to Him grows only if we work at it. Do you have some plan for that? If you want your relationship to Jesus to grow, one of the things you will have to work at is your financial stewardship. Have you made that decision? As our text for this morning puts it, "each one must do as he has made up his mind..."

There are two questions I would like to put to you this morning that relate to you and the coming decade and ask you if you have made up your mind about them. The first question is this: have you made up your mind about your relation to Jesus as it relates to your financial resources? Now, a lot of us have made up our minds about Jesus in other areas. We have made up our minds that Jesus is the Son of God. We have made up our minds that what the Bible says is true. We have made up our minds that Jesus died for our sins. We have made up our minds that if we invite Jesus into our hearts our sins are forgiven and we have eternal life. And a lot of us have made up our minds that we want to go to heaven to be with Jesus when we die. Is that true for you? Have you made up your mind about those things? Well, if you have, but have not made up your mind to tithe, your decision about Jesus is unfinished.

Is there any doubt in your mind this morning that the Bible teaches tithing? Is there any question in your mind that Jesus believed in the tithe for his followers? I suspect not. I doubt if anyone here this morning has any question about tithing being the thing that every Christian ought to do. But the critical question is

this, have you made up your mind to do it? Is your decision to follow Jesus in the decade of the eighties complete or is there an unfinished decision in your life?

In the 8th chapter of II Corinthians, St. Paul tells us about the Christians in northern Greece, the Macedonians. Let me share with you one verse in which he tells us about them. He wrote, "for in a severe test of affliction (that is, they were being persecuted. Many of them were suffering persecution at the hands of others) there abundance of joy and their extreme poverty (and here Paul tells us they had a lot of joy in Jesus because they knew him as their Saviour, but that was the only thing they had in abundance, because they had extreme poverty) have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part..." Now, did these people give because things were going well for them? Well, apparently not. St. Paul said they were in a severe test of affliction. Actually, when we look at St. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, he writes to them, "for you received the word in much affliction" (I Thessalonians 1:6) and in another place he said, "(that) no one be moved by these afflictions. So they were not giving because things were going well for them. They were being abused and maltreated and punished for their faith. In addition they had pain and sickness and some of them were dying. We know that because in his letter Paul indicates they had asked him some questions about heaven because some of them were dying. So, they didn't give because things were going well.

Well, if things were not going well, maybe they gave because they had a lot of money. But St. Paul tells us they had extreme poverty. As a matter of fact, he once spoke of the early Christians in this way, "not many were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth." So, they didn't come from a wealthy background. They didn't give because they could afford to or because they had a lot to spare. Actually, St. Paul says this of them, "for they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means." (II Corinthians 8:3) So, they didn't give because things were going well and they didn't give because they could spare it.

In light of that, let me ask you this: why do you give to Jesus? Why do you give to the church? Is it because things are going well for you or because you can spare it? If that is your reason for giving, I can tell you this: what you give isn't what it ought to be!

Let's ask ourselves this question: If I tithed my income, could I live on what is left? Ask yourself that question. If you took ten percent of your income off the top--if you took a tithe of what you have--and gave it to the Lord, could you live on what would be left? Now, notice I did not ask you if you could afford it. I didn't ask you if you would have all you wanted or if you would need to change your life-style and the way you live. No, the only thing I asked was this: if you tithed, could you live on what is left?

Now, I suspect there is not a single person here this morning who would answer "no" to that. We might not be able to buy a new car just when we wanted it. We might not be able to dress quite as well or perhaps not be able to eat the best cuts of meat. We might not be able to go out as frequently. We might have to put off doing some things and we might have to live a little more modestly, but all of us could get by, we could live on what was left.

If that is the case, and if you do not tithe, then why not? You see, if I believe both the Bible and Jesus teach the tithe, and if I love him and want to be who and what he wants me to be, and if I can still live on what I have after giving Him ten percent even though it might mean some changes in the way I live, and if I still am not tithing, doesn't it mean I have an unfinished decision about Jesus and me?

Are you holding out on Jesus with your finances? If you are do you know who you are cheating? You are cheating yourself. You are cheating your family. You are denying yourself one of the greatest spiritual blessings you can have. You are denying yourself and your family the joy of Jesus. Do you remember what St. Paul said about those Macedonians? He said that in spite of things going wrong in their lives, in spite of affliction and poverty, their abundance of joy had caused an overflow of giving on their part. Do you have some unfinished business with the Lord as we get ready to go into the decade of the eighties? As we think about the next decade; as we think about who and what we want to be; as we think about what may happen to us, where we will be, what life will be like when the 80's come to an end; as we think about what we would like for our relationship to God to be and how close we want to be to Jesus, is there some unfinished decision you need to complete?

Earlier I said there were two questions I would like to put to all of you this morning and the first questions was, "have we made up our minds about our relation to Jesus and our finances." The second question is this: as we face the decade of the 80's, have you made up your mind about the kind of church you want our church to be? Now, there are a lot of churches where the Sunday School is not growing. Do you want a church like that? There are a lot of churches who do not have a strong youth program. Do you want a church like that? Many churches do not have a strong women's program or a singles ministry. Most churches do not have a program of outreach to the elderly or an outreach in evangelism. Do you want a church like that? Many congregations do not have programs to support missionaries or minister to the poor and needy or to help others. Would you want a church like that? Well, you don't have a church like that. You have a church that is growing and expanding, reaching out to others, bringing the lost to a saving relationship with Jesus, and touching more and more lives for the Lord. That's the kind of church we have. And because we are trying to be faithful to Jesus, God is blessing this church and he is expanding our ministry. That's the kind of church I want--don't you?

So, for the 80's, to keep on being that kind of a church, God is calling us to greater giving and greater sacrifice. In 1980 we need to pay off our debt. It isn't much of a debt, especially for a church this size, since we only need \$270,000 to be out of debt. But there are two things: first, God says to owe no man anything except to love one another. I don't believe God wants this church in debt. Second, in the decade of the 80's I am convinced God is going to call us to greater and greater service and he wants us to clear the decks, to get ready to move into exciting new adventures with him as he blesses us and leads us on. We can't follow him if we are tied down with an old debt. So, in addition to our budget, our Session is asking us to make a special, over-and-above gift to pay off our debt in 1980.

Can we do it? Of course we can--provided we decide to do it. And that is the second unfinished decision we have to make next Sunday. As St. Paul put it in our scripture reading this morning, "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully, God will bountifully bless us. Is that what you want for yourself--for your church? It is what I want.

So, next Sunday we make our first commitment for the decade of the 80's. What will the decade hold for you? Where will you be--what will you be--when it comes to a-close? Once a rich young man came to Jesus and he said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "...give...and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." I don't know what the 80's will bring--I don't even know what tomorrow will bring--but whatever the decade brings, I want to know that I am following Jesus and that I have treasure in heaven. What about you--do you have any unfinished decisions you need to make next Sunday?