

Sermon for Sunday, November 15, 1981 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO 63105

"HOW TO GIVE UNTIL IT FEELS GOOD"

I Chronicles 29:1-19

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

I Chronicles 29:9

I don't remember where I saw it, but somewhere I saw a motto or a sign that said, "give until it hurts." Well, I cannot ever remember giving until it hurt. All the giving I have ever done made me feel good. Recently I was reading a comment by Dr. Lane Adams, who until last year was pastor of the great Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis. Some of you may remember Dr. Adams when he visited and spoke to our Women of the Church several years ago. Anyway, Dr. Adams was telling about his experiences as a professional entertainer prior to his becoming a Christian. It seems his wife had been convinced by her Christian dentist on a visit to his office that if she really meant business about God, she would tithe. At that particular time the Adams had very little money and Lane was not even a Christian. However, his wife, Annette, persuaded him--much against his will--that they ought to start tithing what they had. So they took a tenth of the money they had, bought postal money orders at the post office, and sent half the tithe to her mother's church and half to his mother's church. He describes what happened this way: "When I went to the mail drop and put those envelopes in the slot, I had to turn away from Annette so she couldn't see my face. I could not suppress what was beginning to erupt from within me, the sense of, 'Hey, buddy, you did something right, you did something really, importantly right, you brought me into partnership with you.'" He goes on to add, "Somehow, in a mysterious way I can't even put into words, I had a new sense of well-being. I dared not let Annette see, because after all, I still was persuaded we were going to go hungry. I managed to get a real gruff look on my face and said, 'You are going to be sorry about this, you really are.' And inside all the time I felt great..."

Well, that is the way it is with God. If you are giving to him what he commands you to give, it won't hurt at all. Instead, it will feel just great. If you are giving until it hurts, I think you will find a clue to why it hurts in our text for this morning. There we read that the people willingly give with a whole heart. I think the clue is that they gave with a whole heart. Is that the way you give? I once was pastor of a church where one of my officers waited until all the pledges were in. Then he would find out what the largest pledge was and he would make his pledge just a little larger. You see, he wanted to be known as the largest contributor in the church. (I always had this sneaking urge to slip in a fake card with double what he had ever pledged!) Now, do you think he was giving with a whole heart? He never considered God's command to tithe--he only considered beating the next highest pledge.

Sometimes people give a small amount so they won't have to give a real amount. See how it works. If I fill out a pledge card this morning--no matter how small the amount--nobody will call on me this afternoon. Nobody will come to me and say, "Look, you have a substantial income and you live very well. This pledge isn't enough and you should raise it." So, I give a little in order to keep from giving what I should. Do you think I am giving with a whole heart?

But the Bible says that the people gave willingly and with a whole heart. As you and your family come to make your financial commitment to the Lord for 1982, is your heart whole towards God?

Well, suppose you're getting ready to fill out your commitment card. How much should you give? If your heart is whole towards God, you will give a tithe. And as Lane Adams said you will have a sense of, "Hey, you did something right, you did something really, importantly right, you brought me into partnership with you." You see, when you do that, joy begins to well up within you. Isn't that what happened to the Hebrews in our Scripture this morning? With a whole heart they were doing something really importantly right and because of that, the Bible says they rejoiced.

I suspect there are some here this morning who will not commit a tithe to the Lord. Those persons will have a number of reasons. They will tell you they can't afford it--or that they don't really believe in the tithe--or that they intend to tithe later, when their financial situation is better. But let me tell you something--if we don't respond in obedience to the command of God the only reason is our hearts are not whole toward God. We need to be honest about that. You can say, "I don't like the preacher", "I don't like the choir", "the people aren't friendly,", "they pay our staff too much--or they pay our staff too little", "they don't need my money, they've got all those wealthy people." But none of those excuses count. That has nothing to do with a person's tithe. If one's heart is whole toward God, he will respond in obedience and that brings joy. That means quite simply that the happy giver is the obedient giver.

Why does giving with a whole heart bring joy? Well, I think one of the reasons is that doing what God commands us to do brings a great sense of satisfaction. Isn't that always true in our lives? When we do something that we are supposed to do--and do it well--doesn't it make us feel good? Whether it is doing a job at the office, or cooking a great Thanksgiving dinner, or turning in a good paper for a class, it gives us satisfaction and joy to do it as we should.

Lane Adams, whom I mentioned earlier, gives another reason that tithing brings joy. He writes, "There is one thing in this Bible I can do perfectly every week.." Well, I would like to do just one of God's commands perfectly, wouldn't you? I fall down on so many commands. The Bible says love your enemies and pray for them--I certainly can't do that perfectly, can you? The Bible says to love my neighbor--and I can't do that perfectly, especially when he is an outdoor freak and his lawn makes mine look shabby! So I can't think of many of God's laws and commands I can keep perfectly. As a matter of fact, I can count them on one finger--the tithe. It is the only thing I can do perfectly that God has commanded me to do.

Well, God isn't going to compell any of us to give. The Bible says that King David and the Israelites gave willingly. When I was in college I preached each weekend in a little open country church. Each week one of the families would take me home for dinner after church. One Sunday afternoon, my host farmer was showing me around his dairy farm. I saw one cow that looked as though she must be extremely productive and I asked him, "How much milk does that cow give." He grinned and his eyes twinkled as he replied, "Well, if you mean by voluntary contribution, she don't give none. But if I can get her in

a stall where she can't move or kick, I can get about four gallons a day if I take it." Whatever we give will have to be willingly and from a whole heart.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale has a story about a man named Fred Rackliffe that I would like to share with you. Fred was sort of forced by friends to go with them to a meeting where the great Dr. E. Stanley Jones was preaching. Much to the surprise of everybody, when Dr. Jones finished preaching, Fred said, "I'm sold! I've never seen Jesus the way you present Him. I will give myself completely to Him." Fred was so excited about what had happened to him that even though it was 1:30 in the morning, he went to the home of his pastor and pounded on the door. The sleepy pastor stuck his head out the window and said, "What's going on down there. Who's down there?" "It's Fred Rackliffe. I've just been converted." "Well, thank God you've been converted, but couldn't you do it at a more respectable hour?" "The first person I've got to see is you," said Fred. So the pastor let him in and they sat in the kitchen and drank coffee as they talked. Fred said, "Now Reverend, we can't fool around anymore. We've got to turn this town upside down for Jesus Christ. We've got to get at it and I want to start this morning. What do you want me to do?" Well, the minister didn't have the slightest idea what he wanted Fred to do, so he said, "I'll tell you what. We are having a meeting of the official board tonight and I want you to come." Fred came and he found a dull affair in which the treasurer dolefully reported that the church was \$11,000 behind on current expenses. Fred jumped to his feet shouting, "This is astounding! This is incredible! This is awful that the church of Jesus should be \$11,000 in debt. Come on, fellows, let's wipe out this debt right now. I'll give a thousand dollars and the rest of you fellows pony up like I'm doing." He was met with an overwhelming lack of enthusiasm. However, at the end of the week, Fred had the debt wiped out and \$5,000 to spare. He discovered a dead Sunday School class and turned it into the largest Sunday School class in the state of Connecticut. Dr. Peale tells how after Fred's death he sat on an airplane next to a man who had known Fred. The man said to him, "I was a bad kid in New Britain and Fred got hold of me; if it hadn't been for him I'd have gone down the road." He choked up, wiped tears from his eyes and said, "There is nobody I ever met like him."

Well, what made the difference in Fred? What made him a powerful man for Jesus Christ? It was the tremendous life change that came to him when he said of Jesus, "I will give myself completely to him."

Our Scripture this morning says that David and the people gave willingly with a whole heart. When they did that, the Bible says they rejoiced. I pray for each of us this morning that we walk out of here with a deep inner joy--joy because we have done the one thing we can do perfectly--joy because we give willingly--joy because we give with a whole heart. That is the only way to give until it feels good.