

# More Than Riches

1 Chronicles 29:1-17 | Psalm 49:1-9 | Hebrews 13:1-8 | Matthew 6:19-21

## 1 CHRONICLES 29:1-20

<sup>1</sup> King David said to the whole assembly, 'My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great; for the temple will not be for mortals but for the LORD God. <sup>2</sup> So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, coloured stones, all sorts of precious stones, and marble in abundance. <sup>3</sup> Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God: <sup>4</sup> three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, <sup>5</sup> and for all the work to be done by artisans, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the LORD?' <sup>6</sup> Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. <sup>7</sup> They gave for the service of the house of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. <sup>8</sup> Whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, into the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. <sup>9</sup> Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the LORD; King David also rejoiced greatly. <sup>10</sup> Then David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; David said: 'Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel, for ever and ever. <sup>11</sup> Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. <sup>12</sup> Riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. <sup>13</sup> And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name. <sup>14</sup> 'But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill-offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. <sup>15</sup> For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. <sup>16</sup> O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. <sup>17</sup> I know, my God, that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you.

At this point, you would normally expect to hear an introductory illustration from me. And we'll get to that in a moment. As you may be aware, I am meant to be preaching about the *stewardship of treasure*, which is rather euphemistic way of saying that today is when I am supposed to speak in such a way as to quietly reach into your wallets and pocketbooks, and extract the money that we need to run the church. It is undoubtedly awkward for you. And believe me, it's awkward for me too. I mention this because I don't want to put you at ease. ... That's right, I said I *don't* want to put you at ease. Now, this *isn't* because there isn't a need. Ben, our Treasurer, will be making a presentation following the service to outline our monetary needs in detail. Likewise, it *isn't* out of self-interest. I am what is known as an NSM, a non-stipendiary minister, a volunteer. And it also *isn't* out of guilt. Yes, we could do more for our building—like getting some new carpet or a better sound system, we could do more

to take care of our Chaplain, we could do more to support other charities.<sup>1</sup> But again, my hope for unease is not out of emotional manipulation or guilt. I *don't* want to put any of us at ease because, as we shall see from our Chronicles reading, Christian stewardship and giving to the church is about far more than money. It is about something far more important. So, let's begin.

## INTRODUCTION

It was the year 1930. It was the height of Prohibition in Chicago. And the streets were run by Alphonse Gabriel Capone and his Chicago Outfit. His lawyer was a man from St. Louis named Edward Joseph, E.J. to his friends and family, and Easy Eddie to everyone else. He was a very successful lawyer. Very. He's described as having 'made a fortune' in his ongoing collaborations with Capone in business and law. But something began to trouble Easy Eddie. He had all the money he could need. But didn't have a reputation that he'd want to pass along to his son. Easy Eddie was discovering that there is something more important than riches. There is something of greater worth than treasure. I'm not going to tell you that he found God. I don't know if he did. But he committed himself to the notion that there is something of greater value than money that he could pass along. And knowing that it would certainly mean the end of his life, he reached out to and became an informant for the IRS. He later became a key witness in the prosecution and conviction of Capone himself, and was the one who tipped the government prosecution that Capone had fixed the jury. Capone went to jail. And unsurprisingly, some years later, Easy Eddie was gunned down in his car by two men with shotguns driving by. He traded his money and his life for something greater.

Our Chronicles reading likewise teaches us that there is something far greater than money. Money is useful, to be sure. But, when it comes to stewardship, is far too easy to focus on money, on personal sacrifice, and tithing, on material resources. It is far too easy to forget that it is actually about God. Stewardship is not really about resources. It is fundamentally about a relationship with God. The Chronicles reading—an example of God's people gathering together to give to the infrastructure and operating costs of the religious community—demonstrates this central idea in three important ways.

## 1. GIVING TO GOD

First, like Easy Eddie, David's concern was for his son, but his focus was always on God. In order to see this, we must consider the historical background.<sup>2</sup> After the many struggles of his early life, David was finally able to settle in Jerusalem as king and bring the ark of the Covenant, the beacon of God's presence manifested on earth, to Jerusalem. There is a story at the beginning of 2 Samuel, chapter 7, where David is sitting one day in his palace and looking at it. And he muses to himself: 'it doesn't quite seem right that I'm sitting here in this nice palace, and God's ark is sitting over there in a tent.' And in that moment, he commits himself to building God a temple to dwell in. But through the prophet, Nathan, David is told that he

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<sup>1</sup> For example, one out of five ordained clergy in the Church of England, and more than a third of ordinands, are simply struggling just to get by financially. These statistics and many others were compiled by the Clergy Support Trust, a charity dedicated to supporting Anglican clergy. For the data, see [clergysupport.org.uk/about](http://clergysupport.org.uk/about).

<sup>2</sup> The book of Chronicles is not a book that many will know as this is, literally, the only reading from it in the entire Sunday lectionary. The two books of Chronicles retell the history of God's people from Adam to the exile. Interestingly, the first 9 chapters are entirely genealogies and lists of names. The story in chapters 10-29 focuses on David.

will not be the one, in fact, to build the temple. Rather, it is his son, the one who will build the temple—a son who is not yet even born.

And this is where our 1 Chronicles reading picks up. David is clear that his son, Solomon, inexperienced as he is, will be the one to build the temple. He's concerned for his legacy and, in fact, he's been preparing this entire time. He saved materials in order to give to this project, collecting gold and silver and bronze and iron and wood and precious stones and marble.<sup>3</sup> He gave of his own personal possessions, we read. Why? It's right there at the end of the first verse: *"for the temple will not be for mortals but for the LORD God."* David was focused on God and this is what he wanted to pass along to Solomon. Again, in verse 3: *"because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God."* For their part, the people follow him in giving this way. Verse 7: *"They gave for the service of the house of God..."* and again in verse 9. While they give and give generously to the building of the temple, they do not lose sight of the God for whom the temple is being built. They don't get caught up in the financing and the building, but according to the author, remain devoted to the idea that this is for God.

## 2. GIVING FROM THE HEART

Second, the giving is from the heart. It is a willing giving. It is not under compulsion or out of guilt.<sup>4</sup> It is not out of hope of some reward. It is out of the desire of the people. This is noted especially in verses 6-9. In verse 6, the offering of the people is referred to as a freewill offering. According to the Law, a freewill offering is an offering given beyond the required sacrifices.<sup>5</sup> It is voluntary and given out of a spirit of thankfulness. Verse 9 makes it even clearer: *"Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the LORD; King David also rejoiced greatly."*

## 3. GIVING BACK

Third, we see that they understand themselves to be giving back. They don't talk about the work they did to fell trees or mine metals. They don't talk about their shrewdness in finding good prices on the market or even their frugality in saving. They understand everything to belong to God already. Listen to how David talks about it in his prayer: Verse 11: *"Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all."* Or slightly later in verse 14: *"For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."* You might recognise those words from our liturgy. This is the foundational concept of stewardship. From creation to time to talent to treasure. It is all the Lord's already. And ours is but to steward it, to take care of it on behalf of God, and to return it to him.

## IMPLICATIONS

And so, stewardship must be God-focused, not money-focused. Stewardship must be willing. It must come from the heart. Stewardship must recognize that we give on the basis of God's generous provision to us. It's this last idea that I want to explore a bit more. Because, as you know, this part where I ask what this all means to us, the part where I try to apply what we've

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<sup>3</sup> These materials and the materials mentioned later in the passage are remarkably similar to those used to construct the tabernacle. See Exod 25:3-7, 35:5-9, and 35:22-28.

<sup>4</sup> See Amos 4:5.

<sup>5</sup> See Exod 35:29; Lev 7:16-18, 22:17-25, 23:28; Num 15:1-10; Deut 12:1-32, and 16:10.

learned. And in this case, it is where I bring out all the tired clichés you’ve been waiting to hear: about how God loves a cheerful giver, and how you all spend way too much on coffee, and Jesus gave 100 percent... so why can’t you give 10 percent, and you can’t take it all with you. I could keep going. I found an especially odd one about a kid and his dad eating french fries—chips if you are British—and how the kid didn’t want to share the fries, even though the dad paid for them. The moral of the story is: Share God’s fries.

But, given what we’ve learned, I’m not going to go that route. Because the fact is, stewardship isn’t about stuff. It’s about you and God. And we have to get the order right. We have to recognize that God gives to us, first and foremost. And indeed, he gave to us in the most important way. That most famous of verses captures it: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son [gave him to die on a cross], so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* If you don’t believe that, if you don’t already know that in your heart, then don’t worry about giving to the church. That’s the least of your concerns. Starting that relationship of faith with Jesus Christ, our Saviour—that comes first. But if you do believe it, then maybe you have some things to consider. When you give, is it about you and your bank account? Or is about God, worshipping him? Do you give out of a sense of duty? Out of a sense of guilt or responsibility? Or do you give out of the willingness of your heart, freely and sincerely? Is it out of thankfulness for what he’s done? Or is it because you feel secure in the financial holdings of what you have earned? Is it in recognition that, indeed, it’s all his anyway? Maybe it is time to start rethinking these things. Maybe it is time to reconsider your tithes and offerings, your financial planning. Maybe it is time to invest deeply in the God who created the heavens and the earth, who put you here, provides for you, and saved you. Maybe not. But at least consider this: It really comes down to your relationship with him. Because, as I said from the beginning, there is something much more important than money. Perhaps it is as simple as the legacy you leave, the love of God that you demonstrate to your children and your neighbours and anyone else. Because, brothers and sisters, as our Gospel reading concludes, where your treasure is, that is where your heart will be found.

## CONCLUSION

David understood this. He prayed at the end of our Chronicles reading: *“I know, my God, that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart...”* That message was heard by his son, Solomon, who much later, after his father was dead and gone, prayed for wisdom from God using nearly the same words. Easy Eddie from Chicago understood this, as his son, Butch, went on to be a naval aviator and the first naval recipient of the Medal of Honour in WWII, single-handedly saving the USS Lexington from nine Japanese bombers. By the way, their surname was O’Hare—as in O’Hare International Airport in Chicago. They knew that there is something more important than money. And so should you. Your relationship with God. And Jesus understood this best of all. He came not to collect the riches of a kingdom, but to pay the price, to give his life as a ransom for many, so that we might be reconciled to God.

Let me pray, using the words of David at the end of his prayer: *‘O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep for ever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct our hearts towards you.’<sup>6</sup> In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Chronicles 29:18.