

You are all trustees. I'm sure many of you have never been called that before, so let me explain. You're heading off to college in another state, and your parents let you use their car for the year. You are a trustee. Your neighbors are going on vacation for a couple of weeks, so they ask you to house-sit for them. You are a trustee. Your friend lets you play with her favorite doll for the day. You are a trustee.

Do you see what word is in trustee? TRUST. A trustee is a person whom another person trusts to look after his/her belongings. So yes, you are all trustees. We're God's trustees. God has given us blessings to look after during our lives. And these blessings aren't our own. Psalm 24 says, "The earth is the LORD'S and everything in it; the world and all who live in it." Everything we have belongs to God.

This morning, and the next couple of weeks, we're going to focus on those belongings, God's belongings. We're going to talk about our use of God's blessings. Now, I know it's one of the most unpopular subjects to talk about in the church, but it's the one issue Jesus touched on more often than any other issue throughout his ministry. That's stewardship.

As we come to the end of the church season of Pentecost, what a fitting topic to talk about, but even more importantly, to learn about, to be instructed from the very words of God from Scripture. The season which focuses on our new life in Christ, growing in our faith in God and then living that life of faith. And then, ending like this, how we, in faith, can respond to God's grace, his amazing love. How we can thank the Lord, for everything he's done for us, for everything he's given us?

Stewardship. Giving back to God. Everything we give to God is already his. When we give back to God, we are really saying, **"WE GIVE THEE BUT THINE OWN!"**

I've always thought 1 Chronicles gets a bad rap when it comes to reading books of the Bible. It's the book with "all those long lists of names," all those genealogies. But really, after nine chapters of those long lists, you to the real meat of 1 Chronicles, the reign of King David.

In chapter 29, we find a real gem, an account of David that's recorded nowhere else in the Bible. David was near the end of his life, and so he was preparing to turn his kingdom over to his son, Solomon. In his preparations, he was gathering the materials needed to build the temple. For you see, David had wanted to build the temple, the Lord's house, himself, but God told him that Solomon would get that privilege. And yet David didn't sulk when God gave him this news, but he gladly made plans and gathered the materials for the building project Solomon would undertake.

Now David carried out his final fund drive for the building campaign, pledging his own personal fortune, over \$2.5 billion by today's standards. A pretty staggering amount! And the response from the people in their giving was just as amazing, almost \$4.3 billion. Because of this awesome display of generosity, David was compelled to pour out his heart in a prayer of thanksgiving to God: "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the GLORY and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours... Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things...Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name."

Our text looks at the second half of David's prayer. All the people were so generous with their giving. It should have been God thanking the people for their gifts, right?!?! Not so. David refused to take any credit. He gives thanks and credit where it was due, to God.

How could he and the people be so generous? Well, everything they had came from God. They were only giving back what was his. The people were only sojourners, temporary dwellers, on earth. They wouldn't be able to take their wealth with them after death anyways. But God was the most important person in their lives. They wanted to build a magnificent house for him. And so the Israelites gave. They gave willingly. They gave joyfully. God was testing the hearts of the Israelites, and he plainly saw their faith. God saw that they were using their blessings to glorify him.

This was like another situation in the Old Testament, one involving Moses. The Israelites were bringing gifts to build a different house for God, the Tabernacle. And their giving was just as generous and willing and joyful as the gifts David and the people brought for the temple. But what made these offerings even more spectacular was that at one point, Moses actually had to tell the people to stop bringing gifts. Imagine that happening today! What a wonderful problem to have. The Israelites had more than enough to build the Tabernacle. How amazing was that?!?! These people were definitely generous in their thanking God for giving them abundant blessings.

David and his people were thanking God with their words as well. In his prayer of thanksgiving, David said, "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity." Could we say the same? Would God be pleased with the integrity and sincerity we show through the use of the blessings he's given us? "God's given me the gift of a great job, but I think I'll cut corners and try to get as many benefits out of it as I can." "He's graciously given me his Word, but I don't think I really need to ever open my Bible up. There's really nothing new in there for me." "God has blessed me with wealth and other material possessions, but with the economy being the way it is right now, I should probably take care of myself first. Then maybe I'll give to God what's left over, if there's anything left over."

Or, how the thought, or the selfish, pervasive attitude rises up in you and me when it comes to giving back to God, or even, when the church starts talking about money, the thought, "The church, aka, God, is telling me how to use my gifts, my possessions, my money?!?! I earned it. It's mine!" I know those thoughts go on. I've had them before.

I don't think any of those thoughts would make a good prayer of thanksgiving to God. It would be like getting \$50 from Grandma for your birthday, and, when your mom forces you to write a thank-you, all you say is, "I'm glad you sent me \$50, but it would have been better if you had sent me \$100." "Thanks...but no thanks." That's not much of a thank-you, but often, our thoughts, our actions, our hearts aren't expressing much of a thank-you to God for all the blessings he's poured out on us, instead throwing all of the filthy rags of our sins back at him.

Thankfully, though, God has never been in it for the thank-you. God knew we could never fully express our thankfulness to him, and yet he still gave us the greatest gift of all, Jesus. Because of his great love, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

I know we're still a couple of months away, but with stores and TV commercials saying Christmas is right around the corner, let's talk about the greatest gift exchange ever held, by God. He took the measly gifts that we offered, all our sins, and gave them to Jesus. And then that righteousness Jesus had through a perfect life, God gave that to us when Jesus died on the cross. God exchanged our sinfulness for Jesus' righteousness. That's why the Bible says, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it's a gift from God." The only way we could ever have the perfection God demands was through his gift of Jesus.

Jesus is the best gift we have received because through his life, death, and resurrection, we have forgiveness. We have eternal life in heaven. But God's love goes even above and beyond the gift of his Son. Everything we are, everything we have is a blessing from God. He has given to us from his own abundance.

And how do we react to Him who has never been frugal in his giving? I think David and Moses set some great examples for us. We can thank God with our prayers and our praise. We can thank God with our gifts. God has given us so richly, so we can't help but want to give back to him. You and I want to support the Lord's work.

Are you looking for ways to do that, to give back to God, to say thank you to him? Over the next couple of weeks, we'll look at ways to do that, but for this morning, there are so many opportunities to do that. With our gifts, our treasures, our belongings. You know, God even throws down the challenge for us to give: "Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

But even money isn't the only way we give back to God what is his. We can thank God with our abilities, our time and our talents. God says, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." We can all use our prayers, our gifts, and our abilities to give back to God just a mere portion of the wealth of blessings which he has so wonderfully lavished on us.

You see, you and I really are God's trustees. God has taken from his wealth and has entrusted it to our care. He wants us to enjoy these gifts throughout our lives. He also wants us to show appreciation for them as well. You and I, we can do that. You and I, we do that. We thank God for everything he's given to us. And then we give thanks to God by joyfully giving back what is his. Amen.