

Giving Series, pt.1, 2.1.09

Firstfruits – The Order and Attitude God Desires

Intro

1. Jesus & and the spiritual disciplines – Mt.6.2, 3 (give); Mt.6.5, 6, 7 (pray); Mt.6.16, 17 (fast). Giving, praying & fasting are ongoing expressions of our Christian faith. These are things we are to continue as practices of our Christianity. They assist in developing the life of Jesus inside of us.
 - a. Some of the quickest ways of fanning into flame the presence of God in your life are to do those things faithfully & creatively.
2. God is drawn to generous givers – Lk.8 (the Roman centurion); Acts 10 (Cornelius); Acts 10 (Tabitha). They each had a significant encounter with Jesus. Is.58 is clear that God's presence rest upon those who are generous. It's not the size of gift, but the heart of the giver that draws the presence of God.
 - a. We want to fan into flame giving. Debt can be a real hinderance to being a grateful giver. We want to aggressively deal with it this year by focusing energy on training and other opportunities to retire personal and church debt.
3. Another thing I have noticed is that when God touches us we become generous – Luke 19 (Zacchaeus); Acts 4.31f (early church); Revivals (1 Chron.29.6–9: the building of the Temple; 2 Chron.24.8–10 the reconstruction of the Temple under Joash; 2 Chron.31.5–9 the reconsecration of God's people; Sword & Spirit Conferences – \$6000+ & others over \$7 – 11K)
4. It's easier & more fun to give when we (individually & collectively) are experiencing the presence of God in our lives. I can normally gauge where I am spiritually based upon my attitude towards giving.
5. Prayer of release for a generous heart. God doesn't hold back on us; he splurges & indulges us;

Firstfruits – The Foundation of Giving, Gen.4.2–5

Intro: Cain was a farmer & Abel was a rancher. The earliest story of giving offerings; there are no specifics given about the purpose of the offerings – sin offerings, covenantal or thank offerings. It seems best to suppose the latter. How they knew to give an offering isn't stated. It can be assumed from how God would later instruct Abraham & Jacob to make offerings that either God told Cain & Abel directly or He instructed Adam, who told his them. How God spoke to them is a mystery. We know that He spoke directly to Cain in 4.6, 9 & placed a curse on him. There are some things we don't know, but others we do, such as:

- A. There was a time to worship – 4.3. NLT – “When it was time for the harvest”, more literally, “at the end of days.” This seems to imply there was a sacred season or an appointed time to bring the offerings to God. NLT takes some liberties in interpreting this phrase as a harvest time, but they might not be far from the truth.
- B. There was a place to worship – 4.3f NIV – “Cain brought...Abel brought.” – The idea of bringing implies that there was a designated spot to offer sacrifices. It might have been at the east of the Garden (Gen.3.24). They took their offerings to a designated altar.
- C. There was a way to worship – 4.3f.
 - a. The text doesn't insinuate that God distinguished between their offering based upon the type. In other words, the text doesn't say the reason God approved of Abel's offering over Cain's was b/c Abel's offering was an animal & Cain's was a vegetable offering.
 - b. A more literally rendered translation reads: And Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to Jehovah; and Abel

brought the same; he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat. And Jehovah had respect to Abel and to his offering; but to Cain and to his offering he had no respect.”

- c. It wasn't the type of offering, but it was the order and attitude of the offering that distinguished Abel's as a superior compared to Cain's.
- d. God desires the firstfruits. (4.4a)
 - i. Firstfruits are the first portions and the best portions. God desires the first and the best. He didn't just give the first animal, but the pick of the litter.
 - 1. For me this is the tithe, but it involves all of life.
 - 2. Students – God desires to be first in your life and for you to give Him your best in everything.
 - 3. Abel
 - ii. Why are we to give God the firstfruits?
 - 1. It is a way of expressing your thankfulness to God. How do we like for our employers to express their appreciation to us? Money. Words are nice, but money speaks louder than words. There are many ways to tell God thank you, and giving God the firstfruits is one of them.
 - 2. It acknowledges that everything comes from Him and belongs to Him. Giving our firstfruits is a constant reminder that God is in charge and we are just managers of his stuff.
 - 3. It expresses my faith that he will take care of my needs. By giving your firstfruits, you are intentionally placing yourself in a vulnerable position before the Lord. God responds to Spirit directed risks (Note: Spirit directed).
 - 4. It's a way of securing God's blessings. Prov.3.9–10 gives a promise of both provision and bounty to those who give their firstfruits to the Lord.

- e. God desires a faith-filled giver. (Heb.11.4)
 - i. Cain's offering was done out of obligation under his own terms. Cain gave what he wanted and Abel gave what God wanted. Abel walked in faith and Cain walked in his own way ("I'll just do what I want.")
 1. This seems to be a pattern in Cain's life. God gives instructions; Cain does his own thing; God's disciplines him.
 2. This is esp noticeable in the warning from God, the murder of Abel and the consequences that followed.
 3. 4.6f - God gave him a clear warning and instructions. Earlier, it can be rightly assumed that God gave Cain clear directions about the offering.
 4. 4.8 - Cain murders Abel. He does his own thing and rejects the instruction of the Lord. He sees his brother as the problem and kills him. Like with the offering, he does his own thing and rejects the instruction of the Lord.
 5. 4.10-12: God disciplines Cain by prohibiting the ground to yield good crops and making him a homeless wanderer. Like earlier, God disciplines him by not looking with favor on the offering. & Cain, instead of looking inside his own heart, sees his brother as the problem.
 - a. God makes him live with two constant reminders of his rebellion. First, he always reminded of his brother's death through the infertility of the soil. The lack of produce from the ground is like the soil is crying out, "You killed your brother!" The second reminder of his rebellion is that he is a wanderer with no home. God was

saying through this discipline, “Since you are so restless and want to do things your way, you go ahead do your own thing and live your life outside of my presence.

God’s discipline was the outworking of Cain’s desire to be away

6. Cain didn’t listen to the instruction of the Lord, decided what he wanted to give and didn’t experience the blessings or presence of God in his life. Encouragement: Give God’s way if you want to experience His blessings in favor.
- ii. Abel’s offering was done in faith. He gave the first and the best. He thought deeply about the offering and he gave God the pick of the litter.
 1. Again, it wasn’t the type of offering, but it was the heart behind the offering. The image I get is that Cain is going by his fields on the way to the altar gathering up some of the crops as an offering and thinking, “anything will do.” Whereas, Abel had been spending months carefully tending only his best young lambs and then thoughtfully culling them until he selected the choicest one. He thought to himself all along, “Only the best will do.”
 2. It wasn’t the type of offering that moved God, but rather the heart behind it.
 3. Appl – What is the heart behind your offering? Is it “anything will do”? or is it “only the best will do”? It’s not just important to give God the firstfruits, but that your giving comes from a heart that wants to give God its best.
 - a. Jesus watching the people pay their offerings in Luke 21. He was moved by the heart of the poor giver.

D. There was a reward to worship – 4.4b–5.

- a. “The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering” – 4.4b. The type of approval isn’t stated, but it was something observable since Cain grew jealous of it. Abel had some measurable degree of God’s favor on his life.
- b. From the Gk version of the text it translates “looked with favor” as kindled a fire. In other words, like in Gen.15.17, Lev.9.24, Judges 6.21, 13.19f, 1 K.18.38, 1 Chr.21.26 & 2 Ch.7.1, God consumed Abel’s offering with fire. It was a clear indication of the acceptance and pleasure of God upon the offerer.
- c. I believe that as we give God the firstfruits of our resources from a faith filled heart, He still rewards us with his favor and presence. At least, three people in the last year who told me that God either blessed them with promotions or incredible favor with their supervisors after they trusted God with the firstfruits.

Conclusion:

The order and attitude are important to God. Pray: Lord I want to give you the first part from a faith filled heart!

I know it’s tight, but don’t you like living on the edge with God.