

God is Working Around the World

Pastor Tom
November 20, 2016

We have heard today about many great works of God in our community and around the world. No surprise, God is always doing something. Jesus declared in John 5:17, “my Father is always at his work and I too am working.” A new work of God began with the coming of Jesus. We saw this in our study of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus announced the arrival of the kingdom of heaven. He demonstrated the kingdom’s arrival through His ministry and powerful works. He teaches throughout Matthew about living as disciples of Jesus in this kingdom.

Joining God in His kingdom advancing work is part of our discipleship journey. One way we join with God is through our support of missionaries through the ministries that we heard about today.

But how can we support missionaries and ministries of outreach?

We support through prayer. We have focused on prayer through this fall. We have learned about our desperate need to connect with God through prayer. But we must not only pray about ourselves and loved ones. God calls us to pray for others. So we pray for those called to go or serve in some of the areas we’ve talked about today. We pray for our missionaries and for the ministries we support. We pray for the children we sponsor and the people impacted by these ministries.

We can also support through encouragement. We may not be called to go ourselves. We may not have much money. But we can encourage ministries and missionaries through letters or packages. We can encourage by packing Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes or the HART clothing drives or preparing Kindred House special meals.

We also can support financially. As soon as a church starts talking about money, walls can go up. There can be many reasons for this. One might be tied to this statement you may have heard - “All churches ever want is your money.” Maybe you have heard someone say that or you’ve even thought that yourself. “They’re always holding out their hand. They’re always passing the plate.”

On the one hand, such a conclusion is understandable. In some church traditions, they took several offerings in one worship service until reaching a certain goal. The minister would pressure people into giving before he let them go home. Some Christians have lived luxurious lives funded by the offerings of their ministry. Some Christian organizations have handled money poorly or misdirected its use to that for which it was not intended. Then there are the massive

cathedrals, church complexes, church owned land and assets. People see these and wonder why a church would need money when it has so much. The church also has a checkered history when it comes to corruption and its motivation for giving appeals. Some looked very much like money grabs disguised as promises of spiritual blessing. We see this even today when a Christian broadcaster promises healing or blessing to anyone who will send in 20\$ for a jar of anointing oil or a sacred handkerchief that will be sent in the mail. So if someone has only had these kinds of experiences with a church or Christians, it is understandable why they might conclude “all they ever want is your money.”

But on the other hand, this appears to be an overstatement. “All they ever want is your money?” Many churches actually offer and give to others. They send someone to visit the sick in the hospital. They officiate weddings, funerals, baptisms and child dedications with no charge. They go into the community to help. They open up drop in ministries. They support food banks. They provide spiritual growth opportunities. They offer community for the lonely. They come together around families and communities in the midst of tragedy. They offer free messages every Sunday – with child care and programs for kids and youth. Some churches actually give or offer much to the people in and outside the church.

So some criticism about churches and money is justified. Churches need to take to heart these concerns and ensure that they treat the gifts of people as a sacred trust. Yet, if we stop and think about it, most organizations depend on some money to function. Think about the sports associations that you or your kids have joined and the registration fees they charge. Think about candidates or political parties who run for office based on donations from their supporters. Think about hospitals, which are in the helping and healing work. They require loads of money to keep staffed and functioning.

But there is something that’s supposed to be unique about churches and the ones who support them. That’s the motivation behind receiving and giving financially. Our motivations should be profoundly different than what we see in other segments of society because of whom we serve.

So what should motivate a local church’s appeal for financial support? Our motivation is not to make a profit. Unlike businesses who work to provide services and make a profit, a church’s primary aim is not to increase its profit margin every year.

Our primary motivation must not be continued existence. There have been some great churches throughout history that once thrived and now no longer exist. Think of the New Testament church at Ephesus. This church grew initially under Paul and later Timothy's ministry. Many think the Apostle John attended this church in his later days. Some think he wrote 1st, 2nd and 3rd John from Ephesus while he attended this church. According to Revelation 2, the church at Ephesus was a significant gathering of Christians with much influence in the city. But this church no longer exists. The sea receded from Ephesus. It used to be a port on the Mediterranean. But when the shore line moved away, the ancient city dwindled to nothing. The people departed and the church closed. Some of you have probably been part of churches that once thrived but now are closed. This does not mean those churches necessarily failed. Churches close for many different reasons.

This should not surprise us if we understand the right motivation behind a church's existence. **The church exists for the advance of the kingdom of God.** If we exist only to keep existing, our church's survival will guide our decision making. If we exist to make a profit, our decisions would be based on which ministries generate a profit and which don't.

But if we exist for the purpose of advancing the Kingdom of God, that puts things into a totally different realm. Instead of making decisions based on survival or profit, we seek to make decisions based on God's leading and provision. This includes the possibility that one day His purpose for SVBC may end. Christ does prepare the universal church – Christians throughout history – for Himself when He returns. But local churches can come and go in the advance of God's kingdom.

Yet God has purposes for local churches in certain times and places. Through them He carries out His mission. One way God advances His kingdom is through churches who support ministries and missionaries beyond its walls.

A major reason we seek to receive financial gifts is to support the ministries and mission you've heard about today. So the key motivation for a church to receive funds must be for God's kingdom to advance in us and through us. That's unique compared to all other motivations for receiving funds in our world.

But we are also supposed to have different motivations for giving gifts and money. **What should motivate our giving? 1 – We give because it is an act of worship recognizing the Lord's ownership over everything.** Psalm 24:1

states “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it; the world and all those who live in it.” God owns everything including all that we own. So though we may hold legal title to a house; though our name graces the registration slip in our car; though our name is attached to a bank account – God ultimately owns our house, our car and our money. It came from Him and ultimately belongs to Him. He entrusts it to us for our short life span to use for His good purposes. These include providing for our families and supporting the advance of His kingdom. Therefore, when we give, we tangibly acknowledge His Lordship over us and all we have.

A second motivation for giving concerns our love for God. **2 – Giving demonstrates that our first love is for God and not money.** Randy Alcorn makes the point that our hearts go toward where we put our money. So if we put much of our money into accumulating and possessing, our heart love will be satisfied in accumulations and possessions. If we put much of our money into some prized possession, then our heart love will be in that possession. But if we give towards God’s projects our heart love towards God is strengthened. Jesus made the need for choosing a first love very clear in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 6:24 – No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

A third motivation for giving relates to our ultimate provider. **3 – Giving is an act of faith that reminds us of our ultimate dependence on God for all we receive.** We have been trained to believe that our existence depends on the amount of money we have. So if we have money, we will live well. If we don’t have money, we won’t live. But what does Jesus say?

Matthew 6:25-26 – Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” Then he goes on to point out how in nature, birds don’t make any money. Yet the father provides for them. Lilies don’t make any money. Yet God clothes them with glory. So if God can look after birds and flowers, He will look after us.

Yet, if hold tightly to everything we make, how will we ever know that God really provides for us. Won’t we be tempted to conclude that God may provide in word but we’re really the ones providing in deed? So say we give away some of what we earn and we can still live by God’s provision. This begins to cultivate in our hearts and minds that we

ultimately depend on Him and not money for life. We turn to God and He makes up for what we give away in other ways. So we give as an act of worship, an act of love, an act of faith.

A fourth motivation for giving - 4 – **Giving is an obedient response to God’s command.** – The regular giving of God’s people for the purposes of supporting the worship and benevolent ministry of the priests has been commanded since Israel became a nation. God commanded His people to give 10% or a tithe of whatever they made – in crops; in animals; in money; in goods. But Israel at times struggled to obey God’s command about this. We find out about one such situation in Malachi the last book of the Old Testament. The Lord speaks.

Malachi 3:6-12 English Standard Version (ESV)

⁶“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ ⁸Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. ¹¹I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. ¹²Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

So the Israelites withheld the full tithe. God interpreted that as an attitude of robbery towards Him. He calls them to bring in the full tithe and trust Him. Then he would open heavens blessings. We as a church continue to practice the 10% guideline. We recognize that tithing is not specifically reemphasized in the New Testament. It talks about giving and never mentions a percentage. Yet we believe that when people ask how much does God call us to give, 10% of income is a good starting point. We believe that this giving should be done first to the local church and then to other causes God lays on your heart.

Many of you have been very faithful in this. I want to say thank you to you. Our family came here in January of 2006. We decided to build on the sanctuary and offices in March of 2006. A million dollars had been saved prior to the project. We expected the total cost to be about 2.2 million. But 2006 and 07 were an extremely expensive time to build. So the project cost turned out to be 3.2 million. Yet I have watched God move through His people to almost completely pay off the other 2.2 million dollars over these past 10 years. We are very thankful and blessed to have this happen.

But to complete this project, we have had to at times cut back in other areas. We have worked to maintain our mission's giving through these years. The mission's pamphlet states that we have dedicated approximately 15% of our budget towards missions. But there were times we were near 20%. Sometimes we've had to go lower than 15% of operations. We are now on the verge of paying off the mortgage. We want to return to a more vigorous missions and outreach focus in our giving. We'd like to get that number up to 20% of our operating budget.

So we want to invite you to prayerfully consider your support of what God is doing at and through SVBC at this time. We would invite you to come to the congregational meeting this Wednesday evening where you can hear more specifically some of what is happening and the direction we sense God leading us. You are welcome to attend whether or not you're a church members. We recognize some of you are facing tough economic times. You may not be able to give much financially. But please support our missionaries and ministries through prayer, encouragement and help. Some of you are newer to our church. If you sense God calling you to be part of us, will you prayerfully consider supporting the many ministries that happen through SVBC in a greater way than you currently are? If you've been attending SVBC and may be giving only occasionally, would you consider a regular donation? Ministry happens year round.

If you are here today and think this message confirms the belief that all the church ever cares about is money, the last time I preached a series on giving was May 2013. We do collect an offering every service, but we don't make a big deal out of it. We simply would like you to be aware of the different motivations we think we're supposed to have for receiving and giving funds because of our faith in Christ. We invite you to join in some of the wonderful work God is doing in us, around us and throughout this world. So let us pray and ask the Lord for His guidance on this. We receive to advance the Kingdom of God. We give as an act of worship, love, faith & obedience.