

# Vision 20/20

*“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?”  
(Matthew 21:42 ESV)*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”  
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”  
(Matthew 25:13 ESV)*

## **Give**

**November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Exodus 35:4-29; Acts 4:32-37**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning church! I’d like to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Exodus 35:4-29; that’s on page 75 in your pew Bibles. We are talking this morning about giving. Now, I understand that in today’s church culture you have to be careful when you talk about giving. Some churches have been manipulative and embarrassingly unfaithful to Scripture when it comes to this conversation. And the Bible warns us to be on the lookout for false teachers who actually work their way into churches in order to steal money from naïve and silly people.

Jesus talked about fake religious leaders:

“who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” (Mark 12:40 ESV)

So there are people who pretend to be spiritual leaders in order to steal money from little old ladies.

That is horrible! That is despicable! But that is true.

But that is not a good reason not to look at what the Bible says about giving. Giving is part of how we respond to the grace and kindness of God. So we aren't going to let the crazy people steal this topic from us. We're going to look at what the Bible says and we are going to respond accordingly.

Now a lot of the confusion about giving has to do with how it is affected by our move from the Old Testament to the New. We get distracted by the few things that change and that keeps us from appreciating all the many things that stay the same and so to help us see what the Bible as a whole has to say about this topic, I've decided to look at TWO passages simultaneously. One from the Old and one from the New Testament. They are very similar actually. They are both presented as representative stories depicting the normative approach to giving within the covenant community.

So hopefully you have your Bible open now to Exodus 35:4-29; we'll read that and then right away we will move from there to Acts 4:32-37. So hear now the Word of the Lord:

Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. <sup>5</sup> Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; <sup>6</sup> blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, <sup>7</sup> tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, <sup>8</sup> oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, <sup>9</sup> and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

<sup>10</sup> "Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the LORD has commanded: <sup>11</sup> the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; <sup>12</sup> the ark with its poles, the mercy seat, and the veil of the screen; <sup>13</sup> the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; <sup>14</sup> the lampstand also for the light, with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light; <sup>15</sup> and the altar of incense, with its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the door, at the door of the tabernacle; <sup>16</sup> the altar of burnt offering, with its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; <sup>17</sup> the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court; <sup>18</sup> the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court, and their cords; <sup>19</sup> the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests."

<sup>20</sup> Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. <sup>21</sup> And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose

spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments.<sup>22</sup> So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD.<sup>23</sup> And everyone who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins brought them.<sup>24</sup> Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD's contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it.<sup>25</sup> And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen.<sup>26</sup> All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats' hair.<sup>27</sup> And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece,<sup>28</sup> and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense.<sup>29</sup> All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD. (Exodus 35:4–29 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Alright, now let's move forward quickly in our Bibles to Acts 4:32-37; that's on page 912 in your pew Bibles. This is like sword drill – I'm going to give you 5 seconds to find that then I'm going to start reading. Hear again from the Word of the Lord.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.<sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.<sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold<sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.<sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,<sup>37</sup> sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32–37 ESV)

This too is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Well, as I'm sure you've already noticed, there is a great deal of similarity between these two stories. So let's just take a few minutes and say what can easily be said about giving in both the Old and New Testaments.

### **What The Bible Says About Giving In Both The Old And New Testaments:**

I think the first thing we would want to say is this:

#### **1. Saved people give generously**

That's the main idea in both passages! In the Exodus passage we are looking at a group of recently liberated slaves. The Israelites had lived in Egypt for about 400 years. For the first bit they were a privileged minority but then their situation changed. Exodus chapter 1 tells us that:

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph (Exodus 1:8 ESV)

This new King was worried because the Hebrews were multiplying rapidly while the Egyptian population had plateaued – so he subjected the people of Israel to slavery – thinking that this would put a check on their growth and power – but the opposite happened. The Bible says:

But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.” (Exodus 1:12–14 ESV)

So Pharaoh and his proposed solution was horrific. =He said to the midwives and nurses that worked among the Hebrews:

“When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” (Exodus 1:16 ESV)

So RUTHLESS SLAVERY and BRUTAL GENOCIDE – that's what God delivered the people of Israel FROM.

And therefore, obviously, they were GRATEFUL.

And they were looking for a way to EXPRESS THAT – and so God gave them a WAY.

That’s what giving is!

The well-known Old Testament scholar Douglas Stuart comments on this passage saying:

“It was God who told humans how he wished to be worshipped, not humans who told God what they had decided to do by way of worship.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s so important for us to see. This was not Moses’ idea! Look at verse 4 of Exodus 35. Moses says:

“This is the thing that the LORD has commanded.” (Exodus 35:4 ESV)

Do you see that?

This was God’s design. This is a form of response commended by God. God understands that it takes faith and it shows gratitude when we give of our material possession – so that’s what he designed as a means of response. God wants to SEE FAITH and he wants to OBSERVE GRATITUDE and this is a thing that God commanded in order to display those pleasing attributes.

And saved people get it.

They don’t have to be compelled – there was no arm twisting – no manipulation – no guilt tripping – in either story. The recurring phrase in Exodus 35 is some version of:

“everyone whose spirit moved him” (Exodus 35:21 ESV)

They wanted to do this. Old Testament and New – this is how saved people respond to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Exodus* in The New American Commentary Volume 2, (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006), 751.

The second thing we can say – out of both stories – is that:

## 2. Generous giving builds up the house of the Lord

How do you give to God? Where do you mail that cheque? Well in both of these stories giving to God was actually giving to the House of the Lord. This story in Exodus 35 in my bible is given the heading: “Contributions For The Tabernacle”; I imagine you have something similar. The tabernacle was the movable house – the movable sanctuary during the time of the exodus and during the time when Israel was moving from place to place in the desert. When they were firmly established in the Promised Land then they built the temple, but while they were moving around – the tabernacle was the house of the Lord and the centre of Israelite worship.

And so the things being given in Exodus 35 – are for the tabernacle – for the building up of the house of the Lord.

Well, flip over to Acts 4 and we see the exact same thing.

Now of course, in the New Testament the CHURCH is the house of the Lord. If the NT is clear about anything it is clear about that. Paul says to the church in Corinth:

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16 ESV)

That YOU in 1 Corinthians 3:16 is a plural you – it refers to the whole church; Paul wants them to know that THEY are the temple of God – they are the house of the Lord. Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 2:5. He says:

“you yourselves like living stones are being built up as **a spiritual house**, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:4–5 ESV)

So the church is the house of the Lord – made up of individual stones – individual people who have built their lives upon the Cornerstone of Jesus CHRIST – thanks be to God!

So in Acts 4 – look at what they are doing:

“There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold<sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” (Acts 4:34–35 ESV)

In Acts 4 they are caring for the stones – the individual Christians that collectively comprise the House of the Lord.

That’s what the money in this story was for. It was used to build up – and elsewhere we see it begin used to press out.

The Apostle Paul commended the church in Philippi. He said:

And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.<sup>16</sup> Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. (Philippians 4:15–16 ESV)

The church in Philippi was one of the first churches to figure out that their gifts should be given not just to care for themselves – but to extend the Gospel to other people and places. They were early adopters with respect to foreign missions.

So we see here that in both the Old and the New Testaments – giving was intended to build up – and to build out the house of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

The third thing we can say here is that in both stories:

### **3. Giving is proportionate to means**

In Acts 4 it says:

“as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold” (Acts 4:34 ESV)

Now to be clear, most of the churches mentioned in the NT were meeting in people’s houses – so this passage is not telling us that we have to sell our houses – it is just telling us that some people did. Some people were able to liquidate properties so as to be more heavily invested in the progress of the Gospel.

We see something similar in Exodus 35. Look at verse 24:

**Everyone who could** make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD’s contribution. And **every one who possessed** acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. (Exodus 35:24 ESV)

So to state the obvious – if you don’t have something, then you can’t give it - and that’s ok!

It isn’t the GROSS AMOUNT THAT MATTERS. That’s the whole point of the Widow’s Mite story. Jesus commended the poor widow for putting in a couple of dollars – because that cost HER as much as this piece of property cost Barnabas – or probably more so. I think the thing to notice is that God looks more at what we keep than what we give - his evaluation metric is a little bit different than ours.

So everybody can give in accordance with their means - and everybody should give in accordance with their means.

Paul told a young pastor:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.<sup>18</sup> Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. (1 Timothy 6:17–18 NIV11)

To whom much is given much is required.

In both the Old and New Testament giving is in proportion to means.

The fourth we can say from both stories is that:

#### 4. Giving requires trust in the leadership

That's very obvious as well isn't it?

The people had to trust Moses and Aaron and the people in the New Testament had to trust the Apostles. Acts 4 says multiple times that people brought their gifts and:

“laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:35 ESV)

Old Testament and New it is the job of the leaders within the covenant community to steward the gifts of God's people. We often talk of course, about how the job of the Elders in the church is to oversee the teaching ministry in the church – and that is true. But of course not all elders actually DO the teaching – we know that from 1 Timothy 5:17 where Paul says:

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, **especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.**” (1 Timothy 5:17 ESV)

ESPECIALLY THOSE who labor in preaching and teaching – which means, transparently, that there were elders who didn't labor in preaching and teaching. Well what did they do? They looked after the money! We see that in Acts 11. There was a famine one time in Judea so some Christians in Syria took up a collection. Luke tells us:

So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.<sup>30</sup> And they did so, **sending it to the elders** by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:29–30 ESV)

The gifts of the disciples are entrusted to and stewarded by the elders of the church. And that is how we are set up here. We have formalized the two parts of the elder role in our polity. I am a teaching elder. My job is to oversee the teaching ministry. But I don't handle the money. I don't

vote on financial matters at the Board. I am not a Director of the Corporation according to the charitable act. That responsibility lies with the Board.

It is the job of the elected elders to steward the gifts of the disciples.

And they do it very well – I can say that because I don't help. I'm not allowed to help! But they take their job very seriously. We have an auditor who comes in to check their work and to improve it as necessary. As of this last audit – we are in full and glorious compliance. Your elders have done a good job. And they are transparent. There is an AGM every year where you are invited to scrutinize and to comment upon their work.

This is important in our day and age – but it has always been important. You can't ask people to give unless you have provided them with leaders that they can trust. You see that in both stories.

And then fifthly and finally here, we can see in both stories that:

## **5. Giving is about more than money**

Money is important! But money isn't everything. It takes money to build up the house of the Lord – but it also takes time and talent and you can see both of those things on display in these stores.

In Exodus 35:26 we are told:

“All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats' hair.”  
(Exodus 35:26 ESV)

So raw materials were provided but then somebody with skill had to work with those raw materials in order to make the curtains and the uniforms that were required for the worship. And these women had skill.

In the subsequent paragraphs we're told about some men who had skill. In verse 30 it says:

“See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah;<sup>31</sup> and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence,

with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship,<sup>32</sup> to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze,<sup>33</sup> in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft.” (Exodus 35:30–33 ESV)

Are you seeing that?

The first spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible were welding and metallurgy. That’s what it took originally to build up the house of the Lord.

The Spirit gives different gifts now – but those gifts too.

The point is giving is about more than money. It is about your time and your God-given talents. It takes all of us giving of all that God has given us – to build up the house of the Lord.

That’s what the bible says about giving – Old Testament and New.

### **What Are The Main Differences As We Move From The Old To The New Testament?**

Now, in the few minutes we have left we do need to say something about those few things that have changed now that we have moved from the Old Testament to the New.

If you’ve spent any time at all inside the Christian church you know that one of the things you have to figure out is how to understand this balance between CONTINUITY and DISCONTINUITY when we consider the two testaments that make up our Bible.

There are some fairly major changes as we move from one to the other.

We didn’t sacrifice any sheep today as part of our worship did we?

And yet the Old Testament is filled with sacrifice – so why didn’t we kill any sheep today as part of our response to God? And the answer is because Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – so that part has been fulfilled. It’s over. We don’t do that anymore – that’s one of the many changes that we observe as we move from Old Testament to New.

Alright what else changes? And specifically, what changes with respect to giving – that’s our interest today. The first thing I think we’d want to say is this:

**1. In the OT the church and the nation were one and the same**

Israel was the church – they were the gathered people of God.

AND they were a nation that needed to support a king and an army and provide basic sanitation and human services to a population – so TITHES and TAXES were not so easily distinguishable from one another.

But obviously that is not the case now.

The church now is not a NATION – rather the church exists INSIDE every nation on planet earth – so of course, that has to be factored in.

The second thing we want to notice is that:

**2. In the OT obedience was motivated by the law**

The Apostle Paul refers to the law as being a like a guardian or a tutor. In our spiritual immaturity – in our infancy as the people of God – such a mechanism was required. But Paul goes on to say, that now that we have come of age as sons and daughters, we have been given the Spirit as our new guide and teacher.

“all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (Romans 8:14 ESV)

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” (Galatians 5:18 ESV)

So there has been a hand off in terms of our basic guidance and motivation – but that doesn’t mean that we are travelling in a different direction. We’re still doing the same things – we are just doing them in a different context and for different reasons.

We aren't afraid of getting in trouble – we are eager to get involved.

We aren't mindful of consequences – we are honoured to participate.

So we have different reasons for doing the things that God's people have always done.

And that leads us to the last thing we need to say:

### **3. In the NT we have more to be thankful for**

This brings us full circle. I mentioned that giving in the Old Testament was a response to God's grace and kindness in our redemption. Well so it is also in the New Testament – but in the New Testament we reflect upon a much greater and far more significant redemption.

The people of Israel were set free from Pharaoh – but we have been set free from sin, death and the devil!

The people of Israel were headed for the Promised Land but we are headed for the eternal Kingdom of God!

Our redemption is more remarkable and our inheritance is more glorious and therefore our worship out to be more generous and whole hearted – amen?

That's the dynamic as we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It is a movement from the lesser to the greater. And so obviously that ought to be reflected in our approach to worship and giving!

We take our bearings from the direction and promptings of the law. But then as TRUE BORN sons and daughters – filled with the Holy Spirit – and overwhelmed by the grace and kindness that we have received – we step FORWARD and we STEP OUT and we respond GENEROUSLY to all that God has done for us in Christ.

We GIVE – as all saved people do!

We give FREELY and GENEROUSLY because God is good! Because GREAT IS OUR REDEMPTION and because this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.