

We have been studying what Bible scholars call the Christ – event. The death of Christ on Good Friday, the resurrection of Christ that Sunday, then 40 days later the ascension of Christ, and lastly today, the giving of the Spirit of Christ to the church on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after Easter.

God has given us so much, that we can say God has made us givers!

SI – what if you had a garden and you planted strawberries and grew a quart of strawberries. You might enjoy them yourself over the next few days. But what if you grew five gallons of strawberries! You need to give some away. If you grew 500 gallons of strawberries, you might become known as ‘The Strawberry Giver,’ because you would be active all day giving away strawberries.

That brings us to the main point today...

Because God gives and gives to us so much, He has given us the gift of giving!

1. God gave the promised land and its fruit.

The land was a big deal. It was God’s special provision for His people. It was an inheritance from the Lord.

The people enter the land. Then the people conquer the land. Then the people settle in the land. Once settled, they start to enjoy the good land. What does that mean? Harvest! They get crops that they did not plant.

In verse 1, we learn how the people got the land in the first place – it was a gift from God, and following right after that in verse 2, we learn what God wanted the people to do with the fruit from the land. So, verses 1 and 2 read like this, *“When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it, and live in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put [the harvest] in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make His name to dwell there.”*

Each farmer was to take from each of the different types of vegetables and fruits to the worship service to give back to the LORD.

Why? To acknowledge that it was God who chose the people of Israel as His people, and secondly, that it was God who redeemed His people.

In thankfulness for God giving the land to them, the people were expected to give a token presentation of the first harvest to God in a special worship service. Verses 3 and 4 describe the worship service. The farmer was to go to the priest

and say to him, *“I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.”* Then there was a small ceremony that involved the farmer and God’s Old Testament priest, which is recorded for us in verse 4, *“Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.”*

Do you see how this is coming full circle? God gave land to the farmer, the farmer harvested crops on the land, and then the farmer brought the crops back to God in worship.

In verse 5, the key to the procedure was the farmer’s statement about his status before God and his personal history. He was the son of a wandering Aramean. This is an unusual way to refer to Jacob. We are going back to the time of Abraham, with help from Pastor Tony in his series on the life of Abraham. We know that we have Father Abraham, his son Isaac, and then there was Jacob. Jacob was a wanderer. So, here is how verse 5 reads, *“And you shall make a response before the LORD your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.’”*

Then, in verses 6 and 7, the aspect is drawn out here about the bad condition of the people while living in Egypt, because they were mistreated and oppressed by the Egyptians. Here are verses 6 and 7, *“And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. 7 Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.”* How did the people of God get from being slaves in Egypt over to owning their own land? It was God.

In verses 8-10, God’s powerful actions are described. Who gave them the harvest? It was not the false god Baal who had been formerly worshipped in that land by its former inhabitants who gave them the good harvest. It was not Baal, even though they called Baal the fertility god of the Canaanites. It was the LORD God who provided the harvest. It was the LORD God’s power that gave the land in the first place, and then God gave them produce within the land. Verses 8-10, *“And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. And He brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God.”* They made statements of worship to God. They did specific actions of

worship to God, such as setting down the food baskets before the Lord in the special service designed for that event.

In verse 11, God made it clear that even the foreigners were to be welcomed to eat of the harvest, so that they too could taste the Lord's provision and celebrate God's power and God's generosity. Here is verse 11, "*And you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.*" This is Biblical inclusion of people. This is God's heart when it comes to various people coming together.

In verse 12, we suddenly fast forward two years. After they have been in the land for two more years, we see more instructions from God. The initial ceremony of firstfruit happened soon after they entered the land. Then, after two years had passed, another ceremony was to happen. This other ceremony was not to take place at the central worship location, but rather within all the Israelite towns and villages. What was the purpose of this gathering and this other feast? It was to show that God remembers hurting people, and therefore God's people are to remember hurting people. Listen to verse 12, "*When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled...*"

What a beautiful picture. God cares for everyone, and so God's people care for everyone.

In verses 13-15, there is again in this ceremony words to declare the Lord as the provider and a prayer of blessing on the people and on the land. While the previous dwellers there - the Canaanites - would have offered food to dead people, God did not allow His people to offer food to dead people. Instead, the people of God were to re-dedicate themselves to their relationship to God. A God of covenant promises expected a people of covenant vows.

In verses 16-19, the people had to pledge themselves in allegiance to their God. God was loyal to them; God expected them to reciprocate by being loyal to God in return. God chose them out of all the nations of the earth to be His treasured possession. What does all this mean for us in the New Testament church?

2. God gave us His Son, and all the gifts that flow from Him.

OT people of God received land, and so become generous people.

NT people of God received Christ, and so become generous people.

The Lord Jesus also willingly gave Himself. That was Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension Day. Once again on Pentecost Sunday, Jesus gave us Himself. Jesus gave us His Spirit.

Pentecost Sunday marks when Jesus poured out the Spirit on the Church. What difference did the gift of the Spirit of Christ make? The gift of the Spirit of Christ makes a difference because we walk not according to the flesh, but rather we walk according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:3, *“by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”*

The gift of the Spirit makes a difference for every step of our walk, and every moment of our lives.

The Covenant God has bound Himself to love us now, and to love us forever, by giving us the gift of The Holy Spirit.

In John 7:37, Jesus stood up and cried out, *“if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive...”*

Jesus has given us so much of the Spirit, that the Spirit flows out of our hearts like rivers of living water.

God the Father gave us His own son. Romans 8:32 shows the giving heart of God the Father. *“He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, with Him, graciously give us all things?”*

The apostle Peter uses a lot of terms from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy when He summarizes the blessings that God has given us... 1 Peter 2:9-10, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

3. The Spirit of Christ makes us givers from the heart.

The concluding verses of Deuteronomy 26 are about our relationship to God.

The passage is filled with covenant language.

He is our God who promised to us and then gave gifts to us.

We are His people who receive His gifts, and we share with others.

We are His treasured possession, and He redeems.

The words here are serious and legal, yet also relational. The words make us think of the official actions that we use words to conduct, such as making of a

contract for business, or the exchange of wedding vows, or the signing of adoption papers.

Ephesians 1:13-14, we received the Spirit, “*who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it...*”

We already have the Spirit, and the Spirit is a downpayment from God to us, showing that we will receive a much larger inheritance in heaven. We are rich!

Why did God give us riches of the Spirit? To share. Riches of spiritual gifts and riches of money, food, homes and cars are all to be shared.

Pentecost means we should share with others.

How do we cultivate a mindset of sharing and giving? By reminding ourselves where our riches come from. Our giving to God is the first step toward being generous toward others.

Luke 18:9-14, Jesus told the parable about our hearts as those who walk before God. It is a parable about how two different ways to understand our relationship to God. The first man was the Pharisee, who bragged that he fasted twice a week and paid all his tithes. The second man was the tax collector, who said, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus was revealing a danger that the people trusted in themselves that they were righteous and viewed others with contempt. Jesus saw right through the Pharisee – the Pharisee was trying to justify himself. The Pharisee was trying to show what a good person he was.

Jesus was teaching that there are wrong ways to give.

- 1) Self-righteously.
- 2) Begrudgingly

To give self-righteously is a wrong way to give, because it is an attempt to make yourself look better than you are.

To give begrudgingly is a wrong way to give, because it is mixed up. You have not decided whether you want to give or not! To take the action of giving, but internally to not be glad about giving, is a wrong way to give.

Now let’s talk about the right way to give.

The right way to give is from humility and from a heart of love and thankfulness.

Jesus uncovered the heart of the repentant tax collector. Jesus explained that when the repentant tax collector stood far away, he was so humble that he would not lift his eyes to heaven, and he said, “*God be merciful to me, a sinner!*” With acknowledgement of his sin, he turned to God alone for mercy.

Jesus taught that he who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Now let's apply this to giving.

By the work of the Spirit, we have a humble view of our gifting from God. Exalting yourself is saying, "other people have an opportunity to give to me."

Humbling yourself is saying, 'I have an opportunity to give to others.'

The firstfruits ceremony in Deuteronomy 26 is an offering from the viewpoint of humility.

Pride says it's about time that the harvest comes, and the next produce had better be bigger.

Humility says, "All of this is for me, as a gift? And there is more coming?"

Self-righteousness says, "I deserve this, so I don't have to share."

Thankfulness says, "I don't deserve this, but it is a blessing and I gladly share it."

J.D. Rockefeller was a Christian man who died in 1937. He was wealthy. If we adjust for today's dollar figures, he would have 258 billion dollars, and Bill Gates has only 146 billion. 112 billion dollars richer than Bill Gates! Many have agreed that J.D. Rockefeller is the richest man in American history. He was raised by his mother to be a devout Christian, so throughout his life, Mr. Rockefeller would read the Bible daily, attend prayer meetings twice a week and even led his own Bible study with his wife. J.D. Rockefeller said, "From the beginning, I was trained to work, to save, and to give. Money-making was considered by Mr. Rockefeller as a 'God-given gift.'" He also said, "I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week."

Why give? To acknowledge that God is the giver of all good things, and to use our advantages to provide for the disadvantaged.

It started with God. God is generous.

Conclusion: Don't covet what other people have; give away what you have.

1. Recognize God's generosity to us. This is the lesson from verses 1-4, when the people received the land, and the farmers were to bring a basket of produce to God in thankfulness. Today we also bring our hearts to God in thankfulness. We recognize that we have the fruits of the Spirit, from Galatians 5:22-23. We look into our hearts, and we see the evidence of God's generosity to us. In our hearts, we have love instead of hatred, we have joy instead of depression,

we have peace instead of worry, we have patience instead of anger, we have kindness instead of meanness, we have goodness instead of wickedness, we have faithfulness instead of brokenness, we have gentleness instead of harshness, we have self-control instead of being out of control. The land flowing with milk and honey is an Old Testament way of saying the generous blessings of God. The New Testament way of saying the generous blessings of God is to recognize that we have upon us the very same Spirit that was upon Jesus Christ Himself! The people used to be in slavery, and then found themselves in a land flowing with blessings. We used to be in slavery to sin, and now we find ourselves in a relationship to God that is flowing with blessings. All of these gifts belong to us because of God's generosity to us.

2. Learn to rejoice in God's goodness all over your life story. This is the lesson from verses 5-11, when they tell that their father was the wandering Aramean Jacob. We have a spiritual history also. We are called to think not just about the present blessings of God and the future blessings of God, but about the past condition from which we were saved. Just like the people of God were brought up out of Egypt with its harsh treatment and slave conditions, we too were brought up out of slavery to sin. We used to be in families and situations that were filled with harsh sin, and bad conditions. Why are we in a better place now? Because of God's goodness to us throughout our lives. Consider the words of verse 11, when you reflect on your life, "...*you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house...*" And we reach out to other people, who are neighbors, extended family, co-workers, and others, such as "*the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.*"(v.11) One part of testifying to others is telling them where you would be without Christ. You would be in the same sad condition of every other unbeliever. Before you can give away that perspective, you need to cultivate it. Learn to rejoice in God's goodness all over your life story.

3. Having the Spirit within us, means we are givers. This is the lesson from verses 12- 19. We serve God by giving to God and others.

God trained His people to give their tithe from all the produce. In verse 12, those gifts are actually given to the Levites, the sojourners, the fatherless, and widows. The people of God are the kind of people who take care of others. It was not just the first crop that was plentiful, but year after year God kept giving produce in the good land, as verse 15 repeats – "*Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that You have given us...a land flowing with milk and honey...*" God wants us to give with

hearts that keep on trusting in God's abundant care for us. Verse 16, "... *you shall therefore be careful to do them with all you heart and with all your soul.*" How can we trust this God to keep giving to us, while we keep giving to others? Verse 18, "*The LORD has declared today that you are a people for His treasured possession....*" Verse 19, the knowledge that our God will "...*set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that He has made...*"

We are holy, because the Holy Spirit lives in us. We give because God has made us givers. Because of the Spirit within us, we have the heart of givers. We want to proclaim the excellencies of Christ. We want the rest of the world to know of our Great God.

We have received the best gift – the Spirit of Christ – and that is why we give.