

# "The Goat and the Transmission"

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## **II Corinthians 9:6-15**

*The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.*

*You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

I'd like to speak to you this morning on the all important topic of "The Goat and the Transmission."

Two hunters were walking through the woods one day when they came across a hole. They looked in and saw that it was incredibly deep. In fact, it was so deep that they could not see the bottom. Anxious to discover how deep it was they looked for an object to throw down into the hole. They found a old car transmission nearby, and together they dragged it and dropped it into the hole. Suddenly a goat ran out of the woods and jumped into the hole. The two hunters were stunned at what they just saw. A short while later while they were still standing there and farmer came up to them and asked them if they had seen his goat. "It was the strangest thing. Your goat just jumped down this hole." "That's impossible," said the farmer. "I had him tied to an old car

transmission!"

Our lives in a very real way are tied into money. From paychecks to taxes, from household budgets to school budgets, from town budgets to federal budgets, from IRAs to social security checks, from offerings & appeals to donations and gifts, from credit cards to pledge cards. Our lives and money are linked together - for better or for worse. And sometimes money drags us into a deep, deep hole of debt, despair, discontent and greed.

Do you know that the Bible talks a lot about money? Because the Bible is not only a book about God, it's also a book about us. And in the Bible there is not the distinction we sometimes make between the sacred and the secular. It's all sacred to God.

Here are some surprising numbers.

- 1 - The Bible teaches directly about Prayer about 200 times
- 2 - The Bible teaches directly on Love about 300 times.
- 3 - The Bible teaches about Money, Wealth and Possessions 600 times.

Jesus talked about money, wealth and possessions as much as any other topic you can think of; because Jesus knew that money is a part of our lives and something we need to have a handle on. He spoke about a Prodigal Son who didn't know how to manage his money and squandered it away. He told another parable about three stewards entrusted with a sum of money from their master. Two invested it wisely. One did nothing with it. The Master in Jesus' story scolded him and said, "At least you could have put it in the bank where it would have gained interest!" Jesus understood the grip that a love of money can have on a person. He spoke about the foolish man who just devoted himself to building bigger barns to store all his wealth. Jesus knew that money can be all consuming. "You cannot serve God and wealth," he said. "Where your treasure is your heart will be also."

Jesus also understood that financial concerns are very real and cause real anxiety even for people of faith. - he's realistic. So he has a large section of the Sermon on the Mount about money - *"Don't worry about what you will eat or what you will wear. Look at the birds of the air, the lilies of the field. God cares for them. God cares even more for you."* You'll have enough. Enough what? Enough money.

Not only is money necessary, money can do much good in the world, according to Christ. Jesus commended the Good Samaritan not only for caring for the wounded man but also for putting him up in an inn for the night and giving the innkeeper a sum of money to pay for his room and board.

Our lives are tied into money. Our lives of faith are tied into money. We wouldn't be sitting here very comfortably in this sanctuary if we couldn't pay the gas bill. We work hard each year on our budget because it's how we spend your money, God's money. We pay workman's comp, my health insurance and pension, insurance on 3 buildings and much, much more. So we have to get comfortable talking about money. It's too important of an area for us not to talk about it.

Today we get to talk about one aspect of money that I think we intuitively know is a spiritual matter and that is giving. II Cor. 9: 7 - *"God Loves a Cheerful Giver."* It's one of the most well-known verses in all the Bible.

There was a church that had a message sign out front. And one day is read this:

*"God Loves a Cheerful Giver . . . but we're not that picky!"*

Well apparently God is. Why does God love a Cheerful Giver? It's because God wants our love - not just our obedience, not just dutiful service, our obligatory gifts. God wants our love. Jesus taught us that by telling us that Deut. 6 was the most important command in the Hebrew Scriptures: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength."*

Think about a husband who takes flowers home to his wife. She of course loves them, and says, "Oh, they're beautiful! You're so kind! I love you so much!" What if the husband replies, "Well, I thought it was duty. After all, I'm your husband. It was the least I could do. Besides they were on sale. I just felt it was my responsibility to get 'em." Does she even want the flowers? God wants our love, so God loves a cheerful giver. Cheerful givers are grateful givers. They give out of a sense of Gratitude and Love.

William Barclay tells a story that illustrates this well. It's about the

author, Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson's native servants loved him. A boy used to wake him up every morning with a cup of tea. One day his usual servant had the day off and another young boy took his place. This boy awakened Stevenson not only with tea but also with a beautifully cooked omelet. Stevenson thanked him and said, "Great is your forethought." "No," the boy said, "Great is my love." May we say that to God through our gifts.

Cheerful givers are grateful, loving givers. Cheerful givers also tend to be generous givers. Are you a generous giver? I want to be, don't you? In fact, this verse can also be translated, *"God love a Hilarious Giver."* Have you ever made a hilarious gift?

A friend of mine did once. My friend, Al and his wife, Rae were visiting her hometown in Wales, England. Al loved that old town that she was from. They went to the church Rae grew up in. It dated back to the 11th century. When it came time for the offering, Al who was feeling very blessed and therefore very generous, put a very large bill in the offering plate. The usher then whispered to him, "I'll be back with some change."

God loves Hilarious Givers! Our Goal should always be that of St. Paul - to be Cheerful Givers, Hilarious Givers! God loves cheerful givers, because they give out of love. They give out of Gratitude. And they give generously. This is important because we tend to undervalue church and faith.

A pastor friend of mine did a wedding and they forgot to pay him. After the couple got back from their honeymoon he called them up and reminded them. They asked, "How much do we owe you?" He was feeling quite generous that day and so he said, "Whatever you want to give me." They paid him \$25.00. Think about all the other checks they wrote out for their wedding. My friend figures he made about \$4.00 an hour.

We also tend to forget how much things cost around the church. At my first church we had an old Hammond Organ. And one day it finally broke for good. As we talked about what to do, a guy said to me, "Well, we'll all just chip in \$20.00 and fix it or get a new one." It was a small church. \$20.00 from each family would have allowed us to purchase an organ bench, but nothing more!

Our lives are tied to money - just like that goat to the transmission.  
Therefore we need to make sure that our money is tied to our faith, in  
order that we might be the kind of givers we want to be and God wants us  
to be.

Amen.