

Sermon University Chapel Sunday Jan. 11, 2015.

At 7: 00 a.m.

**Topic: The Baptism of Jesus, Tithing and
Christian Stewardship.**

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, remind us that our responsibility is to give the first fruits of our labour, not the leftovers. If we are not giving our best, make us brave enough to begin, even now.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight O Lord my strength and my Redeemer Amen.

Introduction: Today, we celebrate the baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist. At Christ's baptism there was a manifestation of the three Persons in the sacred Trinity. The Father confirming the Son to be Mediator; the Son solemnly entering upon the work; the Holy Spirit descending on him, to be through his mediation communicated to his people. In Him our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable, for He is the altar that sanctifies every gift.

Mark 1:7-11 New International Version (NIV)

The Gospel reading taken from St. Mark 1: 7-11 speaks about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. But why did John have to baptize Jesus? There are several reasons why it was fitting for John to baptize Jesus at the beginning of His public ministry. Jesus was about to embark on His great work, and it was appropriate that He be recognized publicly by His forerunner. John was the “voice crying in the wilderness” prophesied by Isaiah, calling people to repentance in preparation for their Messiah (Isaiah 40:3). By baptizing Him, John was declaring to all that here was the One they had been waiting for, the Son of God, the One he had predicted would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11).

Christ does not deny that John had need to be baptized of him, yet declares he will now be baptized

of John. Our Lord Jesus looked upon it as well becoming him to fulfill all righteousness, to own every Divine institution, and to show his readiness to comply with all God's righteous precepts. In and through Christ, the heavens are opened to all God's people. This descent of the Spirit upon Christ showed that he was endued with his sacred influences without measure. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

As we celebrate this important day in the Christian life, we know that Baptism is both individual and corporate. Each of us must live out our baptismal promises and take responsibility – to be Good Stewards in our own lives and to work towards the preparation of others to join with us. Let us take time to reflect what it might mean for us to be a Good Steward.

Whenever there is a discussion on Christian Stewardship, invariably the subject of **Tithing** comes up. Usually, the conversation centres around the fact that the Christian is obliged to tithe – to give 10% of one's income to God, as this is pleasing to God. Some even assert that those who fail to tithe are actually sinning against God. Tithing is therefore very often used as a yardstick of faithfulness and in some instances is used as a veiled threat to coerce persons to give more to the church. In fact, the Old Testament prophet Malachi in Malachi 3:8 says: "I ask you, is it right for a person to cheat God? Of course not, yet you are cheating me. 'How?' you ask. In the matter of tithes and offerings."

The subject of giving may seem distasteful for some, but giving is truly one of the privileges of the

Christian life. When we give, we display the glory of God who gives, and who has blessed us with his indescribable gift.

History of Tithing

Today we will examine briefly whether there is in fact a scriptural basis for tithing and whether Jesus had anything to say about it.

The Old Testament is replete with instructions and encouragement to tithe. In fact, there is no question that the Bible contains the command to tithe. In Leviticus 27, verses 1-8, the Lord speaks to Moses telling him to instruct the Children of Israel as to how they should bring their offerings to the Lord once they have made an explicit vow to Him. The instructions are quite clear and persons are instructed as to how to give in respect of their

gender and their age. The Books of Deuteronomy and Numbers also contain instructions for the People of Israel as to how they should offer their offerings and tithes to the temple. Indeed it was a divine imperative to the Israelites and the offerings were used for the upkeep of the temple, the livelihood of the Levites as well as for the operation of the government and for the worship of God.

The Law of the Tithe falls under the Old Testament categories of “civil” and “ceremonial” law. These laws governed the civic life of the nation of Israel as well as the worship life of the Old Testament Church.

These categories of law do not remain in force for the New Testament. They came to a conclusion with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He has fulfilled the ceremonial requirements of the Old

Testament in His own flesh, becoming Temple, priest, sacrifice, and even tithe for us.

While tithing may still be helpful by way of example, it is not commanded of Christians.

Tithing is simply not required by the New Testament Scriptures. It is mentioned in the Gospels by the Jews in conversation with Jesus, but nowhere does Jesus institute the tithe as a New Testament law.

The New Testament's Take on Tithing

The New Testament stresses the fact that as good Christian Stewards we owe an obligation to God from whom we get everything that is endowed to us. It contains several commands regarding stewardship, support of the Gospel ministry, and charity. In the four areas where financial obligations

are set out in the New Testament, nowhere is there mention of the percentage of one's income that should be rendered to the Church.

Listen more carefully now: Our Christian Duty as Good Stewards is that we owe a debt of responsibility to take care of our family, our church and our pastor.

Christian giving is consistent with spiritual abundance. In 2 Cor. 8:7-8 Paul observes certain spiritual blessings that the Corinthian Christians enjoyed in abundance. He notes that they abounded in faith – they were able instructors of others, they possessed abundant knowledge of God and His truth and were diligent in performing their Christian duties as well as exemplary in their love. **However, he indicated that they had been careless in the matter of giving. He therefore**

calls on them and us to be consistent in our giving.

The Apostle Paul defines giving as a “gracious work” as it expresses our awareness of God’s grace to us. So when we give, we are actually acknowledging the undeserved favour we have received from God and are reflecting that favour back to him in sharing with others.

Jesus reflected on how we should give when he spoke of the Widow’s mite as being more of a significant gift than the rich man who gave a large sum, but which to him, was not really a sacrificial gift. Just imagine, the poor widow, almost ashamed of her small offering – but giving it with love and sacrifice. It is probably her only income. Jesus compares her small offering with that of the rich man, who is boastful of giving a large sum, which

was basically left over after he had spent abundantly. He says that in this instance, her offering is far more genuine and far more appreciated by God.

In 2 Cor. 8: 2-15 St. Paul speaks on the subject of Christian giving in the following way.

1. Christian giving is modeled by the Lord Jesus.

The supreme example of gracious giving is the Lord Jesus Christ. As an act purely of grace, he exchanged his riches for poverty, so that we might become partakers of the eternal riches that are rightfully his.

2. Christian giving reflects Christian Commitment.

Christians should be motivated to give of their resources, as Jesus did in his ultimate sacrifice for us.

3.Christian giving achieves equality in the body of Christ.

Paul's thought concerning giving God's way implies the fundamental love ethic of Christians for one another – a love that seeks to share from one's own abundance with those who lack. Such sharing is mutual and anticipates the possibility that one day the positions might be reversed.

Today's giver may be tomorrow's recipient in this mutual relationship of loving concern.

Conclusion

So, while tithing is not required of the New Testament Christian, faithful stewardship of the money and possessions God provides is required. Such stewardship includes taking care of one's family, paying one's financial obligations and debts, paying one's taxes, paying one's pastor and supporting the ministry of the Church, and assisting those who are poor or who are in need. Such giving ought not to come only from fear of the Law, but abounds as a fruit of the Gospel. Faithful stewardship is a loving act of worship and thankfulness toward God and an act of loving service toward one's neighbor.

“God Calls Givers to Accountability, Authenticity and Advocacy” says

Baroness Caroline Cox in a Testimony delivered at Generous Giving's joint conference with the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, London, England, September 10-11, 2004.

Baroness Caroline Cox, a member of the English House of Lords, says, ‘it is easy to give into “faithless, fearful dread,” rather than to seize the opportunities that the Lord provides. For her it’s an easy temptation until she remembers that the **church’s mandate includes accountability, authenticity and advocacy.**’ The baroness shares her experience in going out into the world and taking risks to fulfill this mandate and proclaim God’s love through word and deed. She acknowledges that while it would be easier to live a life of ease, instead she considers it a privilege to help and pray for those who are persecuted in specific countries around the world.

Why don’t we all in this New Year pledge to give according to our ability; yes, “ to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds to labour and ask for no reward save that of knowing

that we do the Master's will." In the name of the
Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.