

Giving a Gift to God
Leviticus 1:1-3
December 3, 2017

I am going to let you in on a personal secret this morning - I am going to be open with you about one of my greatest personal challenges - I am a terrible gift buyer!

For this reason, I absolutely dread birthdays, anniversaries and Christmas - Don't get me wrong, I love the season of Christmas and all that it represents - but I must admit I have some trepidation about Christmas morning - Why? - Because I am usually a failure when it comes to buying gifts for my wonderful wife, Donna.

The odd thing is that my wife is so easy to please - She is content with just about whatever she has - She never complains - and she never wants much! - I think this is part of the problem - She very rarely ask for much of anything!

The other problem I have, is that Donna puts her heart and soul into the gifts she buys - If you are on her list, you can know that she has invested time and thought into what she gives you.

She may not have paid a lot of money for the gift (and for her that is part of the fun - getting a great deal) - but you can know she has worked hard to pick it out!

Me on the other hand - well I hate to shop - my favorite day to shop is Christmas Eve - Why you ask? - Because time does not allow me to shop - it only allows me to buy! - My motto has always been, **“Why take 3 days to shop for what you can buy in an hour!”**

But, unfortunately my motto does not always lend itself to buying the perfect gift - Thus, I am usually a failure at the whole gift-giving exercise! - So, with each passing day as we move closer and closer to Christmas, my anxiety grows!

With my wife, I have found that I fail in three big ways when it comes to giving her the right gifts - First, I am never really sure what she wants - This is usually because I don't listen closely enough to the hints that she gives me along the way!

Second, I often shop for her with the wrong attitude - I am usually in a rush - I am more focused on saving time and getting out of the store, than getting the right gift for her.

Third, I sometimes find that I am buying her what I want her to have, rather than shopping for the things that she desires and is hoping for! - Husband, unfortunately lingerie and kitchen appliances never on her list! - Bummer!!!

This morning I am not going to attempt to give any lessons on gift giving - But during this season, when giving gifts is at the forefront of our minds, I do want to share with you some thoughts on the gifts we give to God.

If you are a Christian this morning, I know you have wrestled with the thoughts of what we should give to Our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ - What do we give to a God who truly has everything?

Think about it - What can I give to God that He doesn't already have? - Any gift that I give to Him seems so meager and insignificant - Yet, according to His Word, there are some things that He desires from me.

These are gifts I give Him - But it might be better said, **“These are gifts I give back to Him!”** - for everything that I have come from God - The best I can do is give back to Him from the storehouse of gifts that He first gave to me!

So, this morning, let's go shopping for Our Heavenly Father - The store where we will shop is our own life - And let me say, **God has a wish-list! - His Word speaks of many things that He desires from us.**

So, this morning let's first, explore what is on our Heavenly Father's Christmas list - and Second, let's examine 3 important attitudes that I must have when I give Him any gift!

First, what are some things that God enjoys receiving from His kids? - How about a quick list from God's Word:

Romans 12:1 - I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

A great gift to God is **"Our bodies a living sacrifice"** - our time, our talents, our obedience - Given to Him on a Daily basis!

Eph. 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Another gift the Father loves is when we **"Walk in Love"** towards each other! - This is a sweet smelling gift to God - it is like giving Him one of those scented candles that smell so good!

Mat 9:13 Jesus said, "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'."

One of our Father's favorite gifts is when we **"Show Mercy to each another"** - He prefers this gift even over us making some sacrifice for Him!

Next, Paul writes in **2 Co 9:7, So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**

Our Father loves it when we **Give Financially** from the resources He has blessed us with - But, He loves this gift best when it is wrapped in cheerfulness!

There are many more gifts on His list, but I will mention two more - They are found in **Hebrew 13:15-16** **Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.**

Our Father loves it when we offer Him the **Sacrifice of praise** - I hope you gave Him this gift during our time of worship - Just using the songs we sing to say **Thank You** for all He has done for us.

Lastly, He loves it when we **“do good and share”** what we have with others! - One of God’s favorite gifts is our generosity! - When He sees you sharing with others in His Name, He is so pleased!

That is the start on a pretty good Christmas “Wish List” for Our Heavenly Father! - But, God doesn’t just want these gifts from us - He also wants them given with the right attitude - For God, this is even more important than the gift itself.

In the Law of Moses, God embedded certain underlying principles that were to guide the people in how they approached Him - God wanted sacrifices made, and offering given - but they must always be done with the right attitude of heart!

Let’s be clear right up front - We are in no way under the Law of Moses - Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we have been set free from the Law - We live our lives as believers under the glorious covenant of grace!

But, there are many principles that we find all through the Bible that guide our worship - These are truths that are taught in both the Old and the New Testament.

This morning we want to identify and make application of three of these heart guiding principles - They are all found in the Book of Leviticus.

In Leviticus, God is giving instruction to the Nation of Israel on the making of sacrifices and the giving of offerings - There we find three words which reveal the attitudes God wanted His people to have when they were approaching Him with an offering or sacrifice.

Each descriptive word was designed to make a person evaluate their heart when approaching the Lord in worship - These three words are: **(1) Free-will; (2) Unblemished (or “without blemish); and (3) Firstfruits.**

Let's read first a couple of passages from the Book of Leviticus to set the context for our study - **Leviticus 1:1-3 Now the LORD called to Moses, and spoke to him from the tabernacle of meeting, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of the livestock--of the herd and of the flock. 3 'If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD.**

2:12 'As for the offering of the firstfruits, you shall offer them to the LORD, but they shall not be burned on the altar for a sweet aroma.

Our first word that was to reflect the attitude of the worshiper was **“Free-will”** - Hebrew word with the root meaning of **“pleasure” or “delight”** - when we give to God, it must be from a heart of delight - we were never to approach God begrudgingly.

We never give a gift to Our Father from a heart motivated by guilt, or pressure or compulsion - We read earlier 2 Cor. 9:7 - **So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver!**

God never wants His People offering Him a gift because they feel pressured to! - Remember, this was the case with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 - They saw the generosity of other church members - Each of them giving freely of what they had to the work of God.

Ananias then made a serious mistake: **Acts 5:1-6 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? 4 "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. 6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.**

Let's understand something about God - He does not take back what He freely gives to us - He had blessed Ananias with a nice piece of land - God did not demand it back as an offering - Ananias just felt peer-pressure - He wanted to look more spiritual than he really was!

So, he begrudgingly sells the property and gives part of the proceeds as an offering - claiming he had given all - God decided to make a point to His Church - Dishonesty in our gifts to God is not acceptable!

Ananias drops dead - later his wife Sapphira comes and tells the same lie - She is also instantly judged for her hypocrisy! - She also drops dead - Wow, aren't you glad God is not judging us this same way when we offer to Him a gift with a less than pure heart?

God was teaching us the importance of giving freely - He was reminding us that only that which we freely offer to Him is acceptable - we need to give without greed in our hearts!

We too can easily become begrudging givers - and God hates a gift given with a tainted heart!

God is pleased with the person who is a cheerful giver! - He desires that ever sacrifice we make - or ever gift we give to Him or to others - to be given as a Free-Will offering - One given with delight - One given with Joy.

The last few years, I have been going to the bank in early December and getting two \$50 bills - I give one to Donna and I keep one - Then during the month of December, we each pray about who to give our \$50 bill to.

We could leave it as a tip - or just give it to a stranger on the street - or even to a friend who might have a need - the point is just to give it away freely to someone as God leads us.

This is not as easy as you might think - It becomes difficult when you begin to try to qualify the need of the person you are considering - Does this person really have a need? - Suddenly, it is not about the joy of giving a gift - it becomes about making sure the person receiving the gift really needs it!

I know at times this is an important thing to consider - but, I can get so concerned with the worthiness of the recipient that I miss the point of the act of worship!

The point is to freely give away a gift - and to trust God that He would use it - To often our giving can become about the bottom line - **Did we give to the most important need - and will the money be used the way I desire to be?**

When it comes to my Acts of Worship, this is a dangerous way to think - Am I giving freely? - or am I simply directing funds and calling it an act of worship?

I think God is more concerned with the attitude of my heart than whether our gift was targeted perfectly - Today, I fear we are becoming a church of “practical” givers - rather than a church of “worshipful, thankful” givers.

Make sure your gifts are given freely - and are not simply practical means for you to solve social problems! - And to direct your offerings where you think they should go! - We need to give to God freely - with no strings attached!

Our second word is **Unblemished (or “without blemish)** - The Hebrew word carries the idea of **“perfect” or “complete”**.

The sacrifice brought to God could never be scarred, or deformed, or injured in some way - it was to be the best sheep in the herd - not the runt we wanted to get rid of anyway.

God’s point was that the sacrifice or the offering had to cost you something - You were never to offer to God something that was worthless to you - You offered God the lamb, or the goat, or the calf of highest quality.

You were never to pawn off on God something that was inferior - The Alter of God was never to become the place where we deposited our leftovers - We were never to clean out our basement, or closet, and give what we didn’t want to God!

The Goodwill Store or the Salvation Army are great places to give away things we no longer want - but let’s not confuse this with giving a gift to God!

There is a wonderful story tucked away at the end of 2 Samuel - David had grown prideful about his army and the victories he had experienced - So he decided to count his army - He wanted to know just how great and powerful he had become!

The Commander of his army, a man named Joab, tried to talk him out of doing this - He sensed that David had become prideful about his power and prestige - but David would not back down.

So Joab took the census for David - and God got angry - God was already upset at David for the arrogance - Now God was going to punish him for this unlawful counting of the people!

As soon as the census was completed, David quickly felt the guilt of his sin - He repented before the Lord - but. . . there were consequences for his sin that were on the way!

God sent the prophet Gad to David to deliver His message - Gad said to David, **“I have some good news and some bad news for you, David.”** - First the good news - **David you get to choose your punishment from three choices! - The bad news is that they are all pretty awful!**

Behind Door #1 - Seven years of famine in the land of Israel
Behind Door #2 - Fleeing from your enemies for three months
Behind Door #3 - Three days of a deadly plague in the land

All three choices meant that some of the men he had just unlawfully counted were going to die! - When Leaders sin, innocent people often pay the price!

David chose the 3 Days of Plague - And it hit hard - 70,000 men died in the judgement - And it could have been worse, but God, in His mercy, ended the plague before it hit Jerusalem - the most heavily populated place in Israel!

Gad returned to visit king David - He is now broken hearted over the pain he has caused - Gad instructs David to go down to the House of Araunah, the Jebusite, and build an altar to the Lord - So David did as the Prophet commanded.

When he arrives, David tells Araunah that he wants to buy his threshing floor - He is to build an altar there and make a sacrifice to God.

Araunah immediately offers to give the threshing floor to his King! - It will cost David nothing to build God's Altar!

But in verse 24 we read David response to Araunah - **2 Sa 24:24-25 - Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel.**

David would not offer to God a sacrifice that cost him nothing - He knew that in order for a sacrifice or a gift to be meaningful, it had to have cost him something!

He would not offer a blemished sacrifice to God - He would not offer a gift to His God that was from his freebies!

Think about it - Do you pull a gift from your re-gifting pile if you want to send a meaningful message to someone you love? - No, you take the re-gift to a party where you don't care who gets it!

But when the person receiving the gift means a lot to you, you want them to know that it cost you something - You want them to know that You spent time and resources picking it out and purchasing it!

How often do we give to God from our left-over pile? - Years ago, Donna and I had an insightful conversation with a former church member and his wife - As we talked, they made this statement, **"We want to tithe, but there is just very little left over at the end of the month!"**

God doesn't want our leftovers or our throw aways - God desires an unblemished gift - and an unblemished gift always cost us something! - It is never what we are looking to be rid of - more often it is the thing we value most!

That brings us to the final word that we find in Leviticus - It is the word **Firstfruits** - The firstfruits were the opposites of the leftovers - they were the first of the harvest - they were the first of our blessings - they were the first profits we received from an investment of our time and resources!

In the Law of Moses, on 13 different occasions, God command that the people give the Firstfruits of the harvest of the Land to Him - This included almost everything they produced - **grain, wine, olive oil, sheared wool and even honey** - The first of all they produced was to go to God by way of an offering or a sacrifice!

This offering was designed by God to send a message to the people that the blessings of the Land came from Him! - With each offering, it would be a constant reminder that God was the One behind their successful harvest - He was the one providing the blessing.

It would be an exercise of faith for them to give the first of their harvest back to God - They would be expressing faith that God could and would meet their needs with what remained after the offering was made - they would trust Him that **“less than all”** would be enough!

This underlying principle is expressed all through Scripture:

Proverbs 3:9-10 Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase. 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

Here the emphasis is placed on giving from our increase - By this we recognize that God is responsible for our growth and our pay raises!

God also promises that He will always out-give us! - Our Barns will be full - This thought is reiterated all through the Bible - We can't out-give God!

Luke 6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

Here the emphasis is that God wants to bless us - We just have to be willing to Give to Him first and then trust Him!

Phil. 4:17-19 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

In this passage the emphasis is on the joy and pleasure God receives when we give in His Name!

Giving to God first - whether it is my time - my money - my talents - my resources, - it is an act of faith:

- it is a statement to God that **I trust Him**
- it is a statement to God that **I recognize He is the source of all that I have**
- it is a statement to God that **all I have belongs to Him**
- it is a statement to God that **I believe He can do more with what is left, than I can do with all of it!**
- It is a statement to God that **I know I can never out give God!**

But, there is another reason God required the first fruit? - I know this from personal experience - If I don't give to God first - whether it is my time in prayer and devotion - whether it is my money in tithes and offering - whether it is my service in His church - if I don't give to him first, I just don't seem to have much leftover to give Him!

I have found that if I don't start my day with a time of prayer, it is very difficult to find time to pray - if I don't write my tithe check first, I very rarely have much left to give after I pay my bills - if I don't dedicate my talents to God first, other personal pursuits will swallow them up!

But, if I give to God first, there always seems to be enough - God really does supply all my needs according to His riches in glory - **Not according to what I have - but according to what He has!**

This Christmas season, if you are planning to give gifts to God, start with the right attitudes in your heart - **Am I giving to God "freely"?** - or because I feel some guilt or some nagging obligation?

Am I giving to God an unblemished gift? - or am I giving to Him something I really don't value at all? - Am I "re-gifting" my worship and offerings to God?

Third, **am I giving of my first fruits to my Lord?** - or am I just hoping there will be something leftover that I will offer Him when everything else done?

During this Christmas season, my prayer is that we will really examine the gifts we are giving to our Heavenly Father - Is He on the top of your Christmas list? - If not, I hope you will put Him there!

Let's Pray.