

Commitment Sunday 2009

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Gracious God, we ask for you to pour out your spirit amongst us now as we look at your word again, and particularly a passage which just displays your greatness.

Who are we, O Lord, that we could give so generously? Father, I pray that you would search our hearts that we might give with honest intent, that we might desire your glory, that we might see all things come from you.

And who are we to do this? And we ask it for your sake. Amen. Since the St. Paul's Vision 2020 was launched a few weeks ago, I've had time to go over the plans.

You've had time to discuss them amongst yourselves or with the leaders and to pray about them and to consider your commitment to them. And, of course, what we launched a few weeks ago is not the final word on what's going to happen here.

Obviously, in the next 11 years, there's an awful lot of work to be done, and it's certainly impossible to sit this side of 11 years and to work out all the details, particularly all the fine operational details of every ministry for the next 11 years.

[1 : 13] Those things will happen. That will be discussed as we go along and work out what we need to do and is where God's leading us. But for now, we have the big picture. We have the big picture. We have the key elements of why we exist, what we value as a church, what we hope to achieve under God, him giving us the strength and the mercy to do it.

What we hope is that it will pull us together as a church to work in a common goal, to head in a common direction for God's glory. And the question which is before us, the one that I left you with on Vision Sunday, is will you commit yourself to what the Lord has laid before us as his people? More importantly than the question of will you commit yourself to Vision 2020, is will you commit yourself fully to the Lord in this place?

Will you commit yourself fully to the Lord in this place? On Vision Sunday, we looked at the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke, and the call of Jesus there was for us to make decisions now in view of eternity.

And in particular, the call was for us to build up treasures in heaven and to use our money now and to put it behind ministry. It is the one thing that you will buy which will actually be an internal investment.

[2 : 31] I've also mentioned a number of points that for Christians, money is not purely a financial issue. It is a spiritual issue. And so what we are doing here today on Commitment Sunday is not fundraising, it is faith-raising.

That's the deal. That's what we're working with here. It's fundraising, not fundraising. Faith-raising, not fundraising. It's been a long day. 1 Chronicles is primarily about David, primarily about his reign. It's about David's reign as king and the building up to the construction of the temple. And you see David, even though he made a bunch of mistakes in 1 Chronicles, you see him come to the fore at the end of this book.

The temple is crucial for the people of God. It is the permanent structure where God will permanently dwell with his people. It is a recapturing, if you like, of the Garden of Eden where people and God walked together and were in peace and harmony and rest with each other. And so it would be the place where God would rule the world. It would be the centre of the world. It was the symbol of God's unending state of rest and peace with his people.

[3 : 44] A permanent dwelling where God would permanently dwell amongst his people. It was crucial for the nation of Israel for this to happen. David had already been told that he wasn't to build the temple and so what he does in his retirement years is he gets ready for his successor and his son Solomon.

Verses 1-9 describe the facts for us on a human level. There is an incredible generosity in Israel for the collection to pay for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. David led the way by giving of the official treasury, the stuff that he had the checkbook for, the official treasury of Israel.

He gave significantly out of that but he also gave significantly out of his personal resources. And these personal resources were highly valued or in actual fact these resources in the original language they were the treasures of the king.

It's what the king treasured. They were highly valued by the king. They were treasured by the king because they were kept in reserve for the king as an insurance policy against any unforeseen political misfortunes or natural calamities.

So if he needed to buy an army to beat up someone who was against him, he's got his own money to put into it as his own personal security. So what happens here is that David leads the people by giving of the goods that were stored up for his own personal security.

[5 : 22] The amounts are there. 100 tons of gold, 240 tons of silver but the amounts actually don't matter. The amounts don't actually matter. What matters is he led the people in giving up of his personal security.

And the Bible leads me consistently to conclude that the extent to which we are prepared to risk our material well-being is a measure of the seriousness in which we take our discipleship.

That is why, friends, this is a faith-raising issue for St Paul's. That's why David challenges the people, now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?

This whole thing in raising money for the temple is purely about that. David calls the whole assembly together and says to them, will you freely offer yourselves to God?

The issue is not the amassing of glittering jewels or precious metals but the pouring of themselves as God's people into the building of the temple as a symbol of the wholehearted worship that will soon take place in that temple.

[6 : 48] What David is calling for here is very similar to what Paul says to the Macedonian churches in 2 Corinthians. Again, in the context of giving, he says, they did not do as we expected but they gave themselves first to the Lord.

They consecrated themselves to the Lord and then to us in keeping with his will. That's just what David says a thousand years earlier or more.

Give yourselves to the Lord. It's what I've been looking at as we've been travelling with Jesus on this road to Jerusalem. What does it mean for Jesus to be our king? And he says, give yourselves to the Lord.

Give yourselves to this king who will consecrate themselves this day to Jesus. And the response was overwhelming. The fathers, the princes, the commanders, the overseers gave gold and silver and brass and iron.

Everyone who had precious stones gave them to Jehiel, the Wendy J of David's court. Those are the facts on the human level. There was an enormous generosity.

[7 : 56] The money came in. There was enough to build the temple. How do you account for that? Was David a charismatic leader?

Were they just fearful of David? How do you account for this? David, at one level, David is not the least afraid of saying that the people did the giving. He stresses their wills were profoundly involved in the giving.

Verse 9, The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. They were not coerced. They made choices.

This is what anyone can see on a human level. But what matters on this day is not what the eye can see. What matters is the great, invisible reality of God on this day.

And to help us to see that, what the writer of Chronicles does is he sort of pulls apart the curtains on David's prayer. David prays in such a way that he pulls apart the curtains to see what is really happening when the people of God give so generously.

[9 : 08] Back then and here today. What really happened was that God revealed himself to his people.

So get this. The giving of money for the house of God was the work of God to reveal God so that the people of God would stand in awe of God.

That's what's going on. I'll say it again given the confused, glazed looks that you all have. The giving of money for the house of God was the work of God to reveal God so that the people of God

would stand in awe of God.

That is what's revealed in David's prayer. That is what David sees and this is what he says he sees is happening on this day.

Of course this is invisible. No camera could pick up God. No reporter could stick a microphone and ask him what's going on on this day. Technically there are no signs and wonders.

[10:25] There are no miracles but David says what has happened here today is all of God. And he mentions at least 11 things about God.

11 attributes of God which are being revealed in this enormous generosity in 1 Chronicles 29.

Number one yours oh Lord is the greatness.

That is God is great. He is expansive. He is larger than any reality in this universe. Number two yours oh Lord is the greatness and the power.

God is powerful. All power belongs to God. He is not only big and expansive. He is also strong. He is stronger than any atomic power any hydrogen bomb any natural forces like hurricanes or ocean tides or an exploding stars.

He is not only great in size but he can move that greatness to accomplish everything that he wills to accomplish. He is very powerful.

[11:28] Number three yours oh Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the splendor. God is glorious. In other words his greatness and his power come together to beauty.

Not ugliness. It's beauty when God's greatness and power come together. When we see God for who he is our hearts our souls respond with a tremendous satisfaction because we were made to behold glory and splendor.

We were made to exalt in infinite beauty. God is the source and the essence of all great and powerful beauty all glory and splendor.

Number four yours oh Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the splendor and the majesty. He is majestic. This means that he has all the marks of royalty or kingliness.

When he rides by you take off your hat and you salute. You don't slouch. You don't swagger. You don't joke. You don't jest. You stand in awe and you tremble with joy before this God.

[12:44] You tremble with joy that you have been granted to see him and not die. He is majestic. Yours oh Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor for everything in heaven and on earth is yours.

God owns the world and he owns everything in it. He owns your home. He owns your car. He owns your television. He owns your blender. He owns your mind.

He owns your emotions. He owns your will. He owns your very life. Everything is his. He owns your life. He owns your life.

He owns your life. He gave it freely as a trust and he may take it whenever he chooses all of it or any of it and he would have done you no wrong.

We are only trustees of life and thought and possessions. We are only trustees of life and thought and possessions.

[13:53] Just dwell on that for a little while and that will blow your mind inside out and upside down. We need to ponder that more than we do. Number six, yours, oh Lord, is the kingdom.

In other words, he not only has the splendor of royalty, he has the authority of royalty. He actually rules as king over the world. He has dominion, ruling authority as king over all.

His kingly decrees hold sway over all. Number seven, yours, oh Lord, is the kingdom. You are exalted as head over all. God is the head over all things.

That is, he is the leader and he is the final authority over all things. God is not incidental or accidental over all. He chooses to be head over all.

He exalts himself as head over all. His position in the universe is a position he chooses to keep. His reputation as head over all is something that he wills and desires to be known to the ends of the earth.

[14:59] Number eight, wealth and honour come from you. Not only does God own all things, rule all things, exalt himself as head over all things, he also is the source of all things, the source of all riches and honour that come to any man, woman or child.

On a merely human standpoint, we look and we go, my riches and honour come because of my inheritance, because of some good willing and dealing on the stock market, some shrewd real estate dealings, I've saved some money, I've worked really hard, I've lived an honourable life, but

David says riches come from God, all honour, any title that you have, any possessions that you have, all comes from God.

That is the invisible work of God in and under and behind all of our daily work. Number nine, and linked with this, in your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

The new thing here is that all human greatness and all human strength are the work of God's invisible hand. It's all of God.

The ability that I had to even comprehend what 1 Chronicles 29 was doing and to put it into some form of a sermon was the work of God in my brain and in my heart.

[16:33] God's point in all of this, in this great generosity in Israel is to show that it is his hand that lies behind it and makes it great.

Number ten, after pausing in verse 13 to burst with thanks and praise for all of this stuff, David goes on with more about this great God who has been at work in his whole affair of giving and he says this about this great God, he is merciful.

God helps us to do what we do not deserve help to do. Verse 14, but who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this?

everything comes from you and we have given you only what comes from your hand. In other words, God has enabled us to give like this is what David is saying.

Even though we don't deserve the help that God has given to give like this. Who are we to be helped to give like this? St. Paul's Chatswood is a fellowship of graciously saved sinners.

[17:51] As verse 15, the second answer verse 15 says, there is no hope for people like us outside of God's mercy to us in the Lord Jesus. No hope whatsoever. Nevertheless, God acts for us in mercy and behold we give because he has acted towards us in mercy.

And so the 11th tribute to God in this matter of giving is that God is sovereignly merciful and he helps us give even though we don't deserve that help.

And so just over 10 days ago, I told you last week, staff and parish council got together and they pledged \$5,200 a week for 2010. And following on from the words of David, who are the staff of St. Paul's Chatswood? Who are the parish council of St. Paul's Chatswood that they could give \$5,200 a week for next year? We are utterly undeserving.

Yet from his hand we have given to him only what came from him because he is a merciful God.

Number 11, finally, jumping down to verse 18, we see that God's enabling in this matter is not simply that he gives the funds but that he gives the willingness to give.

[19:17] This takes us back to where we started. Remember what we said about the people, the people did the giving. David even stresses the significant aspect of their will in that they were profoundly involved in the giving.

Verse 9 it says, the people rejoiced the willing response of their leaders for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord.

That is, the people of Israel made choices. Human choices, real choices, joyful choices. That is what you can see.

That is what all the people can see. It is obvious for us to see that but that is not all that David saw. What David saw and he makes known to us in the petition in verses 18 to 19, O Lord, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in their hearts of your people forever and keep their hearts loyal to you.

And give my son Solomon the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, requirements and decrees and to do everything to build this palatial structure for which I have provided. See what he's saying there?

[20:30] Where is Solomon going to get a heart to keep the commands of God? From God. David prayed in verse 19, give my son Solomon the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands and requirements and decrees.

Friends, we ought to be praying for that. We ought to be praying that prayer. Give it to us, Lord, the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, your requirements and decrees that we might generously give.

And so that's what he says. What about these people here? What about those who had already given so generously? Those who says he, verse 9, had given freely and wholeheartedly. What does David pray for them?

Verse 18, O Lord, keep this desire in their hearts of your people forever and keep their hearts loyal to you. This is not the end of the matter.

We ought to be growing more and more in this matter. When a sinner directs his heart towards God, God has done that. Apart from God, our hearts will go in every direction.

[21 : 36] But God, apart from God, our hearts will go after everything apart from God. We will treasure anything else in this world apart from God.

That is what is so crucial for us as a church to have treasure Jesus at the centre of our mission statement. We ought to be treasuring him more than anything else. And may God give us the hearts to pursue treasuring Jesus more than anything else.

Apart from God, we do not give willingly and joyfully to the cause of God. That is why David prays. A prayer that is asking God to do what man cannot do.

We cannot direct our hearts to God or give willingly to God unless God directs our hearts to himself and causes us to give willingly. I'm kind of hoping by now that you've picked that up from me in my preaching.

As we've looked particularly at Luke's gospel and the travel narrative of what it means to walk with Jesus on this road to Jerusalem, I've been asking you give it up for the king.

[22 : 55] we live to treasure Jesus. And so now on Commitment Sunday, now is the time for you to consecrate yourself to the Lord.

If you haven't already do it, to consecrate yourself to the Lord. I do hope that you have considered and prayed and come prepared with your pledge cards.

I do hope that you've done that, you've worked hard on that. I believe that your leaders have done that. When parish council and staff met together about 10 days ago, we went through this process. We looked at this passage. And I believe that this passage is calling me as the point leader of this church to lead as King David did. And so at parish council meeting with the staff and parish council there about 10 days ago, I publicly declared to them what the contribution of Natalie and I would be, what our contribution would be in 2010.

I will be the only one publicly to do so and the moment I enjoy doing it, I will stop doing it. Up until recently, we have been giving \$500 a month.

[24 : 10] But as we've walked with Jesus to Jerusalem, we have been rethinking our contribution. And so I said to parish council that we would be contributing \$600 a month in 2010, but I asked them to pray for us that we might reach \$700 by the end of the year.

We have since revised that and it's now \$650 a month. We're starting that right now, \$650 a month. And so I'm praying that, I'm asking you to pray for us that we might reach \$750 by the end of the year, given that my target was so short.

And that is specifically to the ministry of St Paul's Chatswood. That is to our weekly offertory here for the ministry of St Paul's Chatswood. Our mission giving and our giving to the poor will be over and above that.

And like the target that I want to set for everyone here, we are aiming for dollar for dollar. I then called the staff and the parish council to follow suit.

And they did. \$5,200 a week was pledged for 2010. \$2,300 was raised for the external project and over 6,000 for the internal project.

[25 : 21] They have significantly knocked those figures off already. Your leaders have led. It was a wonderful response and I rejoiced greatly.

And I now call St Paul's Chatswood today to follow your leaders. In a moment we are taking up a collection. I'm hoping that you've come prepared with your pledge cards if you haven't.

I believe Geoff's got some. There's some at the back. But the big question I want to leave you with is who here today will consecrate themselves to the Lord in this place in Paul's Chatswood.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Gracious God, merciful God, all power and authority and glory are yours. You rule over all that is. You own everything in this world. You own our lives, our possessions. Oh Lord, we don't recognise that enough.

[26 : 31] We thank you for the life that we have. We thank you for the strength and the honour that you have given us to be able to gather, to work, to save, to earn.

Lord, we sit here today, we reflect even on what the leaders of this church have done, the staff, the parish council. And as David said before Israel, who is Steve Jeffrey?

Who are the staff of St. Paul's Chatswood? Who are the parish council of St. Paul's Chatswood?
Who are the people of St. Paul's Chatswood that we should give so generously as this?
We only give what you have already given to us. And so Lord, rescue us from hypocrisy. Rescue us
Lord, from anything that would want to turn it back on ourselves.
May we rejoice in you and your goodness to us. May we do it with honest intent. And we ask it for
your glory. Amen.