

Sermon Outline:

Introduce the Message

Text: Matthew 5:23-24

The Heart Makes the Gift Acceptable (TRUTH #4)

The Condition of the Heart is a Matter of:

1. Forgiveness
2. Obedience
3. Character
4. Willingness

God Knows the Condition of Your Heart

God Wants to Correct the Condition of Your Heart

Summary

Application

1. I need to ensure my heart is right to give an acceptable gift to God
2. I need to take whatever steps are needed to put my heart in a condition to give an acceptable gift

Pastoral Note

Sermon Notes

INTRODUCE THE MESSAGE

So far in our series entitled, *My Giving...From God's Perspective*, we have discovered some surprising and interesting truths from God's Word. We have answered some questions and perhaps created some new questions in our hearts about our giving to the Lord. We have uncovered 3 of the four Biblical truths about giving in a way that is pleasing to God. The first truth we learned was that **Amount Matters**. When we give gifts to God, He is interested not just in *why* we give, but also *how much* we give.

Last week we saw truths #2 and 3. Truth number two is, in giving an amount that matters, **We Determine the Amount**. God does not prescribe the amount, the percentage, or the formula for our giving. He desires for us to give from our relationship with Him. The third truth we learned is that we are each to **Give from our Ability**. God has given each of us multiple abilities from which we can give to Him: (Our profit ability or income; our possession ability or assets; our paid-for ability, money that is freed up from blessings, and finally our faith ability, giving to God through a relationship of listening and trust.

Today we want to ask the question that so many people focus on when it comes to giving, "What about the heart?" "Isn't a gift acceptable as long as the heart is good?" "If I bring a sacrificial gift to the Lord, does anything else really matter?" We want to unpack what God's Word really reveals about the condition of the heart and how it relates to our giving an acceptable gift to God.

Did you know that Jesus told us there was a time **not** to give?

TEXT: MATTHEW 5:23-24

Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

Matthew 5:23-24 (NASB)

THE HEART MAKES THE GIFT ACCEPTABLE (TRUTH #4)

From this vignette that Jesus uses in His teaching, it becomes very clear that God puts a greater priority on the condition of a giver's heart than on the gift that he/she would bring as an offering. He said, hold off giving that check, make things right in your relationships, then come back and present your gift.

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The condition of our hearts matter when we are giving to God. If the heart is not right, then our gifts are unacceptable to God. They don't delight Him because most of all, He is after our heart.

A clear picture of an unacceptable heart condition is found with the story of Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5:1-10). They wanted to give the appearance of a sacrificial gift. They wanted others to think they were giving all the money they had made by selling a piece of land. But what happened is God knew their heart. He knew they were lying and revealed it to those receiving the gift. When challenged and given the opportunity to make it right, they continued with an impure heart and they both paid with their lives. God makes it clear that the condition of the heart really does matter when it comes to our giving.

You may have heard this verse (Acts 5:3-4) in the context of a guilt-based message, or that God wanted 100% of their money. In fact, Peter's rebuke clearly showed that the money they received from the sale was "at their disposal".

(Acts 5:3-4)

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." God expected them to determine the amount. Their sin was in lying about their gift.

THE CONDITION OF THE HEART IS A MATTER OF:

1. Forgiveness

From our text, Jesus was specifically dealing with the condition of unforgiveness and broken relationships. He said if you remember your brother has something against you – leave your gift and be reconciled, go and forgive.

Perhaps the opposite is true. You know you have hurt or wronged someone else. For your heart to be in a condition to give, you need to seek to be forgiven.

Either way, if we harbor unforgiveness in our hearts, it will be impossible to give an acceptable gift to God.

2. Obedience

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Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams." **1 Samuel 15:22 (NASB)**

Clearly God, speaking through Samuel, said that He desired obedience over an offering. God has given us so much: eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sin, untold blessings, the promise of a new body, and so much more and all He asks in return is that we live in obedience to His Word. When we live in obedience, our hearts are right before God and our gifts are acceptable to Him. God is not a bill collector!

3. Character

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. **Matthew 23:23 (NASB)**

Jesus came down hard on those whose character didn't seem to match their level of giving. He was more interested in how they lived, how they treated others, and how they served God more than the fact that they gave consistently and sacrificially.

The writer of Proverbs said it this way...

To do righteousness and justice Is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice.
Proverbs 21:3 (NASB)

And Paul said it doesn't matter if you give away everything, but don't have a lifestyle of love...

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. **1 Corinthians 13:3 (NASB)**

4. Willingness

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable... 2 Corinthians 8:12 (NIV)

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. **2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)**

So we can clearly see that though the amount matters and we determine the amount by our abilities, it is the condition of the heart that makes our gifts acceptable to God. And we certainly must understand...

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GOD KNOWS THE CONDITION OF YOUR HEART

God knows our motives, our heart condition, our character when we give. We can fool people, even ourselves, but not God.

...God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 (NASB)

Jesus made this point perfectly clear...

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. Luke 16:14-15 (NASB)

The Writer of Proverbs said...

Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts. Proverbs 21:2 (NASB)

When God weighs your heart, when He looks into your life does He see a clean heart? A pure heart?

Sometimes we aren't even aware of the condition of our heart: busyness, noise, distance from God, etc. But when we give, we can pause; consider our heart, consider our relationships, turn our hearts to God, and give out of love - to delight Him.

Here is the great thing about God...

GOD WANT TO CORRECT THE CONDITION OF YOUR HEART

What is important for us to understand is that even though God sees our hearts and knows our lives – He still loves us unconditionally. Like a perfect Father, all He really desires is that we acknowledge the areas of our lives that fall short. That we come to Him to seek forgiveness and we go to others we have wronged to and ask for their forgiveness. That we change the things in our lives that are out of step with who we are in Christ. That we become obedient in the areas of our lives where we have strayed away.

David knew without a doubt that he had failed. And what did he do? He confessed and asked God to clean up his heart.

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. Psalm 51:1-2 (NASB)

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David sinned against God and others, but he came back to God admitted his failure and asked God to clean up his heart. Why? So he could (once again offer to God his life and his gifts and they would be acceptable.

Look at the gift David gave later in life AFTER his heart had been cleansed...

Now with all my ability I have provided for the house of my God the gold... the silver... the bronze...the iron...wood... 1 Chronicles 29:2-5 (NASB)

It was the most extravagant gift value ever recorded. David certainly gave an amount that mattered to him, an amount he determined himself. And he gave of his complete ability (v2). But more important than the value of the gift, David wanted God to know the condition of his heart.

I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. 1 Chronicles 29:17 (NIV)

David understood this 4th and final truth: that God wants nothing more than for His children to come to Him with clean, pure and willing hearts in worship as we give.

SUMMARY

Very simply put, the condition of your heart matters. No gift can be acceptable to God if our hearts are not right before Him. He sees and He already knows the condition of your heart. If there is unforgiveness, if there is disobedience, if your lifestyle is off the mark, if your focus is not on your relationship with Him...He already knows. And all He desires is that you come to Him in honest openness and confess your failures and seek His forgiveness and love. He is standing with arms wide open to love you like a Father loves His child. No condemnation, no "I told you so", just simply welcome back, I love you.

When your heart is clean and right, then your giving is received by your Father as a pleasing pleasant aroma that touches the heart of God.

APPLICATION

- 1. I need to ensure my heart is right to give an acceptable gift to God**
- 2. I need take whatever steps are needed to put my heart in a condition to give an acceptable gift**

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PASTORAL NOTE

For this message, you might consider moving the receiving of your offering after a time of invitation or altar call, following the message (if you include those elements in your worship service).

Perhaps some would use the time of response to cleanse and purify their hearts. Others may need to leave – and giving them permission to do so, to make things right with others who are not there may even be appropriate.

This may seem unconventional or even risky, but after all, these truths speak to the heart and challenge many Believer's to act upon them before they give. It could be that receiving offerings after sharing these truths, gives your congregants the opportunity to do heart business with God – then give as an act of pure worship.