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By Rev. T. van Spronsen

Bible Text: 1 Timothy 6, Philippians 4:10-20

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Canadian Reformed Church of Yarrow

42285 Yarrow Central Rd

Chilliwack, BC V2R 5E3

Website: yarrow.canrc.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/yarrowchurch

Let us now take our Bibles, brothers and sisters, and open up God's word to us. First, I'd like to turn with you to the book of Acts, Acts 2, and we'll read verses, a couple passages from Acts actually, 2:42-47 and then from chapter 4. Page 910, 911 actually. We'll begin reading in Acts 2:42. This is after the sermon that Peter gave after the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, then we read how they, those that were followers of Christ, those that repented and were baptized,

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Then turn with me also to chapter 4 where we'll read the verses 32 to the end of the chapter.

32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

So far from the book of Acts.

I'd like to also turn to Paul's first letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy 6, a couple of passages there. It's on page 993. 1 Timothy 6, we'll first read the verses 6 to 10.

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

We'll continue reading at verse 17.

17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

And finally let's turn to the letter to the Philippians, the letter to the Philippians. We are continuing in the sermon series on this. Last time we looked at the verses 10 to 14, this time I'm using verse 14 also as part of the text today. We will read from, our text will be the verses 14 to 20, but we'll begin our reading at verse 10. Philippians 4:10. Hear the word of God.

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

This begins our text,

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a

fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

So far reading from God's word.

After the sermon, we can respond by singing hymn 47. Yes, I mistakenly sent the wrong hymn so the board is incorrect, the liturgy sheet is incorrect. It's my fault. Let's sing hymn 47, the fourth stanza after we hear God's word proclaimed.

Brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, you might remember when we dealt with the verses prior to our text, that Paul is in the process of thanking the Philippians for their gifts, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me." And though their gift gives Paul much joy, what he wants his readers to be sure of is that he is content whether he is in need or has plenty. That was the main focus in the verses prior to our text, and the reason he can be so content is that he learned that he can do all things through him, through Christ, who strengthens him.

And now we hear Paul telling them how kind it was that they shared in his trouble. Notice, brothers and sisters, that by their giving they actually shared in Paul's troubles, in his distress. The word for "sharing" comes from the same root for "having fellowship with or partaking." We also read about that. They are all variance of that beautiful Greek word "koinonia," which we looked at last time. You see, Paul makes clear that the way that they share with him in the Gospel is by their giving, their generosity.

The Holy Spirit teaches us how we can share in that great work. Not only that, we know, we hear in our text that giving pleases the Lord. And if that weren't enough, giving is totally worth it, for God will supply our every need. And it gives glory to our God and Father, isn't that the very reason why we're here in the first place, to give glory to God?

Brothers and sisters, all of this instruction about giving is found in our text this morning so I preach to you God's word from Philippians 4:14-20 and I'd like to use this theme: believers everywhere are encouraged to glorify God by giving generously. The Holy Spirit teaches us that giving is sharing; secondly, that giving is satisfying; thirdly, that giving is worth it. I would have loved to have another "s" word there to make it all line up, but I couldn't think of one. Giving is sharing is the first one, giving is satisfying, and finally, giving is worth it.

You know, we especially in today's Western world, we are very well off. Someone once said that anyone with enough money to buy a book is wealthy compared to so many others in the rest of the world. Well, if we think of it this way, I'd say every one of us is more than just well off, we're loaded, we're rich, and the culture we live in puts a lot of emphasis on money and wealth and it is so easy to get caught up in this pursuit of wealth also for believers, whether we like it or not. There is a very real danger that comes with the many blessings we receive also when it comes to the money that is at our disposal, and God's word warns us of that danger often. Just one example from what Jesus Christ

taught us while he was on this earth: no servant can serve two masters; we cannot, cannot serve God and money. We also read from 1 Timothy how money is the root of all kinds of evil, that some have even wandered away from the faith because of their cravings. So, yes, since we are blessed with so much relative wealth, it is good that we reflect on our attitude toward it. Let's not be naive to the fact that Satan also loves to use money for his purposes.

Now with all this in mind, today we'll be talking about what we do with our wealth, more specifically we will hear from God's word that what he says about giving it away, because what we do with our money is directly linked to our faith in the Gospel, and in Philippians shared with Paul it was not just a two-way relationship between Paul and the Philippians but a tight three-way bond between Paul, between them and Jesus Christ, also sometimes referred to in this letter as simply the Gospel. It is so important for us to notice this, that the material, the physical, the wealth and the spiritual are not separated. Their giving and receiving is spoken of as being credited and debited to the same account, to the work of the Gospel. You see, that's the kind of language Paul uses here, the debiting, the crediting, it's all borrowed from the business world.

Brothers and sisters, by all this it is very clear how the Philippians were more than eager to share in this way in the work of the Gospel. And yes, we can ask the questions: are we? They gave generously more than their means, we read elsewhere. Do you? Do I? They not only gave enough to cover Paul's basic needs, remember how we read that? Paul says, "I am fully cared for." Is that our attitude as well?

I thought maybe we could get a better picture of what this might look like by remembering the attitude that the first followers of Christ had as we read from Acts. All who believed were together. They all had all things in common. They began selling their possessions and belongings in order to share the proceeds to all who had need. No one, no one said that the things that belonged to them was their own. There was not a needy person among them.

It's quite the picture we are painted and maybe you're thinking, "Well, hang on a minute. Can we even compare them to us today? For example, we also read how they did all these miraculous works and wonders, we don't have that. Wasn't it all very very different as the Gospel started spreading out to the world?" And it's true, there are differences, the circumstances were different too, but don't forget we are told all of this for a reason, and the principles that are found here and not only here, in many other places, these don't change over time. You see, we learn from God's word to the Philippians that their giving is about, it's all about the grace of God that has been shown; it's all about their desire to fellowship in or to share in the Gospel. In other words, giving is sharing.

Now quite often we do have that desire, don't we? We have the desire to give, to share, but then at this point sometimes we struggle with questions like, "Well, how much? How much should we give? Do we look to the Old Testament and follow the whole tithing teachings? Or maybe do we take our church budget for the year and divide it by the number of members to find out what we should be giving?"

Let's start with the tithe. Unfortunately we don't have time now to go into it to depth, indepth, but I'd like to share with you just a few points that I gleaned from people who have done a lot more work on this subject, and that is that there is no evidence that tithing continued in the New Testament church, I mean, think of those believers who sold all they had. And often people forget that tithing was not only a donation, but that it also acted as a kind of tax used to support the civil and the religious systems. Also, if we were to add up – this is an interesting point too – if we added up all the tithes that were required, the total actually comes closer to 20 than 10%.

Having said all that, we can learn from the principle behind the tithe. God wanted his people to give from the firstfruits of what they received. Then we can see that something like the tithe and maybe using the figures from our budget, they can be, maybe they're a good place to start but probably not a good place to stay, for if we continue to glean the principles behind giving from God's word, we do find more direction as to what our giving is to look like. One rule of thumb we could say is that we are to give in accordance with what we have been given. Paul tells the Corinthians to set aside every week – oh, by the way, notice how it is a regular setting aside – to set aside every week an amount that reflects what God has blessed them with. In other words, Paul knows that each person would give a different amount. Those with more were expected to give more than those with less. That makes sense. We can think of Jesus' rather shocking words about the widow who put two small copper coins in the offering box. In many ways, it's like our penny which we don't really see anymore. Compared to what the rich put in, her gift was ridiculously small, It would take about 130 of those coins to make up just one day's wage, and yet Jesus surprised them all when he said that she put in more than all the others. That is because he knew her heart, he knew that she put in all that she had to live on. You see, Jesus teaches us more, teaches us that it is more about our attitude when we give than about the particular amount.

Paul further explains this mindset in his second letter to the Corinthians, we are to give with a willing mind, a willing mind, according to what we have, not according to what we don't have. Hear what God's word said, it says each one of us should give just as we have decided in our heart, not reluctantly, not under compulsion because God loves a cheerful giver.

So while there is a lot of room for discretion, yet at the very minimum we are to give according to what has been given to us, to share with others. Another principle we learn from God's word that is also helpful for us to know how much to give, is the idea that we should give enough that it matters. Our giving is meant to be felt. It should impact our lifestyles. Think again of the early Christians selling everything. I'd like to borrow from how C. S. Lewis explains it. He writes, "If what we give does not pinch or hamper us at all, if it does not affect our comforts and plans, we are probably giving away too little."

You see, this is one way that we offer ourselves as living sacrifices of thankfulness. I realize how this can be difficult for us to accept, let alone put into practice. I know I felt convicted about this as well. But you see, God knows this too. Just think of how often

Jesus got to the very heart of the matter by telling people to sell all they had and give it to the poor, though I'm not suggesting we have to sell everything we have like Jesus said, like the first Christians did. It sure does do give us a different perspective on our readiness to share. For example, let's say our take-home pay is about \$50,000 a year. Let's say we give about \$500 of that away. Or if we make more like \$300,000 and we give away \$3,000. Well, \$3,000 sure sounds like a good amount on their own, but to give us some perspective, these amounts are only 1% of our incomes of those examples.

So let us be encouraged to keep on raising the amount that we give until we feel it, until it hurts, we can say. We can apply to ourselves how Paul challenges the Corinthians. Actually when I read this part of God's word, I thought I wouldn't dare say this if it weren't in God's word. Paul writes, "I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others." This is when he spoke of how much the Philippians, the Macedonians gave. So today, brothers and sisters, God's word also, the sincerity of our love is being tested by the very diligence of the Philippians.

When we put off installing that new kitchen, or when we buy a used car rather than a brand new one, when we adjust our holiday plans in order to give because we want to, because it is something that is in our hearts, God loves that and God blesses that. He promises that whoever sows sparingly, they're gonna also reap sparingly. Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. And if we think about it, actually the truly amazing thing is that we actually get to reap what we sow. That is truly a gracious gift of God. Generosity is rewarded. Giving is not only sharing, it is also satisfying and that is our second point.

Giving is satisfying. Now, first of all, let me be clear that I don't mean we should give so that it is satisfying for us. Though it is true that we often do feel good when we share, and by the way, that's not a bad thing, the point is more that giving is satisfying or pleasing to our God. Paul makes clear that he is not writing all this because he is after more of their gifts, "Not that I seek the gift," he writes, "but I seek the fruit," another word that could be used there is "profit that increases to your account, that credits your account." Notice again how Paul is using these financial terms. We could almost imagine him as an investment manager. He wants to see increasing profits, compounding interest, we could say, for his clients, in his case the Philippians. Paul already prayed for this in the first chapter, "I pray that on the day of Christ you may be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ."

Yes, that riches that comes through Jesus Christ. You see, often we are not very comfortable with this idea that our actions add up and credit some kind of account that can actually be filled up by what we do, and rightly so. That's not exactly what Paul is saying either. He's not interested in counting up all kinds of brownie points as they or we give our gifts, rather what he is interested in is that their gifts are evidence that their relationship with Christ is in good order. That's his concern. That's what continues to grow and increase when they give. No, we don't give in order to receive, and yet giving is blessed by God. This reward is a gift of grace and the blessings we receive, they far outweigh any sacrifices we might have to make.

Then we should also take careful notice how Paul calls the gifts of the Philippians that they sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice, notice a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. It is really quite striking, actually, that Paul refers his readers back to the sacrifices their ancestors made. So often the Israelites were told to offer up an animal, a burnt offering to the Lord, and then we also hear that when that is done with the right motivation, with the right heart, we hear how it is a soothing aroma to God. Isn't that incredible, our acts of faith are pleasing to God as true sacrifices.

Let's not miss what's happening here. Often helping someone out can simply be thought as, for example, an act of kindness, but we are clearly taught that the act of caring is a spiritual act of worship. Remember how God loves a cheerful giver. When that is the case, our gifts are like a holy offering to God; they are actually a sweet-smelling aroma. Once again, we see that the physical, the material realm is so closely linked to the spiritual.

Brothers and sisters, let us hear this again, may we be well aware of the dangers that come with our wealth. May we have the ability to control it rather than have it control us, and one of the ways that we can do this is by giving it away. Yup, you heard me right, just give it away. I don't mean throw it away, for notice that the Philippians give because they are so interested in sharing and taking part in the Gospel. That is why our first priority when we give is to our church in the work of the deacons, for example. After all, the church is where the ministry of the Gospel is found.

So often that's what we hear about, the collections are made for giving to the church. And of course, it is true there are many many worthwhile ministries that are out there that we can support also financially, but God's word is so full of examples where we see that our first priority is to those who are of our household of faith, we could say those that are our family. Then if we follow that principle of giving until it hurts, I'm sure there will be plenty left over to support other ministries and charities.

So let us give freely as we share and take part in Christ, for giving is sharing, giving is also satisfying. Yes, we are blessed with the reward of it, but more importantly it is pleasing to God. And now let's see how giving is completely worth it. Hear from God's word, "And my God, my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever." What a promise. What a promise. "My God," notice how personal Paul is, "My God," and, yes, because he is our God and we believe and obey him, he will provide for our every need. And based on the context, there's no doubt Paul does have in mind their material needs as well. Remember we could read elsewhere too that they gave in the midst of great poverty. "My God," says Paul, "will take care of you. Don't worry."

Our God and Father in heaven knows all that we need. If he provides for the birds in the air and the grass on the field, will he not provide for us? And brothers and sisters, Jesus is teaching, challenging us to trust in our Father. This is nothing new. We sang those very same words in Psalm 37 and that very same challenge was put to the Israelites which we

hear about in the prophecy of Malachi. God, first of all, accuses his people of robbing him, robbing him in their tithes and offerings. Not giving of our firstfruits is actually robbing God. And then he tells them to bring the whole tithe to him, and then God continues telling his people, "Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will have not room enough for it." Almost sounds like the prosperity gospel, doesn't it?

This comes from God's word and what a challenge, brothers and sisters. "Just try me," says God, "test me. Go ahead, give like you've never given before and see if I don't bless you." We could imagine maybe God saying to us, "So you've managed to save up a few grand? Great. Instead of hiding it away in some nest egg, give me half of it. Try me. You've got a couple hundred grand stashed away somewhere? Why not give away 30 of it? Test me and see if I don't supply your every need according to my riches in glory in my Son Jesus Christ." It sure makes us think, doesn't it?

Now we should know that Paul is not only talking about material needs when he says God will supply every need. Even the language suggests much more. Every other kind of need is covered. Actually, it is a really fitting way to end this letter. We can easily see Paul thinking back to some of the needs he's written about and the current suffering that they are facing in Christ. God will supply the ability to stand firm, to have joy, to be encouraged. In their need to be of one mind, to have the same attitude as Christ, God will richly provide the grace and the humility that is needed. In the place of grumbling, chapter 2, verse 14, and being anxious, chapter 4, verse 6, God can and will be with them as the God of peace. "My God," says Paul, "will fully meet all your needs." "Just try me. Just test me. See if I," says God, "don't deliver even more than you asked for. Just trust me."

Should we ever doubt that God can deliver in this way, we are reminded that he will do so according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Yes, and if we think of these riches we have in Christ Jesus, we already receive so very much. In Christ, we are so rich and we are even promised much more. In Christ, every single need of ours will be met. Do you see that giving is definitely worth it? For also through our giving, not exclusively but also through our giving we are giving glory to our God and Father. All our lives are to be lived to his glory and this includes being content and sharing in the Gospel of Christ from what we are so richly blessed with.

So my dear brothers and sisters, may we be encouraged this morning to give generously, to share in the Gospel until we feel it. In this way, we can give all glory to our God and our Father forever and ever. Amen.