

EXODUS 25:1-9

PROVISIONS FOR THE SANCTUARY

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breast piece. And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.’”¹

It is easy to imagine that our offerings are given to support the church; and to be sure, our gifts do underwrite the work of the congregation. The needs of a congregation are admittedly great; at any given moment the membership will know that the congregation faces substantial needs. The contributions of the people *do* underwrite the ministries of the church. The congregation determines through the budget adopted how moneys entrusted to the congregation will be distributed; then, the leadership must administer those funds to carry out the ministries God has assigned.

For any congregation, a large portion of received moneys are used for pastoral support, ensuring that those who labour full-time in service to the congregation are free to fulfill the tasks that God has assigned. The smaller the congregation, the greater the proportion that must be set aside for ministerial support. Some moneys go to maintenance of the properties and a portion is used to ensure our ability to provide relief to the needy. Some of the funds are transferred to various missionary causes to assist in the advance of the work of the Kingdom. Therefore, the gifts are, in fact, supporting the church.

However, in the text before us you will note that when Moses was directed by God to receive the offerings of the People of God for the Sanctuary, God emphasised that the contributions were offered to Him. Moreover, God emphasised the operation of His Spirit moving the heart of the people so that participation was voluntary and not coerced. Additionally, it was vital that the people remember that what they gave was for a great purpose. Giving, according to the Word of God, was to God and not in support of His work. What was true in Moses’ day is equally true today.

This provides the outline of our message today. The message is a challenge to review our worship through giving. Why do we give? What motivates us to give and what do we hope to see accomplished through the act of giving? Far too often, we slip into the fallacy of taking offerings because we “need” money, and not because we seek to glorify God. I want to change that. I want us to find what pleases God and then courageously do that thing.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

CONTRIBUTIONS ARE MADE TO THE LORD. The wording of this divine command is revealing. “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take *for Me* a contribution.” God called the people to take a contribution *for Him*. One Bible states, “You are to take *My offering* from everyone whose heart stirs him to give.”² Another translation reads, “Tell the Israelites to choose something to give Me as a special contribution. You must accept whatever contribution each person freely gives.”³

One point is so obvious that it is easily overlooked. Throughout the Word of God the emphasis on giving is always that one’s giving is to be presented to the Lord. We perhaps build a building, support the labourers or minister to the needy, but always we are giving to the Lord. One hundred eighty-one times the Bible speaks of “an offering” presented to the LORD, and eleven times it stresses that “offerings” are to be presented to God. To be certain, many of those offerings are sacrifices, but we must not forget that our gifts represent a sacrifice to honour God. Once, the Bible speaks of a “contribution” made to God, and eleven times it refers to a “contribution” made to the LORD.

When the people presented their peace offerings before the LORD at the Tabernacle, even though the presentations were destined for the exclusive use of the priests and Levites, those same presentations were spoken of as “their contribution to the LORD” [see EXODUS 29:28]. Repeatedly, God treats these offerings as a “contribution to the LORD” [see LEVITICUS 22:15]. God plainly speaks of “the tithe” as “a contribution to the LORD” [NUMBERS 18:24-29].

I suspect that at the first, the concept that the people thought that contributing to the LORD rather than contributing to support the Tabernacle was novel. The reason I say this concept was likely unusual was that Moses was so frequently compelled to remind the people that they were contributing to the Lord. Though the patriarchs had deliberately presented offerings to honour God, the Israelites at the time of the Exodus had never in conscious history made a contribution to the LORD.

Evidence supporting this assertion is seen in the way in which Pharaoh and Moses interacted during the judgements of God. Pharaoh is incredulous that the people would actually worship and increased the burden of the slaves following Moses’ initial requests. After the plagues began, Pharaoh attempted to negotiate the manner in which the people would worship. At each stage, it is apparent that worship as Moses anticipated was novel since Pharaoh was unfamiliar with the actions of the worshippers. Near the conclusion of the negotiations, Pharaoh is displeased that the people would need their goods in order to worship. However, it was not merely that the people would need the animals to make sacrifice, but they were giving of their wealth to God. Similarly, I suspect that we do not always understand the distinction between contributing to the Lord and supporting the church. There is, however, a significant difference in the two concepts.

Moses was careful in the choice of his words and he was careful to emphasise that the people’s contributions were to the LORD. I am not suggesting that Moses was neglecting the need for a Tabernacle or the need for the various accoutrements required to carry out the service God commanded. He simply realised that it was not possible to separate building the Tabernacle from serving God.

² **Holman Christian Standard Bible**, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³ **GOD’S WORD Translation** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

Just so, though it is possible for one to worship, and even to serve God, without a church building and without supporting those whom God appoints to serve Him full-time, providing buildings and supporting preachers cannot ultimately be separated from giving in order to honour God. This connection is clearly witnessed in Paul's instructions to Timothy. "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer deserves his wages" [1 TIMOTHY 5:18]. Words matter. What is said reveals what lies hidden in the heart. Nouns and verbs are important as we define and describe what is being performed in the work of our Lord. Precision in speech is not merely an issue of importance to an English teacher, but it is also vital to fulfilling the work of Christ in a manner pleasing to the Lord. I do not want to overstress this issue, but neither do I wish to neglect the point.

Gifts do benefit the congregation; however, our gifts are *offered* to the Lord. This is a constant theme throughout the Word of God. "Vow offerings and freewill offerings" were to be offered to the LORD [e.g. LEVITICUS 23:38]. "Firstfruits," when offered, were contributed to the LORD [e.g. NUMBERS 18:12]. COLOSSIANS 3:17 should guide Christians in this matter. "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." When a plea is made for support of various ministries, do you focus solely on the need; or is your giving an act of worship of the Son of God? If all you hear is a request for money, you deprive yourself of an opportunity to honour God.

When we began services, Dal Brown, a godly member of the assembly, urged us to broadcast the services by radio so that the messages presented could be heard in nearby communities. He believed so strongly in this mission that he was prepared to invest his own wealth to see this happen. We could not have known how that suggestion would grow. What began as a broadcast to local communities has grown to cover the two westernmost provinces, even being beamed into the United States.

Soon after beginning these broadcasts, a local television station generously provided time to televise the messages presented from this pulpit. Now, we receive affirmation and expressions of gratitude from those watching the broadcasts in the Atlantic Provinces, in Ontario and throughout the western provinces. These television broadcasts now touch lives throughout the nation. The time is near when we must consider whether it is time to provide a daily radio broadcast on some of these stations? Perhaps it is time for us to consider providing the message of life on satellite radio! The challenge before us is great. As such possibilities are presented, I see Paul's words in a new and scintillating light, "A wide door for effective work has opened to [us], and there are many adversaries" [1 CORINTHIANS 16:9]

At various times, conscientious individuals have asked, "How much does this outreach cost?" However, I wonder whether this is the wrong question? Perhaps it is more appropriate for us to ask, "Who will this service reach?" or even, "How will God be glorified through this outreach?" Surely, the primary determinate for us is whether God is leading in this means of outreach. Through these various media efforts we are expanding the outreach of the congregation, ministering to a larger community, comforting the shut-ins, strengthening fellow believers, winning lost people to faith in Christ and extending the Kingdom of God. Our media ministries have been an opportunity permitting us to honour God, expanding the work of the Kingdom in a manner that is for us unprecedented.

The messages preached from this pulpit are available for download in both written and in audio formats. These messages are read and heard by hundreds each week.⁴ I am humbled to note that the messages are studied and used by Christian ministries far removed from our own country.⁵ God has permitted us as a congregation to invest in the outreach to other nations and in multiple languages. This knowledge humbles us and causes us to rejoice in Christ our Saviour.

In years past I took note of the locations of those accessing the teaching we are providing by tracking the locations of those listening to the sermons or reaching the messages. I no longer do this, but the indication is that we are serving a far greater community of faith than we could have ever dreamed. Surely this is a mark of God's goodness to permit us to serve Him and His people in this way. God continues to bless us as a congregation. Ours is not a massive congregation; but we have received opportunity to serve a large community of God's choice saints. Our growth has been steady, though no one would claim that it has been spectacular. Through it all, God has shown us great mercy.

Some who once walked with us have moved on. That fact does not, however, detract from the truth that people have openly professed Christ during that time and growth in outreach and service to the people of God has grown dramatically. Some have moved from the community—we rejoice when they unite with other congregations. Some have chosen to attend another congregation within our communities—we rejoice that such opportunities to serve exist in our area. Some have fallen by the wayside, just as Jesus warned would happen. However, the core constituency of the congregation, despite turmoil and transition, has grown and we have prospered.

Now, we are given opportunity to extend our outreach and to bring more people into the Kingdom of God and into active service for Christ and for His cause. Through the various media ministries we are hosting we are presented with the opportunity to reach more than if we held ten services each week. Increasingly do we hear from individuals who listen to the messages or who read what is printed or who watch the television broadcasts. A growing number of lives are touched each week. Many are returning to take a second look. Some are communicating that they are encouraged through the messages posted. Above all else, God is glorified and each of us shares in the advance of His eternal Kingdom. Kingdom growth demands that we continue to invest in the work that Christ is doing through us.

When finances grow tight it is not unusual that we take our eyes off the Master. However, should we take our eyes off Christ we are prone to say, "We must cut back our expenditures. Trim what is spent on outreach and pay the bills. Now is not the time to expand the ministries of the church. Wait until we have enough money, and then add new ministries." The people of God must be cautioned that such thinking is the death knell of a church.

⁴ Available on SermonCentral, <http://www.sermoncentral.com/Sermons/SearchResults.asp?ContributorID=30823>, Sermons.Logos.com, <https://sermons.logos.com/#q=&content=/profile/52382&tab=paneTabHome&pane=homePane>, and New Beginnings Baptist Church home page, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/category/sermon-archives/>, Sermon.net, <http://drstark.sermon.net/main/main/20452557>

⁵ E.g., "Baptist Distinctives," http://baptist-distinctives.blogspot.ca/2009_06_01_archive.html, providing free online study materials for Asia, Africa and Latin America, <https://soundfaith.com> and "Baptist Churches in the Philippines," <http://baptist-rp.blogspot.ca/2009/10/help-typhoon-ondoy-victims.html>

If there is a “money” problem, it is because we have lost our vision. We have opportunity to invest in the Kingdom of God that will undoubtedly result in the salvation of many souls and in building His people. We have the opportunity to witness God at work in a way we could never have imagined in years past. Either we listen to the voices of fear and “play it safe,” or we will honour God and reach beyond ourselves to glorify His Name. Whether we live or whether we die, whether we advance or whether we retreat, will be determined by decisions we make and implement as a congregation.

If we will honour God, it will require faith; and faith will challenge each individual to review his or her gifts to ensure that what is given is offered to the Lord and that we seek to honour Him through the act of giving. Our giving reflects whether we honour God, or whether we are merely trying to “pay expenses.” Either we believe that we have opportunity to glorify God through bringing our gifts as an offering to Him, or we are simply paying the bills. The issue is determined by whether we see ourselves as giving “to the church,” or whether we realise that our gifts are offered to the Lord. There are no “small” gifts *if* each gift represents a determination to honour God and *if* each gift is prayerfully presented with a willingness to glorify His Name.

CONTRIBUTIONS ARE TO BE VOLUNTARY. “From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for Me.” Always, some will register concern that there is not enough money to provide for the dreams of the congregation. I suggest that it is more accurate to say that our vision for the congregation is seldom great enough. When we dream small, we see small gifts. If we have a nickel and dime vision, we receive nickel and dime gifts. However, if we envision a great cause in the service of a great God, God’s people will respond in a great way. We serve a *great* God; and He has assigned us a *great* work. Therefore, as the vision is articulated and clarified, you may be assured that God’s people will respond in a great way. What must never be attempted is to compel God’s people to do what God Himself does not move them to do.

I have believed since my earliest days as a believer that a pledge system for financing God’s work of is coercive and thus unscriptural. I was a member in a church that sought a pledge from the people each year in order to determine what plans the church would formulate for the coming year. I have always believed that we should first pray and then follow where God leads. While in membership at that church I was approached annually and asked to sign a pledge card. My response did not vary during those years: “Methodists pledge; Baptists give.” Maybe here in Canada I would have to say that “Anglicans pledge; Baptists give.” I am not against individuals planning how they will give during the year. There is a degree of wisdom in determining what will be given during the coming year. However, I have difficulty in signing a pledge since the giving is to the Lord to permit the assembly to fulfil a corporate vision.

When the congregation has determined a course of action, prayerfully considering the will of God and determining that God is leading in a given direction, it becomes the responsibility of the leaders to foster the divine vision so that the congregation will see the progress toward the goal. This is the reason I insist the people should know every week what is needed and be informed of what has been contributed on a regular basis. The money is given to the Lord, but the people must be fully informed what God is doing among them. The contributions do not belong to the elders, or to the deacons, or to a finance committee, or to the treasurer. The moneys given are given to God.

I have served multiple churches during the years of my service before the Lord. My intent was to serve one congregation for the duration of my service before the Lord. However, God directed me to a series of churches decimated through conflict. I served these congregations one after another. I observed how the gifts given by God's people were handled in most of those churches. The treasurers, or the finance committees or the deacons had forgotten why churches receive contributions. They focused on getting money and not on the ministry God had assigned the congregation.

One treasurer came to me week-after-week, almost chortling as he proclaimed, "We're broke. There's no money." He thought he would punish me for my pointed preaching by informing me that there was not enough money to provide support for me that week. This continued for almost two years, until one day I dismissed him from the church as result of an egregious violation of church polity. Following his dismissal, offerings trebled within one month! I can only imagine that this man's refusal to be open with the people disheartened the people. The congregation was actually quite generous.

Another congregation was "blessed" with a treasurer and board of deacons that felt it was no one's business to know what the finances of the church were. I usually ask that each congregation be informed of the financial condition. In that church, I asked for a regular accounting to the congregation of receipts and expenditures. The treasurer promised, "You shall have this, sir."

After a month, I again asked if we could please receive a regular accounting of the finances of the church. I was again promised, "You shall have it, sir."

In two more weeks, I spoke with this woman and said that it was obvious that she was uncomfortable telling the congregation what was happening, so would it be possible even to give to the chair of the deacons a monthly report. Again, the promise was made, "You shall have it, sir."

After another month, I attempted once again to get an accounting of the finances. I never finished my request as this woman bluntly informed me that it was none of my business what the church received. Moreover, she informed me, "When we need money, I'll tell you and you can get it from the people." It should surprise no one that though this church was once known throughout the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, it is no longer in existence. They congregation dwindled and died.

One other wealthy congregation I served had a treasurer who literally attempted to steal thousands of dollars from my support moneys. This is a serious charge, but this man insisted that I was to receive neither a housing allowance nor a travel allowance as prescribed in law. I really wasn't concerned since I anticipated that I would receive the deductions when I filed my taxes. However, when I received my T4, the amount withheld did not match my records. I discovered that this man applied to Revenue Canada for a refund to the church of over \$9,000—all stolen from me—claiming an overpayment of funds to the government agency.

When I confronted this man, at first he denied that anything untoward had occurred before changing his story to contend that he only intended to obtain these moneys so that he could refund the over contributions made on my account. When I brought this before the Church Council, the members chose not to confront this man because they feared that the confrontation might embarrass him. The leadership concluded that it was likely an honest mistake. Yet, this same treasurer was the comptroller of a major charity in one of Canada's largest cities.

In each of these situations, a church leader or a group of leaders appear to have decided that their role was to obtain money—much as the perceived role of government is to extract our moneys through imposition of taxes. These leaders within the assemblies had lost sight of the purpose for receiving gifts. They spoke of “paying tithes” and of “making money,” but they forgot about “worship” and “advancing the Kingdom of Heaven.”

According to the Word that God gave Moses, the people were responsible to make voluntary contributions. It is not an easy task to transform years of poor theology. It seems always easier to treat the church as a business and plan for ministry on “sound” business principles. However, there is a difference between faith and sight; and though we are responsible to be honest and careful, we still walk by faith and not by sight. The congregation of the Lord is a spiritual entity first! We are responsible to seek the Lord’s will, avoiding pursuing an agenda of our own making.

I have long contended, and I again state the case, that when the leaders inform the people of the needs and clearly state how the people are responding, there will be sufficient moneys—and more—to accomplish all that God desires of His church. The rule is transparency and communication. When the people have spoken, clearly determining the direction they wish the work to go, then it becomes the responsibility of the Deacons to tell the people what has been given, to tell the people what the needs are, and to remind the people of anticipated expenses that will yet be encountered.

CONTRIBUTIONS ARE GIVEN TO A VISION. “Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.” I notice a most interesting fact that may be overlooked in our haste to get through the message. At the time God issued this command, there was no sanctuary. The people were not giving to support what was then in existence, but rather they were being challenged to give to support a vision of God in their midst. The offering Moses was to receive was to be designated to provide for the Tabernacle and its furnishings. The vision they received was that God would “dwell in their midst!”

Here is a vital, though neglected, truth. People do not give to support “needs.” If that were true, there would be no homeless people on Canadian streets. If people gave to support “needs,” every village throughout this Peace Region would be evangelised. People give to advance a vision. Just so, Moses called the people to advance a vision of God in their midst.

CHAPTERS TWENTY-FIVE through THIRTY-ONE provide an account of the building of the Tabernacle. The account begins with God’s command to accept donations and continues with specific details for the building. Emphasised throughout is that all this is done for one great purpose—to honour God and to make His Name known! Finally, in **CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE**, the offering is received. Focus on a brief account of those offerings.

“Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, ‘This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD’s contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breast piece’” [**EXODUS 35:4-9**].

Move down in the account just a little, noting how the congregation in the wilderness responded to Moses' plea. "They came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the LORD. And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD's contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. And every skilful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats' hair. And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breast piece, and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD" [EXODUS 35:21-29].

Those who came are identified as those "whose heart stirred him" and as those "whose spirit moved him." There is not a hint of coercion in this account. The people were giving to honour the Lord and in response to a vision that originated in the work God was doing. Notice also the vital point that the contributions which the people brought represented items that were deemed precious—costly metals, dyed cloth (dying was an extremely expensive process), tanned skins, costly woods and spices. The gifts represented the people's best, and all that was given was given voluntarily. This is the principle—your best, given with a willing heart, will assuredly bring glory to God. Emphasise this concept in your mind: your best, given with a willing heart glorifies God. What is important for our consideration now is not what was given, but why it was given. God is very much concerned with why we give and whether we have given our best!

Far too many Christians seem to think that in some unfathomable manner they will honour God while being penurious in giving. Such thinking reminds me of the story concerning three religious leaders talking with one another about how they determined what to give to honour God. The first, a Pentecostal, said that he drew a circle and stood in the middle of the circle. Then, he took all the money that he had earned in that week and threw it up into the air. Whatever fell into the circle, he gave to God.

The second man, a Presbyterian, said that he also drew a circle. Then, standing in the middle of the circle, he threw all the money he had made during that week into the air. Whatever fell outside the circle, he gave to God.

The third man, a Baptist, was silent. Finally, with prodding from the other two, he confessed that he also drew a circle. Then he threw all the money he had earned in that week into the air. Whatever God wanted He could keep, and whatever God let fall to the ground the man kept.

I have often weighed the strong words of the Prophets. Among those Prophets of God that have shaped my thinking to a great degree is the Prophet Malachi. Perhaps you recall one portion of his brief message to a people who were content with ritual and failed to consider the reason for their actions.

“A son honours his father and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honour? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD’S Table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favour? says the LORD of hosts. And now entreat the favour of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favour to any of you? says the LORD of hosts” [MALACHI 1:6-9].

Here are some questions that only you can answer—and you must answer them if you will honour the Lord our God. Are your gifts given “to the church?” Or are you giving to God? Are you giving to support what is? Or are you giving to support a vision of what can be? The church perhaps needs to die if all we have become is a collection agency. If, however, you are giving to God, you must ask and answer the following question—does your giving honour God?

To determine whether your gift honours God, ask yourself whether you give with a willing heart, or whether you merely go through the motion of giving what you have always given? Does your gift demonstrate esteem for God and does it honour Him? The size of a gift is less important than is your attitude in giving. Related to this is the question of whether you spend more on toiletries, on hobbies or personal pleasure than is invested to advance the cause of Christ.

When you bring your gift to Christ, do you recognise that you are investing in something that has eternal consequences? Are you giving with the prayer that we will see people redeemed from death and eternally saved? We are given great opportunities to make an impact for eternity. We reach out week-by-week through the messages preached, through posting the message of life on the Church Web Site, through disseminating the truths taught as those in attendance share the teaching through echoing what is taught and through inviting others to share in the worship of Christ the Lord.

I have long thought that we should be establishing congregations throughout this region. Young ministers seldom share the vision of extending the message of life. They have debts, they are looking for a congregation to take over, they want a pulpit from which they can preach. I believe God would have us seek His face, asking that He supply workers to advance His cause. Though we may never build a great edifice in this place, perhaps it is that we can encourage the establishment of congregations in nearby communities where advance of the Gospel has seemingly stagnated and where the saints have grown discouraged. Has not God called us to ask for this? Jesus pleads with disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” [MATTHEW 9:37, 38].

Our media ministries have grown beyond our expectations during these past several years. There is a growing need for individuals to invest their lives in producing and editing these programs. I am humbled when I see the young men and young women enter the media room to record the messages. Their labours honour God and ensure that the messages are ready for editing. Nevertheless, I am increasingly aware that the time grows short if we will make an impact for the cause of Christ. Evil grows at a rapid pace; at the same time opportunities to make a difference in the world are greater than ever.

A daily program presenting the message of life on satellite radio would potentially reach millions of people, advancing the cause of Christ and building the faithful. I am increasingly aware that many people draw encouragement through the teaching ministries presented by radio and television. I do not encourage anyone to neglect the local congregation; but many people do not have opportunity to participate in the services of a sound congregation with any degree of regularity.

It is astonishing how little such a ministry costs today. It is even more amazing to think of how great an impact such an outreach can make for the glory of our God. Who knows what might happen if God's people sought His face and sought His will for their gifts and for their lives. I am shameless in calling on God's people to provide for these ministries to our world now.

Haggai is another of the Minor Prophets whose major message I have pondered. Haggai was deeply concerned because the House of the Lord lay in ruins. Therefore, the prophet admonished the people to think about their personal condition, considering whether it was the result of neglect for God's House. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD. You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house" [HAGGAI 1:7-9].

Is it possible that we are plodding as a congregation instead of sprinting toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ? It is possible that in our personal finances we just meet bills and plod along because we fail to understand that through giving and worship we have an opportunity either to honour God or merely to pay the bills. With one decision, we can transform our worship. Each individual Christian can determine that she or he will honour God. Each of us can give something. None of us are so destitute that we have nothing to give to the cause of Christ. It is a matter of priorities.

We can prayerfully consider the investment of our time and of our moneys into the cause of Christ, and when we do so, we likely will discover that God stands ready to entrust to us even more of this world's goods so that we can be generous on every occasion. This is the promise of God recorded in **2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-11**. "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that having all contentment in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God."

I have spoken to Christians. To any who share our service who has yet to be born from above, this message as presented has no application. This final word is the application delivered to outsiders. This final word is a citation of the Word of God as recorded in **ROMANS 10:9-13**. The Word of God calls each of us to believe the message of life that Christ has died because of our sin and raised from the dead to declare us free of all condemnation.

Thus, the call of God to any who will receive it is, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

That is our call to you. Believe the message of life and be saved today. Amen.