

There are 3-4 topics in our culture that we don't talk about very well: Politics, sex, and religion. Also: marriage, morals, and transportation. Oh, also the economy, the environment, human rights, animal rights, immigration, health care, taxes, education, and the government. Well, maybe there are more than 3 or 4 topics we don't talk about very well in our culture! As one Seattle Times columnist put it a couple days ago in an article about political discussions getting hijacked by social media tweets by a host of government officials: **“And so a day that began with a much-needed discussion about an important policy devolved into everyone fighting about ... a dumb tweet” (Seattle Times, 3/8)**. So those are the topics we struggle to talk about. All that's left is sports, the arts, and pets. And we can get heated about those things, too – except maybe pets. They're too cute to argue about. Actually, there's at least one more we can add to the list of topics we don't talk about well, and that is “money” – especially, how we use it. And today we are diving into this topic as we continue our series titled, “Believe.” Part 1 this past fall was wrapped around the question “What do I believe?” And part 2 now is wrapped around the questions, “What shall I do?”

And the key belief statement that we're looking at today is this: **“I give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.”** And the resource that is meant here is our financial resources. Now, the last couple weeks we've looked at some resources we have and how we use them to fulfill God's purposes. Last week was the resource of “time.” We had a nice musical illustration/drama about that just a few minutes ago. I would've used that a week ago if I knew it existed! The week before *that* we looked at how we use our spiritual gifts, which are a resource that God has blessed each of us with, and he wants us to use for His glory.

And one of the passages we looked at in that sermon is connected to today's passage. In fact, the first verse today was the last verse in that passage two weeks go. And in that passage, we saw that God brought forth all these people who had gifts and abilities that were to be used to make the tabernacle

– essentially what you and I would call a sanctuary. And they were making it a portable worship space so as they wandered in the wilderness for these 40 years, they could take it with them wherever they went. So they’re building a porta-sanctuary, and to do so, they all have gifts and abilities that God has blessed them with and they are to use to help build this.

Then today we see that there is more that is needed to build the tabernacle. Now: **We have to keep in mind that for them, to give materials – such as metal or cloth or thread – was the equivalent of us giving financially.** We sometimes give in this way, too. We call them “in-kind” gifts. A few years ago, Gwen and I gave a car to a Christian sports ministry that a friend of ours helps lead in Tacoma. Granted, it wasn’t the value of a Lamborghini; but they were able to take that and get money out of it by selling it. Many years ago, Mamie Kimble gave this church a house, and Paul (and his family) would not be here leading our 9:30 service and youth ministry if we didn’t have that. I found out last weekend that there is a church not too far from downtown Kirkland that recently sold a house that had been given to them and they’re using the money to do some remodeling at their church. So financial contributions through the giving of goods and materials is not unknown to us, even if it’s not the most common way we give.

And for them, coins were not in use at this point. All business transactions in the “marketplace” and all financial giving was through the giving of possessions. **The coin that came into use much closer to New Testament times is the shekel. It is what a coin is called still today in Israel, and a shekel was initially a measurement of weight.** So when a shekel is mentioned in the Old Testament, it’s not referring to a coin, but the weight of something. Even if they had coins at this time, and everyone had donated money, where were would they buy the materials for the tabernacle anyway? Back in Egypt? Wander into the land of the Jebusites and Hittites and all the other “ites” whose land God had promised to the Hebrews? No. They don’t have options. They have to depend on God and use what He has blessed them with if they’re going to build this tabernacle. So that’s the financial resource they gave: the actual materials that were used to build the tabernacle.

And what happens in this passage we read is that: **The builders go to Moses**

and say, “**Hey! We’ve got more than enough materials! The people have financially given more than we need. Tell them to stop giving financially.**” We might say that they were an over-funded church. And so Moses went out and preached the first sermon to ever bear the message, “Stop giving financially.” Not only was it the *first* sermon to ever have that message, I bet it’s about the last. Who’s ever heard of a church being over-funded? Maybe today there are a few that seem to have more financial resources than needed. Most of them use those funds wisely to plan for the future or to fund missionaries or Christian non-profits that sometimes struggle to make ends meet. There are a very tiny handful of churches or Christian non-profits that are perceived to be overfunded (and maybe are), usually because of some exorbitant building they build that feels ostentatious and over the top, or because their pastor or other staff are living in a house that is outside the range of normalcy for their community or driving cars that belong on an episode of “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.”

Because a few churches are like that, it’s easy to make sweeping generalizations that *lots* of churches are like that, or that even *most* churches are. Unfortunately, that’s oftentimes the perception that non-Christians have about the Church and those who lead it: it’s all about the money. **But the reality is, most churches are not over-funded.** Most scramble near the end of the budget year to make ends meet, and don’t live into other dreams beyond their annual budget – like building a port-sanctuary. Or a new permanent one. I remember a church in Chehalis that was literally across the street from the church I pastored for 6 years. They had purchased some land about a mile south on the main road through town. There was a big sign for several years that said “Future home of Chehalis Christian Church.” Unfortunately, they’ve never gotten the financial resources to move ahead with that project. Those stories are much more common than the ones like we read of this morning.

And so here, they had gotten to the point of being over-funded, and Moses went out telling people, “Stop giving! We have too many financial resources. We have too much material.” Can you imagine that being preached from the pulpit of a church today? In fact: **Verse 6 tells us that the people “were restrained from giving more.”** They had to be held back! Maybe not

physically like holding onto the leash of a Labrador Retriever that just watched its favorite tennis ball get thrown across a field. But the image painted for us here is that the people wanted to give...they were eager to give...and they had to be held back from doing so. They were excited about the tabernacle. They really wanted to give to it and support its construction and see it come to fruition.

And the question I find myself asking is: How did they get there? **What happened that the people gave so generously that they were asked to stop giving?** Because it's not like they were perfectly faithful people. They elected not to go into the Promised Land that God wanted to lead them to; they built a golden calf and worshipped it; they complained about the food that God provided. Moses even called them "a stiff-necked people" when he complained to God about them. So it's not like they're deeply committed people with incredible spiritual depth who will go to any length to live into God's purposes.

We do get some clues a little earlier. In Exodus 25 we read, "**The LORD said to Moses about the building of this tabernacle: 'Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give, you shall receive the offering for me'**" (Exodus 25:1-2). The people gave generously because of their hearts; because their hearts felt prompted to give. Maybe not everyone gave – but those whose hearts were prompted, did. And the reality is, people love to give to a specific cause. Giving to build their tabernacle was something that people could grasp and understand and envision. There would be a tangible thing that they would be able to touch and see at the end.

Another clue we get is that God filled leaders with His Spirit to lead and inspire them. Moses, Bezalel, Oholiab, and others were filled with the ruach of God – the Spirit of God – to lead God's people in this building project. When God's Spirit moves in people's lives, it inspires us and draws us closer to the Lord and leads us forward in living for Him and His purposes, and helping to bring those purposes to fruition.

We have plans to make some changes to our facilities around here. We've got

a great church building that needs some updating since it was last seriously worked on 45 years ago (not to say there hasn't been work done on it). Jim Peterson and Dan Wolfe are Spirit-filled guys who are helping to provide some leadership for it. They're sort of our Oholiab and Bezalel. There are a couple different teams of people that they're working with to help bring this to fruition. And at some point, once we've got our ducks in a row, we'll see fruit from this project to renovate our bathrooms and enlarge the lobby and hopefully do more beyond that, too.

But it's going to take some financial generosity from all of us. **It will take hearts that are prompted to give and hearts that are filled with the Spirit and want to see this come to fruition for God's glory.** And that's the thing about financial support of the ministry: It really isn't about the building, or the program or the paint or whatever the tangible thing is that's getting worked on. As easy as it is to get excited about some of those things, the real fruit is lives that are changed, and disciples of Jesus who are made. I remember nearly 20 years ago I was on staff at a large church in the area that had built a gymnasium. My job was to lead this brand new athletic ministry. They raised a bunch of money for the gym, built it, but they didn't raise all that they needed, and so they had debt to pay off. They decided to have another capital campaign fund to try and pay off that debt. And one of the guys who was leading that asked for my help, because I was loaded in my late 20's and could cut a check for a couple hundred thousand dollars to help jump start the fundraising.

Just kidding. 😊

Bob said to me, **“Getting people to give to a building project is much easier when the building isn't yet built or is under construction. Now that it's done, it's a lot harder to motivate people.”** I think that's kind of sad, because it's losing sight of the mission, the purpose for the building. So he wanted me to share with the congregation some of the fruit of the ministry that was happening in the gym. That's why it was built. And so I was able to share how God had touched some people's lives – really transformed one gal named Bridgette, in particular (she replaced me when I left the position); how people who hadn't come to church ever before or in many years, were getting

their foot in the door through the athletic ministry; how I saw guys come to a service at our church after 9/11 because they'd been to basketball or volleyball at the church. There was God-honoring, and life-changing fruit in that athletic ministry. Stories like that can be said about a number of ministries in *this* church that have led to people growing in faith and living for Jesus as well. That's why ministries from our own basketball ministry to quilting exist: to make disciples of Jesus.

And *that's* why we give financially to the church. It's not about the building per se. Or the programs. Or the salaries. Or the utilities. It's about Jesus. And as inspiring as building campaigns like the one Moses led are, the reality is that it's the regular giving that supports the every day ministries that really matters. An annual budget isn't a particularly thrilling thing, though our budget at RH this year is the biggest it's been in several years and sometimes that does get my heart-rate going, believe me. I'm praying regularly for faithful giving to make ends meet by the end of this year.

But the faithful giving of God's people supports all that we do here at Rose Hill, and it's all directly or indirectly related to making disciples of Jesus Christ. There are all kinds of ways that people's lives are changed and touched because this church exists. From the home-bound century-old life-long follower of Jesus who gets visited every month by one of our deacons to the young couple with a 6-month old baby and they come to worship on a Sunday for the first time ever, or in many years...and all kinds of people along the spectrum in between...in all those places, God is doing great things, touching people's lives, shaping people to be more and more like Jesus. And that's why we give financially: not because of some great new building project or ministry, but because through it God will touch and transform lives. People will know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Those are the purposes of God, and that is what this church is all about. I pray that we would give generously. And maybe one day I'll stand here and preach a sermon with the theme of "stop giving to the church!"

Let's wrap up this morning's message by joining our voices together as one to affirm our statement of belief: **"I give my resources to fulfill God's purposes."** I pray that would be true – not only the giving part, but that

God's purposes would be fulfilled, because that truly is why we give. Let's pray...Amen.