**THE JOY OF GIVING JCC 27/04/14**

**Acts 20:35 ‘I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’** You might ask, how could it be better to give than it is to receive? If you have ever given a gift to someone, you already know the answer. Receiving a gift is wonderful, but also somehow very humbling. But giving a gift fills your heart with great joy like nothing else can! That is what Jesus meant by the word ‘blessed’ – happy and filled with joy because of giving. On top of the joy received through giving, you set God’s promises into action in your life. **Luke 6:38 ‘Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure you give it shall be given unto you.’** Oh how we love prosperity, how we love quoting this verse, but we many times forget or leave off the first word, ‘Give’. Giving and receiving belong together, but it is only as we give that we are in a position to receive our harvest. The amount you give is the amount of harvest you will receive. In the natural world, when you plant a seed into the ground, you will reap a harvest – but the ground can only give to you as you give to the ground. Does that make sense? Yet somehow when it comes to the things of God, many people want something for nothing. If such an attitude does not work in the world, why should we expect something from God if we have not invested in the Kingdom of God? Of course, when you talk of giving and receiving, our minds immediately travel down the ‘money road’, relating our giving entirely to money. But there is so much more we can give than just our finances, as important as that is. As you invest your time, your talents and skills, your commitment to building His Kingdom, and your money, you will receive a wonderful harvest of grace, of mercy, of compassion and of supply for your every need. In other words, you will reap exactly what you sow. Your present generosity today will determine and ensure tomorrow’s harvest of blessings.

Our giving needs to be as unto the Lord. **Matthew 25:40 ‘And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it (gave) to the least of these My brethren, you did it to me.’** Whenever we visit the sick or those in prison, help the hurting, give food or clothing to the poor, take in strangers, and the many other social needs in our community, we are doing it for Jesus. The person we are helping becomes Jesus to us. When we put our arms around that lonely, suffering person, we are putting our arms around Jesus and comforting Him. When we bring the Gospel of Good News to the lost and dying, it is for Jesus we are laboring. The focus of our giving needs to be on Jesus and Him alone – He is our source, He is to be the object of our worship and our love, He alone is worthy of our life’s service – and He alone can supply our needs. As we give to others, let us keep our focus and vision clear – we look past those we are giving to, with our faith directed to God. The good we do is offered as a service of love to Him and for Him.

**Colossians 3:23** **‘Whatever you do, do it heartily, joyfully as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that it is from the Lord that you will receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Jesus Christ.’** What is the reward of the inheritance? Heaven, the promised fulfillment of our faith, eternal life, streets of gold, no pain or tears – only great joy awaits us there. Why? Because everything we did here on earth was dedicated to serving Him with all our hearts, mind and strength – and we loved our neighbors as we loved ourselves. Some Christians have experienced dissatisfaction, disillusionment and discouragement as they have given of their substance or time. Why? They were serving people, serving a Church, serving a denomination, perhaps even serving their own feelings by feeling good for all the good they accomplished. We need to keep it straight – we are serving the living God, whose reward for us is Heaven, and we well enjoy eternity with Jesus, because we were obedient to His Word and faithful to live it out in our lives while on earth.

**Mark 10:17-31** This young man, referred to as the rich young ruler in Luke’s account of this incident, asked the question, ‘What must I **do** to get to heaven?’ Of course, we know that we cannot earn our salvation or our way into heaven, there is only one thing we can do to get to heaven – fall on our knees and beg for His forgiveness of sin – humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift us up – to heaven! Jesus struck the key issue in this young man’s life. **‘Sell all you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me.’ (Another message for another time – the importance of you laying up your treasure in Heaven)** The young man went away very sorrowful, because he had a lot of possessions. This shows that the young man was selfish and had made an idol out of his wealth, thus breaking the very first commandment**, ‘You shall have no other Gods before me.’** Jesus was saying that it is impossible to trust in riches rather than God, and enter heaven. Why have we been given the ability to earn money; to have wealth? So we might share it with the less fortunate – after our needs have been met. And remember, the more we give the more we will receive. This is God’s principle; His law of reciprocity. The seed that you plant in another’s life is proof that you have conquered greed. Greed is not defined only by wanting more and more, but greed is also keeping what belongs to someone else. Remember, God gives, man hoards and satan steals. Who do you want to be like? The seed you sow today will create tomorrow’s harvest. Consistent, continuous giving guarantees a consistent, continuous harvest. When you release what is in your hand, God can release what is in His hand, and I am sure there is a lot more in His hand than is in yours. The seed that leaves your hand multiplies – it does not leave your life. God does not respond to needs – He responds to seeds – seeds of faith given with the expectation of a harvest. If God responded to needs, there would be no earthly needs – no sickness, no poverty and no problems. Giving sets God into action. Our prayers of faith, that confident expectation of blessing from Him, set Him into action on our behalf.

Your giving shows your love, in action, not only words. **1John 3:16-18, 23**

**Matthew 10:8 ‘Freely you have received, freely give.’** God does not ask us to give what we do not have, but to give what we are able to. He does not ask you to do what you cannot do, but what you can do. You are not the miracle worker, He is. He will take what you give and multiply it to the benefit of hundreds and thousands. A seed will always remain just a seed until it is planted. So plant your seed of love, of mercy, of friendship, of compassion, and watch it grow and bloom in and through your life. Expect a great harvest as you sow your seeds. In your hand is seed and in God’s hand is harvest. Unlock your future by creating a new season in someone else’s life as you give to them. Release the joy of giving into your life as you look for opportunities to bless others with what you have to give.

What can you give to? How can you give?

**Tithe.** Bring 10% into the ‘storehouse’ – where you are being fed, and expect God’s abundant, always good, blessings; an open window of heaven over your life. If you don’t agree with New Testament tithing, then bring your **gifts and** **offerings** to the storehouse. **Alms** – giving to the poor, to those who cannot repay you. Give your time and effort to an existing worthy social program. The women of Jubilee have recently joined themselves to the Crises Pregnancy Center. As a group of believers, we need to be looking into other ways of blessing our community – giving our time and effort towards a salvation campaign, perhaps towards blessing the First Nations people, or planting another Church, or the many other needs we see. So take a ‘seed inventory’. We all have seeds of salvation. We are all ‘ministers of reconciliation’. We can all give the gift of Jesus; His seeds of love and forgiveness – and His seed sack will never run dry. If you want grace, mercy, compassion, joy or friendship in your life, sow those seeds abundantly and reap that harvest. Sow into good soil and the harvest is inevitable. What you have in your hand is seed – what God has in His hand is harvest. Open your hands today and release what you have – allow God to pour out the greatest blessings you could ever experience – the joy of giving will be yours!

**Galatians 6:7-10 ‘Whatever a man sows that will he also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while dong good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.’**

**May God continue to bless you as you give your way to prosperity – here on earth and ‘prosperity for eternity’ – treasure in Heaven!**