

Spire Article about Stewardship (November 2016)

By Julia Kung

Grace Made Visible

We are very excited about this year's stewardship campaign: "Grace Made Visible" and will be sharing how people in our congregation have experienced God's grace. At ACP we have been exploring the theme of grace, of knowing that we are saved through Jesus Christ, rather than through our own good works. This begs the question: Then why do we have to give if we are already saved? Does it matter if we give or not?

In Ephesians 2:4-10 it says:

"But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

To me, this means that everything we do must demonstrate our faith in Christ Jesus. Whether it's going to work, raising our kids, or how we interact with people around us, these actions must reflect our honest desire to live like Christ. When I think about how Christ lived, I am constantly reminded about how he truly cared for people, especially the lowly and the poor, while admonishing the rich for holding onto their treasures. I remember the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and asked Him what he must do to receive eternal life. Jesus told the man to sell everything and to give the money to the poor. But the rich young ruler became very sad and walked away from Jesus. "How hard it is for rich people to enter God's kingdom! It is hard for a camel to go through the eye of a needle? It is even harder for the rich to enter God's kingdom" (Luke 18:24-25).

While God does not actually expect us to sell everything and give it all to the poor, he does require that we give to his kingdom. When I was a child, I remember that my parents told me if I received an allowance of \$10, then God expects me to give him \$1. This did not seem very difficult back then, and I faithfully dropped \$1 into the offering box while keeping the other 9 for myself. However, as I became an adult, and started to earn a paycheck greater than \$10, this became more difficult. Instead of giving God the first 10% of my paycheck, I would negotiate with Him and end up giving Him a small gesture to make the issue go away. Why? Because the more we have of "this world", the more difficult it is to give it up and follow Christ's teachings.

Fortunately, this is not always the case, as illustrated by the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector who climbed a tall tree in order to see Jesus. Zacchaeus was completely changed by his encounter with Jesus and repented of his sins right then and there. He demonstrated his repentance by saying he would give half his money to the poor. Zacchaeus became a new man that day. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says: "Anyone who believes in Christ is a new creation. The old is gone! The new has come!"

This brings us back to our original question: Does it matter if we give or not? While we are not saved by our good works, we cannot be faithful Christians if we are not changed by Christ through our actions like Zacchaeus. If we truly care for the poor, the sick, the dispossessed, and the unsaved, and we trust that our church is properly allocating the resources received, then we **should** give faithfully as a reflection of our desire to be Christ-

like: to help the needy... to give to the poor... to be a "Beacon on the Seine" ... to be the salt and light of the earth!