

Our teaching time during worship over the past few weeks has been leading up to something. Each message has been preparing us to answer a question. It's a question that every single one of us has to answer for ourselves – and it's **so important**, that the answer we give ourselves will have a profound effect on WHAT we do, HOW we do it, and how we FEEL about it each day. It's a very simple question. It's only 2 words. The question is, "What's enough?" It's a simple question, but it may not be easy to answer.

Over the weeks, we've heard the stories of the tragedies that some people's lives have become when they've had lots of what this world values dropped on them. We heard about a Brit in the UK who completely squandered 15 million dollars that he'd won in a lottery and ended up working in a cookie factory – no offense intended to cookie factory workers.

But we're also aware of many who've had the same kind of thing happen to them, but they've handled it so well that they've maintained or even GROWN their wealth. In fact just this week, I read an online article about an NFL player name Darrius Heyward Bey. The article was written because even though he hasn't been a great player, he's been a wise money manager. He still has almost all of the nearly 35 million dollars he has been paid. Here's what he said. "I don't have any kids and I'm not married, so the money I spend is on me. It's really easy to say no to myself," Heyward-Bey said. "I keep things real simple. I'm not really a flashy guy. I understand what I want to buy. I invest my money well and pay my

taxes." That article was newsworthy because it seems he's the exception to the rule. And what was the critical sentence in what he said? "It's really easy to say no to myself." That's why he still has it – the wisdom not to indulge himself. We've come to realize that it is that makes the difference between these two outcomes – between those who lose it and those who keep it. It's that kind of wisdom.

But I hope that we've all become keenly aware that this doesn't just apply to people with millions. It applies to all of us. The attitude we have when it comes to our finances isn't indexed like our taxes – it doesn't get more important the more you have. It's exactly the same for those who have lots of it as it is for those who don't.

Friends, again, that simple question is What's Enough? But our ANSWER is going to be determined by one critical piece of information. That one piece of information will utterly transform any idea we might have about our resources. That all-important piece of information is this: it's all God's. That's the clear and irrefutable truth the Bible tells us.

Here's the truth that I see revealed in scripture. If we *believe* what we have is *ours*, we'll be tempted to keep it all. But if we believe what we have is *God's*, we'll have a completely different attitude toward it. In the Bible's world-view, what God wants will become more important than what we want. And then, we'll know the blessing – and even the joy – of using it the way God wants us to.

One of the things that he has told us about that – how he wants us to use what he gives us – is to set aside a portion for him. God has set the amount of that portion by a percentage, and that percentage is one tenth of our increase. It's called the tithe.

Now I share this with you as a truth of the Scriptures. And I'll tell you, people sometimes get pretty worked up around this particular biblical teaching. Thing is, I really don't think that happens because they don't believe the Bible. People who are committed to the word and have been in long-standing Bible studies have stopped coming to their church because their preacher did a sermon on the biblical principle of the tithe. So what is it that could be behind such a powerful reaction to something that's in the Bible – the same Bible they trust for the message of salvation? It's really pretty simple. It's what *usually* influences people to react like that – with that kind of intensity.

Quite simply, it's fear.

It's really clear in the Bible that God created us with the willingness to give—to him and to others. That desire is part of our makeup; we actually have the **NEED** to be generous. Yet there are two voices that “war” against our God-given impulse toward generosity, tempting us to keep or hoard what we have. And **BOTH** of those voices rise up out of a kind of fear.

The first voice is a misconception we have – one that we don't even realize is mistaken. That fear – fear of what might happen to us – fear that we might not

have enough – THAT FEAR will keep us from being generous. That fear will tempt us to hoard what we have. But the truth is that no matter how much we **have**, no matter how much we **keep**, it still can't provide us with real security in this world. That's the misconception – that the more we **have** the more **secure** we'll **BE**. We might **feel** more secure, but we won't be. Those with the most, coupled with that attitude that it's all theirs – they're the ones that are always anxiously checking the markets, worried about the next big recession. Why? It isn't why you'd think. It isn't because they have the most to lose. It's because they think that's where their security comes from. That which they thought would provide them with peace ends up being the source of incredible anxiety.

The second voice is the one that our culture screams at us. It's the one we mentioned last week. It's the voice that tells us that our lives consist in the abundance of our possessions and pleasurable experiences. So we find ourselves thinking, I have to keep what I have, so there'll be enough left for me.

Where is faith in that? Where is our trust in God?

I want to share an illustration with you about this. It comes from a pastor in the Atlanta suburb of Decatur named David Slagle of Veritas Church.

If you read this week's teasers on the website or facebook, you already know what's coming.

When it comes to this idea of tithing, it's a challenging idea for many of us. I mean, it's a stretch, especially when you first start following Jesus and you're

having those impulses, that war that's going on inside you between those voices we mentioned. Give a tenth? You've got to be kidding.

Now what if you knew the owner of an apple orchard who let you pick a peck or two, and all he asked was that for every 10 you picked, you give one to him to pay for the rest. You get to keep 9 out of every 10 apples you pick. Would you do it? That's the way God sees it – your wealth and your income – God sees it like these 10 apples. And God says that 9 of them are yours. Use them to take care of your family, to clothe yourselves. Use them for food and for shelter and set some of them aside for retirement and give some away to your friends and some are designed to be used for your vacations and recreation.

You have nine of these apples. But the Lord says, "This first one is mine. And it's the first one because, first of all, it's to be used as a way for you to express your praise and your love for me – your obedience and devotion. And I'm going to put YOUR first one together with everyone else's – and that's what I'll use to accomplish my purposes in the world.

But here's what happens with many of us. Many of us find – because society is pulling us in so many directions – that 9 apples just aren't enough any more. I mean, how can we do all the fun stuff and the cool stuff and stuff we NEED to do and pay the bills and everything else on just 9 apples?

So we start thinking, "Well the Lord's not going to mind if we just take a little bit." << CUT A PIECE >> You know, there's that trip that we've been wanting to

take. And it's really important and special to us. And we're just going to have to take a little of the Lord's apple. He'll understand.

And then it's Christmastime << CUT A PIECE >> and we didn't set enough aside for all those Christmas presents. And that's a KIND of giving, isn't it? – even if it isn't to God? It's to our children and others and so God will understand.

<< CUT A PIECE >> We'll take a little more of God's apple.

And we start thinking about retirement. We realize that it's coming up a lot quicker than we think. And you know I need to be setting aside more in that IRA

<< CUT A PIECE >> But I can't stop spending from these other 9 apples to do that. I've got to take that from someplace else. << CUT A PIECE >>

And I have to pay for that medical emergency because we didn't set emergency funds aside in our savings account like Dave Ramsey tells us to.

<< CUT A PIECE >>

And it's time for a new car, and I didn't set aside anything for that. << CUT A PIECE >>

And there's that big screen TV – you know the Super Bowl isn't far away even if the Browns won't be in it. << CUT A PIECE >>

And of course there's that new house because the one we're in doesn't satisfy us any more. << CUT A PIECE >>

And what has happened? Pretty soon, there isn't much left of the Lord's apple. << EAT MORE OF IT >>

And then we say, “Well, Lord, this is your part. This is what I’m going to give to you.”

Does any of this sound familiar? << PICK UP CORE >> Are we really ok with this being what we give to God?

Friends, when we give our lives to Jesus, when we invite him to be Lord, when we allow the Holy Spirit to begin changing us from the inside out, we find that our fears begin to dissipate and our aim in life shifts from seeking personal pleasure to pleasing God and caring for others. Although we still may wrestle with those voices from time to time, we’re able to silence them more readily and effectively the more we grow in the Spirit. And the more we grow in him, realizing that even our LIVES belong to him, the more generous we’ll become. Generosity is a fruit of spiritual growth. The Bible tells us that in Acts 20:35: “We find more joy in doing things for other people and for God than we ever did in doing things for ourselves.”

The thing is, in the power of God, giving faithfully like this actually makes a difference in us that we might not have expected. Our fear tells us we’ll be more anxious because we’re worried about having enough. Our faith – giving as God has said to – gives us a joy we’d never be able to find otherwise. When we’re generous – to God, to our families, our friends, our neighbors, and others who are in need – it fills our hearts with what? Joy. They are enlarged by the very act of giving. When we give generously, we become more generous. And as we

thought about a few weeks ago – if we handle WELL what God has placed in our hands, we'll see needs in others, and we'll be able to meet those needs without batting an eye. I get excited about it just saying it. How awesome would that be?

And it all comes back to how our attitude leads us to answer that simple, 2 word question. For us, What's Enough? Will you live so that the 9 apples will be Enough – and give the first one back to God? If you will, you'll be living according to the promise of God, and you'll find joy in your simplicity and generosity.