

## Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

[Offering](#) - Gen 1:29 & Genesis 4:2-4

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. Gen 1:29

Everything you and I present to God in the way of offering is something God already had. That was one of the biggest question I had when I first became involved and interested in the church and a relationship with God. Why is there a collection, an offering in church? God created everything, why does the church need my money, why should I give to the church?

The money you contribute, the time and work you put in doing things around the church, it is the church who benefits from that not God. I am not contributing to the wellbeing of God. God doesn't need anything I have or can give to be alright. God would be just fine without me.

The church on the other hand does have needs which my contributions effect. If I contribute to St. Paul, Susie can pay the light bills and Bob, John and Ray our trustees can maintain the building as someplace pleasing for people to come. We can hire people like Rev. James to visit our members in all the hospitals and nursing homes and people like Steve and Hansford to help us present quality music for worship. We can afford to have people reaching out in children's and youth programs or people traveling to other areas to minister in times of disaster or in the clean up afterwards. The church can use the funds effective to reach others with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

For the next several weeks we are going to be talking and sharing from some scriptures that talk about our offering. We will look at the cost of offering, the value of offering and even the tithe. But the truth be told, God does not need anything I can bring and place in the offering plate. But the offering has immense value for me personally. However having said that, I want us to think for a few minutes about some verses we find just a few chapters on in the story. In Genesis 4 we find the first instance of someone bringing an offering to God.

Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, <sup>4</sup> and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering. Gen 4:2-4

After the fall of Adam and Eve the one thing they had to present to God was themselves. All of creation was at God's disposal; only humanity had withheld themselves from the presence of God. Adam and Eve had hid from the presence of God.

I noticed that it is Cain and Abel who decide to bring an offering to God. Adam and Eve, mom and dad, had known God during their walks in the cool of the evenings. But we see no contact between Cain and Abel and God until this moment when each brother brings an offering to God. We are going to leave for another day the last sentence in the scripture I just read which says, "And the Lord had regarded for Abel and his offering." I want us to think about this first time when humanity goes to approach God with an offering.

Prior to this moment in the story, we have no knowledge of Cain and Abel ever having or seeking any kind of relationship with God. It is pretty safe to assume that mom and dad must have said things over the years or they must have over heard conversations between Adam and Eve remembering the good ole days when they walked with God in the cool of the evenings. But at this point Cain the older and his younger brother Abel seek a relationship with God. And the way in which they do that is to bring an offering!

Now that at first might seem strange but when I thought about it, I recognized what humanity has been doing for ages. Whenever we want someone to notice us or to think favorable of us we bring them a gift. How many men through the ages have brought women flowers? Do you think we honestly cared

about the flowers? We were not offering flowers ladies; we have been offering ourselves and hoping that you would favorably respond by taking them and showing interest in us. Oh, certainly the flowers will brighten your day, but honestly ladies; we are interested in you and want you to be interested in us.

When Cain and Abel bring offerings to God, they want God to be interested in them. They may have heard about mom and dad's relationship with God but they have come seeking their own relationship with God.

I have to think at that moment God has got the biggest smile ever upon God's face. When Adam and Eve went hiding, it was God who came seeking them. When you look at each of the stories in scripture from Cain and Abel to the seven churches in Revelations, there is this constant element of God seeking after his people. In every single story there is God finding a way to come closer to people like you and me. When Cain and Abel stop their working, gather whatever they are going to bring and then seek to come into God's presence with an offering, God must have the most amazing smile on God's face.

Bringing an offering is the way in which the first people sought a relationship with God. When you and I stop from our regular activities and approach God with an offering we are repeating an age old way of asking for a relationship with our heavenly Father. We are asking God for the very thing God wants more than anything else, the very thing that God has been working for in our lives. First there was the sacrifice system when we had sinned and left God's presence. Then God provided his only son, Jesus as atonement for our sins that nothing would stand between us and God. When we approach God with an offering we are coming to someone who has been wanting and watching and hoping for our return to him.

The story of the prodigal son has that wonderful image of the father looking down the road for the return of his son. The son had left claiming all of his inheritance even before the father died. It was not a pleasant separation and knowing how things fester over time no one would have thought less of the father if he had written the son off completely. But that is not the story. The father is standing one evening on the porch looking down the road, when he spots his son still off in the distance, the father runs to him and throws his arms around him and welcomes him home. When Jesus finishes the story it is clear in his teaching that the father is God and you and I are the prodigal sons. God is watching for us to turn in God's direction. God is waiting and hoping and anticipating our return.

God has never been interested in anything we bring, what is of interest for God, even a consuming interest if you will, is our desire for a relationship with God. It is God who came seeking Adam and Eve when they had sinned and moved away from God. When you and I come to a time of offering in particular the offering of ourselves, God is keenly interested. The angels of heaven fall in hushed silence waiting as you and I approach to give ourselves in relationship with God.

Now in light of this we are going to for at least the month of August present our offering in a different way. In the early days of the church and often throughout history offerings were brought to the altar. We did not have ushers who collected them and brought them for us, Christians as a highlight of their worship brought their offerings to the altar of God; there they presented their offering but more importantly they presented themselves. Today we are going to do the same thing. Rev. James and I will lead the choir down the side aisle and up the center aisle. The ushers will place the collection plates here at the altar rail. You may place your offering in the plates at that time. I also encourage you to present yourself to God. Should coming to the altar be difficult for you there will be ushers available to bring your offering for you, just raise your hand. God who has been watching and waiting like the father in the story of the prodigal son is watching for you. I invite you to follow Rev. James and myself as we present ourselves, our offerings to God.