

## Why I'm Thankful for the Building Fund

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Tyler Velin | Psalm 20

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We have reached a natural transition point in our series through the book of Deuteronomy as Moses has concluded an extended introduction to the law. In this first part of Moses' he has been helping Israel plan for their future by reminding them of their past.

He has done this primarily through the repetition of the command, "take care." Five times Moses has reminded Israel of something and then said, "Take care lest you forget your God," or "Take care, lest you be deceived."

In college and in seminary, they always say the key to public speaking is to repeat your main point. While this might not be the main point of Deuteronomy, Moses certainly sees the thoughtfulness of God's people as something which needs to be constantly stoked.

We are prone in both times of emptiness and in times of excess, to forget God. In fact we saw in Deuteronomy 8 that as God brought Israel into a season of wilderness wanderings, he did so to test them so as to see what was in their heart.

We here at Sovereign Hope are in a season of wilderness. As the vast majority of us are well aware of, they city has bought our leased land and is not renewing our lease, leaving us in need of a new home, and new funds to pay for that home.

As of right now, we have amazingly raised over \$325,000 dollars in just over a year, and really only significantly in the past nine months. This number, plus the pledges of future donations have us sitting at right around \$600,000. But the Coke building we are buying at a discount, still has a \$1.4 million dollar price tag not including any costs for remodel or occupancy codes.

And here is the reality of this: it's not my building fund, and it's not the elder's building fund. Our membership gathered together this past summer and voted to make this our building fund. The beauty of this is that it is not a burdened shared by any one individual, but the burden of this is that it is a burden which a lot of us may feel all at once.

Tim Keller uses a helpful illustration in the context of marriage. He says that marriage is like a five ton Mack truck, and your heart is like a bridge. When the truck goes over the bridge, a poorly maintained bridge may begin to show some cracks. And it's not that all of a sudden the bridge began to crack, it's that the weight of the truck begins to show cracks which have formed over years of neglect. Through this lens, the weight of the trial actually leads to gratitude because it exposes where we are unknowingly weak.

The British preacher, Charles Spurgeon, who wrestled with physical and mental weakness his whole life once said that, "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the rock of ages." Paul says in **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**.

In this way, the building fund leads us to gratitude because it exposes issues in our heart and in our church which only God can come and weld back together with his gospel.

In the building fund, we have an opportunity to not be wishful thinkers, not dreary doubters, but boastful worshippers. You may be visiting here today, you may have no burden of our current building issues, but what I do know is that this world tests all of us. And if we only learn to see God in the obvious, then we might neglect to see the beauty of gospel in all of life.

This sermon is not an expository sermon that we are used to at Sovereign Hope. Normally we like to pick a text and drill down into that text. But a number of months ago, God convicted my heart of wrong hopes and thoughts I had regarding the building fund. And that morning I wrote on a sticky note, five reasons why I'm grateful for the building fund.

And in light of Thanksgiving this week, I want us as a church to fit our hearts accordingly on the stage that God has brought us to. So today we are going to walk through those five points that we might, as Paul says, encourage one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs during this time.

Just as Moses wanted the Israelites to take care and not forget, so the building fund makes us thankful to God by way of reminding us of certain truths. Here are the reminders we are going to see today: **trust not in numbers, generosity gives joy, discipleship is always costly, ministry has no end, and Jesus is our legacy.**

So let's dive into our first grounds for thanksgiving: **The building fund reminds us that we trust not in numbers.**

Read with me **Psalms 20:1-9.**

Now this Psalm is a song sung from the perspective of God's people. It reflects the heart of God's people that during times of fear and of uncertainty, they would pray and plead for the success of their king.

And at the heart of their plea is the wonderful declaration in verses six through eight. And in those verses we see two truths which are really important for us to see: God will save his anointed king, but God will save his anointed king from his holy hill. In other words the salvation we have in God doesn't look like the hopes of man. It comes from the hill of God not the hangers of man.

There is a wonderful illustration of this point in Judges 7. Gideon is the leader of God's people at the time and God is calling Israel to go to war with the people of Midian. And here is the little detail that the author gives regarding the size of the Midianite camp: **Judges 7:12.**

How big is the Midianite army? Too big to number, they've got camels without number.

Gideon knows they are outnumbered, so he musters up by any means necessary an army of 32,000 Israelites. But look at what God does: **Judges 7:2-3.** God cuts Gideon's army in half, why? Because God doesn't want Israel to boast in themselves. He wants them to trust in God.

So now Gideon has gone from an army of 32,000 to 10,000. But look at what happens next: **Judges 7:4-7.**

Do you ever have days where you feel like Gideon? Days where it seems that despite your intentional and best thought plans and hopes, everything is being taken away from you? But the point is that in those moments, God is reminding you of where you hope ultimately is.

Because here is the deal. Gideon probably lacked confidence in his 300 men, and the Midianites probably had over confidence in their innumerable army. But numbers mean nothing apart from God.

Now the tension is that God used numbers. He used those 300 men. God didn't work outside of the means of man, but God wanted Gideon to know that it is God, not the means who is to be trusted.

I can tell you that there have been days with this building fund where that progress bar in the foyer has been my hope. If that gets larger, then I will have peace. If this donor comes through, then we will make it. Maybe for you it's if the scans come back clean, if the offer gets accepted, if the internship comes through.

But in these moments God wants us to consider the reality that we may be talking to God, but trusting in things which are not God. This is especially true when it comes to the gospel. If you are someone who is constantly wrestling with the assurance of faith, then God is testing your heart to show you that you might be missing the work of Jesus.

If you think that it's the amount of prayers, or rededications, or money given, or hours donated that gives you confidence in your faith then you miss the wonderful confidence that comes from trusting in Jesus.

If you are a non-believer in here today, or a believer who wrestles with what is observable and numerable, I want you to consider that the only thing we are able to trust with any confidence in this world is what Jesus has done on the cross. As the David says, chariots, horses, donors, 401K's and health will all fail, but Jesus never will.

Sometimes it is God's grace in our heart to remove things in which we trust to reveal the misplacement of it. But by grace, God has given his people to hope in him.

The second reason I'm grateful for the building fund is that it reminds us that **Generosity gives joy.**

This week there was a college basketball player who was punished by the NCAA and as part of his punishment he had to donate \$11,000 to a charity of his choice.

Now I find this to be an interesting punishment for two reasons: donating something in order to meet a requirement is by nature not a donation. It is a purchase. He is purchasing the removal of an obligation. And second is that the word charity stems from the Biblical ideas of love and mercy. Those things are very rarely applied from the outside.

But for many of us, don't we express a similar understanding of generosity in our hearts? Now if I polled everyone in this room and asked the question: "Do you believe generosity gives joy?" We would probably have a consensus "yes." But on the whole I think our experience might say otherwise.

It almost becomes a sort of stoic chant, correct as a proof text, but completely void of emotion in practice. You see most of us cling to the promises of Jesus pretty desperately. I remember when Sarah

and I found out we were pregnant three months into marriage we clung to God's promise in Psalm 127, "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are the children of one's youth, blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!" Or many of you in hard times of conflict in your home or in your marriage cling to Jesus' "Blessed are the peacemakers," or for the persecuted church, "blessed are those who are persecuted."

But how many of us cling and cry so desperately to Jesus words in Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

I can tell you that I have prayerfully pleaded with God to hold many of his promises, but I've never done so with that verse. Why? Perhaps because we are so quick to functionally disconnect generosity with the gospel.

But consider the heart of generosity in **2 Corinthians 9:6-15**.

I'm assuming you noticed the language of gratitude and thanksgiving in this text. But I want us to see ultimately what stands in the middle of it. In the middle of Paul's text on joyful, generous giving lies the work of Jesus, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

You see in the gospel Jesus gives us what we need. Our greatest problem is no lack of wealth, it is a lack of righteousness. We are imperfect and eternally separated from God. But in Jesus we get his righteousness by faith. And because Jesus holds his people fast, we get to hold everything else loose. We can never accidentally give away what we really need.

It's not until you see this that you can truly be generous. And this isn't just true financially this is true relationally. You can generously clean your roommate's mess because Jesus dealt with yours. You can generously give your time, because Jesus gave you eternity. You can generously know joy because in those moments you're reminded of what you cannot lose.

Consider this illustration from Charles Spurgeon. He speaks of a gardener who kept his master's garden and cared for one rosebush in particular. One morning he noticed that the flower for which he especially cared for was gone, and he became quite upset thinking that someone had stolen it at night.

"He was complaining very bitterly of his loss when someone said, 'The master has been down in the garden this morning, and he has been admiring this rosebush, and he has taken away that fine bud of which you were so proud.' Then the gardener was delighted that he had been able to grow a flower that had attracted his master's notice. Instead of mourning any longer, he began to rejoice. So should it be with anything on which we have set our hearts. Let each one of us say to our Master, 'My Lord, if it pleases you to take it, it pleases me to lose it. Why should I complain because you have taken from me what is really your own?'"

May we be given the joy of losing for the sake of gaining joy in Jesus.

The third reason why I'm grateful for the building fund is that it reminds us that **Discipleship is always costly**.

Look at what Jesus says in **Matthew 28:18-20**.

I want to define discipleship here as Jesus defines discipleship: discipleship is the mission of Jesus' church. That's what the church does. To be part of Jesus' church is to be involved in the mission of discipleship: helping others follow Jesus in all of life.

This contains the two part commission that we talk about: make disciples by going out with the gospel and make disciples by growing people up in the gospel.

That's how important discipleship is to the church. The church exists to disciple. And this call is always costly. As we consider the needs of the church and the call to generosity what a great reminder of a truth which should saturate all our lives: life as part of God's church is always a costly life of discipleship.

This text we just read, the Great Commission, can almost sound like a glamorous call. But the same Jesus who commissioned his disciples to disciple, also told them about the often difficult work of discipleship: **Luke 14:27-33**.

As we consider the cost of this building it is a great reminder that we not forget the cost to follow Jesus. It demands everything. Following Jesus is not a great first step if your goal is worldly comfort and success. But none of those things can save you, none of those things love you. But on the cross Jesus did both for you.

And because of everything we've talked about, the cost we incur in discipleship is so unique from how we think of costs from a worldly standpoint. Look at **Matthew 13:44**.

What is Jesus' point in this parable? It costs everything to follow Jesus. But it costs nothing to be spent for such a treasure. And the truth is unless we are looking for the small and unseen places of costly discipleship, this large and visible place of discipleship will always be incomplete in what it is intended to accomplish.

I was speaking to a brother after church last Sunday who said he was trying to spend more time in concentrated prayer, and he was describing the difficulty that was behind it. What a beautiful difficulty. It is always difficult to grow as a disciple because if it was easy we wouldn't need Jesus. But the cost reminds us of the power of Jesus.

So be grateful that we have such a clear reminder in our own lives.

The fourth reason why I'm thankful for the building fund is that it reminds us that **Ministry has no end**.

Now this is something that might be nearer and dearer to my heart. I know that during this process there have been times where I have often thought, once this is done I can relax, we will have made it. And the thing behind the "once" has always moved: "once we've gone public with the ask," "once the pledged cards are turned in," "once financing is secure," "once we are in the building," "once the building is remodeled."

And in all this I've come to realize that our work of discipleship and ministry is never done in this life. There will always be something else for us to do.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible comes from Mark 6. In the preceding passages the disciples have been sent out two by two and they proclaimed the gospel, they healed, they preached, they cast out demons. And in Mark 6 they return to Jesus: **Mark 6:30-31**.

So the context is that Jesus realizes the disciples need rest, and he offers them rest because he knows they need it. But what follows is incredible.

Jesus takes them across the lake, and even more people on that side of the lake flock to see Jesus. And on a day when the disciples were supposed to rest, Jesus preaches to the people all day. And then when evening comes, the disciples say to Jesus, "Jesus, it's night, you brought us to this desolate place for us to rest, now send these people away so that they can get some food and we can get some rest."

But what did Jesus do? He said to them, "You feed them." Can you imagine how frustrating this might have been to the disciples! Not only are the disciples totally exhausted, but they don't have enough food. But then something amazing happens, the disciples bring Jesus a mere five loaves and two fish, and look at what happened: **Mark 6:41-44**.

You see when the disciples were hungry and dissatisfied, they thought that what they really needed was a good day off. But what they soon realized is that this Jesus supplies exactly what his people need in order to be full and satisfied in their ministry.

In Matthew 24 Jesus says that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world and then the end will come. You see one day we will have a rest from ministry and we will be ministered to by the shepherd himself in a perfect world. But until then it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we learn to look to the hand of our master and find rest in our ministry.

Don't overlook where you are right now. Just as our role is not done when we have a building, neither is your ministry over when you cross a milestone. So learn to rest in Jesus and labor in the power of his might.

And the last reasons why I'm thankful for the building fund is that it reminds us that **Jesus is our legacy**.

For this I want you to turn back to Psalm 20. Now remember in this song, God's people are petitioning God to care for their king, and in the success of their king is their success as a people. But look at what God in his wisdom caused these people to sing thousands of years before Jesus came: **Psalm 20:4-8**.

Did you notice what they hoped in? They didn't say: Some trust in chariots, some in horses, but we trust in our king.

Now why wouldn't they say that? In a Psalm which so vividly presents the corporate hope for Israel as the king of Israel that would be the natural conclusion. You see it was the king himself, King David, who wrote this psalm, and David knew his faults, he knew his weaknesses and he knew that if the people wanted a secure hope they needed a hope bigger than himself.

They needed to hope in the glorious name of God himself.

Brothers and sisters, it is in Jesus Christ where our hope and our king finally meet. It is in Jesus where we rejoice in the salvation of the king and set up our banners in the name of God.

Which means this, when this King commissions his people to go and make disciples of all nations, we know that for the glory of his name, God will fulfill all his petitions.

Because Jesus is our legacy as a church, we have all the reasons to be thankful even when it seems our own church is in uncertainty.

Let me close with a short story. In the late 1800's Korea was a place of immense fear of western influence. As a result it was a country dedicated to preventing any Christian influence from arriving and violently dedicated to eradicating what little influence was already in its borders.

One Welsh missionary named Robert Jermain Thomas was struck that despite this persecution, the Korean people were still zealous to read the Bible.

So he did a short exploratory journey into Korea and was quickly forced to withdraw due to persecution. But in 1866, he set sail aboard a commercial trading ship headed for Pyongyang with the goal to distribute Bibles.

Catastrophically, the Koreans and the traders were engulfed in a battle. And while the battle raged and the boat sank, Thomas handed out what little Bibles he had left to the Korean's on the shore. His last Bible was handed to a man who moments later beheaded Thomas in what was most likely one of the quickest and most fruitless mission trips in Christian history.

But, two decades later another missionary entered Korea. And to his surprise he discovered Christians. As he began to ask them about how they heard about Jesus the believers answered by telling him of a man named Robert.

Park Chun Won, the man who executed Thomas, knew almost immediately that he had killed a good man. And by God's grace, he began to read the Bible which was handed to him. And he was converted.

General Pak, who lead the attack, confiscated the rest of Thomas's Bibles and plastered the wall of his house with their pages as a sort of trophy of his conquest. But Pak was converted by his own trophies hanging on his wall. He read the wallpaper and his home soon became the first church in Pyongyang.

In the decades following Thomas' martyrdom, over 80,000 Korean's came to know Christ and now South Korea is the second largest missionary sending country in the world.

You see Korea soon forgot about Robert Jermain Thomas, but they would not soon forget about his Jesus. Sovereign Hope, we may not know what the name on a building might look like one year or ten years from now. But we know the name that hangs in the heavens which died for us and promised to build his church. If we are to be merely wallpaper in the history of Missoula, may we be wallpaper for Jesus Christ.

Because of this we know that every dollar raised, every disciple encouraged, every meek and feeble effort in evangelism is not lost to history, but stored in the great glorious plan of our God.

So let us take care to not forget the grace that God has given us in the building fund, and may we give our lives to his glory until he brings us into glory.