

January 27/28, 2006

*Stewardship Series*

## **We Reap What We Sow**

**Numbers 13-14**

Pastor Bryan Clark

We believe that nothing is impossible if you put your trust in God. That song was the theme song for the Billy Graham Crusades for several years in the mid seventies and was a song written by my dad, and in many ways was his declaration of faith in the midst of very difficult circumstances.

I grew up in a very unusual home. My dad was bedfast, was confined to a bed, and was totally blind. I never knew him any way but as you see him in the picture. He couldn't roll over by himself, couldn't sit up by himself. For twenty years my mom slept on a couch next to his bed in order to get up multiple times every night to take care of him. Every day for my dad was a day filled with excruciating pain and suffering, and for us that was our life. That's all I ever knew growing up.

My parents had a remarkable faith. I suppose they could have chosen to become angry and bitter at God, but that would have only cut them off from their only source of hope, and they knew that. Rather, they chose to trust God—that God would be sufficient for their daily needs.

Now when I'm talking about daily needs, I'm talking about God's supply to pay the bills every day, but more than that, God giving us what we needed spiritually and emotionally just to make it through another day.

We're talking about stewardship. If you're visiting with us, this is the third weekend in our series on stewardship. We're talking about what God has to say about money. We close our series today, and we move on to the book of Acts next week.

I would guess in a crowd this size there are a number of people who are just enduring these messages. You're thinking, *I'm glad this is the third week. If I can just live through one more, then it will all go away and I don't have to think about it again for another year.* And you are absolutely determined to keep God's hand out of your wallet. In your mind, the series will end and you can lay it aside, and you've survived another one. If you have a little bit of a cynical streak, you may even be thinking, *Well, they're trying to pay off this building and that's what this is about.*

I can assure you that is *not* the motive. As a matter of fact, I'm going to tell you right up front this morning I'm not going to pull any punches. I'm going to hit this hard but not hit you over the head with a ball bat. But rather, as a pastor who deeply cares for his people, I want you to understand when you're choosing not to give to God, you need to understand the choice you're making and the ramifications of that choice.

Think with me of what Jesus said in Matthew 6. Jesus commanded his people to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. What He's saying there is to steward or manage what God has given you for eternal purposes. Don't spend it all on the stuff that's here today and gone tomorrow. He goes on in that passage and says at the end of the day you can serve one of two masters. You're either going to serve God or you're going to serve money. And in serving money in essence what He says is you're going to serve yourself. There is no middle ground there. Either you're going to trust God or you're going to trust yourself for the daily provisions of life. And everybody has to make a choice.

Now initially as followers of Jesus, we would say, “Well, of course we trust God.” But how do we measure that? What’s the barometer? Well, Jesus tells us in that passage. He says, “Where your treasure is, that’s where your heart is.” In other words, what He is saying is where your treasure is, that’s who you trust. It’s easy to say I trust God, and we’re good at that; but at the end of the day, if you don’t trust God with the most practical, tangible things in your life, you don’t trust God. It is fair to say if we laid out your spending for this last year, that would be an accurate picture of your priorities. It would be an accurate picture of where your heart is. That’s what Jesus said. So you end up either trusting God or you trust yourself, and a measure of that is what you do with your money.

That passage goes on to say the decision you make will affect how you face the everyday issues of life. If you choose to trust yourself, then your life will be characterized by worry, anxiety and fear. But if you choose to trust God, knowing God is sufficient for your every need, then your days will be filled with a sense of calm and quiet and peace.

I think as Christians we have a tendency to treat God like He is kind of a genie in a bottle or a genie in a lamp. We kind of live our lives our own way. We run our own show. We do what we want with our money. But when we get into trouble, when we get in over our head, when we have a problem, we want to rub the lamp. And we expect God to come to the rescue and bail us out. Perhaps your theology of grace is that no matter how you live, no matter what choices you make, no matter how you spend your money, in your hour of need God is still obligated to come to your rescue because that’s His job. He’s God. That’s grace.

I have to tell you this morning if that’s your theology of grace, you are sadly mistaken and you are headed for a great disappointment. Actually, what the Bible teaches is what might be called the principle or the law of the sower and the reaper. The correlation between sowing and reaping is taught in both the Old and the New Testaments.

For example, in II Corinthians 9:6, Paul is clearly talking about money and he says,

**Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.** (II Corinthians 9:6-8, \*NASB)

That is the law of sowing and reaping. There is a direct correlation for what we reap as it relates to what we have sown. Think of it this way. If it is true that God is obligated to come to your rescue regardless of the choices you’ve made with your money, that passage is false because what Paul says is just the opposite—there *is* a direct correlation.

Now as we talk about giving this morning, just to try and put some framework on it, I want to think in terms of a tithe. Mark mentioned two weeks ago that there’s discussion about whether or not the Old Testament concept of a tithe carries over into the New Covenant, and people discuss that and argue it. But all scholars agree that in the New Testament if the concept of a tithe isn’t in effect, it would be more, never less. In other words, a tithe would still be a *minimal* standard because in the New Covenant, God has given more, not less. So we’re just going to say that a tithe is a word that means ten percent. Ten percent of gross is kind of the ballpark we’re talking about as a minimal standard for giving.

Basically what Paul is saying in II Corinthians 9:6 is if you choose to give generously to God, what you're saying to God is, "God, I trust you. I trust You to be my provider. I trust You to be my sufficiency, and that is my declaration of faith." And if that's what we say to God, then we can expect to reap accordingly. God will be our provider. God will be our sufficiency. The text clearly is talking about money, but goes on to say that it's not just money, but God's grace will abound in such a way that you will experience God's sufficiency in every area of your life, that God will be your sufficiency in your hour of need.

This is not because God needs your money. It's because God wants you to say in the most practical, pragmatic area of your life, "God, I trust You." If you choose to sow sparingly, then understand what you're saying to God is, "God, by the way, I just want You to know I don't trust You with the most practical, pragmatic areas of my life. Therefore, because I can't trust You, I just need You to know I'm going to take care of myself." And the text is clear: You sow sparingly, then you will reap sparingly, including in your hour of need.

So this is the question I want to propose to you this morning: If you are not giving to God, are you absolutely sure that's the arrangement you want with God? Do you really want to be saying to God, "God, I don't trust You; therefore, I am going to take care of myself." Because that is what you're saying.

Throughout the Bible there is often a rebuke to those who test God, but there is one passage in the Old Testament that is very unusual because in that one passage, God says something very unusual. He says, "Go ahead, test Me." It's a passage Mark spoke out of two weeks ago in Malachi 3. That's extremely rare for God to say that, but in a passage specifically dealing with bringing your tithes to God, He says, "Go ahead. Give it a shot. Test Me and see if you won't experience more of My goodness, more of My favor. See if your crops won't grow more."

You see, it's a big deal to God that we trust Him. And it's a really big deal to God when we as His people say in the most practical area of our life, "God, You *cannot* be trusted."

If you have a Bible, turn with me to Numbers 13. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers – fourth book in the Old Testament. God has always required His people to walk by faith. From Genesis to Revelation, God was always faithful to His people, but He never gives them what they need on a platter. There is always a requirement of faith. Whether you're talking about Abraham being a hundred years old before he has a son, whether you're talking about Joseph being thrown in a prison for a crime he didn't commit, whether you're talking about the children of Israel leaving Egypt and coming up to a dead end at the Red Sea with the Egyptian army right behind them, having no alternative but to trust God to divide the sea that they might have a way of escape. That's just a beautiful picture of how God has a way of working us into a corner where we have no way out but Him in order that we might experience the walk of faith.

In Chapter 13 of Numbers, the nation of Israel has finally arrived on the border of the land of promise. This is what they've been longing for. It's what they've been dreaming about ever since they left Egypt. This is the land flowing with milk and honey. This is the Promised Land. This is everything they ever wanted. This would now be home. This is their moment. So we pick it up in Chapter 13:1:

**Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, "Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel."** (Numbers 13:1-2a)

The relevant point in verse one is to recognize God said clearly, “I will give you this land.” Now that is repeated over and over and over again. It’s not that the nation of Israel got there and wondered what would happen. God said, “This is the land of promise. This is the land all the way back to what I promised Abraham. This is the land I will give you. Trust Me.”

The text goes on and describes the twelve spies who were chosen to go in and spy out the land. They get into the land and find it to be a land flowing with milk and honey. It’s a fabulous land. Everything is very positive. We pick it up in verse 27. The spies have come out. They’ve been in the land for 40 days. Now they give their report:

**... “We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large.”** (vs. 27-28)

Skip down to verse 30:

**Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.” But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.” So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size.”** (vs. 30-32)

You get the story. Twelve spies go in. When they come out, ten of them say, “This is a fabulous land, a land flowing with milk and honey. It’s everything we ever dreamed it would be. But there’s a problem. The inhabitants are really big and they’re really strong and they’re really fortified. Therefore, we don’t think we should go in. We should forfeit the land.”

Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies, step forth and say, “Wait a minute! What do you think you’re talking about? It is a fabulous land that God has promised! God has promised to give us the land. We just have to trust Him. He’ll be faithful! We say we go, and we take the land.”

This is the divide that Jesus talked about in Matthew 6. There are the ten who trust themselves, and there are the two that trust God, and how you view your ability to possess the land depends upon whether you trust in yourself or whether you trust in God. The lines have been drawn.

Chapter 14, verse 1:

**Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.” Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which**

**flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.” But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.** (vs. 1-10)

The ten spies convinced the majority saying, “We can’t take the land—they're too big, they're too strong. We’ll die, and our children will die! As a matter of fact, we probably need to just turn around and go back to Egypt. Let’s find a new leader, and let’s go back.” You have to understand they were saying, “We’re going to go back to slavery because we’d rather be slaves than to die in this land.”

Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb, they knew exactly what was being said, and they immediately come before the people and they tear their clothing as a way of saying, “What are you people saying? God has promised us this land. God will be with us. God will give us the victory. Don’t do this!” They understood that what the people were saying to God is, “God, we don’t trust You.” And Moses and Aaron understood the consequences would be severe for such a statement, and they're begging and pleading with the people to rethink this and to have the faith to go in and possess the land God promised.

But rather than the people listening and responding, they pick up stones to silence their voices because they refused to trust God. That’s maybe how some of you feel about the preacher talking about stewardship. *Let’s take him out and stone him.* Rough crowd!

And then a very dramatic thing is said in verse 10 in the middle of this discussion where the majority won't trust God and they want to go back to slavery, and this group of four are pleading with the people to trust God. In the midst of this discussion, the presence of God comes and lights up the tabernacle, and it becomes evident that God is here. God is going to speak. God has something to say about this. What I want us to see in this text is how God feels about being told by His people, “We don’t trust You.” Verse 11:

**The LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they.”** (vs. 11-12)

Now I’m not suggesting that if you don’t give to God, He’s going to strike you with pestilence. But I do want you to see how God feels about not being trusted by His own people. He says, **“How long will this people spurn me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?”** From Egypt to this moment God had demonstrated His faithfulness over and over and over and over again. And now they're on the perimeter of the land of promise and all they had to do is trust God and take the land—a land flowing with milk and honey. Yet, they refuse to trust Him, and God responds with very strong language.

Starting in verse 13, Moses intercedes. Moses pleads on behalf of the people, and says, “God, for the sake of Your reputation, don’t destroy them.” We’ll pick it up again in verse 20 when God speaks once again.

**So the LORD said, “I have pardoned them according to your word.”** (vs. 20)

In other words, God said, “Okay Moses, I hear your prayer and I’m going to answer it. I’m not going to wipe them out. But indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.” That’s another way of saying, “But I will not be treated this way by My people.” When God’s people fail to trust Him, it tarnishes the reputation of God. And God says, “My glory will fill this earth and I will not be treated this way by My people.” In other words, what He’s saying is there is a law of sowing and reaping, and if that’s what they’re going to sow, then here’s what they’re going to reap.

**“Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.”** (vs. 22-24)

God says, “Okay Moses, I hear you and I’m going to answer you. I’m not going to wipe them out. But here’s the deal. Because of how they have treated Me, they will not set one foot in the land. They’ve missed their chance. A fabulous land flowing with milk and honey; it’s a land that I’ve always wanted for them. All they had to do was trust Me, and it was theirs. But they wouldn’t trust Me, so this is the consequence—not one of them will set one foot in the land.”

The text will go on to say that for the next forty years they will wander aimlessly in the wilderness. And they will wander in the wilderness until every single one of that generation dies. And the next generation comes up, and God will give them the chance to trust Him and enter the land, but for this generation their chance is lost – with the exception of Joshua and Caleb because they had a different spirit. They trusted God, so God said, “Everybody is going to die except these two. And they trusted Me, so I’m going to let them enter the land.”

This is the law of sowing and reaping. There is a consequence to our choices. You trust God and God pours out His blessing. You say to God, “I can’t trust You,” then there is a consequence to that.

In verses 36, 37, and 38 we’re told that God specifically pulled aside the ten leaders who were responsible for convincing the majority not to trust God and He struck them with a plague and they died. Verse 39:

**When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, “Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised.” But Moses said, “Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you.”** (vs. 39-42)

In my opinion, that’s one of the most sobering paragraphs in the entire Old Testament. What happens is this: Moses declares to the people, “Okay, your choice was not to trust God, so these are the consequences: For the next forty years you’ll wander aimlessly in the wilderness, and there you will die. And not one of you will set foot into the land except Joshua and Caleb.” And the people grieved. They mourned. That was horrible. They slept on it, and in the morning they said, “You know, what we decided was really bad. We’ve changed our mind. We want to go in.” And God said, “No. No second chances here.”

The realization that at that point God said, “You know, this is the land I wanted to give you—a land flowing with milk and honey. It’s everything I ever wanted for you. But because of your consistent refusal to not trust Me, no second chance on this one. You’ve missed your shot.” That is the law of sowing and reaping. There is a consequence to the choices we make, and this text helps us understand how God feels about being told by His people, “We don’t trust You.”

Now some of you may be thinking, “Yeah, but that’s Old Testament. That’s the Old Covenant. We live in the New Covenant—it’s different.” No, it’s not. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. How God felt about not being trusted by His people thousands of years ago is exactly the same as how He feels about it today.

As a matter of fact, in I Corinthians 10, Paul is actually telling some of these Old Testament stories. And he includes this very story that we have just looked at, and it follows with this statement, “These stories were written for your instruction that you would not make the same mistake they made.” Clearly, in the New Testament Paul is saying that God feels the same way today as He did then about His people saying to Him, “I don’t trust You.”

At some point we have to understand that it’s easy to talk about faith and we’re good at that. But faith isn’t something you talk about; faith is something you do. And if you cannot trust God with the most practical, basic, tangible area of your life, then you do not trust God. And what you’re saying to God is, “God, You just can’t be trusted with the most practical areas of my life, so I’ve decided I’m going to trust myself.”

Patti and I have been married for a little over 25 years. And I can say without hesitation that over those 25 years, we have without exception always taken at least 10 percent of our paychecks and immediately given that back to God. And there were times when that was really hard. My first ten years in ministry I worked a second job the entire time just to keep the bills paid, and from a human standpoint you might think, “You know, why don’t you just keep that ten percent and buy your kids some shoes?” Because that would have been a declaration, “God, I need to trust myself to be my provider, to be my sufficiency.” And when times are hard that’s the last thing I want to say.

I don’t tell you that so you can be impressed. I tell you that for one simple reason: Because for the first 20 years of my life the truth that was driven into the deepest part of my being is that God has to be our provider and our sufficiency, or we simply will not survive. Every single day of my life for the first 20 years of my life I was aware of the fact that without God’s sufficiency, we will not survive this. That’s a truth that goes to the deepest part of my being. And the thought of ever declaring to God, “God, I don’t trust You. I want to do this myself,” doesn’t even show up on my radar. As a matter of fact, the thought of saying that to God just makes me sick to my stomach because I know what life can be like. And in those moments, the last thing I would have ever wanted to say to God is, “God, I don’t trust You. I’m going to handle this myself.” I can’t even process that.

I believe with all my heart that on a day-to-day basis, the source of my strength, the source of my competence, the source of my calm, the source of my peace is knowing that I have carefully and systematically in the most practical area of my life said to God, “God, I trust You, not me. And I know no matter what I face, You’ll be my provider. You’ll be my sufficiency. You’ll be adequate for my every need. So there’s no need for fear. There’s no need for worry.” I have no question God will be there for me.

The question I want to pose to you this morning as we close is if you choose to not give to God, do you understand what you're saying? It is true, as of this morning the Stewardship Series comes to an end, and next week we go back to the book of Acts. But please understand the issue does not go away. Do you understand that you are declaring to God, "God, I can't trust You in the most practical area of my life; therefore, I'm going to need to trust myself. I will be my own provider. I will be my own sufficiency." Are you absolutely sure that's the arrangement you want to make with God? Because if it is, I can assure you, in your hour of need you will come to the realization you have made a terrible, terrible mistake.

*Our Father, we are thankful this morning that You are a God of grace. But Lord, if what Paul said in II Corinthians 9:6 is true, if there is a relationship between sowing and reaping, then we have to understand that grace doesn't mean You bail us out no matter what the choices are that we've made. Lord, clearly Your word says to experience Your proficiency and Your provision for every area of need in our lives and to experience the fullness of Your power and Your presence on a daily basis, we have to be willing to sow bountifully. Lord, my prayer this morning for each one of us would be that we would understand the law of sowing and reaping. And Lord, by faith we would declare in the most practical area of our lives that we want to trust You and not ourselves. Lord, may it be so, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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January 27/28, 2006

**Study Questions**  
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**We Reap What We Sow**  
**Numbers 13-14**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

**Opening Discussion**

1. Is it possible to trust God with certain areas of our lives without trusting God with our money? Why or why not?
2. Does grace mean that God will always be there to bail us out regardless of our attitudes or behaviors?
3. Is money an accurate barometer of whether we are trusting ourselves as god or trusting God as God? Is there a better barometer?

**Bible Study**

1. Read Matthew 6:19-34. What is the relationship between money and heart?  
  
Can God have your heart if He doesn't have your money according to Jesus?
2. According to Jesus, what is the relationship between our daily needs and which master we serve?

Why is worry about daily provision an issue of faith? (v. 30)

Is Jesus saying that when we serve money (ourselves) as master we will be anxious about life because deep down we know we're not adequate for the job? What's the solution?

In what way is "laying up treasures in heaven" an issue of faith which ultimately determines who we trust, God or ourselves?

3. Read II Corinthians 9:6-10. Is there a correlation between what we sow and what we reap?

What does this mean?

Compare this to what we studied in Malachi 3:8-12 two weeks ago. Is it possible to "rob God" of the offering He is due and still experience a meaningful Christian life?

4. Read Numbers 13-14. God has always required His people to live by faith. God promised to give Israel the Promised Land but they would have to take it by faith. Did the people choose to trust God or themselves for the land?

How did God respond to their unwillingness to trust Him?

5. When we choose not to trust God with our money, we are saying to God He can't be trusted for our daily provision. We are saying we would rather trust ourselves than God. I Corinthians 10:1-11 tells us that stories such as this one in the Old Testament are written for our example that we might not make the same mistakes Israel made. Does it matter to God if we choose to trust Him or not?

How might this correlate to sowing and reaping?

Can we expect that God will bail us out in our time of crisis if we've clearly determined by our behavior that we trust ourselves more than we trust Him?

Was the nation of Israel allowed to enter the Promised Land after they learned of the consequences of their lack of faith?

## **Application**

1. We may tend to think that giving God our money is not really that big of a deal. However, what it reflects is a lack of trust in God. According to Jesus we can't have it both ways. Either we trust God or we don't, and money is a tangible means to measure whom we trust. If you are currently not giving financially to God, you are telling God He can't be trusted. Are you sure that's the message you want to communicate to God?
2. Part of the concept of sowing and reaping is recognizing there are consequences to our choices. If God will supply when we sow bountifully, isn't it fair to say He will supply sparingly when we sow sparingly?

Is that really the arrangement you want with God in your hour of need?

3. If you are sowing bountifully to God, don't you have every reason to believe God will deal bountifully with you and care for you through the challenges and trials of life? Giving generously to God is the pathway to peace and confidence to face life's challenges.