

**Deuteronomy 26:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:20; & 16:1-4**  
**Second Sunday Morning of Easter, April 18, 2004**

On the evenings of Sunday and Monday, May 2 and 3 NBC will be showing a miniseries called "10.5." This is a disaster epic about massive earthquakes that topple the Golden Gate Bridge and cause the ocean to sweep over Los Angeles, submerging everything west of Barstow, California. Frantic authorities will attempt to stop the temblors by fusing the San Andreas Fault with five atomic explosives, but it won't work. To real-life seismologists who've already seen "10.5," the movie doesn't work, either.

I grew up back in the late 60s and the early 70s when all those disaster movies were making a run. Remember some of those? "Airport", "The Poseidon Adventure", and "Earthquake" are a few. I've always been fascinated with earthquakes. Perhaps that is because I was reared about 90 miles due east of the New Madrid Fault. Some of the most powerful earthquakes ever occurred along that fault line back in 1812 that caused the Mississippi River to flow backwards for several days and rang church-bells as far away as Philadelphia, PA. Even though experts say the movie that will air two weeks from today contains "gross inaccuracies,"<sup>1</sup> I'll probably watch it because of my fascination with earthquakes.

One thing about earthquakes that fascinates me is the "aftershocks." Aftershocks are those quakes of lesser magnitude following a large earthquake in the same area. Something usually comes after the "big one." I'm also intrigued with the concept of "aftereffects." An aftereffect is an effect following its cause after some delay. An aftereffect of those quakes along the New Madrid Fault in 1812 was the creation of Reel Foot Lake in western Tennessee.

Easter continues. As I remarked last Sunday morning, Easter Day is everyday. So the celebration of Resurrection never stops. One can talk about the aftershocks of Easter. It's interesting that an earthquake is associated with Easter in Matthew's account. Matthew 27:51 notes that at the moment of Jesus' death "*the earth shook,...*" On Easter Sunday morning, Matthew 28:2 observes that "*suddenly there was a great earthquake;...*" It may have been one of those aftershocks from Good Friday. To put it in a theological tone: the earth has been shaking ever since with the result being some aftereffects of Easter. And I want to give some attention to one of those aftereffects. So you'll know, there are no "gross inaccuracies" in the script.

An aftereffect of Easter is the offering. OK I hear you. "He's using Easter to get on us about money." No. I'm not going to "get on you" about money. The truth is we're doing rather well right now. Now don't take that as an invitation to ease up, though! What I want to do is encourage you to keep on doing what you are doing and then some.

Last Tuesday I learned from The Barna Group, which is an independent cultural analysis and strategic consulting firm that studies cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, that giving to churches rose substantially in 2003. The total amount of money donated to all non-profit groups, including churches, synagogues, mosques, or some other house of worship, rose from a mean of \$991.00 in 2002 to \$1,079.00 in 2003. That's an eight percent increase. And churches continue to be the dominant recipients of people's generosity. In total, about three out of every four dollars went to churches, synagogues, mosques, or some other religious worship centers. Examined as a percentage of household income, contributions represented about 2.2% of a household's gross income.

Compared to this time last year, Tabernacle is ahead by nearly \$20,000.00 in actual giving. This time last year, we had received only 84% of what should have been received. This year, we've received 92%. We are also being good stewards as well. This time last year, we were over-spending the receipts by nearly \$20,000.00. As of Friday, we are under-spending receipts by nearly \$41,000.00. The good news? Even though we are under-spending, the ministry of mission is taking place throughout this community and the world. I commend you for your discipline and exhort us to maintain the discipline and even be more disciplined when it comes to the offering. We can if we'll focus on the offering as one of the aftereffects of Easter.

Did you notice that immediately after this great text on Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says, ***“Now about the money being collected for Christians in Jerusalem:...” (16:1)***. It seems that Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that an aftereffect of Easter is maintaining faithfulness to the offering. The same is true for us. The phrase, ***“money being collected”*** in verse 1 of the New Living Translation, translates one Greek word rendered literally *“collection.”* This was a gathering of funds for a specific purpose: to relieve the suffering of Christians in Judea, namely in the Jerusalem church.

The reason for the need in Jerusalem was the product of a series of factors that included the famine of the late ‘40s and the relative poverty level in Jerusalem, which resulted in a large number of poor, which flocked into the early church. This collection was a major undertaking of Paul’s Third Missionary Journey. The particulars are fleshed out here in 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8-9, and Romans 15. Paul wanted them to make good on their commitment. I don’t think it is an accident that he speaks to this right after this lofty discourse on Resurrection. Paul saw commitment to the offering as an aftereffect of Easter.

Resurrection calls us to make good on all of our commitments – the collection or the offering included. Not a person in here will argue with the reality of Resurrection’s power. I don’t think anyone will dare to challenge 1 Corinthians 15:20: ***“But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again.”*** Nobody is going to take issue with that. Well, maybe I should not be so naive.

Most of us don’t take issue with “the fact” of Christ’s Resurrection. And because He has become the first of that great harvest, we can make good on the commitments that we’ve made and the ones that we’ll make in the future. Surely we are ever mindful of the reality that to follow the Resurrected Jesus demands an unwavering commitment in every facet of life. I would never suggest that the offering or the collection is the only demand placed upon us. It is one of many features in following the Resurrected One through all of life. Every feature of following Jesus demands commitment and part of that commitment acknowledges the need to plainly demonstrate it with an offering as an act of gratitude. At least that’s what the intent of Deuteronomy 26 is.

Charles read this ancient word, which is wedged in the framework of an explication of the Tenth Commandment. These words connected material blessings with Israel’s story with the Lord on the one hand, and, on the other, the just responsibility to share those blessings with the defenseless, needy, and unfortunate. A careful reading of the Old Testament, especially the book of Deuteronomy, reveals that Israel was never permitted the luxury of believing that its material security was a product of its own doing or that such security came without responsibility. In many ways, Israel’s understanding of its relation to its material prosperity was more complex, more subtle and healthier than the understanding of that relationship held by many, largely secular, societies today.

Let’s put it in relationship to Easter. An aftereffect of entering the Promised Land was to express gratitude by taking some of the ***“first of all the fruit of the ground...put it in a basket” (v. 2, NRSV)*** and offering it to the Lord through the priest at the place the Lord chooses. It is a wonderful liturgy that prepares one to celebrate with worship leaders, strangers, and all who gather in the Land what God has done in giving the Land and the ***“bounty” (v. 11)*** that comes from it.

In the same way, Paul gave instructions to the Corinthians. An aftereffect of Easter is to express gratitude by giving an offering. Listen again to what the Apostle said. ***“On every Lord’s Day,”*** [Sunday that is], ***“each of you should put aside some amount of money in relation to what you have earned and save it for this offering. Don’t wait until I get there and then try to collect it all at once”(v. 2)***. Some of you give every week. You’re able to do that because your income is steady, it is constant. Others of you give once a month because you are paid monthly. Others give three or four times a year. And some of you give once a year. The point is: you follow a discipline that comes as an aftereffect of Easter. You employ a principal that enables you to celebrate what God has done for you in allowing you to enter Resurrection life just as our Hebrew ancestors entered a promised land.

That to which it comes down is nothing more than grace. Grace is a gift. In fact, the words translated *gift* and *grace* in the New Testament come from the exact same word in Greek. What the Corinthians would be doing in giving the offering was bestowing a grace upon God just as He had bestowed one upon them in the Resurrection. And when one has received grace, its aftereffects result in grace being extended to God and His humanity.

One of those aftereffects, really an aftershock, took place two weeks ago. On Tuesday of Holy Week, I returned from the Holy Week ecumenical lunch and worship at Trinity Baptist Church. Upon entering the office, Drucilla Peters, who was answering the phone that day while Paula was on vacation, said, "Jimmy, this is David. He would like to see you." We went to my office. I had no idea who he was. Never seen or met him. The same was true for David. He had never met me. Had no idea who I was. He shared with me an experience that he had had.

David was working his way through Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life. He said that God had impressed upon him a mission: to give 100 copies of that book to people he did not know. He said, "Last night, for whatever reason, the Lord impressed me to give a copy of this book to the minister of Tabernacle Baptist Church. Are you familiar with this book." I felt the grin come across my face and shared with him what we had just concluded. It was obvious that he was taken aback that I had read and studied and guided a small group over a six-week period and already had a copy. He was thinking I had no idea what the book was or that I was opposed to it if I did. He said, "Can I give it to you anyway?" I said, "Sure you can." Again, he it was obvious he was taken aback, thinking, perhaps, I would refuse and insist he give it to another. I gladly received his gift. He was now at ease. We began to talk about various things. I asked him to tell me about himself. He politely declined, saying, "All you need to know is that my name is David." He said, "You think I'm crazy, don't you?" I said, "Not really. You're having some kind of spiritual experience that is rooted in Christ and you're expressing it through an act of generosity. It is something called grace."

As he got ready to leave, he said he had something else he wanted to give me. He pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and said, "I'm trying to quit smoking. It is so hard. I pray I smoked my last cigarette just before I came in here." He took that pack and dropped it in a white gift bag. He said, "I'm giving you this. I need to surrender this smoking thing to God and you are His representative." Inside the bag were several packs of cigarettes. He stood, embraced me, and said, "I hope you have a great Easter!" I said, "You too." He left. His presence reminded me that the aftershocks and aftereffects are still occurring and will continue to occur. Now that's a 10.5 for real!

David offered grace to me and I to him. He left a book that he keeps in his heart and an addiction that he wishes to abandon. I received his book with gratitude and became the symbolic caretaker of his addiction. Both of us extended grace to God in our offerings.

It is like those ancient Hebrews who extended gratitude to God for bringing them into the Promised Land by giving the first of all the fruit of the ground to the Lord. It's also like those Corinthians who were exhorted to set aside an amount of money each week as an expression of gratitude to God for bringing them into Resurrection life as a result of Christ being the first of that great harvest.

Every time you and I drop the money we set aside into the offering plate, we're extending grace to the Davids and to ourselves. More importantly, we're extending it to God as an expression of gratitude for a Land beyond this world that is Promising, indeed, and a life filled with Resurrection for the claiming right now. What an aftereffect!

So what are you offering today? Christ gave His life for you and me. What have we really given Him? There are many Davids out there who need to extend their grace and they need people like us to receive their grace. And they need from us some grace too.

While there are “gross inaccuracies” in that miniseries “10.5,” be assured there aren’t any in the saga of resurrection. Jesus is alive. He’s out there making a difference in somebody’s life through people like you and me. He’s still shaking the world. The aftershocks continue and the aftereffects of His Presence are granting graceful life to all who will believe. May the aftereffect of the offering, draw us closer to Him and to each other and to all of humanity. So how much have you set aside today?

**Sermon by Dr. Jimmy Gentry, Pastor  
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**All scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Living Translation, 1997.**

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Reich, “Scientists Find Fault with NBC’s Earthquake Miniseries,” [The Seattle Times](#) (seattletimes.com), Sunday, April 11, 2004.