**Series:** The Blessed Life **| Title:** The Principle of Firsts

**Scripture:** Exodus 13:1-16 ESV

**Opening Line: As we continue in our series ‘The Blessed Life’, I want to talk to you about The Principle of Firsts.**

**Sermon Introduction**

This is a spiritual principle that is throughout the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

* I will say this, out of all the principles we have looked at in this series on giving, this principle right here is the one that has had the greatest impact on how Kenzi and I view generosity.

**Read: Exodus 13:1-2, 11-13 ESV**

*The Lord said to Moses,**“Consecrate to me all the* ***firstborn****. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast,* ***is mine.****” (This is extremely emphatic language. And why Kenzi and I dedicated Cordell to the Lord)...When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you,* ***you shall set apart*** *to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the* ***firstborn*** *of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's.* ***Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck.*** *Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.*

**Main Thought: The Firstborn Must Be Redeemed Or Sacrificed.**

What we just read was the principle of firsts. The first of everything we have is God’s and it is set apart (declared holy).

* We know that actually everything we have is God’s, not just the first, but He requires us to give the first of what we have directly back to Him. That’s why when we tithe, we give the first 10% to God. And God said that 10% is set apart for Him.
* Last week we talked about why it was 10% that God requires and not 2%, 5%, or 20%, but now let's look at why God also requires us to give our firsts…because the firsts must be redeemed or sacrificed.

In order to help the Israelites understand this principle, God gives them an example. He talks about two animals, a donkey (unclean/cursed) and the lamb (clean/holy/blessed).

* So the firstborn donkey has to be made clean and the only way for it to be made clean is by redeeming it with a clean animal, which is the lamb that is sacrificed so the donkey can be made clean.
  + So the donkey was unclean, and in order to make it clean it must be redeemed by the sacrifice of the clean lamb, otherwise you shall break its neck and you lose out on the blessings of the donkey.

Remember when I said that tithing was personal to God because Jesus was God’s tithe?

* Look right here. Jesus is our first-fruits. He is the lamb that was sacrificed so we, the donkey could be redeemed!

Let me put it in a way you can easily understand and remember…**you were an ass and needed Jesus to redeem you!**

* I’m joking with you because I don’t want you to miss the importance of this principle. Without Jesus you would be unclean. You wouldn’t be holy and you wouldn’t be righteous. Without Jesus you would be broken and discarded, never fulfilling God’s plan and purpose for your life.
* But Jesus, the lamb of God, came and sacrificed himself so you and I could be made clean!

God made a decision out of his love for the world to give His one and only son as first-fruits so you and I could be redeemed.

* But God’s decision also shows us the power that this principle of firsts can have in every area of our lives. That’s what we are going to take a look at next. The decision and the power of the principle of firsts.

**Supporting Thought: The Decision Of Our Firsts.**

Each one of us has one of two choices when it comes to our first-fruits. We can bring them to God, or we can steal them from God.

* If you want to live a blessed life, you have to bring your first-fruits to God. It’s not enough to just bring him something, you have to bring him your firsts.

**Read: Genesis 4:2-7 NLT**

*When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a* ***gift to the Lord****. Abel also brought a gift—****the best portions of the firstborn*** *lambs from his flock. The Lord* ***accepted*** *Abel and his gift, but he did* ***not accept*** *Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected. “Why are you so angry?” the Lord asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”*

* The only difference between Cain and Abel’s gifts was that Abel brought the best, the first-fruits and Cain did not.

You may be thinking, “Well that doesn’t seem fair. They both gave, they both sacrificed.” But remember, God doesn’t want your money or your possessions, he wants your heart. And Cain’s heart was not in the right place.

* This also shows us something about God that he cannot do. And this is important because a lot of times we say God can do anything, but he can’t.

When you look at the attributes of God, his character, God can’t change (immutability). If God could change he could get better, and God can’t get better because He is perfect. He can’t think like us (omniscience).

* Likewise, God can’t be second in your life. He has to be first because God is first, and you and I are created in His image, which means that we are created to also put Him first. And Cain didn’t do that. Cain did not honor God as the first person in His life.

Remember, where your treasure is there your heart lies also. Jesus knew what he was talking about when He said that!

* The first thing that gets your attention in the morning is what gets your first-fruits. Is it Facebook or is it the word of God?
* The first place you go at the beginning of each week is where your priorities are. Is it to your living room to relax, up on the mountain, or is it the house of God?
* Likewise, the first place you give your money is where your heart is at. Are you making the decision to give the firsts of everything you have to the Lord or somewhere else?

We all have a decision to make. Are we going to give our firsts to God, or give him our leftovers?

* And I’m not just talking about your money here. Remember, it’s a blessed life, not a blessed pocket book!

There is something so special and refreshing about the first thing you do in the morning being time in prayer with the Father and reading the word of God.

* There’s something about coming to church that just resets my week and reminds me to put God first. It brings order to my life.

Likewise, when Kenzi and I made the decision to honor God with the first of our income, our finances have truly been redeemed.

* That doesn’t mean we don’t struggle and that we have all the money in the world. But it does mean that we don’t stress over paying the bills like we used to. We aren’t confused about where our money is going. We aren’t wondering how we are going to make it every week. Because we know that we have given the first 10% to the Lord and the other 90% has been redeemed!

It’s important for us to understand that it is not the 10% portion of the tithe that enacts the blessing. The 10% is the test. It’s the faith it takes to give the first of your increase that enacts the blessing. Because you are trusting that God can do more with a blessed 90% than you can do with a cursed 100%.

We have to make a decision with our firsts. Are we going to bring the first-fruits of everything we have to the Lord, or are we going to rob it from Him. And when you bring it to Him, you will recognize the power that the principle of firsts can have in your life.

**Supporting Thought: The Power Of Firsts.**

Jump back with me if you will to Exodus 13. Knowing what we know now, I want to re-read what we read earlier to capture this principle of firsts, and then we will read the verses that come after it as well.

**Read: Exodus 13:1-2, 11-13, 14-16 NLT**

*The Lord said to Moses,**“Consecrate to me all the* ***firstborn****. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast,* ***is mine.****” (This is extremely emphatic language. And why Kenzi and I dedicated Cordell to the Lord)...When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you,* ***you shall set apart*** *to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the* ***firstborn*** *of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's.* ***Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck.*** *Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem…And in the future, your children will ask you, ‘What does all this mean?’ Then you will tell them, ‘With* ***the power of his mighty hand****, the Lord brought us out of Egypt, the place of our slavery. Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, so the Lord killed all the firstborn males throughout the land of Egypt, both people and animals. That is why I now sacrifice all the firstborn males to the Lord—except that the firstborn sons are always bought back.’ This ceremony will be like a mark branded on your hand or your forehead. It is a reminder that* ***the power of the Lord’s mighty hand brought us out of Egypt****.”*

* What is God saying here?

Let me put it in context for you. There will be a day when your son grows up and takes over the ranch. And one day, he’s going to be looking over the books and saying, “uh dad…I don’t know if you noticed, but we’re in the ranching business right? Well last year we had 47 heifers give birth for the first time, and I don’t know if it was an oversight or what, but you killed all 47 of those calves. Why did you do that?”

* And when that time comes, you pull your son aside and say, “Son, I need to tell you something. We weren’t always in the ranching business. Before, our family was enslaved, but God, and the power of His mighty hand, the Lord brought me out of bondage. Therefore, I gladly give to the Lord what is rightfully His.

And I know that there will be a day when Cordell sees me pulling up the computer to pay our tithe for the month, and he’ll probably say something like, “Uh dad, that’s a lot of money! Why are you giving that to the church?” And I pray that I am reminded of this passage of scripture, so I can say, “Son, there’s something I need to tell you. Daddy wasn’t always a pastor. Daddy was a slave to sin. But God, with his mighty hand, delivered me out of bondage, out of a life full of lust and pornography, and out of the anger, hatred and resentment I had in my heart. Therefore, I gladly give to God what is rightfully His.

**Closing Thoughts:** I’m not kidding when I say that this principle right here, the principle of firsts, will radically change your life. If you want to live a Blessed Life, watching the blessings of God on full display, give Him your firsts.

* The first of your increase, your income. The first part of your day and week. Give Him your firsts and watch the power of God bless your family for generations to come.

**Call/Challenge: Will you stand with me this morning. As we have been doing every week of this series, as we go into a time alone with God and sing this worship song, will you simply ask God in your heart, ‘Lord, what is it that you are speaking to me?’ Let’s give Him the firsts of our worship.**