

Wesleyan Methodist Church Sunday 27th July 2014

Generosity #2 Giving Away God's Resources

Gen 22:1-12; Matthew 13:44; Ephesians 1:3-4; Romans 11:35-36

Intro: An interesting week...

Well I've had an interesting week. My dad was taken to the Royal Melb Hospital last weekend for an operation. He is now home and improving each day. This has meant two trips to Melbourne as well as trying to fit in my usual commitments.

In amongst all this God has been speaking to me powerfully about generosity. Last week Alan spoke on being 'Generous People' and we discussed it at Home Group on Tuesday night and of course I knew I was addressing the topic this Sunday so all week I've been asking the Lord what it means to be generous. As I've asked that question God has put some really interesting challenges in front of me as if he was saying, 'You say you want to be generous, then this is what I mean by being generous.'

Our generosity begins with an understanding of God and what he has done. What is...

1. Our response to a loving God?

If we understand God as giving and sustaining all life and all we have comes ultimately from him then we must conclude that he is a loving and generous God. In fact love produces generosity. God has blessed us so much. Ephesians 1:3 says, 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.' Expand by noting the whole passage 1:3-14.

How can we look squarely into the face of God's amazing love for us and not feel compelled to respond back with love and gratitude. First and foremost God wants our complete devotion and allegiance. He is a jealous God and rightly so because he is the one true God with no equals or rivals. As our creator he has the right to expect our devotion.

There is a problem. Instead of being devoted to God we can easily be seduced by the world's ways. We can be tempted materially, socially, sexually and ethically into believing what the world offers is better than what God offers. If we are consumed by the need to have things and get things we will struggle to be generous. If our source of contentment is found in fulfilling our selfish desires we will miss completely our reason for being here.

Jesus said how hard it was for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Let me rephrase: How hard it is for a western person to enter the KOG. You see we are all rich by world standards. May our prosperity not be a barrier to entering the KOG. The surest way to have the right attitude with our wealth is to be generous with it. 'If you are not prepared to give it away then consider it stolen.'

Our generosity begins by learning to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. How do we go loving God? Are we generous with our love back to him or are we stingy and half-hearted? Do we divide our allegiance to him by placing other things on the same level?

Jesus said all of the commandments could be summed up by loving God with all your heart and loving others as much as you love yourself. We could conclude that...

2. At the heart of generosity is others... not ourselves!

Recently some of us went to Hillsong in Sydney. Now there were aspects of the Hillsong conference that didn't grab me but there was much that did challenge me. One of the things that really struck me was the army of volunteers who generously gave up a week to serve others. The slogan on their tee-shirts said it all: 'Love All, Serve All'.

This wasn't just show, these volunteers went out of their way to make sure all conference goers had the best experience possible. They served generously and with a smile. You couldn't help being impacted by these un-named and largely un-acknowledged people. Their presence and ministry was felt and set the tone for the conference.

Last week Alan finished his message by say how contagious generosity can be and encouraged us all to be genuinely nice to one another. I'm sure I wasn't the only one who sensed a buzz around the room as we put that into practice. You could see people greeting, affirming and ministering to one another. Did it encourage you to continue being that way? I hope so.

Being generous is about putting others before ourselves.

Rhonda and I were very blessed to get to know a beautiful older couple while we lived in Healesville. Describe them.

- Like mentors
- Not a part of our church
- They generously support our ministry; practically, financially and prayerfully: Expand.

Instead of being selfish with their time and resources they were exceedingly generous. On one occasion they gave us a generous amount of money. I was embarrassed by this particularly knowing they only lived off a pension. Their response was they had all they needed and God had blessed them so much. They told us the more they gave away the more God seemed to bless them with. What an inspiration they have been to our family. Even though they reside in a retirement home they continue to pray for us and our ministry.

Our friends had the attitude that all they had belonged to God and they had the privilege of giving away God's resources.

So you may ask...

3. If God owns everything then what do I own?

It is a good question. How would you answer it? I think the only thing we really own is the right to choose because God has given us that choice. We can either choose God's ways or our own. You only have to go to a funeral to be confronted by the fact that we can't take any of our worldly possessions with us; the only thing we really have at that point is the results of our choice to trust in God or not.

Abraham had this choice. On one side he had his most precious possession, his only son Isaac whom God had promised would be the beginning of a mighty nation and on the other side he was asked to trust God and sacrifice his son.

On one side was his natural instinct to trust in what he could see and on the other God was asking him to do something totally ridiculous. What would he trust, his own judgement or Gods? This was a massive test for Abraham a test that he needed to pass in order for God to trust him with the responsibility of being the father of a great nation.

It was a test of obedience. God was saying, 'if you trust me Abraham I will bless you so that you will be a blessing to others.' We could say that Abraham was prepared to give God everything and in return God was mighty generous and blessed him. Abraham trusted a generous God and was blessed generously.

Our passage from Romans says, "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?"³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

We can't add anything to God or give him anything that he doesn't have yet God asks us to abandon all for his sake. If he doesn't need our stuff why does he ask for it? Because he wants our obedience and when he has our obedience he blesses us.

Like God testing Abraham He is still keen to test us in obedience and generosity....

4. (A test in obedience and generosity)

On Monday I was in Melbourne waiting to see my dad after his operation. I had some time so I organised to meet our architect for our church extensions. I boarded a tram and I'd just sat down when a man came from behind and asked me for some money. Tell the story:

- Homeless and hungry
- Buy you some food
- Heard some of his story
- 15 min to make an impact
- Our conversation at the table: God's grace
- In jail and found God. 10 years away from him but coming back. Knew he had to ask me.

- Was blown away by God's ways. I was too.
- I was \$50 short but much more blessed than he could imagine.
- God had taught me a lesson in obedience and generosity

Is it possible to out-give God?

I read the other day, 'True giving is not an economic exchange; it is a generative act. It does not subtract from what we have; it multiplies the effect we can have in the world.'¹ Giving leaves the giver and the recipient as different people.

Now hear me right, I'm not advocating that Christians have a right to be prosperous like something we earn because we follow Jesus nor am I saying that to follow Jesus means having no material wealth. What God wants is a heart that is not compromised by what we have. The best way to have an un-divided heart is to be generous.

Application for our church

How can we create a culture of generous giving in our church? The other night I couldn't sleep because I was grappling with this issue.

Then I had this thought; I wonder what would happen if we all decided to increase our giving by 50%?

- What could we do with that extra income as a church?
 - Well we could employ a youth pastor for two days per week
 - We could give more to missions
 - And we could almost pay back the cost of our extension in 10 years.

But hang on what would happen to us if we did that? Surely we would each suffer financially if we increased our giving by 50% or would we? No, in fact the opposite is true. God would be delighted in our obedience. Not only would the church be blessed but we would be also.

Now do we believe this? Do we really believe that God honours our sacrificial giving? Do we believe that we can't out give God? Do we believe that we are never depleted when we give, like the widow did for Elijah when she was on her last meal?

¹ Contagious Christianity p61 quote by Kent Nerburn

Talk about my own journey in giving.

Our giving defines who we are.

I believe it with all my heart.

- You may say it is okay for you to talk about being generous but do you do it? Well it is a struggle to be obedient in this area but God is teaching me.
- As a step of faith in being generous and believing that our extensions are totally possible Rhonda and I have increased our giving by 50%.
- This is not to brag but to say we totally believe in this principle of generosity.

Why not prayerfully consider your giving over these next few weeks.

- Alan will be picking up this theme next week.

Finishing story:

My running and competing career. I decided to give away half of my prize money away and God continued to bless me. It became such a privilege to do this.

Message by Pastor David Lloyd