

Hearing God's Grace: Grace to Give

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 February 2013

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 0 0] 6 is essentially the kind of the heart of the book and it's a detail of all the different laws and commands that God gave to his people that they were to follow as they lived in the promised land and we're going to be looking at one of them in particular today but let's pray and ask for God's help. Father we thank you for your word. We thank you that it is good for us. We thank you that it teaches us how to live in relationship with you but also how it drives us towards you and therefore we ask that as we look at your word together that you would be speaking to us by your Holy Spirit renewing us giving us a heart to love and obey you and to follow your commands and we pray that as we live this kind of life that in turn we would be reflecting the very nature and the very character of God to all those around us. We pray Father for your help as we do this together in Jesus name. Amen. Well would you describe yourself as a generous person or if somebody was to fill out a little kind of a little kind of a little kind of a little kind of description of you, your best friend, would they describe you as being generous?

Well if we're followers of Jesus Christ then generosity ought to be one of our defining marks. Here's the principle. God in his grace has been overwhelmingly generous to us.

Therefore we are to be generous to others. God has been so gracious to us. Therefore we are to be generous to others.

That essentially sums up the message of this text here in Deuteronomy chapter 14. God has been so gracious to his people in bringing them into the promised land.

A good land flowing with milk and honey. In other words it was fruitful and plentiful. And now as they go into this land they have to live in a certain way.

[2 : 4 7] And in particular they are to give special attention to those who are needy. Look at verse 28 of chapter 14.

At the end of every three years bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns. So that the Levites, they were the priests who have no allotment or inheritance of their own.

And the aliens, that's the refugee or the outsider, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied.

You see, out of their plenty that they have received, they are to give generously to those who are needy.

In fact, God commands them to be generous givers. We're going to look at three things from this section. First, God's gracious commands.

[3 : 5 1] As you read through Deuteronomy, you'll discover that many of the commands have to do with what you own and the needs of other people.

Basically, the laws were put in place to prevent people from becoming too rich or too poor. Or as Craig Blomberg, in a very helpful book which was called *Neither Poverty Nor Riches*, puts it like this.

The laws established safeguards so that people do not needlessly accumulate possessions at others' expense. So let me give you an example of this through the laws.

Look at chapter 15, verse 1. We're actually going to be looking at chapter 15 next week, but chapter 15, verse 1. At the end of every seven years, you must cancel debts.

Or verse 7. If there is a poor person among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God has given you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your poor brother.

[5 : 06] Rather, be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs. Or chapter 19, verse 14. Chapter 19, verse 14. Do not move your neighbour's boundary stones set up by your predecessors in the inheritance you receive in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

In other words, don't be taking what does not belong to you. Let me give you a contemporary application of it.

When you're putting in for your expenses, if you didn't do a certain mileage, don't claim for it. Don't be taking what isn't rightfully yours. Because you're actually robbing from somebody else when you do that.

Or look at chapter 23, verse 19. Verse 19. Verse 19. Verse 19. Verse 19. Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest.

[6 : 23] You may charge a foreigner interest, but not a brother Israelite. And in case we think this is total discrimination, look at chapter 24, verse 14.

Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien, somebody from outside living in one of your towns.

Do not pay him his wages each day before sunset because he is poor and is counting on it. Now I think we've got many examples today of companies that fail to pay wages and then all of a sudden go bust.

We've seen that in the news. Or look at chapter 24, verse 19. When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back and get it.

Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. They were what were called the gleaning laws. A certain amount was to be left round the edges so that the poor people or those who didn't have land could actually collect some food for themselves.

[7 : 45] Or chapter 25, verse 13. Do not have two differing weights in your bag.

One heavy, one light. Do not have two differing measures in your house. One large, one small. It's talking about honest business transactions.

In other words, if you were to sell something, sell it for what its true value is. Don't be putting a value above and beyond what it actually is. Be honest in your dealings with one another.

And we could go through many more. But you see, what we have here is an idea of how God treats those who do not have and how those who do have, how they should treat their possessions.

And in spite of what so many people say, God's laws are actually good laws. The laws that we've just read are good for you. They're good for society.

[8 : 51] They promote fairness and justice, equality and generosity. They make sure that those who have plenty do not get more.

And those in poverty do get more. So God's commands are not to spoil our fun or to take away our freedom. God's laws are a gift to us, as we saw this morning in the Ten Commandments.

They are to do us good. They are a sign of God's grace towards his people. Now, if our coalition government were to implement the laws that we've just read just now and they were to put them into law tomorrow or enforce them, we'd be a long way down the road to solving our economic and financial worries.

And more importantly, if we, the citizens of the country, kept to these laws, we would all have what we need and nobody would be in want.

So the point is very simple. These are God's gracious commands to his people. These are laws that are good for us. We have to work out how they apply, of course, but very simply, they are a sign of his grace to his people to do us good.

[10 : 16] Secondly, then, God's command to give. And we're going to look at one of those specific laws that he has given to us. It's outlined in chapter 14.

And as we'll see, it's repeated in a little bit more detail in chapter 26. Let's read chapter 14, verse 22. Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.

This is what we often refer to as the tithe. It's a tenth of all your income and produce was to be given away at appointed times in the year.

Now, before we move into the detail of this, let me correct a misunderstanding about tithing. First, the tithe that is mentioned here is actually one of three tithes that the people had to make.

There was one that would go to the temple. That was 10% of your income. There was another one that was also 10%. That went at festival time for sacrifices and for upkeep of other things.

[11 : 28] And a three and a third percent went to the poor. So tithing was not, as many of us often think, 10% of what is left over after you've spent everything.

But it was actually 23 and a third percent of all that you had. That's what a true tithing person looks like. But second, by the time we get to the New Testament, the idea of tithing is completely dropped.

No actual figure is given. In fact, the emphasis is now on regular generosity. In other words, they're saying there's actually no limit to how much you can give.

You can give 3%, you can give 10%, but you know what? You don't even have to stop at 23 and a third percent. It's regular generosity.

Well, let's look at two aspects of this giving. First, why we are to give. Let's read from verse 22 again. Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.

[12 : 41] Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and your flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place you will choose as a dwelling for his name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.

Now, this might be a little bit foreign to us if we kind of don't have land and we don't have animals and all that sort of thing, but let's try and picture it here. We can imagine the family going out and gathering all of their produce together, digging up a few spuds and cutting a few cabbage and getting the odd lamb or the calf or whatever it was, and heading off for this great big celebration.

It was a communal feast at a particular place that God would decide that they were all to meet there and they were all going to eat of their produce together.

And so this act of gathering all the food together and sitting down and preparing the food and then eating it all together was to remind them of who God is.

So that, look at the end of verse 23, that they may learn to revere the Lord your God always. To honour him.

[13 : 59] To be in awe of God's generosity. To be humbled at his amazing grace towards his people. And of course, as we read, if the journey was too far and it was too much to bring all your vegetables and to carry your lambs all that distance, well, you could sell them at home.

And then when they arrived in the place, verse 26, you could use silver to buy whatever you like. Cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink or anything you wish.

Then you and your household, your family and everybody who belong to your house shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice.

So this was a celebration feast. We could imagine it. I would love to have been there. All that roast lamb, steak, wine, bowl fruits or a fruit salad or whatever they did, I don't know.

Lots of vegetables. And as they were tucking into this great big feast, it would cause them to stop and reflect on God's amazing generosity and his provision to them throughout the whole year.

[15 : 16] Every bite of food that they had, every drink to wash it down, was reason to rejoice at the generosity of God.

Now, I don't know about you or what your practice is within your own home and family, but I think there's just one very simple principle that we could take from that.

To take time at some point in the day when we sit down together to have food, to acknowledge where it all comes from and give thanks to God.

We are so blessed. We have so much. Stop, reflect. Teach our children the need to give thanks to God and where it all comes from.

But primarily, I think here, the big point that I want us to see is that our giving, in all of this, because this was part of their tithing, is to be done not to earn God's blessing or to try and find favour from him.

[16 : 25] No, our giving is in response to God's generous grace towards us. It's all because of what we've received that we are able to give.

So that's why we give. Second, how we give. And for this, we need to go to the parallel passage in chapter 26.

So flick over to chapter 26 of Deuteronomy. More detail is given here, but it's essentially the same command.

So how do we give? Well, in chapter 26, we see that the tithing was done in two stages. Firstly, chapter 26, verse 1.

He said, It was like a confessional.

[17 : 50] This is what they were to say. I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land that the Lord swore to our forefathers to give us.

Now again, this short confessional in verse 3 was to be a reminder of all that God had given them. The very place that they stood was the beautiful gift that God had given them.

God had given them this land. And the first thing they were to do was to acknowledge that where they stood and where they were was a wonderful gift from God to his people.

A land of prosperity and plenty. And as they reflected on that, that in turn became the motivation to give to others.

This is the second part of the giving. Verse 4. And here's the second confessional.

[18 : 54] My father was a wandering Aramean. It's referring there to Jacob. And he went down into Egypt with a few people. And he lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous.

But the Egyptians ill-treated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, to the God of our fathers.

And the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders.

You see, the second part of the confessional recalls or retells the whole story of God's redemption.

From way back to the very beginning, to their rescue from Egypt and the provision of the good land. This is their salvation story that they're retelling.

[19 : 57] Verse 9. He brought us to this place and gave us this land. A land flowing with milk and honey. And now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, O Lord, have given me.

Place the basket before the Lord your God. Bow down before him. And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your households.

You see, it was only by retelling the gospel story that we can be motivated to be able to give. Without that continuous recalling of God's salvation, unless we remember everything that God has done for us, our basket, as it were, would always be empty.

We will always be tight-fisted. We will be greedy instead of generous. We are to recall the story of what God has done to help us to be generous.

You see, our giving is not to be done begrudgingly or out of sense of a duty or do I have to do this or, you know. No, our giving is to be spurred on to be motivated by the amazing grace of God.

[21 : 28] And that principle is seen very clearly for us. Have a look. Keep your finger in Deuteronomy 26 and go to 2 Corinthians 8, verse 9.

2 Corinthians 8, verse 9. We started with this this morning.

2 Corinthians 8, verse 9. He says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

That's the good news of the gospel, really tightly put together. The story that we need to retell over and over again. The story we must recall.

The story that we must tell to our children. That Christ took on our poverty. That he took on our sin. That he took my guilt and my shame.

[22 : 46] That he took the punishment that we deserve through his death on the cross. But much more than that. Look at the end of verse 9. So that you through his poverty might become rich.

Christ has given us his riches. We have his righteousness. We are clothed in his righteousness. We are now accepted through faith as God's children.

Treated and treasured as his own son. And God has given us the promise of eternal life in heaven. The ultimate promised land.

We have been given all of this by his grace. This is our salvation story. And how are we to respond to it?

Well it motivates us to be generous. Look at chapter 9 verse 11 of 2 Corinthians. Chapter 9 verse 11. You will be made rich in every way.

[23 : 52] So that you can be generous on every occasion. And through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

So that's how we give. Motivated by God's grace. Recalling the story of God's salvation to enable us to freely give to those who are in need.

So those are some of the principles that we want to have in place. Now go back to Deuteronomy 26. And the results of our generous giving are incredible.

God's grace in giving. There's three things here. The results of our generous giving. First. When we give.

It fills our life with joy. Chapter 26 verse 11. And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household.

[25 : 07] Do you see that? The giver is filled with joy as they are reminded of all that God has given them. And that's exactly the same for us. Our giving actually produces a joyful life.

As we reflect on all that God has given to us. As we reflect on all that God has given to us. Of all that God has provided. Of everything that we have received from his hands. The homes that we live in.

The fact that we've got a roof over our head. The work that we have during the week. The food that we enjoy. The cars that we drive. The finances to do everything else that we want to do.

And as we are able to give from our plenty. The blessing is we are filled with joy. God gives us that joy.

But not only to us. Notice also the receiver is also filled with joy. Look at verse 11 again. And you and the Levites.

[26 : 11] And the aliens among you. Shall rejoice in all the good things that the Lord has given to you. Because they get to share in it. They get to share in what you have been able to give.

So they also are filled with joy. So the results of giving is not kind of like misery. A lot of rich people are the most miserable looking kind of people.

Why are they miserable? Because they hold on to it. But if we give. It fills our life with joy. Second. It's the means of welcoming others in.

Welcoming others in to the community. Chapter 26 verse 12. When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year.

The year of the tithes. You shall give it to the Levites. They were the priests. And they weren't allowed to own land or property. The alien. That was the refugee or the outsider.

[27 : 14] The fatherless. And the widow. So that they may eat in your towns. And be satisfied. Or the parallel verse that we read in chapter 14.

says the aliens. The fatherless. The fatherless. And the widows. Who live in your towns. May come. And eat. And be satisfied. Do you see there?

The outsider. The isolated. The person who is excluded. The person who doesn't have anything. And who wouldn't be able to be involved in the feasts.

Unless somebody gave. Is invited. And welcomed in. To share in it. In fact in chapter 14. We're told. They were to store it up in their towns.

For a year. For those who didn't have anything. So that they may benefit from others. Generosity. And that's what God's grace does. It's always about welcoming.

[28 : 11] The outsider. In. And it's the same through our generous giving. That we are able to reach out beyond our own boundaries. And welcome people in.

To welcome those who do not have. To the refugee. Who comes from another place of difficult circumstances. It enables us to include the financially broken.

So much in our society is done on the basis of how much you own. And what you're able to do. Some people can't do those things because they don't have enough. Maybe somebody isn't able to go to the church weekend.

Because they haven't got enough. We are to be able to welcome in. Everybody on the basis of our generosity. To open the door to the marginalized.

So that they might come in. And you see this kind of welcome. That we are able to give to people through our giving. Welcome. Becomes a bridge.

[29 : 15] To the greatest welcome of all. The welcome of Jesus Christ. Because as people see. Generous people.

They begin to see. What God's grace is about. People don't just need. They do need. And I want to stress that they need to hear the grace of God. But they also need to see the grace of God.

What's the point in talking about a generous God. And God who freely wants to give forgiveness. If we're tight-fisted. So it enables people to be welcomed in.

To the community. And third. The result of our giving. It brings a blessing. The conclusion.

To these instructions about giving. Ends like this. In chapter 14 verse 29. It says. So that the Lord your God may bless you.

[30 : 16] In all the works of your hands. In chapter 26 verse 15. It says. Look down from heaven. From your holy dwelling. And bless your people.

Now we have to be careful how we apply this. This does not mean. That when we give to God. Or if I dig into my pocket.

And I give a tenner into the collection. Or something like that. That God is going to miraculously give me a hundred euro in return. That's the prosperity gospel. The kind of nonsense that you'll see on the God channel.

Stay away from it. Unhealthy. Not good. No. This is simply telling us here. That when we give. There is blessing from God.

In return. Again. Let's go to 2 Corinthians chapter 9. To see how this gets worked out. In the life of the church. And the people.

[31 : 16] 2 Corinthians chapter 9. And verse 10. Actually chapters 8 and 9.

Are a great. Text on the whole thing of giving. We're going to read chapter 9. Verse 10. And 11. Verse 10.

Now. Talking about God. He who supplies seed. To the sower. And bread for food. This is talking about those who give.

It will also supply. And increase your store of seed. And will enlarge the harvest. Of your righteousness. What does that mean? Well look again at verse 11.

You will be made rich in every way. Why? So that you can be generous. On every occasion.

[32 : 16] This is the blessing. As we give generously to God. God will enrich us. In every way.

Spiritually. Meeting our needs. Materially. So that. And here's the purpose. So that we can go on. Being generous to others.

It's not so that we can store it up for ourselves. And keep it for ourselves. The blessing is for those who give. God will meet your needs.

And above your needs. So that you are able to give. To others. That is the blessing. For those. Who will trust God.

So let's go back to our original question. That we asked at the very beginning. Would you describe yourself. As being generous.

[33 : 13] If you were to write a report on me. Would you say. I'm generous. That is the challenge. And that is the question. Being asked of us.

We must continually look back. To the grace of God. For the way in which he has brought us in. To so much. Given us so much. Materially.

Given us so much. Spiritually. And the fruit of somebody. Who has received and experienced. The grace of God. Will be a heart.

Of generosity. Let's pray. Together. Our Father God.

We do thank you so much. That you. Have been. Incredibly. Generous to us. Materially.

[34 : 14] For all that we have. We thank you so much. Forgive us. For complaining.

About the state of our country. Forgive us. For complaining. About new taxes. Forgive us.

For complaining. Of when we are asked to give. Father help us. To remember. To retell.

And to recall. Your story of redemption. Of Christ. Who gave up his riches. Took on our poverty. So that we might become.

Rich. In Christ. Father teach us. To be generous. Show us how we can do that.

[35 : 10] Not just with. Money. But with our time. And with all of our resources. We thank you. For the generosity. Of this church.

For people's giving. In so many different ways. And for all that give. We pray that you will fill their life with joy.

We pray that it will be a means of welcoming. The outsider. The outsider. In. And we pray that in turn. You would bless us.

So that we can go on. Being generous. To others. We ask this. For your glory. And for your honour. Alone.

In Jesus name. Amen. Well we're going to sing.