

Generous Life

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[0 : 00] It'd be great if you can get your Bibles open at Luke chapter 10, if you haven't got there already. And also the St. Paul's app has an outline for today's message, The Generous Life.

Historical study has revealed that Karl Marx, the self-proclaimed defender of the working class and the working class public, never truly knew or had any relationship with a single member of the working class public.

So far as researchers know, he never set foot in a flour mill, in a factory, in a mine, or any industrial workplace in his entire life.

He lived a carefree, bohemian lifestyle, an intellectual lifestyle. He knew poverty because of his lifestyle choices, but he always kept company with middle class intellectuals.

When he created the Communist League, he made sure that working class socialists were eliminated from any positions of power and influence in the organisation.

[1 : 20] It is also clear for all his endeavours to be the social benefactor of humanity, he disliked people. And he continuously fought with members of his own family and circle of friends.

Marx lived his life in an atmosphere of verbal violence, quarrelling with everyone with whom he associated with, with any length of time.

He worked hard, in fact, most of his life to become middle class. He spent the last two decades of his life in a comfortable middle class home.

And for the last 10 years of his life, he never had anything less than two servants. Why do I mention that?

It's because it is so hard for humans to live up to what we champion intellectually.

[2 : 27] It is so hard for us to live out what we hold to as being our belief system. You know, it's not uncommon to love the idea of loving people than actually loving people themselves.

Now, from a biblical perspective, our love for people is even more revealing. Because it indicates the authenticity and the health of our relationship with God.

The spiritual logic is clear. Love for God produces love for people. And when you turn that spiritual logic around on its head, you can discern a love for God by the existence of love for others.

That's the correlation. And it's there in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And so today we're entering into this new series called Generous God.

And it's going to carry us to the end of term. And the basic idea is that God's generosity to us in Jesus Christ produces a life of generosity.

[3 : 53] Or another way to put that, God's love for us produces a life of love.

Sacrifice produces sacrifice. Now, when I say generosity, I'm not meaning exclusively or primarily money.

I mean generosity in all of life. Money is but a means of transaction. It's a commodity in the same way that my time is a commodity.

Some of us can be generous with finances but not generous at all with our time. And not generous with our emotional life. I'm talking here about generosity in all of life.

With times, talents, treasures, testimony, relationships, hospitality, forgiveness. All of life. A life of love. Now, our text for this series is the travel narrative in Luke.

[5 : 00] And it's called the travel narrative in Luke because Jesus is traveling. Who would have thought? He's on a journey with his disciples.

Starts at Luke chapter 9 verse 51 where Jesus resolutely, it says there, he set his face to Jerusalem. And it ends in chapter 19 verse 44 when we discover that Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem.

And all the way along he teaches his disciples what it means to follow him. And he says some radical stuff. What we discover in the travel narrative is through the stories Jesus tells that he turns the thinking of the world upside down and inside out.

Hence the graphic we have in front of us of a wheat field that's upside down. Not because we're in Australia. It's because it's upside down. The travel narrative of all these stories that Jesus tells is he messes with the value system of the world in which we live.

And there's probably no greater story, more controversial story he told than the story of the Good Samaritan that Nolene just read out for us just then in chapter 10.

[6 : 19] So three points today. The mandate for a generous life, the magnitude of the generous life, and the motivation for a generous life. You'll see that on St. Paul's app. Open that up. And Luke chapter 10, kicking off with verse 25.

The context of this story and the mandate for the generous life is where an expert in biblical law asks Jesus what must he do to receive eternal life.

And we are told that he asked Jesus this question because he wants to trap Jesus. He wants to trap Jesus because Jesus has been doing what they think he shouldn't be doing.

And that is welcoming people, welcoming sinners. Jesus hanging out with people that he shouldn't be hanging out with. And in their mind, he's disobeying the law.

Jesus is open. He is friendly to sinners. And this scholar in this moment wants to expose Jesus as someone who does not respect the word of God.

[7 : 32] That's his intent. He asked Jesus, what must I do to be saved? What must I do to be accepted by God? And he expects Jesus as someone who's not taking God's word seriously to say, it doesn't matter.

Look, in the end, we'll all get there. In the end, it'll all be fine. Just do some good stuff. That's what he's expecting Jesus to say. God will accept everyone.

But instead, it's Jesus who traps him. And it's a good trap. Never be afraid to be trapped by Jesus. It will turn out for your ultimate benefit.

The law expert's heart is exposed by Jesus here. And Jesus asked him, well, what does the law say? And he gives Jesus a summary of the law.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. Which is great. You know, like, it's much better for Luke not to have to record the entire law again, the whole Torah, and put it in there.

[8 : 34] He does a summary version, which is what the Old Testament does. Deuteronomy 6, Leviticus 18. Does a summary of the law. Love God, love your neighbor.

What does it mean to, first of all, love God? What does that mean? Archbishop William Temple put it like this. Your religion is what you do with your solitude.

There's a description of what it means to love God. Your religion is what you do with your solitude. In other words, where does your mind go naturally in the moment of quiet?

I know we don't allow ourselves quiet very much nowadays, but where does it go in a moment of quiet? In other words, where does it love to dwell?

Where does your mind love to dwell? Is it God? Is it his love? Is it his characteristics? Is it his attributes? Is it his excellencies? You know, when that moment where the TV's off, and you're not scrolling through Facebook, and you're not updating your life, and you have, just, I need 10 minutes to consider the excellencies of God.

[9 : 46] There's a go there, naturally. That's what it means, according to Archbishop William Temple. It means to love God, is that you are dwelling on him. So do you love God?

William Temple says, Where it goes is your real religion, your real God, your real faith, your real salvation, your real hope. The first test is love God so much that he dominates your solitude.

Love him so much that you are content in any circumstance, because you will always have what you want the most. So let me ask you, anyone here pass that test?

Anyone? Okay. Let's leave that. That's only 50% of the test. One more to go. Love your neighbor as yourself.

As yourself. Meet the needs of your neighbor with all the force, all the joy, all the speed, all the power by which you meet your own needs.

[11 : 13] Be as happy for them when their need is met as when your own is met. Is that it?

That's all? Pretty simple. Well, when you see the law, when you see what the law is after, as opposed to, I've obeyed that one, I've obeyed that one, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick.

When you actually see what the intent of the law is, you go, wow, I'm starting to feel the force of it now. It is brilliant what Jesus does here, because the law outlines a way of life that is right, but the force of the law helps me to understand that I cannot do it.

The law is the way of life, but it can't be the way to life. That's the brilliance of what Jesus does in this moment. We should live this way, but when you see the force of it, you realize you cannot live this way.

And so Jesus traps us. The mandate to live a life of radical generosity and love towards others is so, so crucial that Jesus makes it, in fact, the test of genuine love for God in Matthew 25.

[12:48] Okay, so that's the test. That's the mandate. And then we get to grappling with the magnitude of it, because this is essential. What does this law expert do as soon as he hears Jesus say this?

He immediately, his natural inclination is to put limits around it. This religious expert immediately wants to put limits. Verse 29, he wanted to justify himself, and so he asked Jesus, hang on, when you say neighbor, who is my neighbor?

I mean, who do I really have to live like this with? He wants to reduce the force of the biblical law so that it's reasonable, so that it's doable.

You see, the premise of his life has always been, God will accept me because I am good.

I'm good enough. So what's the minimum standard that God requires? And that's when Jesus launches into his most famous story, and the magnitude of the generous life becomes very clear.

[14:04] There's a guy traveling down from Jerusalem to Jericho. We are to assume in this story that he is a Jewish man. This man gets robbed, he gets stripped, he gets beaten, and he's left for dead.

By chance, a Jewish priest comes wandering by. Surely, he will help. The priest couldn't be bothered. He walks on the other side of the street. He didn't want to go near him.

Now, a Levite comes along. Again, expert in the law. Jewish man comes along. You would think he's going to help a fellow Jew, but he can't be bothered.

Walks on the other side of the street and continues on. And then along comes the Samaritan. And Jesus telling this story to a mainly Jewish crowd and they would have gone, Samaritan?

How dare he bring a Samaritan into this story? Jews and Samaritan tensions were incredibly deep racial tensions over a very long period of time.

[15:09] The Samaritans were despised more than any other people group to Jews. And the majority of Jews in Judea and Galilee absolutely detested Samaritans.

And by the time of Jesus in first century Palestine, that animosity between these two groups had grown to the point over several hundred years where there was violence and murdering of one another.

Genocide even. In villages. What's the Samaritan doing in Jesus' story here? The Samaritan sees the injured Jew on the side of the road and he goes over to him and he has compassion on him. He cleans him up, treats his wounds, puts him on his donkey, takes him to a local motel, checks him in, hands over his credit card, says, I'll fix up whatever the expenses are when I come back. No limitation. It's one of those American Express platinum black thing, you know, no limit. Hands it over. Go for broke. This story is socially charged.

[16:32] It is offensive for the Jew to hear this story. So imagine I get an invitation to address a neo-Nazi far-right white supremacist rally in Australia.

and I get up there and I tell this story about this Australian SAS soldier who's been blown up on the side of the road by a bomb in Afghanistan.

He's lying there on the side of the road. He is dying. Australian military medic comes along, sees the man, walks on the side of the road, continues on.

Australian army chaplain walks by, sees the man and continues on and leaves him there to die. But friends, let me tell you about the ISIS terrorist who came along, saw the man, treats his wounds, picks him up, puts him in his Humvee, takes him to a medical facility, treat and end, hands are over, pays for all the costs, but also pays for his military pension.

Do you think they're going to invite me back? Do you think I'm going to get out of there unscathed?

[18 : 05] That's the context of Jesus here right in this moment. Remember, this story is the answer to a question and the question is, who is my neighbour?

What is the bare minimum standard that God requires of me? And at the end of the story, Jesus says to his lawyer, do that.

Do that. Treat your worst enemy like that. Treat the whole range of their needs.

Live and act and love and serve and think and sacrifice like the Good Samaritan all of the time. Not part of the time, not just most of the time, all of the time.

Meet the needs of people who belittle you, curse you, marginalise you, ridicule you, hate you, berate you, ignore you, demean you, would even kill you, with, love them with all the force, all the joy, all the speed and all the power by which you meet your own needs.

[19 : 26] that is the magnitude of the mandate of the generous life.

And Jesus will not allow us one moment to limit the force of it. Not one moment. And yet we try to. We try to limit the who, we try to limit the when, we try to limit the how much.

It's natural for us to want to be generous to people who are like us and who we like. You know, after all, Steve, charity begins at home.

In most cases, it never goes beyond the home. And Jesus won't let us limit it here. The Samaritan reached across an enormous racial and cultural barrier to help a natural enemy.

We also tend to limit the when. It's very typical to be generous to people and situations when we think it isn't their fault.

[20 : 36] When we think they deserve our generosity. And Jesus won't let us do that either. You know, a natural disaster, it wasn't their fault, it happened, they're destitute because of that, let's be generous towards them.

we're generous when we think they deserve it. The Samaritan here would have absolutely believed that the guy along the side of the road deserved what he got.

He's a Jew, he deserves to be in the gutter. He's a member of an oppressing group, and he still helped him.

So imagine I decided at the age of 53 to take up parkour. And I decided for my first attempt at this that I was going to move as quickly as I could from this side of the street to the other side of the street via the rooftop of the church building the trees and the power lines.

Obviously I didn't make it very far. I'm on the middle of the road or probably actually just at the end of the building. I've got multiple fractures on my limbs and I'm not yet electrocuted but that was the next thing that was going to happen to me and I'm lying there.

[22 : 10] Do you think in that moment I would do anything to love myself? You would all say rightly so idiot.

What was he thinking? What was he thinking? And in that moment are you going to I'm not going to read the ambulance he's getting what he deserves.

Do you think I'm in that moment going to lie there and go no no no don't call an ambulance I do not deserve to have my fractures healed and my blood put back in I don't deserve it.

I am going to pursue the meeting of my needs in that moment with all the force and all the joy and all the speed that I possibly can in that moment.

I'm going to do that for myself even though I'm an idiot.

[23 : 21] Jesus won't let us limit the when he won't let us limit you only meet the needs of people you only meet the needs of people when you think they deserve it because there's a single person in this room who only meets your needs when you think you deserve it.

If Jesus decided to only be generous with his blood to those who deserve it he could have saved himself a trip. We also tend to limit the house it's the excuse that we can't afford to help people it's noticeable that Jesus puts the story of the good Samaritan on a particular stretch of road not just any stretch of road it was well known dangerous road it was referred to as the bloody way it descended from Jerusalem around about 3,000 feet above sea level down to Jericho down to 200 feet below sea level a windy narrow road through cliffs and crags imagine the scenario of walking through the darkest alley in the worst part of the worst city without street lights that's that's the road that this

Samaritan is on why did the priest and the Levite walk past why did they walk past because they were smart that's why they were smart they could see that the man was not yet dead what does that mean it means the robbers are still here somewhere they're close by and they would risk

everything to stop stopping would be fatal when the Samaritans stop he is risking absolutely everything he puts no limits on his generosity at all and when we do when we do we are saying that we can't afford to be generous with our time and talents and treasures without some of the burden of that coming back onto us and Jesus says yes that's exactly right that's what generosity is he says if you can't afford to help if you can't afford to help if you can't afford to help then you're not helping enough you're not loving your neighbor we can't put limits on the generosity on this story or the mandates of the

Bible to live generous lives and so my final point is what's the motivation for this generous life at the end of the story Jesus says go and do likewise so yeah so the law expert is was that is that it you kind of want to guilt me into doing stuff is that is that is that what Jesus doing here you know guilt motivation by guilt is basically the approach of religious and secular motivation for everything religion says you must live a generous life because a holy book command you to it if you want to get into good books with God then you need to live a generous life that's religion secularism says that you must do it because you have so much and they have so little and it will give you a sense of meaning in life and the world's a mess so you got to do something about it guilt and in this story there are two very moral and religious people who do nothing the priest and the

Levite do nothing the irony is both the priest and the Levite in first century Judaism had the job of distributing financial assistance to the destitute that was their job they did it six days a week that was their job even people who would normally spend their day helping other people can't keep the mandate of living a generous life in other words morality guilt legalism will take you somewhere but it won't take you far enough so I want to ask you having just gone through this story already does anyone here right now feel guilty about the poor in our society does anyone here feel guilty about not doing enough I see lots of head knobbing around the room and those who are not sure whether they should or not stop it stop it stop feeling guilty guilty because it won't take you anywhere near where Jesus wants you to go guilting the good Samaritan this story of the good Samaritan is not about guilt so if you're feeling guilty it's not the response Jesus wants from you

[29 : 02] Jesus is not trying to make the lawyer feel guilty Jesus has put something in this parable that points to a different motive the key to the parable is to understand which of the four characters in the parable does Jesus want this lawyer to understand he is which of the four characters is Jesus saying to this lawyer you are that person in this story most people read it as if the lawyer Jesus wants the lawyer to be the good Samaritan that's not what Jesus is doing here and I'll get to it in a moment he puts the lawyer on the side of the road as the dying man that's who he is he puts the hated Samaritan in the rescue chopper the hated Samaritan in the rescue chopper the Jewish lawyer was meant to ponder not what he needed to do for eternal life but what has been done for him for his life that's what he needed to understand he needed to see that his life was ebbing away that he could not save himself what if his only hope his only hope was an act of free radical grace from an enemy who owes him nothing what if your only hope in life is an act of radical generosity from someone who owes you nothing but rejection you see Jesus isn't giving this Jewish scholar a to-do list he's actually giving him a dynamic not a to-do list a dynamic a grace dynamic that can change his heart it's not until this lawyer sees that he is the one on the side of the road bleeding out unable to save himself but saved by an act of grace by someone who he has rejected is he then able to be that person to others in other words he will never be a good Samaritan until he has received grace from the good Samaritan and where would he get something like that notice how Jesus turns the story around at the end let me point out to you the lawyer starts off by asking who is my neighbor but at the end of the text

Jesus asks which of the three was the neighbor he uses his language and reapplies it not who who who was the neighbor but who was the neighbor in other words which of the three was neighborly and the law expert can't even bear to say the word Samaritan but he gets out the one who had shown mercy what's the point of this story who is the good Samaritan who is neighborly to those in need who is the neighbor to those who who's been rejected by others but is the neighbor to the one who needed a neighbor the Christian faith says it's Jesus Christ the core of the Christian faith the gospel says that every single human being like this law expert is a self-justifier we are all self-justifiers whatever it is that we set our heart on to justify ourselves and to feel worthy and good and acceptable ultimately is the thing that controls us it drives us it's caused us to do anything for it and make us miserable because that thing whatever it is and for some people it's religion whatever it is will never ever deliver on its promises it will kill us for instance power will only cause us to want

more of it and the fear of losing it the more power we have the more insecure we will feel have a chat with

Vladimir Putin about that if we set our hearts on power in order to be significant power will ultimately control us and enslave us you see if it's not God whatever it is that you set your heart on if it's not God it will beat you up and it will fill you with fears and discouragement and failure and the Christian faith says that Jesus Christ God the Son the creator of all that is the author of life itself the one who owes us nothing except us experience nothing but rejection from the humanity that he has created Jesus Christ came into the brokenness of our road and had compassion on us the word compassion is there in verse 33 and verse 34 not literally translated in English in every translation but it's there in verse 33 and verse 34 and it's a word that's used more often than any other word in the Bible to describe

Jesus' emotional life Jesus knew that to come to us on the road to rescue us wasn't to risk his life it was in fact to give his life as the good Samaritan came down the road and lifted up his enemy onto his horse so Jesus came down to us and pulled us up to his place I keep going back to this verse again and again and again but I just want to say it one more time for today 2 Corinthians 5 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God didn't just deal with our sin but lifted us up if we see Jesus as the good Samaritan the one who has radically generously neighbored you it will change you forever it is the dynamic and the only dynamic that begins the process of changing us as people who overflow into radically generous lives the evidence that we have been radically neighbored loved mercy of Jesus Christ generous life to our neighbours everyone is the evidence that we have been radically neighbored only when we see the true neighbour do we become true neighbours in such a way that our actual neighbours must look to the true neighbour to come to grips with what they are experiencing in radical generosity from us only then

I wonder are you still feeling guilty are you still feeling guilty if you are then do what Jesus wants you to do with that guilt what did Jesus want the law expert to do with his guilt he wanted him to feel the weight of sin and expectations he wanted him to see that his goodness was not good enough that his generosity was not good enough he wanted him to run to Jesus with his guilt until we are crushed by the mandate and the magnitude of generosity that God requires from us until we are crushed by that we will not be humble enough to receive the mercy and the generosity that he offers us in Jesus a generosity offers us in the not good

[38 : 22] Samaritan but the great Samaritan Jesus Christ