

# Generous Giving

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[ 0 : 00 ] we are today drawing to a close our series, Generous God. The thrust of this series has been that God's generosity to us in the Lord Jesus Christ produces a life of generosity, pervasive generosity, generosity in all areas of life, generosity with our time, with our talents, treasures, our testimony, with our relationships, hospitality, with forgiveness, all of life, all of life.

And one of the challenges has been is that it's possible to be generous in one area of life without being generous in another area of life.

It's quite possibly generous here but stingy over here. It's possible to give away large portions of our finances and assets while not willing to serve in a ministry.

What that tells us is that our time is more valuable to us than anything else. or to not draw close to others, not to spend time but to share our hearts, to share our emotions, our feelings, because our privacy is more valuable to us than our time or our possessions.

The radical generosity of God to us in Jesus Christ, it is a holistic salvation, produces a holistic, pervasive generosity in all of life of those who follow him.

[ 1 : 32 ] Radical generosity is so much more than money but it's not less than what we do with our money. That's why we've not really focused on the issue of money in this entire series right through, I dabbled in a little bit earlier on, but right through this whole term, we've not really touched on the issue of money until right today, right at the end.

Because I didn't want you to think it was all just about money. And I know you've been busting, waiting for the money one to come. And so here it is today, just to complete the whole series for you. Now, why are we doing it right now?

Why are we doing it? There's three reasons I want to talk about money. Number one, it's because I actually want us to celebrate today.

While we have had, and you've been aware of this in communications, we've had some significant financial challenges this year as a church, due to the childcare centre not coming off earlier this year.

and we've, however, continued to give as a church, which has been fantastic. Back in 2014, can't believe it was only 10 years ago, part of the funding to redevelop our entire site here was for us to take out a mortgage of about a bit over \$400,000.

[ 2 : 59 ] We started this year with about \$93,000 or so left to pay off on that mortgage. As of the end of last month, that is entirely paid off.

St. Paul's is now debt-free for the first time since 2014. That's a celebration moment. That is a phenomenal effort. So as I talk about money today, I'm talking about it with a heart of celebration for us as a church.

I think it's a phenomenal response that we've had this year. Secondly, I want to talk about money because in Luke's gospel, Jesus talks about money, possessions, greed, and wealth, a whole lot.

One third of his parables in Luke are about this issue. He warns of the dangers and what it looks like to have a life of pervasive generosity. So Jesus talked about it and we want to talk about it.

Thirdly, crucially, our perspective on money and possessions and wealth and how we handle them lie at the very heart of the Christian life.

[ 4 : 10 ] At the very heart of the Christian life, at the very center, the core of the Christian life. If you think that's an overstatement, it is not. I'm not using hyperbole here. The Bible emphatically demonstrates that what we do with our finances significantly influences eternity.

Not just to other people's, yours. God has recorded in the Bible everything we need to know about his investment priorities, his high standard of management and the rewards he offers his faithful stewards.

The issue of riches and wealth and money come up again and again and again as Jesus takes his journey towards Jerusalem. And as he draws near to Jerusalem, he's asked a question by a man known for centuries as the rich young ruler, which is our text this morning.

And with this interaction with Jesus, there are three things to learn about money, wealth and possessions. And if you've got the St. Paul's app in front of you, I'd encourage you to open it up and you see the three points there in front of you.

And the first one that he highlights is the danger of money and wealth. And that's our first point. We see it in the middle of the passage. We're at Luke 18.

[ 5 : 39 ] So I open that up if you haven't got it in front of you. Luke 18 verse 24. Jesus looks right at this rich young man and he says to him, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Now, John touched on this last week.

He strayed into my passage, unfortunately, but that's okay. I'm not correcting him on anything that he said. I'm just gonna remind you of what he said because it's so essential.

Jesus is using the metaphor of impossibility. The camel was the largest land animal the people knew at that time. The eye of the needle was the smallest hole.

It is impossible, in other words, he's saying here. It is impossible for the rich to get into heaven.

Now, as I was writing this out, the richest person in the world at that time had a personal fortune of \$251 billion.

[ 6 : 47 ] I don't know if it's gone up or down since then, but it probably doesn't matter to him a whole lot. I personally do not appear on any of the published rich lists.

And yet, when Jesus says this, he's talking to me. He's talking to you. Everyone sitting in this room here, he's talking to us.

He is saying that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for us to get into heaven.

Notice the reaction of those who are listening to this. Verse 26. Well, who then can be saved? You see, the disciples were confused by this because in their culture, their day and age, they thought it was the rich ones who were particularly blessed by God.

Everything they had came from God. So it must have been God who had obviously particularly blessed them because of their righteousness or in some way. And Jesus' response here is, what is impossible with men is possible with God.

[ 8 : 07 ] Notice Jesus did not say, what is impossible for rich people, it's possible with God. He says, what's impossible with men is impossible. In other words, what is impossible for all people, it's possible for God.

He's saying, all salvation is a miracle. It is impossible for anyone to save themselves because as Romans 3 tells us, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

It's not possible for anyone to save themselves except for God intervening and doing the impossible.

Now, the reason why Jesus raises that issue here is because the same thing that makes salvation impossible for all of us is made worse by wealth, money and possessions.

In the Old Testament book of Proverbs, it's a great book if you have never read it, it's about, really about primarily concerned with how to navigate life in God's world well.

[ 9 : 32 ] The Proverbs talks a lot about money and it talks, it's particularly got two very important things to say about the spiritual power of money.

Firstly, it says that money has the power to distract you from what's important in life. Distracted enough so that you actually don't ask the really important questions of life or why am I here and what am I really meant to accomplish in life?

In fact, it can even be so distracting for Christians that they don't think about the deeper issues of life.

What are my priorities? What is my next step? Proverbs 11 verse 4 says, wealth is worthless in the day of wrath but righteousness delivers from death.

What that's saying there is money can't help you. It can't save you. When the troubles of life hit, it can't help you. It does try to give you some sort of a delusion into think that if you've got enough money, it will help you in those moments.

[10:48] I get the cancer diagnosis, I've got enough money, I can go to the best doctors to try and get that solved. I've got a leg up there. Get myself in trouble with the law, got enough money, I can hire the best barristers to get me out of trouble.

It gives you the illusion that it will keep you safe. But you're not safe. You're not safe from grief, from bereavement, from illness, from disaster. Ironically, you're not even safe from financial ruin if you've got lots of money.

Money can't stop death, it can't stop tragedy, heartbreak, and when it comes, if you've spent your life pursuing it, trusting in it, living for it, it won't give you anything back.

Money has the power to distract us from the important questions of life. The second thing that Proverbs says about money is it distorts your self-image. In Proverbs 30, verses 8 and 9, it says, give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread, otherwise I will have too much and disown you and say, who is the Lord?

To see a person humbled under prosperity, to see a person humbled under prosperity would have to be one of the greatest rarities in the world.

[12:23] In fact, I remember reading once, someone said, it's amazing how the wealthy self-made person becomes an expert at everything in life.

Not just their area of expertise, but everything in life. Only the self-made wealthy person seems to have that problem.

It puts the person into a place where they say, who is God? Why do I need him? That's the danger of wealth. So why is it so dangerous?

We're going to go back to the beginning of this passage and unpack the second point, why wealth is so dangerous for us. So again, Luke 18, verse 18. A certain ruler asked him, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Why do you call me good? Jesus answered, no one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony.

[13:30] Honor your father and your mother, all these I have kept since I was a boy, he said. Now, when we read that, we should be shocked.

We should be shocked by Jesus' answer to the question, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Because it appears, in fact, not just appears, it's what Jesus says, obey the Ten Commandments. We should be shocked by that. The implication is that's how on earth you get salvation. Be good is what Jesus says. This should shock us because immediately before this, Jesus tells the story the Pharisee and the tax collector where the obedient religious man went home not saved.

But the sinner is saved. So, what's Jesus do? I mean, come on Jesus. Why did you not just pull out two ways to live?

You know, take the guy through Alpha for goodness sake. Why say that? Why did he not say, I am on my way to Jerusalem to die on a cross to pay a ransom to take the penalty that you deserve for your sin and if you put your trust in me you'll have eternal life and salvation.

[14:58] Why did he not say that? Given it's consistent with the New Testament and everything else he said. that's because to say to this young man I've come to die for your sins would have been incomprehensible to him.

Like most people he didn't think he had a problem. His culture told him he didn't have a problem. Look at what he says in verse 21.

All these I've kept since I was a boy. In other words I don't need a rescuer. I'm a good person.

I may not be perfect but I don't need a rescuer. So what Jesus is doing in his response here is he's trying to target the heart. He's trying to dig deeper into this man's heart.

Deep down despite his goodness he must have been feeling unsettled in some way. That something wasn't right. something was missing.

[16:00] Otherwise why would he come to Jesus with a question in the first place? It's understandable really his predicament. If we think that we can get right with God by being good we will always feel insecure.

Even those who project an image that they've got it all together on the outside deep down on the inside they know better. We know better too.

We all know better. We know the things that we've done. We know the things that we've thought.

We know the things that we would work our entire life to hide from everyone else so that they do not

see the true us.

The things that we cannot hide from our own consciences. Jesus is reminding this man that his first and his fundamental problem is that he is in fact not good at all.

No mere mortal is. And then Jesus starts to prime us to show him where he's not good. Verse 22 when Jesus heard this he said to him you still lack just one thing wouldn't that be great just one thing.

[17:19] Sell everything you have give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and then come follow me. should be crucial to point out again that Jesus has never never suggested to another individual that the way to be saved is to give away all of your money to the poor.

He's never done that before and never does it after this. He's doing it here as a brilliant strategy to help this young man see that he has a need of rescuing.

he targets his heart his idol is what he does the core of his life that he's living for the thing that he's looking to ultimately make him approachable to God or God to like him in some way.

You see money for him is not just a tool it's his scorecard it's his security it's his hope this is the thing that he's squeezing God out of his life and when Jesus presses him on this one issue he finally sees that in fact he's not obeying the commandments at all he can't even get past the first one you must have no other gods before me his money was his God because he walks away sad refusing to surrender it and that puts Jesus up where he puts money up as the alternative God he could have used a whole range of things but he only ever puts money up as the alternative God you cannot serve both

God and money you're devoted to one or the other but it can't be both that is why wealth is so so dangerous which brings me to the last point how do you therefore escape the danger my landing point here is you escape the danger through a life of radical generosity the first thing to escape the danger is to assume that you are in denial just assume it Jesus is so blunt with this guy because he was in denial and that's the very nature of addiction the very nature of addiction is that you're in I'm not addicted I don't have a problem I've got it under control the first thing that we need to do is to assume that we're under the influence especially living in a society that is deeply deeply committed to materialism where your personal scorecard is your assets your net worth is your self-worth that's our materialistic culture so assume that you are marinating in that culture all the time and it is having a significant influence on your priorities assume that the amount of money that you think you need is more than what you really need and assume also that the amount of money that you think you can give away is less than what you actually really can give away assume both of those things assume it the bible says that money makes us blind in a way that other sins don't no one commits adultery and doesn't realise that's what they're doing they know exactly what they're doing but not when it comes to money we're blind to this issue the second way to escape and the key way to escape the danger of wealth is to look to the rich young ruler as your hope your salvation and your motivation salvation why would you do that when this rich young ruler walks away and rejects

[22:07] Jesus why would we look to him for our hope and our salvation well it's because I'm not referring to him I'm referring to the other rich young ruler in this passage there's two of them Jesus is around 30 to 32 when he is headed to Jerusalem the bible says that he existed with God for all of eternity he's the God who made everything he's the God who rules everything he's the God who owns everything sustains everything and he left that came from heaven to identify with the spiritual poverty of humanity he is on the way to Jerusalem to die on a cross and into a poverty deeper than any human being has ever ever experienced in the entire history of humanity he will know and experience a humanity deeper than anyone has ever experienced he will experience the abandonment and loss like no one has ever experienced he will be stripped of everything including his life life and what he has done for us 2 Corinthians verses chapter 8 verse 9 puts in economic terms for us for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus

Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich he was drained of all riches chose to do that so that we though we are spiritually poor and bankrupt can receive the abundance of his riches his bank account has been swapped with ours in Jesus we get adoption into God's family forgiveness we get pardoned we get eternal life it is the only wealth that makes us truly secure even in and beyond death and so we need to look to the true rich young ruler the true rich young ruler until we get excited excited over what he has achieved for us what he has gifted to us this is what this series on generous God has been all about from start to finish it's been about the gospel the good news of

Jesus Christ look to the glorious news of God's grace and riches to us in the Lord Jesus Christ until it drains all the power out of money and possessions until it no longer becomes your scorecard until it just merely is currency it is no longer your security and your self esteem your hope your salvation salvation and so that leads me to the third thing that we need to do to escape and that is a life of radical generosity have a plan to use your wealth with purpose to use it with eternity in mind as stewards of God's resources and I got four steps here very quickly four steps number one investigate what percentage of your income you're currently giving away how much goes to Christian ministry and charity Christian ministry to help people out of spiritual poverty charity to help people out of physical and emotional poverty investigate what percentage that's not hard to do number two if that percentage is not at least 10% the very least amount that the disciples are to give away the very least biblical amount is 10% work out how you could aggressively move towards 10% before the end of this year which means step three work out what sacrifices you are going to make to get there selling stuff cutting back on expenses if it is not sacrifice to get there then it's not radical generosity if you don't need to make sacrifices to give 10% then you aren't giving enough sacrificial giving is not about a percentage it is about our living standard changing in such a way that we feel lost so that others might gain that's what sacrificial giving is that's what radical generosity is it's not a percentage it's about you feeling lost that others might gain let me add to what Jesus says here at the end of these verses having seen the rich young ruler walk away Peter pipes in verse 28 we have left everything to follow you what about us and Jesus reassures his disciples that though they have sacrificed many things that they have left many things they will never fail to receive many more blessings now and forever truly I tell you Jesus said to them no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come eternal life when you choose to lose for others you actually gain you actually gain in other words when you choose to lose for others you're pursuing your joy step four decide what you're going to give and follow through with it make yourself accountable in other words our giving to ministry and charity is a spiritual issue and like all spiritual issues we're accountable for it to live radically generous lives with our money our wealth and our possessions you don't need courage as much as you need joy you need joy you need to understand everything that you have in Jesus what he [ 29 : 06 ] God has already provided you with we need to be relaxed and at peace and secure enough to give away our resources and this joy only comes when we look to the true rich young ruler who lost everything so that we might gain absolutely everything for eternity and the more we look to Jesus and the riches we have in him the more we allow the gospel to be preached to our hearts and our minds day in and day out the freer we will live a pervasively generous life to have 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9 with you every time you go into Westfield to have it in front of you before you choose to upgrade your house or do the next renovation to have that in front of you say here is my hope not this thing that I'm holding from the rack Jesus is my hope fill yourself with gospel joy before you open your wallet phone you knew good okay I may oy but I don't okay