

RADICAL GENEROUSITY

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Date: 29 November 2014

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[0 : 00] Gracious Father, we thank you for the indescribable gift that you've given to us in the Lord Jesus. We thank you that we who, deserving of separation from you for all of eternity, have been brought, that we might worship you for all of eternity because of the work of the Lord Jesus.

Thank you for your radical generosity towards us. And we pray, Father, that you would impress upon us what you've done for us in such a way that our hearts would be overflowing with generosity towards others, towards you.

Make us, we pray, a church of radical generosity. For the glory of your name we pray in Jesus' sake. Amen. On Sunday the 10th of July this year I told a fictitious story about Wendy J, our treasurer, squeezing juice out of an orange as part of a carnival sideshow.

I want to emphasise it was a fictitious story. Someone asked me afterwards, when was that carnival down at the concourse? I said it was a fictitious story. The punchline was that she was able to squeeze half a cup more juice out of an orange after a 150 kilogram hulk of a man got all of he could out of it.

And it was because she is the church treasurer, that's what she does each week with the offertory. The reality is that all too often raising funds for ministry and charity is in fact like squeezing out those last drops and making a little bit go too far or stretch far.

[1 : 46] This is certainly what's been happening for us as a church this year. And so this core value that we're looking at tonight, number six in our series of seven of our core values, has particular relevance for us now.

But it's not just for that, that we're looking at it tonight. And as we look at this core value of radical generosity, I'm basically going to say what I said in July.

I looked at this core value again and figured I couldn't come up with anything better than what I'd said last July. And with a few adjustments, we're going to hit it again.

And so there'll be things in this that will be familiar to you if you heard me in July. We're going to see how money exercises power over us, why money exercises power over us and how we can break that power.

It seems that money is a big deal to God, probably because it's a very big deal to us. Jesus talked about money 10 to 20 times more than he talked about sex, twice as much as he talked about prayer and faith.

[2 : 55] One third of his parables are about money. And of all the things that he could have picked, Jesus sets money up as the alternative God when he says you cannot serve both God and money.

Now, given that money is a big deal to God, it shouldn't surprise us that what the Bible does is it revolutionizes our view of money and possessions and generosity. For instance, 1 Chronicles 28 and 29, King David is praying in response to the overwhelming generosity of the people of God to build the temple in Jerusalem.

And he says, everything in heaven and earth is yours. Wealth and honor come from you. Everything comes from you. And we have given only what comes from your hand.

What that means is that everything that we have is a gift from God. Everything. Totally everything. Now, that might seem a little bit offensive because you might have worked pretty hard for what you have.

But those verses from 1 Chronicles and others like them in the Bible say that you've been working very hard with abilities, opportunities, circumstances and health that God's provided.

[4 : 11] A bunch of other stuff that God himself has provided. But it's not just that everything that we have comes from God, but that everything that comes from God is still God's.

He still has ownership of it. God does not give up ownership of something when he gives it to us. And so we relate to our money and possessions and resources the way an investment manager relates to the wealth of their clients.

If you're an investment manager, you don't operate as if the money that you have been entrusted with is yours to do whatever you want. There is an accountability. If you have to invest, you have to invest the money in line with the purposes and the desires and directions and values of the investor. And so if you take their money and ignore their directions and decide instead to go and buy Ferrari with it, it's called fraud. And there's an accountability for that.

And so if we deny the investment manager role we have with God's resources and regard ourselves as the owner of it to do what we want with it. Well, that's called robbing God.

[5 : 25] That's how strong the language is that God uses in Malachi 3. If you've got your Bibles there, Malachi 3. When referring to God's people's failure to be generous, he says, you have robbed me.

And so chapter 3, verse 8, God poses a question. Will a man rob God, yet you rob me? The word rob there is a very rare word in the Bible.

In fact, it's used in only one other place. It's in Zechariah 5, verse 3, where it's translated as curse. And it's a word that really means to oppress, to pillage, to plunder.

It's quite a violent word. And this is what the people of God were doing to God when they weren't being generous. And so they hear this and they're shocked.

Verse 8 says, how do we rob you? How could we possibly be doing that to you, God? What on earth are you talking about? And God comes back and says in verse 8, in tithes and offerings, that is how you are pillaging and plundering and raping my purposes for the world.

[6 : 40] He says, you are robbing me. When I say that, I'm talking about your lack of generosity, you know, with the money that I'm giving you. I'm talking about the fact that you hold on to too much of it.

You spend too much of it on yourself and you don't give enough away. So when they're keeping it for themselves, they are robbing God. They're plundering, pillaging, raping God's purpose for his world.

And what's interesting is that according to verse 8, they're oblivious to this sin. Quite a serious sin. It's like, what are you talking about, God? We're confused here.

You see, a great deal of the power that money has over us is that it blinds us to the power that it has over us. Money is different to other things because we are blind to the hold that it has on us. Greed is a sin that blinds you to its presence. I'll show you what I mean. Verse, Luke chapter 12. Jesus says, watch out. And it's a massive explanation, Mark.

[7 : 40] I won't yell it at you. But Jesus says, watch out against all kinds of greed. There's no other place where Jesus says, watch out for all kinds of sexual immorality.

Watch out for all kinds of adultery. It's not because adultery is any less sinful. It's because we're blind to greed and materialism in a way that we're not blind to sexual immorality or adultery.

Jesus doesn't say, watch out. You might be committing adultery. You don't know it. I mean, the reality is, of course, you know it if you're committing adultery. But we are blind to the sin of greed and materialism.

No one thinks it's their problem. To this day, and I've had a whack of sin confessed to me over the years, no one to this day has ever said, Steve, I think I've got a problem in the way I handle my money.

No one. Not a single person. But if we take the text of the Bible seriously, then we should work on the assumption that we are blind to.

[8 : 48] Just work on that assumption. I'm not saying it's necessarily true of you. I'm saying that the only way to give credence to the text of Scripture is to always be looking for the blind spot.

And I would say, ask other people to help you look for the blind spot. I don't think it's anything. Because it's a blind spot, by nature, we need other people to help us. Fortunately, the Bible does give us at least one guideline that we can check ourselves to whether or not our use of money or our money has a hold on us.

It helps us to see if our understanding and generosity and giving to ministry and charity is in any way in the ballpark of what God thinks it should be.

And it's right there in Malachi 3 verse 8. It's called the tithe. Now, the Old Testament Scriptures require that God's people gave 10% of their annual income to the temple.

In actual fact, that was the minimum. I mean, when you take on all the offerings and festivals and everything else, it was kind of more like 30% is kind of what they gave away in reality.

[9 : 55] Now, historically, it's been raised. It raised a question of whether or not that tithe is an obligation for Christians. Because the tithe is only mentioned once in the New Testament.

It's in Luke chapter 11 verse 42, Jesus talking to the Pharisees. And he says, Woe to you. There's that word curse again. Curse you Pharisees. Because you give God a tenth of your mint, your rue and other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.

You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. You see, the trouble with the Pharisees is that they were operating with a legalistic limitation mindset.

They give God 10% and they say, This 90% is mine. So God, you can have 10% of the herb garden. The rest of the veggie patch is mine. And so God gets the herb garden.

And when all of a sudden there's a need, you know, there's a family over here that needs food.

They go, Well, actually, you take it out of the 10% God. This 90% is mine. I'm not sharing my veggies with anyone else.

[10 : 59] They refuse to go beyond the tithe. They aren't being motivated by the gospel, by love, by justice, but by a legalistic code of conduct that says, I've done my bit.

And the 90% is mine. Now, I don't think we could ever expect God to say to his New Testament people with greater blessing and greater privileges and greater hope in the gospel that you, in fact, can give less than the Old Testament people.

And I suspect the reason tithing isn't mentioned a whole lot in the New Testament is because we're not meant to see it as a legalistic mindset, limitation to our giving.

I believe it's meant to be a baseline, a guide, a rule of thumb, a beginning. It helps us to see whether we at all are in the range God expects us to be and from there to see what we can do beyond it.

Now, I also think that Malachi 3 gives us a clue as to why money has such power over us. Verse 10, Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house.

[12 : 11] Now, the word house there at the end of that means God's temple. And God's instruction here is for his people to give of their gold and their silver and so on into the storehouse of his temple.

The word house means temple. The word storehouse in the Hebrew language means treasury. In other words, bring your treasure into my treasury.

And when God says bring your whole tithe, bring your treasure into me, into my treasury, into my temple, into the service of my salvation, into the worship of me, the implication is that if you are not taking it and putting it there, you've actually got it somewhere else.

Your treasure is in another treasury, in another temple somewhere. I'll give you two examples of what I mean by that. Firstly, if you find it very hard, I mean really hard to give money away, you know, it's just hard to give money away, but so incredibly easy to spend money on clothes and cars and travel and renovations and entertainment, then those things are the real treasury of your temple.

You're looking to those things to give you a sense of identity identity and desirability and acceptability and lovability and awe and experiences rather than looking to the knowledge and love of God.

[13 : 46] Secondly, there are those who look at people who spend money on, you know, stuff like that and clothes and homes and cars and travel and you just sneer. You know, you're, you're kind of proud of the fact that you've been wearing and repairing the same pair of undies for the last 10 years.

You hang out your tea bags to dry and so you can reuse them again and you don't own a mobile phone. You get really, really frugal and what you do is you squirrel all your money away into the bank, into investments and savings and stuff like that, all for a rainy day.

You're still under the power and control of money. You see, if you find it very hard to give money away but very easy to save money, then ultimately your bank is your temple.

Rather than God, you're looking to your bank, to your accounts to give you a sense of control in a very, very chaotic and unpredictable world. Instead of God, I get beauty and acceptance because of

the clothes that I wear.

Instead of God, I get control because of the investments that I have. It's easy to give money to whatever is your saviour, whatever is your hope, your happiness, your identity, your meaning, your significance, your security.

[15:01] Now, I like giving money away. Sort of. I'll say sort of. Sometimes it's a battle.

It's not always joyful. But I don't have the same battle with everything that I buy. There's not always a battle for me to spend money.

My ongoing battle is with the temple called Bunnings. That's my ongoing battle. I find it terribly easy to pay homage in Bunnings with my money in exchange for tools.

tools. I don't I find it easy to spend money on tools. Why? Why is that?

Because in my family context and in where I grew up, I got a sense of identity. I got praise and congratulations for being useful and practical.

[16:09] That's ultimately the issue. That's why I spend money in that direction because my identity is wrapped up in it in some subconscious kind of way.

And so the question for me is, is my identity wrapped up in Christ and who I am in Him and what God thinks of me or is it because people think that I'm useful and practical? Where's my identity?

And the reality is it's both. And that's why the battle rages. The battle rages in tools.

In a way, the battle does it. I walk into spotlight, the battle's not raging for me. There's no battle there when I walk into spotlight. You know, Nat walks into Bunnings with me and she goes, she walks into spotlight and I go, I can easily spend \$100 at Bunnings.

I want her to justify every cent that she spends at spotlight because there's my battle but it's not there. For some, it's a bookstore.

[17:20] You find it terribly easy to buy books because your identity is wrapped up in what people, people like thinking that you're smart or something. For some, it's clothes.

That's where you pay homage because your identity is wrapped up in your appearance. The point is money reveals what we really worship.

And for me personally, right now, the battle's raging. I've got two bids on things on eBay. Two tools. And I'm kind of hoping right now I'm going to get outbid on them.

Otherwise, I've got some justifying to do tonight. You see, radical generosity is not just about what you give away but about what you keep for yourself and what you spend on yourself.

And that is why Jesus says you cannot serve both God and money. He sets up money as the alternative God because it promises you identity. It promises you security and hope and freedom and a clear conscience and control and good health but it will never ever deliver what it promises to deliver.

[18:36] The biggest saving count of the world cannot stop cancer. It cannot stop traffic accidents. It cannot stop family disintegration. It cannot stop broken hearts and broken marriages. God is the only one who can give us security.

The only significance we can get and the only love that we can never lose. So it seems to me that if we do not have the freedom because money enslaves you if we do not have the freedom to joyfully give our money away in eye-popping proportions it's because something besides the Lord Jesus is in fact our functional Lord and Saviour.

And so how do we break the power that money has over us? The only answer is the gospel of the Lord Jesus. You see radical generosity this core value of radical generosity is not a different subject to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Radical generosity is a value that displays the wonder of the gospel in a world enslaved to money. Paul puts it like this in 2 Corinthians 8 when the Corinthians were failing to follow through in their commitment to raise money for ministry of mission.

He says see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I'm not commanding you but I want to test the sincerity of your love 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.

[20:06] There's the gospel right there. Now everyone in this room has set their heart on something. Something has your heart.

It could be children, grandchildren, status, career, physical beauty, leisure, investments, great Australian dream, tools, it could be anything and whatever it is we will do battle in order to get it.

We will pay any cost for it anything to maintain it sustain it and reclaim it. We will give our lives for it ultimately. We will sacrifice for it. Some in you know I will sacrifice for tools but I will give my life away for my wife and my kids because they got my heart.

Jesus came and he died for us. Why would he do that? At least one answer is that you and I are his heart's treasure.

every other treasure will insist that you die in order to sacrifice, in order to purchase it. You will sacrifice in order to purchase it but Jesus is the only treasure that sacrificed to purchase us.

[21 : 34] And so the way we break the hold of money over our life is to think and to think and to think on the radical generosity of Jesus Christ on the cross until we get the freedom to joyfully give generously.

There is no other motivation. When we see Jesus dying because he so loved the world only then will we actually love him.

When we see we are his greatest treasure then he will become our greatest treasure which is part of our mission statement as a church. The advice of the Apostle Paul here is don't sit down with a calculator if you want to break the power of money over your life and to grow in generosity.

Sit down with the cross and think about what Jesus did what he has given and what he has promised until it causes us to be generous like he has been generous to us.

Now I recently read the sad reality is that many Christians are in fact not radically generous. What that means is that although they profess faith in Jesus they haven't fully grasped the significance of the radical generosity of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

[22 : 56] Same recent survey 20% of those who regarded themselves as mature or very mature Christians had never given a single cent to any Christian ministry at all.

And what's more the average Christian gave just 2.7% of their income away to anything not just to mission but to charity work and anything. Because of the gospel we should seek this core value of radical generosity to shape our attitudes and our actions in our life here as a church.

Radical generosity is not just about what you give it's also about what you keep. Now let's be frank we're all at different levels here. Some of us are sitting fairly securely financially let me just restate that every single one of us here is sitting secure financially given that every member of the Australian population is in the top 1.5% of wealthy people in the world.

So it doesn't matter where you are you're in 1.5% wealthiest people in the world. If you own one motor vehicle you're in the top half a percent of wealthiest people in the world. So on one level taken in perspective we're all sitting fairly securely but some more secure than others you might say.

And the Bible says those have been given much as expected. Some of further down the scale on that some of us are sitting here thinking our small contribution won't make any sort of difference.

[24 : 30] I want to say radical generosity is not about the size of your bank account. It's not about that. It doesn't matter what end of the spectrum you're on.

Equal sacrifice but unequal giving is the biblical principle. Equal sacrifice unequal giving. So sit down. I want to encourage you tonight.

Sit down with the cross on this commitment Sunday. Make a decision to take one step forward in showing gratitude in showing gratitude of what Christ has done for you.

The gospel is to be your motivation. Not even our current financial issues are to be your motivation. The gospel has to be your motivation. I want us to be joyfully radically generous because it reflects the hearts that are aligned with God's heart.

So our grasp of the great eternal treasure that Jesus is will be reflected in a life of radical generosity. Especially so in a world that loves money. And so here's what I want you to do today.

[25 : 36] If you are not, you might be one of those 20% never give anything. If you are not currently giving, start giving. If you are giving irregularly, spasmodically, start giving regularly.

Take one step towards that direction. If you are regularly given but you're only giving a pretty small portion, take further steps towards that 10% ballpark that God seems to have had there in the Old Testament.

If you're irregular and already hitting the 10%, then just go beyond it. It's not meant to be a legalistic limitation. Take a step towards extravagant giving beyond that 10%.

And so with the crossing view and the principle of equal sacrifice but unequal giving in mind, I want to encourage you to apply the big gulp principle to your pledge today.

Write a figure on a piece of paper and your big gulp is going to be different than my big gulp. That is, write a piece of paper, a figure, and if it doesn't cause you to go, then maybe you should try writing something else on the piece of paper.

[26 : 42] And then pray for the grace and enabling of God to fulfill it joyfully throughout the year. You see, writing something on a piece of paper is one thing.

To joyfully fulfill that week after week throughout the course of the year, that's where it gets hard. You know, when the bills are racking up and there's things you want to do and other people are buying stuff and you're not, that's when it gets hard.

Do it because of the radical generosity of the Lord Jesus going to cross for you? I firmly believe that when the cross of Christ is our motivation, our experience in giving will in fact be a joy.

So let me read to you what Paul says about the Macedonian church in 2 Corinthians 8. And now brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability, entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

[27 : 57] The Macedonians are models of radical generosity and Paul shares their radical generosity with the church of Corinth in order to inspire them into the lives of radical generosity themselves.

And I believe they're meant to be an inspiration for us too. In great poverty, they pleaded for the privilege of giving. They saw it as a privilege, not a burden.

And so our core value of radical generosity reads like this. Our gifts, possessions, finances and time belong to God. We will therefore use them for his glory and not for our comfort.

We desire to be like the Macedonians whose joy in Christ through extremely difficult circumstances resulted in rich generosity towards others. We believe that in a world that loves money, a lifestyle of radical generosity proclaims that Jesus is our greatest treasure.

And so as a church we are committed to sacrificial, enthusiastic, joyful, regular giving in response to the gospel of grace. We're committed to supporting those who teach the word of God.

[29 : 04] We're committed to the responsibility of all Christians to pay what they owe. We're committed to the responsibility of all Christians to provide faithfully for their family, being generous to the poor and needy and supporting the wider work of the advancement of the gospel in the world.

So brothers and sisters, as you submit your pledge tonight and as you under God seek to fulfill it in the coming year, may Paul's words to the Corinthian church be ever on your minds and your hearts. Excel in this grace of giving. I'm not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love 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.

Amen.