

Lavish Generosity. Part of a series on living the life of an urban contemplative, preached on November 4, 2018 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons MALACHI 3:8-12
II CORINTHIANS 8:1-5
MATTHEW 13:44-50

One of the major ministries of Paul's 3rd missionary journey was the taking up of the special relief offering for the poor Christians in Judea. Once before Paul had assisted in this way (Acts 11:27-30) and he was happy to do it again. Paul had other blessings in mind besides the material assisting of the poor. He wanted his offering to strengthen the unity of the church as the Gentile (non Jewish) churches shared with the Jewish congregations across the sea. The offering was also evidence to the Jewish believers that Paul was not the enemy of the Jews or Moses.

Early in his ministry, Paul had promised to remember the poor (Gal. 2:6-10) and he diligently labored to keep that promise;

At the same time, he hoped that the generosity of the Gentiles would silence the jealousy of the Jews

Paul's first call to the believers in Corinth comes at the end of what we know as I Corinthians

15 – the importance of the Resurrection of Jesus to all believers and for all time.

Remember, in the original Greek there are no chapters.

I have always been struck in a good and positive way by Paul's words about the 'Christian event' For here in these verses, Paul clearly reminds his readers then and now that the Resurrection of Jesus has some very practical implications

Then he follows in what we know as the beginning of chapter 16 with the words,

Now concerning the collection for the saints; you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. (16:1)

God's work in Jesus is to be the governing factor in the whole of your lives.

We ought not to be surprised that Paul calls his readers to be generous with their funds.

Why?

Because Jesus spoke about money and possessions as much as he did the Kingdom of God and prayer.

Jesus knew the power of money and possessions in our lives to either make us grateful or possessive

To make us share or hoard,

To trust in Him or to be always worrying whether we have enough!

Therefore, Paul is merely following Jesus' lead.

The lesson Annie read tells us how Paul's call to be generous is going.
In two words, 'it isn't!'

Like many people, the Corinthians had made promises, but they FAILED to keep them.
In fact, the text reminds us that an entire year had been wasted (II Cor. 8:10)

I wonder – why the delay?
Bank machines not working?
Cheques in the mail that had been lost in transit.
Other wants, disguised as needs?
No Paul to harangue?
We are not told here – except the funds for the church in need had not come in as quickly or at all!

So Paul addresses the Corinthians again,
reminding them that the need is still there.
It is not an angry challenge
It is a basic one!

It is one that puts Paul's reminder in perspective.
This is not for my sake says Paul,
This is not to make me look good,
To layer guilt or embarrass you Corinthians
Listen to how the recently deceased Eugene Peterson phrases verses 8-9 of chapter 8 in The Message.

⁸⁻⁹I'm not trying to order you around against your will. But by bringing in the Macedonians' enthusiasm as a stimulus to your love, I am hoping to bring the best out of you. You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus

Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us – in one stroke he became poor and we became rich.

This is the energizing pivot of practicing generosity in this life – *God's lavish generosity to us.*

It is what can be called the heartbeat of generosity for believers.

It is where our own practice of generosity originates – *a clear recognition and acknowledgement first and foremost of God's lavish generosity to us.*

Over the past few weeks this fall we have been addressing practices for being an urban contemplative

How do we retain a Jesus first perspective in a world too busy, too apathetic, too hostile to the message of the Gospel?

Today, *the call and the challenge to be generous* – not just with our friends, and not just with our finances – but generous with things like time, gifts, relationships, saying thank you.

How then can we live as a book I once read phrased it – Being an Uphill Christian in a Downstream world.

For giving remains a very powerful indicator of the health and depth of our spiritual life.

Generosity then is not optional for God's people.

A dictionary definition of generosity says this "it is giving freely without expecting payment in return".

So how do we cultivate this generous spirit and turn it into action?

I believe we have to first admit to ourselves that *this is a sensitive matter that one does not approach by steam rolling over people or being in their face!*

Generosity as the scriptures see it is not retained, built upon or even prompted initially by guilt, embarrassment or threats.

Just as one cannot be shouted into the Kingdom of God,

One cannot be forced to be generous.

Gimmicks, give aways and false promises will not sustain God anchored generosity

Jesus knew this, so did Paul

St. Paul's words to the Corinthians were not then a sales pitch.

Rather they rested upon the proven and confirmed promises of God that Paul had seen in his own life as well as in the lives of so many others

...Until you can see how lavishly generous God has been to you as an individual, you will not respond with equal generosity to any other person, in any situation.

It was the love of the Lord Jesus for them first that would prompt them to give generously, sacrificially and practically.

And give not in some mimsey. 100 lb canary chirping *cheap!* way

Give not out of a sense that it is some sort of heavenly tax

But give out of compassion, grace, mercy, forgiveness; provision that reflected God's lavish generosity to them first.

Practicing generosity then begins by cultivation of *a thankful to God for his many blessings each day*" attitude.

I do not under-estimate how difficult that is to do consistently and neither should you underestimate its difficulty

Sometimes it is hard to be thankful
Sometimes it is hard to see through the mist of tears, hurt, regret, loss and pain and be thankful.

In such times it is only as we look behind us that we see God's loving hand guiding us, his love arms keeping us safe.

In such times, it is only the promises of God we can and must cling to –

Nothing shall ever separate us from the love of God Paul's Romans letter.

I know my Redeemer lives from the book of Job
The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want from the Psalms

Words, words, and words only you say?

No promises!

Acclamations affirming God's care for us, no matter what!

Witnesses to the validity of God's promises who have gone before us!

I wonder – where would be if we as God's people did not have such promises to hold to? To bind us together.

These promises ARE part of God's lavish generosity to each of us.

Make time on a regular basis to say thank you to God

Take time to reflect on all that he continues to give and make happen in your life.

Generosity is also cultivated *as we practice it toward others.*

A prepared to be generous heart is particularly sensitive and mindful of the needs of others.

My mother in law was a generous woman. She never took for granted the material blessings of this life my father in law's career provided,

And she had a special almost 6th sense as to the needs of new Canadians who crossed her path. For example, she sought out and paid for dental care, for eyeglasses, for medical checkups not covered by the government.

She knew what was most needful before people asked and she would be angered if she knew that I was saying these things publicly.

In fact, both my in-laws were generous people. Up until recently when dementia has taken a hold on

my father in law, there was no legitimate cause he did not support generously.

One of the people on his elders' district was a single mom whose child had MS.

A specially equipped van was needed.

My father in law went to the minister of their church and said, Marion needs a van for Sandor.

This is what it is going to cost.

Can the church buy it, and I will fund the cost?

Marion never knew who had bought her van.

Nor did any in our family until very recently...

Again, he would be ticked if he knew I was telling this story.

The needs of others also includes other smaller things

A meal prepared,

A dog walked

A bit of babysitting

A phone call or note

An arrangement of flowers

A lunch or dinner gift card or "this is on me!"

A listening ear

The practice of generosity in this life may also include willing to be interrupted or inconvenienced from our schedule or to do list.

If you are the parent of young children or teens or really any age.

If you have parents that are beginning to need more attention and care – role reversal –

If you serve the public in any way – you know all too well about interruptions – yes?

A maturing lesson for this type A person has been the realization of how often the interruptions of this life are more significant in the long run than what WE had planned to do.

Look at the Gospels? What did Jesus always have time for? People!

There is a lesson here for urban contemplatives – under God’s discernment and leading, maybe we need to see people less as interruptions and more as possible ways to grow in God’s grace.

Showing the generosity of God in our lives in a practical way *also involves our material wealth.*

I have always found it interesting after someone years ago pointed out this particular passage from the Old Testament book of the prophet Malachi.

That this is one of the few places in scripture, if not the only place, where God directly challenges his people.

Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In your tithes and offerings! ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me – the whole nation of you! ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so

that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. (Malachi 3:8-10)

This is a call to trust God to provide is it not?

And it is still hard to do all the time, isn't it. I know some have caught the vision and live in the light of what is said in Malachi.

Hudson Taylor, 19th century missionary and founder of the China Inland Mission lived his life under the dictum

God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's provision.

I can point to enough examples from my own life as I expect can most of you, where provision by God was evident.

Look, if we wait until we can afford to give – whether that is to a community of faith or any charitable cause or any need, including those who do not issue tax receipts, We will never give – because we will be afraid that we will go without or not have enough.

Yet the scriptures promise that if we give out of an acknowledgement and thankfulness of God's

lavish generosity to us first, we will never go without.

In fact and many attest to this, our gifts will be multiplied and expanded in ways we could never imagine at the time we gave.

Important qualifier – we are setting ourselves up for disappointment and hurt if we expect instant returns or payback for our generosity – no matter what form that generosity takes.

Showing the generosity of God in our lives does not work on an instant in/out return!!

It may take months and years before we see the results of our generosity,

But know this and be confident in it – God sees our generosity! God will not forget our generosity!

In the light of God's lavish generosity to each of us first, we are then called and challenged to live generous lives.

Generosity is not an option! AMEN Let us pray