

2 Corinthians 9.6–15

Treasuring generosity

Amington (Online)

Sunday 29 November 2020

Treasure [4]

To Love is to Give

Today is the last in our mini-series on *treasure*. We began by thinking about the rich man, whom Jesus told to focus on treasure in heaven rather than worldly wealth.

Then we thought about where treasure leads us – towards or away from God. We saw how money doesn't last, and how it demands loyalty, distracting and taking us away from God.

Last week we thought about the true treasure, which God gives to us his jars of clay. We thought about the light that he shines in our hearts to show us Jesus, to lead the way.

Today we are thinking about what we *do* with what God gives, we are thinking about *generosity*.

Two men were marooned on an island. One man paced back and forth worried and scared while the other man sat back and was sunning himself. The first man said to the second man, 'Aren't you afraid we are about to die?'

'No,' said the second man, 'I make \$100,000 a week and give 10% to my church. My Pastor will find me.'

I suspect that when some of you who've been round the church block a few times see that the reading comes from 2 Corinthians 9, you groan a little inside and think, 'Here we go, the vicar's asking us for money again.'

And I guess, in a way, I am – although I'm not *only* asking for money. I'm asking for much, *much* more – because that is what God asks of us! But he doesn't ask anything of us that he hasn't done first...

I imagine many of you know John 3.16: **God so loved the world that he... gave his one and only Son.** When God wanted to show us his love, he *gave* us his Son. And what did the Son do? **Christ loved us and... gave himself up for us** (Ephesians 5.2). In Jesus we see that to love is to be generous, to give, to hold nothing back. That is how God loves us: he gives. And he doesn't only give Jesus!

Psalms 24.1 says this: **The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.** If everything ultimately belongs to God, then *everything* we have is a gift!

Let's hear what J John has to say about it.

Video: God owns all the doughnuts

God owns all the doughnuts, and he is super generous with them. Everything you have, from your car and your house to your odd socks and that thing in the kitchen drawer that you can't remember what it does any more – it all belongs to our generous **God, who gives life to everything** (1 Timothy 6.13).

So let's think about generosity: its purpose, its promise, and what it proves.

Purpose

God is generous to us – why? First, so we can be generous to others. Verse 11: **you will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.** God gives, so we can give.

When you train people and animals, what really works isn't clever words, it is repetition, and a good example. Animals – and people – copy what they see far more than things they hear.

God knows this. He doesn't simply tell us to do something – he shows us *how* to do it, by giving us everything, even his own Son. He gave, so we can give. That's the first purpose of generosity.

The second is this: it makes God happy!

Now, not everything we do makes God happy. But as Paul says, **God loves a cheerful giver** (8). When we give generously and cheerfully, God loves it!

When you train people and animals, and they do the things you've been trying to teach them, it makes you feel great! Giving with a cheerful heart – it makes God smile.

As if generosity needed another purpose other than that one – but it has two more! In verse 12 Paul writes that the generosity of the Corinthians is **supplying the needs of the Lord's people**.

He was talking about the severe famine that was taking place in Judah, the area around Jerusalem, at that time. Paul encouraged the Christians in the churches he had planted to help out.

On their own, each of those Christians could make very little difference. But together they made a *huge* difference. Paul had a principle in his churches: those with plenty supported those with little (2 Corinthians 8.14).

Amington Parish Church is an example of this principle at work in the Church of England. As far as I can tell Amington has never paid the full cost of having a vicar – not even close. However, Amington has had a vicar for decades. That money, the gap between what we can afford and we've actually had – that gap has been made up year after year by the generosity of other Christians.

We are about £20,000 short every year. That means in the last 30 years alone other Christians across Birmingham have needed to give well over £500,000 more than they needed to pay for their vicar, so Amington could have one too.

I hope that doesn't make you feel bad or guilty – that's not my intention at all. I tell you that to lead us to the fourth purpose of generosity: *thanksgiving*. I read out the first part of verse 12 earlier, about **supplying the needs of the Lord's people**. But the verse carries on: **this service you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks... to God.**

As Christians we are generous, not so people praise us and hold us up as paragons of virtue – but so people might give thanks **to God**. After all, he owns all the doughnuts! So if I am to give thanks for my doughnuts, it's God to whom I need to say thank-you!

Perhaps over the coming days you can in your prayers say thank-you to God for the faithfulness and generosity of all those loving Christians who have generously and sacrificially given so much, so that Amington can have a vicar.

There is a common thread that runs through all this: when we are generous we stop looking inwards, and start looking outwards. We receive from God's generosity and follow his example. We notice the needs of others and give generously. We overflow in thanks to God for the way his generosity has inspired others to be generous.

All that is the purpose of generosity – but what about its promise?

Promise

The church board met to discuss their pastor's pay package for the coming year. After the meeting the chair of board told the pastor: 'We are very sorry, Pastor, but we decided that we cannot give you a raise next year.'

'But you must give me a raise,' said the pastor, 'I am but a poor preacher!'

'I know,' said the chair, 'We have to listen to you every Sunday.'

God makes three promises in this passage:

1. **Whoever sows generously will also reap generously** (6)
2. **God will supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness** (10)
3. **You will be enriched in every way** (11)

Some people read this and think that God is like some sort of cosmic investment manager, promising financial returns that even the best city trader would marvel at. It's called the prosperity gospel, and preachers of it say that all you need to do is give more and more generously (usually into their private accounts) and God will bless you with more money than you put in.

But that is not what Paul meant at all! The **harvest** he was talking about is a **harvest of righteousness** (9, 10). We might put it like this: practice makes perfect; the more we practice being generous, the more generous we become.

If you've ever sown seed – as I was with the gardener this year down at church – you'll know you can't do it with your fist closed tightly around the seed. If you do that, you'll hold on to the seed you have, but you won't get much grass – and you certainly won't get any more seed.

You have to open your hand to let the seed go so it can grow into grass – and only if your hand is open are you able to receive more.

This is why when I pray I often hold my hands out like this. An open hand is hand that gives, *and* a hand that is ready to receive.

Proof

Finally, generosity is the proof of our new life in God, not the performance we put in to earn it. In verse 13 Paul says **you have proved yourselves: others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ.**

Generosity is not a performance to earn God's favour, but goes with and proves our faith in the gospel of Christ. Generosity is not how we earn God's favour, it's how we say thank-you for it.

Which I suppose leads to the final question: how generous is your heart? Is your heart like this *ball fist*, or like this *open fist*?

For, when we see how great, how indescribable (15) is the gift of God to us in Jesus – how can we hold anything back? How can we not be generous, giving all we have in thanksgiving and joy?

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. Amen.