

The Generous Church

Week 1

Week of 11/8/09



The Hope: We want to grasp the biblical truth that there is no significant spiritual growth until you and I put our money — and how we think about money — in God's hands.

Intro: So many of our worries and fears center around money. God knows this, so He filled the Scriptures with wisdom about it and all of life's "possessions." We're going to look at a church in Jerusalem and how the grace of God affected their lives. The freedom, love, empathy and hope we will see in them is both convicting and encouraging. Because of the transformation Jesus brought to their lives, they saw their lives and possessions differently. Let's pray for God's grace in our hearts and minds so we see all of life's things as His.

Consider reading aloud *1 Chronicles 29:11-13*, part of King David's prayer to the one true God declaring everything is His.

Discussion Questions

- 1) *Opener:* what first comes to mind when you hear the series title, "The Generous Church"?
 - 2) Joel shared this weekend the simple truth that *everything we have will someday be thrown in the garbage or given to someone else.*
 - a. What was your first thought when you heard that?
 - b. Have you thought about it since then? Do you think differently about it now than when you first heard it?
 - 3) Read *Acts 4:32-37* aloud together. Verse 33 says, "much/great grace was upon them all." What does this mean? (See Leader Guide 3a below.)
 - 4) When you look at the text, what are some of the evidences of this "great grace" that was among them?
 - 5) Are you living a generous life? Are you giving of your time? Money? Skills? Where do you need to grow and become more generous?
- Depending on the group dynamic and size, you may want to transition to praying for one another at this time.

Leader Guide // helpful answers and pointers for above questions

- 1a) (May reveal our skewed perspectives, which we all have.) Do you think about money? About sharing with those in need?
- 2a) (Again, no "right" answers here, but that statement should be eye-opening for each of us. Let people speak freely.)
- 3a) The "great grace" that was upon them all was the gospel message that saved them. (We read in v. 32 that they all believed.) They believed they were sinners who couldn't get right with God by good behavior; so Christ died for all their sins and they trusted in the One who triumphed over death and the grave for them. The fact that all of this comes as a free gift from God was overwhelming them.

- 4a) They were of one heart and soul — UNITY was real for them (v. 32), and so they were radically generous (vv. 32, 34-27). They were empathetic towards those who were in a hard spot (v. 34), and they loved teaching and testimony (v. 33). Testimonies are stories of God's transforming work in their lives. Does anyone have a story of God's grace?

The Generous Church
Week 2
A Generous Church is Smart
Week of 11/15/09

Matthew 6:19-21: Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

- ***Question: How is this passage different than the "Prosperity Gospel" message that many churches preach today?***

Matthew 13:44-46: Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

- ***Questions: Must we give up everything we own for the Kingdom? Should Christians sell their possessions and give to the poor? (see Mark 10:21). What do we have to give up to gain eternal life? (Luke 18:22-30)***

1 Timothy 6:17-19: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

- ***Question: What is the difference between worldly and spiritual wealth? Read Matthew 25:34-40 and find out another way to obtain wealth beyond this world.***

Luke 16:13-15: Jesus said, “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

- **Question: How can money become an obstacle to serving God? How can money become an obstacle in our relationships with each other? How can money be a force for good in serving God and each other? Where have you seen one or the other take place (either it be an obstacle or it is a force for good?)**

1 Timothy 6:6-10: “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

- **Question: What is godliness with contentment? Is a desire for money always a root of evil?**

Mark 10:17-31: As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “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: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

- **Questions: Did Jesus say that salvation comes by obeying the commandments? (10:19) Read Galatians 3:23-29 for more on this. Could we lose our eternal reward by lacking just one thing? (10:21) How could a camel fit through the eye of a needle? (10:25) Does Jesus want us to abandon our families? (10:29) What guarantee comes with our commitment to follow Christ? (10:30)**