

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

It is a privilege to “stand” before you this morning and have the opportunity to share with you a message from the word of God.

I would like to speak about generosity and how Jesus is our example of generosity. And of course, for the Christian, generosity is a gift that comes from God. God is generous with us. We experience that generosity in our lives everyday. Sometimes we may not pay enough attention, but he is for ever pouring down on us his generosity.

Before we continue, let us say a word of prayer.

Father, we are here, together this time. It is our desire that you will use this time and your Holy Spirit will speak to us where we need to be met. We pray that you will open our minds and hearts to you and to your generosity, which you pour into us all the time. I pray Lord, with the Psalmist, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer”

(Psalm 19:14).

Rather than giving us a definition of what is generosity, let see what the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthinas concerning generosity. Paul, writing to the Galatians tells them about a time he met with the leaders of the Jerusalem church, this is what he writes,

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

“And recognizing the grace that I had been given, James, Cephas, and John—those reputed to be pillars—gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. They only asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. (Galatians 2:9-10).

From the beginning, the church has been concerned for the needy, the sick, the orphan, the widow, and the oppressed. Paul says that remembering the poor, was THE thing he was eager to do. Helping the poor became a big part of Paul’s ministry.

According to Acts 11:28-30, when prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch,

“One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted through the Spirit that a great famine would sweep across the whole world. (This happened under Claudius.) So the disciples, each according to his ability, decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gifts to the elders with Barnabas and Saul”

Generosity as a gift of grace:

And many churches jumped in to the opportunity to help the church in Jerusalem. They were eager to help. They were ready to exercise that gift, because it is a gift:

Paul writes about that grace given to the churches of Macedonia:

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God which hath been given in the churches of Macedonia; how that in much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality (2 Co 8:1–2 NRSV).

For the Christian, generosity is a gift from God. I know, there are many people, who are not Christians and who are very generous. This is true. But we, Christians recognize that whatever acts of generosity we participate in, is because of what the Lord has done for us and we do in order to bring glory to his name.

Generosity: Attitude:

Many years ago, when I first came to this country, I was mentioning to someone about the need to help someone in need. They knew I was from Guatemala. Their answer was, “Rudy, in this country, people are poor because they want to, but they don’t have to be poor. There are many opportunities for work here”.

While there may be less people in need of help here, there are still plenty of people in need, even in this country. Let us not harden our hearts to the sick, the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the oppressed. Jesus has never held back his graces towards us. So why would we hold back our generosity to those in need?

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

The Macedonian churches wanted to be part of this gift or “ministry to the saints” in Judea. Paul says,

“For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begs us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints (2 Cor 8:3-4 NRSV).

They considered it a privilege to share some of their possessions with the church in Jerusalem. Yes, they considered it a privilege. I think the attitude with which we participate in generous acts make a difference. The focus of our act of generosity is not us, but the recipient of the gift and God will be glorified in this.

It is hard to be generous when we have a bad attitude. Yes, it is hard when we don't have the right attitude. When we have an expected response to our generosity and we don't get it. We don't like it and may even regret it. What response to our act of generosity do we expect and why? What happens if our expectations go unfulfilled?

A very loved pastor friend of mine said that we can't stop being generous with people just because some people don't seem to appreciate our sharing or because some end up taking advantage of our generosity. This is true. Let us not be discouraged or become resentful when people don't seem to appreciate our generosity.

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

Jesus never withdrew his grace, love, mercy towards his disciples because they did not believe sometimes, or because they abandoned him in times when he needed them the most.

Jesus continued to show his grace towards people even when Jesus knew that they were following him not because they saw signs he performed but because they ate the loaves and had their fill (John 6:26). That didn't stop Jesus from his ministry towards people.

Generosity: motivation

Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

“Excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you – see that you also excel in this grace of giving”

Let us notice the other elements that Paul tells the Corinthians to excel in, faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness and love, and with the grace of giving. You see, generosity is not one and itself. It is part of the whole grace of God towards us in Jesus.

Our generosity can't contradict our faith, speech, knowledge, and love. When generosity is not behind a good intention and motivation, it can become a form of control and manipulation. Some pragmatist will say, “it doesn't matter as long as people are helped”. But I think the right motivation

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

matters, specially to Christians. In our generosity, we honor and glorify the Lord. Not ourselves.

Jesus taught his disciples to do acts of generosity for the right motivation. He told them not to be like the Pharisees. This is what he said,

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full”. (Matthew 6:2)

Their reward is being seen and honored by people. That is it!

How many times have we heard of someone who is generous with their spouse but uses it as a way to control and manipulate the spouse and the family. The motivation behind “this generosity” is selfish and manipulative with no regard for the recipients as long as they can manipulate and control them.

Paul tells the Corinthians,

“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others”.

Paul, now writing to the Corinthians and about their desire to help, tells them to test their sincerity (in their desire to help), with what others have already done. The Macedonians already did it, now the Corinthians, who are hearing from Paul what

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

Macedonian churches did, need to do what they say they want to do. But he reminds them, “I am not commanding you”. Truly, generosity can not be forced, if we try to “command” others to act in generosity, then it is no longer generosity. It becomes fear and manipulation.

Generosity: Intention and action

Paul continues in his letter to the Corinthians,

“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”

It is simple, generosity is the way of Jesus. We are called to be generous for the sake of others, not ours. Jesus has made grace available to us. It is up to us to receive it or reject it. The grace is offered, not because our merit but because of his grace.

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to finish the work that they want to do, so that their desire to give to the poor in the church in Jerusalem supplies for their needs.

Good intentions, even right intentions **do** no serving to others if we do not act on our intentions. So, Paul exhorts them, do what they have said you want to do. Their desire to give is a good thing and so now they need to act on their desire to help. And do it according to their means. Do not worry about how the churches in Macedonia did it, out of their poverty and in

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

abundance. “The gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have” Paul says.

In our context, I would say, if you want to give a gift and do not have the money, do not incur debt to do it. Wait for other times when you will be able to do it.

Although we tend to think generosity in terms of money, it does not have to be money. We can be generous with our time, we can be generous with our knowledge, we can be generous with our words. A word of encouragement goes a long way. Sometimes, it is these little things that make a great difference in other people’s lives. We can be generous with other resources not just with money.

Paul continues, *“Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed. But that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little” (2 Cor. 8:13-15).*

When we give, especially if it is money to those in need, we are decreasing our quantity and bringing theirs up to a higher level and thus accomplishing a degree of equality. We now feel, to a degree, the way they were feeling before they received from our generosity. It is this way that we completely empathize with the ones in need.

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

Generosity and transparency:

Paul took on a lot of responsibility when he took on this project. He was careful in being transparent and honest with this. He writes,

“We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord, but also in the eyes of others” (2 Cor 8:20-21).

So, Paul is taking all the necessary steps to manage this gift in ways that others can't criticize the way he is doing this.

IF and when we are charged to manage gifts of generosity, we must be faithful and transparent and provide any information concerning how we are handling it and ensuring that it gets to the final recipients of the gifts of generosity.

Later on verses 22 – 24 Paul tells the Corinthians about the man he is sending to collect their gifts. An unnamed brother, who is zealous about this gift and Titus. They will be the ones receiving their gift with the charge to ensure that eventually it gets to the church in Jerusalem.

You know, eventually Paul delivered this gift to the church in Jerusalem. I found it interesting that we don't get to hear about those who received and how this gift was received. And I think it is right, because this was not about the people receiving

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

it, but it was for givers to learn how to exercise well the gift of generosity.

In giving, we recognize that we have received plenty from the Lord. He is the source of everything that we receive every day, every minute. The first centering song we sang says, “Your blessing is a river”. God blesses us in so many ways. His blessings and gifts are new every morning, like a river flowing. Yes, every day.

When I am on my way to work I rejoice in the new morning and praise the Lord for the new day. By the time I am a mile from work, the sun is coming up and it is normally beautiful. But there have been days when it is not sunny and bright. It has been cold and gray. I noticed one of the morning I was worried about something and I almost missed the blessing of a new morning. I was so focused on my self and feeling a little sorry for little me. Then I thought, how can this be? God is giving us this morning and I almost fail to notice this blessing, just because is gray, rainy and cold and I am not feeling well.

I have decided not to let these things in life that give me a little grief, miss everything else that the Lord is doing for us everyday.

God is a generous giver and when we give from ourselves to others we show our gratitude to the Lord and in that way, in

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15, 20-24

our gratitude to the Lord, we can be a blessing to others as we share with others in their need.

If by the time the service ends and everyone is getting on with the rest of the day and forget everything I said, please try to remember and go back to read chapter 8th of 2 Corinthians. See and spend a little time in verse 9, “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”

Amen!