

The Godly Principle of Giving

Praise God!

Let's start by looking at Nicodemus. Why? It is because Nicodemus had a keen interest in Jesus. Unlike most of the Pharisees and Sadducees who distained and even plotted to kill Jesus, Nicodemus was fascinated by the truths that Jesus was sharing and the miracles performed at the hand of Jesus. Jesus wanted Nicodemus to understand his purpose and the gift that he would give to the world.

Turn with me to John 3:14-21

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, [exalted] that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Back in John 3:3 Jesus tells Nicodemus "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." To Nicodemus the Pharisee this was confusing to say the least. He asks Jesus "Can you be born of a mother two times?"

Jesus takes compassion on Nicodemus and explains to him that he needs more than a natural birth, he needs a spiritual birth as well.

Nicodemus is still trying hard to grasp what Jesus is saying.... This is where we come into our scripture passage for today. Look at verse 14 again. Jesus says: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up"

This he understood... as a devout Jew and Pharisee he was very familiar with the Pentateuch (the first five books of the bible) In Short, he knew what Jesus was getting at. Jesus is referring to the exodus in the desert when Israel complained

against God in Numbers 21. This is when God sent venomous snakes into the camp. People were bitten, poisoned and lay about dying. So finally, the people repented to God appealing for mercy and he granted them life.

God decided to order Moses to make a bronze snake and place it on a pole. This is kind of like a caduceus used by medical practitioners today. When the people looked upon it they were cured. You see the message he was a foreshadowing of what was to come. Jesus would be placed upon a tree and whomsoever looked upon him in faith would be healed. More than that... Jesus told Nicodemus that anyone who trusted in him would live forever.

You see... Healing came when they looked upon the snake on the pole in accordance with God's grace. In this example Jesus was drawing Nicodemus attention to the gift that he would bring to the world.

Finally having placed his message in context for Nicodemus Jesus went on to say in Verse 15 "For God so loved the world, that he GAVE his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

To me personally this is the single most important line of scripture. It is with these words that I understood what Jesus had done for me, and so I GIVE my life to him.

Can you see the exchange? He GAVE his life for me and so I willing GIVE my life to him.

As we go about our lives it is interesting that so many of us compartmentalize our lives.

- This is me at Church
- This is me at School
- This is me playing Sports
- This is me with family
- This is me with Saved Friends
- This is me with unsaved friends
- This is me at work
- And so on...

We set un-Godly boundaries because we feel that these things are to be kept apart... Unfortunately for those of us who have done or are still doing this, it is not what scripture teaches. Every aspect of our lives has to do with our faith. If you look at these compartments, these are the avenues for you to share Jesus. If you haven't shared Jesus with anyone lately, you need to ask yourself:

- Am I compartmentalizing my life?
- Am I just assigning Jesus to Sunday morning?
- Am I excluding Jesus from the other areas of my life?

This morning can we ask the question, have we really given our lives to Jesus or do we just let him have Sundays? Are we committed to God? Are we sold out to Jesus?

How we live our lives and conduct ourselves at work, at home, at school, with family or friends is all done in the presence of God.

Let me change gears here for a sec...

This sermon is on giving and most people wait for the elephant in the room to appear, So with a nod to that aspect of financial giving, I do have a couple of things to say.

I have been a pastor for 7 years now and before that a PK (Pastor's Kid) for 45 years. Over the years I have seen a lot of differing ideas around it. You all know I am not a legalist on tithe, but the Lord loves a cheerful giver and there is an overarching giving principle that must be understood.

Please understand me, I am not against tithing, I support giving, what I am attempting to communicate here is that it shouldn't be about math. ...For some reason we have learned to disassociate giving from our commitment to Christ.

- How often have we considered what we should contribute?
- Do we pray about it?
- Have we sought the guidance of the Lord regarding our finance?

When we look at what the Word of God says, giving is always related to worship. Consider with me if you will Exodus 35:21

Here we see King David kicking off the project for the temple in Jerusalem. The people gave willingly 1 Chronicles 29:6 then when King Hezekiah restored the temple 2 Chronicles 31:5 tells us that the Israelites brought a great amount, a tithe of everything. Now some will say, "but pastor that is old Testament." Yet we can clearly see the same connection in the New Testament

Consider the poor widow who placed everything she had in the treasury, she was trusting God for her provision. Later in the new Testament we see the apostle Paul speaking to the people in Corinth saying: "On the first day of the week each one... should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.

What is my point?

Giving is not just an act of math to take care of basic needs, it is an act of worship. God doesn't just want your cash in the offering plate, he wants your heart there too.

Your faithful giving is an outward expression of an inward devotion.

Do you believe me?

Well, the Lord told us where your treasure is there your heart will be also. Did you know that giving is a testimony of relationship?

So now that part is taught we come back to John 3:16 God GAVE his SON Jesus Christ, who was all-In to be the savior of the world. He did this freely, not out of a sense of duty. We didn't have to fight with him to release the gift of eternal life by begging and pleading for him to send Jesus to us.

God did the opposite He loved us so much that he GAVE his Son.

Parents. You love your kids. You stand ready to provide for them, to help them, to love them. If your kid is sick you willing sit with them to help them feel better. If you are like me, you will do anything and everything to help your kids because you love them so much.

If you are giving out of duty, while being a good steward, you are still robbing yourself of the joy of giving.

God gave his son freely. He came and took our place on the cross. Every one of us falls short of righteousness without Christ. We deserved death for our sin and yet he shed his blood because of his great love for you he GAVE it freely. He gave his life for you personally.

- He has redeemed you – you were bought with the price of his life and the shedding of his blood in sacrifice for you
- He has propitiated you – He took your place, he took the blame for your sin willingly and freely gives his forgiveness to all who believe on him and simply ask
- He has reconciled you into right relationship once again with God the Father. You can now approach the throne of grace confidently
- He has sanctified you – He has wrapped you up in his righteousness. He is your high priest, He is your advocate

What he has given you is amazing! How can we as his disciples do anything less than freely giving to our Lord's kingdom?

This may not be popular, but I have a responsibility to the truth... It is my desire that every person here this morning is led to see and acknowledge that God has given to each of us... liberally.

Let's take a step back for a second and do a reality check...

- Psalms 24:1 tells us that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it
- Acts 17:25 says that our God is not served by human hands as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.
- Romans 8:32 tells us that he graciously gives us all things

If this is the case... and it is because what the word says is true, then we need to wake up and see that everything we have has come from him. Starting with life and working down the list from there. It's all his.

God is a God of abundance. We are told that he came to give us life and that life more abundantly. This morning, are we faithful in the little things as we see in Matthew 25:23 HE will put you over many things. Enter into the joy of the Lord

God blesses his people when they respond in obedience to his commandments. Let's take the example of King Solomon from the bible. Solomon prayed to God for Wisdom... God's response was to give him amazing wisdom, riches and a long life!

How easy it is to forget that God set the sun and the moon in place, that the God we are dealing with here, the one true and almighty God created the universe. Our God sends the rain, grows the crops, and causes the sun to shine.

A major work of the Holy Spirit is bringing about the likeness of Christ within us. Our role as disciples is to follow the discipline of our master. If we really think about what God has done for us and we look at the many examples of generosity that God has already given us, our response should be gratitude.

What am I getting at here?

Let me be clear. God has shown us the way through the example of the way beyond generous gift of his Son. Friends, He gave his all!

The uncomfortable truth is that all we have is God's.

Instead of giving from duty alone or out of obligation, we need to embrace his joy in giving and be inspired by his gifts to us to be generous with what he has entrusted to us. God loves a cheerful giver!

- He showed us that He gives freely
- He showed us that He gives liberally
- He showed us that He gives sacrificially
- He showed us that He gives selflessly

Can we as Christians be generous by giving from our abundance?

Can we as Christians be sacrificial by giving in lean times?

Most of us struggle in this economy. This sermon is not about judging who can give generously and who can give little. It is not about money, resources and time. Although these are realities... It is about motivation. Are you generously donating time to build up your church? What about resources? What about your talents?

No one can judge your situation except you. So many struggle, and with the abuses we have seen in the public media, many have become afraid to trust the church with finances. They have fallen for the trap of the enemy...

... I gave up a six-figure job and a career in business systems. I make about 25% of what I used to earn. Why do I say this? I had to trust God in deciding to become a minister here in the Kootenays. I am not any different than any one of you. I struggle and have to pay bills. Yet... God has continually been faithful.

Today, economically people will look at that financial picture and think I am crazy... Don't get me wrong my giving has not been perfect, nor am I setting myself up as an example. But I can share my experience... So Why am I happier now than I was when I was making so much more money? Why do I now have my house paid off, when I couldn't do that before. How is it that I am driving a reasonably new truck? How did I wind up with a 25' travel trailer this year, way below cost? How is that despite the difficult financial situations that tend to show up, I am still blessed? How can I be so much farther ahead now that I was then? GOD

Giving to God joyfully, willingly and lovingly brings blessing. It is not about a dollar amount or a percentage of income. It is not about a percentage of your time. It is not about building up a fancy church or anything like that... it's about relationship with God. It's about trusting God... May our giving be selflessly offered in gratitude CHEERFULLY.

Consider that our amazing God who so sacrificially gives to us invites us to give back to him. Consider the people in the old Testament who lived as farmers. Suppose a farmer had 100 acres of farmland. God said when you harvest your wheat he wants the first fruits... This means from the first harvest, the first acre was given to the Lord for his purposes. They had faith! Why? Because who know what would happen to the rest of the land yet to be harvested. Let's say you live in Calgary and you farm your land and give the first 10% of the proceeds of the harvest to God. What if the other 90% is then destroyed in a hailstorm? What if a migrating herd of elk eats the rest of your harvest of wheat? FAITH is required

The reality is that true giving takes faith. Do we trust God to accomplish his will in Salmo? Only God and we ourselves can look into our own hearts and determine if we are giving out of duty, obligation or out of relationship.

John 3:16 says: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

What I want each person to take away from this sermon this morning is that giving is a form of worship. Giving can be generous or sacrificial, and both honor God. God wants his people to be cheerful in their giving and this requires faith and an investment in trust. Giving from duty or obligation fills a financial need, but it doesn't fulfill the worship requirement. We should give of our time, resources and finance in worship simply because of who he is and what he has done.

Let's look once more at what he has given us...

As a Church we have declared:

- We Love All People
- We Worship God
- We Embrace Community

Do we have the capacity as a church to love all the people who come? Are we able to help them when they need it? What does that Love look like? Agape love is unconditional. There is no expectation of return.

Do we worship God everyday or do we compartmentalize God? Does he hear from us only on Sunday morning? How is our relationship with God? Do we trust him to superintend his church here in Salmo? Do we believe the vision established for his house?

Are we offering up our lives in worship to him?
If so... What does that look like?

- Do we offer him our time
- Do we offer him our finance to see his will done
- Do we offer him our friendship
- Do we offer him our hearts full of joy

Finally, do you know why I take up an offering on Sunday?

Well 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 tells us to make provision for needs:

Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

Malachi 3:10 tells us that the church is to pour out blessings:

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

This morning, I want to share two last things with you...

- 1) As important as this topic is... I don't want to know who gives what. Everyone is treated exactly the same regardless of their ability to support the church. I find out if we are up or down and if we can cover the expenses and overall total information. Your personal giving patterns are not known to me... nor do I want to know. They are between you and God.
- 2) I don't avoid taking up the offering for two reasons:
 - a. This is your Church and you are it's stewards
 - b. I have discovered that giving joyfully brings blessing and I do not want to rob anyone of the potential for God's blessing your faithfulness.

Friends, this morning I am here to declare that you are loved. If you are a widow with two mites or a multi millionaire you are loved equally. This sermon is about heart relationship and worship in all aspects of your life. Giving is merely one aspect.

I have never been able to out give God...

Summary:

God wants more than your wallet. He wants all of you, full time!

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, I ask for each person who hears this sermon will take a look inside and evaluate where they stand with you. There are many who have been taken advantage of in this world and in some cases by a "church". Many have been used or abused. In some cases, by those claiming to be your servants. I pray Lord this morning a healing of those hearts.

I pray that nothing impedes the worship of any person in this place. I pray a breakthrough in the praises of your people. I pray a breakthrough in prayer in this house.

I pray that your kingdom and your church not be used by the enemy or his children for their evil ends, but that what you intended your church to be... It will be. In Jesus name I pray this and I pray and increase in vision and faith in this house today. Today I declare this church and it's purpose and intention is to serve you Lord God Almighty. This morning God we invite you to walk with us as we worship you in all aspects of our lives.

AMEN.