

If you're new, we're really glad you're here. I know Adam already kind of introduced himself and welcomed you tonight. I want to do the same. My name is Beau. I'm one of the pastors and elders of our church. I have the opportunity every so often, when Matt is either out of town or not preaching, to preach. This is one of those weekends.

Every time he's gone, it doesn't look at that different than when he's preaching, except we as a campus really have the opportunity to consider the Scriptures for us as a congregation here, really in light of our particular context here in our city. I always really just love these times we get to speak together and consider and meditate on the Scriptures together. That's what we're going to do. We've been in this series all fall long called *City on a Hill* where essentially we have been taking bits and pieces of the Sermon on the Mount, which is a sermon Jesus gave and really one of the best sermons, if not *the* best sermon, in the history of the world, and we've just been considering it together. We're going to continue that tonight.

If you have a Bible, please turn to Matthew 6. That's where we are at now. We just finished Matthew 5, so we're going to be in Matthew 6:1-4. I will say this...Matthew 6:1-4 is really a part of a bigger part of this sermon that really goes through verse 18. We're just going to cover the first four verses. I hope it will be helpful. Let's read Matthew 6:1-4. Then I'll pray and ask God to just reveal his goodness to us tonight as we look at his Word and consider what it means to be generous together. Then we'll go from there. This is what Jesus said, as Matthew recorded it, as he was carried along by the Holy Spirit.

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Father, we thank you for this sermon Jesus preached that Matthew recorded for our benefit and for the benefit of your saints everywhere. We just pray tonight, I pray as I've been praying all day long, God, that you would give us a glimpse of your generosity that would compel our hearts to worship, to rejoice, and see how deep, how high, how wide, and how long your love is for us through Jesus.

Would you just give us a glimpse? Would you enthrall our hearts with that vision? Would you rivet our hearts? Would you save some of us in this room who have yet to see that and taste that and believe what you've done through Jesus Christ is real and good and saving? We're asking for you to put yourself on display in our minds and our hearts as we read your Word and, of course, as we continue to sing and respond to it. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

You know, one of the things I want to encourage you to do... It's been great that we've taken the fall to split up this sermon into chunks and dive deeper into those chunks like we're doing tonight with these four verses, but if you've never read this entire sermon, I would just encourage you to do that, even to do it in one sitting. As helpful as it is to dive deep into it, it was a whole sermon. It's a coherent sermon. To read the whole, even preferably in one sitting, I think would be helpful for you, even as you go back and sort of dissect it into smaller pieces. It starts in Matthew 5:1 and ends in Matthew 7:27.

What I want to do today is actually read the end of the sermon. If you're there with me, turn to Matthew 7. I want to read the conclusion of the sermon. One of my friends once told me it's his common practice to, when he gets a book, to read the introduction of the book, and then to read the conclusion of the book, and then to go back and read the whole book. This may sound a little bit weird, but what his point in that is you can understand a lot about what the author is trying to take the entire book by reading the introduction and, in particular, the conclusion. You read the conclusion and go, "Oh. This is the point he's going to try to get across. This is where he's trying to lead us."

That way, when you go back through and you read the individual chapters, as you're reading those chapters, you have a better sense of where it's going. I think the same could be said for the sermon, for any sermon, and even this sermon. Let's read the end and sort of maybe get a grasp together of what Jesus is doing this entire sermon. What's the big picture he's trying to get across to these men and women he's talking to? Many of them are his followers, others are just religious people looking in so they can try to disrupt what he saying and doing in his ministry. This is verse 24 of chapter 7. This is how Jesus ends this sermon we've been studying all semester.

He says this. **"Everyone then who hears these words of mine [this sermon I've just preached] and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock."** What great pictures we have from the hurricane this past week to go with this illustration he's using. By great pictures, I mean actually horrible pictures, but helpful pictures as we try to think through this illustration he's using. He's saying, "There are those who take what I say and build their lives upon it, and they're wise."

Then he says in verse 26, **"And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."** This is the conclusion of his sermon. Based on it, what you see Jesus doing is really contrasting two very different ways of life. That's what he's doing. He's saying, "There's a way of life that is built on, that is founded on me, what I say, what I'm going to do, who I am. That's one way to live your life. That's one way of life...a way of life that is built upon me as the foundation.

There's another way of life that he contrasts with that way of life that is a way of life that is built on something other than him. It doesn't really matter what it is. It just is not him. It's not what he said. It's not based on what he's going to do. Jesus is exhorting these people to listen to what he said and to build their lives upon it. That's what this sermon is about, this whole sermon. If you've been with us the entire fall, or if you just know the sermon well, you can hear that all the way throughout.

You can hear Jesus saying, "You have heard that it was said [...], and I say to you this." What is he doing? "There's *this* way to live life, but I'm telling you you need to live life *this* way. This is the way to live your life that's rooted and grounded and based upon me and my Word." (And eventually his death and resurrection.) This is what Jesus is doing this sermon.

It's helpful because these four verses we're studying tonight, what they're talking about then is *how do we build our lives on Jesus in the area of generosity, in the area of practicing righteousness?* Jesus is going to have some pretty clear things to say to us. One of the things he's saying, as we study tonight, that I want you to hear is, "Those who build their lives on me, those who, like the wise man, have, as their foundation, me and what I've said, one of the things that's going to mark them as different and really affirm they are building their lives on me is that they're going to be a generous people."

In other words, if you really are a Christian, if your life is really rooted and grounded on Jesus Christ and his Word, it's motivated by who he is and what he has done for you, it will transform you, it will transform us as a congregation into generous people. In fact, this particular characteristic of the church Jesus talks about in verses 1-4, particularly verses 2-4, is a characteristic of the church, gospel-motivated generosity, that has historically been something that has made the church different and really strange and alien compared to the world, the culture, around them. You see this all through church history.

Historically, the church's generosity, both in its motivation and in how extreme and radically generous it was compared to the culture, is something that has set the church apart from the world. It actually made Christianity attractive to non-Christians. It's pretty amazing to think about. This particular mark of the church, that they're generous, has been something that has attracted non-Christians into it from day one.

Rodney Stark is a historian...for those of you who like history. He's actually a sociologist. He wrote a book called *The Rise of Christianity*. It was a book that really detailed the spread of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world.

The question he asked as he was writing the book was, "Why did Christianity spread?" Among all the other religions, why did Christianity flourish and spread in the Greco-Roman world like it did? Literally, Christianity went from, as it were, the outhouse in Galilee, in this little nation called Israel, to the White House, in Rome, which was the center of the known world at the time. How did that happen? Why did Christianity, among all the other religions, rise? That's what the book is called, *The Rise of Christianity*. One of the many things he found for why Christianity flourished like it did was because of the unbounded and radical generosity of the Christians motivated by the unbounded and radical generosity of their Lord and Savior.

Even some of these quotes he has... This is from the Emperor Julian, the Roman emperor. At around 360, he said this. He said, "The impious Christians..." Which is derogatory, but that's okay. "...support not only their own poor but ours as well. Everyone can see that our people lack aid from us." He's sort of nervous, saying, "Listen. These Christians, they're so generous that they're supporting not only their own poor, but ours as well, and we're not even doing that as a state." Here you have a pagan saying this about the church's generosity. Dionysius, who was a bishop in Alexandria about a hundred years earlier, wrote this about the church.

He said, "During the great pandemic..." All these plagues would sweep through these cities, these major cities, if you can imagine. They didn't have medicine or technology that we have today. He said, "During these times, most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ. [...] Many, in nursing and curing others..." Listen to this. "...transferred their death..." The death of the people who were sick. "...to themselves and died in their stead. [...] The [pagans] behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead."

From its inception, the radical and gospel-motivated generosity of the church of Christians has set them apart from the world, and it should be the same today. We talk all the time about being a city on a hill, being a city within our city, wanting to be a faithful witness to God's character and his glory here in this little city we love called Denton, and one of the things people should peer into and say, "Well, that's what their God is like," one of the things that should cause them to do that, if we're a healthy church that's truly believing God's grace to us, is our generosity. You know what? This shouldn't be a surprise.

Even covenant members, this is what we say in the membership covenant. We just had a Membership Class about an hour ago, and this is what we have agreed to in our church covenant. It states this. "[We] covenant to steward the resources God has given [us] including time, talents, spiritual gifts and finances. This includes regular financial giving, service and participation in community that is sacrificial, cheerful, and voluntary." This is something we're hoping, in God's grace, and we're believing, if we're understanding the Scriptures rightly, should set us apart.

I'll just pause and ask you, and I'll ask you again in a bit, are you a generous person? Is your life marked by and characterized by generosity? Covenant member, are you giving sacrificially, voluntarily, cheerfully? Is this something that sets you apart from the culture around you? This is one of the ways Jesus is saying, and the Bible has always said, that we as God's people are to be marked off, because we're building our lives on Jesus. This is one of the ways we'll know our lives are being built on Jesus Christ. This really shouldn't be a surprise, because it has been this way from the very beginning. If you think about God, if you think about our God in his character, in his essence, God, in his essence, is generous.

Generosity is not something God does and practices. Generosity is something he is. God is generous. Even in creation, if you know the creation account, God didn't create because he needed anything. He created out of an overflow of his glory and his love and his benevolence within himself. He's a gracious and generous God within himself. That's who he is. Yet, the Bible says he created man in his own image, which means when he created man, he created man to image him in his generosity. God actually created us to be generous and to display the glory of his character in our own generosity toward each other, toward the world, toward nature, toward everything. It's amazing. It's the essence of human beings.

It's God's design for us to be generous, to be selfless, and display his character. Yet, we know from the Bible, because we keep reading, that all men have sinned. This is the way God created, this is what he intended but we, every one of us in this room, have rebelled against God's intent and design for our lives. Selfless generosity, because of our rebellion, is no longer our nature. Selfishness is. All of us in this room, instead of imaging God's selfless generosity like he created us to, we have rebelled against God's design. Listen to this. This is crazy. Because we have followed in Adam and Eve's footsteps, who they representatively did this on our behalf, sinned and rebelled against God's design, but we've done the same... Because we've done this, our very nature has been changed.

Listen. None of us in this room now naturally drift toward selflessness. We all naturally drift toward self-absorption and absolute selfishness. Our rebellion against God has changed our very nature. Just as a side point, if you ever wonder, if you've read the Bible, you read it through, and you wonder... God gets super angry. He gets personally offended when people are not generous, especially people who say they're his people, and they're not generous. He does not take to that too kindly. He is personally offended and angry

about that. You may think, "He's just this cosmic bad guy who has a bad temper. He's just in a bad mood all the time."

No. What he's angry about is he designed us to image himself, and by being stubborn and rebellious and sinful and selfish, we're saying something about who he is that's not true. So when we walk around and profess to be Christians and then turn around and with our lives say something about his character, his generosity that's not true, he's personally offended by it. That doesn't sound like great news. Let me just tell you the beauty of the Christian gospel is this.

Especially for those of you who aren't Christians, the beauty of the Christian gospel is if we repent of this rebellion, if we repent of this sin, and we ask God for forgiveness because of the way we've rebelled against him and become selfless instead of selfish, he'll forgive us. We'll be made right with God by grace. Then he gives us his Holy Spirit so we can actually be restored to being a generous people, which is crazy. More on that later.

Just consider this with me. God created us to image him and to be selfless, to be generous. We have sinned against him. We've rebelled against this design, and let me just tell you why this makes a difference in your life and my life every single day. Because of this...listen...because of our separation from God, because of our rebellion and our nature being changed to where we're now selfish, even our best attempts at generosity apart from God now, are now tainted in motive. Ultimately, they're no longer pleasing to the Lord, because they're not done in faith, and they're not done for his glory.

In God's eyes, because of our sin outside of Christ, all of our best attempts at generosity are now tainted. It's not really generosity. It's a counterfeit generosity. All of our best efforts away from Christ and apart from the saving work and redeeming work of the Spirit of God in our lives, it's a counterfeit generosity. You don't have to look too hard in Jesus' day to see how rampant that was, and you don't have to look too hard to see in our day how rampant this counterfeit generosity is in our culture and even in our churches.

I'll just give you a few examples, but you can think of some on your own. Let me just tell you what I mean by counterfeit generosity. It's something that dresses itself up as generosity, but underneath, it's not generosity at all. One example I would give you is this generous narcissism that is just so prevalent in our culture. It masquerades as generosity, but underneath, it's narcissism.

Let me read this quote from Jeremy Treat. He is a guy who does a lot of research for some of our pastors here. He's doing his PhD up at Wheaton. He wrote this on his blog. He said, "[Generosity] is 'in.' It's the hip thing these days to give away money (Gates), and to adopt kids (Brad and Angelina), micro-finance in Africa (Clinton), drink 'fair-trade' coffee (Tully's), and 'go green' (Leo DiCaprio). Not that we can judge any

of these people's motives, but does anyone even consider whether motives even matter or not? One thing is for sure: Narcissism (obsessive love of self) dressed up as [generosity] is still narcissism."

Cultural expert Jim Gilmore, he's a guy who just studies the culture. I don't know how you become a cultural expert, but apparently he is one. He made up his own word, which I think is cool, to sort of explain this reality. The word he made up was "narcithropy" (combining *narcissism* and *philanthropy*) to describe this reality, because it's so prevalent. It's everywhere. In fact, I was watching (one of the examples I'll use) a commercial (I almost showed this) for an organization called iParticipate. Listen to what their tagline is. This is their tagline. "Improve your health by helping others."

Gwyneth Paltrow, who is a great actress, at least as far as I understand acting to go, is on the commercial and said this: "Doing good for others, doing positive action, always comes back around and enriches your life. It's the biggest gift you could ever give yourself." It's this invitation to help other people and to be generous, but what's the motivation? Your own gain. Of course, they're brilliant to do this, because they know how we function as human beings. They know we get into this. Yeah, if I can get healthy and at the same time feel a little bit better about myself because I'm actually trying to help somebody else, not to matter that my motivation is really to help myself... They know it. It works.

Of course this is a great tagline. This is a great commercial. It sounds good to ears that are not trained by the Spirit of God. But it's narcissism. It's not generosity. This is a counterfeit generosity. This is not about helping other people; it's about getting what we really want out of life. You know, we could use a number of examples. This isn't something that's new. In 1936, Dale Carnegie wrote a famous book some of you have read (some of you were forced to read), entitled *How to Win Friends & Influence People*. Sadly, a lot of his thoughts have made their way into the church. He said this in that book. "Whether it's friends or money you want, be assured that showing genuine interest in people and giving them presents will get you there."

I love that he just said it. He's just like, "You want to have more friends and influence people? If you really want to do that and gain in your own life in that way, just give them some presents and say nice things about them. It's true. He just wrote it in a book, and it was a bestseller. It still is a bestseller. It's a classic. What is it? It's just narcissism dressed up like generosity. "I'm going to give you some presents, and I'm going to be generous, so really I can gain from it." There's this generous narcissism in our culture. It's a counterfeit generosity. Our attempts at generosity are so tainted. This is what culture teaches us to do.

It's not just narcissism. It's also consumerism that just dresses up as generosity. Surely I'm not the only one who feels like every time I go into a shop and purchase something that there's just this competitiveness about who can be more environmentally friendly. Surely not everybody had the same

conviction of conscience in the last half decade. Maybe some people really care about the environment, but really? It's like they're outdoing one another in who is more environmentally friendly. Either they all had the same conviction of conscience in the last five years, or as *Rolling Stone* magazine said this week in one of its interviews, people have discovered that environmentalism "makes for good business in the 21st century." It's crazy to me.

Even the water bottle. They're like, "Oh, you can now recycle the caps of your water bottle. It's 23.3 percent more recyclable." Great. I don't know where the 0.3 percent came from, but I'm super excited about it. They're just competing with one another, and it's this sense that, "Oh, we care so much about the environment." Maybe so. I can't judge, but let me just tell you something. A lot of it is, "You know what, if I can make you feel good about taking care of the environment while you consume our product, you'll consume more of our product." They're using generosity to fuel their consumerism and to attract more consumers, which is just crazy, but it masquerades as generosity. Underneath, it's just consumerism.

I love what Bono has done in Africa. I don't know him. I thank God for the efforts that have been done there, but you think about even the Red Campaign where you begin to marry generosity and consumerism in these sorts of ways and it becomes very difficult to discern what's what. We just fool ourselves to think we're being generous, when really we're being driven by consumption or something else. Then lastly, a lot of people are generous because they really want to earn and find salvation. I was emailing back and forth with a friend of mine this week who lives in New York City. He's right in the middle of it. He's in the Upper East Side of New York City, and he wrote back.

He told me this. He said he once read that one of the motivations of giving for the super rich was "a feeling of transcendence." They want to have a sense that when they die, their influence will live on, and they could attain a certain level of transcendence. That's why they give money away. Firstly, that just speaks of the human passion. God has set eternity in our hearts, and we all want to matter, but you know what it also speaks to? The absolute glory-hunger of our culture. We want glory. We want praise. We want transcendence and salvation, and we'll use even generosity to earn it for us if we can.

This is the culture's version of generosity, but it's not true generosity. It's a counterfeit generosity. Because of our sin, our culture, and every culture, and even our church culture to some degree is filled with counterfeit generosity. The difference between the world and the church...hear this...is not chiefly about who gives more away. That's not the difference.

That's not what marks true generosity from counterfeit generosity, although it is interesting to note that sociologists who have studied it do find that those who have an active faith do give more money away, percentage-wise, both to Christian and non-Christian organizations. They do tend to be more involved in

the community, serving more hours, both in Christian and non-Christian organizations. Those who have an active faith life do tend to vote more. Go vote on Tuesday if you haven't already.

It's interesting to note that, but that's not the chief difference between real generosity and counterfeit generosity. The difference between Christians and the culture at large is not, "Hey, they give this much money, so we should give this much." It's not like Jesus looked at the Sandy relief concert this past week and said, "Bon Jovi and Nicki Minaj..." I'm sure she was there. "...or whoever was there raised \$23 million, so church, you'd better raise \$25 million." That's not the way it happens. That's not how Jesus speaks to it. That's not the chief difference. It's not about amount.

Surely you know that you can give a little and be a lot more generous, and you can give a lot and be not so generous. Jesus taught on that one time as well. The difference between Christian generosity and counterfeit generosity according to Jesus is motive. It's *why* you're giving. That's exactly what he preaches about in Matthew 6:1-4. In essence, what Jesus is saying in this part of the sermon is that true Christians do not give for the same reason as the culture. Christians don't give for the same reason as religious people do or as irreligious people do.

You know what's ironic? The irreligious and the religious give for the same reason, to be seen by others, to be praised by others, or to earn salvation in some sense. That's why both the religious and the irreligious give. Jesus says, "Not my people. Not the people who are building their lives on me and my Word. That's not why they give. They give for a completely different reason and are generous for a completely different reward.

Look with me in Matthew 6 (yes, that was all sort of introduction), verse 1, and we'll walk through these verses again with that in mind. Look at what he says. Again, verse 1 is really the anchor verse in this text. He's going to say what he says in verse 1, then he's going to say, "When you give..." In the next paragraph, he's going to say, "When you pray..." Then he's going to go to the next paragraph and say, "Then when you fast..." What we've done in the last 20 minutes together is actually foundational for next week's sermon as well.

This has implications for not just how we give but how we do all of our lives and all of our good deeds. He's getting at the motive. He says this. "**Beware...**" Pay attention to. Be on guard against. "**...of practicing your righteousness...**" *Righteousness* here simply means the good deeds your faith motivates you to do. "**Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen [or praised] by them...**" If you do that, you're going to get your reward, and it's not going to be a reward from your Father in heaven. "**...for then you will have no reward from you Father who is in heaven.**" You may gain the things you're after, but you're going to forfeit your soul, so you'd better beware of living like this.

Again, he's not particularly speaking to those who are not Christians here. He's speaking to those who are trying to follow him. He's speaking to his disciples here. He goes on in verse 2. Then he begins to talk about what this means for giving money. Then he'll continue on about praying and fasting. He says, **"Thus, when you give..."** He's assuming we're going to give money as Christians. This is not a sermon about giving money. That's not even what Jesus is touching on here. He's just assuming it's going to happen. You know what he's assuming? He's assuming it's going to happen in the Old Testament framework. You know what the Old Testament framework was? About 25 percent of your income.

We can talk about the tithe, but on top of the tithe, there were festivals and all sorts of things. When you add it all up together, it was about 25 percent of your money. What he's talking about here is... Jesus just assumes these people who are trying to follow him are going to give. He says, **"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be..."** What? **"...praised by others."** What they're really after is worship. "I want you to worship me. I'm going to give money so you'll worship me. Jesus is saying, "There's only one who is going to be worshipped here. It's not you." You can do that, but you're going to get your reward in full.

"Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give..." Again just assuming it's going to happen. **"...to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret."** I wish we had time to dive into this. There's actually a blog that's going to be posted online on our blog. Jen Wilkin, who is a staff member of ours and one of the best teachers of our church, wrote a great blog about this and even practical ways to practice giving in such a way that your right hand and your left hand don't know what the other is doing. I just encourage you to go check that out. Jesus says this. He ends and says, **"And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."**

Jesus is saying the only type of generosity, true generosity that's pleasing to God is a generosity that has as its bottom, as its motivation, the reward of knowing we have pleased, obeyed, and reflected the character of our God through our generosity. Think about that with me. That's the only type of generosity that pleases God, is a generosity that does so with the reward of God himself, whatever that may entail, being the reward. That's our motivation. He says that's the only generosity that pleases God. That's true generosity. This doesn't mean God doesn't use generosity that's tainted by ulterior motives. God will use what he wants to accomplish his purposes, and I'm so thankful that he does. That's not my business. That's not our business.

God does what he wants, but there is a massive difference between God using your generosity and God being pleased with your generosity and glorified by it. There's a big difference. What Jesus is talking about here is the latter. What he's saying is generosity that pleases God is generosity that is done for him and in

light of his own generosity to us. Here's where the rubber meets the road. This type of generosity Jesus is talking about with this motive can only be done from a heart that has been made new through faith in the Christian gospel. You can only do this if you're a Christian.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a famous pastor, once said during a sermon on this topic, "There are many hearing me who now know well that they are not Christians, because they do not love to give. To give largely and liberally, not grudgingly at all, requires a new heart." It's the gospel. The news that the generous God of the Bible has given us his Son. "For God so loved the world that he gave his Son, so that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life." It's that news, that reality, that message that makes us a generous people. Our generosity is motivated by the generosity of our God toward us.

We're generous because our God is generous, and that's the only way we can be generous, when we see and believe how generous he's been to us through his Son, and it transforms us from the inside out. I ask you again in light of all this, are you a generous person? Would the people who know you best characterize you and describe you as generous? If not, why not? What's keeping you from being a generous person? Debt? Consumerism? Fear? Wanting to hoard security (as if that really exists)? Maybe it's just self-absorption or laziness, a lack of compassion. Maybe it's the fact that you're not really a Christian.

If you would consider yourself generous, if you would consider the answer to that question for your own life tonight, "Yes, I feel like I am generous" (It's okay to feel that way. We're not here to beat ourselves up. I'm not here to beat you up), why are you generous? What's your motivation? Is it an overflow of worship because of the gospel, because of how generous God has been to you? I'm looking around this room, and for some of you it is. I praise the Lord for you and for your example to me and my family in that. I just love that the Lord has done that in your heart, and he continues to do it.

Is it because of the gospel, or is it because you want others to see you and to praise you? Maybe even because you're trying to pay God back, and by doing that, you're still proving that you don't get the gospel, because the gospel entails that you can't pay God back. That's why his Son came, to pay the debt for you. Are you generous because you're trying to earn salvation, you're trying to earn transcendence? I would just ask this, because, you know, this isn't a sermon that was given to individuals (it was given to individuals, but individuals within a particular community of faith), are we a generous congregation?

That's something I'm asking myself as one of the pastors and leaders here. Would our city and our neighbors say we are a generous people? Would they say our Home Groups that meet in their neighborhoods are generous? As we seek to be God's people within our city, as we seek to be a city on a hill, a people marked and set apart by God for his glory and his display of his goodness and his character,

this is an area of our individual and corporate lives, Jesus is saying, that our neighbors should be able to peer into and go, "There is something different there. The difference is found not so much in how much they're giving away but why they're giving it away and the radical extent to which they're doing it."

I just pray that for us. The only way we can get there is a vision that's so overwhelming and beautiful of God's generosity toward us that just changes us. I'll end with this quote from Timothy Keller. This is from one of our studies we did a couple of years ago called *Gospel in Life*. Keller wrote this, profoundly and wisely in my opinion. He said this. "Often books and speakers tell Christians that they should help the needy because they have so much. That is, of course, quite true. Common sense tells us that, if human beings are to live together on the planet, there should be a constant sharing of resources. [...] But this approach is very limited in its motivating power. Ultimately it produces guilt.

It says, 'How selfish you are to eat steak and drive two cars when the rest of the world is starving!' This creates great emotional conflicts in the hearts of Christians who hear such arguing. We feel guilty, but all sorts of defense mechanisms are engaged. 'Can I help it if I was born in this country? How will it really help anyone if I stop driving two cars? Don't I have a right to enjoy the fruits of my labor?' Soon, with an anxious weariness..." This is where some of you have been in this area of your life. "...we turn away from books or speakers who simply make us feel guilty about the needy.

The Bible..." And Jesus, in this passage we just read. "... does not use the guilt-producing motivation, yet it powerfully argues for the ministry of mercy. [...] Mercy is spontaneous, super abounding love which comes from an experience of the grace of God." Hear this. "The deeper the experience of the free grace of God, the more generous we must become."

Father, we turn our hearts now. As we come to the Table and look to sing, we pray and I pray and ask that you would help us to meditate on your free grace extended to us in Christ. I just pray, even in this next 40 minutes we have together, however long, that the fact that Jesus Christ, the transcendent one, descended. The rich became poor so that in and through his poverty, we who were poor sinners and rebels might become rich. I just pray you would stir up our hearts in that.

I pray that as we come to the Table and take the bread and the juice that we'd taste and sense in a palpable way your generosity as we sing these songs and meditate on the fact that Jesus Christ stood in our place for our sin. Your generosity, the height and the width and depth and the breadth of it would just sweep us up toward you. That you would change our hearts, maybe some of us tonight, that you would just save. Forgive us and minister to us now. Move upon our hearts in a powerful way, we pray, as we meditate on your generosity to us. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

Whenever you're ready as a Christian, come. That's what we're going to do. We're just going to spend the next 30 minutes through the Lord's Supper, through singing, through Scriptures, through praying, meditating on how generous God has been, and then I'll come back up here in a bit and exhort us to some practical things in ways we can be generous together.

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