

Daily Readings

Please note: This week we look at Jesus' parable of the judgment. In this parable, we see a different kind of power. These passages are recommended for your daily reading. Each deals with a different aspect of God's way to power.

Monday, July 7 – Read Malachi 3:8-12.

The prophet Malachi condemns the people of his day for refusing to recognize the Mosaic law of giving. The law is clear — each follower of Yahweh is to give 10% of their income to the work of God, but the people of that day had neglected this law. Malachi adds a word of hope and promise to his instruction as he pushes the hearer to test God. This is the only place in the Bible where we are encouraged to **“test God.”** The result will be an **“overflowing blessing.”** What opportunities do you have to “test” God with your generosity? Are you withholding from God? Why?

Tuesday, July 8 – Luke 3:10-14.

Here John the Baptist is predicting the coming of the Messiah. To prepare for the Messiah's coming, we are to practice radical generosity. Those who have are to share with those who do not have. Are you preparing for the coming of Jesus? How does your day reflect the presence of Christ in your generosity?

Wednesday, July 9 – Read James 1:7-18.

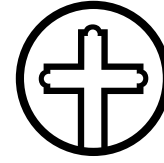
James reminds us that all gifts come from God. Nothing we have is ours. Every act of generosity comes originally from God. How is God using you as an instrument of his generosity? Did God use you today?

Thursday, July 10 – Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

Paul uses a farming metaphor to explain the way generosity works. As we are generous, so we are blessed to be more generous. Paul puts it this way, “the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” John Rockefeller put it this way, “True wealth is measured not by what you have, but by what you give away.” What seeds of generosity have you sown today? How have you reaped the harvest of your generosity? Share your story with someone today.

Friday, July 11 – Read Thessalonians 5:16-18.

This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. God looks at the condition of the heart of those who believe. Paul let us know that God's will for our lives is to **“rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in every circumstance.”** Live in an attitude of prayer and expectation for what God can do. Paul is not saying to give thanks FOR everything, but rather to give thanks IN everything. In other words, in every circumstance, find something for which to give thanks. Begin and end your day in prayer. Offer up the entire day to God as a generous offering. See what God can do with a day dedicated completely to God. Read Psalm 100 as an offering of praise. Give thanks for at least five things that have happened today. Tell someone these positive things for which you give thanks.



TRIETSCH

July 6, 2008

Study Guide & Daily Readings

Front Porch Stories

Gleaning the Truths from the Parables of Jesus

A Generous Nation...

Matthew 20:1-16

The Word from the Bible paraphrase called The Message

¹⁻² God's kingdom is like an estate manager who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. They agreed on a wage of a dollar a day, and went to work. ³⁻⁵ Later, about nine o'clock, the manager saw some other men hanging around the town square unemployed. He told them to go to work in his vineyard and he would pay them a fair wage. They went.

⁵⁻⁶ He did the same thing at noon, and again at three o'clock. At five o'clock he went back and found still others standing around. He said, “Why are you standing around all day doing nothing?”

⁷ They said, “Because no one hired us.”

He told them to go to work in his vineyard.

⁸ When the day's work was over, the owner of the vineyard instructed his foreman, “Call the workers in and pay them their wages. Start with the last hired and go on to the first.”

⁹⁻¹² Those hired at five o'clock came up and were each given a dollar. When those who were hired first saw that, they assumed they would get far more. But they got the same, each of them one dollar. Taking the dollar, they groused angrily to the manager, “These last workers put in only one easy hour, and you just made them equal to us, who slaved all day under a scorching sun.”

¹³⁻¹⁵ He replied to the one speaking for the rest, “Friend, I haven't been unfair. We agreed on the wage of a dollar, didn't we? So take it and go. I decided to give to the one who came last the same as you. Can't I do what I want with my own money? Are you going to get stingy because I am generous?”

¹⁶ Here it is again, the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first.

The Generous Landowner

Only Matthew has preserved this parable. It is one of the more problematic parables of Jesus. The whole story runs counter to fairness. It would be preposterous to look at this parable in

defense of unconditionally free enterprise, or as a basis for labor management relationships. The parable presupposes the situation in first century Palestine.

The parable revolves around a landowner's need to harvest his crops. The landowner does not have a crew of regular workers, but is dependent instead on the occasional help of men from the village. The first group of workers went out to the fields at sunrise, the next at nine o'clock, the next at noon, the next at three in the afternoon, and the last group at five. At sundown (the twelfth hour) all were called together to be paid. When those who had worked only one hour received an amount (a denarius, equal to about 20 cents) that was considered generous for a full day's work, the others must have quickly calculated how much more they would receive. To their astonishment and chagrin, each laborer, no matter how long he worked, received the same pay.

That they grumbled is understandable, especially to anyone who has worked under the hot Palestinian sun. The landowner does not yield to their complaints, however, since he insists that he is free to be equally generous with all. He is sovereign over his own lands and household; if he chooses to, he can give freely to all. There is no ground for complaint, he insists, against such action.

God as the Generous Landowner

In the action of the generous landowner, we see a picture of God's unconditional grace. God's grace has nothing to do with our years of service to him or the work of our hands. Everyone is equal when the final reckoning is done. The dying thief forgiven by Jesus at the crucifixion was just as well off as a person who has been a believer for many years. The sinner who comes to God at the eleventh hour is just as blessed as the one who came at daybreak.

The two main points of the story appear in the double question at the end of the parable: Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? First, the landowner operates by the standard of grace, not of merit. Second, the resentment of the workers is condemned as unacceptable.

The laborers are so bound to legalistic thinking that they cannot conceive of any action motivated by grace alone. The central actor is the generous landowner, not the disgruntled employee. The parable is a defense of Jesus' message of God's grace to all, against the attacks of the defenders of a religion of meritorious works.

God Wants Us to Be Generous

Imagine for a moment what our world would look like if generosity ruled. In our world today, there are plenty of resources to feed the hungry and provide medical assistance

for the sick. This is a complicated and complex world in which we live where the inequities of national and world economics have developed over centuries. Clearly God has been generous with us, and God wants us to be generous with others. Accepting the historical wrongs of the world as impossible to change is just another justification for our selfish attitudes.

This parable reminds us there is no place in God's Kingdom for resentment, selfishness or arrogance. We often trivialize what God has given us by waste and over-consumption instead of realizing we have been blessed to live in this nation of the United States. God has been generous with us, and God wants us to be generous with others. Imagine for a moment what our world would look like if generosity ruled.

Discussion Questions

Please note: These questions are intended to be used in any way that is helpful for you. You may use them as a means of personal reflection. Or you may want to use them as a family to further discuss the issues of patience.

- How does this parable speak to you? Is it relevant to your life today?
- What does this parable say about God?
- What does it mean to be generous?
- Can you put into words how resentment damages us and others?
- What are some of the causes of selfishness? How are we hurt when we are selfish?
- What part does fear play in a reluctance to be generous?
- What is definition of arrogance? How is it related to generosity?
- How is this parable a good example of God's character and action?
- How has God's generosity changed your life?
- How does this parable challenge you?

Next Week's Worship: "Caring"