

Gospel generosity

Study 3



Over the last 2 studies we've considered those who were unable and unwilling to be generous with money and possessions. Both the rich fool from Luke 12, and the rich ruler from Luke 18 had staggering wealth but were in tremendous spiritual ill-health. Ironically, both were in desperate need – not just to let go of their greed and idolatry, but to find where true riches and joy are to be found.

In our study this week, we'll look at three moments of joyous generosity where something very different is modelled by those who understand where such value resides.

A word on Tithing

It is still common amongst Christians to speak about giving in terms of tithing. (The word tithe simply means a tenth). Often people make the assumption that this means we are obligated to give 10% of what we earn. There are at least three problems with this approach to giving and generosity.

Firstly, Jews under the old covenant were actually required to give three tithes! The Levitical tithe to support the priesthood, the Festival tithe to contribute to important feasts and gatherings, the Charity tithe once every three years to support those in need. This meant that their tithing averaged out at 25%!

But secondly, as Christians we no longer live under the requirements of the Mosaic law. We are not called to support the old covenant system to maintain people's holiness or celebrate national feasts to commemorate being saved out of Egypt. Christ has fulfilled the law and there is no command to tithe in the New Testament.

Thirdly, the language of obligation (especially of giving 10%) is unhelpful. It's not that we *have* to give in some legalistic sense, it's that we *get* to give in a privileged sense because of the grace of God. He provides for us in all ways, in order that we enjoy the privilege of giving.

As such, the New Testament doesn't encourage tithing, rather, because of Christ it encourages the fulfilment of tithing – which is joyful generosity.

Opening questions

- 1) How do we react to the following? What might you agree with and what are you concerned about?
 - “Because of my low income, I give my time and my skills to God and his people – but it's up to other people to be the financial givers.”
 - “We do earn more than most people, but we have extra financial obligations upon us, so we've decided that giving 10% is more than reasonable - and certainly more than many others give.”

Generosity in Bethany: Read Matthew 26:6-16¹

- 1) What surprises you about this passage?
- 2) What contrasts and concerns do you notice when it comes to money and value?
- 3) This woman freely gives her greatest and most precious gift to point to the wonder of Jesus.
 - Why is the women's act so appropriate?
 - What does she understand about Jesus and earthly possessions?
- 4) How does this challenge us when it comes to gospel generosity, especially when it points towards the wonder of the death of Jesus?

¹ Note: This incident also comes up in Mark 14 and John 12. The value of the perfume in today's terms would likely be around \$50,000 and would likely have either been the woman's inheritance or most valuable possession.

Generosity in Jericho: Read Luke 19:1-10

In the previous chapter (18:18-27) we met the rich ruler who wouldn't give his money away. Now we meet Zacchaeus who without even being asked, joyfully gives most of his wealth away.

- 1) In the previous chapter we read that it was impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God (as unlikely as a camel going through the eye of a needle). How is it that the impossible is happening here?
- 2) Zacchaeus was not obliged to give so much away, nor to restore four-fold to anyone whom he may have financially cheated. What is going on here and what do we learn about the nature of repentance and conversion?
- 3) Zacchaeus receives Jesus joyfully, and then gives liberally. Why is this such a powerful picture of genuine trust in Jesus?

Generosity in the temple: Read Luke 21:1-4

- 1) This poor widow would most likely have been the very person who would have benefitted from what went into the offering. How do we explain her desire to give?
- 2) How is her giving contrasted to that of the rich?
- 3) Giving out of our abundance seems sensible and achievable. In what healthy ways does this widow perhaps unsettle us?

Application questions:

- 1) Take a look at the opening questions again. How have the passages we've looked at guided how we might respond?
- 2) In what ways are you challenged and encouraged by today's study?
- 3) Everyone likes a generous person, and lots of Christians aspire to be generous, but they find it difficult to do so.

- How has this series been of encouragement to you to take generous steps in trust of Jesus?
- What might giving generously (and joyfully) tangibly look like for you?
- Is there one example that you are willing to share with your group?

Pray together:

- That we would be people who experience even more the joy and blessing of giving in view of what Jesus has given and promised us.
- That our understanding of the value of Jesus would keep growing and overshadow our trust in material things.
- That our church would be characterized by gospel generosity because investment in the work of the kingdom is a gracious and joyous privilege for us all.