

Generous and Good

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Date: 04 May 2008

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[0 : 00] Now we are going to look back tonight to the second half of the Sermon and the Mount. It is kind of difficult to condense it in many ways, but Luke has done it.

He has condensed it and so we will try and do that as well as we condense the teaching of Jesus. When you know this is a summary of Jesus' teaching, because even if we read this right through, it will only take a couple of minutes and I am sure that he preached longer than that.

A full sermon of Jesus, although we know it as a famous sermon on the Mount, even the Matthewian version, would only take a few minutes to read even dramatically to preach.

So we know it is a summary of Jesus' teaching and so we see in it principles for ourselves. And it has become a very important part of the Bible because it is a sermon from Jesus.

And as a sermon from Jesus, it is obviously saying important things to us as Jesus' followers, as Christians.

[1 : 08] And he is telling us, he is encouraging us, he is reminding us, he is teaching us the kind of people he wants us to be. That is very important.

You know, we like to impress our husbands, our wives, our parents, our bosses, our lecturers. We like to impress different people. And we listen to the kind of advice they give us.

Surely we should listen more than anything and anyone to the advice Jesus gives. The kind of people Jesus wants us to be.

And it is very clear and it is very powerful. In a sense, it is a kind of outworking of the happiness principle that we were looking at this morning.

If we live the kind of life with His help, because we cannot do it on our own, we are spiritually dead, with His grace, with His Holy Spirit, then we will find ourselves blessed.

[2 : 11] And that is a good thing to be, we should all be looking for that blessing in our Christian lives. We don't want to be living Christian lives that are dry, do we?

Dry and dead and unfruitful and unhappy. If we are unhappy and miserable Christians then, you should be listening doubly hard this evening.

If you think there is nothing in Christ and in the Kingdom and in the teaching of Christ, listen doubly hard this evening and see maybe where it is that there are things that need to be realigned in our lives so that we know His blessing.

And there are two big areas here that He speaks of and they are very basic. He wants us to be generous and He wants us to be good. Generous and good Christians.

That is what He wants from us. That first section that we read from verse 37 to verse 42 is all about generosity. If you look at the middle of verse 38, it says, a good measure or given it will be given to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap.

[3 : 27] There is a picture of a marketplace in the Middle East where they would have a apron with a pocket in it which they would hold out and the cellar would pour grain into it and a good measure would be filled up and pouring over the edges.

And it is just a picture of generosity, someone giving generously. And this whole section is really about generosity. It is not so much about generosity with money.

There are lots of things to say about that and about being generous with money and things like that. This is more about being generous and it can apply to us all. Maybe not all of us have got money to be generous with.

But it is with regard to our attitude to others, especially our attitude to others when they fail, and their failings.

And it is that generosity of spirit because it is on the context of not being judgmental, not being mean-spirited in the way we think of and come to conclusions about other people as Christians. [4 : 35] Rather, it is about being generous in our spirit as a reflection of the generosity of Jesus in His attitude to us. Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned.

Forgive and you will be forgiven. And then He goes on to speak about being like our teacher and then gives that brilliantly funny illustration in verse 41 which we will look at. Generous. Generous in our judgment of other people. And we do it all the time. You will have done it since you have come into church.

You have made judgments, you have made assessments about people. Maybe people you have not seen before. You have weighed them up. You have looked them up and down. We make decisions all the time.

Now Jesus is not saying that we do not hold opinions and we do not come to conclusions about other people in any sense. But what He is saying is that in our motives, when we look and think and make decisions about other people, particularly within the Christian church, that we are not to be sensorious and we are not to be hypercritical.

[5 : 46] We are not to be unloving and miserly in the way we think of other people. Quick to condemn, quick to find fault, quick to point the finger, quick to make rash judgments about them.

And that is what He is speaking about in this section. And He gives us three spiritual principles to help us so that we have a generous spirit. And you know why it is so important?

Because we are a congregation. That is why. And because the way we think of one another sets the tone and the atmosphere within the congregation.

If we are unloving and sensorious, then that will become, it spreads like a cancer, that will become the kind of spirit within the congregation. And believe me, you do not want that to happen.

We do not want this congregation to have that kind of spirit. But if we have a generous spirit as it reflects Christ, then it will make our life as a congregation much, much better.

[6 : 53] And it will be a powerful witness to the world in which we live. So the three principles to help us here are, be like Christ, who is our teacher.

You know, He says in this parable, can a blind man, verse 39 lead a blind man, will they not both fall into the pit? A student is not above his teacher. But everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

And Jesus is reminding us of the importance of being like Him, that without Him we are spiritually blind. And we do not really know the way to go. And we do not know the way that pleases God. And we do not know the way that will make us most content and happy within our community. And what will lead to blessing. We must not ever forget that we are students. We are students of the Master.

We are disciples of Jesus and we are seeking to be like our teacher. Not above Him, not making our own moral decisions about how we treat other people, but learning from Him and learning that He knows the best way to give us blessing in our lives.

[8 : 06] Be like Christ then, who is our teacher. Remember how Christ treated us and treats us. Remember that when we are tempted to find fault and cast aspersions and be critical and sensorious of each other.

Remember the unbridled, undeserved forgiveness that we have known. Remember the day that you looked into your heart and saw nothing but horrible, ugly, putrefying sin.

And you fell on your knees and asked Jesus, there is someone at the door. No, sorry, you did not ask Jesus, there is someone at the door. There is someone at the door because I have seen a light flashing.

Asked Jesus to forgive your sins. And you received forgiveness. Do you remember that? Joe, Ken has gone the wrong door, it is the main door that is ringing.

Do you remember that day when you felt down and unclean before God and a sinner. And you know where to turn and you said, Lord please forgive me and fully and freely you have known that forgiveness.

[9 : 37] And in knowing that, how can we be mean spirited and hypercritical and unloving towards others. Knowing that all that we have has been gifted to us in an undeserved way.

Can you imagine what we would think if Bill Gates out of his multi-million pounds of resources and all that he has.

If he decided to come over here and to give a massive portion of that to one of the guys that is out there selling the big issue.

Massive portion of it, just take it, take it, have it. And that guy takes it and just carries on selling the big issue.

There is no change, he sticks it in a bank somewhere, doesn't really benefit much from it himself. And never gives any of it to anyone else who is in need. You would think that was strange would you not?

[10 : 42] That is a strange thing to do, well I mean spirited, look he is not enjoying it himself particularly. And even if he is, well he is keeping it to himself. And when anyone else is approaching him in need, he is not giving any of it away.

Well we can be a bit like that with our Christianity. God has given us unlimited resources and continues to give us unlimited resources. Sometimes we just keep them all to ourselves and we thank God for them.

But we never think of acting in the same generous spirited way in our attitude to others. So we are encouraged to be like Christ.

That is radical and revolutionary and counter cultural and different. You act differently in school, you act differently in university or in college, you act differently in the workplace, in the home.

Whatever we are, it is our radical revolution if we are generous in our spirit. In the way we judge people and in the loving way we do so.

[11 : 46] Be like Christ. The second principle in being generous is stop being a plank. It is a great picture here and we are just not being a plank. It is not really a right phrase to use because Jesus does not talk about people being planks.

He talks about people with planks in their eyes and it just seems like such a good thing to say, stop being a plank. So that is what we are to do. We are not to be a plank.

We are not to be mean spirited and Jesus is here using Holy sarcasm in verse 30, in verse 41 when he is speaking about this. This mean spirited, judgmental attitude that we can have as Christians.

You are looking at the speck of sodas, the tiny little flaw in someone else and you pay no attention to a massive big six inch plank that is sticking out of your own eye.

A beam sticking out of your own eye. It is a marvellously hyperbolic picture. It is exaggerated by Jesus. Here tiny wee dust, massive plank and you are trying to take out this tiny wee.

[12 : 56] They have never been to the optician and they are trying to work in your eyes with these tiny little instruments to get anything out. And you are trying to work on that. And there is this enormous big plank in your own eye and it is banging about everywhere and it is getting in the way.

And how do you turn around and it is whacking the optical machine out. It is just ridiculous. It does not possibly work. It is ludicrous picture that we are giving. You hypocrite Jesus is.

Don't be such a fool. First take the plank out of your own eye. And then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Stop being a plank he says with holy sarcasm.

How is it that we can say I see spiritually. I understand grace. I have been a recipient of grace.

And then not show that in our attitude and in our judgments of other people when we remain sensorious. When we are slow to forgive other people. And we are often the way that we look for Jesus and other people very quickly to forgive us for all our failings.

[13 : 59] But we have big massive elephant memories when it comes to other people's failings and faults. We cast it up for days and weeks and years to come.

We fail on an ongoing way. I think this picture is an ongoing picture of the way we are. We are in an ongoing way to be dealing with the plank in our eye.

In other words Jesus is saying if we have a right attitude spiritually. There's always going to be things that we see in our hearts that need dealt with. Before we start making judgments of others.

Why is that? Because you know one else can see into your heart apart from Jesus. And we can't see into anyone else's heart. But we can see into our own heart and it's usually in our own heart that these big planks exist.

And so we need to deal with these big sinful failings in ourselves. And when we are doing that that's going to take up the vast majority of our time. There's a guy there with a plank in his eye.

[15:03] There's another guy there with a bit of sodus. What's going to take the most work? The plank. It's going to take up the vast quantity of time to heal, to get rid of.

And so Jesus is saying when we have a proper attitude and are looking into our own hearts and dealing with the faults and failings of our own hearts. That's going to take up the vast majority of our critical time.

So that we're not left with lots and lots of spare time to condemn and criticise. And wag the finger at other people. It's great isn't it? Absolutely great. It adds, it just brings into our lives a joyless spirit of legalism and resentment.

When we've got this big painful plank and separate, something that separates us from Christ. This great error and failing. And yet we don't deal with it but we would rather deal with tiny little mistakes than other people.

Doesn't that bring? I've seen Christians that I'm sure I've been like that at times. But I've seen it a lot in other Christians too. It gives them that joyless legalistic resentful spirit.

[16:08] And they're so busy, critical of everyone else. They have no time for self-examining. She's hell incarnate. It's horrible, horrible Christianity.

And Jesus knows that and he uses powerful witty sarcasm to say don't live like that as a Christian. Blessing comes when we are examining ourselves and getting our own hearts and lives right.

And I think when that happens, there's a love and a grace within us that can be clearly experienced within the community of Christ.

So that there's a kind of a respect which allows us then to maybe in a gentle and a gracious way point out failings that we see in others.

Because people will know it's done in love and it's done respectfully. And then you will see clearly to remove the spect from your brothers. See that? It's interesting. The third principle is what goes round comes round.

[17:15] You might not think that's a biblical principle in so many words. But Jesus says there in the middle of verse 38, with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

And that's basically what he's saying. What goes round comes round. And that's with this attitude to being generous, spirited. What goes round comes round.

If we are mean and unforgiving and sensorious and quick to condemn, that's how other people will treat us. What goes round comes round. And more so only.

That's how God will treat us too. That's how God will treat us. That's serious and frightening for us in our lives.

The measure that you use it will be measured to you. And if we're slow to forgive, then others are going to be slow to forgive us.

[18:18] We're quick to remember. Others will be quick to remember. If we have no grace and no joy, others will have that reflected in the community of believers. And it will come back to haunt us.

And somehow, and I don't know how, but it will come back to haunt us, either in this life or in judgment day, as God will treat us the way we've treated others.

And if it's been graceless, then that's a very solemn thing. Let's work out the spiritual atmosphere we want in this church.

A generous spirit. A spirit that is in good measure give, and it will be given to you. A forgiving spirit. A non-condemnatory, non-judgmental spirit. Let's work for that. Mean-spirited Christianity is the ugliest thing I know on this planet.

[19:21] Because it kind of goes against everything that Jesus means. And generosity of spirit and an openness of heart towards other people is a genuinely beautiful thing.

So, generosity of spirit. And briefly also, goodness. Jesus wants to be generous and He wants us to be good. He gives us that picture of the tree.

Very simple picture. It doesn't need much explanation at all, does it? It's ABC Christianity. No good tree bears bad fruit. But you notice how many times He says good in this section?

The good man brings good things out of the good stored in his heart. Goodness is what Jesus wants from us as Christians. He wants us to be good.

Now, the older I get, the more I like goodness. Goodness was a kind of a bit of a sappy thing.

[20:24] But the older I get and the more experience I have with my own heart and with other peoples, the more I love good Christians. Because Jesus was good and He was a real man.

And it's a strong thing. It's not a weak thing. It's a powerful thing. It's a manly and a womanly thing to be good.

I think Jesus is good. And that's what He wants us to be. He wants us to be good. Apple trees and curry houses.

When we go and see an apple tree, we want apples off it, don't we? We don't want potatoes. And we don't want thorns. We want apples.

We go to a curry house. We don't expect to get haggis or pasta. We expect to get a good going curry. That's why we go to a curry house.

[21 : 23] When people see Christians, they want to see Christians. They don't want to see pagans or atheists. They want to see Christians who look like Jesus.

But at least if others don't want that, that's what we should want. We should want to be what it says on the tin. We should want to be Christians like Jesus. And Jesus was good.

And so Jesus says, No good tree bears bad fruit. That means we can't be Christians if we don't look like Jesus to one degree or another.

And if we are bad and evil in God's eyes, if our hearts are selfish and self-centered, and if we have no time for Christ and for His kingdom, we might be the nicest person in the world.

But in God's eyes, if we are independent and separate from Him, then we are not bearing the fruit of being Christians. So if in our hearts we love the things that God hates, if secretly we are living duplicitous double standards so that at one part of our life we live one way and another part of our life, we live a completely other way to the way God wants.

[22 : 47] If we have a bad reputation everywhere we are and go, if we are mean-spirited and proud and self-centered as a way of life, then can we claim to be Christians?

Because a good tree can't bear bad fruit. And apples don't grow potatoes. Christians are to be like Jesus.

You know, it's that simple, and yet that's what sometimes we struggle with. That is the kind of people Jesus wants us to be, generous, spirited, good, and it can only come in reliance on Him through His Holy Spirit.

It's a gift, it's a miracle. It's not something we can work up ourselves. That's why we need Him. And I finish and conclude with this case study that Jesus does of two people in verses 46 to the end of wise and foolish builders.

Two men, identical outwardly, really, apparently, we presume they've got the same kind of skills. They're both building a house. The house looks the same to all intents and purposes.

[24 : 06] And yet they go about building the house very differently. One of them spends a great deal of time digging a deep foundation into the rock.

He probably has considered the weather patterns, he's considered the future, and he's been willing to take time to dig deep. The other one doesn't seem to have done any research whatsoever, and with minimal effort has built his house, and they both look fine, until the torrent comes and strikes him.

The storm comes, and the house is built, a very famous story we've known it since we were children. The house that's built on the rock stands firm. The other house just is destroyed completely.

And that's a case that it's a spiritual picture with a spiritual message. See, there's two houses that look the same. But when the times of testing come, one of them is the genuine article, the other will not stand in the storm.

And at the conclusion of this sermon, Jesus is saying it's possible to have a counterfeit faith. It looks the same as other people's faith, but when testing and trial comes, it doesn't stand firm.

[25 : 46] It's possible to have a counterfeit faith. To be someone who listens to Christ's word, you know, the guys listen to Christ, to even say Lord, Lord, as this guy said, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and yet do not do what I say?

So, in other words, it's someone who makes some kind of religious profession, but doesn't have to be Christ. Christ isn't his Lord. So when the time of testing comes and trial and storms come, because there's no change in their hearts, it's only an outward, verbal kind of profession, then they revert back to kind.

There's no sense of forgiveness, so they don't treat other people with forgiveness. There's no grace, and they don't show grace. And their faith collapses.

And when death comes, when judgment comes, their faith is worthless. And Jesus says, because we're told this, I never knew you.

That's his response to the ones who sometimes cried Lord, Lord. I didn't know you. There was no heart to change. Because that's what makes the difference, is that in one case, the builder was digging deep.

[27 : 19] In the other case, there was no cost involved. The difference then is that deep inner change. You know, Jesus or God is always complaining in a sense, not complaining is not the right word.

Warning or highlighting about it in the Bible. You know, in Isaiah 29, he says, these people are near to me with their mouth, they honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. So there's no deep inner change, no radical transformation of the person.

You know, when the Bible speaks about the heart, it's not the physical heart, it's not even the emotions, it's the whole person, the heart, mind, will, soul, intellect, everything. There's no deep change.

There's no deep rooted obedience to Christ, you know. That's what he says here in James 1, 22. Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourself. Do what it says. You know, that's why church and company of church isn't a passive thing where we just sit and listen.

Well, it oughtn't to be. Because part of what must be going on in our hearts and minds is a taking of that Word and applying it to our lives and saying, why am I generous, booted?

[28 : 26] Am I good? How can I be good? How can God help me to be good? And a taking that and applying it and working and allowing it to dig deep into our hearts. Nobody else can do it for you but you. I can't do it.

I've got enough trouble doing it for myself, digging deep. Can't build everyone else's foundations. Gotta build their own. And we do that in relationship with them. We have to dig deep and get rid of these sins that separate us from them.

It's part of what we are in Christ. And He gives us the resources. It's not like He says, there's a rock, start digging, but you've got no resources. He gives us all the resources and the power and the ability to build the foundation in our hearts and lives.

His resources are there. We just need to ask and to apply and to let His light shine in the darkness of our hearts. And so, what Lopez talks about, working out our salvation, fear and trembling, working it out.

It doesn't mean we save ourselves. It means that we work out the salvation we've been gifted. Work it out in our lives. Work it out in our decisions. Work it out in our ambitions. Work it out in our relationships.

[29 : 34] Work it out, you know. He's our teacher. We follow Him. And the difference that Jesus says is the foundation of our lives, the deep inner change that's taken place, the transformation that we must allow God to manufacture in our lives.

It's an ongoing thing. And I hope you recognize, as I must recognize that in my life. So, remember, if we take the last few verses as a summary of it all, dig deep and prosper.

Blessing, you know, going back to the Beatitudes at the beginning, blessing does involve a cost, you know. It does involve a cost. The blessing of God involves the cost of the sadness we looked at this morning.

And that sadness comes from digging deep. From His light shining in our dust. And the cost of having that sin, which is just like a limpid clinging on inside us.

Having it ripped from our hatch, you know. So that He, that cancerous growth is taken and we can grow and be healing and whole.

[30 : 47] And that leads to a wonderful blessing, happiness. But it does involve digging deep. It involves letting Jesus into the parts of our lives and hearts that nobody else reaches.

Nobody else comes there. The secret possessive jealousies or pains or hurts or scars or sins or deepnesses that nobody else knows.

Blowing Him there. Dig deep and prosper. That sounds like something from Star Trek. Or cut corners and face bankruptcy.

If we're going to cut corners spiritually and just look for Christ to skim the surface of our lives. And not reach into our being.

And into what makes us what we are. And if we're only going to be Christians really from the outside. Then we will end up bankrupt.

[31 : 51] Spiritually bankrupt because when the times of testing comes, whether it's in this life. Or whether it's at death. Or whether it's on the day of judgment.

Then we will be found wanting. We'll be unsatisfied in this life. And ultimately bankrupt. Spiritually bankrupt.

And there's no need for anyone to be spiritually bankrupt. Because Christ offers His riches untold, free and fully to us.

And so in this short condensed section which speaks about Jesus' sermon. There's so much isn't there.

Simple but yet very profound with regard to our lives. And I hope that we will be able to go away and think about what Jesus has been saying.

[32 : 48] And that we would make every effort to be generous. And good generous in our attitude to others. Particularly in the judgments we have of them. Especially when they fail. It's easy to be good and generous with people who are nice.

And who are lovely and don't make mistakes. But when we've been hurt. Or when we've been broken hearted. Or when people have failed us. And when others need our forgiveness.

Then how generous are we towards them then? Generous and good. Amen.