

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

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Luke 6:37–45 (NIV)

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.’ He also told them this parable: ‘Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,” when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.’”

This Scripture is the third section in the Sermon on the Plain beginning in Luke 6. The Sermon on the Plain is very much like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel, chapters 5–7, except the Sermon on the Mount is much longer and was probably preached on a different occasion. In the first two parts of this Sermon on the Plain, Jesus has been sharing with us the character that He wants in us as His disciples, the qualities of blessing and woes that He

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

pronounces upon our life speak of our character. Then, in the verses following that, Jesus talks about the importance of loving and of loving those who have given us a difficult time; loving those who have hurt us.

In today's particular section, Jesus is really contrasting the life of His disciples with the life that they have all seen in the Pharisees. The Pharisees were people who were theologically orthodox. They had all the right answers to the important doctrinal questions. They were pious. But they were judges of people. They were opposite of the character that Jesus wanted. As Jesus Himself says in verse 36, "Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful." And verse 37–45 are an exposition of what it means to be merciful. It's different than the Pharisees, who sat in judgment upon people.

How many people here have been hurt by someone who maybe thought of themselves as spiritual. Perhaps they looked down upon you and criticized you and hurt you because of their criticism. That was the case with the Pharisees. It's so easy to be a Pharisee. If you're walking with God and you have all the right answers to the doctrinal questions, you can begin to assume that, somehow, you are better than other people and God thinks better of you than He does of others. That was certainly the difficulty with the Pharisees. It's difficult with a lot of people who live with a legalistic faith, a legalistic religion.

One of my favorite stories is from a pastor friend in Louisiana whose church has grown from less than a hundred people to five or ten thousand people. In the early days of the church, the pastor was talking about the event that sort of changed his whole view of people and changed his whole ministry. He'd been, up to that time, what we used to call a "clothesline preacher." Clothesline preachers were legalists. Their idea was to help the women be as ugly as they possibly could by telling them what all was wrong for them to wear and put on. He was great at that. In the early

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

days of a great work of the Holy Spirit in that church, when the church was packed with people, he noticed an usher ushered down a lady in her early twenties to the front row and she was in short shorts. The pastor was just about to come unglued on the platform, trying to give ushers the body language to get that lady out. They never saw him and he was not going down to make an embarrassment of her and himself so he let her remain. He was thinking to himself, “That gal! The very audacity of that lady being in this church dressed like that!”

When he gave the altar call at the end of the service, the lady responded and gave her life to Christ and wept and wept. The pastor went over and began to talk to her and found out she was a young divorcee. She had two small children. He asked her how she got to the church. She said she was at a bus stop that evening. She’d gotten off work from her shift as a cocktail waitress. She was getting ready to go home and one of the old ladies from First Assembly was there, waiting for a bus to go to church. She began to strike up a conversation with the young woman and said, “You need to come to church. God could help you with your life.” She said, “I couldn’t go to church. I’m not dressed for church.” The woman said, “Honey, at our church we accept people just the way they are.”

God did something through that in his heart about being judgmental toward people.

In this portion of Scripture, Jesus is talking with us about living without censoring people, living without an attitude of judgmentalism. As I was working out a sermon title for this message, I thought of some cute ones like, “Super-critics Make Bad Livers.” I thought a better theological one would be “The Grace-givers,” because He wants us to be that. I finally settled on “Generosity: the Glue of Human Relationships” because it is the generous life, the life filled with grace, that Christ is seeking to develop, not only here in this passage but throughout all of His ministry. Be merciful, as the Father in heaven is merciful.

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

There are some things that this passage of Scripture is telling us that are going to happen in our lives if generosity is not present. Three of them in particular, I want to look at with you:

I. The first thing that's going to happen is we are going to sit in judgment upon other people.

There are two meanings for the word “judge.” One meaning is to simply come to the right decision and the other meaning is to condemn a person. It's this second kind of meaning that the Lord is talking about. When He says, “Do not judge,” we must recognize that He's speaking out of the teaching of balance. In the parallel passage in the Sermon on the Mount, after teaching on not judging, He then turns around and tells us not to throw what is holy to the dogs or cast pearls before pigs. Obviously, that involves some kind of discernment or judging. The Lord is not throwing out all discernment with this phrase, “Do not judge.” What He's saying is to not sit in a position of your life in condemnation and judgment upon another person. He does call us to make moral choices between good and evil, between the better and the best. He calls us to exercise discipline within the body of Christ. But there is a distinction between being a witness and being a judge. While we are called as being witnesses, we can witness and see wrong and right and take our stand as a witness. But we are in no position to sit in judgment on a person and render the final decision and condemn them forever to the prison of our judgment. The problem with judging is that once we arrive at an understanding of where we think a person is, we've confined them to that. We've locked them in that box of condemnation and they can't get out of the judgment we give them.

So often the judgment that we place upon people is not limited to the people that we meet on the periphery of our lives, but the judgment comes to people that are close to us, within our family—husbands and wives and children and parents. We must be as careful not to construct idols of

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

other humans as perhaps not to construct idols of God. So often we are looking for the ideal person and family...the ideal wife, the ideal husband, the ideal child, the ideal parent. The ideal doesn't exist except in Christ.

If you've been around the church for a while, you probably think I'm an ideal person, right?

Perfect and no rough spots to my personality. Talk with my wife. And if you want to know about her you should talk with me. After twenty years of marriage, we're growing together, we're not perfect people. One of the things that has to happen to make a relationship work is that we need to take the idolatry off the relationship. The things we're trying to say, "I'm not going to love you unless you're this kind of person." So often we sit in judgment and say, "You don't match what I'm looking for. You don't have the right job. You don't have the right personality. You're not as caring as someone else." All of those may be true but, at the same time, when we take the standpoint of judgment toward another person, we then begin to look for that other person to change instead of making changes ourselves. The judging person is forever waiting for someone else to change. The loving person is seeking change within themselves. And that's the difference between the two. As long as we place blame for our problems on another person's shoulders, as long as we sit in judgment of them for being the way we are, we will never change. We will never be different.

A condemning person is critical and argumentative and picky. Jesus is calling us out of that bondage and telling us to quit blaming and condemning. And to forgive people, to set them free, release them from the prison of our judgment...and to give.

Giving is something that involves far more than money, although there is a connection between a generous person financially and a generous person in their spirituality and their relationships.

I've yet to find a financial tightwad who was a generous and loving person within their family.

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

Financial tightwads tend to be people who are difficult to live with, because they're playing life very close to the vest and, "What have you done for me lately?"

Jesus is telling us to release and to give. Not just to give of our finances, but to give time. Maybe your giving may mean the giving of time. It may mean the giving of a flower or a bouquet of flowers. It may mean giving up some things that are important for you. It may mean giving kind and healing words. It may be the most important thing—giving of yourself. The Lord teaches us that without generosity in our life, without grace, without magnanimity, we are going to sit in judgment upon people rather than loving them and loving God and loving ourselves.

II. The second result of the lack of generosity in our life is that without generosity we bring loss into our life.

Jesus conveys this through four different illustrations or metaphors. He talks about the good measure that is given to us: pressed down, shaken together and running over. Now He's dealing with agricultural terms of that time because people of those days wore a loose robe that, around the waist, was tied with a belt or a girdle or sash of some kind. The waist had this ability to flower out and make a deep pocket. If you were going to the market place to buy your grain and you wanted to get a good buy, somebody would pack the grain in there, in your lap, and then press it down and shake it together so that it sifted and had it running over. That was getting a good buy. Anybody who's ever done shopping in the market place environment knows the importance of watching that you don't get taken. When I was a kid in China, my parents used to have to be very careful with the quality of milk we bought. If we weren't careful, we'd get half water and half milk while paying for milk.

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

So the Lord is saying, “If you’re a giving person, then you’ll get this back in your life.”

Obviously, the loss is if you’re not a giving person, then that doesn’t happen to you. You are not given back in life.

He says the loss also relates to the fact that we become blind; blind leaders following the blind.

We become the student who places themselves above and beyond the teacher. Everybody knows today that students are smarter than teachers. But in biblical days, it wasn’t so. Then they didn’t have computers. They didn’t have libraries. They didn’t have multiple teachers. In those days, if you were a student, you had one teacher and you were not smarter than the teacher because he had knowledge. That’s why he was the teacher and you had him as a teacher. The Lord, in using this particular phrase, is saying to us, as His disciples, “You must be generous as I am generous. I am your teacher. You must follow Me. A student doesn’t know more than his teacher.”

I get really concerned in the deep core of my being when I talk with people who say to me, “I want to be a Christian. I want to be saved, but I just don’t agree with Jesus on that point.” We cannot be a Christian and disagree with Jesus on anything. A student is not above his teacher.

And the Lord also tells us that we must be the person that recognizes that if we are sitting in judgment and censoring another person, we bring loss to our own life by not being discerning of our own faults. We have a beam in our own eye and we’re trying to take a fleck of dust from someone else’s.

A psychiatrist who works with the Veteran’s Administration wrote an article in which he reported the results of a study that he had done. He’d come across, literally, thousands of case studies of people suffering from severe emotional and mental disturbances. He decided to develop a testing instrument which would be tested on a number of mentally and emotionally disturbed people, and then tested on a healthy sample group within the population also. When the

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

test results were completed, he reported that he came to the conclusion that there was one outstanding fact that stood out above all other facts in comparing the unhealthy group to the healthy group. The fact was this: Those who had extreme tension in their life had one trait in common; they were habitual faultfinders, constant critics of people around them and things around them.

That's exactly what the Lord said. We get what we give. And if we're giving criticism and judgment and censoring other people, then that comes back in our life and we're dissatisfied with life ourselves.

We make the choice regarding what Jesus is saying, as to whether the outcome of life will be the grain in our lap or the log in our eye. Without generosity, we sit in judgment on others, we bring loss in our own life and...

III. We bring destruction to others.

The good fruit and the good tree (verses 43–45). The good tree is bringing something tasty and delicious forth, delectable to other people. But the bad tree, the bad life, the life with criticism and judgment, is producing “ugh” in other people's lives.

A pastor friend of mine said several years ago, “In my early years of ministry, I spent an awful lot of my time trying to make unhappy people happy. I came to the conclusion that you cannot make unhappy people happy. You can only make them less unhappy for a time. But they will go back to being their true selves after a while. On the other hand I found that, basically, you cannot make happy people unhappy. You can make them less happy for a while, but they will also revert to their natural state.” He said, “I learned, therefore, to save a lot of time in ministry by not trying to make unhappy people happy.”

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

That's exactly what the Lord is saying here. The bad tree brings forth bad fruit. There's not an inner core of wellness and, therefore, it cannot produce the sort of wellness on a long-term basis that benefits other people. It brings loss into life.

Of course, with generosity, the opposite things take place. With generosity, we give unconditional love and acceptance to other people. We learn the kind of love that does not depend on somebody else's response to us but is inward-motivated and God-directed. We bring gain into our life because, by being a person of grace or by being a generous person, we are then receiving grace back. We bring encouragement and strength and life to other people by being generous and by being filled with grace rather than by bringing destruction into their lives.

I love this story I ran across this week. I risk using it, even at the price of it not fitting the message. The story of a lady who was vacuuming the bottom of the cage of her pet bird. Pretty Pete was the bird's name. The phone rang and the lady went to answer the phone, but she wasn't careful with what she did to the end of the vacuum hose. She left it dangling in the cage.

Suddenly she heard this loud squawk. She realized the vacuum cleaner had sucked up Pretty Pete. She put the phone down real quick. She ran over to the vacuum cleaner bag and opened it up and there was Pretty Pete, in the vacuum bag, dirty and wounded. She picked him out and took him to the kitchen sink and washed him off. He was alive. She put him back in his cage and let him sit there. A few days later, a friend was asking her how Pretty Pete was doing. She said, "He's doing all right, I guess, but he just sits and stares off into space with a kind of glassy stare in his eyes."

I thought, "There are people I know that have had an experience in life that is sort of like that." They were sitting on their perch, singing, and everything seemed to be going all right, and then life dealt them a cruel twist and they got sucked in the vacuum cleaner of life. And now, instead

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

of being joyful and happy, they're sitting on their perch of life, glassy-eyed and staring. If I were to ask for a show of hands as to how many have had an experience like that and your insides are glassy-eyed and staring, I'd bet I'd get a lot of hands raised.

What do you say to people who have had a brutalizing experience in life? Who, because they've opened the door of sin to their life, aren't singing anymore? They're miserable, absolutely miserable on the inside. Will you ever sing again?

The good news of Jesus Christ is, if you will make him Lord of your life, He'll replace in your life the song, the song of His presence. And the glassy-eyed stare will not just stay there in your life. He has the power to heal us from the inside so that the tree of our life will bear good fruit. On the other hand, if we choose not to make Jesus the Lord of our life, the joy and the song of life will not be there again.

I am so keenly conscious as pastor, as a person who spends a great deal of my time ministering to Christians, that there is such a thing as starting the Christian walk by making Jesus Lord.

Then, somewhere in the journey of the Christian life, failing to keep Him as Lord, and the song goes out when we begin to go our own way. The only way to get the song back and to get good fruit in our life is to put Him again as the Lord of our life, to make the same kind of crystal clear decision now as we did when we first began to follow Him.

Be a person of grace. Persons of grace have received God's grace and that is the glue that bonds us to God—His grace. The glue of human relationships is that grace and generosity we pour out into others.

Closing Prayer

Our heavenly Father, we bow in this moment in Your presence. We recognize, Lord, that there are probably people here today who have known what it is for someone to sit in judgment upon

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

them, to be harsh with them and cruel and unkind. We all know the kind of fruit that's produced in our life when that happens. We also know, Lord, that the only kind of way to overcome that is to forgive and to determine to pattern ourselves after You. And rather than receiving what has been thrown at us which is hurtful and harmful, we simply release it and drop it at Your feet and measure our lives by what You think of us in Your great grace. We think too, Lord, of persons in the church family today that maybe feel like they have really gotten vacuumed up in the lint bag of life. And there's just a lot of hurt that is present; so indescribable that words are insufficient for it. The tearing of the heart, the rending of the inside. You are the greater of the heart and You are the great healer of the heart. I pray, Lord, that in a life of anyone who feels that loss today, that glassy-eyed stare, that You'll come gently to their life and that they will open wide the door of their heart to acknowledge You as Lord. For it is when we make You Lord that we own up to Your great love for us, that we open the door to healing, that we take the hurt that has been thrown at us and we say that God will use it for good. And we also take the sin in our life which also causes the wounds many times, and we say, "Lord, free me. Forgive me of my sin. Though my sins be as scarlet, though they are red as crimson, though they're indelibly dyed into my life, You, O Lord, can wash me and make me white again and make me pure." We thank You, Lord, that You're doing that and we bless You.

As we're continuing to pray and your head is bowed, I've found it to be an almost inevitable law that when the Lord is dealing with our hearts, some disturbance comes in the service to try to focus our attention on that rather than on what the Spirit is saying in our hearts. Let the Spirit direct you to your heart and to what He's seeking to do in your life today. He wants to free people here that are trapped in the wounds of life, people who have been so bitter and so angry and so hostile that only God can heal that hurt. I want you to just open your life to God and be

GENEROSITY: THE GLUE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 6:37–45

honest with Him and say, “Lord, that’s me. I am so mad. I am hurting.” Let God be the judge of the one who has hurt you. Let God move His grace and healing into your life and receive your help from Him.

Lord, we’re open before You. In Your name, in Christ. Amen.