

Sermon: A Life of Generosity

January 19, 2020

Text: Isaiah 58

Discussion Questions:

I think that for some people, generosity can be a bit of a touchy subject in the church. It's probably because generosity involves giving not only your time and talents—but also your money.

- Would you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?
- Do you think people might have a bit of a hesitation when it comes to talking about generosity? Why or why not?
- Why do you think people struggle when talking about money—or HEARING about money when they come to church?
- What kinds of experiences do you think people have had regarding “money and the church”?
- Have you, personally, ever had a negative experience with a church that “seemed to focus too much on money”?

Let's think for a bit about the topic of generosity in general (not just as it relates to money).

- Talk about (or sit down and list) the various ways that you can think of when it comes to being generous. I want to challenge you to push this past the obvious answers of volunteering a few hours to this cause or that cause. Break this question down into very small chunks. What does it look like to be generous in the very small things of life? In the little, seemingly insignificant decisions that we make in the course of a day? Are good manners an act of generosity? Is looking someone in the eye when they speak to you an act of generosity? Take some time to talk about this.

One of the definitions of generosity that I found puts it this way:

Generosity is a quality that's a lot like unselfishness. Someone showing generosity is happy to give time, money, food, or kindness to people in need. Generosity is a quality — like honesty and patience — that we all probably wish we had more of. When you show generosity, you might give away things or money or put others before yourself. But generosity is about more than cash and stuff. When you're forgiving and gentle to people, you show generosity of spirit. If you give others help or credit, that shows generosity.

- Talk about this definition a bit. Do you agree? Do you believe that generosity—more than being something we DO—is more like a quality that we embody and live out? In other words, do you agree that generosity isn't necessarily something you DO—rather, it's something (or someone) you ARE?
- Chances are... you've seen generosity lived out in various people you've met through the years. Who comes to your mind when you think about generosity? What is it about them that stands out to you?

Examination:

- Read **Isaiah 58:1-5**

When you look at the heading for this chapter, you see that it is about “True Fasting.” Spiritual fasting (or “religious” fasting—as opposed to fasting in order to lose weight or be healthier) is the practice (discipline) of going without food for a certain amount of time in order to direct our focus toward God. Jesus addresses the topic of fasting in the Sermon on the Mount, when He says in Matthew 6:16-18:

16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

It is obvious from Jesus’ words, that certain people have turned fasting into something completely opposite of what God intended. Jesus calls those who have abused the practice of fasting “hypocrites.” For these people, fasting is ALL ABOUT MAKING THEMSELVES LOOK BETTER IN THE EYES OF OTHERS.

Which brings us back to Isaiah 58 (written 700 years before Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount) —

- The Israelites seem to have incorporated the practice of fasting into their daily lives—something that most everyone did as a matter of routine. AND YET! And yet there doesn’t seem to be any real connection between their practice of fasting...and their genuine heart toward God or other people. Look at verse 3. What “charge” is God bringing against the people?
 - God asks a very pointed question in verse 5. He is calling the people out for thinking that simply taking a day to “go through the motions” is what is pleasing to Him. Do you think people can make this same mistake today?
- Read **Isaiah 58:6-14**
 - Now we come to the topic of generosity—it permeates every line of these nine verses. God is saying to the Israelites—I WANT YOU TO LIVE LIVES OF GENEROSITY! And this generosity reveals itself in many different ways.
 - How does a generous heart respond to injustice? (v. 6)
 - How does a generous heart respond to oppression? (v. 6)
 - How does a generous heart respond to hunger? (v. 7)
 - How does a generous heart respond to homelessness? (v. 7)
 - How does a generous heart respond to those lacking clothes? (v. 7)
 - How does a generous heart respond to family members in need? (v. 7)
 - These verses go into detail about what God promises to do for those who live generous lives. Make a list of all of the various blessing that God says that He will pour out upon those who live out their faith in Him through acts of generosity.

Application:

Earlier in this study, I asked you to consider others in whom you have observed the quality of generosity. Make a list of those qualities—and commit to DOING one or two of these things today.