

The Miracle of a Generous Heart

Week Three - One Love

Texts: Exodus 35:4-9, 20-29; I Chronicles 29:6-18; Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37; 2 Corinthians 9:7

Welcome to session three of our series, The Miracle of a Generous Heart. My name is Clay West, and I'm the Minister of Small Groups here at University Heights Baptist Church. In session three we're going to talk about One Love and what it means to give of ourselves for the Body of Christ and for others. And today, we're going to start in the Old Testament, back in the book of Exodus. So if you would take your Bible and turn to Exodus 35, I will give you a little bit of background information while you're doing that. The Israelites have come out of Egypt. They're traveling through the wilderness, they've made the golden calf, Moses has gone on to the mountain to receive the ten commandments, and the next major thing that happens is that they begin to set up the tabernacle. And that's kind of where we find ourselves in Exodus chapter 35. And we're going to focus on just a small passage, which starts in verse four, going through verse nine, and then 20 through 29. So "Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, this is the thing which the Lord has commanded: take from among you a contribution to the Lord, whoever is of a willing heart. Let him bring it as the Lord's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze, and blue and purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat's hair, and ram skins dyed red, and porpoise skins and acacia wood, and oil for lighting and spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses' presence, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the Lord's contribution for the work of the Tent of Meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. Then all whose hearts moves them, both men and women came and brought brooches and earrings, and signet rings, and bracelets, all articles of gold, so did every man who presented an offering of gold to the Lord, every man who had in his possession blue and purple and scarlet material in fine linen, and goat's hair and ram skins dyed red, and porpoise skins, brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver and bronze brought the Lord's contribution. And every man who had in his possession acacia wood, for any work of the service brought it. All the skilled women spun with their hands and brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet material and in fine linen. And all the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats hair. The rulers brought the onyx stones and the stones for setting for the ephod and for the breastpiece, and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant instance. The Israelites, all the men and women whose heart move them to bring material for the word which the Lord had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a free will offering to the Lord." This is what's really cool about this passage. Moses says, this is what the Lord is commanded. We need these things for the tabernacle. And over and over in the word you see this same phrase, "those who had a willing heart and a willing spirit brought", they brought all of these things for the tabernacle. It's really important that they had a willingness to give. Remember that God had been connecting with these people over and over again, by being the provider, by being protector. He's leading them into this Promised Land. And in response to what he has been doing in their midst, they willingly gave these items for the tabernacle. We see a willingness of heart. We don't see grumbling like we did last week. There is now a willingness

to give for the tabernacle, a beautiful picture of a willingness of heart. Now, let's jump ahead into I Chronicles 29. Now, we're much further ahead in time. And now instead of providing things for a tabernacle, this temporary dwelling of the Lord, we're now providing things for the temple. We're going to start in verse 6 of chapter 29. "Then the rulers of the father's households and the princes of the tribes of Israel, and the commanders of 1000s, and hundreds of the overseers of the king's work, offered willingly. And for the service for the house of God, they gave 5000 talents, and 10,000 decks of gold and 10,000 talents of silver, and 18,000 talents of brass, and 100,000 talents of iron, whoever possessed precious stones, gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord, in the care of Jehiel the Gershonite, then the people rejoiced." This is so cool! Then the people rejoice, because they had offered so willingly. "For they made their offering to the Lord with a whole heart, and King David, also rejoiced greatly. So David, bless the Lord, in the sign of all the assembly. And David said, blessed are you, O Lord, God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Indeed, everything that is in the heavens and on the earth; Yours is the dominion, oh Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head overall, both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all and in Your hand is power and might, and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now, therefore, our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name. But who am I? Who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this, for all things come from you. And from your hand, we have given you, for we are sojourners before you and tenants. As all our fathers were our days on earth, and like a shadow, and there is no hope. Oh Lord, our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build you a house, for Your holy name, it is from your hand, and all is yours. Since I know oh my God that you try the heart and delight in the uprightness and integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things. So now with joy, I have seen your people who are present here, make their offerings willingly to you, oh Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Our fathers preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of your people, and direct their heart to you." And how beautiful, how beautiful again, that they are willingly giving for the temple. But this is the coolest part. David says, "Who are we that we could give so generously to you?" Because you are the one who gives so generously to us. He loves us and he lavishes his love on us. And we have the opportunity to lavish love back on Him through our gifts. Through our tithes and offerings back to Him, we give to the body of Christ, so Kingdom work can be done. Now, that's just one aspect of it, we're gonna look at the other side of this, which is in Acts. Acts chapters two and four have really made me reflect on the last several weeks, as we've been working on this. It's such a beautiful picture of the church, and how the church is functioning.

And we're going to start in Acts 2:42 where it gives a description of the early church. What's it doing? What's it like? "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching, and to fellowship, and the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe. And many wonders and signs were taking place to the apostles, and all those who had believed were together, and they had all things in common. And they began selling their property, and possessions. And were sharing them with all as anyone might have need. And day by day, continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness, and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day, those who were

being saved." And then over in chapter four, verse 32, through 37. "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart, and soul, and not one of them claimed that anything belonged to him on his own. But all things were common property to them. And with great power, the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who are owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds to the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet. And they would be distributed to each as any had any need." Now, a couple things that I've struggled with with these passages. It seems extreme. I mean, truthfully, don't you see that and feel that a little bit, this idea of selling possessions and land and having things in common? It seems extreme, but it is so beautiful. It is such a beautiful picture of love. It is love worked out. I gotta tell you, I see this happen in our church all the time, I see people that have needs and those needs get met by believers in the church. It may be money, it may be a refrigerator, it may be cleaning off a roof. It may be fixing a car. I mean, it could be anything. But we are allowed the opportunity to show love to each other by the way that we give to each other, by the way that we give generously to each other. So one of the ways that God's been working in my heart recently on this is something that I hold dear, that I really hold on to strongly. If somebody had a need, would I be willing to let go of that thing in order to sell it to provide for that need. I have a really strong suspicion that in the near future He may call me to something like that, and he may call us something like that. But remember, even from times of old as we look at Exodus, from times of old as we look at the early church, and even as we see it worked out in our own church today, love abounds.

All good things come from the Father. He is the giver of all the things that we have. Yes, we work and make money. But to attribute those things to us, I think is a mistake. God is the giver of all good things. God is the one who has been Provider to us. And one of the things he asks us to do is to do just like the Israelites did. We are to give because he has so generously given to us. We generously give to the body of Christ. We generously give to one another to meet needs because that, my friends, is showing love. And when the world sees how we love each other, they're drawn to Jesus Christ. And the gospel is worked out in our midst. And I want to challenge you this week in your discussion that you will think about that concept. Am I giving generously because God is giving generously to me.

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when someone was generous to you and you were generous to others. It's ok to talk about being generous, as long as it edifies the church.
2. What is your most prized possession? Would you be willing to part with it if the Lord called you to it?
3. The Israelites were described as having a willing heart. Willingness is one thing, but obedience is quite another. Talk this out.
4. Where did the communal atmosphere come from in the early church? What was its effect on the culture?
5. Discuss the immediate change we could have on our community if we gave generously to meet the needs of those around us.

