

# Sacrifice and Generosity

## Intro (141)

I'm looking at the next in our series of values, sacrifice and generosity. I'm going to start with a visual symbol, this glass of water. When you look at it what do you see, how do you feel?

Is this a glass half empty, half of the water has already gone, what happens if you get thirsty, who is going to provide you with more water, where is it going to come from?

Is this a glass half full, plenty of water for the moment? You can trust that there will be always be more available when you really need it?

Is your mindset one of scarcity, a world that is insecure and its down to you to create security for yourself or is your mindset one of abundance? Are you generously provided for and able to be generous to others?

## Our Generous Father (476)

If we are going to live the values of Sacrifice and Generosity as the St Swithins church family then what can we learn about them from the character of our Father God.

I am going to take us back to the very start of the Bible with the Book of Genesis. From the very beginning we see that God is the generous, extravagant, and abundant host of all creation. God creates humanity to share in, care for, and extend this abundant creation. However, starting with Adam and Eve we see that humanity fails to look to God for our security and doesn't trust him to provide all we need to live. The result is that we start to look to create security for ourselves. Our way is not the way of life and it leads to mistrust, broken relationships, pain and ultimately to death.

We see the consequences of this ultimate lie, that God is not to be trusted, in the behaviour of God's people in Genesis, the violence of Cain (Gen 4), Abraham's deception (Gen 12), Jacob's lies (Gen 27-33). Again, and again through the Old Testament we see God's people focusing on what they don't have instead of what God has given them and done for them. Israel has a scarcity mindset.

Yet, God's character is to seek justice and righteousness and to reach out in love to his precious creation, humanity, and offer his people a way to return to him. God does not give up on us and in his generosity, he keeps giving us gifts. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah he offers a surprising new way to deal with the evil and death in the world caused by humanity failing to trust their generous host. God promises a new King, unlike any who has gone before, and this king will become a servant and suffer and die. He will offer his life as a sacrifice to finally remove all the sin and suffering caused by humans failing to trust their host the creator God.

And so, we come to these famous verses in John 3:16-17.

*16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

This is the ultimate gift of our generous Father God who did not give up on us and kept on loving us even when we turned away from him. He offered his son Jesus as a sacrifice in our place, and through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus atoned for the debt we owe and purifies us so we can stand before God. In God's story of redemption for all humankind he gives the ultimate gift, himself.

### Jesus teaching on generosity (353)

We've looked at the big picture of God the Father's generosity; what can we learn about how we should live generously from Jesus life and teaching?

Jesus teaches us that we should not live with a scarcity mindset but with an abundance mindset. In Luke 12:24-28 he reminds us of God's generous provision to all he has created, for the ravens for example, who *"do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them"*. If our generous God provides for all his creatures can't we trust him to care for us and provide all that we need? God's generosity is not self-seeking it is indiscriminate giving to all, both the deserving and the undeserving.

It is much easier for us to be generous to people who will respond back with generosity towards us. It is much easier to give gifts to people who love us back. But that is not how God's generosity works he keeps giving gifts to those who don't love him and we can see that in the way Jesus lives his life. Jesus shows love and generosity to people others considered least deserving, to tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, fishermen. Again, and again he teaches that we should love like our generous Father God, love our neighbours as ourselves and love our enemies.

What is clear from Jesus teaching, and his life, is that his generous way of living is not a guarantee of material prosperity. Jesus was God's gift to Israel and they didn't accept the gift but instead they responded with suspicion, anger, hostility and ultimately handed him over to be killed. Jesus suffered for sharing God's generous love as did many of his first disciples, many in the early church and many Christians across the world still suffer today. We need to remember that we too may suffer with Jesus when we share God's unconditional love. But we do have a promise in Jesus of life in all its fulness. This is an abundance mindset, not chasing after economic or material security that we create for ourselves but finding our ultimate security in our relationship with our loving Father.

How can we live generously? (264)

How then should we live out these values as the St Swithin's church family?

In our reading from 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 we hear Paul encouraging the economically wealthy Corinthian Christian believers to give generously to support the Christians in Jerusalem who were in considerable economic hardship. He urges them to give out of the abundant grace God has given them so that God's abundance will overflow in their generosity. It has been described as the circle of gifts and grace. The wealth of God's grace enables an abundance of human generosity which pours out gifts to those who receive and inspires both giver and receiver in an overflow of thanks to God. This is the model we are called to live out as St Swithin's church family, to be known for our sacrificial overflowing generosity that brings praise to God.

In this time of economic and social uncertainty we all face challenges and could find ourselves falling back into a scarcity mindset and seeking to build security for ourselves. But we have received the greatest gift of God's rescuing and restoring grace in Jesus. To live with an abundance mindset we need to fully trust God and remember that he has already given us everything we truly need.

We are not left to make this change in our own strength because God has given us the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we can be changed and re-orientated to live a life that imitates Jesus generosity to others, giving abundant gifts to others out of the generous grace we have received.

#### Conclusion (144)

I'm going to finish with a quote from Charles Sturgeon about our generous God.

*In all of my years of service to my Lord, I have discovered a truth that has never failed and has never been compromised. That truth is that it is beyond the realm of possibilities that one has the ability to out give God. Even if I give the whole of my worth to Him, He will find a way to give back to me much more than I gave.*

- Charles Spurgeon

Finally let's pray:

Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour, and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. All things come from you, and of your own do we give you. Creator God, help us to give generously in response to all that you have given to us. Amen