

November 20, 2022
Barry Rodriguez
Generosity in the Prophets | Sermon Notes

SERIES RECAP

What you're hearing from us this month is not about guilt and shame at all. It's about *joy* and possibility.

Jesus wasn't teaching about money and generosity in a vacuum, but that his teachings were rooted in the grand tradition of the people of Israel. Specifically in the law of Moses. **The law of Moses called the people of Israel to be a living embodiment of God's presence, justice, and abundance in the world.**

Fun Fact: I was so encouraged by the feedback from last weekend's sermon. I genuinely love how profound the Old Testament law can be when understood in its visionary context!

CHEATING GOD

Isaiah 5:8-10

What sorrow for you who buy up house after house and field after field, until everyone is evicted and you live alone in the land. But I have heard the LORD of Heaven's Armies swear a solemn oath: "Many houses will stand deserted; even beautiful mansions will be empty. Ten acres of vineyard will not produce even six gallons of wine. Ten baskets of seed will yield only one basket of grain."

Positive feedback loop of blessing: if the people were generous God would bless them abundantly and they've have more to be generous with.

Negative feedback loop of the curse: if the people withheld, stole, and focused only on themselves they'd find even their existing abundance withering.

Fun Fact: If you're interested in doing a bit more digging and seeing more examples of how the prophets called Israel to recapture this vision of a generous nation, take a look at Habakkuk 2:4-20, Jeremiah 5:28-29, Amos 3:14-43, and Isaiah 58:6-9.

Malachi 3:5-9

"At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

"I am the LORD, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

"But you ask, 'How can we return when we have never gone away?'

"Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me!

"But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?'

"You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me.

You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me."

The law of Moses, including all the rules and regulations about giving and being generous, was not just some static legal code. It was a vision of a nation that would show the rest of humanity what's possible.

But with Israel allowing injustice and corruption to take root, with their nation *neglecting* generosity, they are robbing God of his grand dream of healing the world.

Fun Fact: One of the primary obligations for the Israelites when it came to generosity was giving an annual tithe to support the temple. Specifically, they provided food for the Levites and priests, whose job was to maintain the temple system and kept up Israel's relationship with God. That's why the Levites didn't have any land for themselves. In Nehemiah 13, however, we see that the people had become so stingy with their tithes that the Levites were forced to go work in the fields rather than serve at the temple. No wonder God's blessing felt so absent!

THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN

But as always, our God is a God of grace.

Malachi 3:10-12

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do, "says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight."

The Israelites lived in the hill country of Judea, which was a relatively arid place. They depended entirely on the rain to survive.

But there's another layer here, because this rain also symbolizes the blessing of God. As I've said many times, blessing is about more than just wealth. In Scripture, God's blessing means his *presence*. It's like a return to the garden of Eden. It means peace between neighbors and

enough to go around. It means harmony with the earth and I would argue, harmony within yourself. God's blessing means *life* – God's life for you, your family, and your community.

Full barns and abundant crops and ripe grapes are not just for the wellbeing of a few lucky people. They are given to create a society which reflects the justice, abundance, and presence of God.

Matthew 6:25,32-33

That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear.... your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

The Israelites failed at this. They couldn't break free of the curse. But Jesus could. And now we have *his* spirit within us.

Our generosity will show the world there is another way to live.

FAQs

#1 - How, exactly, will God bless me if I give?

- Pouring out rain - God giving something good.
- Guarding your crops from insects and disease - God preventing *bad* things from happening.
- Giving a huge grape harvest - *multiplying* the work you're already doing.

God's blessing takes many forms.

Fun Fact: In verse 11, the phrase which the NLT translates "insects and disease" is a Hebrew word meaning, "the devourer." Literally, God promises to "rebuke the devourer"!

I don't know *how* exactly God will bless you if you're generous. But I am fully convinced that he will. The question is, are you willing to put him to the test and experience that blessing firsthand?

#2 - Should I give to the Church or to other organizations and causes?

Reasons the Israelites were commanded to give:

- To ensure the people of God can worship and grow
- To care for the vulnerable
- To celebrate in gratitude

There are a lot of fantastic non-profits and organizations that do one or more of those things. And yes, you should be giving to them.

But as I said last week, the local church - Grace Church - accomplishes all three of those purposes.

As we share and worship and celebrate what God is doing in our midst, everyone in this spiritual family - including you - can experience the blessing of God. Don't give to your church because we need it. Give to your church because you do.

Fun Fact: As someone who once ran a small non-profit, I can tell you how vital it was for our mission to have generous financial supporters. Let's keep those targeted, laser-focused organizations thriving even as we support the ongoing work of the Church.

How *much* should I give?

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that you are supposed to give 10% of your income to the church.

So how much should you give? Give till you feel it. Give until it requires a bit of sacrifice. A bit of dependence on God to take care of you.

I'm not telling you what that amount is. This is between you and God. I'm just asking, what would it look like for you to give till you feel it and let God throw open the windows of heaven to make up the rest?