

## AUTHENTIC GENEROSITY Matthew 6:1-4

### INTRODUCTION:

In our language and culture, we have a lot of familiar sayings that, in a few words, convey a wealth of wisdom. We say, “a stitch in time saves nine” and most of us know instantly what that means. Just six words but they say a lot, don’t they?

Many of those pithy sayings can also be expressed in ways that are neither so terse nor so powerful. Let’s see if you can decipher the familiar saying behind these verbose sentences.

- ❖ Never attempt to calculate your juvenile poultry department before the proper process of incubation is fully materialized. (“Never count your chickens before they are hatched.”)
- ❖ Should any person elect to eschew the use of a straight, slender and cylindrical stick upon his descendent, the exercise of that option will vitiate the scion. (“Spare the rod and spoil the child.”)
- ❖ Male human offspring will behave in a manner consistent with male human offspring. (“Boys will be boys.”)
- ❖ Avoid continuing to flagellate an equine that is in a deceased state. (“Stop beating a dead horse.”)

Now, I have no desire to continue to flagellate a deceased equine but I just want to point out that we have been camped out in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount since the first of the year. And now it is May. But at least we have completed a rather detailed study Matthew Chapter 5 and we are ready to move to Matthew chapter 6.

With Matthew chapter 6, we come to a new section of Jesus’ sermon; a section I might title “Religious Acts”. Jesus spoke about giving, praying and fasting. And in relation to each of these religious acts, Jesus followed a specific formula. He gave a **warning** not to do this act to be praised by other people. He gave a **guarantee** that those who ignore this warning will get the praise of people that they are seeking but they will get nothing more than that. He gave the **instruction** to perform religious acts privately, secretly or humbly. And he gave the **assurance** that God will reward openly those who practice their piety privately.

Look for those elements while we read the text for today: Matthew 6:1-4. (This text is on page 960 of the pew Bible in front of you.)

<sup>1</sup> *“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

<sup>2</sup> *“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I*

*tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Do you understand what that means? Jesus said that authentic charity is intended to benefit the other person whereas artificial charity is intended to benefit the donor.

In this text, Jesus established a fascinating principle with regard to giving. He taught that our *reason* for giving will determine our *manner* of giving and our *manner* of giving will determine our *reward* from the giving. We ought, therefore, to be careful of why and how we give and not just what we give.

## I. OUR REASON FOR GIVING

I stated earlier that the reason for our giving will determine the manner of our giving so let's start there. When people give donations, offerings, contributions, there are at least three reasons why they may be giving.

### A. To be seen by men?

Jesus began this teaching with these words:

*“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them.”*

The term “acts of righteousness” is a translation of a Greek phrase that refers to any religious duty. Church attendance could be considered an “act of righteousness.” Church membership could be described as an “act of righteousness.” Serving as an elder or a deacon would come under the umbrella of an “act of righteousness.” Singing in the choir, teaching a Sunday School class, taking communion to the shut-ins and almost any other activity around here would fall under the category of an “act of righteousness.”

Now hear me out on this: there is nothing wrong with doing “acts of righteousness.” My goodness, we certainly need more people to do more acts of righteousness.

But Jesus cautioned us not to fall into the temptation of doing “acts of righteousness” for the purpose of impressing other people. And it is very tempting to do religious things so that other people will notice and be struck with how pious we are or how religious we are or how godly we are. The reason Jesus began the section of his sermon about “Religious Acts” with a warning not to do them to play to the crowd, is because it is so easy to slip into doing what we do so that people will see and be impressed with us.

B. To meet needs?

An alternative motivation for doing “acts of righteousness” is because they need to be done.

They need to be done as acts of obedience. The Lord has told us to practice spiritual disciplines and, as obedient children of God, that ought to be reason enough to do “acts of righteousness.”

But another reason that these “acts of righteousness” should be done is because there are needs to be met. If no one were willing to play a musical instrument, our song service would suffer. If no one were willing to teach Sunday School, our education program would falter. If no one were willing to take communion to the shut-ins, a ministry would not happen. One reason to do “acts of righteousness” is because they simply need to be done by someone and a servant says, “I will do what I can.”

In our text for this morning, Jesus moved from the general expression, “acts of righteousness” to a specific example. He talked about giving to the needy. Is there a need for charitable giving? Consider these facts:

- ❖ Half of the world, almost 3 billion people, live on less than \$2 per day.
- ❖ The poorest 40% of the world’s population have only about 5% of the world’s income. The richest 20% of the world’s population control about 80% of the world’s income.
- ❖ There are 2.2 billion children in the world and 1 billion of them are in poverty.
- ❖ According to UNICEF, 26,500-30,000 children die each day due to poverty. And they “die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world. Being meek and weak in life makes these dying multitudes even more invisible in death.”

Are there needs? Absolutely! We believe that the United States gives a lot of aid to poor people. But we are wrong. Every year, we, in the United States, spend more money on cosmetics than the entire world spends on education for third-world countries. We spend more on pet food than we send to feed the malnourished of the world. We spend more on ice cream than we do on proper nutrition for the impoverished. We spend more on diet foods, diet drugs and diet programs than we send in food-aid.

The proper response is not to pity the starving people in other countries. Pity gives the crumbs of his cake to the poor. What is needed is not pity but brotherhood. Brotherhood shares whatever he

has: if it is cake, we share the cake; and if it is only crumbs, we share the crumbs.

Is there a need for acts of charity? There certainly is! But be warned, our reason for giving determines our manner of giving.

## II. DETERMINES OUR MANNER OF GIVING

- A. Jesus painted a word-picture of a person who gave his charitable contributions with a trumpet fanfare and a press conference to draw attention to his generosity.

Jesus said that people like this do what they do in the synagogues and on the street corners so they will be honored by men.

Jesus called people who give like that “hypocrites.” They are actors wearing a mask and playing a part so they can receive the applause of their audience.

- B. In contrast to the public spectacle of the giving by the hypocrites, Jesus said that his followers are to give quietly and privately. Their giving is so unobtrusive that their left hand doesn't even know what their right hand is doing. Now that is probably hyperbole: an exaggeration for the sake of effect. It is impossible for your left hand not to know what your right hand is doing. (Although there have been times when I have been playing the drums and it *sounded like* my left hand didn't know what my right hand was doing.) But I am sure you know what Jesus meant. Jesus meant that we are not to be making a show of our giving. Rather, we are to give because we want to help.

But how can we do that? Really, most of us don't have wads of cash lying around that we can pick up and send to the needy. Well let me give you some practical suggestions.

1. Change your life-style. People! We are only here for a brief moment in time. Compared to eternity, this life isn't even a nano-second. It is pretty foolish to neglect what is lasting so we can make the brief and temporary more luxurious.
2. Fast one day a week and send the money you save to the poor.
3. Cut your food consumption (why should we have to pay so much to lose weight that others so desperately need just so they can live?)
4. Stop making excuses
  - a. We say, “I can't help them all and I don't want to play favorites so I won't help anybody.”
  - b. We say, “I don't want my kids or grandkids to suffer and miss out on dancing lessons, karate lessons and swimming lessons, the latest video players, video games

and video discs; the coolest clothes, the coolest shoes and the coolest jewelry.”

- c. We ask, “What if I sacrifice and no one else does?”
- d. Or you may be asking, “Darrel, what are you going to be doing?” (And let me reply to that: If I told you, that might be drawing attention to myself. I’m a left hand and you are a right and we need not know what each other is doing.)
- e. The fact is, it is past time to quit making excuses for not helping our fellowman who is starving and it is high time for each of us to do what we can to meet his need.

Our reason for giving will determine our manner of giving and our manner of giving will determine our reward from the giving

### III. **DETERMINES OUR REWARD FROM GIVING**

- A. Jesus said that if we seek attention from other people, we will probably get it but that will be our only reward.
- B. But in contrast to that, if we give to meet needs, the needs will be met plus God will give us added reward as well.
  - 1. ***The satisfaction of making a difference for others.*** These others are God’s children made in the likeness and image of their Father. To fail to help the needy is to fail to help some of God’s own kids. There is great satisfaction from having partnered with God to help His kids.
  - 2. ***The satisfaction of having helped God’s own Son.*** Do you not recall that Jesus said, “in as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these, my brothers, you have done it unto me”? If Jesus’ followers really love him, would they not want to give him food if he was hungry, water if he was thirsty, clothing if he was naked and shelter if he was homeless? Quietly giving to meet needs brings the reward of knowing you have helped God’s own Son.
  - 3. ***Eternal reward from God’s own hand.*** In our text, Jesus said that God will not leave unrewarded, those who have quietly given to meet the needs of His children.

### **CONCLUSION:**

We don’t talk about it much but most weeks, the giving at Clay City Christian is not sufficient to meet our expenses. In fact, in 2007, on average, our weekly expenses exceeded our weekly offerings by \$368. We are able to absorb that because of the generous Thanksgiving and Easter offerings that you have given. But most people do not give to these special offerings so we can pay for our operating expenses.

Most people give to these special offerings to meet other needs such as paying for our annual revival, major building and grounds projects, etc. In

fact, I am told that there was a time when the Thanksgiving offering was used to underwrite the salary for a youth minister. Currently, even if we were trying to hire a youth minister, we'd have a hard time doing so because we are living off of the special offerings just to pay the bills.

Again, we don't talk much about this. In fact, we probably don't talk enough about it because most of you probably didn't know that our weekly giving is not meeting our weekly expenses.

If your reason for giving is to meet needs, you would probably want to know that we have these needs. I hope to come up with a method for doing a better job of keeping you abreast of our financial situation in the future. But this will have to do for now as we invite you to partner with us to meet the needs of the local church and to advance the cause of Christ in other areas.

On the subject of meeting needs, I also want you to know that Scripture says that God saw you as a person in need: in need of forgiveness, in need of cleansing, in need of healing. God saw you as a person in need and in response to that need, God gave...*"His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life."* Will you humbly receive what God has so generously given to meet your need?

**INVITATION:** #675 – "I Gave My Life For Thee"