

The Joy of Generosity

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[0:00] If you have your Bibles, turn with me this morning to Luke chapter 21, and I want to preach this morning on the joy of generosity. And you would imagine that this is tied to what we're doing this morning, and it is, but I want to tell you it's not just about what we're doing this morning.

I want to talk to you not just about what we're going to be pledging and giving, committing in just a few minutes, but about a lifestyle of generosity.

So I hope you'll keep that in mind as I preach the message this morning. I want to say one thing about this commitment time, too, that we're going to make here in just a few moments. I want to be real clear about this, and I know that church leadership will agree this wholeheartedly.

We know that some of you have been negatively impacted by this COVID virus over the last year and a half, nearly two years now. And so as a result of that, some of you have had a loss of income. Some of you have had additional expenses that you haven't had in the past. And I know that for some of you, it's going to be impossible to participate, and we want you to understand that's okay.

[1:10] We understand that completely. I don't want anybody here to do anything they don't feel comfortable doing, anything that you know that you can't do. We don't want you to feel like a second-class citizen for not being able to do that either.

We're glad to have you as a part of First Baptist Church of Pickens, and you just give as God leads and enables you to be able to give. So if you have your Bibles, turn with us to Luke chapter 21, and let me just tell you about the message.

It's going to be short in explanation. Usually they're longer in explanation, shorter in application. This one's going to be shorter in explanation, longer in application, but it's not going to be long, okay?

I'm going to preach a relatively short message this morning for me, okay? So some of you are saying, well, okay, that's still about 50 minutes, right? No, I promise it'll be shorter than that. We've got four verses we're going to look at, and I'm going to explain those, and then we're going to go back, and we're going to look at three points that I want you to see about the generosity, three principles of generosity.

So with that said, let's jump right in, Luke chapter 21 and verse 1. He looked up and saw the rich dropping their offerings into the temple treasury.

[2:21] Now, if you think about it, and you may never have thought about this before, but that's kind of an odd thing to see Jesus do, because in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus makes it real clear when you give, how you do to give.

You're to give in secret. Don't let anybody know what you're doing. Don't let your left hand know what your right hand's doing, right? So it seems a little bit peculiar that Jesus has come into the temple area, and he's in this room where they gave their offerings, the treasury room, and there are trumpets on the wall.

Now, when you think about a trumpet like in our orchestra at times, that's what I'm talking about. It wasn't an actual playing trumpet, but it was an instrument that looked something like a trumpet, and it was attached to the wall, and people would go over, and they would put their offerings into this trumpet.

Now, keep in mind, paper currency didn't come around until about the 10th century through the Chinese, and so at this point in time, everything's coinage. Coins were silver and gold and other metals, and obviously the silver and gold were most valuable, and the larger the coin, obviously the greater the value.

Well, Jesus watches, and that's what's kind of odd about it because he's actually watching them. Have you ever reached in your wallet to put out money to put an offering plate, and somebody from

the pew behind you leans over and says, hmm, that's a 20?

[3 : 45] You'd be kind of offended by that, right? I mean, you'd say, well, wait a second, man. This is my own business. Don't watch me give. But Jesus just kind of takes position here in the room, and he's watching, and all these wealthy people are coming through, and they're putting their coins into this trumpet.

Well, because it's metal, and the coinage is metal, guess what? It makes quite a racket, right, as you would expect. So they're putting their offerings in, there's a lot of clanging going on, and Jesus is just watching one, another, another, another, another, and these people drop their money in their offering.

Well, look at verse 2. He also saw a poor widow dropping in two tiny coins. The scholars tell us those coins were likely what we know today as a lepta.

It was a tiny little, almost weightless coin. I had some replicas of those several years ago, gave them away to somebody, but they call them widow's mites.

You've heard that expression. It was just a tiny, tiny coin. It was the least valuable of all the coins that the Greeks used, okay? If you took those two coins that I had and you had dropped them on this floor, those of you only on the front would hear it, and then only faintly, and those of you in the back would never know it.

[5 : 08] They were just light, almost as a feather, much less weight than even a penny. So verse 2 says, He also saw a poor widow dropping in two tiny coins.

Verse 3. I tell you the truth, he said, This poor widow has put in more than all of them. Now here's the picture. Jesus is standing there watching. We don't know what the disciples are doing.

They're milling around, and he's watching these rich people put in their coins, hearing all this clan, and then here comes this widow, and she's got two little leptus in her hand, and she drops them in there, and you don't hear anything.

And Jesus just suddenly just stops and says, Guys, get over here. And they all come to Jesus, and he says, Hey, you see these rich guys going there? Yeah. You see that little widow right there? Mm-hmm. She just put in more than all those guys together. Wow. I mean, Jesus notes what she gives and comments on it.

[6 : 12] Now, those disciples, if they're like us, you know what they're thinking? He needs to go to Costco and get a hearing test. I mean, did you hear all that clanging and banging when they emptied those bags of money into the trumpets?

And I don't know what she gave, but it couldn't be much. Just look at how she's dressed. She didn't have much, but he says she's given more than all of them. Now, I want to tell you something.

Simple little story.

Four verses. We're getting ready to see the fourth verse. You don't have to be a theologian. Never had to be at seminary a day in your life. In fact, if we've got a sixth grade boy or girl here, they can come and read this next verse, and they can tell you as well as I can what Jesus meant.

Look at verse four. For all these people have put in gifts out of their surplus, out of their plenty. But she, out of her poverty, has put in all she had to live on.

They've given maybe lots and lots of money. She's given just something that's virtually worthless. And he says she's given more.

[7 : 22] He's not talking obviously about dollars and cents. Jesus has a different way of looking at things than how we typically look at things. He's not concerned about how many zeros are at the end of her gift.

Jesus says, I want to tell you something. She put in more than all because they gave out of their abundance, out of their wealth. She has given out of her poverty. And here's the startling thing. Everything she had to live on. When you look at her, we use that expression, I'm broke. She really is. Most of the time when we say it, we don't really mean that.

We've got stuff back at the house, right? But she has given everything she had going forward to live on. I want to share with you three principles about generosity.

And I hope you'll listen carefully. The first is this. The truest measure of generosity is not what you give, but what you keep for yourself. The truest measure of generosity is not what you give, but what you keep for yourself.

[8 : 31] The wealthier had given more, but they had plenty left over. They gave out of their surplus, but she gave out of her poverty. Now, I want to be real clear about this, and I don't want you to miss

this because I think sometimes when we talk about generosity, we skip where we miss this.

What those guys did, Jesus is not condemning. Jesus is not saying one thing negative about what those wealthy people did.

In fact, it was commendable. I want to say to you, all giving is good because they're taking that which is theirs, no one's forcing them to, and they're giving it away to someone else.

So all giving is good, and I'm guessing everyone in this building, without exception, has at some point, it's hard for me to fathom that anyone in this room has not ever given something away.

That's always a good thing, but some of you know what it is to be generous, and generous is even a better thing. The book of Proverbs repeatedly commends people for their generosity.

[9 : 46] Jesus speaks a number of times about being generous. Jesus tells his own disciples, freely you have received, freely give. The Bible again and again commends generosity, but I want to tell you something.

No one modeled it better than Jesus. No one who has ever lived. He's the absolute epitome and picture of what it is to be generous.

He never owned a home. He never owned a means of transportation that we know. He's always borrowing a donkey, right? He owned absolutely nothing. He lived day to day to day trusting God, and at the end, he gives everything.

He spills his blood that humanity might have eternal life. You know what's always kind of bugged me when you think about generosity? The media will find some athlete, some actor, some politician, some leader in business who makes kazillions of dollars, literally millions and millions and millions of dollars, sometimes even pointing out they're billionaires, and they give \$100,000, they give \$200,000, they even give a million dollars, and they say, boy, what a generous, generous contribution.

Well, that's a good thing. I'm not saying anything bad about those who make those donations. It's a good thing, but generous, not hardly. It's not, it's not what you give, it's what you got left over that determines if a gift is really, really, a generous gift.

[11 : 22] I want to show you a picture so you'll know, you'll leave knowing exactly what generous looks like. In my first church out of Seminary, I'm 25 years old, I go to be pastor of Western Avenue Baptist Church in Statesville, North Carolina.

I immediately meet this older couple, they're in their late 60s, their names are Clyde and Eula Neighbors. We all called him Drag. Don't ask me why, I never knew why.

But his name was Drag Neighbors. Wonderful old fella, wonderful, wonderful gal in Eula. She became like a grandmother to me. He died about two years after I got there. She was still living when I left, but she died later in her 80s.

They lived about six blocks south of the church. They walked to church on Sunday morning, on Sunday night, on Tuesday evening for visitation, on Wednesday evening for prayer meeting. Any other meetings going up to the church, they walked that six blocks to the church. They walked about a half a mile to the grocery store and back anytime they went to the grocery store.

[12 : 25] He walked about a half a mile to work at J.C. Steel where he labored for years and years and years. They walked a mile to town in Statesville to do all their shopping.

Everywhere they went unless someone stopped and gave them a ride, which was seldom, they walked. When I went there and he's about seven years old, they're still walking.

I'm told that someone asked Drag Neighbors one day, Mr. Neighbors, you work at J.C. Steel. It's a steel foundry there in Statesville, not far from the church, Cross Street, in fact, from the church.

And they said, why is it you never owned a car? All these other guys at the foundry own cars. They pay good wages. Everybody has a car. Why don't you have a car?

And they said that Drag just tried to blow them off, wouldn't say anything. They kept pressing, kept pressing, and finally, you know what Drag Neighbors, told them? He says, I don't have a car because me and you had decided years ago if we owned a car, we couldn't give as much to missions.

[13 : 27] Can I tell you that our secretary told me that beginning January 1 and all through the year, we received money from them for a Lottie Moon Christmas offering from January through December.

Drag died about two years after I'd been there. years passed. We relocate the church on the other side of town. I made a pledge to those senior adults who lived on the south side of Statesville.

We'll not abandon you. We'll come back and pick you up and give you transportation to the new location. Bought a van to transport them. Ran every service we had. On Sunday nights, oftentimes, after I'd preached that day, I would relax by taking those ladies home.

So, one night, I get on the van with these ladies, about six, seven, eight ladies. I'm carrying them to the south Statesville. That morning, I have announced to the church we've got an opportunity to buy 10 more acres of land.

It's going to cost us \$100,000. In about two or three weeks, we're going to have a big Sunday like you're having today, and we'll take an offering. We'll see if we can gather that \$100,000 in a single Sunday offering.

[14 : 34] Well, I get on the van. I take the ladies home. I've dropped off two or three. Miss Yule is still in the van. Still two or three other ladies on the van. She says to me, Pastor, we're pulling up to her house on Fifth Street.

She says, Pastor, when we get to my house, I've been a little wobbly lately. She's never been wobbly. She says, I'm a little wobbly lately.

Would you walk with me up to the door? So, I know she's got something she wants to say. I stop the van, get out, open the door, let her out. She holds Marm.

I walk her up to the front door. She fumbles for her keys and then as she's opening the door, she looks at me and says, I heard what you said this morning about that land and I want to help you.

I said, well, that's great. She says, in my house, I've got a shoe box there in my closet. I saw a pair of shoes. She calls the name of a store in Statesville on Broad Street.

[15 : 30] She says, I've seen a pair of shoes up there. I've been saving for it. I've got \$56. You wait right here. I'm going to get that \$56. Boy, tears is being streamed down my face.

I said, Miss Sheila, I don't want you to do that. I said, you need those shoes way worse than we need that \$56. You just keep that money. It'll be okay. Big tears now streamed down her face and she says, I want to get that money and she goes inside and gets it and comes back and hands me \$56.

She says, don't let any of them women on this bus know what I did. That's a picture of generosity. Do you know that? It's not that athlete who gives \$100,000 when he's making \$20 million a year.

That's a picture of generosity. Second thing I want you to see is this. Generosity is never about giving what is expected of you. It is about giving what no one would suspect you'd ever do.

Generosity is not about just reasoning and thinking, okay, what can I afford to give and here's what I should give and here's my fair share. Generosity is when you say, you know what? Let's just do what I don't say I'm going to be able to do.

[16 : 45] Let's just blow folks' minds. Let's just blow our minds. That kind of giving is fun. Let me prove it to you and I'm going to prove it to you. How many of you have carried your wife out for a real nice meal?

It's a special occasion or maybe you've done something boneheaded and you want to make up for it, you know? And so you carry your wife out for a real fancy meal. You go to somewhere like the Peddler or somewhere close by in the Easley or Pickens.

It's a real fancy place and you go in and I'm going to make it probably less than what you paid but let's say for the sake of argument you paid \$50 for the meal, okay? They bring you your bill. Well, what are you going to do?

You're going to leave about a \$10 tip, 20%. You're going to feel okay about that but I'll tell you something. You put that on your credit card and you pull out an extra \$10 and you pay the bill and when you walk out of that restaurant you don't ever think about it again.

Am I right? No biggie. It's what is expected. 20% here's my \$10, \$50 meal. Okay, I'm good to go but watch this.

[17 : 49] The next morning you get up, you're heading on your way to the office and you didn't have time for breakfast so you pull into your favorite little diner cafe and that waitress who waits on you all the time she's there and she takes your order and all you want is coffee but you notice it's taking an unusual amount of time because there are very few working that day and some of the customers are getting kind of unruly and impatient and they're dogging it where are my eggs and where are my grits and where's my bacon and you didn't do this right, you toasted the wrong piece of toast and that kind of stuff you know.

Giving her a hard time and you watch that and so when she brings your coffee you drink your coffee and you get up to pay the bill and it's only two bucks but this time you pay 500% in tip. You reach in your pocket and you leave a \$10 bill the same \$10 bill you left the night before at the peddler but this time you leave a \$10 bill on the table for her tip and then you go pay the \$2 at the cash register.

Can I tell you something? You will think about that \$10 all day long. It's not that you'll regret giving the \$10 you'll just think boy I hope that made her day right?

I mean you'll look back as you're going out the door to see did she get that \$10 I want to make sure she got that \$10. You'll feel good about it. You can't wait to see her the next time you go in that restaurant because you know you've been generous right?

[19 : 17] Generous isn't doing what you're expected to do it's about doing what nobody would expect you to do. Here's the final third thing and I close the message. I believe great generosity is motivated more often than not not always but more often than not by three things.

I'm going to tell you what those three things are. First of all by love. Love is the best motivator for giving that I know of. You know how I know that?

you are most generous with the people you love the most. Your wife your husband your children your grandchildren can I tell you something?

I am generous to a fault when it comes to any of them. I'm an easy touch right? They know they ask me for it if I can do it I'm going to help them.

I'm not going to spoil them but I'm going to tell you something I'm going to do everything I can to give them everything they need and much of what they want because I love them. You ask me why did this woman put in the last thing she had to live on?

[20 : 21] I believe this first and foremost she loved God. Why is she at the temple? She's at the temple because she loves God. Why is she at the temple? She's there to worship because she loves God.

Why is she at the temple? She's there to pray because she loves God. She passes these trumpets and thinks you know what I've got two left there's not much but I want to give it to God and motivated by love she does what she does.

Many of you in this room have been motivated by love at one time or another to give and I want to tell you something every time you do it's a great feeling isn't it? You remember that special gift you got your wife?

That special gift you couldn't wait to give it to them? That special gift you got your grandchild? For those of you who are grandparents I'll throw this in for absolutely free this morning I went online about six months ago I guess it was wasn't it Regina?

And I found this little box it's about this high and about this wide and it's a truck inside it I can't you remember the name of that truck? It's something like a monster truck or something right? And you turn this key and the box goes to shaking right?

[21 : 28] It's the craziest thing you've ever seen in your life it cost me about 50 bucks but I'm going to tell you it was worth every penny of it to watch him turn that key because that box it talks to you and it moves back and forth back and forth until finally the box explodes and this truck comes running out if you want a good gift for your three year old grandchild now that's the gift I'm just telling you right?

You do it because you love them Second reason you give is because of faith she gave out of her poverty everything she had to live on let me ask you do you think for a minute she thought well I guess this is it I'm going to die today I'm giving away everything I've got to eat on here's the two leaps no she gave that because she loved God and she had this mentality God is always taking care of me I don't know where the next meal is coming from but he's always provided one and so if he takes care of me in the past he'll take care of me it's not prosperity preaching listen prosperity preaching says this if you give I promise you God is going to cause the Wells Fargo truck to pull up in front of your house that's not so she didn't think that she didn't give with that in mind she just gave thinking this God's always been good God's always provided

I'm a person of faith don't know how he's going to do it but he's going to take care of me now listen to me if I ask you how many of you in this room believe that about yourself the vast vast vast majority if not unanimously everyone in this room would raise their hand but I want to tell you something the evidence says otherwise I have never in my life and I'm 69 years old witnessed a day and a time and I'm not talking about with believers only I'm talking about with believers

non-believers across the board I have never seen a time in my lifetime where people thought they had to insulate themselves and protect themselves so much with their stuff I call it we have more stuff than we know what to do with and we dare not give that stuff away or throw it away because it makes us feel safe to have all our stuff you know what I'm saying right through one of these neighborhoods where the houses are pretty close together in Greer we got them everywhere and they have for the most part two car garages but you'll see two and three cars parked out in front of that house at night you know why because they can't get them in the garage you know why they can't get them in the garage because they got their say it with me stuff their stuff is filled the garage right you walk in if you just rudely walked over and said hey what's in this closet open the closet you'd get killed right it'd fall out on top of you

I mean it's just packed with say it with me stuff big question for you you do know don't you that you're going to die one day every one of us in this room unless the Lord come we're going to die I want to tell you something when you die big question what are they going to do with your stuff I'm going to tell you right now I'm going to put your mind at ease or horrify you one they're going to throw it away they're going to get rid of it they may sell some of it the valuable stuff but most of it they're going to pay somebody to come in with a truck and load it up and haul it off so they can sell your house they don't want your stuff here's how I know they don't want your stuff you go visit your kids you don't want their stuff right you walk in you see their stuff and you say hmm why did they buy that stuff man why didn't they buy furniture like we buy they come to your house and you think man this is great stuff here we got they don't see it that way they want something utilitarian they want something gray right they want something that don't have all them flowers on it they want their stuff they got their taste they want their stuff they don't want your stuff and you don't want their stuff so what's going to happen is they're going to give all your stuff away now you worked hard for that stuff and you've been protecting it all these years apparently right you didn't want to throw it away you didn't want to throw it out so you must think it's a value but the truth is one day it's going to all be gone so here's the big deal why don't you give it away if somebody's going to have the pleasure of giving it away giving it to goodwill or giving it to some ministry or giving it to somebody in need somebody's house burns or selling the stuff and donating that money to somebody or selling the stuff and going on a vacation or buying your wife a fancy ring or something but why just keep collecting stuff you know why because we're fearful unlike that lady that we won't make it to the end unless we keep our stuff you see that that's a lack of faith how many of you

I don't know about Pickens but over in Greer where I live you can't go a mile and not see a storage facility we got a real fancy one now across from Riverside High School and it's got we've got air conditioned storage for your stuff I don't know what they put in there popsicles ice creams or what but you need to keep it cool you can keep it cool in that storage facility right and so folks pay lots and lots and lots of money to store their stuff and then they never go get it and they never use it so I'm asking you why don't you think about today if you don't get anything else out of this message go home and throw away some stuff right just call somebody hey you know what I noticed you could use this why don't you come get this sell that stuff and give it the money to some charity well here's the third thing I want to say to you and I close the message there's a third reason for giving love faith and the third one is joy and if I had the privilege right now of changing the screen

[28 : 10] I would put up additional word I didn't think of when I sent Colton the outline selfish joy selfish joy and the reason I'd say selfish joy is because living generously is a hoot I just want to tell you it's a real real hoot to live generously the scripture even tells us it will be second Corinthians nine seven says this each person should do as he has decided in his heart not out of regret or out of necessity you ever done that you ever looked in your wallet they take one of those quickie offerings you didn't know was coming you look in your offering in your billfold and there's a twenty and you're hoping there were some ones yeah that's what he's talking about not out of regret or out of necessity for God loves a cheerful giver that word literally means this hilarious has there ever been occasion when you pass the play here and they couldn't go on with singing because people were just laughing so hard

I heard you a hundred dollars pass it on that's how it ought to be now I'm gonna tell you something you have been like that when I gave that little truck to my grandson I was way more excited about it than he was I mean I got my camera all right son keep pushing that box do what it tells you that thing's gonna bust out of here in a minute it's gonna be great right when you give generously out of love and faith I'm telling you it's always a hoot there's always great great joy I close by telling you

this there are a lot of folk I know who are hundred heirs and thousand heirs and have a lot more fun with their money than a lot of people who are millionaires do you know that a lot of people who are thousand years have a lot more fun with their money than millionaires do because they're just keeping it all not all of them a lot of them are very very generous people but there are some out there who are doing that

I close with this story Francis Chan is my favorite preacher in the world he's a little Chinese guy he was on the west coast he's now overseas in Asia he he's got about as good attitude toward money and things as anybody I know he gives this illustration he's standing on this car lot and there's a fancy fancy sports car right here right and Francis says because he sells books by the millions he could just buy anything he wanted but everything he gets he gives away and Francis says I could drive this fancy sports car here and there's nothing wrong by the way with having a fancy sports car if you want to give me one I'll take it nothing wrong with that he says I could have this sports car but I don't have it and he walks and here's another one and another one and another one and another one and he says I don't drive any of these but the truth is if I'm if I'm being honest with you I could afford to drive any one of these

I want but he keeps going down to the end of the row and here sits I don't remember what it was but it was like a Honda or a Toyota something like most of us drive and he said this is what I drive and you know why I do that I do it out of selfishness he said here's why he said if I buy this fancy car down here and I pull it in your parking lot and somebody scrapes my door I am ticked and he said if I go down the road and somebody hits me I am just my day's ruined or the first time he gets scratched or even after a while I just get bored with it because we all know this right we're all going to get bored with the car sooner or later and he says so I have great joy for a while but it just goes away but he says I have learned I can take the fifty thousand dollars I save in buying that car and not buying this car and because of the economy the way it is I can take that fifty thousand and send it to

Africa and I can build an orphanage that will house ten to fifteen children and he said and every time I get to go there or every time they send me photographs and I see the pictures of those little kids not just this year but next year and the next decade and the next decade and the next decade every time I get those pictures he said it just brings me great great great joy and he says so I try to give and buy that cheaper car out of selfishness it brings me more joy to do that than it would if I had that sports car can I tell you something you don't believe that probably deep down in your heart but if you ever did it you'd find out it's right it's right the things in life that have brought you the most joy are not those things you own it's those things that you give away

[33 : 22] I hope you'll do well in this offering but I hope even more that you'll adopt today a lifestyle of being generous do it with your waitress at lunch today do it with your wife today or your husband today or your children today or your neighbor or the guy who works with you that person who's having a tough time that you know about be generous with it not just we a church just adopt a lifestyle of generosity let's pray Lord I pray you'd move on us right now what we're to do in this service about this commitment I pray that no one would feel coerced because we don't need that kind of giving and you don't want us to give that way but I pray God that we would be motivated by how well you've blessed us and our ability to give and our spirit of generosity make us joyful generous givers is our prayer in your name amen thank you