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Sermon Notes

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God's Most Generous Gift

Matthew 20:15, 17-19

It is to the glory of a King to show lavish generosity

- Solomon put on a lavish display of generosity to impress the Queen of Sheba
- Xerxes put on a display of his wealth and power and generosity for a full 180 days (As recorded in Esther 1), culminating in a lavish feast that lasted seven days; the palace was decked out richly, and the king's lavish generosity was apparent in the quality of the food he served and the gifts he gave his guests
- Even evil kings like to impress their subjects with lavish displays of generosity: King Herod rewarded a dancing girl with the lavish boast: "Ask for whatever you wish, even up to half my kingdom"
- So the Caesars, ruling the world, loved to impress; when Hadrian visited Athens, he lavished on that city innumerable costly gifts, and competed many expensive building projects as a display of his generous nature
- When King James I took the throne to rule great Britain, he put on a lavish Christmas and New Year's celebration to display his wealth and largesse to the people; there were lavish feasts with gifts for all his guests; incredible foods, drinks, and even a play written and acted out by one William Shakespeare
- Machiavelli, *The Prince*: Lavish generosity was one way the a king would show his power... it was usually self-serving, and sometimes dangerous, for these displays were expensive and usually paid for by raising taxes to a huge amount; furthermore, the subjects of the king could become selfish and EXPECT these displays regularly; it would be better according to Machiavelli, for the Prince to be generally STINGY and if he came into some wealth from another kingdom, spend that like water!

Well, it is to the GLORY of the true King of Kings, the God of the Universe, to display His lavish generosity in ways we can scarcely imagine

This week is holy week, a time in which Christians throughout the world stop and contemplate with reverence and fear and love the infinitely mysterious and powerful twin truths of the Cross and Empty Tomb... the cross, on which the Savior of the World died, and the Empty Tomb from which He rose

This morning, I want to put a single concept from last week's passage together with the facts of Christ's death: the single concept is the sovereign freedom of God to be as generous as

He chooses to be with His own things... and that the highest form of generosity He has ever shown is in the death of Christ.

I. Christ Declares God's Sovereign Freedom to be Generous

A. A Declaration of Freedom

ESV Matthew 20:15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'

1. the immediate context: the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard
2. some only worked one hour and received a denarius...ordinarily a wage for a full day's work
3. others worked twelve hours and received a denarius as agreed upon
4. when they received it they began to grumble against the landowner... they had worked for twelve hours and got the same pay as these men, who'd only worked one hour
5. the landowner said, "It's not a matter of JUSTICE but of GENEROSITY

Matthew 20:13 "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?

I WANT TO GIVE the man who was hired last the same as I gave you."

ESV Matthew 20:15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'

6. So the lavish generosity of God is on display in this parable... but more than that... the freedom of a sovereign God to be as generous as He chooses to be
7. he says "I WANT to give..." it is a matter of his will
8. he says "DON'T I HAVE THE RIGHT TO DO WHAT I CHOOSE with what belongs to me..." it is a matter of his sovereign rights and privileges
9. he says "Are you envious because I am generous"... so it's a matter of sovereign generosity

B. God's Sovereignty Defined

1. The sovereignty of God is the doctrine that God is King over the universe, every square inch of it is His, every atom in it is His for He made it.; and He can do whatever He wants with all of it
2. He owes us NOTHING...

- a. He does not ask permission
- b. He does not ask advice
- c. He does not owe it to us to make us all equally gifted or blessed
- d. He does not owe us a single word of explanation
- e. He is not accountable to us... but we are accountable to Him

3. Therefore, God can be as generous as He wants to be with His own things!!

C. God's Sovereignty Resented

- 1. "Do you begrudge my generosity?"
- 2. The doctrine of God's sovereign generosity is very troubling to human beings... they resent that God sits on His throne and is in NO WAY ACCOUNTABLE to us
- 3. it is especially poignant for many in the issue of salvation: they feel that if God does anything to save anyone, He is under obligation to do equally the same for everyone... He MUST GIVE EVERYONE the SAME ACCESS to His grace

D. God's Generosity Required for our Blessedness

- 1. Because we are creatures
 - a. God is glorified in human dependence on Him
 - b. God created us TOTALLY DEPENDENT on Him for our very existence
 - i) Our very atoms hold together only by an ongoing exertion of His will
 - ii) Our biological lives depend on oxygen and water and nutrients... if we don't get these, we will perish
 - iii) We were created needy, and God is glorified greatly by this
 - c. Therefore, God MUST be generous to us, He must open His hand and satisfy our needs, or we will perish
 - d. Simply because we are creatures and He is the Creator, we MUST have God's generosity
- 2. Because we are sinners

- a. When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, all His posterity sinned with him
- b. We are members of a sin-cursed race of rebels against the throne of Almighty God
- c. We are all of us under the death sentence uttered in Genesis: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die”
- d. So also its restatement later through the pen of the Apostle Paul,

Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death

- e. We have consistently violated God’s laws... God the King gave us His laws; the Ten Commandments, the Two Greatest Commandments... and we have violated them again and again
- f. We deserve eternity in hell; he deserve the deepest punishment!!
- g. Therefore, for us to receive ANYTHING GOOD AT ALL from God is an act of astonishing generosity
- h. That we should actually have sunshine, rain, delicious food, the beauty of the earth, natural gifts, enriching and pleasure-filled experiences... all of this is nothing less than astonishing generosity from God

So... we are totally dependent on God’s sovereign generosity for two very clear reasons: 1) because we are creatures, and 2) because we are sinners

We must start here: because we are creatures, we can make NO DEMANDS WHATSOEVER on God; whatever He gives, we must receive gratefully

How much more is that true now that we have sinned... God can be as generous as He chooses to be, and we would have no right whatsoever to complain... we all received a stay of execution from the death that our sin deserved... anything we get other than condemnation is GRACE from GOD

II. God’s Common Generosity, Given as He Thinks Best

A. Common Grace Blessings

1. Heavenly lights

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Deuteronomy 4:19 And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars-- all the heavenly array-- do not be enticed into bowing down to them and

worshiping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.

2. Sun and rain

Matthew 5:45 He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

3. Crops and joy

Acts 14:17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

4. Physical blessings

- a. Physical strength, health, beauty, height, quickness
- b. Mental strength: intelligence, the ability to concentrate, insight, education
- c. Financial resources: inheritance, talent for earning money, business success
- d. These gifts God gives or He doesn't based on whatever He thinks is best

B. God Sovereignly Gives Common Gifts

1. It is patently obvious that God does NOT create all men equal in these things

- a. Some live in particularly fertile land and their harvests are particularly blessed; Others live in particularly arid climates or on sterile soil, and they have to scrape out a meager living from the dust of the earth
- b. Some are excellent athletes, and excel on the court or field with lavishly gifted bodies... they are strong, quick, agile, with excellent hand-eye coordination; Others are more clumsy, awkward, uncoordinated, short, weak, and do not in any way excel at sports
- c. Some have clear minds, fantastic memories, sharp perception skills and acquire new concepts with remarkable ease; others struggle to concentrate, and forget things readily, and seem somewhat dense... they do not excel in mental tasks and do poorly in school

2. God is free to give these gifts or not as He sees fit... to make one person different from another, to give some lavishly and others not so lavishly

3. God sits on His throne and can be as generous as He wants to be

4. AND it is for us to praise Him and thank Him for whatever gift He has given and not murmur

5. Yet for all of that, God has been incredibly generous to the sinful human race... far more generous than we deserve
6. yes we can see that generosity in these common grace blessings... how much more in the giving of His only begotten Son
7. The basic concept here: all of God's gifts come at HIS CHOICE, by HIS WILL, as an expression of HIS SOVEREIGN FREEDOM... He didn't have to give any of them

Don't I have the right to do what I want with what is mine??

III. God's Greatest Generosity, Given as He Thinks Best

A. The Greatest Gift in History: Jesus Christ

1. the logic of Romans 8:32... the infinite value of Christ

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

- a. The root concept of this verse is this: the greatest gift God has ever given is Jesus Christ
- b. He was God's most precious gift... His "only begotten Son"...
- c. All the universe's material wealth—all its gold, silver, diamonds, starry host, etc. are as so much dust to God the Father compared to Christ

C.S. Lewis: "He who has Christ and all the world has no more than he who has Christ alone!!"

B. God Had the Right to Be Generous with Jesus... and He WAS!!

1. this deliverance of Christ was done by the good pleasure of God
2. He was under no compulsion... he was under no obligation... God the Father gave God the Son freely and completely... with lavish generosity
3. and it was infinitely painful and costly, because He gave Him up for death and destruction
4. the details of that lavish gift are in the next section of Matthew's Gospel, verses 17-19

IV. Details of the Most Generous Gift

Matthew 20:17-19 Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ¹⁸ "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son

of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

In this intimate moment, in which Jesus opens up His mind about His impending death, we see some amazing aspects of how generous is the gift of the Son by the Father

Does not the Father have the right to be this generous with the Son? Yes!! But we are thereby under immense obligation to pick up each jewel of generosity and gaze at each facet and let the light hit each one so that we see just how sovereignly generous God has been

A. Intimate Relationship

Vs. 17 "He took the twelve disciples aside..."

1. The twelve were His chosen ones... those closest to Jesus
2. The crowds that followed Him did so because He healed their diseases, because no one ever spoke like Jesus, because He fed the 5000, because He was immensely fascinating; BUT Jesus "did not entrust Himself to them" (John 2)
3. He chose twelve men after a night of fasting and prayer, that they should be with Him and know His most intimate thoughts
4. so he "takes the twelve disciples aside"... implying intimacy, closeness, love, relationship

John 15:15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

5. Part of that intimacy that Jesus shared was how He FELT about the cross... though that is not revealed here, it is elsewhere
 - a. In John 12:

John 12:27 Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. "Father, glorify your name!"

Jesus reveals to His closest disciples the pain and agony He felt INWARDLY about the cross... but this He did not reveal to the crowds generally

b. In Matthew 26, Gethsemane

- i) Jesus called His closest disciples to Him—Peter, John, James
- ii) He wanted them to experience His agony over the cross

iii) They saw Jesus lying prostrate on the ground, sweating great drops of blood, asking for there to be some way not to drink the Cup

6. So here on the road up to Jerusalem, He gives His twelve disciples the gift of intimacy... of intensely close relationship... of opening His mind and heart

7. notice also the intimacy in the word “We...”

“We are going up to Jerusalem...”

The central purpose of the mission only Jesus could do... He ALONE could go to the cross for the sins of the world

BUT He wanted to go up there WITH THEM... so He said “We are going up to Jerusalem...”

We see therefore the intimate friendship in this encounter

B. Prophecy

1. the ability to predict the future is the unique gift of the prophets of God
2. only God knows the end from the beginning, only God can establish the future

Isaiah 46:10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

3. the Bible is full of prophecies... but by far the most significant prophecies center around the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ
4. sometimes these prophecies come in patterns and types... things lived out in the life of Israel
 - a. the saving of Isaac’s life on Mt. Moriah—when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son, his only son Isaac; and the angel of the Lord intervened and a ram in the thickets caught by its horns was a substitute for Isaac... a clear picture of Christ
 - b. the Passover lamb, whose blood was spilled on the night of the tenth plague in Egypt, the plague on the firstborn; the blood was painted over the doorposts and lintels where the Israelites lived and the angel of the Lord passed over... a clear picture of the death of Christ
5. Sometimes the prophecies were verbal predictions... descriptions of what would actually happen to Christ... like Psalm 22 which says the Messiah’s hands and feet would be pierced
6. here Jesus gives a simple, clear prediction of the details of His death

"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

7. this prediction was given in love to teach us a simple lesson: Christ willingly CHOSE to lay down His life... He was no victim but went into His suffering and death with His eyes wide open and from a willing spirit

John 13:19 I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He.

C. Betrayal

1. The details of this prophecy are striking, and it begins with this word...
"Betrayed"

Vs. 18 the Son of Man will be betrayed...

2. this is a very strong word, a very specific word
3. it follows the last issue... relational intimacy; you cannot be betrayed by a total stranger; in order to be betrayed, you must have a friend do the sordid task
4. Jesus chose the twelve, and one of them would BETRAY Jesus to His enemies
5. Jesus would make this issue abundantly clear at the Last Supper

Matthew 26:21-25 And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." ²² They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?" ²³ Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." ²⁵ Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

D. Condemnation by the Priests

Matthew 20:18 the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death

1. the betrayer would hand Jesus over to His Jewish enemies... the leaders of the Jewish nation
2. the leaders were the chief priests and the teachers of the law

3. this is even more powerful, even more striking... these were men who spent every day of their lives (supposedly) studying Scripture and carrying out its precepts

John 5:39-40 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

4. the priests were those who were supposed to be offering sacrifices to the Lord in fulfillment of the Laws of Moses

Hebrews 10:11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

5. The priests should have known that animal sacrifices were merely a picture of salvation, and that the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin
6. They should have understood who Jesus was, why He had come more than anyone else... but they were the ones MOST SET AGAINST HIM!!!

John 1:11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

7. so ***they condemned him to death***... amazingly enough in so doing they would fulfill the purpose of the animal sacrifices they offered and make them obsolete for all time!!

E. Hatred by the Gentiles

Matthew 20:18-19 They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles

1. Though the Jews' hatred was strong enough to kill him themselves, yet it was not the will of God for that to happen
2. actually MANY TIMES in Jesus' life, enraged Jews sought to kill him... to push Him off a cliff in Nazareth, to stone Him in the temple area when He claimed "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58); and again when he claimed "I and the Father are one" (John 10:31)
3. but it was God's will that BOTH JEWS and GENTILES have a hand in Jesus' death
 - a. a few years ago, when Mel Gibson's film on the Passion of Christ came out, there was significant controversy over the fact that Gibson portrayed the Jews as in ANY SENSE WHATSOEVER responsible for the death of Christ

- b. Jewish leaders and Anti-Defamation League officials spoke fervently about the history of anti-Semitism that such a link has produced and the history of bitter persecution of the Jews as a result of being blamed for the death of Christ
 - c. However, it was God's will that Jews and Gentiles ALIKE should share EQUALLY the responsibility for Jesus' death
 - d. For in this way Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin, and Jews and Gentiles alike are all rebellious against God, and Jews and Gentiles alike are all in danger of hell
4. So God ordained that the Jewish leaders should condemn Jesus to death and turn Him over to the Gentiles for the actual execution

F. Mocked

- 1. the Gentiles would delight in mocking Jesus... so would the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees and crowd as well
- 2. everyone seemed to enjoy the mocking of the Son of God
- 3. the Romans made a science of it
- 4. Mockery was predicted in the Old Testament

Psalm 22:7-8 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

- 5. Mockery was fulfilled in the life of Christ
 - a. The Romans made a science of it

Matthew 27:27-30 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

Luke 22:63-65 The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. ⁶⁴ They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" ⁶⁵ And they said many other insulting things to him.

- b. King Herod and his soldiers enjoyed it too

Luke 23:11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate.

c. The crowds that lined the streets pitched in

Mark 15:29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him

d. The chief priests and scribes and Jewish leaders stood by the cross to rub it in

Matthew 27:41-43 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴² "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

e. The soldiers who crucified Jesus mocked him

Luke 23:36-37 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

f. Even the thieves crucified with Jesus mocked him... though one of them later repented and was saved

g. This mockery was a great dishonor to Christ... but part of the lavish gift He gave

6. Amazingly, the Bible speaks of how graciously willing Jesus was through all of this

Isaiah 50:6 I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.

7. in this way it is plain that Christ could not really be mocked:

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.

G. Flogged

Matthew 20:18-19 They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified.

1. Flogging is one of the heinous tortures ever devised by man

2. it involves a short stick of hard wood around which was wrapped long straps of leather; at the end of these long straps were embedded chunks of bone or metal which acted like teeth

3. a skillful and sadistic flogger could wrap these straps with vicious force around the bare back of a victim and rip away pieces of his flesh; he could expose sinews and blood vessels and muscles and nerves and lay bare the white bones of a hapless victim
4. this flogging could be fatal if it went on too long
5. Jesus spoke this single word “flogged” knowing full well it would happen to him
6. it almost didn’t happen... Pontius Pilate was actually trying to release Jesus; he knew that Jesus was innocent and that the Jews had merely handed Jesus over to the Romans out of jealousy; he kept trying to release him, but the Jews wouldn’t permit it; so Pilate figured “Maybe if I flog him, beat him up a little, they will be satisfied”
7. this is the flogging Jesus predicted

H. Crucified

1. the final step of Jesus’ predicted sufferings... crucifixion
2. the most hideous form of death employed by the ancient world
3. invented by the cruel Assyrians, picked up by the Romans for use only on foreigners; it was so horrible and degrading a death that no Roman citizen could ever die that way, no matter how heinous his crime
4. the mechanics of the death are well-known to you: hands and feet pierced, nailed to a cross of wood; the victim having to push up painfully on his blood feet to gasp for breath
5. it was in this way that Jesus knew he would die... it had been written in the prophecies, with specific words like “pierced”

Psalm 22:16-18 Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. ¹⁷ I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. ¹⁸ They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6. this is the cost of the gift of Christ for us... that God the Father would give His only begotten Son for THIS
7. how could any of us claim that we deserved this?

8. How could any of us demand that the Father do this for us, if the Father had not so willed?
9. This is not a matter of what we deserve but of lavish grace and mercy
10. and WHY? Why was the Son of God so shamefully destroyed? Simply put, He did this as our substitute, that the punishment we deserved could be laid on Him, and His righteousness given us as a free, generous gift... full forgiveness of sins and the right to enter an eternity in heaven
11. this free gift is ours simply by faith... "Without money and without price..." God commands us freely to come and receive His greatest generosity with NO LABOR at ALL, just by faith

I. Resurrected

Matthew 20:19 On the third day he will be raised to life!"

1. thankfully, the story doesn't end here:
2. Christ told His disciples ahead of time that He would be resurrected from the dead
3. we will joyfully celebrate the fulfillment of this promise next week... a gift beyond compare, of boundless generosity, for people from every tribe and language all over the world: eternal life, to live in the presence of God forever

V. Application

A. See Every Blessing as Grace from God

1. God did not have to give you anything! He didn't owe it to any of us to be generous
2. the central idea of this sermon is that God the King is free to be as generous as He wants to be
3. see every earthly gift you have received not as something you deserve but as grace from God to you
4. see every earthly limitation also as apportioned to you from God; though God could have made you smarter, or stronger, or more intelligent, or more beautiful or richer or more successful... He has apportioned to you precisely what His wisdom ordained; are you envious of someone else's blessing because God is generous to them and not so generous to you? DON'T BE!!

B. Focus Your Minds on God's Greatest Gift

1. all earthly gifts are temporary and not worth comparing with the glory of Christ crucified and risen from the dead
2. in Christ alone find your worth, your success, your strength, your power, your wisdom, your righteousness
3. realize how generous God must be to have given what is most precious to Him so freely, so costly, so generously
4. thank God hourly for this indescribable gift!! Thank Christ hour after hour that He poured Himself so painfully out for you

C. Allow this Sovereign Generosity to Humble You

1. the gospel is meant to humble us... to search out our pride and destroy it
2. it is by God's sovereign generosity that there even IS a gospel, that there even IS a Christ crucified and resurrected
3. AND it is by God's sovereign generosity alone that you have believed in Him... it is by grace you have been saved
4. every good and perfect gift is from God the Father.... Allow this to humble you and boast not of your strength, or wisdom, or intelligence, or wealth, or success... but boast in Christ alone