

## GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

6.7.14

### **Giving – Part 1 – Joss Bray**

We haven't had a talk about giving since we started last April.

It can be a tricky subject with people having quite strong views on many aspects of giving. Money, in particular, can bring out the worst and indeed the best in people.

As usual – we need to look at what the bible says about giving – but crucially, we need to look particularly about what God has given us. It is only when we grasp that, then we can understand better what giving means, and how we can do it in a Godly way.

#### **What has God given us?**

When you start to look at it – there is so much.

JN 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son

Most of all, he gave us Jesus – his only Son. There is no greater gift that someone could give than their own son – if you think about it. In itself – that is a whole series of talks!

JN 3:34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.

He has given us the Holy Spirit – to equip us, the church, to be built up and do the things he has called us to do. The Holy Spirit gives us specific gifts to do them and to be filled with the power we need to do them. He also produces fruit that grows in us – the fruit of the Spirit - fruit that makes our character more like God.

He has also given us new life – we are born again – not of this world any more but born as citizens of a heavenly kingdom. Note that this does not mean we have dual nationality! The bible says we are in the world but not of it – our old citizenship has been nullified – we have died to that – and been born to a new one. Even so – how often do we behave as if the world is our home and the heavenly kingdom is just a distant hope for the future?

We have therefore been given hope! When we look around at the world and our circumstances, we can see beyond them – not just to the distant future but that hope applies to now – who we actually are in God. Hope for the future and hope for now.

The freedom that God gives us is not just from judgement for our past sins but freedom to live in a different way now and not to be conformed to the world. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free – why do we worry about what people think of us, when what God thinks about us is what counts. We are free from the slavery of judgement – not just eternally but also now – from the world.

So that brings us to forgiveness – this is a big one. We are forgiven people. The price has been paid for everything we have done and thought wrong and everything we will do or think wrong. For all our selfishness and bitterness, pride and resentment – all done – all gone in the eyes of God. An amazing gift – difficult to grasp at times.

He has given us holiness – clothed us with righteous robes – we can enter the presence of God without fear of being consumed or punished. If we could really grasp how holy God is and how sinful we have been – then we would appreciate that a lot more!

He has given us a purpose and a mission – we are to live for him, to glorify him and lift up the name of Jesus. We are to be witnesses to what God has done in our lives and to tell people the good news about Jesus. We are to do the things that Jesus tells his disciples to do – have compassion on the poor and sick and needy and those in prison.

He has given us faith – it is a gift from God – faith to believe and faith to trust him with our lives – which of course are no longer ours.

He gives us all we need, that is his promise – we do not need to worry about food or clothes – God will feed and cloth us.

He has given us creation to live in – in all its beauty and order - although that will be nothing to the new heaven and earth at the end when we will be given a heavenly city that will surpass the best this world has. There, we will enjoy life forever - and I really do believe we will enjoy it!

In the meantime, he has given us each other to be the church together – it is not coincidence we are together here – it is God's design. That's amazing to think of really. We have been given by God to each other – we are literally God's gift to each other. This could transform the way we look at each other and react to each other. It's a bit of a step of faith of course – but well worth persevering with!

And he gives us grace and mercy – in unlimited amounts – remember, mercy is not getting what we do deserve, and grace is getting what we don't deserve. This sums up all of the above in terms of what God gives us. We don't deserve all the things he gives us it but he freely gives nonetheless. And his mercy to us is also unlimited – it's just as well!

### **How does God give?**

When we think of giving, we sometimes have a very limited idea of what that means. We don't often experience total, no strings attached, limitless, repeated, wholehearted giving.

When God gives – he gives generously and because his heart is to give. His giving is all those things that we don't often experience. He does not hold back.

For example – when he gave Jesus – there was no greater gift. When he sends his Spirit – it is without limit as we have read.

We sometimes get the idea that when God gives us a gift, somehow it is not really ours – that actually God is lending it to us, or we are supposed to give it back sometime. Do you ever feel that what we have from God is even ever so slightly dependant on whether we deserve it or look after it or use it wisely?

Perhaps we think of the parable of the talents. Jesus tells this parable in the context of not knowing when he would return – therefore it is important to be ready:

MT 25:14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.<sup>15</sup> To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

<sup>16</sup> The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.<sup>17</sup> So also, the one with the two talents gained two more.<sup>18</sup> But the man

who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

MT 25:19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

MT 25:21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

MT 25:22 "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

MT 25:23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

MT 25:24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. <sup>25</sup> So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

MT 25:26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? <sup>27</sup> Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

MT 25:28 "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

What does this parable mean? – On the face of it, it could be inferred that when we are given something by God, unless we use it and make it grow for the kingdom, then we will have it taken away again when Jesus comes back. This seems to imply then that the gifts we get from God are conditional.

However, if we look at it again and then consider what the master was cross about, then it takes a different slant.

We note that he gives different people different amounts – according to their ability. In this case it is talents – which are units of mass equivalent to the amount of water in an amphora (a big pot). The master is pleased when the first two servants realised what the master wanted and used those things to increase the wealth of the master. Note that he was just as pleased with the 2 talent servant as with the 5 talent servant.

We can be sure that just because we don't appear to be as "gifted" as someone else, then the important thing is to know what God

wants us to do with those gifts. God is just as pleased with us who have 2 as those who have 5.

So what did the 1 talent servant do wrong? The master already knew that his ability wasn't as much as the others, but still gave him a chance. If he had made 1 talent his master would have been as pleased with him as the 5 talent servant.

If we read the master's comments again we get a clue – note the question mark at the end of the sentence:

“So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?”

The master questions what the servant thought he knew about him. To me this implies that the master wasn't like this at all – as we can see from his treatment of the other two – who he goes on to entrust with many more things. He then tells the servant what he should have done if he really believed this about him:

“Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.”

The third servant did not know his masters heart. We can believe inside that God's gifts are conditional and dependant on us and can be taken back – but then we have the attitude of the third servant here. Jesus is saying – no – understand how God gives, understand his heart, don't be afraid to use what he has given you.

God does not give us gifts for them to be deliberately buried and not used. The third servant didn't even have to do anything himself – he could have put the money in the bank! We don't even have to strive to do things – if all we can manage is just to bring our gifts from God to be used in whatever way he wants – even if it is not spectacular – than that pleases God. If we don't know what gifts we have from God – ask someone else – you may be surprised!

So we need to understand the giving heart of God - unlimited and with no strings, and to respond to him in a similar giving way in our lives. That is what we are going to look at next week – the practical outworking of understanding what we have received when we ourselves give and what the bible tells us about that.