

Good morning, guys. You all look good. Did y'all enjoy your hour of sleep? Yes, I assume. Yeah? I think some people might come in here about 12:30 with really confused looks on their faces. It's really good to see y'all this morning.

We're going to continue Matthew 6:1 through 4. We're turning a chapter in our *City on a Hill* study. Matthew 6:1 through 4. As we are all going there, I just wanted to remind you this is Jesus' famous discourse. This is the Sermon on the Mount, where he is calling us, how we're to live, how his people are to be. We've turned a chapter now and really into, I think, *beyond* a new chapter. He is really kind of changing the conversation a little bit too, so this is interesting.

There are three things I want to pull from this text. I think there are three things the Lord is making clear. One is the *expectation* of generosity. Two is the *motivation* of generosity. Then third is the *reward* of generosity. So let me read this, and then we will kind of get into it. Jesus says, **"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."**

**Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."** I'm just going to tell you guys from the outset that this passage I'm going to preach through really carved me up, and I'm not the only one.

So Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was a famous British preacher in the twentieth century, said, "[Matthew 6] is one of the most uncomfortable chapters to read in the entire Scriptures. It probes and examines and holds a mirror up before us, and it will not allow us to escape. There is no chapter which is more calculated to promote self-humbling and humiliation than this particular one." Hear what he says. "But thank God for it. The Christian should always be anxious to know himself."

I read that, and I went, "Okay. Cool." Steve, thank you for assigning me this sermon to preach. It's good. So let's read chapter 6, verse 1, here. He says, **"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in**

**heaven."** So practicing righteousness here. This word is used all the time in the New Testament. I love the translation in 1 John, chapter 2, verse 29. It's translated "to do what is right." I think that's a good fit here. He is saying beware of doing what is right.

Now don't miss the operative thing that's attached to it. "Beware of doing what's right *in order to be seen by other people.*" This is kind of the governing verse for this entire chapter. Jesus is actually setting up the chapter through this verse to drop the hammer on the Pharisees. This is deliberate humor. Okay, what we're about to read is humor, because the Pharisees are really masters of drawing attention to themselves.

Maybe in this political season we're in, you guys might be able to go somewhere, have seen some ad, can remember something where you knew maybe a guy was giving something out, but he was doing more than giving out. He was giving something out in front of a camera so CNN and Fox News and everybody else would broadcast his generosity in front of everybody. This is kind of the heart of what's going on here. So Jesus is about to really set up three things he is calling the Pharisees out on.

Verses 2 through 4 of our passage say they blow the trumpets when they give to the needy. "Oh, you have a need? Let me help you! I'm helping this guy!" That kind of thing. There's fanfare. In verses 5 through 6 he says when the Pharisees pray, they stand in busy places. They use really big words, and they maybe keep one eye open. They pray very poignant, long-winded prayers that might sound like, "Seeing him more clearly and following him more nearly day by day by day by day." You know? It's just drawing attention to yourself. Some of y'all got that.

Then verses 16 through 18, this is my favorite one. He says the Pharisees, when they fast, they disfigure their faces, and they look gloomy. They walk around sad and depressed, especially during meal times. They kind of have one of *those* faces on so everybody in the world knows they're missing a meal, that they're fasting. He is just going after their righteousness. The thing I love about this is because humor, like all good things, originates with God. Satire did not start with *Saturday Night Live*. He is just using the humorous gift of satire to draw attention to some of the things they do.

John Stott said, "A ravenous hunger for the praise of men was the besetting sin of the Pharisees." Jesus says this much to them directly in John 5. He says, "You receive glory from one another, and you don't seek the glory that comes from God." John says about the Pharisees, "**...they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.**" He says that in the twelfth chapter of his book. Mark Twain said, famously, that he could live two months off a good compliment. I thought that was kind of funny. It's true. He was like, "You give me a good compliment, I'll be fine for two months." So could the Pharisees. They feasted on the accolade.

It's interesting, though. It's all they got. I mean, we're about to talk about that more, but the accolade is all they got. I have to wonder to some degree if this was confusing to the original audience. Here's why. In chapter 5 (Matt preached this), verse 16, Jesus says, **"...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."** Now he is saying, "Be really careful to do right in front of others to be seen by them." I'm wondering if the disciples are going, "Huh? What?"

I think they might be confused, but when we drill a little bit further down into the passage, we see that in the context of Jesus saying, "Let your light shine before men," he is saying, "don't lose your saltiness. Don't look like the world. You're a preservative. Don't shrink back. You're showing cowardice. You're showing fear when you need to be a preservative. You need to be something altogether different." When he is speaking in this verse, when he says, **"Beware of practicing your righteousness..."** he is calling out showiness and ostentation in them. He is calling out their desire for vanity, to be seen.

So one commentator said Jesus is simply saying we are to *show* when we are tempted to *hide* and we're to *hide* when we're tempted to *show*. I thought that was a succinct way of saying that. So let's see where Jesus takes this. Let's look at verse 2. He says, **"Thus, when you give to the needy..."** I have to stop there, because we have to look at these words. Every word of this Book matters, and when we read it, it says, **"Thus, when you give to the needy..."** The word is not *if*; the word is *when*.

Jesus assumes they give. There is an expectation of generosity in the Scriptures. The word *needy* there is the Greek word *alms*. It means a deed of mercy or pity. It can really be anything. The application is wide open. That can mean time. That can mean money. It can mean resources. It can mean energy, but alms were the religious duty in Judaism. It was not a philanthropic option to give alms. It was an expectation. This expectation is just as clear in the New Testament all throughout the Gospels, all throughout the Epistles. A command we give to look after the poor is replete throughout all of the Scriptures.

Jonathan Edwards, who some people think is the greatest American thinker, the greatest mind to ever come from our part of the world, said this. He was a Puritan pastor too, a genius. I love him. I read his biography. He is awesome. Anyway, I don't know why I told you all that, but this is what Edwards says: "Where have we any command in the Bible laid down in stronger terms, and in a more peremptory urgent manner, than the command of giving to the poor?" You see, this is righteousness.

When you think about righteousness (I'm talking about myself; I'm thinking about you guys if I'm in your shoes), I think your mind immediately goes to (and mine does to) really kind of a privatized righteousness. So like private holiness and how we're doing in our time with the Lord and the Word, what our quiet time

looks like, how we're battling sexual sin, what our prayer life has amounted to. It really is kind of internalized, individualistic. Maybe how is our piety going?

The problem with that is while that is certainly a good understanding of righteousness, righteousness has a much broader application, a much broader understanding. It's the Hebrew word *tzadeqah*, and righteousness is not only about us. It has social implications. Those who are righteous are those who are right with God and therefore committed to putting right all relationships on earth.

Tim Keller says it this way: "But in the Bible, *tzadeqah* (righteousness) refers to day-to-day living in which a person conducts all relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity, and equity." So righteousness gives way to this biblical idea of justice. Justice is the Hebrew word *mishpat*. In Tim Keller's book *Generous Justice*, I just want to go ahead and give it a plug. It was huge for me. I'm going to quote him just all the time here, and I just think that's good, because he really gives us a good perspective.

Justice, the Hebrew word *mishpat*, means acquitting or punishing every person on their own merits, regardless of their race or social status. This word is huge! It means more than just punishing wrongdoing. It means giving people their rights. So we're giving people their due, whether that be punishment, whether that be protection, whether that be care. The disciples knew, the Pharisees certainly knew, Jesus obviously knew justice was at the heart of God. This is one of those threads throughout the Old Testament that really weaves through almost every prophet, that they would say something like Zechariah said in what I'm about to read you.

Zechariah 7:9 through 10 says God's people are to minister true justice and show mercy and compassion to one another. **"Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor."** These categories today, if we fleshed them out, twenty-first century Dallas, they might look like refugees, migrant workers, the homeless, some single parents, the elderly. I mean, just a host of really derivatives here. When we talk about the justness of society (because justice means we do justice and then we live justly), Keller says justice, according to the Bible, or the justness of a society, is evaluated by how it treats these groups.

"Any neglect shown to the needs of the members of this quartet is not called merely a lack of mercy or charity, but a violation of justice." Wow. "God loves and defends those with the least economic and social power... This is what it means to 'do justice.'" A really cool thing happens in the Bible in the Old Testament, not just for nerds like me but for all of us. A really cool thing happens. This word *righteousness* and this word *justice* come together 36 times like a compound word. Remember compound words? Remember those? Yeah. They come together like a compound word.

When righteousness and justice come together in this compound word, the word best translated in our understanding is *social justice*. Are you ready for that buzzword? Social justice. Listen to what Jeremiah says. This is what the Lord says. **"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, [social] justice, and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight."**

So do you see that? If you want to know something about the character of God, who he is, he delights, he finds favor, in exercising kindness and social justice on earth. These are the things that make him happy. He is glorified when his people do these things. That makes him happy. You see his eyes are toward the poor. God's eyes are toward the poor. He has no little thing for the poor. I'm talking twenty-first century Dallas, right here at Walnut Hill, Marsh, and Midway. He has no little thing for the day laborer who hangs out looking for work at Royal Lane just right over here.

He has no little affection for the foster kid who is bouncing around homes in South Dallas. His eyes are toward the mom who is trying to figure out a way to raise her kids and who has not gotten a child support check in years and years. He is just toward all of those things. He is toward those people. He is a God who delights in kindness and in social justice. So this isn't just a little pity. He is not just sprinkling a little bit of love. He doesn't just have a little soft spot.

In fact, the more and more we read the Bible, we see he is with them, he identifies with the poor, he is tethered to them, he takes up their cause. The Bible is inundated with these texts, texts like Psalm 68:4 through 5, that says he is, **"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows..."** Listen to what Proverbs 14 says. It says if we dishonor the poor, we insult him, but when we are generous to the poor, we honor him. We can take that further.

Deuteronomy 27:19 says, **"Cursed be anyone who withholds the justice due to the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow."** In that same book, Deuteronomy 10 says he defends the fatherless. He loves the alien. He gives them food and clothing. His heart quite literally is stayed on the needy. This is the character of our God. Here's a really cool thing. I'm graced at The Village Church to be one of y'all's pastors. One of the biggest graces of being your pastor is seeing really some of the most generous and charitable people I have ever known in my life. They go to church here.

I mean, I'm telling you, we have people who give just inordinate amounts of time and money and cash and resources. I mean, people who are just given to incarnating into South Dallas. We have people like Carly Pickens, who has given her life to mentoring these marginalized kids. I mean, you should hang out with our older folks. I get in trouble when I call them *old*, so *older*. It's the adjective I use. You should hang out

with them (some of our original members here) and watch the way they care for the widows. Watch the way they care for one another. It's really compelling.

We have people who travel across the globe to adopt from impoverished countries. When I canvass this church and I look at people, I'm really curious. When I canvass you guys, when I look around, I really do see some of the most generous people I've ever known, and it's a grace to me. I don't think you guys would disagree that the Bible says we have to serve the needy, but I do think even amongst us, certainly in this city, there are these overtones of cultural Christianity. What these overtones say with regard to the needy sounds a lot more like a political party than it does biblical Christianity.

When you look at your Christianity, you might recognize you have more separation or more of an aversion to the poor than you actually realize. I quoted this article the last time I preached, and I feel like it's worth quoting again. The *Dallas Morning News* said Dallas specifically is high on the list of metropolitan areas divided by residential income segregation. Dallas is built this way. If you look at the charter of the city, the "haves" were going to live over *here* and the "have nots" were going to live over *here*. It seems like this has, in many ways, continued to perpetuate.

Since 1980, this sociologist (last name Taylor) told the *Washington Post* our country has increasingly sorted itself into areas where people are more surrounded by their own kind. So it is very possible for you to be hemmed into a kind of culture here in Dallas where you never cross the other side of the tracks. You never get your hands dirty. You don't swerve potholes. I'm not saying Dallas roads are great. All of us have been on LBJ, but you don't swerve potholes. Your roads you drive, the area where you live, the city makes dang sure they're amongst the nicest roads in this place because they don't want to make you mad.

There's just this constant progression toward safety and toward upward mobility. You're hoarding, and you can hem yourself into these aspirations just to be seen, just to hang out with the "haves," and just to show it. I remember when I met my wife. Her dad owns this company in Houston. He was really generous in employing me at times when I just needed cash in college. He gave me all kinds of jobs to do that were like, "Here, move this box for \$100." I'm like, "Thanks!"

There was this older lady who worked there, and she had just been around, lived all over the place, and had worked there a long time. She said, "Oh, you're from Dallas. That's cool. I lived in Dallas. I didn't like it. You guys are really showy." I remember thinking, "Well, at least I don't live in Houston. I mean, seriously! Yeah, I mean swamp, honestly." I'm sorry. I need to be careful. God will send me there. I need to be careful. When she told me that, she was like, "Yeah, your city is really pretentious. Dallas is really showy." I remember going, "Yeah, a little bit, but not like anything else."

I was dumb, and I was also inoculated to the city, so I didn't see the full affects of its showiness, but we *are* very showy. I had to wise up a little bit to see it. In our showiness, I think as I have inventoried my own heart, as I know you guys, as I know the things you struggle with, my lenses, your lenses, are not *compassion* but *comparison*. Instead of being selfless we're stingy. Here's the thing: it's exhausting. It's exhausting to keep up with this kind of life.

Honestly, for some of you guys, your truest religion is to yourself. It's not to widows and orphans like James says, and it's exhausting. Some of you guys, you make no margin for the marginalized. There's not an ounce of your time, there's not a dollar of your money, there are none of your resources that are going to those in need. Not one! There's not one! Not one is going to them. When you think about the migrant or the widow, you think about the single mom, you think about sex trafficking that goes on in our city, the poor, they're just not on your radar. Even worse, some of you guys may just snub them. You may just explain them away in some kind of really one-dimensional axiom. "Well, if they just did this, then..."

The problem with that is the Bible doesn't just explain poverty in as simple of terms as some of us do. See, I was born into a hard-work house. High education. Valued education and hard work. My NFL career looked great until the eighth grade when I stopped growing, so I had to turn it on then. I mean, education was always a value. I worked every job, I think, in the Metroplex before I got hired here at The Village between seminary and The Village.

My last job actually was at Cary Middle School and Thomas Jefferson. I was an AVID tutor, which means I got to hang out with the kids who were not the least performing and then they weren't the gifted and talented, but they were B students. The teachers saw a lot of potential in them. I got to hang out with them. I remember just learning about that school and how eye opening it was to me, because at Coppell High School where I went, you could have a 3.5 and be like 50 percent, like right there in the middle, with a 3.5. If you want to know where I was, it was below that... *way* below that.

I remember just really selling them, because I looked around, and I was like, "Okay, you guys don't take your books home. You don't do homework at home. You do your homework here." I saw how easy it was to get an A. I remember telling these kids, "Listen, do your homework! Turn in your homework. If you turn in your homework, you'll be in the top 10 percent of your class. If you're in the top 10 percent of your class, you can get into A&M. I know how much money your parents make."

I mean, these kids are bused in from an area over there where the socioeconomic levels are low. They are amongst the poverty level. "I know how much your parents make. You'll live off scholarships, Pell Grants. You can go to A&M for free if you turn your homework in!" I remember telling them, "You can to go

College Station. No, you don't want to go to Austin. You can go to College Station." I remember telling them that. "Yeah, I mean, I guess you can go to Austin, but you can go to College Station."

Man, some of the kids got it. I don't want to stereotype. Some of the kids got it. Some of the kids are already there. Great! I remember looking at some of the most well-meaning kids, hard-working kids, and telling them about the value of a post-high school education, and it was just a blank stare in their face, because I couldn't sell them. The reason I couldn't sell them, I realized, was because they just didn't grow up in a house that valued education like I did. I didn't get it.

What they saw at the end of their rope in high school (if they graduated) was an opportunity to get a job for a couple of dollars more than minimum wage and contribute to their parents who had real financial needs and be able to get a place of their own and get a car and those kinds of things, even if it meant they stayed in relative poverty. It was just eye opening to me, and I think there's this undercurrent among us that says, "If you work hard, you'll get it. This is Manifest Destiny. This is the story of our country. You'll overcome all odds and get it. It's on you."

While these stories are true, while there are tokens of this, I just don't think we can simplify poverty to a single axiom because the Bible really points to three things to help us understand poverty. One is *calamity*, another is *oppression*, and the third is *personal moral failure*. What do I mean by calamity? There's a really good example right now in the news with Hurricane Sandy, our fellow brothers and sisters up there in New York.

I'm going to tell you what would happen to me... what would happen to really a lot of you...if a tornado or a hurricane came and we couldn't work. I'm a salaried employee. I would get PTO. I would get sick time. You, the elders, are generous. I would be taken care of, but do you know what happens when a blue-collared hourly employee doesn't get to work for two weeks? They don't make money. They don't make it back. Do you know what happens? Their creditors and their landlords and their banks don't extend grace and say, "Oh, okay." They say, "Do you know what? You owe me this money, or I'm going to take it from you."

So calamity, just like in New York, or like in Haiti two or three years ago, can perpetuate poverty. Beyond that, so can injustice, so can oppression. This might look like discrimination. This might look like injustice. This might look like the family breakdown we see all throughout our country. Then of course beyond that, a reason to explain poverty is personal moral failures, a series of bad decisions. But my question to you as this verse read me was it's just not as easy as I historically made it, and I'm wondering are you prone to oversimplification of poverty, just to snub your nose and say, "Yeah, they can get over it"?

Every time you see somebody in poverty, does Paul's verse come to mind? "Well, if a man doesn't work, he doesn't eat." Yes, that's true. In the context of the church, if you don't work, you don't eat. If you sit idle forever and you make no attempt to find work, even work you don't like, and you make no attempt to do it whatsoever and you're continually begging for handouts from others, yeah, that verse is in place to teach us a lesson that God created us to work with our hands.

But we don't explain away poverty, every situation of neediness, just saying, "Well you know, they can get over it. If they don't work, they don't eat." It's just not that simple. So my question to you is...*Are you prone to oversimplifying poverty?* Even beyond that, do you understand this is an expectation? My first point: there's an expectation of generosity in the Bible. So we see the expectation of generosity, but what about the motivation?

See, the Bible seems to say we can have a right understanding of poverty and understand we need to pray and fast and to actually do all these things well and still get rebuked by Jesus. So you can give a lot. You can say a lot. You can spend a lot of time giving alms, and you can still do it wrong. That's why we need to see the motivation of generosity. Verse 2 (and I'll just read it on through) says:

**"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."**

See, the Pharisees didn't actually use trumpets. Jesus is using imagery here. He said there's fanfare about them. They do good deeds, and they let everybody know. They employ whatever means they can (Facebook, Twitter, whatever). They blow a trumpet, and they bring attention upon themselves. Even beyond this, Jesus says something which is really peculiar. It's an idiom. He says, **"...do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing..."**

It's really interesting here that one part of your body would be aware of what the other part of the body is doing, but this is exactly Jesus' point. He is saying, "When you give your alms, be so far away from announcing these things to other people that you're not even announcing it to yourself. Run so far away from public attention that you yourself are forgetting the good you are doing." Jesus seems to be saying to run away into something all together different. That is, self-forgetfulness in your good deeds.

You see, the Pharisees might have been all about the external applause, but the internal applause can be just as devastating, right? So the things we do, the attention we draw upon ourselves to make ourselves

feel good, the stories we tell ourselves... You see, self-conscious giving can become self-righteous giving. This is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer said about this verse that it's the death knell of the old man. *Knell* means a bell, a toll, a bell ringing. I had to look it up. The death knell of an old man. He says self-centeredness belongs to the old man. The new life in Christ is one of uncalculated generosity.

So what's Jesus saying? What's the motivation of our generosity? He is saying we give up significant time, money, resources. Don't make a spectacle about it. In fact, forget you're doing it all. Do it secretly as best you can so only God sees it. That will be your reward. So do you like it when people notice you when you do good things? Do you like to notice yourself? Are you given to that applause, the external applause, the internal applause? If you are, like I am, it's all you get.

See what the Bible says here? It says in Matthew 6:1, "**...then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.**" Then in Matthew 6:2, it says at the end, "**Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.**" If you are about the approval and the accolades and the applause of man, it's all you get. That's why Mark Twain said he could live for two months off a good compliment but not the rest of his life, because when you live off the perpetual praise of other people, you have to continue to get that praise from other people. You have to be seen. You have to be noticed. They have to pay attention to you.

So as I read this text... I mean, Lloyd-Jones was right. I just have a long way to go. I really do! I am stingy. I am selfish. I love the praise of my own name. I love the internal applause I give myself sometimes. I have not sought kindness and social justice. This text has read me. I'm your pastor. I'm telling you, it's read me. I drive past opportunities of kindness, opportunities toward social justice, all the time. I have a bad heart and so do you.

The glorious thing about the gospel is Jesus doesn't leave us with our bad hearts if you want something else. Mary sings this song before Jesus was born. She says in remembrance of his mercy, his arms are going to flex, and he is going to scatter the proud. He is going to bring down the mighty, and he is going to exalt the humble. He is going to fill the hungry, and he is going to send the rich away. He is going to help his people. Jesus is born, and he picks up the identical language of the Old Testament prophets. Anything the Father is about, you can assume his Son is also about.

He picks up the identical language of the prophets, which means he believed and echoed what Micah said; we have failed to do justice, we have failed to do mercy, we have failed to walk humbly. He knew Israel had failed to show itself off to be a community of generosity, enformed by the grace of God. They were not a generous people shaped by his character. He knew that. In an exposé of our hearts, because God knows everything that's going on in your heart...*everything* in your heart, *everything* in my heart...John says something really peculiar and insightful really about Jesus.

He says Jesus needed no one to bear witness about man, because Jesus knew what was in man. He looks inside our hearts, and he sees what's there. He knew we were stingy. He knew we loved praise. Even if that praise wasn't from others, from ourselves, he knew that about us. He saw the fullest implications of our bent to sin, that we had shunned the poor, that we had built up storehouses. He knew that about us.

Knowing all of this, he still comes down. He still incarnates. He still tabernacles. He still moves in, quite literally, with the poor, and he states and argues and pleads the cause of the widow, of the outcast. He honors the dignity of the needy, because he knows they're created in the image of God. He lives the life we were supposed to live in every dimension.

He is the true Son of God, a perfect heart leading to perfect actions. Everything he did was in love, so that Paul can say this in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8: **"I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."**

You see, Jesus recognized the bankruptcy of our hearts, our own shallowness, our own stinginess, our own spiritual poverty. He recognized those things, and he went to the cross as a substitute with justice still in place, dying for our failures to love, failures to give, dying for us, sometimes knowing what our right hand is doing. He knows he dies for that. He dies for the internal applause we're looking for, and he takes our justice so we get grace.

Remember I defined *justice* as getting what's rightfully yours. The rightful implications of the way we have shunned the poor lead to a condemnation on our lives. Jesus took that condemnation. He took our justice. This is the generosity of God. What he demanded, he supplied, and he didn't skirt the sin that angered God. He took that justice upon himself so we would be free. This is free grace. This is unmerited favor. This is God's kindness to us.

This is why we can sing, "Christ has regarded my helpless estate." So if you can't look at the cross and see generosity from the Lord, something is off. If you can't look at the cross and see the generosity and the kindness and the mercy of the Lord toward you when you were an orphan, when you were estranged, when you were what the Old Testament calls "a whore" running from the Lord, if you can't see the justice of God and the mercy of God, the kindness of God, the generosity of God in the cross of Christ, then something is off.

What does this grace do? Well, it changes everything. It frees us across the board. We really are free. That's what freedom means. We're free. It frees our hands from being stingy. It just frees us from every kind of stinginess. You are not going to acquire or achieve something you don't already have. In every way, you're free from being "unhemmed" to the value of a city. I think I just made a word up: "unhemmed." You are free from being "unhemmed" to the values of a city.

Then you are free from having to be seen for our good deeds. We're free from those things. The gospel frees us by our faith. You don't have to be noticed for your good deeds. They're a gratitude offering! You're not going to do anything else where God goes, "Okay, cool. Now you're in." They're a gratitude offering. They're to give, not to get. You don't have to constantly remind yourself how good you're doing, because the gospel says Jesus is always and only okay with you by his Son. Always. He is a perfect substitute, a perfect sacrifice.

So what does free grace do? It frees us up to do the things God delights in. He delights in kindness and social justice. You know, John Calvin said the sum of the Christian life is 1 Corinthians 6:19: **"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price."** You are free. Now go. Where? Everywhere. Go everywhere with kindness, mercy, and social justice. How can you do it? I mean, I'll just give you a few. They're everywhere. I pray the Lord would impress on you your own deeds of mercy, your own deeds of kindness that you've neglected...how you can be Christ to some people around you.

You go after orphans. This is Orphan Sunday. That's why Compassion International is out there. You can adopt. You can foster. You can bring these little guys into your family. You can bring them into your world. You can show them what it's like to be an adopted son of God. You can serve widows. You can actually get connected with men and women here who serve widows, who go and take care... Do you know what it's like for a widow who lost her husband decades and decades ago to be visited by people and loved and have groceries brought to her and have her hair brushed? I mean, it's life giving. You can do that. You can do that here at The Village.

You can go tutor at Cary Middle School. You can form kids' minds. You can go anchor. You can be an anchor and a buoy in the life of some kid's soul in South Dallas by mentoring them through Champions of Hope. You can call the City of Dallas up and tell them just how bad the roads are the more and more and more you walk away from the more affluent parts of Dallas. You can do that.

Call them and tell them how miserable it is to drive west of Webb Chapel, south of Walnut Hill. You can do that. I'd love for some of you guys to say, "Roads in Preston Hollow look like this. Roads over here look like Third World countries. Fix them. I demand for the sake and the dignity of the people who live there that you fix them, that they don't have to swerve potholes." You can do that. You can do social justice.

I just don't have time to unpack it. You can do everything. So how do you give? How much do you give? Are you ready for this? Look at Christ. He gave everything. All of him for all of us. That's our pattern of giving. Whatever that looks like for you. All of him for all of us. Keller says Jesus didn't tithe his blood; he gave all of it. He gave all of it, and that is our model of generosity. We're not compelled. It is not simply a mandate. The motivation is to give cheerfully, not out of compulsion, Paul says.

The last part I'll say is really social justice is a buzzword, and so what it largely has become is just going and serving the needs of people, like being on city council with them and fixing their roads and serving them food. This kind of started in the early twentieth century with a guy named Walter Rauschenbusch, who lived in New York City. He was a pastor of an area called Hell's Kitchen that was just awful. He saw just how impoverished these people were and how all the Christians just came in and said, "You need to know the Lord. If you know the Lord, okay, good. I'm not doing anything with your poverty. I'm not going to serve you. You need to know the Lord. That's what you need to do."

So what happened is this social gospel became, "Well, we just need to seek their needs. We need to feed them. We need to clothe them. We need to make sure they have the fullest rights of their citizenship." It certainly is that, but it's more than that. True biblical social justice is going to them and saying, "Sin got us into this mess, and grace gets us out. How? The life of Christ. All of him. Let me show him to you." So what's our reward? What is our reward for generous giving with right motivation? Well, if it's not men and it's not internal applause, what is it?

Well, it's a number of things. It's the end of the activity itself. So love working itself out to meet all kinds of needs. You know what it's like. It's just contagious when you actually see your love meet somebody's need. So that's one end. The surest reward of our love and generosity is we get the reward of being like Christ, which is the goal of this life...to become more like Christ, to share in his sufferings, to be more conformed to his image. When you give to the poor, you look something more like himself. So the reward is to look more like him. Beyond that, it cultivates gratitude for what you have experientially. You go see what people don't have. It just cultivates gratitude for what you have.

Then even beyond that, you see it's a constant remembrance. When you see poverty, you see a microcosm of your own heart, of who you were apart from Christ. You remember that. You also remember what we still are without him and that he has bound and united himself to us. It's compelling. Beyond all of that, the reward is that Jesus brings us into his life. He brings us into his life, and he shows us through his life that it really is better to give than it is to receive. So we look at the cross, wonderful generosity. I pray the Lord would apply that to your heart however he does. Let me pray.

Father, thank you for today, for your goodness, your mercy, your kindness, your compassion to us. Lord, you have never left us to ourselves. You have always intervened. You took the initiative with us. You came at an unimaginable price to redeem us, to call us yourself, to feed us, to clothe us.

So, Lord, grant us that we would see more and more and more of your generosity and your kindness and what you've done and that that would compel us to do likewise, Lord. I pray we would have hearts that are transformed and are cultivated, that we would be less stingy and more generous, that we would not, Lord, just be self-righteous toward the poor when the reality is a lot of us just don't know what poverty looks like. That's our lot, and we thank you for that, but may we not neglect them.

Lord, where we seek the internal applause of ourselves, when we seek the praise of others, will you just show us once and for all that these fears, this fear of man, this codependency needs to be put to death, that you have sung a song over us eternally that says we are yours and you love us? You love us because you love us. So thank you for that, Lord. I just pray your Holy Spirit would work here among us now. We pray that in Christ's name, amen.

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