



## **Xmas: Keeping Christ in Christmas (Part 2) – Give**

Pastor Deone Drake – December 6, 2015

I was wondering what you would think if with that music, it made me think that maybe I should do a ballet coming up here. Go for it. Since some of you think that I can actually run from two weeks ago, maybe you think I can do the ballet, too. I can't.

It's good to be back again and to speak about generosity. And hopefully you'll have a different picture of it when we're done.

Let me start this way. Back in 1984, I started teaching full-time at Christian Central Academy, and I was hired to be the high school Bible teacher. And so I taught bible classes for grades nine through twelve. But, in order to justify a full-time position, they also had you teach something else, and I got stuck with - I mean, I was chosen to teach high school math.

And I remember the first couple years. It was actually 1986, because the student that I'm thinking of was in ninth grade in 1986. His name was Jeff. And Jeff just really had a problem. I don't know if you remember when you're in ninth grade, but basic algebra was the deal. And we're talking about if Bob is twice as fast as Bill, and it takes Bill two hours to get to the

store, how long does it take Bob? Those kinds of questions. They were just going over his head. And I could see throughout the school year that he was getting increasingly frustrated and frustrated. And on one particular day, really contrary to his disposition, he was so frustrated that he took the pencil in his hand and slammed it on his desk and said, "When am I ever going to use this in my life? I mean really, what difference does it make in my life?" You ever ask that question about any of the subjects you took, let alone math?

And I began to think every December, we open up the Bibles to Matthew two or Luke chapter two, and we read the Christmas story and digest it and contemplate and think about it. But I'm wondering if somewhere in the galaxies, God isn't slamming His celestial pencil down and saying to us, when are you ever going to use this in your life? When is this ever going to make a difference in your life? And so the four people who are communicating this month, this series, began to think about maybe, just maybe keeping Christmas and Christ in it, is not just about saying "Merry Christmas" instead of "Happy Holidays". But maybe it's actually figuring out how the Incarnation is going to change the way we live every day.

And so, Pastor Jerry gave to us kind of like the big idea for this series last week when he said this: "Keeping Christ in Christmas is when the Incarnation changes the way we live every day." That's what keeping Christ in Christmas is all about. When the Incarnation, God with skin on, coming to this earth, actually makes a difference in the way you and I live every day of our lives.

Last week, Pastor Jerry talked about God's love. The Incarnation very clearly tells us that God loves us. And the Incarnation makes a difference in our lives when every single day we love Him with all our hearts and we love others well. I don't know about you, but when I hear a message on love, where my mind typically goes is thinking yeah, I realize I could really love my wife better. And I could love my son and his wife better. My granddaughter, I've already got that covered. But I could love my friends better and I know that they would really appreciate it. But I really began to think last week as I was sitting in the front row listening to Pastor Jerry speak maybe God's targeting, how about loving some of the difficult people in your life to love. How about beginning to love the marginalized, the outcast. Those who typically don't receive that kind of love. Because if I really understand the Incarnation, that God was coming in Christ to demonstrate His love, then I also would love well.

But there is a second component. Second thing that the Incarnation teaches us, and that is that God gives. God is, as you've have already heard several times this morning, God is a generous God. And the neat thing to me is that that generosity is connected to love, as Pastor Jerry was speaking about last week. In fact, here's the way I see it: Love is the essence of God's character, and generosity is one of the expressions of that love.

And there are four key passages in the New Testament that connect God's love to God's generosity. So let's look at them. Three of them will be very familiar, if not all four. The first one is, of course, John three sixteen: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever

believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Galatians two twenty. Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Then Paul also writes in Ephesians five two: "Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." And then in chapter five, following in verse twenty-five he says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

So these four passages connect God's love with God's generosity and there's two things that hit me right away. First of all, the defining moment, the defining moment that shows that God loves us is the death of Jesus on the cross. He loved us and gave himself for us. It's not that God does not verify to you moment by moment, day by day, His great love for you. He does. But if there's anyone in this audience - listening, watching - that is questioning the validity of God's love, God says look at the cross, it's the one defining moment. If you ever doubt my love, just look at the cross. So it is the cross of Christ that defines God's love and also His generosity.

Because God, secondly, is defining generosity. God gave us His very best. His Son. I want to look at a verse, I want to look at the first part now, we'll look at the second part later on. But in Romans eight thirty-two, Paul says it this way: God, He did not spare his own Son. He did not spare his own Son. To demonstrate his love, God gave generously and did not spare His Son.

Now it's interesting is that concept, God not sparing His Son has a foreshadow. Go back to Genesis twenty-two. It's the story of when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son on the altar. And God describes it this way: the son whom you love. It's the very first time that the word love is used in the Bible. So we ought to pay attention to it. So Abraham begins to do what God said. Places his son on the altar. God interrupts, provides a substitute ram and God has this conversation with Abraham in Genesis twenty-two: "Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your only son, your only son whom you love." Abraham passed the test because he demonstrated that he would not withhold his only son whom he loved. It's the exact same word that Paul uses in Romans eight to tell us that God did not withhold His Son, the son whom He loved. That's what generosity is, and that's what generosity does.

As I said, I want you to see generosity perhaps in a different light, and here's where I'm taking you this morning. Generosity is measured by what we give and what we keep back. What we give and what we keep back. What I want you to see in that statement is that there is automatically implied a gap. A gap between what we give and what we keep back.

You see, we can, and we do deceive ourselves by thinking we can give without ever having the heart of a giver, like our generous God. How do we do that? Well, parts of our hearts can be off-limits, and it sounds something like this: I'll give this, but I won't give that. Not just money - time, resources, ourselves. I'll give this, but I won't give this. I'll give this much, but I won't give more. Or, God can have this, because I'm not really using it

anyway. So in an October Saturday when the church is going out to Love Serves, well I don't have anything to do on Saturday anyway, so I'll give that. That's not the heart of generosity.

It's almost like, and I'm sure there's no one in this audience who's ever done this, like on December twenty-fourth, when all the stores are now closed you realize that you've not bought something for a relative that you don't like anyway. And so you scrounge your house looking for something respectable, wrap it, I can hear you're laughing, some of you have done this, and put a real nice bow on it. I ask you, is that generosity? It's not. You've given something of little or no value.

But God's generosity is displayed by what He gave which had infinite value to Him, and what's important to us is that He did not keep back what was valuable to Him, because generosity is measured by what we give and what we keep back. And when you and I know, experience, have lived out the generosity of God, we will be generous as well.

So, just three points this morning. Why should we be generous? What if we're not, and what should be our aim?

So here's the first. Why should we be generous? Why should we be a generous people? Why should we be people who give of ourselves and our resources and our time and our stuff so that we can show the love of God to others. Why should we be? I thought of two reasons. You can probably think easily of ten more. But these two will suffice.

Here's the first. Because God has been generous with us. God has been generous with us. It was very difficult for me not to run down the same parallel track as I was two weeks ago. Because it's what we talked about. God has been incredibly good to us. As I said a moment ago, the cross is enough to display how good God has been to us. As I said two weeks ago, anything that I receive more from God other than hell is much more than I deserve.

But God doesn't stop there. Go back to Romans eight, thirty-two, the second part of the verse. "He 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?" I don't really understand what all things mean. But I have a feeling that I'll be learning throughout eternity what it means.

And then Paul says in Ephesians one, three: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly places with every spiritual blessing in Christ." How in the world could you unpack what every spiritual blessing in Christ means? But I have a feeling I'll be learning throughout eternity what that means.

What I want you to see is the motive behind that. Why does God give us all things? Why does God bless us with every spiritual blessing in Christ? I like the way Paul gives us the motive in Ephesians two, seven: "In order that in coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." Paul says, that it thrills the heart of God to take, if he has to take eternity to show you just how kind he is to you.

Let me ask you a question. Is that your view of God? Because if that's not your view of God, there's no way you're going to be generous. And if that's your view of God, there's no way you can help but be generous. There's just no way. And why would He be so generous with me? Why would He be so generous with you? So that you would experience and enjoy it?

Absolutely. But also, so that you would share it. That's why He does that. God, you see, is teaching you generosity, so that as you experience it, you will share it.

My wife and I really began to learn this principle, and really sought to apply it as Jonathan was growing up from age twelve to age eighteen. We really made an attempt to be generous with him. Now why did we do that? So that he would take care of us when we got old? Absolutely not. I hope he does, but the real issue is this: so that he would be generous with others. We were trying to teach him generosity, which is a whole different subject than spoiling your kids. We were teaching him generosity so that he would be generous as an adult, and I'm so grateful that not only is he but he also married someone who is like-minded, and they are so generous in opening up their home and sharing it.

You see, the same principle is taught by Jesus, when he sent his twelve disciples out for the first time to talk to others about the kingdom. He said and laid down this principle: "Freely you have received; freely give."

What's He saying to you? You have learned, I have taught you generosity by freely giving, and now you freely give. That's the principle. Jesus is telling you and I that we need to be a conduit of what we have received. We do that as we learn generosity from Him, that we are also generous. God



teaches us generosity by modeling it. And our generosity is proof that we've learned well.

But there's a second reason we should be generous. Because God has given us His nature. God has given us His nature. The Incarnation has been replicated in us. That's why Paul would say in Colossians one that Christ is in us. God, in Christ through his Spirit, dwells in us. Therefore we have His nature if we've been born from above.

Peter says it this way in 2 Peter: "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Peter is saying that if you've been born from above, you have the nature of God within you. I'd like to think that we have His DNA in us. And so therefore, we are generous because we have God's nature within us.

Maybe this illustration will help. Our dad pastors a church towards Plattsburg. He has for the last ten years. But our dad did not become a pastor until my brother and I were adults. So I never had the opportunity to hear my dad preach when I was growing up. But a while back, my wife and I had an opportunity to go hear my dad preach. And both of us walked away being absolutely amazed at how similar my communication style was to his. Obviously, I did not learn my communication style from him, because I never saw him speak. The only conclusion we could have is what? I'm his son. I have his nature.

Well, God is generous. Would you not expect His DNA being in you to begin reflecting some things that are part of his nature? And would you not be surprised if you didn't see it? So in other words, if a person is not generous and they claim to be a believer, maybe they don't get it because they missed the huge object lesson that is the cross. How can you and I look at the cross, at what God did in not sparing His Son and not be generous? Not to pay him back. We could never do that. But we're generous because we've learned generosity. And how can people who claim to be born again not be generous because they have His nature unless they don't. Because if I have His nature, I'm going to reflect what he's like - increasingly so.

It's almost like the made-up scenario that I've seen on TV a few times. Where a dad and mom are bragging about their child, and everyone's snickering behind their back, because the child looks more like the mailman than the one who's claiming to be his father. And I'm wondering if the world, when they look at our lack of generosity, snicker when we claim to belong to the Father who is so generous. We ought to be generous because we have His nature.

So, I guess that led me down a track to begin asking the question - well, why would someone not be generous? Here's the second question: Why would we not be generous? And I began to think, because I'm a logical person, I began to think silly examples like, why is it Jesus' birthday and we get all the presents? Or a little bit more serious - why is Jesus so specific about ways to show generosity?

Like in Matthew twenty-five, when he says, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those in prison, help the sick. And then in Luke chapter fourteen, when he says, when you hold a banquet, don't just invite people who can pay you back. Don't just get a Christmas present for someone who's going to get you one. No - offer to those who cannot pay you back, so that God rewards you in eternity. Why does Jesus give us specific activity to be generous, and we almost treat it as if he were joking. Unless my church has a Christmas initiative, and then I can throw some money towards it and feel good about myself. Why is that?

So why do most studies show that the average Christian gives less than 2.5% of their annual income to the mission of the local church? My goodness. I'm eight times more generous to the lady who brings my food at Olive Garden. Why is that? Why would we not be generous? Well, here's a reason. Maybe it's because we think our life is defined by what we possess. If we think that our life is defined by what we possess, there's no way we can be generous because in order to have a better life, we need more stuff.

Jesus said this is exactly the very definition of greed. He says in Luke chapter twelve verse fifteen. He says, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." So covetousness is fueled by the mistaken belief that my life is defined by what I possess. I'm wondering how many parents feed that mindset into their children at Christmas time.

So Jesus tries to explain this reality in a parable that I'll update. There's a businesswoman. She has a phenomenal year. Quadruples her income and

her sales. She doesn't even have an idea what to do with all that. Well I guess I could buy a bigger house. Certainly buy a newer and better car. Can sock away some into the 401K so that I can retire a little earlier than I planned. She has absolutely no idea that it's entirely possible that God gave her extra not to consume only on herself, but also to bless others.

And so, we should take notice that Jesus has an evaluation of this kind of mindset. Calls this person a fool. A fool is someone who looks at all the evidence, and draws the wrong conclusion. Here's the evidence: you've been blessed. Here's the wrong conclusion: spend it on yourself, only on yourself.

And so, we would not be generous if we really thought our life was defined by the things that we possess. It can't be. But you're also not going to be generous if you forget that none of what you have belongs to us. One of the reasons we're not generous is because we forget that none of what we have belongs to us.

Now I guess - you know it's really almost silly for me to be talking about generosity in the truest sense of the word, because if we really understand that none of it is ours, then talking about generosity might seem a little bit silly. I'll explain what I mean. It's not ours. It never was. And if you don't believe me find out how much you're holding on to a second after you die. It's not possible then because it all belongs to God - it's not possible to really be speaking of generosity about us being generous, but rather God being generous through us, and whether or not we will let Him be generous through us.

King David taught us that in first Chronicles twenty-nine fourteen. "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand." It all belongs to Him.

One of our funniest Christmas memories, the only Christmas we have on video. Jonathan was four, Mark was twelve. I don't know if Mark had a paper route at that time, but he had some money, and he bought his mom a Christmas present. So Jonathan, being four, wanted to do the same thing. So he's got this coffee mug wrapped, and he presents it to her. Pat, being a good mom, fusses all over it. We have this on video. There's Jonathan, folding his hands and strutting around like he's a peacock. Like he had given her the Hope diamond. Now let me ask you as question, serious question. What do you think the chances are that I violated the child labor laws, and sent him into the work place so that he could earn five dollars for that coffee mug? So was Jonathan generous or was I generous through him? He used my money to be generous to someone else. That's exactly what's going on.

So if it's not mine, then generosity isn't really the issue. It's this issue: will I let God be generous through me? This is why it's so important to get the ownership issue settled.

I began to think how tragic it must be. We recognize there are circumstances beyond our control. But how tragic would it be when you hear of a need for vans for churches in the East Side, or for a church plant in Bangkok, and you'd love to help. But you're so strapped in debt that you

can't. That you're not able to be generous because you've handled His resources so poorly. Sometimes it's the circumstances and we get that. But sometimes it's because I've handled my money like it's mine.

I know I run the risk of making some of you angry. I probably won't get four hundred seventy-six likes on Facebook like I did two weeks ago. But anger is the typical posture that we're supposed to take when the pastor talks about money. It's all they talk about, is money. I'm not talking about money. I'm not. Jesus puts it in right perspective. We're talking about your heart, and we're talking about my heart. Matthew six, twenty-one: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." And maybe you and I can't be generous because of what is wrapped around our hearts.

You know sometimes when, if a person comes up to us, and says you know what? I'm not really as close to God as I'd like to be right now. And typically the response is to fire off four very important questions, by the way. So, are you in the word of God every day? Or, tell me about your prayer life. Or, are you involved in a small group and you're doing life with other believers? Or are you in a place of service? All very good questions. How many of us would actually think of asking the person who says, you know what, I'm really not as close to God as I really would want to be - hey, would you mind if I saw your checkbook? That's what Jesus is saying. Is it possible that you have placed a lid on your spiritual life because of what is wrapped around your heart? You see, a generous heart realizes, I can release my stuff and live open-handedly because I cannot out-give God.

I'm so thankful for the experience I had in 1980, when I was at Liberty Bible Institute. And one of my professors, Dr. Ed Hindson, took the time to talk to us students about financial stewardship. And he said something that obviously I still remember, and has had a great impact on my life thirty-five years later. It's this: God will be no man's debtor. God will be no man's debtor. God will never allow you to look up to heaven and say God, I have been more generous with you or with others than you've been with me. God will be no man's debtor, so I can be generous, because He has been so generous with me, and I can't out-give Him.

You know, the people that I work for - you know the people I work for - are incredibly generous. My wife and I feel so blessed and so taken care of. It wasn't always that way. I remember when Jonathan was a baby, and I drove my wife to the bank, and we took out the last hundred dollars out of our savings account. Pretty sure my wife cried all the way home. I want you to understand something. Then and now, God has been incredibly generous to us, and God has always taken care of us, because God will be no man's debtor. He will provide for you. He will take care of you.

So with that in mind, what should be the aim of our generosity? What should be, lastly, what should be the aim of our generosity? Most of us are generous at Christmas. Most of you will go overboard like you do every year with the people that you love. And we know that when we look at our January credit card bills. We all say things like, yeah, I probably shouldn't have spent so much money. I'm not talking about splurging on your children. Go for it. But teach them generosity, not being spoiled.

I'm talking about being generous. And when you do splurge on your children or the people that you love, I want you to put into perspective and understand something. It's temporary. It's temporary. So I'm aiming for something higher when I talk about the aim of our generosity. It's temporary. And you know it is - that gadget that they have to have that will prove that you're the greatest parent who ever walked this planet, if you get it for them? In six months it will be outdated. And it may very well be discarded in less time than that. We all know that. So let me reach higher for a better generosity. It's being generous by investing in eternity.

Paul said this in 1 Timothy: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasures for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life." Putting things in perspective, it's much better for your kids to have a better eternity than a great Christmas. That's what Paul is saying. And that higher priority is generosity and investing in eternity.

What am I talking about? So a couple of weeks ago, here, about how we have an opportunity to give a Thanksgiving offering so that some churches can have vans to pick up kids and people who wouldn't ordinarily have an opportunity to come. So we have an opportunity to buy a van. And that van picks up a little boy who wouldn't get to church any other way. And that little boy sits in a Sunday school class and hears about Jesus, and gives his



life to Jesus. How do you put a price tag on that? How? Do you think maybe that's what Paul is talking about?

You know, at the end of every January, there's two important pieces of mail that come into our home that I'm interested in. One is our W2s. Looking at how much I made, or how much we made. And the other envelope is from the church - what we gave. We give to other, but predominately we invest in where we believe the mission of God is so in tune with our hearts. So we give to the church. So I'm looking at these two envelopes - what we made and what we gave - and I always have this perspective. First of all, I thank God that he has given us the ability to be generous, but I always see a gap. I always see a gap between what we gave, and what we kept back for ourselves. And what we do as a couple, is we make a new commitment to close that gap in the coming year between what we gave and what we kept back. I can't imagine what it would be like when I stand before God and for the first time I really see the gap between what I gave, and what I kept back.

Maybe this picture will help you. Some of you are familiar with the movie Schindler's List. And towards the end, there's this moving scene when Oscar Schindler, the Polish businessman who had actually used a portion of his fortune to have the names of Jews put on a work list so that they did not go to a concentration camp. And he faces those who escaped certain death, but now were saved because of his efforts. But as he looks into their faces, he has a moment of clarity about what truly is valuable. And in a conversation with his Jewish friend Stern, well it goes something like this: I could have got more. I could have got more. What if I - I could have got

more. Oscar, there are eleven hundred people alive because of you. Look at them! If I only made more money. If I only gave away more money. I threw away so much mo....you have no idea. If I just... There will be generations because of you! I didn't do enough. You did so much! This car. This car. Why did I keep this car? I could have saved ten people if I had gotten rid of this car. And he throws off his swastika and says this pin, this pin is gold. I could have saved one more person. Why didn't I do more?

He was asking the question that all of us will ask in the end. Why didn't I invest more of my life into that which truly matters? Will I ask this question too at the end of my life, the end of my days, as I stand before God? Why didn't I do more? Why didn't I give more so that more could be done for the sake of the gospel?

But as we're about to leave in just a moment, I do not want you to think that this message has been just about money. Because as I said before this message is about your heart. Not only what you give, but what you keep back. And in a moment of clarity, will you begin to ask the question, is God instructing me through His Spirit to close that gap just a little bit more today?

You see, maybe you're here and you've decided because, maybe for the sake of the family or the family pressure, that you'll give God your Sunday morning, but you've kept back your heart. Or, maybe you give God your intellect, and you do read your word and you do those kinds of things, but your emotions - you've kept that back. You're still in charge of your anger and your bitterness, so you can maintain some control. Or, maybe you give

in a lot of different ways, but you're keeping back your computer habits. Or, maybe you're perceived by a lot of people as a very generous person, but you've kept back your relationships. You're in charge of those - thank you, sir.

You see, generosity is not just what you and I give, but it's what we've kept back. If I said to you this morning, if the only way that we could actually demonstrate in a physical way what it means to be absolutely generous, it would be that I'm not withholding any part of my heart and therefore here it is, Lord. Everything is yours. Everything is yours. Could you say that, and there's not a but after that? Everything is yours, Lord, but... Or everything is yours, except...

See, that's what we're talking - keeping Christ in Christmas is when the incarnation changes the way we live everyday and here's how it is: every single day, Lord, more and more of me. I'm yours. All that I am, all that I have. And then, God can use you as a conduit to fully touch the lives of those around you for the sake of the gospel. And the simple question is whether or not you and I have come to the point where we say, I want that. I want God to fully use me for His glory and so I'm yours, Lord.

So as we close in prayer, your heads bowed and eyes closed, I want you to take the time to ask the Holy Spirit, Lord, is there something in my life right now that I'm keeping back? Again, maybe you're seen as a very generous person. God bless you. But you know deep down inside there's something in your heart that you're keeping back, and you've been keeping it back, and the Holy Spirit has been touching your heart and said give it

up. Give it up, give it up. And it might be that you need to give your heart and life completely over to Jesus Christ, so you find yourself in the Fireside Room in just a moment. Whatever it is. God is asking all of us to be generous as He is. By not sparing anything, by not holding anything back, but God you are completely ours.

Let's pray. God, you gave your all for us. How could we not give everything we are to you? Especially it's all yours anyway. And, Lord, one day you will take it back unto yourself and you will hold us and give us, and make us accountable for what we've done with what you've given us. And here in America for most of us, you've given us much in terms of resources. You've certainly given us much in terms of time and other kinds of resources and Lord, sometimes we keep things back, and we say this is ours. But you've asked us to live a different way, so that we actually have the Incarnation change the way we live every day. I pray, Lord, I'm thankful that this is a generous church. There's no question that you're doing much. But, Lord, I know that you would want to close that gap between what you're able to do through us and what you would want to do through us. Help all of us to be in tune with what that looks like as a follower of you every single day of our lives. And that this month would be a great demonstration of just how generous you are through us. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Thank you everyone. You have a great week. God bless you.