

Soteria Church, January 4, 2009
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A New Year's Generosity
Mark 10:17-31

Exodus 33:11A *Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*

Exodus 33:12B-13A *yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have found favor in my sight.' Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight.*

Most Christians, including me would say they desire a relationship with Jesus that is described like this: “face to face,” “like a close friendship,” “knowing God’s ways,” and “gaining favor” what we call “blessings”

The promise of the New Year always brings hope:

Maybe this is the year finally when I gain control over the habits or lack of personal discipline that hold me back from being healthier, smarter or nicer to be around

Maybe we're just hoping that next year is a whole lot better than this year has been

Maybe we're looking for God's favor in the form of relief from the major struggles we've battled with this past year

-physical or emotional health

-employment and income

-loneliness, especially for those of us who are newly single

-marriages and families that need nothing short of God's intervention if they're going to be salvaged

With apologies to our guests today, this sermon is really intended for our members and regular attenders.

What all Christians struggle with is the relationship between God's favor and our obedience

Look at one man's struggle, something we can all identify with:

Mark 10:17-18 *And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."*

This may seem like a strange question for Jesus to have asked, but Jesus was asking the guy “Do you believe I am God, therefore having the authority and sovereignty of God?”

Mark 10:19-20 *“You know the commandments: Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.”*

Like this young man most of us here also know the commandments of God, the Ten Commandments, and most of us would also probably say that we agree with God that these commands are right, and even for our own benefit.

Mark 10:21-22 *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

That, you’ll agree is a hard saying

But what was Jesus saying to the man, what is He saying to you and me today?

Psalms 51:6 *Behold you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart*

Jesus is far more interested in how we respond to His truth than in how many times we claim to agree with God when we hear His truth spoken

So what was and is Jesus saying to us this morning?

He is calling each of us to honestly consider in whom or in what do we place our trust?

Proverbs 11:4 *Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death*

Proverbs 11:7 *When the wicked dies, his hope will perish, and the expectation of wealth perishes too*

Many of us are plagued with fear that we won’t be taken care of, so the amount of money we maintain in our bank accounts and investments is really what we put our faith in

Proverbs 11:24-25 *One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered*

Jesus is calling us in this New Year, I believe, to be a generous people

Generous in giving to other people

Picking up the check at the restaurant – Mat Dimarco and Ed Pride both do this, among others

Not expecting the same person to pay each time, whereby you then come to hope for if not expect the generosity of other people

Tipping generously, especially when the waiter or waitress knows you are

a Christian and/or are associated with our church, (like every time you are at Alligator Soul on a Wednesday night)

Numbers 18:26 *Moreover, you shall speak and say to the Levites, "When you take from the people of Israel the tithe that I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present a contribution from it to the Lord, a tithe of a tithe"*

Your church tithes. You may not be aware, but our church gives ten percent of our income to an organization that helps plant other churches in the Northwest. We also give a portion of our time and resources to another organization that encourages church planting in North America and around the world

Your leaders tithe.

Some of the biggest givers in our church are our elders and deacons

Sadly, though, not all of our leaders are generous. Some don't give at all

And we have members that don't give at all

Sadly, some of you have become content to ride in the jet stream of other people's generous giving when it comes to what our church provides for you

And some of you have great ideas for what the church should invest its resources in and ministries we should initiate and develop, but you yourself have no intention of contributing to that yourself

We are all looking at the New Year, hoping for God's presence and pleasure. We hope for God to bless us in the months ahead, to meet the needs we have.

We want God to be closer to us, especially in our trials and difficulties, but what God is consistent saying is: He's never the one who moved away – if we're distant from God it's because we're the ones who moved away from Him

Malachi 3:6-7 *For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?"*

God is talking directly to Israel after their 70 year captivity and deportation to Babylon and then to Persia. But see the term "your fathers" as the Jews being our "fathers," our forerunners in not being obedient, from having turned away from God's statutes and not trying to keep them. We move away from God when we are not obedient in being generous

In the following verses God answers their question of "How shall we return?"

Malachi 3:8-10 *Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, "How have we robbed you?" In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that*

there may be food in my house. and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need

What did God just say?

1. Instead of blessings, our lack of generosity results in curses upon us
2. Some people's lack of trusting God by being generous results in a lack of blessing for the entire church
3. And some of us don't trust God enough to believe Him when He says, "Test me in this!" We claim to love and follow Jesus, but we really put our faith in our own finances, our own money and resources – for our self image and for our future

Mark 10:21-22 *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

This guy, sadly, decided there on the spot that even though Jesus loved him and told him the loving truth, he decided that he couldn't or wouldn't leave his money idol in order to know and follow the one true God

Jesus loves us. He loves you. He loves you enough to tell you how to experience His close presence and friendship, and how to be free from the curse that hoarding your money and being stingy is – the curse of never feeling secure or never having enough to be truly happy.

The curse of always feeling guilty every time I stand in front of you and talk about giving

Too many of us still claim Jesus as Savior, and yet do not know that we are disheartened and sorrowful because we want to be god over our money. Our money has become our god, and God said back in **Exodus 19:3**, in Ten Commandment #2 that "*You shall have no other gods before Me*"

And He followed it up with Commandment #3

Exodus 19:4-6 "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments*"

Here's the bottom line:

If you're unwilling to realize that God has given you everything you have, and are not committed to being a generous person – you hate God. That's what the Bible just said.

If you are a member of Soteria Church and are yet unwilling to be obedient to giving at least a tithe (a tenth of what God has given you) to your church, you really shouldn't be a member. You made a commitment, but not really. You didn't mean it.

If the real reason you are content to be a regular attender but not wanting to be a committed member of our church is because you do not want to be held accountable to give

-you don't really trust God

-or, you are content to mooch off of the generosity of other, more faithful people

-both of which are sad. I'm sad that you hate God

Instead of that, can this next year be the time when you experience the steadfast love of Jesus that He shows generously to those who love Him and keep His commandments?

It is my prayer right now that we will be a generous church, filled with generous people, who by being obedient in our generosity proclaim that we really do believe in the one true God.

...and I pray that this next year will be for you filled with blessings, and not curses; and a growing devotion inside of you for the God who loves you through His Son Jesus, our Savior and Lord