

Prayer & Self Denial 2018 - 'Made New'

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Julian Doorey - Sermon - Week 4 - A New Generosity... for Mission - 1-7-18

(Acts 2: 41-47, 11:27-30, 1 Cor 16:1-4, 2 Cor 8:6-15)

PrayerIntroduction

Welcome to the 4th and final week of our NZ Baptist Mission 'Prayer and Self Denial' (PSD). This is our annual focus on global physical and spiritual needs and our response to that. NZ Baptists have worked overseas since about 1885. Currently we work in India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Macau and East Asia. The purpose of PSD is to raise awareness, prayer and funds for overseas mission. Our collective response will be today.

2 This year's theme is 'Made New', taken from 2 Cor 5:17 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old is gone, the new is here'! Our 4 messages are: (i) A new spirit, (ii) A new perspective, (iii) A new generation, and today (iv) A new generosity - *for mission*.

3 This year's receptacle for collecting our offering (more symbolic these days with internet banking) is a small silver bowl. They are used in the Thai New Year festival 'Songkran' to pour water over people's hands to symbolically demonstrate honour and respect. Songkran has been adopted by the Thai church to promote the love and word of God in a familiar and culturally appropriate way. As people celebrate cleansing by the water, the church teaches we can be cleansed by Jesus' blood. I notice that after 4 weeks there are 27 bowls still un-collected in the pigeon holes.

Generosity - in the eye of the beholder

4 As part of preparing to make our financial pledge to support overseas mission, I'm talking about 'generosity'. We may be generous in one area of life (that we value), but appear un-generous in other areas (that other people value). Many years ago when I was single and working as a civil engineer earning good money, I reached a point in my discipleship, of giving 25% away (before tax), equating to about 30% (after tax). About 10% went to the church, 10% went to pro-poor mission, and 5% to various. I was living simply and a little ascetically. However, two xxx-xxxxxxx people didn't see the generosity or certainly didn't value it. They saw a person living frugally. One called me 'tight' and the other said I was 'lacking a spirit of generosity'. Heading off to Bible College and receiving no income (no student allowance for religious training back then) didn't help. I learnt that generosity is in the eye of the beholder (and sometimes their culture) and people are watching and ready to pounce. My response was a slight change in lifestyle, where I now offer to take those folk (and others) out to café's and pay.

Some questions, based on my experience. Which of the following are generous actions or attitudes?

- Most NZ Christians don't give to beggars in Asia?
- NZers with their 'do it yourself' culture often try not to employ trades people?
- Asians often employ trades people?
- Asians often employ home help and kitchen help?
- German BMW drivers often pick up hitchhikers / German Mercedes drivers seldom?
- Some NZ Christians give up their houses for missionaries on home assignment?
- A NZ Christian funded a mission family at \$80 per week for 13 years (total \$52,000)?

- A Dunedin orthodontist charges half-price or nothing for dental work for returned missionaries?
- A person not contributing to the \$1 charity cause at the Warehouse checkout?
- NZ overseas aid and development budget / giving? Refer to attached page info & graphs (p5).

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That's enough from me. Let's hear from a couple, who are incredibly generous...

>> Interview: Elizabeth & Ray James - about giving money - What, why, when, who?

Let's look at 3 examples of generosity in the early church.

(i) Local church generosity - Jerusalem

The brand new Jerusalem church was birthed by God's Spirit and Peter's gospel explaining. This resulted in a new community described in Acts 2 and 4 (similar). Reading from Acts 2:41-47...

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Acts 2: ⁴¹⁻⁴² That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers. ⁴³⁻⁴⁵ Everyone around was in awe - all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. ⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. **People in general liked what they saw.** Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved. (Msg)

What an attractive and generous community! **#1 A spirit filled church is a generous community.**

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This is very similar to the 5 habits of highly missional people (BELLS) - we did previously.

#	Habit	Value	Acts 2 activities
1	Bless others	Generous	life together / wonderful harmony / holding everything in common / sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met
2	Eat together	Hospitable	the common meal / meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful
3	Learn Jesus	Christlike	teaching of the apostles
4	Listen to the Spirit	Spirit-led	prayers / wonders and signs / worship in the Temple / they praised God
5	Sent by God	Missional	everyone around was in awe / people in general liked what they saw / every day their number grew as God added those who were saved

On a less positive note, I've never seen or experienced a community like this. Has anyone else? I think we see and experience these things in part. When it comes to sharing material things in a community, we struggle. Intentional Christian communities with a common purse do exist, such as Jesus People USA in Chicago inner city who assist the poor (eg: night shelters), operate social businesses (eg: roofing) and witness through music (eg: Resurrection band and Glenn Kaiser). Another example is Gloriavale, who do many things right, do some things wrong and are trapped in another culture. I read some years ago, that our Western individualistic culture makes it very difficult (almost impossible) for us to live in a community which shares resources.

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I came across a saying / quote recently: 'Culture eats strategy for breakfast'. Although originating in the business leadership world, I was instantly drawn to it as a truth, perhaps THE TRUTH explaining the challenge of trying to implement things such as generous community living and more intentional outreach. Culture (how we've been brought up to think, feel, do, value) is very hard to change. The family unit is the basic building block of our culture, so we 'generally' use 90% of our 'generosity' on our immediate families, and offer the 10% scraps to the wider community. This is explained by saying 'Blood is thicker than water', so blood family comes first. However, I thought that every member of the Christian community is also blood family, through the blood of Jesus.

(ii) Inter-church generosity - Antioch / Jerusalem

A few years later we look at the Antioch church (Antakya in Southern Turkey / close to Syria). This church began with persecuted people scattered from Jerusalem. A church was planted and grew rapidly and became a key mission sending church. Reading from [Acts 11:27-30...](#)

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[Acts 11:](#) ²⁷ During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹ The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the believers living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (TNIV)

Famine wasn't uncommon in the Roman world. Crop failure (wheat) due to a dry climate with erratic rain resulted in food shortage, higher food prices and food hoarding. People were pushed into poverty, malnourishment and ultimately starvation for some. There were 4 famines during the reign of Emperor Claudius from AD 41 to 54. The famine predicted by Agabus happened around AD 45. The Antioch church sent a gift to help the Jerusalem Christians. Interestingly the Antioch church had only been in existence about 5 years, and yet they were keen to help. **#2 A generous church wants to assist other churches.**

(iii) Global generosity - Corinth / Jerusalem

About 10 years later there was another famine in the Roman Empire in AD 55. Paul asks the Corinthian church (also only 5 years old), to take up a collection (of money presumably) to again assist the Jerusalem Christians. With Corinth located half way across the Mediterranean sea from Jerusalem, in an age where most people would barely leave their village, let alone go on a major dangerous boat trip, we're talking about a 'global situation'. Reading from [1 Cor 16:1-4...](#)

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[1 Cor 16:](#) ¹⁻⁴ Regarding the relief offering for poor Christians that is being collected, you get the same instructions I gave the churches in Galatia. Every Sunday each of you make an offering and put it in safekeeping. Be as generous as you can. When I get there you'll have it ready, and I won't have to make a special appeal. Then after I arrive, I'll write letters authorizing whomever you delegate, and send them off to Jerusalem to deliver your gift. If you think it best that I go along, I'll be glad to travel with them. (Msg)

Interestingly, 1 year later, the collection for Jerusalem hasn't actually happened. cf Cavy Baptist Building Committee (4 yrs) and Pastor Search Committee (1 yr). Paul spends a full 2 chapters in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 encouraging them to complete it. Reading from [2 Cor 8:6-15...](#)

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[2 Cor 8:](#) ⁶ So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But since you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge,

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in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you - see that you also excel in this grace of giving. ⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ 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 through his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰ And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. ¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, ¹⁵ as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little." (TNIV)

These verses are packed with insightful things to guide us. Working through the verses we learn:

- 14 • v7. The Corinthians shone in everything - faith, speech, knowledge, sincerity and love. They also need to be generous in giving support to poor Christians half a world away. Same for us.
- v8. Paul tests their sincerity by comparing them with (plays them off against) some other churches who "gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability" (v3). Perhaps Paul is being naughty here, but it's helpful to know about budgets and our share in that.
- v9. Paul gets to the heart of things: "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 through his poverty might become rich." The incarnation of Jesus from heaven to earth (rich to poor) and ultimately cruel death on the cross, for all humanity and creation, is our motivation for love, mission, generosity.
- v10-11. When the Corinthians were first requested to contribute the year before, they were keen as mustard, but they didn't follow through. God wants consistency in our commitment.
- 15 • v12. They are to give according to what they have - the rich more, the poor less. Same for us.
- v13-14. The Corinthians are not to suffer while the Jerusalem Christians have it easy. The non-poor are to assist the poor, but in future the situation could reverse. Equality over time.
- v15. Referring to the manna (food-like substance) which God provided for the ancient Israelites in the desert during the forty-year period following their Exodus from Egypt, God provides sustenance for each person according to their needs.

In summary, **#3 God enables churches to generously support and fund global mission.**

16 Conclusion

What have we learnt this morning about 'A New Generosity... for mission'...

- A spirit filled church is a generous community.
- A generous church wants to assist other churches.
- God enables churches to generously support and fund global mission.

>> [Children return to families.](#)

Invitation to respond

I hope you've enjoyed and engaged with our NZ Baptist overseas mission focus 'Made New', concluding today with 'A new generosity' for mission. We'll now make our collective response. I invite you to come up the front and do 2 things involving generosity:

1. Write your pledge amount to support overseas mission on the large pledge form. Pledge forms and pens are here on the table. Gather around the table, rather than single file to save time. Take the large pledge form home as a reminder to make the payment. Write the same pledge amount on the small pledge form. Put the small pledge form in the large silver bowl. >>> Please make the payment over the next 2 weeks (by 15 July) via envelope or internet banking. Include 'Self Denial' and your 'Cavy giving number' to receive a tax credit (on 50% of your offering).
2. Wash each other's hands (the person behind you) by tipping water from the small silver bowls. Bless the person whose hands you wash by saying: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old is gone, the new is here! Let us be a generous community'. These words are on the table. There are towels for drying your hands on the table.

This does not need to be a quiet response.

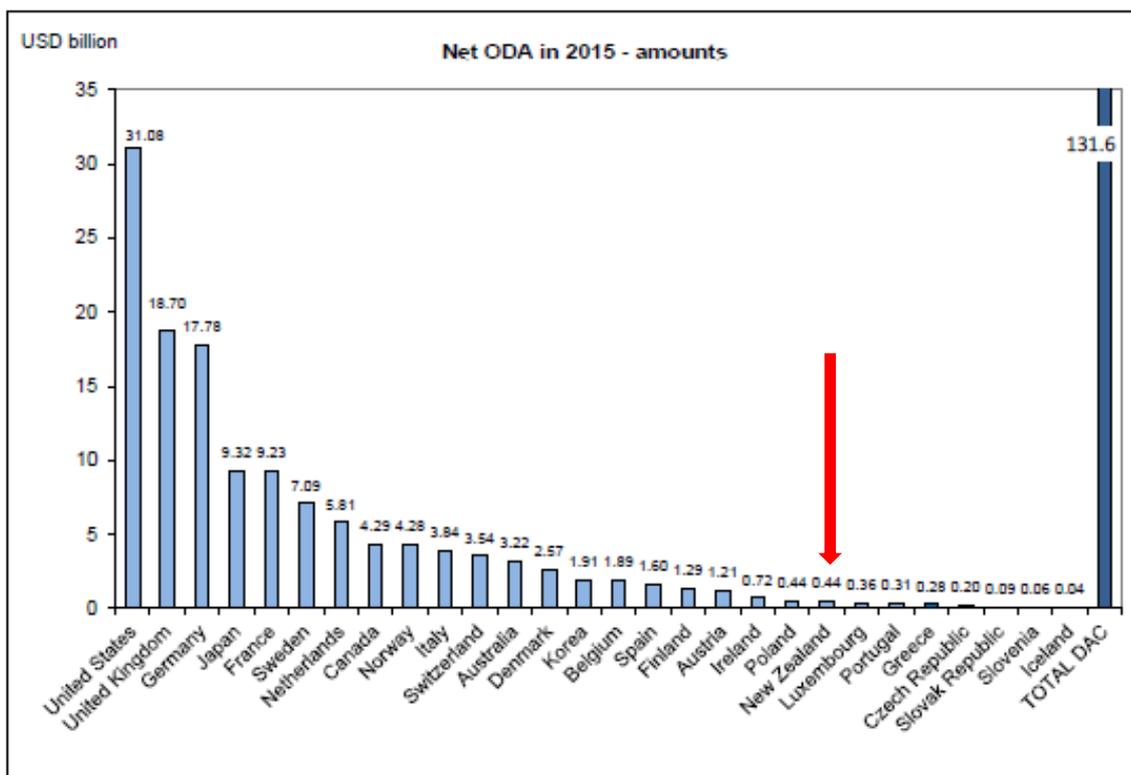
Play CD music, so musicians can be part of this.

>> PTO for NZ overseas aid info and graphs.

NZ overseas aid and development budget / giving

OECD - Paris, 13 April 2016

- OECD: The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is a unique forum where the governments of 34 democracies with market economies work with each other, as well as with more than 70 non-member economies to promote economic growth, prosperity, and sustainable development.
- DAC: The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is a forum to discuss issues surrounding aid, development and poverty reduction in developing countries.
- ODA: Official Development Assistance.



Net ODA in 2015 - as a percentage of GNI

