

He Shares With Us What He Made for Himself

I know a woman from this church who did a simple but powerful act of generosity a few years back. She had knit a scarf for herself and was wearing it when she went into Dunkin Donuts over on Route 4 to get a cup of coffee. This happened during another year when we were studying the topic of generosity in our worship services. The donista (At Starbucks they're called "baristas." At Dunkin' Donuts I think they're called, "donistas.") said to this woman, "I really like your scarf." The woman said, "Really? Well, thank you." Then she took off the scarf, handed it to the waitress and said, "I want you to have it."

The waitress was dumbfounded. She protested, "Oh no, I couldn't do that." But the woman insisted. She said, "No, I made this myself. I can easily make another. I really want you to have it. God has been so generous with me, I want to share some of that with you." And she smiled, took her coffee and walked out.

Has anyone ever shared with you something that they made for themselves? Well, whether you realize it or not, someone has! His name is Jehovah and that's the focus of our study today. So, what exactly has God shared with us? First we need to see that:

I. God Shares With Us His Own Image.

Col. 1:16 says:

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Now, someone here might be thinking, "Wait! I thought God made all of this for us? I thought He loved us so much that He made us and this world for us to enjoy." Yes, God does love us dearly and He did create the world with us in mind, but He has a love that is greater than His love for us. It's the love He has for Himself.

You say, "Oh, come on! That's crazy! I thought loving ourselves more than anything was wrong! How can it be right for God?" Well, it's right for Him because He is perfect and we aren't. In fact, for God it would be evil if He loved us more than He loved Himself. John Piper helps us understand this when he writes:

God would be unrighteous... if He valued anything more than what is supremely valuable. But He Himself is supremely valuable. If He did not take infinite delight in the worth of His own glory, He would be unrighteous. For it is right to take delight in a person in proportion to the excellence of that person's glory.ⁱ

So, when Christ died on the cross, He did it first of all, to bring glory to His Father and secondly because of His love for us. It's not wrong to do something for two reasons as long as those reasons don't contradict one another and these don't contradict one another at all! The reason they don't is because people carry something that nothing else in all creation carries; we carry the very image of God! (Gen. 1:26a NIV 2011):

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...”

People are different from all the rest of creation. We are NOT derived from other animals. You can't believe in Darwinian evolution and be faithful to the Word of God because the Word of God says that people are a special creation of God and were formed “...from the dust of the ground and [God] breathed into his nostrils the breath of life...” (Gen. 2:7) You did not come from any other life form. You are a special creation of God and you share with God some of His characteristics, such as, speech, moral reasoning, abstract thinking and an eternal soul. Plants and animals and the stars in the sky are the creation of God and in their own way they “...declare the glory of God,” but they do not share these attributes of God. Only you have that remarkable privilege. You are not “exactly” like God, but you share “some” of His attributes. But that's not all that God shares with us. He also...

II. God Shares With Us His Work

Part of what it means to be “created in the image of God,” is caught up in our mission, our work in this world. Technically, Gen. 1:28 is not a command, it's a blessing. In other words, God isn't saying to Adam and Eve, “Here's your job description, do this – or else!” No, it says, “*God blessed them...*” God invited Adam and Eve to share in His work. The Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the “us” and “our” in “*Let us make mankind in our image...*” invites us to join Him in His work of overseeing His incredible creation. One commentator puts it this way:

Because man is created in God's image, he is king over nature. He rules the world on God's behalf. This is of course no license for unbridled exploitation... mankind is here commissioned to rule nature as a benevolent king, acting as God's representative over them and therefore treating them in the same way as God who created them... Noah... is the arch-conservationist who built an ark to preserve all kinds of life from being destroyed in the flood. ⁱⁱ

But sharing in God's work isn't limited to farming and conservation. It includes every vocation that promotes, protects and provides for good living. Health care, law enforcement, food services, home building, car repair, selling insurance... all of these potentially, if done in God's way, are God's work in this world! Do you understand that? The only vocations that aren't God's work are those that destroy people's health, or people's wealth or lead them away from God's path.

How do you view your job? Do you see it as the “work of God”? In a recent Gallup study, 50% of Americans said they were, “not engaged in their jobs personally.” Another 22% said that they were “actively disengaged in their jobs.” So, over 70% of Americans say they're doing their job just for the money, they have no personal investment in what they do all day. Where did this mindset come from?

Let me give you a brief “history of work.” The Greeks believed that work was not for real men. In fact, the Greek word for work means “sorrow.” Only slaves did work. Free men and women spent their time doing art, philosophy and politics. The Romans picked up this same mindset and shunned work. This idea of work as a curse carried on into the Middle Ages. But then something changed. Through the reformation and revival of the church, an old, biblical concept of work was re-born. It was given the Latin name *vocare* from which we get the word “vocation.” That Latin word means, “calling,” as in “a calling from God.” This word was applied to

every form of work except those that were illegal, immoral or destructive. Where did they get that idea? They got it from Jesus! When the Pharisees were criticizing Him for working on the Sabbath, Jesus said to them: (John 5:17)

My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working. What kind of work was Jesus doing at that moment? He wasn't teaching, He was healing! This idea that work in all its forms wasn't a curse but a blessing set off the industrial revolution and the scientific revolution that laid the foundation of the western world we know today.

Now, do you see the generosity of God here? He didn't have to INCLUDE us in His work. We could have been just like wild animals, spending all day looking for our next meal. But no, God honored all people by saying to the first man and woman, "I want to give you the chance to do more than just survive! I've created you and only you out of all My creation with the ability to experience the joy of knowing that your work, whatever it is, has great significance, has real meaning. I am working and I'm calling you to join me in the blessing that is work! Come on, let's restore the world together!" Is that the mindset you have about your work?

Dr. Robert Lewis, the founder of Men's Fraternity, was visiting the famous art museum in Paris, the Louvre, and was able to go beneath the museum where they were doing some archaeological digging. Beneath the Louvre there's a medieval castle from about the time this new view of "work as a blessing" was taking hold. Dr. Lewis noticed that many of the stones had crosses chiseled into them. When he asked about it, the tour guide said, "Oh, those are stones that were made by Christian stonemasons. They wanted their stonework to be done so well that it was worthy of carrying the sign of the cross." ⁱⁱⁱ Would you be willing at the end of every day to put the sign of the cross on your work so everyone would know it had been done by a Christian? You take that mindset to your workplace next week and I'll guarantee you it will transform your job into a calling.

So, the generosity of God is proven by the fact that He shares with us His image, His work and finally...

III. God Shares with Us His Son.

If you look up the word "generous" in a thesaurus, you find these synonyms: "bountiful, open-handed, lavish, overflowing." What's your most precious possession? If you're a parent, I'm sure you will quickly say, "My son, my daughter." Can you imagine ever giving them up so that a stranger could live? Yet that is what our Father God did for us. John 3:16 is perhaps one of the best known and best loved verses in the Bible and that is what it explains when it quotes Jesus as saying: (John 3:16)

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.

What I've tried to help us see in this lesson today are the various ways that God has been generous with us. The obvious take-away is that, as followers of Jesus, we should be moving in His direction with regard to our own generosity. But this is so over the top, it's just hard to get a handle on it. I mean, how could God the Father or God the Son find the motivation to do this?

I think the answer to that is found in this all too familiar verse. They did it because of their love for us and their determination to bring glory to the only One

who will ever truly deserve it – Themselves. So, how do we translate that into our own lives? It will have to be through a supernatural infusion of that same love.

Who is it that you're having a hard time loving? Who is it that you are telling God, "I know you want me to love them, but I can't; I just can't do it!" Is it possible to love a person like that?

John and Jane Doe (not their real names) have been our World Outreach representatives in a very dangerous Muslim country. In fact, they returned home with their children after one of their co-workers was assassinated by a terrorist. The truth was, he was driving John's car so they were trying to kill John. The Does have decided to return to that country to love those people. "How," you say, "could they possibly arrive at that decision?" Please watch as John describes an evening when Al Qaeda was blowing up their city as they sat in their apartment and he called out to God...

[Play Doe video – 5:16 min]

"I want to be there when one small stone is put in place." Are you willing to do your part in building the Kingdom of Jesus Christ? Look, I'm not asking you to go to a Muslim country, but are you willing to pray for those that do go? The Does are a radical example of commitment but they need you and invite you to join them in praying for their work. We need to re-activate our prayer room! We need 10, 20 people a day who will come and provide prayer cover for all ___ of our World Outreach team members. Friends, I don't need to tell you that this world is coming apart at the seams! This is happening on our watch!! Are we going to stand on the sidelines and let the enemy of God have his way with millions of people or are we going to activate a counter-offensive of prayer the likes of which this church has never seen?? Desperate times call for desperate measures! Are you desperate for God?

We have a team of 200 'desperate people' from this church who are preparing to place their "one small stone" for the Kingdom of God in the city of Bristol. Did you know there was a bomb threat at the Greene-Hills School last week? Does our Bristol Team also need prayer? You bet! And we're going to do that right now. I've asked Pastor Chris to come so that we all can pray for him and, if you are part of the Bristol 200, would you please stand where you are, whether it's here in the Sanctuary or in The Venue. Please stand, let's pray...

ⁱ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), p. 42, 43

ⁱⁱ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), p. 33

ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Robert Lewis, *Authentic Manhood: Winning at Work and Home*, lesson 13 (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2008), p. 13, 14