

I Chronicles 29:1-20 The Greatness of God seen in the Generosity of His People

Introduction

How do people around us visualise what God is like? We accept that there are some people who are not interested in the question. Such individuals would reject any attempt to engage them in conversation about this kind of topic once they were aware they were speaking to someone who had a personal faith in God. However, that is not where the vast majority of people stand in our country. There is still a majority who declare in surveys that they believe in God and that they accept basic Christian moral values. Yet many of this majority would not see the need for a personal active faith in the sense of overt Christian commitment to Sunday worship or being an active member of a local congregation. Although by declaring a belief in God, if sincerely claimed, does provide the potential opening in the future for a Christian witness by members of a local Christian Church. I began with the question –how do people around us visualise what God is like? The answer to that question is through the attitudes, values, priorities and lifestyles of believers! Dr Dan Strange, Vice Principal of Oak Hill Theological College in London, is well-known in his public lectures for declaring that when confronted by someone stating that they do not believe in God usually replies: ‘I probably don’t believe in that kind of God either!’ His argument was that too often the message communicated by Christian people in our attitudes to one another and to outsiders; and by our choice of words and actions in a range of social contexts portrays an image of God that falls significantly short of the example Jesus called His disciples to model. All of us can very easily think of examples of Christians failing to honour the Lord in their treatment of one another. In the story of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus was teaching about His return and reign as the coming king. Amongst the words directed towards those who were welcomed into heaven are these from Matthew 25:40: *‘The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.”*

The big question that we need to consider is this: What picture of God is being communicated by you / me, and by this church? It is not enough to say the right words if it is not backed up by our actions. If we claim to believe in a God whose whole being is characterised by love (I John 4:8b); do other people observe that demonstrated in the way we relate in the first instance to one another? After all, that is the one test given to outsiders to assess the credibility of our Christian credentials (John 13:35); if we proclaim –as we do - a gospel of grace to the undeserving, do we model that in our treatment of one another, not holding past failings against one another, rather looking for opportunities to affirm and build each other up. Paul challenged the troubled church in Corinth with these words: *...try to excel in gifts that build up the church* (I Corinthians 14:12b); if we believe in an incredibly generous God who has given His very best for us in the person of Jesus, then our response must be: how can I model and reflect His generosity in my own life? Paul alluded to this in Romans 8:31-32: *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who 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?* What we all know is that the outworking of our faith in the particulars of daily life is how we demonstrate that our conduct is deeply rooted in our convictions. In our set passage for today, I Chronicles 29:1-20, is an example of the modelling of such principles by the people

of God three thousand years ago which resulted in this offering of praise and worship to God.

1. **A Reflection of the Generosity of God** (1 Chronicles 29:1-9)

(a) **The Example of King David** (1 Chronicles 29:1-5a) (i) **His expected offering** (1 Chronicles 29:1-2) *Then King David said to the whole assembly: 'My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God. ² With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God – gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colours, and all kinds of fine stone and marble – all of these in large quantities.*

The context of these events is in the closing days of King David's life. He has rightly gone down in history as the greatest ruler of the nation of Israel. He is revered to this day in that country as a model king in many respects. It is a time of transition and decision as the country prepares to anoint as King the young and inexperienced Solomon. David prepared for office the hard way in the Judean wilderness, often on the run from the increasingly unstable King Saul in the last years of his reign, whereas Solomon had known only a comfortable life in the royal palace. There could not have been a greater contrast between these two periods of formation prior to an election to office. However, the primary focus was not on the national government of the country but on the worship of Almighty God and the erection of a place of worship suitable for the gatherings of His people in the capital city Jerusalem. For many years a large tent had been used whether here in Jerusalem or at earlier places of worship like Shiloh (see I Samuel onwards); but the people mostly lived in more solid structures and it had been David's biggest wish to erect such a Temple as the lasting legacy of his reign. In the previous chapter we have the words David brought to the assembly that day to remind everyone present of that fact. 1 Chronicles 28:2-3 states: *King David rose to his feet and said: 'Listen to me, my fellow Israelites, my people. I had it in my heart to build a house as a place of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, for the footstool of our God, and I made plans to build it. ³ But God said to me, "You are not to build a house for My Name, because you are a warrior and have shed blood."* The timescale was not what David had wanted but he accepted that this structure would be erected in the reign of his son and heir Solomon. There was never any doubt that it was the will of God for the Temple to be built, but it would take longer than they had expected to erect and dedicate this structure to the glory of God.

David begins by modelling an example to the people of God that had assembled that day. He explains that over some years he had been collecting the necessary materials for the building of the Temple. It cannot be denied that his reign had been marked by fighting many wars and a considerable part of the gold, silver and precious stones he handed over that day had been appropriated from these conquered peoples and countries. Throughout recorded history this has happened as any visit to the British Museum in London, and many lesser ones will illustrate. In the ancient world, and some modern countries as well, rulers and their close associates have plundered the collective resources of the nation for their personal enrichment. The list of guilty parties is a sadly a long one. However, David here makes a very powerful and clear statement that these national treasures are not his, but for the collective good of the nation and willingly he dedicates them to this cause. It may be obvious to us that it was the right thing to do, but many other rulers in the ancient world would not have seen it as their duty to do any such thing. In essence, putting it in contemporary terms, David was showing that the offerings for this building project that the people might

have expected him to give were being given. This was not in any doubt. However, what happened next no-one could have required or expected, but was his personal response to the prompting of God for this project.

The basic principle for regular giving for Christians is that of our tithes. The prophet Malachi, 400 years before the time of Jesus, was challenging the people of his day to recognise that part of the reason why they were not being blessed by God in the way they were expecting was because of their failure to honour God in their financial giving. Malachi 3:8-10 states: *'Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. 'But you ask, "How are we robbing you?" 'In tithes and offerings. ⁹You are under a curse – your whole nation – because you are robbing me. ¹⁰Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.* Some Christians have been under the mistaken impression that in the New Testament this has been abolished. This is incorrect. Jesus, in Matthew 23:23 made this very clear: *'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, **without neglecting the former.*** The wording is even clearer in the New Living Version: *You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things (Matthew 23:23b).* However, Jesus here as with other things sought to change the mindset of God's people on this subject. In Mark 12:41-44 there is the record of an incident that allowed Jesus to explain clearly how He viewed our calling to generosity in our financial giving: *Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴²But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few pence. ⁴³Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, **'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.'*** The disciples had made a big mistake by looking at the absolute amounts put in by some wealthy people who did not miss the donations they had easily made. What Jesus sought to demonstrate here was that the giving of our tithes was the standard platform for our regular giving, but that there would be occasions when appeals would be made for more sacrificial giving to particular needs that arise. It is between each individual and the Lord what one ought to give on any particular occasion. For all of us there are some months or years when financial demands upon us are particularly heavy or difficult and the giving of our tithes or meeting our essential commitments is a real struggle. However, there are other times when we have been blessed with more comfortable circumstances. The question as always is this: Lord how may I bring glory to You through what I give of myself and from the resources You have entrusted to me?

(ii) **His personal generosity** (I Chronicles 29:3-5a) ³ *Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: ⁴three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, ⁵for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen.* In life there are things that are rightly expected of all of us. In society we are rightly outraged that some large corporations, like Google, Amazon and Starbucks have made vast profits but paid little in the way of taxes to the UK treasury despite the large amount of business carried out in this country. The system of taxation in the UK was based on the foundational Christian principle that the richest minority should contribute more than those less well off to the national Government to pay for public services. Those with the broadest shoulders should carry a greater

burden of responsibility. There are political arguments about how this should be done and rates of taxation, but the overarching principle is clear and should be indisputable. It is possible, indeed probable, that David had by legal means become personally wealthy and might even have been one of the richest men in the country. However, he was conscious as he was shortly to meet his maker that as his family were well provided for already that he would choose to donate his personal fortune to the Temple building project. It is possibly similar to the approach some people have today in setting aside sums of money in their wills to donate to particular good causes near to their hearts. Whatever the exact equivalence might be, the clear message he communicated that day to the nation was one of exceptional generosity, possibly even a sacrificial level of generosity to set an example to other people who were present that day. David recognised that if he was to ask the people to give generously to this building project that he too needed to demonstrate his own commitment to the cause. He was in no doubt that wholehearted dedication to bringing glory to God would be a significant pointer to people outside the faith about how seriously God's people wish to honour Him and give their lives in service for Him.

(b) **The invitation to follow His Example** (I Chronicles 29:5b-9) *Now, who is willing to consecrate themselves to the Lord today? ⁶ Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work gave willingly. ⁷ They gave towards the work on the temple of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze and a hundred thousand talents of iron. ⁸ Anyone who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the temple of the Lord in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite. ⁹ The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, **for they had given freely and wholeheartedly** to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly (I Chronicles 29:5b-9). Notice two key words here that are foundational in I Chronicles 29:9: ...*for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord*. Pressured or constrained giving is not something that brings glory to God. Paul, writing to the wealthy church in Corinth, brought these words to their attention: *Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, **for God loves a cheerful giver.** ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.... ¹¹ **You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God** (II Corinthians 9:6-8,11). This is the model for both the Old Testament Jewish people, together with the New Testament calling of the Christian Church.**

Living for Jesus is counter-cultural. Millions of people spend a fair bit of their lives dreaming of lottery tickets coming up so that it will be possible for them to get a whole load of things, admittedly not all but it is the supreme motivation for many ticket purchases; by contrast the Christian rejoices in the difference we can make in the lives of other people by our giving whether at home or overseas. We want to invest the blessing of the resources God has given us to bless other people. Over the years in this church we have done that at home and overseas through offerings for a variety of good causes. In 2016 we have a particular focus on the need to raise the funds to extend Panmurefield Baptist Centre so that it will allow us to reach more people for Jesus; to avoid waiting lists for certain current events, together with the creation of facilities that will make possible larger and more varied activities in reaching that local community for Jesus. What we must not do is think that the little we may be able to give or do will not make a difference. God takes what we have to offer to accomplish far more than we may even have asked or imagined. In the time of

Nehemiah more than four centuries before the time of Jesus, ordinary people working together alongside a smaller number of skilled craftsmen rebuilt Jerusalem's city walls in fifty-two days – an astonishing feat. In II Kings 4 an impoverished widow needing urgent assistance implored Elisha the prophet to assist her. His question to her was unexpected. *Tell me, what do you have in your house?*' (ii Kings 4:4). In effect he was asking her is there a creative and innovative way yet unexplored by which the needed money can be raised? We are focussing particularly on a gift day in the very near future, but we will need to find other ways to raise additional funds for this project. Will we pray and ask the Lord if there might be some other creative way that we can raise additional resources? Direct giving, gift aided if we are taxpayers, may be the best and most straightforward way of giving, but it is not necessarily the only way to achieve our goals.

2. **A Recognition of the Glory of God** (I Chronicles 28:10-20)

(a) **Yours be the Glory** (I Chronicles 29:10-13) *David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, 'Praise be to You, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. ¹¹ Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is Yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; You are exalted as head over all. ¹² Wealth and honour come from You; You are the ruler of all things. In Your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. ¹³ Now, our God, we give You thanks, and praise Your glorious name.*

Think for a few moments about what is declared here:

The greatness

The power

The glory

The victory

The majesty

Everything in the heavens and on earth is Yours

This is your kingdom

The One who is over all things

Riches and honour come from You alone

You rule over everything. Power and might are in Your hand;

What we do for the Lord is supremely for His glory, not for our advancement. The words here are echoed to a significant degree in the words Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 6:9-13: *'This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

We must never reduce our thinking of our financial giving to the level of just paying bills or other financial obligations, we are bring glory of God so that others may see something of His greatness in our generosity. That other people outside the church will want to ask – why is it that this group of people are so generous in the provision of these facilities or these services to our community? Our response is quite simple: 'We do it to honour and glorify God so that what is seen causes others to desire to worship and adore Him!

(b) **Ours is the Requirement of Humility** (I Chronicles 29:14-17)¹⁴ *'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. ¹⁵ We are foreigners and strangers in Your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow,*

without hope. ¹⁶Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building You a temple for Your Holy Name comes from Your hand, and all of it belongs to You. ¹⁷I know, my God, that You test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly Your people who are here have given to You.

David in his prayer rejoices in the **privilege of giving** to God's work. This is important to remember. That Almighty God chooses to accomplish some of His work in this community through you and me. His hands and feet, His wallet and purse in this community are to some extent ours! It is not the 'Do I have to?' attitude we have all expressed at times from our childhood upwards, but can I really be blessed to have the honour of participating in glorifying God in this way? The exceptionally poor Macedonian Christians had grasped this principle. *And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.* ²*In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.* ³*For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,* ⁴**they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.** ⁵*And they exceeded our expectations: they gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.* (II Corinthians 8:1-5).

David also recognises the importance and **significance of stewardship**. We do not own the things we possess in an absolute sense- they are gifts from God. They are a trust from our Lord and God to invest in the extension of His kingdom here on earth in this community and beyond. We will not take anything out of this life with us. The wealthy patriarch Job got this several millennia ago: *Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised*' (Job 1:21). How are you and I exercising our stewardship?

(c)**Ours is the Responsibility for Obedience** (I Chronicles 29:18-20) ¹⁸ *Lord, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of Your people for ever, and keep their hearts loyal to You.* ¹⁹ *And give my son Solomon the wholehearted devotion to keep Your commands, statutes and decrees and to do everything to build the palatial structure for which I have provided.* ²⁰ *Then David said to the whole assembly, 'Praise the Lord Your God.'* *So they all praised the Lord, the God of their fathers; they bowed down, prostrating themselves before the Lord and the king.* The final challenge of the passage is this: *Give praise to the Lord Your God* (I Chronicles 29:20). This is supremely what we seek to do in all areas of our lives, both in church and outside it. The only question for us to answer though is this: 'How best can I reveal something of the greatness of God to this community through the generosity of the giving of my time, my skills and my financial resources', for Jesus' sake, Amen.