

The Sharing Life – Acts 20:35

The St. Jude Children’s Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, received a plain white envelope in the mail. Inside was a game piece from a McDonald’s monopoly game that was being played at that time. The piece had printed on it simply “One million dollar instant winner.”

Whoever sent this to the hospital included nothing else in the envelope but the winning game piece. There was no return address on the envelope and the only clue to who sent it or where it came from was the postmark from somewhere in Texas. An interesting sidebar to this is that the fine print for the game rules (if you’ve ever read them) states that you cannot transfer the ownership of a winning piece from one party to another. If you do, that invalidates it and they don’t have to pay. However, some wise person in public relations at McDonald’s decided that it probably was a good idea, in this case, to pay. As a result, St. Jude Children’s Hospital received the one million dollars from McDonald’s — the largest single gift the hospital has received in its entire history. That means that someone in Texas decided that it was better to share than to be a millionaire.

Jesus loves us a whole lot more than anything he owns.

Much closer to home was a national news story that played out right here on Shady Oak Road just about two miles up the street from Wooddale Church. On December 21st all 280 employees of the Rollerblade Company received a Christmas card from owner Bob Naegele and his wife Ellis. Along with the Christmas card was a check made out to each of those employees. The amount of the check was one hundred sixty dollars for every month that they were employed by Rollerblade. For some employees it was a very significant amount of money. In some cases husbands and wives both worked at the Rollerblade Company and some of the checks were in excess of twenty thousand dollars. There were no hooks,

no conditions and no accountability as to how the money was to be spent. They were all free gifts with the taxes paid in advance so that the whole amount went to the employee. The total cost was estimated to have been about one and a half million dollars. From the front page article in the Minneapolis Star Tribune and CNN there were reports of the excitement, surprise, laughter, tears and joy of the Rollerblade employees who got these checks.

I was particularly interested in the closing paragraph in the Star Tribune story. It tells about a conversation between Matt Majka, the director of product marketing, and Bob Naegele. Majka said, “You can’t imagine the impact you have had on everyone.” And Naegele said, “That is just what I wanted to hear. This is not mine. It is a gift I had to share.”

Those are stories of enormous generosity, but they’re nothing compared to the greatest story of sharing — the ultimate example. It is in a league of its own – unmatched and unsurpassed. It is the story of Jesus Christ sharing his riches with us.

II Corinthians 8: 9 says, “*You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*” When we’re talking rich, Jesus was really rich. As rich as heaven — owner of earth and the entire universe. He was in heaven as comfortable and content and wealthy as could possibly be.

It’s interesting to think about that and to imagine what he was like. Riches do different things to different people. Sometimes when people acquire a significant amount of wealth they want to hoard it, always thinking up ways of getting more. By contrast, there are other people who take great delight in what they have received and are anx-

ious to give it away or share it with other people. They consider themselves blest and they want the blessing to go around.

The story of Jesus hints that there's nothing wrong with riches. The clear implication of the Bible is that Jesus was as rich as anyone could possibly be and there was nothing at all wrong with that. The issue, of course, is what a person decides to do with whatever riches he has.

Rich Jesus decided he wanted to share his riches with us. It's almost as if we imagine him sitting comfortably in heaven one day dreaming about what he could do with his exorbitant wealth. His great dream was to share his wealth with us. He decided he was willing to leave heaven and come to earth, becoming poor himself, in order to give to us. You know, it's got to be more difficult to become poor if you have been the richest person of all. But he decided to become poor in order to give what he had to us and to make us rich.

What does all of that mean for us? It means that Jesus loves us a whole lot more than anything he owns. It also means that everything that we have comes from him. We usually don't think of it that way. We think that we have worked very hard, or saved very carefully, or our success is the result of a good education, or that we simply lucked out and ended up with a lot of good stuff. But if the riches originate with him then everything that we have, whether it is a job or money or good health or possessions or relationships, all of these riches are because of his generosity. It means that we should never be proud because what we have didn't come from our own efforts. It means we don't need to hold on to things with a tight grip because he will take care of us. It also means that the greatest expression of wealth is not money but salvation because that is the main reason that Jesus came — not to enhance the balance in our bank accounts but so that we could have eternal life. He wanted us to come to live in his heaven, to be in the presence of God, to expe-

rience the very best of the best.

When Jesus came he had a fabulous secret he wanted to share. It is one of those wonderful truths that totally transforms the lives of those who get it. Jesus had to decide the best way to communicate this fantastic secret of his. He could use a deductive approach where you tell about it and then show how it's done with an illustration or an example. Or he could use an inductive approach where he would show how it's done with the hope that we would figure it out for ourselves before he told us about it.

Let me explain the difference. In my high school chemistry class we were studying the Periodic Table of the Elements. When we came to sodium I think the teacher wanted us to learn that sodium is a comparatively unstable element. If he used a deductive approach he would have just told us, but he wanted us to figure it out for ourselves so he used an inductive approach.

Instead of turning to the chalkboard and writing, "Sodium is an unstable element," he had an experiment for all of us to share. He had each pair of lab partners take a petri dish and put some water in it. Then one person from each team went up front and received a very small sliver of sodium from the teacher and came back and put it in the water. Wow! That little piece of metal became like a nuclear powered walleye whipping around that dish! I was really impressed. From that observation we were supposed to figure out for ourselves that sodium is not a very stable element.

My lab partner really got into this inductive approach, wondering what would happen if you put a big chunk of sodium in the water. He patiently waited until the teacher was away from his desk, sneaked up, picked up the knife and lobbed off a nice big chunk and brought it back and plopped it in the water. It took off like a Fourth of July rocket, exploded out of the dish and shot straight through the high school chemistry lab ceiling! This, by the way, was a brand new high

school building that had just opened.

I remember very little about high school chemistry. I don't remember the teacher's name. I can't recite the Periodic Table and I remember very few of the abbreviations for the elements. But I sure do remember that sodium is an unstable element. Not because the teacher told me but because the teacher showed me.

Jesus chose the inductive approach to tell us his great secret. He could have just told us but he showed us. I should mention that he didn't always use this teaching approach. Sometimes he used the deductive approach. When it came to the dangers of sin he knew it was best to warn us instead of letting us find out for ourselves and suffer the inevitable and awful consequences.

So what did Jesus show? He showed great generosity. He loved people who hated him. He forgave people who never even asked to be forgiven. He healed people of terrible diseases who after they were healed walked away and never turned around and even bothered to say thank you. He befriended people that nobody else would have anything else to do with: Gentiles, poor people, prostitutes, criminals. He did not try to accumulate wealth – he never owned a house or a business or a vehicle of transportation. When he stood before a Roman governor on trial for his life, the clothing that he wore was borrowed. He died on a borrowed cross and was buried in a borrowed grave.

For his entire life he kept showing and showing and showing. There is no record in any of his four biographies of him

ever coming to the point of telling the secret that he was showing by his life with the hope that everyone would figure it out. The telling of the secret did not actually come until years later when St. Paul was saying good-bye to some friends from the city of Ephesus. It's recorded in Acts 20:35 where Paul said to remember "the words

The best way to solve our problems is to share with others whose problems are bigger than ours.

the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Jesus had shown this principle in his life assuming that we would observe and figure it out for ourselves.

Do you think it's true that it is more blessed to give than to receive? Because if it is true, it is absolutely amazing! Most of the people in the world live their whole lives trying to be happy by receiving and that is totally backwards. Jesus was saying, "Do that and you'll never be happy. The secret to happiness is not to receive but to give." Jesus showed it and now we know it!

I believe that Jesus knew what he was talking about. I believe that what he said was true. At the very center of the Christian life is this wonderful secret that the best way to be happy is to give.

To be a Christian is to be a sharer! It is to be like Jesus Christ. Christians are those who share their time and their gifts and their love and their money and themselves. We have received so much from Jesus that we want to do exactly what Jesus did and share with as many others as we possibly can.

I want to tell you that it works, although I know that what I am going to say is dangerous. There are those who are lonely and friendless and anxious in life because no one seems to care about them and they have very little in terms of emotional reserves. When they use that little bit of

emotional reserve to reach out and to befriend someone else they often are helped themselves. There are people who are frazzled because they

can't get everything done. They have no time to give to anybody else because life's plate is so full and the schedule is so packed. Yet taking a few minutes to reach out to someone else can have a revolutionary effect on one's schedule. There are those who struggle with finances and no matter how much money they make there never seems

to be enough to pay their bills. Yet when they start to give some money away very often it has a transforming effect on the entire management of their finances. The best way to solve our problems is to share with others whose problems are bigger than ours.

But admitting to that includes a danger because somebody may start sharing for selfish reasons. There may be people who say, “That’s great! I want to be happy. I want to get more money. I need more time. I’ve got all these problems to get solved so I’m going to start sharing.” But that’s selfish and counterproductive. That’s not what it’s all about. The best approach is to just be like Jesus and do what he did to discover from experience that it really is “more blessed to give than to receive.”

Consider three categories and classify yourself. Are you mostly a spender, a saver or a sharer? We’re all a mixture of all three. Very few are 100%

spenders, savers or sharers. The realities of life are that you have to spend and you should save and you may share. But what is most important to you? In a sense, spending is a selfish thing — it’s about me. Saving, whether it’s saving time or saving money or saving anything, is preparation for future spending — so I can spend it later, also on me. But sharing is really unselfish – it’s mostly for others. That’s what Jesus did.

Now please understand, neither Jesus nor I are trying to talk you out of anything. We’re trying to call you to the true happiness of being like Jesus — a sharer. Think about that. Dream about it. Step back and take inventory of what you have received from God and think of how you could share it with others.

Remember the words and actions of the Lord Jesus himself, that it really is more blessed to give than it is to receive.

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