

## Living Generosity

✠ **devouring condemnation (vv.38-40)**

✠ **great gifts unasked (vv.41-44)**

In the Name of Jesus the soul's great Friend, Captain and Commander, fellow redeemed:

This week our nation celebrates Veterans Day again, November 11<sup>th</sup> every year. Maybe you've also had opportunities like one of mine serving jury duty with a vet. It was an honor to buy him lunch and thank him for doing what he did so that I would have the freedom to do what I do. We gather here today without fear of prosecution. We're not hiding in the forests as many Christians must. We recognize the need for our nation to have God's mercy. We also thank our merciful God for His **Living Generosity** and plead today that our guilt will give way to gratitude in God's grace. As "Amazing Grace" John Newton wrote: "Our sins they are many, His mercy is more." God creates **Living Generosity**, not...

✠ **devouring condemnation (vv.38-40)**

Any soldier who reads the Bible will find comrades in arms everywhere. Abraham – famous for the first recorded night attack with his own trained commando force. David – in God's Name destroyed 9' tall Goliath with a sling and a stone, and with him the whole Philistine army. Moses – at the Red Sea where Pharaoh and his superpower army drowned after Israel crossed over on dry ground. Decades of Egyptian history go missing. We sing the Song of Moses at sunrise for every Easter Vigil: "I will sing, I will sing to the God who sets me free! Pharaoh's army and his chariots God cast into the sea!" We recognize Christ as the Captain of our souls because, "**The LORD is a warrior.**" (Exodus 15:3 EHV<sup>1</sup>)

By Jesus' time the Israelites were suffering under the iron boot of Rome. Israelite soldiers were commanded by self-righteous churchmen. As God's Son, establishing God's kingdom of grace, Jesus is teaching battle tactics for His troops, His disciples. Advanced training is not white, sandy beaches swimming in the surf! No, Jesus warns, "**Beware of the experts in the law who like to walk around in long robes and receive greetings in the marketplaces. They love the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and offer long prayers to look good. These men will receive greater condemnation.**" Any power opposing God will lose in the end.

These **experts in the law** were like political generals sitting behind a desk, advancing their own careers. They despised the soldiers and visa versa. Combat vets versus think-tank policy wonks. Much like tradesman who tend to consider others inferior. Or men and women discounting each other's thoughts and feelings, disregarding God's special creation of both. Self-righteousness is everywhere.

"During the fall of Cambodia the Communists used a simple but very effective way of controlling their prisoners as they forced them to walk through the jungle. Using a long needle they would thread something like fish line through the palms of each of their captives. If a prisoner lagged behind or tried escaping, the pain would be excruciating for all. When people think of being under sin's bondage they often think of the 'big and dirty' sins like murder, adultery, addictions. They picture sin's bonds as heavy duty chains. But the devil is smart. He often controls people like those Communists in Cambodia controlled their captives – with slender threads of pride, bitterness, and the like. One of his most common 'threads' is self righteousness. That was the thread the devil used to bind the Pharisees of Jesus' day."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Cares, "The Captivity of Sin." Blog posts about Truth in Love to Mormons. <http://hishealingnow.wordpress.com/>

Our Captain and Commander Christ provides a new uniform for His troops. He trades the torn, soiled rags of our righteousness for His clean and new. The Holy Spirit pictures the armies of heaven coming out of the great tribulation in white robes. ***“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”*** (Revelation 7:13-17) The best humans are like a blind child trying to sew a dress uniform for his dad out of rags. Our dear heavenly Father welcomes us home as fully forgiven sons and daughters to wear ***“the best robe”*** (Luke 15:22), God’s righteousness in Christ. This uniform is a free gift of God’s grace (Revelation 6:11), received by faith. God gives **Living Generosity** like...

### † **great gifts unasked (vv.41-44)**

If we could sit and observe with Jesus in the temple near the treasury, what would we see? Lots of rich people throwing in big gifts, some with a big smile hoping to be seen, others scowling to give anything at all from their precious portfolio. Giving to get, giving out of guilt, giving from behind a self-righteous mask – none of this is pleasing to God. So we’ve often told guests to leave their wallet at home.

Many passages in the Bible speak of God’s tender, loving care for widows and His expectation that God’s people stand up for them. In fact, the first Church Council or Board for Lay Ministry members were elected to make sure their widowed sisters received Christian care. (Acts 6) Being poor is not a curse in God’s view, because by faith you have God as your greatest possession through His Son Jesus Christ. Everything is yours. God’s big guns of grace are aimed to bless you 24/7. “To the poor Jesus preaches the Gospel, to those who feel the depth and hopelessness of their spiritual poverty; with Christ they will find the true riches that last throughout eternity.”<sup>3</sup> What good is all the bluster of a brave soldier if you’re all out of ammo? God gives us all we need in His kindness and mercy. **Great gifts come unasked.**

Jesus says, ***“This poor widow put more into the offering box than all the others. For they all gave out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all that she had to live on.”*** The miracle is that no one asked her. She did this entirely on her own. God’s Word even tells us to use God’s gift of money to take care of our family, pay our taxes, and yes, even enjoy recreation. She had none of that, but gave all she had to God instead. What amazing thankfulness – **great gifts unasked.**

These **great gifts** seem so small. What did the Roman soldiers think as they led Jesus out to crucify Him? Jesus said, ***“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”*** Could they learn to trust Jesus as He calmly gave up His spirit to His heavenly Father? Victory! He said, ***“It is finished.”*** ***When the centurion and those who were guarding Jesus with him saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, “Truly this was the Son of God.”*** (Matthew 27:54)

Fast forward to Nazi Germany as a Rev. Martin Niemöller is led through tunnels under city streets from the prison to the courtroom where Hitler’s henchmen will doubtless condemn him for standing up to der Führer. Pastor Niemöller seems to hear a breeze, then realizes the soldier escorting him is whispering in his ear: ***“The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”*** (Proverbs 18:10 NIV) That soldier’s witness of God’s Word strengthened Pastor Niemöller through the trial and the years of imprisonment, and peace long after the war. Niemöller passed from grace to glory in 1984.

**Great gifts unasked** came to our brother Don Childs, Sr. as he told the story from the Battle of Chosin Reservoir in Korea. As a rifleman, Don told how his heavy weapon needed two to carry and fire. In that dreadful winter cold as the communists overran their positions, Don’s rifle jammed. He figured he was dead. But an African American soldier whom Don had befriended, stepped in and saved his life. I don’t know if the man lived or died, but Don never forgot that brave sacrifice that saved his life.

Don’t ever forget God’s sacrifice, Jesus volunteering to step in and save your soul. ***“It is finished.”*** God says so. Be reconciled in God’s eternal **Living Generosity**. Let guilt be gone and gratitude live. God’s peace to you and yours, your heart, your home, your soul – in Christ alone. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Kretzmann, Paul E. *Popular Commentary Of The Bible*. St. Louis, Missouri: CPH, 1924. NT II, p. 285.  
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