

John 10:27-30

Introduction

You may have seen some of the Children in Need events this week – there's always plenty going this time of the year. The thing that particularly caught my eye was Vernon Kay, the Radio 2 presenter running from Leicester to Bolton in four days, raising over £4 million in the process. It's lovely to see all the generosity, both from the people donating the money and from the celebrities putting themselves through so much to raise it. We love to see people being generous around us

We know that generosity is wonderful thing; it's good for us to be generous. But as always, our behaviour and actions need to be rooted in who God is and what he's done for us. Our passages today point us to this and show us how immense God's generosity to us is.

Our passage today comes in the wider context of John chapter 10, which is mainly focussed on establishing Jesus' identity. The Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus' day, were questioning him, challenging him that he couldn't possibly be the Messiah, God's promised King. Because they either didn't understand or didn't like what Jesus was teaching, they sought to discredit him, claim that he was leading people astray and making false claims about himself.

Jesus' response was to point them towards all the evidence that he is in fact the son of God, and to go on to teach about who he is, how he relates to God the Father, and what he is like.

That's where we join the action in our passage today – Jesus is showing what he is like, and demonstrating the generosity that is inherent to his character. He's showing how self-giving he is, and how generous he is to his people.

Our first point today is: Jesus gives eternal life.

Jesus gives eternal life

Let's read verse 27-30 again: **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.**

Here, Jesus is reusing the illustration of his being the Good Shepherd, who cares for his sheep and provides everything they could possibly need. But what he's offering goes far beyond that of a shepherd's provision! I'm no agricultural expert, but I expect a sheep's needs are fairly basic; they need food, water, shelter and protection. A decent shepherd

would provide all of these, meeting the sheep's basic needs. But what Jesus says here goes far beyond that of providing necessities!

'I give them eternal life and they will never perish...'

Do you see what's on offer here? Jesus is promising eternal life, perfect and never-ending life! And he's promising it to his sheep – here he means us, those that follow him.

Sheep - it's not a flattering picture, is it?! If we were choosing something to be compared to, I imagine we'd probably not choose sheep! We'd go for something more intelligent and less smelly.

But Jesus chooses this picture of sheep. It's not flattering, but it is accurate. Sheep aren't known for making wise decisions – they'll panic and run when scared. They'll wander off and get into trouble when they're distracted. They stand around not doing much unless they're steered. Whilst we'd love to think we're above that kind of thing, it does seem familiar – there are elements of that in all of us.

But that's what makes Jesus' promise here so amazing – we, Jesus' people, those who trust in him, are promised this eternal life that we can never lose and that can never be taken from us! We're the sheep here, but our shepherd is incredibly generous, offering us far more than we could imagine, let alone deserve.

He gives us a certain and secure future – in verse 28 he promises that no one can snatch us from his hand, and in verse 29 he says that we are secure in God the Father's hand. If we are in Jesus, if we are his people, or his sheep, absolutely nothing can separate us from him.

Lots of us will have watched the coronation earlier this year – it was quite a spectacle! The King was there on the throne, with the crown and the orb and the sceptre and all the other amazing jewels and things.

Now imagine that someone tried to steal the crown jewels from the middle of the ceremony. It's not going to happen, is it? Westminster Abbey and the surrounding area was awash with security; police, soldiers and the security services were everywhere, not to mention the hundreds of guests and millions of people watching at all times. It's safe to say that the crown jewels were pretty secure, because they were protected by full resources of the British state.

But the level of security we have in Jesus is far higher than that of the crown jewels. They were definitely protected by the police and military – our eternal life is protected by God himself. Absolutely nothing can take us away from him or get between us and him!

If life feels overwhelming, or we're struggling, or it feels like our relationship with God is hard work, this truth still stands – if we're in Jesus, one of his flock, we are utterly secure. Nothing and no one can affect that at all!

There are so many times when we can find ourselves doubting this. When life is busy and we feel that God is only a small part of our lives. When we're struggling with relationships or bills or family and it seems all-consuming. When we or those we love experience serious health problems. When we see the persistence of sin in our lives and don't seem to make progress against it. We can feel insecure, distant from God, and that our grip on him is weak.

But Jesus says, **'No one will snatch them from my hand'**. Because of Jesus, because he holds us, we're not going anywhere. However uncertain life may feel, our long-term future is secure and utterly guaranteed.

So Jesus demonstrates his generosity, giving a wonderful and undeserved gift to those who don't deserve it. But his generosity doesn't end there! Whilst the offer of eternal life, utterly secure with him is incredible, when we look into what it cost, we see a whole new depth to God's generosity.

Our second point is: God gives his son.

God gives his son

We're dotting around the book of John today, so let's read chapter 3v16.

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.

It's a verse that'll be familiar to most of us, and a favourite of many. It's a summary of the whole gospel in one verse! It builds on God's generous and giving nature that was shown in chapter 10 and adds a whole new dimension to it!

God offering us eternal life is amazing in itself, but when we look at the cost, we glimpse something of the depths of his generosity.

Our salvation, our eternal future with Jesus costs, and the price is high. But it's a cost that God is willing to pay.

Due to our sin, our state of living in opposition to God, choosing our own path rather than his, we are by nature God's enemies. It's this attitude that separates us from him, and overflows into the way we think and act and relate to each other.

It's not something that God can overlook or sweep under the carpet and say it doesn't matter. It does matter. If we are to have this secure future with God, something big needs to happen. Jesus took this punishment on himself, dying in our place to achieve our forgiveness. That is incredible generosity

God took the punishment on himself purely out of his love for us – he didn't owe us anything. He doesn't need anything from us that compels him to die for us. He did it

because he loves us and wants the best for us and was prepared to give up everything he had for us.

God's generosity is measured in the cost he is prepared to take on himself for us. A gift that costs the giver nothing is great – it's still lovely to receive! But a gift that comes at great cost to the giver is truly generous.

Let's imagine for a moment that you're in need of money, there's a large debt that needs to be paid that you simply can't afford. Fortunately, you've got relatives willing to help.

You phone your rich uncle and ask if he can help out. He says, 'yep, great, no problems. Give me the details and I'll transfer it over from my account in the Cayman Islands'

But maybe a parent offers to help as well – you get a call from them and they say 'I'd love to help! I've done the sums – if I delay retirement for 3 years, remortgage the house and take on some extra shifts at work, I reckon can make it work'.

Both help you out, both give what's needed, and either way you'd be incredibly grateful, but one offer is far more generous, because it comes at a much greater cost to the giver.

This is an imperfect illustration of God's generosity to us, but finding a perfect picture of how much God gives to us is impossible. His goodness to us, giving his son for us, his natural enemies, is beyond our comprehension. It's just so big that even the wisest people with lifetimes of study cannot claim to have fully understood it.

It's so huge that we can't totally comprehend it, and sometimes we can mentally skip past this, to take God's love as read and carry on with our lives, kind of knowing it's there, but not particularly dwelling on it.

But this is fundamental – God's love for us and generosity to us is at the heart of everything – we should not underestimate how much God cares for us. As Christians, this knowledge of God's love and generosity and how it's such a central part of his character should spur us on to action.

That's our third point: our response to generosity

Our response to generosity

So we've seen how amazingly generous God is to us, and how generosity is rooted in his character and flows out of his love.

The question is, then, how should we respond? When we've understood God's love and experienced his grace, what should our lives look like?

Well unfortunately, a full answer to that would take far more time than we have today! But I'm going to focus on our being generous in response to his generosity, on giving because he gave.

Well, it can be both fun and occasionally challenging when looking at how your children take after you. Aside from the physical family resemblance, you can often pick out ways in which they resemble you, or maybe you see it in other people's families. I'm told that I stand like my dad does, we have a similar posture. You can pick up the figures of speech, the accent, the little habits. In all these, you can see a little something of what they've picked up from their families.

How kids act can to some extent reveal what they've learned from their parents. And like that, how we act should reveal what we've learned from our father God. If our father is loving, then we should be loving. If our father is giving, then we should be giving. It'd be strange if we'd fully understood how much God has given to us and refused to give to others. It'd be incongruous to accept God giving up his only son for us and refuse to give up our time, comfort, energy and money for him.

So we should be loving and generous, rooted in our understanding of God's character, giving of ourselves even though there's a cost involved. This is hard, no doubt about it. When you've had a hard days' work and a busy week, it can be tough to pick up the phone and get in touch with the friend who's struggling to help support them. Sometimes getting to church early on a rainy Sunday to make the tea is the last thing you want to do. But we should look to God, look to what he's done for us, and that can spur us on to serve him in response to his generosity.

To be clear, this isn't about repaying God – the debt we owe him is far too great to ever be repaid. God isn't interested in a transactional relationship, if he does this then I must do this in return. It's about a loving, family relationship in which we increasingly show the family resemblance – God does this, and because we love him we want to copy what he does.

God's generosity to us should spark a gratitude in us that flows out as generosity to others. This applies in all areas of life, in our finances, our energy, our possessions, our time – whatever we have, we should be generous with it.

God even provides us with the means to be generous! He created us, the world and everything in it. There's nothing in our lives that he hasn't first given to us – our strength, health, energy, money – all of it has been gifted to us by him. So whilst it's ours, it is also in a sense God's. It's easy to look at our bank statement and think that it's our money, and then to think 'what can I give to God'. But possibly a more helpful mindset would be to look at the account and pray 'God, this is all yours. Please show me how to spend your money'. Realistically, a good chunk of our spending will be on keeping ourselves housed, clothed,

and fed, but remembering that he is the source of everything we have can help to reset our minds on his priorities, and make giving less of an afterthought.

And the fact that God provides for us, and that he holds us completely secure in his hand means that we needn't worry. We can be generous without worrying about the future. God sustains us, and our long term future is utterly secure in him!

Our giving is a key part of Christian life, and is one of the many areas in which we can respond to God's goodness to us. As it's the giving review this week I've mostly focussed on our financial giving as an application, but it is only a part of our response.

Let's flick back to chapter 10v27.

'I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.'

Our lives, our existence in Jesus, is endless – due to his death and resurrection we can confidently look forward to an eternity with him. Our lives now are a small part of a much bigger picture – our whole lives are an opportunity to respond to God's amazing goodness to us.

That perspective can be freeing – we don't necessarily need to get the best out of this life as if that's all there is. The best is yet to come, so let's take the opportunities we're given to respond to God's incredible goodness to us.

Let's pray.