Weekly Reflection: Giving – Kingdom Identity Precedes Kingdom Activity

Giving

I want to start by answering one of the biggest most perplexing questions. Which came first the chicken or the egg? The answer is chickens came first (see Genesis 1:24-25). Eggs don't produce chickens, chickens produce eggs. You put two eggs in a chicken pen and come back a year later all you're going to find is two rotten eggs and no chickens. My point is that the order really matters. First chicken then eggs.

We work, or act, or give, out of our identity; not work, or act, or give, to get an identity. Or we could say it like this, you do work, or act, or give out of your identity, period. Who you think you are, your identity, is how you will work, act, and give.

So, what's this got to do with giving? God honoring and glorifying giving is the egg. If you or I are going to lay that egg, we first need to know we are a chicken. The order matters. It's really hard and burdensome to try and lay a chicken egg when you're not a chicken. We will work, act, and give like who we think we are.

When I said we would be talking about giving, I'm guessing that some of us started thinking, how much, is it ten percent, is the tithe still relevant, is it before or after taxes? But those types of questions are questions about the egg. Not necessarily bad questions but wrong order, chicken comes first. I think we will get to those egg questions in a few weeks but first I want to focus on the reality that if you want to lay a chicken egg you got to know you're a chicken.

Matthew 5:13-16

I want to propose that these metaphors point us at the identity of the world we live in, the community that we live in. Second, these metaphors define the identity of born-again believers, who we are as citizens in the Kingdom of God. (Chickens) And then thirdly, these metaphors define our calling, purpose, and activity as participants in the work of the Kingdom. (Lay eggs and why)

The Identity of the World

These metaphors really do help us understand the identity of the community we live in. Why do you use salt? Your food is bland, so you put salt on it. You would never add more salt to a perfectly cooked and perfectly seasoned steak. It doesn't need more flavor. Jesus wouldn't send salt into the world if the world didn't need salt. Salt was primarily used to preserve, to keep things from rotting. Why would Jesus say the world needs salt? Because it's morally decaying, it's corrupt. It needs to be preserved.

Now, why would the world need light? We need light when it's dark. So, Jesus is implying that the world is in darkness (evil, disobedient, blind, death). "***Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."" (John 8:12)*** Jesus is stating that anyone who is not following Him is living in darkness.

The identity of the world we are living in is darkness, blind, can't see truth; and this is causing moral and spiritual decay and death.

The Identity of born-again believers.

"You are the salt and you are the light of the world." Jesus is saying our identity is salt and light, that's who we are. Jesus doesn't say do good works so you can become like salt and become like light. He says you are. He's pointing to something amazing that has happened to all who are followers of Jesus.

We read already in John 8 that Jesus is the Light of the World. So why would Jesus say to believers, "You are the light of the world?" Because He has lit us up. If you follow Jesus, you've been lit. That's your identity. ***"for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8 ESV)*** Notice the order, you are light (identity), walk as children of light (activity).

"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4 ESV) The disciples got lit up at Pentacost, the day the church was born, tongues as of fire rested on them. What happened to them? They were filled with the Holy Spirit, the very spirit of Jesus, they took on the very identity of Jesus. If you are a born-again disciple of Jesus, you have been lit by the risen Jesus. Do you believe that? Do you believe that the Spirit and glory of the character of Christ now lives inside of you? You've been lit. Do you really know that you are a Holy Spirit filled disciple of Jesus? If you do, then you will begin to act like it. Do you believe that you are the light of the world?

When you are the light of the world, and you know it and believe it, you have a purpose. You have something to do, you have work, or activity, or giving, that comes out of your true identity.

<u>Kingdom Identity precedes Kingdom Activity</u>

The chicken precedes the egg. If you're ever going to live the way you've been called to live, you must start by affirming who you are. And you see that our identity precedes the call or activity in this passage. You are light, so let your light shine by doing good works. If you're ever going to accept the call of Christ to live His life, you have to first receive the truth of what Christ is saying about you. Kingdom activity must always be preceded by Kingdom identity.

<u>A Description of our calling, purpose, and activity as participants in the work of the Kingdom of God.</u>

"***You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)*** Now verse 15 starts by saying it doesn't make any sense to light a lamp and cover it up. You light a lamp because light is needed, and you put that lamp in a place where it shines. I mean, that just makes sense. It does seem that Jesus may be implying that you could be a Christian, you could be light, but living in such a way that you're not shining in the world. You're living under a basket. And He's saying that's not who you are, that's not why I lit you up. I lit you up to shine in the dark world, not to hide under a basket. Lights shine, that's what they do. Our calling, our purpose, our activity is to shine.

<u>This passage is about evangelism.</u>

Now, maybe you're asking, "How is this evangelism? Isn't that just a call to be nice, do good works?" Look at the words here; it says, "***Let your light shine before others so that ...*** [that's a purpose clause] ... ***they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.***" If somebody in the watching world, is brought to the place where they actually recognize God's existence and give God glory, a fundamental transformation has taken place in that person's heart, because the unbelieving person isn't out there giving glory to God.

Here's the purpose of our being lights and shining through our good works: that by our shining and good works (Christ-like living), people are exposed to actions and lifestyles that are not normal or instinctive for them. They wonder at the mercy that they've received. Why would this person care for me? They wonder at the love. Why would this guy love me this way? They wonder at the patience; they wonder at the forgiveness; they wonder at the sacrificial giving, and that wonder is the Spirit of God, beginning to work in their hearts, they've met something they can't explain. And that testimony of a life that's different because it has been lit by Jesus confronts the life of this person and gives wonderful opportunities for pointing to the glory of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, this passage is not a call to be nice. This is an evangelistic passage. That people would see your good works and not just say, "This is a nice guy; this is a nice woman," but say, "Oh, perhaps there is a God, and if this is the result of His work, I want to know this God."

You are the light of the world; you've been lit; now go shine. Shine before that neighbor; shine before that boss and fellow workers; shine in the public places in your community; shine in your local church. And perhaps by those works of mercy and love and sacrificial giving, you would be used of God to help someone see Jesus and glorify God. Perhaps through you, one person would be caused to give glory to the Father who is in heaven. And even if that only happens once, your life has been worth it because you've lived for the Kingdom of God.

I think an argument could be made that God honoring giving is all about evangelism, all about shining as the light of the world so that people will see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. But remember before you can shine like the light of the world you have to first be lit by THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, and you have to truly know and believe that’s who you are and what you’ve been called to do. Kingdom identity precedes kingdom activity.