

Reflection: HEY BIG SPENDER! By Bruce D. Prewer

I found this marvelous sermon that I really wanted to share with you. It speaks of God's abundant love and lifts up that fantastic song Big Spender made famous by Shirley Bassey, a bi racial woman born into poverty in Wales who overcame great odds to pursue her career.

*Love your enemies and do good, and lend without expecting any return. Your reward will be great **for you will be children of the Most-High.** For God is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap.

Let's be a bit ridiculous and link those words of Jesus with one of the most renowned songs sung by Shirley Bassey:

*"So let me get right to the point,
I don't pop my cork for every guy I see.
Hey, big spender, spend....
A little time with...me...me...me!"*

When Shirley Bassey, in the turbulent 1960's, made these lyrics famous, I doubt whether she thought they would turn up in church. Well, they have. The words 'big spender' have become a part of common speech; and today I would like to, sort of, baptise them?

By 'big spender' we mean a person who has style and wealth to share; who spends as if money grows on trees; who does not know when to stop. A big spender is profligate.

I put this to you: God is the ultimate Big Spender. The God of Jesus is the most stylish of all the "real big spenders." In fact, the God of Jesus makes all other big spenders, even the most generous among them, look just pale and distorted reflections. Most of the pale ones have ulterior motives. Not our God. God showers abundance upon us just for our own happiness.

I don't
pop my cork for every god I see.

But what I find in Christ Jesus, pops my cork bigtime.
*The minute Christ walked into my life
I could see he was a god of distinction,
A real big spender.*

If you think you know the God of Jesus, yet have not realised how freely and generously this Most High One showers upon you unconditional gifts, without measure, then you have not met the Christ of the Gospels. God is pure altruism, white-hot generosity, looking for no reward except the enrichment of each person.

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OUR GODLINESS

Many good people aspire for godliness. What is godliness?

Is it keeping yourself apart from the world, free from any possible contamination?

Is it being ready for every occasion with a quote, chapter and verse from the Bible?

Is exhibited in those who refuse to own a TV or read a newspaper?

Is it found in those who can fluently pray extempore in any situation?

Is it the capacity to stay awake in prayer meetings that run from dusk to dawn?

Is it abstaining from sex, except for procreation, even in marriage?

Is it having a perfect attendance record at church, come wind or high water?

Is it the virtue of those who meticulously tithe from every skerrick of their income?

What is godliness? You could be all of the list I have just given you, yet sadly, you might still have missed out on godliness.

What is true godliness?

Jesus leaves us in no doubt. It is being generous in motive, thought, word and deed; like the Most-High God whom he called “Abba.” Godliness is following this “big spender” God. Therefore, be sup-generous and...

you will be children of the Most-High. For God is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish.

A WOMAN AT THE MARKET?

Do you like the skimpy sketch in few words that Jesus goes on to draw? It hints of a woman at the market, buying grain for her family. She gets a surprise when the grain merchant goes far beyond what is expected from a fair deal. He first does the just thing and fills his measuring jar. Then this extraordinary fellow pushes the contents down hard, and adds more grain. Even that is not enough. He shakes the jar to make yet more room for additional grain. This poor woman does not have a bag in which to carry this abundance. She holds out her apron. Into this is poured much more grain than she ever expected or deserved.

Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap.

This grain merchant is a first century version of “big spender.” He does not stick to the strict letter of a bargain, but goes overboard with generosity.

What Jesus is on about is not just about how we use our monetary wealth. It is a whole lifestyle. It is an generous attitude than wells up from the roots of our being. It is the truly generous spirit.

I find myself wanting to repeat the words of Jesus , over and over again to myself and to you.

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Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap.

Please God, is us that generous spirit!

That is the God who comes to seek and save the bewildered and the lost tribes of earthlings. It is the only God with whom you need to have dealings. More than that, it is the only God there is in heaven and on earth.

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AN ITALIAN PAINTING

Recently I returned to visit the National Gallery, in the elegant, tree-lined, St Kilda Road. Melbourne. I had not been back since the major renovations, and the moving of the section of Australian art to the new Federation Square.

I was delighted to see how there was now space for many European paintings formerly kept in the gallery’s vaults. I came up to a painting by the Italian, Giambatista Pittoni (1687-1767). The subject was the “Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes.” Struck by work of art I had not seen before, I sat down on one of those central benches to revel in it.

Let me tell you about the painting. In general, the scene is as you would expect from such a painting of that period. There is the big crowd, distant and close ups of the colourful common folk. Some disciples carry around large baskets of food.

Yet it was neither the people in the crowd nor the disciples, nor even Jesus, who had excited me. It was a dog. In a central place. What is more, it looked like a tattered, stray dog.

This poor mongrel was having the time of its life. A basket of food had been left aside on the ground. The dog was into it. Literally into it. Not just his head and mouth but also a front foot. That poor dog was having the time of his life. To make my excitement complete, not a single person was worried about this dog getting at the food. The loaves and fishes were so plentiful that if a stray dog wanted some, good for him!

What a wonderful parable in paint! Jesus and his God do not go in for half measures. They do not even stop at the point of what is a just and fair measure. This God is prodigal in giving gifts. The ultimate big spender.



The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes by Giambattista Pittoni, 1725.

Who is that poor, stray dog? When I look at the painting it is me. If you won't take offence (for that matter, even if some of you do take offence!), I would like to include you; include you in the name of the true God; "God of God light of light."

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I hasten add words Jesus spoke after his story about a good Samaritan: *“Now you go and do likewise.”*

Godliness? If we give less than what is just, we are a long distance off. If we deal justly in all things, we might be one third of the way there. But it is in the other two thirds of generous abundance, grace upon grace, that we begin to share the sheer wonder and delight that is of God.

And our text for this day:

Love your enemies and do good, and lend without expecting any return. Your reward will be great for you will be children of the Most High. For God is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap.

Wow! What a life this is!