

## **Excell In Generosity**

This morning we come to what I think is a very appropriate topic for the day. - money.

If you are like most Americans, this is something that's a hot topic. Many of us are watching money we thought we had become money we wish we had. We are reading and hearing about astronomical monetary figures - figures unprecedented in our life-times. Hundreds of billions of dollars - trillions of dollars to the rescue.

Billions - trillions. I can't even figure out how much that is.

Then we wonder - where is this money coming from. Printing? Borrowing? Maybe there really are trees that grow money and we just never knew about them.

All I know is that I don't have one.

The next two chapters in 2 Corinthians deal with money - but really they deal with much more than that. They deal with a Christian response to the grace that God has given. These chapters are about responding to God and His cause in real and tangible ways.

Paul has been pretty hard on the Corinthians thus far. He's been pleading his case about who he is as an apostle. He has been laying out his defense and many times has suggested that the Corinthians follow him as he follows Christ.

But now, Paul takes the focus off of himself and he puts it on another group of people - the churches in Macedonia.

IN order for us to understand where Paul is coming from, we need to look at 1 Cor 16. 1Co 16:1 ¶ Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

There was a collection being taken for the saints in Jerusalem. For some reason - a reason we do not know, the church in Jerusalem needed money. The saints were living in poverty. Why? It could have been due to a famine that was prophesied by Agabus in Acts 11. It could be because their Roman oppressors kept them poor and in need. It could be because the government took out too many loans or printed too much money.

We don't know why, but back during Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he told them that a collection was being taken from the churches in Galatia, in Macedonia and in Corinth.

Now in second Corinthians 8, Paul gets around to reminding the church about the collection.

What we are going to find today is that giving is not about a formula - it's about a response to what God has done in our lives. Giving is not about wealth or philanthropy - it's an expression of the Joy of serving the Lord.

First of all, Paul sites the example of the Macedonian church.

Vs1 ¶ And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

What do we know from these verses?

Things were not good in Macedonia.

Out of their severe trial. These were not wealthy people. They were not rolling in dough. They did not have a lot of luxuries. They were not sitting on an economic bubble. Things were tough. They could have been in a recession. They were in extreme poverty. It says Severe. They could have lost all their retirement.

They were rich in generosity

They did not only give what they were able to give, they gave beyond what they were able to give. They were not coerced into giving, but they gave on their own. In fact, they pleaded for the opportunity to give in this way.

They didn't look at their bottom line and say "how much can I afford to give". They didn't wait for someone to make them feel guilty or prod them in their giving. It was a joy expression for them to give as much as they possibly could,

Now I want you to know that likely the Macedonians had never met the saints in Jerusalem. They didn't know their exact situation. They didn't know if they were authentic and really in need or whether they were playing the system. And yet, these Macedonian churches gave sacrificially. It's hard for me to even imagine. They were already in severe poverty, yet they gave beyond their ability.

Now how do people get to that point in their lives? How do Christians, and even churches get to the point of true generosity?

Lessons

## **GIVE YOURSELF TO GOD**

VS 5

5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

They gave themselves!

Proper stewardship ALWAYS begins with God getting YOU and as you learn to love Him with all your HEART and SOUL and MIND and STRENGTH...you find that putting your finances where your heart is comes quite naturally. (Jesus said..."For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21)

Notice that the first thing the Macedonians did was to give themselves to the Lord. They didn't first give themselves to Paul or any of the other apostles. They didn't give themselves to a denomination or to a television ministry. They didn't give themselves first to their wealth or their possessions or their families. They didn't give themselves to their friends or their own happiness or own desires.

They gave themselves to the Lord.

Charles Spurgeon was saved on January 6, 1850, and on February 1 he wrote the following prayer of consecration: O great and unsearchable God, who knowest my heart, and triest all my ways; with a humble dependence upon the support of Thy Holy Spirit, I yield up myself to Thee; as Thy own reasonable sacrifice, I return to Thee Thine own. I would be for ever, unreservedly, perpetually Thine; whilst I am on earth, I would serve Thee; and may I enjoy Thee and praise Thee for ever! Amen.

Charles Spurgeon, Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers, W. Wiersbe, p. 235.

We don't know about really giving ourselves to the Lord today. Not like Charles Spurgeon. It seems that other things get in the way.

Life gets busy. We have job obligations and family obligations and sports obligations. We forget that we are not our own. We are bought with a price.

There are two passages in the New Testament where Paul asserts his role as a servant of God.

Ro 1:1 ¶ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

Tit 1:1 ¶ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—

the word servant is worth noting. It is the word, bond slave or bond servant. A bond servant was one who gave up all his rights and gave himself to another's will. There was a fastening together like with chains.

It's like supergluing one's self to the Lord. Today we like to use painters tape. IT sticks when we want it to and it comes off when we want it to.

When Jesus called disciples, he was pretty clear that he wanted their whole life and dedication to be his.

Lu 9:23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself

Lu 14:33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Are we dedicated to the Lord? Are we consecrated to him. Are we willing with all our heart to say - whatever your want Lord?

Generous people first give themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord.

I fail or succeed in my stewardship of life in proportion to how convinced I am that my life belongs to God.

-Pearl Bartel

## **GIVING IS PART OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY**

VS 7 ¶ But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us— see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

What makes a mature Christian? Is it Bible knowledge? Is it witnessing? Is it knowledge of doctrine?...faith ... love?

Well, of course there are a lot of things that make for a mature believer.

Have you ever thought about giving?

WE talk a lot about growth.

Said it before. I don't think Christians can stay the same. We cannot LIVE plateaued. If you are not growing then you are falling backwards. If you are not excelling in your Christian faith, life, knowledge. Then you are falling backwards.

So what are we supposed to excel in?

Paul says this

“Everything”

All the Christian disciplines.

Faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, love

Now we can get a handle on those. But what about the next part.

Also excel in the grace of giving.

How many like to eat at the Golden Coral? You know what that is? It's a smorgasboard. When I was 30 I liked those places. I just can't eat as much as I used to. But we like those places because we can pick and choose what we want to eat. Not only can we graze, but we can decide. If we want all desserts, that's what we can have. If we want salads - we can just keep going back for salads.

Too many of us treat the Christian life and God's Word as a smorgasboard. Not only what do I want to choose today - but what do I want to avoid today.

I'll take a little growth in faith and in love and in knowledge - don't ask me to change the way I talk. And definitely don't ask me to take a look at my generosity.

How many of us think about that?

We think the benchmark for a Christian is 10%. If we give our tithe, then we have proved our selves to be followers of Christ. But from this verse do you think that's the New Testament model?

NT indicates we are to be excelling in **every way - in everything** in our Christian growth and that mean generosity as well. So if we've have given 10% for the last 20 years? Yes we are tithing but are we growing? Is that what Paul has in mind?

We need to re-evaluate our model for Christian maturity. If it doesn't include generosity, then we only have half the truth. We need a new model.

## **LET YOUR EXAMPLE BE CHRIST**

VS 8 - 9

8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

9 For 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.

The Corinthians are not being commanded to give, but they are being tested. Tested to see whether grace permeates every area of their life.

What is grace? Grace is unmerited favor. We get something that we don't deserve. We do not deserve salvation. We sinned. WE sinned against God. We missed God's standard. Yet God sent Jesus to die instead of us. So now, instead of death, we have eternal life - that's grace.

I'm not sure we understand the fullness of that act of love. I'm not sure we comprehend exactly what was done for us by Jesus Christ.

Paul says we know the grace of our Lord.

He was rich - he had it all. His home was paradise. He was rich beyond measure.

Yet he gave it up and became poor.

He became a citizen of the world and he subjected himself to its struggles.

He became a carpenter - not a rich man. Jesus himself said He did not even have a place to lay his head. He took on insults that were not His to take on. He bore whipping marks that were not his to bear. He was nailed to a cross - which should have been our cross. He died so that we would not have to.

And Paul said he did all this so that we who were poor might become rich.

So Jesus gave all he had to benefit us in a way that we could never benefit ourselves. His grace made a way where we could have never made a way.

Jesus, then becomes our example of generosity. If he gave so much, what should our response be?

What is our response to that grace?

Grace should cause us to look for ways to extend grace to others - even in the area of generosity.

## OBEY GOD'S VOICE WITHIN

vs 10 - 15

10 And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.

11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

13 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.

14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,

15 as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

Paul reminds them.

You Corinthians were the first to commit to give and also to have the desire to do so. Now finish what you started.

I think verse 11 is key.

Our generosity should match two things -

- 1 - the willingness to do it
- 2 - the means we have

first the willingness

Our willingness must come from the prompting of the Lord. If God encourages us, then we need to get our will lined up with His.

Next week we re going to talk more about that - giving is not something we do by coercion or under compulsion. We do it in response to God and a response to his Word and His grace.

Second is - the amount is tied to our means

basically, Paul promotes equal sacrifice, not equal gifts.

Some in the Corinthian church could give a lot. Others could give a little.

But the Question is - are the ones giving a little just as generous as the ones giving a lot? And are the ones giving a lot just as generous as the ones giving a little.

Jesus stood by and watch the widow put in two mites. Two little coins and said she has given more than everyone else.

What! Some guy just dropped in a thousand dollar bill and you are saying her two cents is worth more? It is if it represented more of her living income. If she lives on 50cents a week and that guy lives on 10 grand a week, then she gave more. She sacrificed more. She was more generous.

When it comes to generosity we need to follow God's prompting and direction.

The important thing is to find out what God wants you to give and then give it.

Most of us are way too calculated.

Well, when I look at my budget, I can afford to give this.

Generosity is not about what I can afford - its' about how I can seek God's amount and then be obedient to give it - even if it doesn't look right on my balance sheet.

Walter Gingerich - been quoting

Ps 50:10 for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.

In this economic time, it's important to remember that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. And he owns the hills and he owns the gold and silver in the hills. And we are joint heirs with Jesus, so our Father is not going to be impacted by an economic collapse. God's resources do not run out. And his resources for you and I do not run out.

The Macedonians were in deep poverty yet they were generous. How is that possible? They knew that if they gave, God was able to give back to them. He would meet their needs as they met the needs of others.

CHURCHES