

2 Corinthians 9:1-15 – Sowing Generously

Good morning. It's good to be with you all again. And it's a privilege to share God's Word with you.

Today we're continuing the second part in our mini-series called Grace, Joy, and Stewardship, as we think about money, and generosity. Michael preached on 2 Corinthians chapter 8 last week, and today we're looking at chapter 9.

Whenever we talk about money in the church, it's sometimes an awkward or sensitive issue.

But as Christians, money and finances are an area we are called to be faithful in. It's also a way through which we can honor and glorify God.

And even Jesus himself, never shied away from addressing this topic.

And therefore, as his followers, it ought to be something that we are concerned about and talk about honestly as a church.

Our motivation for this series really isn't to guilt anyone, or to put some sort of religious pressure on you. But our hope is really that this is an encouragement and call to greater faithfulness with what God has entrusted to us, for his glory.

Pray

Generosity is a funny thing because many of us probably have mixed feelings about it.

I think most people genuinely feel good when they give something to someone else who really needs it. And there's this feeling of deep fulfillment when what was excess for you, has become vitally important, and maybe even a means of survival for somebody else. And I think even the most reluctant among us feel that innate satisfaction of helping others.

But here's where that mixed feeling comes in. In that moment when I'm enjoying giving away, I'm at the same time counting the opportunity cost of what that giving means. There are times, maybe when we're writing out our offering checks, or looking at our bank statements. We look at that amount we give, and we can't help but think of what else that money could have been used for. And everyone has their standards of economics. It might be a family vacation, a payment of a mortgage, a car, a new iPhone, a nice meal.

The word for generosity in the New Testament is an interesting word. You can see it twice in v11, for example. But the word most often translated generosity, is also in other places, translated as single-minded.

It's a very interesting pairing of meanings.

The same word is translated single-minded, and generous.

As we look at today's passage, what Paul seems to unpack, is this single-mindedness in giving. For many of us, who may be double minded about giving. At the same moment, you rejoice in giving, yet you regret giving. What Paul seems to suggest is that divided mind can

change. So that you begin to have one mind. That the joy of giving will eclipse the regret of what else you could've done with that money.

The passage for today is in 2 Corinthians, which is a letter the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, which is in modern day Greece, or Achaia as it was known back then.

The Christian movement started in the city of Jerusalem, and it began to spread. Largely because of the work of the Apostle Paul, so that it went all over the Roman Empire. And one of the places where Paul planted churches, is an area called Macedonia, up in Northern Greece. He planted a few churches there. Berea, Philippi, Thessalonica.

And afterwards, he came down to Achaia, southern Greece, and planted a church in the major city of Corinth. Corinth was, itself, a wealthy, cosmopolitan city, much like New York or London, in comparison to the poor rural towns up north.

And what happened in this particular situation, and you can read more about this in the end of Romans and in 1 Corinthians, is that a severe famine broke out in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a place from which every Christian in that time could trace their spiritual roots. And a call for help came out from the church in Jerusalem. Asking for help from churches around the area for money, so that they can buy food.

One by one the pledges came in.

The first to make that pledge, and the largest pledge came from Corinth.

But time passed, and while everyone else gave their promised gift, nothing came from Corinth. This massive pledge, followed by no money.

And so the Apostle Paul, out of concern writes to them, addressing this problem.

So that's the context for the passage for today.

We'll be taking a look at three things from the passage: **the motivation, the nature, and the result of giving.**

I. So first, the motivation for giving.

Paul begins in chapter 9.

²For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.

Here's the interesting thing about the situation. Paul says to them, last year, you guys were the first to make a pledge (2 Cor 8:11). And in fact, I was so encouraged by it, that I kept telling everyone in Macedonia.

And you know what? It was your enthusiasm that caused many others to give too. And many other churches said, if the Corinthians are going to do that, we are going to do our best too.

But the problem is that after you motivated everybody else, and they all paid, you did not.

Paul goes on v3: **³But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow.**

That word hollow, literally means, in vain. Paul uses the same word in chapter 6, v1, to say, **may the grace of God not be in vain.**

So, in one sense, Paul is talking about giving, but in the other sense, it seems to suggest that this is a much bigger issue.

Which is, Paul is saying, I want you to prove, through your life, that the grace of God is not in vain. I want you to prove that your desire and enthusiasm to give, and your love, is sincere (2 Cor 8:8), and not just empty words, or hollow promises. Prove that you have experienced the grace of God, and are aware of your life under the gospel.

Zooming out a little, there's a very curious thing that is happening in this whole situation. And it's that while these wealthy, cosmopolitan Corinthians are reluctant to give. It's the poor Macedonians, that gave generously. Our passage last week said:

²Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

When the Macedonians gave, Paul says, they gave as much as they were able, entirely on their own, and it says, even beyond their ability.

And here's what I find strange. It says they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.

Imagine the situation.

The call goes out to give. And the Macedonians are so encouraged by the Corinthians that they say we want to give too. And they say the amount and Paul goes, guys, are you sure?

The church in Jerusalem are just a little worse off than you. Those guys are starving to death, but you're almost starving to death.

But the Macedonians are begging Paul, saying please take our money, and bring it to Jerusalem. We know it's not a lot compared to Corinth, but we want to help.

What is going on here? Why are they begging Paul to give away their money, when they barely have enough?

This is what the Macedonians were not thinking. They were not thinking: Well Paul, why don't I see how much I need to keep up my own quality of life. And whatever left, but you can have that.

I think that's the way most of us think about giving.

There's a standard of living that I want to guard. Here's how I expect to live. And if there's anything left over, I'll willingly give it.

But when Paul says they gave beyond their ability. What that means is that in their act of giving, their standard of life goes backwards a couple of notches.

Have we ever given to the point that we are almost as bad off as the people you're helping?

I think that doesn't even compute in our psyche. But I think that is the heart of Jesus.

I think Jesus wants to give us a heart that is so willing to give, so that I don't assume that my current standard of living is something I have an inherent right to guard. And as long as I don't dip below this, I'm fine giving the rest away.

But he says when we give the way the Macedonians give, beyond their ability, meaning that they became poorer, because they made somebody else better off. And Paul says whenever we give this way, we exactly capture the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who didn't stay in heaven and say, I'm going to send good wishes down to earth. But who actually gave up a lot, to become one of us.

2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

We just celebrated Christmas, but I'm not sure if you've thought about it. But it was an incredible insult, an absolute disgrace for Jesus to become human on Christmas day. The all powerful, all knowing God, to be enclosed in a body of flesh and bones. Just becoming one of us, was a massive drop down.

Jesus didn't just help. He became poor, so that we may become rich. In fact he switched places with us.

Paul isn't saying that we all have to give until we have no money. It's not really about giving away a lot of money to mimic the behavior. But it's starting to understand the heart behind it.

And the heart behind it is Jesus, the Lord of the universe, who loved us so much, that he came down to earth, stripping himself of all honor, glory, and power, to save us.

And because we have received that, the generosity that we should respond with is not the kind that says, well, what's the least I can give and still be okay with God. But the kind

that does as much as it can, as much as it is able, even if it's at a cost to me, because that's what Jesus did for me.

So Paul, says to the church at Corinth, if you have understood and experienced God's infinite grace to you, prove it. Prove it by being generous to others.

In v5, it says: **finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised.**

Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

The word gift here, literally means, blessing. And Paul is saying that what makes it a gift, is the attitude with which you are giving.

Sometimes we can give, but not have it be a blessing. Because after we give, we and say, I hope I don't regret this. Or we think, well, maybe there was something better I could've done with that money. Or we do it out of duty, and think, it's just that time of the month again, and we reluctantly put that check in the offering. And there's this reluctance to it. And it really takes the joy out of the gift. It's a grudging gift and not really a blessing.

But Paul is saying, when you give, let it be a blessing. Be single-minded about it. And it becomes a blessing when it is a willing gift, a gift that comes freely and joyfully, because we know of how much we first received from God.

II. Second, let's look at the nature of giving.

Paul goes on and he talks about what real generosity looks like.

Paul gives us four pictures:

The first picture is of a bountiful giver.

V6 - Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

It's a picture of a farmer, who doesn't calculate the cost. He doesn't go, I only have three thousand seeds, I better be careful. Let me only use three hundred this year and I'll save the rest.

That's not the type of farmer we are supposed to be. We are supposed to be generous with what we have, and to sow generously.

And the reason why we do this is because the gospel is bountiful. It's generous. What we have been given by Christ, what we have received is bountiful.

And whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. In the end, it's not about material things here, but it's about the nature of the gospel. The gospel we have received is bountiful, it's generous, it's gracious. And therefore, we don't have to be stingy.

It's a picture of a bountiful giver, who gives generously because he has been shown the infinite generosity of God.

The second picture is a **cheerful giver**.

2Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Paul's main point here is that when we do give, we should be cheerful. And if we are not, we should really think about the reasons why we aren't cheerful or joyful in giving.

Maybe we feel like we're giving a lot, and feel proud about it, feeling like God really needs me, and my money for his plans to succeed. Or maybe it's a feeling of reluctance or obligation.

But what Paul seems to be saying is that what's more important in giving is not so much how much, but why are you giving? God ultimately does not need our money, because it's all his anyway.

But the far more important question is, why you are reluctant to give? Why is it that you're not cheerful about it?

Because that really is the heart of the issue.

And perhaps, if we are not cheerful in our giving, maybe it's because we haven't truly experienced, or understood, fully, who God is, and his infinite grace and mercy, and his gift to us in Jesus.

The third picture is a confident giver.

Why?

Because Paul says, **8And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.**

It's a confidence that if I give, God will provide for me, somehow.

It was a reminder that God was sufficient. And if you want to work for him and serve him with what you have, he is sufficient for you. And he will provide.

And it doesn't mean every single time he will do it, but his nature is sufficient. And he promises to be a Heavenly Father who gives good gifts to his children.

The last image is a righteous giver.

2As it is written:

**"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."¹⁴ [10](#) Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.**

Paul here quotes Psalm 112:9, and it's a picture of a righteous man, who provides for poor people. And the reason why he's righteous is because he provides for people who don't have as much as him.

And this verse, says that his genuine righteousness, his love, it will endure forever. It doesn't mean that his good deeds makes him righteous, or that he can earn his righteousness or salvation, but it means that his generosity actually has a lasting effect on who he is and his character. And that he lives in line with God's everlasting character of righteousness.

Paul never says how much to give. And how much is seems to be of secondary importance to him. But what's important is why and how you give. He says give generously. Give freely. Give cheerfully.

That might mean for some of us, you can only give, ten dollars. Whereas others of us can give ten thousand dollars.

But the incredible thing is that the one who gives ten dollars can be just as abundant and gracious in giving, as the person who gives ten thousand.

I think that at the heart of it what Paul is saying is this. God is never interested in having our money, before he has our hearts.

And there's no way to shortcut that process and say, God, I can't give you my heart yet, but would you take my money in the meantime. I don't believe God is interested in that money. In fact, God doesn't need that money at all.

What drives the kingdom of God are not dollars and cents. God's kingdom is not about money. What drives his kingdom are hearts that that are repentant, and captivated by and respond to his love and grace.

I think one of the reasons we have this double mindedness about generosity, that we love money and we love God. And many of us feel genuinely that's the case. When I'm giving and helping I really do feel good and I love God and other people. But I also love things. And I'm trying to reconcile it. I love God and his work, and I love my stuff.

And the problem arises by believing wrongly that I can reconcile those two loves. But Jesus says that you just can't do it. It doesn't work that way.

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

We can try to make up a world where that's possible, but it's just not possible to love two things with the same heart. Especially when one of those demands all of you.

And that's where the singlemindedness of generosity comes in. It's when we realize I can't actually create a life where I'm allowed to say, I love both God and money. Because I'm going to end up serving one of those two lovers with everything I have.

I believe what God is after is not that we split our resources with him and others, but that he would have the totality of our hearts.

I think that's what he's always wanted, is to have first of all, all of us.

III. **Lastly, the result of giving.**

What happens when we give?

V11: **11You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.**

First, giving impacts not only me, but it produces thanksgiving to God from everyone else who is watching.

And then in v13 it says: glorify God. **13Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.**

When we give, people start to thank God and people start to glorify God. Why?

Because they look at Christians and realize that they don't only talk about being generous, but they really live out what they believe in the gospel. They are truly generous just like the one who they claim to be their savior and Lord. That the gospel they proclaim, they also live out and obey it.

What else? It says in v14: **14And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.**

People see God's grace working in your life, and what happens? It says they will long for you, they pray for you.

On my way back from visiting my parents in Sydney, I was seated next to a tall Australian guy. We said hi, but for most of the flight, we didn't pay attention to each other. But about an hour or so before we landed, I looked over and saw that he was studying something. It was a large stack of papers. When I looked a little closer, I noticed that it was John's gospel in Greek.

I struck up a conversation and it turns out that he was a paramedic, but was studying in the local Baptist seminary. I shared with him about the ministry here in Hong Kong. And he shared with me about how God was working in his church in Sydney, and also about how he was on his way to Myanmar to visit some missionaries he supports there.

We traded contacts and about a week or two later, he sent me an email saying that he enjoyed our conversation and was praying for our church and Hong Kong, that God would continue his work here.

I'm sure many of us have experienced something like this, but you could grow up with somebody all your life and yet feel so distant from that person.

But you could meet someone for the first time and find out that they're a brother or sister in Christ, and you feel like you understand each other, and are somehow deeply connected with each other because of what God is doing.

When we see the gospel working in a people group, in a person, we start to long for them, we start to pray for them.

Why? Because of God's surpassing grace that is on them.

Finally, Paul ends with this verse: **15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!**

As a reminder, that none of our giving, is possible without Jesus, the indescribable gift to each us.

I think the challenge to all of us today is not whether you put a dollar in the offering, or you put a hundred dollars in the offering, or whether you put a thousand dollars. It's not really the amount that ultimately matters.

What matters is, are you living a life that is shaped and motivated by the gospel?

So that whatever you give, your money, time, resources, it's with all your heart for the glory of God, and for the joy of all people. That's what matters.

And that's my prayer for us today.