

Giving Sunday

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] helpful for me. And as always, you can find a little outline just inside the notice sheet, inside the other sheet there, just to see where we're going as we look at this together. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we hear his voice.

Father God, as we turn to the word of your spirit, we pray that you will open your words to our hearts and open our hearts to your word.

For Jesus' name's sake, amen. Well, just imagine with me that you go on a trip to an idyllic Scottish village. I'm thinking thatched cottages, stone bridges, a couple of really good old pubs with roaring fires.

And there's a church building in the village. Outside the church is a sign with a massive thermometer on it. It's for their fundraising. It stretches up to 300,000 pounds, and next to it is their slogan, Save St. Andrew's Church. Have you ever seen something like that?

I certainly have. If we hear that a church is having a giving Sunday or having a financial appeal, that's the kind of thing we often think of. We think of the church, the building, having to ask the local community for money. Otherwise, the church building is going to have to close.

[1 : 2 3] And one of the problems with that image in our mind is that it's so topsy-turvy that the church is meant to save the world. We've got the news about Jesus that can save the world.

And yet, when people think about the church and money, we think, oh yeah, the world keeps having to save the church. So that when we run events as a church, often when we invite non-Christian friends, they're often thinking, oh, it must be a fundraiser. The church must be after our money. Instead of hearing, oh, these guys think Jesus has got something so important. They want me to hear about it. And Christian giving starts to look the same as all other kinds of charitable giving around the world.

But when we look at what the Bible says about what God says about giving, it's revolutionary. Because it's not motivated by guilt. As though we have to feel that, oh, I've got to give or God won't accept me.

I've got to give or God will be angry with me. It's not motivated by that, Christian giving. And it's not motivated by desperate need, by urgent and desperate need. So the aim of today isn't to show you some photographs of me and Ruth and Christine looking exhausted.

[2 : 3 6] And say, oh, I was just so tired. Can you get more staff? Because that's not how you motivate Christian giving. It's motivated by the grace of God. That's the key word in this chapter.

You see it again and again. If you just have a look at verse 1, he says the grace that God has given. Verse 4, he talks about the privilege of sharing.

And that's literally about grace. In verse 6, he talks about the act of grace. In verse 7, the grace of giving. Verse 9 as well, grace.

The undeserved kindness and generosity of God. And we're going to think about that together. Now this chapter, it's worth saying, isn't actually about giving to gospel work. About kind of giving to your local church.

What happened in the first century was there was a famine in the area around Jerusalem. And the apostle Paul was making a collection from some of the early churches of money to help support the Christians in and around Jerusalem who were starving because of the famine.

[3 : 3 8] That's what was going on. But as he makes that appeal, he gives us lots of principles that we can apply more generally to Christian giving today. Let me just mention a couple of principles that we see in here.

He says, get round to it. The church in Corinth had said the previous year they wanted to help with the appeal. And then they never did it. So if you have a look at verse 11, he says, Now finish the

work so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it according to your means.

And we bump into that problem all the time today. I'm the same. We hear about a need. Maybe it's St. Silas. Or maybe another Christian organization has got a financial need.

And we even think to ourselves, yeah, that really matters. I'm going to give to that. I'm going to give some money for that. Or maybe we get a pay rise or we get a bonus at work. And we think, oh, yeah, I better review my giving, actually.

I could probably afford to give a bit more. I'll have a look at that and then I'll give some more. Or we join a new church and we start going and weeks turn into months and we think, oh, yeah, yeah, I'll start giving.

[4 : 49] But then we're busy, aren't we? And we just never get round to it. We never quite set aside the time to fill in the forms or get on the bank transfer or have a look at our finances.

And verse 11 urges us, get on with it. Get round to it if you want to do it. Another principle Paul gives us is give out of what you have. That comes in verse 12.

He says, So the Bible doesn't give us a set rule of how much we're to give.

Under the old covenant before Jesus, there was a set rule. 10%, give 10%. People sometimes still use that as a guideline and they call it a tithe. But it's not commanded for us as Christians.

For some of us, we might be really struggling to get by. And giving 10% to the church would be too much. We can't afford it. Well, don't give what you don't have.

[5 : 57] For others of us, the reality is that we're earning more than we need. And just to give 10% wouldn't really affect us very much at all. We could give a lot more.

I remember a friend I worked with in London as a lawyer. And he was talking to me one day about his giving. And he's a single guy, right? He didn't have a family to support.

He didn't have dependents. That affects things. Although he was living in London, which is very expensive. And he was renting in the East End in this expensive part of London to be near work.

And he told me he'd had a look at his giving. We were talking about giving. And he was earning about £55,000 a year at the time. That was his salary. And he'd worked out. He'd gone to see someone to get some tax advice and things so that he was giving as tax efficiently as he could.

And he was saying to me how he was rejoicing.

[7 : 17] And when the price that came in, the gospel was advancing. The news about Jesus was being better known in his church and beyond because of what he could give. So you get around to it.

And you give according to what you have, not according to what you don't have. But as Paul seeks to motivate us using the grace of God, the first thing we see is the model of grace-filled giving.

That's what we get at the beginning of chapter 8. Paul injects a healthy bit of competition into things. He says, let me tell you about a different church. And he describes three factors that have come together for these churches in Macedonia to give.

I don't know what you'd expect to find if someone said there's three factors that have made this church give loads of money away. I'd expect they're really rich. They got loads richer.

Didn't know what to do with their money. And they felt really guilty. So they gave it away. That's what I'd expect. Verse 2 is very surprising, isn't it? In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

[8 : 29] So the Christians in Macedonia were extremely poor. In fact, the word there is very deep. It's like we might say they were rock-bottom poor. Rock-bottom poverty. Even by the standards of a famine-stricken Middle East.

And they were being heavily persecuted. That's probably what it means by the severe trial. And they might have been connected to those things, as they are in parts of the world today. That because they become Christians, they may have lost livelihoods, jobs, homes.

They were under fire. They're the kind of people I would expect to have a financial appeal. And say, can some of the other churches help us out here? Because we're struggling. Paul says, out of that affliction and rock-bottom poverty flowed a wealth of generosity.

Why is that? Only because of the other factor in verse 2. Did you see that? Their abundance of joy. Their overflowing joy. This is grace-filled giving.

And it's as if Paul can hear the objection that people like me think next. Well, we wouldn't want to get too carried away, would we? Overflowing joy and giving away lots of money. Have a look at

verse 3.

[9 : 38] For I testify, he says, that they gave as much as they were able. And even beyond their ability, entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.

I don't know what you think about that, but I've never seen anything quite like that. I've seen church leaders begging people to give money. This is completely the other way around. Did you notice that? Here were Christians so overwhelmed by the generosity of God, they were begging for the joy of giving beyond their own means to help.

And it was totally God-centered. Not to please other people, but look at verse 5. He says, So what caused that overflow of generosity?

Well, Paul describes it in verse 1 as the grace of God. And by that, I think he means two separate things. They're inseparable, but they are distinct. First of all, it's the grace of God to the Macedonian Christians in the gospel.

In the gospel of Jesus, our rescuer and king. The grace of God to them. And secondly, I think he means the grace of God in them. Because when the spirit of God works in our hearts, he fixes our eyes on the gospel, and it means more to us.

[11 : 13] And it moves us to joy. And that overflows in acts of giving and service. So when we see Christians giving money generously and sacrificially, it's evidence that God has been very good to them.

As good to them as to us in giving us Jesus. And good in their hearts to have given them, by his grace, joy that means they give their money away.

To put it another way, because Christ is so magnificent to them, they don't have to cling on to their money anymore. And they can give it away. Wouldn't we want to be like that?

I suppose it follows as well, doesn't it, that if we see, I don't know if you've ever had this, but if you saw a Christian friend, and you realized in conversation with them that they just weren't bothered about giving to gospel work, and their conversations are all about their home, and making it bigger, and extensions, or holidays, or cars, we shouldn't feel self-righteous, or angry, that they're not doing their bit, and we're doing our bit.

We should feel sad for them. Because it's such a shame, if people are not gripped enough by the generosity of God, to want to give their money for gospel work, they're missing out on so much.

[12 : 38] So instead, Paul gives us this great positive model. And I don't know if you noticed, but verse 6 begins with that connecting word, so, so we urge Titus. In other words, because of that, because of that model, I'm sending Titus to you, to bring all sorts of completion, this act of grace on your part.

So I'm sending Titus to you, in light of the Macedonians, and me telling them about you, so that you can see that model, and be like them. He wants us to be inspired. I heard of a Christian businessman, traveling in South Korea, and he passed a field on a guided tour, and in the field, a young boy was pulling a plow by himself, and an older man, presumably his dad, was just holding the handles to help as he pulled this plow along.

So quite a strange thing to see. So the businessman took a photograph of it with his phone, and he said to his guide, I guess people around here are very poor. And the guide said, well actually those two people are Christians, and when their church was being built last year, they were eager to give something, but they had no money.

So they sold their ox, and gave their money to the church. So this spring, they're pulling the plow by themselves. Well the businessman went home, he went to his minister, he showed him his photo, and he said, I want to double my giving to the church.

That's the sort of thing Paul's doing for us here, in 2 Corinthians 8. He's holding up a photograph, and saying, let me show you a model of Christian giving.

[14 : 17] Look at it. Learn what grace-filled giving really looks like. So that's the model of grace-filled giving. Secondly, and more briefly, the importance of grace-filled giving.

Paul was writing to a church that thought they were very spiritual, because they had lots of spiritual gifts. And they were a bit proud of it. So look at verse 7. But since you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and in the love we have kindled in you, see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

There's a bit of irony there. They excel in so much. See that you excel in this. And the problem they had to see was that the mark of being a spiritual person isn't spiritual gifts, it's spiritual fruit. And Paul is saying to them, make sure you excel in this fruit, financial giving. Most of us, we don't like to talk about money, do we? And we certainly don't want to be challenged about our money. Money's the kind of subject, it's very easy to give a sermon on money in someone else's church. It's murder doing it in your own church. Because we don't want to be challenged. But according to verse 7, our money and how we spend it is a key spiritual issue.

[15:36] You see that? So let me ask, is that how you think of a spiritual person? That a significant mark of being a spiritual person is sacrificial financial giving?

Is that one of the ways you would assess the health of a church? If you were looking for a church or finding out more about a church, I'm not sure it is. If we're finding out about a church, we might find out about the Bible teaching.

Is it faithful? Is it clear? Is it relevant? Is it culturally relevant? We might think about the worship experience, about the music. We might think about prayer. Is this a praying church?

About the community, about midweek groups, about small groups, about the children's work. But we should also think about the giving. Is this a place where the Christians are so gripped by the generosity of God to them, it overflows in sacrificial, joyful financial giving?

And then God's word puts things so strongly in verse eight, doesn't it? Let's have a look at verse eight. It's very challenging. The apostle Paul says this, I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

[16:58] That's painful, isn't it? They say they love Jesus in this church. Paul says, I can test how genuine that is by comparing your financial giving with the breathtaking example I've just given you of the churches in Macedonia.

And I take it for that to be true, there must be a direct correlation between our love for Jesus and what we give financially. We've thought about the model of grace-filled giving.

Secondly, the importance of grace-filled giving. So thirdly, the heart of grace-filled giving. The unanswered question so far, how on earth does this work, Paul?

How does the grace of God, the undeserved kindness of God, how is that going to motivate me to think so differently about my money, I can let go of it and give it away?

And then comes verse 9, a verse to memorize. Verse 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.

[18:16] Jesus Christ was very, very rich. He was the man who had everything. He spent eternity in the majesty and comfort of heaven, very comfortable.

Angels worship him and serve him. He reigns where there's nothing bad and no one's sad. He was as rich as you could possibly get. And he became poor.

Even if he'd come to live in the White House or at Balmoral Castle, he would have become poor by his standards. By taking flesh and becoming a man, he lost more than we can imagine.

He stepped into a world ravaged by sin, born into poverty, fleeing genocide as a refugee. Then as an adult, serving the crowds he knew would turn against him.

And picture Jesus before the angry mob, the ones he taught in the temple, baying for his blood, before the soldiers as they blindfold him and spit on him, and then nail his exhausted body to a cross.

[19:26] And then spiritually, he's bankrupt. The sky goes dark. He's forsaken by God. He suffers hell on the cross. He'd been as rich as you could ever get.

He became as poor as you could ever be. Why? Well, in Revelation, the Apostle John is given this vision of the future. And he has a vision of a great multitude of people.

And they're all gathered around the throne of God. And the Lamb, Jesus, is on the throne next to God. And one of the elders explains to John to explain the scene as he sees this multitude from every nation.

He says who they are. And he says that these brilliant white robes they're wearing so that they can stand before God. He says they were made white by the blood of the Lamb on the throne.

And now they are sheltered with his presence. Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd.

[20 : 28] He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes. They're rich. And friends, that's us who John sees.

We've won the spiritual jackpot in becoming Christians. Richer than we could ever dream. Because Jesus looked on us and he wanted to share all his heavenly wealth with us.

He reigns in eternity and he wants us to reign with him. He inherits everything from his father. And so he wanted to make us sons of God so that we could share the inheritance.

And it's when your heart leaps because you've grasped the magnificent generosity of God that you can joyfully give your money away.

And when you give to support gospel work, you're giving to share the news about what Jesus has done so that others can join that multitude.

[21 : 30] You give because of the great commission that Jesus says, go and make disciples now of all nations. He wants those people around the throne dressed in robes, cleansed by his blood, rich so that they never hunger and thirst again.

Sharing our joy. So that's the heart of grace-filled giving. That you consider Jesus who was rich beyond all splendor. Seeing us, you and me, lost, spiritually bankrupt.

And choosing to lay aside his majesty and take up a wooden cross so that we might be changed from beggars to being on the rich list. From slaves to kings.

With him, secure forever, for all eternity. That's what we're to fix our gaze on as we think about our money. Let's pray together.

Father God, Lord of heaven and earth, we praise you for all that you have and for your immense generosity. Thank you for your grace to us in the gospel.

[22 : 39] We ask that you will do a powerful work of grace in our hearts so that our joy will overflow into grace-centered giving so that your gospel will advance all the more in us, among us, and beyond our walls for the praise of your name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.