

# Generosity that changed the World

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 May 2024

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[ 0 : 0 0 ] yeah so it's Philippians chapter 4 verses 10 to 20 we're going to read just now I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me indeed you were concerned but you had no opportunity to show it I'm not saying this because I'm in need for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry whether living in plenty or in want I can do all things through him who gives me strength yet it was good of you to share in my troubles moreover as you Philippians know in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel when I set out from Macedonia not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only for even when I was in Thessalonica you sent me aid more than once when I was in need not that I desire your gifts what I desire is that more be credited to your account I have received full payment and have more than enough I am amply supplied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent they are a fragrant offering an acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God and my God will meet all of your needs according to his riches according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus to our God and Father be glory forever and ever

Amen Great thanks so much Derek for reading and let's ask for God's help let's pray Heavenly Father you know our hearts and you know our situations and our circumstances you know how difficult we find it to be generous with our money by your spirit we ask that you will open your word to our hearts this morning and open our hearts to your word in Jesus name Amen it's always difficult to I find to teach about money in a church family that's as diverse as ours because there will be some people for whom money is a massive struggle and really just needing the help of others to get by and so in that kind of situation we don't want you to feel unduly or inappropriately guilty for seeking to provide for yourself in that kind of way and by a call to give generously to the church there will be others of us where we are actually maybe much more comfortable materially than we realize and could be giving much more and more sacrificially than maybe we feel we can and maybe need to hear that challenge from God's spirit as we look at his word and so we just I just need to trust God with the results of that and we need to grow in our wisdom about how we think about our money in accordance with with God's word and Philippians chapter 4 is a great Bible passage to be looking at together

I think that the best passage of the New Testament for the particular thought of thinking about how we give to support gospel work so support giving our money to support the work of making Jesus known in the church and beyond in the mission of the church and it's good for us because lots of us feel our relationship with money is not what it should be and I was reading this week a letter from Megan a Christian woman to her pastor asking for help she said this I have a confession I love stuff I'm very materialistic I love browsing for things to buy online I get a thrill waiting for something I've bought and then when things arrive in a delivery I know I need to stop this and I want to stop but how do I and why do I do this and lots of us would know how Megan feels maybe we wish Jesus meant so much to us we didn't want what money can buy but when it comes to money we love the power it gives us we love the new things that we can get with it and we have this nagging sense there's something not right about this something has gone wrong in how we relate to money or what about Simon not a Simon here to be clear no one in our church a different Simon says if people looked at my life they'd probably think

I've got no problem with money I'm careful I'm not flash I'm not a big consumer but deep down I'm a hoarder my problem is I love money because it gives me security my mind often wanders to how my money is stored away in my pension my ISA my property and it makes me feel secure how can I relate better to God and to money so again maybe we can relate to Simon we have this nagging

sense that this just isn't right something has gone wrong in how we relate to money and looking around us this is the air we breathe in the western world our news is full isn't it about economic growth about inflation job news and one minister said before the Sunday trading laws were changed so that people could spend their Sundays at Bray Head and Silverburn one minister said Sunday used to be the most miserable day of the week so you see that idea now that we can shop freely Sunday is less miserable but when we come to Paul's letter to the Philippians we find a group of people so liberated by Jesus they've been outstandingly generous with their money Paul's letter to the Philippians is a thank you letter I don't know whether some of you write thank you cards thank you letters Paul writes one here to a whole church in Philippi because through a messenger Epaphroditus who they sent to Paul they've sent some financial support to him and the whole letter is this thank you letter but he finally gets to that in chapter 4 if you just look at verse 10 he says I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me so how do we go from being like like Megan who loves money who loves money because of shopping gives her joy or Simon who loves money for its security to being like the Philippians who freely generously gave to support gospel work well first we see the mindset behind gospel giving we see the word sharing used in verse 14 if you just have a look down he says yet it was good for you to share in my troubles and in verse 15 he uses that same word again sharing and that word is a word that he uses through the whole letter but it gets translated differently for us through the letter and it's the word partnership so in chapter 1 if we just turn back a page he says in verse 4 of chapter 1 [ 7 : 40 ] I always pray for you with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now and we learn more about what that partnership in the gospel looks like in chapter 1 verse 27 just looking down there verse 27 whatever happens he says conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ then whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence I will know that you stand firm in the one spirit striving together as one for the faith of the gospel so when we think about giving to church we're not to think of it like we're just consumers like you would with a club membership or a subscription service where you think well I kind of get this much worth out of my church so I'll give that much to reflect what I get from it rather we're to think about partnership the invitation for each of us is to think would you like to become a partner in the gospel through your church and in your church we know that word from the business world well I used to work as a lawyer and the law firm

I worked in was a partnership like lots of accountants firms or GP surgeries today so at the law firm I worked at if you got made up that's what it was called you got invited to be a partner then you had to pay money in first into a share in the partnership so that if they ever needed that money they could spend it and then after that what all the fee earning work that you did for different clients you were doing for the common goal of the partnership and profits were shared out at the end of each year they were striving together for a common goal and that's the picture that the apostle Paul gives us of the Christian life that we look at one another and we see partners striving together for a common goal what's the goal well this is momentous it's the most extraordinary privilege for the big thing that God is doing in the world today is offering forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to everyone thanks to Jesus' victorious work at the cross

God is calling people all over the world into relationship with him and saving them for all eternity that is the big thing God is doing today this is the great privilege of where we are in salvation history and then the extraordinary truth how does God do that gracious powerful resurrecting saving work he does it through us through his people as we live lives for Jesus as we speak God's word prayerfully to others we are used by God in the big thing he is doing in the world so when I where I worked at this law firm in London when people were made up when they got to be a partner in the law firm they were absolutely thrilled because basically the deal was once you got to a certain level as a lawyer become a slave for a few years at the law firm make sure everything else is behind work you never say no to work and we will select a few of you who we feel are too good to lose and we're invited to be partners and so they felt this sense of wow

I've been vindicated I've been affirmed I now have this purpose I'm a partner in the firm well what would God say about that in God's perspective I guess becoming a partner in a law firm is a relatively small thing compared with eternity and the big thing that he calls us to and he calls us to it not because we've earned it every Christian is being invited to share in this most extraordinary partnership that God would call us his fellow workers his co-workers in making Jesus known it's an extraordinary privilege and Paul is addressing here a whole church it's not just for the elders or who

we would call the ministers he wants the whole church in Philippi to be partners together and that will be reflected in how we think about our money it's this is going on across our church we're seeing people in our church family buying into partnership in the way they serve others and that's a great thing to see and it's good to think about that with money

I was talking to a friend who works for a church down south in England not so long ago and he said maybe we need to talk about money more because he was on staff at a church and he said that their treasurer of their church said to their staff team one day I want you all to close your eyes the staff team and he said I want you all to put your hand up if you give more than a certain amount a month to the church in their own personal giving it was 400 pounds a month or something like that he said I want you to put your hands up if you give more than that amount to our church and then he said right put your hands down open your eyes he said I can tell you that across our church 12 people give more than that amount and half of them are in this room so that was a moment of them realizing actually we need to do a better job of encouraging our whole church to think about their partnership in the gospel so just think about the language of partnership and how Paul uses it in this letter it's a joyful partnership he says in Philippians chapter 1 verse 4

[13:23] I rejoice whenever I think of you because of your partnership with me in the gospel Paul is addressing here a whole church and he talks about striving together so it's energetic partnership and maybe that language is helpful for us to think because it's about thinking of going from being an attendee at church to being kind of a member not just stopping at being a member but feeling I'm a partner in the work that's going on that's when I walk into church on a Sunday I'm not just there to receive I'm a partner in what's going on and if we're on board with that mindset it might still be that giving our money is the last thing we'd want to give as part of that work so that brings us to our second point it's the secret that enables gospel giving so here we're looking at Paul's own example and just have a look at verse 11 as he talks about himself and his attitude towards the gift they've given him verse 11 of chapter 4 one of the reasons that we don't give is because we think we need the money we're not content with what we've got or maybe putting it better we don't think we would be satisfied with what we would have if we gave our money to support the work of the gospel there was a newspaper article about a TV celebrity some time ago who was very unhappy and the article concluded like this she's a very pretty woman with a doting husband three adored stepchildren two golden retrievers seven horses and a large house with its own cinema and 50 acres she's had an extremely successful career in TV and made a fortune she should thank her lucky stars you see what people are thinking as they read the article do you see the equation good looks plus a doting husband plus kids plus two dogs plus seven horses plus a house plus a cinema plus fields equals contentment how can she have that and be unhappy if we think like that we'll hold on to our money but Paul knows the secret he says that contentment is not actually about your circumstances he learned to be content when he was well fed he had to learn when he was in plenty the secret of being content and he knew what it was to be content even when he was in want even when he was hungry when Paul on his missionary journeys couldn't afford food and was hungry he was content so what's the secret well the secret is basically knowing Jesus is the greatest thing you can have those of us on the weekend away saw this in James chapter 1 and we see it here in Philippians as well knowing Jesus is the greatest thing we see a glimpse of that in the next verse as Paul says in verse 13

I can do all things through him who gives me strength and literally I can do all things in him who gives me strength because I'm in Jesus because I know him I can be content and he puts it perhaps most clearly just in what he just wrote in chapter 3 if you just glance up at chapter 3 verse 8 he says in chapter 3 verse 8 I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord in other words knowing Jesus really is the greatest thing it's so great in fact that Paul is willing to suffer to serve others knowing that Jesus suffered to serve others because as he does that for Jesus he feels he'll know Jesus better so look at verse 10 of chapter 3 and you see Paul describe that in verse 10 I want to know Christ yes to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings becoming like him in his death so here's the secret of contentment it's the surpassing worth of knowing Christ we want money because of our desires and what we need is a greater desire contentment contentment comes not from kind of restraining your desire but rather from redirecting your desire away from the things money can give us and towards Christ we hear the God of money whispering to us

I can give you the security you crave I can give you the joy you long for you just need more of me Paul knows that it's in Christ that we can find security and joy and money won't actually give us those things we think money will give us security but the reality is that the time we will all need security the most is when we die and we have to stand before God and give an account and on that day we won't have any of our money with us you can't take it with you even in this life money is unreliable for our security when the chips are down in life what you really need much more than you need money is friends you need a community that cares for you the things a church family should be and Paul has found that true security comes in knowing Christ we see that connection in a different area of the New Testament

Hebrews chapter 13 it says keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said never will I leave you never will I forsake you so knowing that we what we have in God and that he is our security we are liberated to be content with what we have he is the one who will get us through judgment day and out the other side into his forever kingdom he is our security and we think money will give us joy but we all know that when you actually do buy something new and you do feel joy about that the joy wears off doesn't it just recently we bought a new bike for one of our kids you know and when you get a new bike it even smells brilliant like there is this kind of new bike smell I don't know if it is the tyres I presume they are not adding a smell and then it had all those like bubbly bits around the wheels before you have ever ridden it it is like oh brilliant new bike now it is just in the shed with all the other bikes and we are on to the next thing it does not fill the hole buying more stuff and Paul has discovered that true joy comes in seeing Christ more he is gripped by the magnificence of Jesus in all his power and his wisdom and his grace and his kindness and his goodness so how do we learn that secret of being content whatever we have or don't have it is partly through taking the time to grow as a Christian time with God day by day reflecting on Jesus listening to his word encouragement from Christian friends meeting with God's people worshipping God in song communion but we also learn the secret through the discipline of generously giving our money away when we have money it can get in the way of our joy in the Lord it's striking how Jesus warns us of that so he tells the parable of the soils and being a Christian as being like different seed the seed being sown in the soils and when he talks about the seed being choked up so that it doesn't become fruitful in a person's life it's money life's riches life's pleasures the deceitfulness of wealth he warns us he tells the parable of the great banquet which is this parable about where heaven is like this banquet where Jesus is the host and the invitations go out and people won't come they all make excuses and he gives three examples of the excuses not to go to the banquet and two of the three are about something the person has just bought because what you buy because money fogs our view of eternity it distracts us from eternal things and Jesus warns us of that so when you give your money away you teach yourself this will not satisfy me this is not my security it's not my joy only God is those things and the apostle Paul had learned that it looks too as though the Philippians knew that as well so that's what we're going to see next in our third point their model of effective gospel giving we see that from verse 15 just a few things to notice first is it was immediate verse 15 moreover as you Philippians know in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel when I set out from Macedonia not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only so sometimes we think to ourselves you know [ 23 : 14 ] I'll get round to giving generously in a few years time it'll be easier then and it doesn't get any easier but the Philippians gave money in the early days of their acquaintance with the gospel they were young Christians and we know from 2 Corinthians chapter 8 that they gave out of extreme poverty they didn't wait and some of us maybe just need to hear that if you're waiting before you start giving and you're a Christian there will always be something that you could be waiting until you can think I'll wait until I've been a Christian longer but if you feel thankful to God today for what he's done in your life and saving you then that's a great reason to give and there'll always be a reason not to start we can think oh I'll wait until I'm earning a proper salary and then it becomes I'll wait until I've paid off my student loan and then it becomes I'll wait until I've saved up for a flat and then it's you know looking after elderly parents or looking after children these are all good things that God gives us money for and yet he also gives us that money for generosity and the Philippians gave immediately it was immediate the next thing about their giving it was pioneering so Paul says you notice that not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only and I think that's remarkable because one thing that can hold us back from giving generously extremely generously is when we look around at other

Christians we know and we suspect that they're not giving as much but the Philippians didn't think like that they didn't wait to see other churches giving they were pioneers they led from the front they just went for it that's quite a thought that you could be someone who says I kind of think there are Christians around me who are holding on to the money God's given them I can see that from their lifestyle their choices but I'm just not going to worry about that and what they're doing with their money this is about me and God and I'm going to be a pioneer in generous giving and that kind of giving makes a radical difference it's worth thinking just imagine if we as a church were known for our radical giving if people looked in 10 years time at Glasgow and there were lots of people who'd become Christians at St Silas and grown as Christians at St Silas and there were new gospel churches in Deniston and Clydebank and Postle and Renfrew and people sent overseas to tell people about Jesus there and people asked how did all this happen in Glasgow and come from Glasgow and one of the answers people said was well there was this church

St Silas not a huge church but they were just really generous with their money for gospel work well Paul can say that kind of thing about the Philippians it was pioneering and the last thing about their giving is it was continuous so in verse 16 he says for even when I was in Thessalonica you sent me aid more than once when I was in need so they didn't have a one-off gift day and then think thank goodness that's out the way they continually sent money to help Paul so then what does the money do well that's our fourth point our final point this morning the surprising results of gospel giving we can predict there's an obvious result from gospel giving which is that it leads to gospel growth and that happened at the moment in our evenings we're doing a series in Acts about the early church and last week and tonight's reading we see about Paul going to places and there's revival and there's a riot as he preaches about Jesus what we don't see in Acts is that the reason

Paul's able to do all of that full time and not be a tent maker which was his his day job was he being freed up by the giving of churches like this one in Philippi so that's an obvious predictable result of giving but Paul doesn't focus on that here look at verse 17 not that I desire your gifts what I desire is that more be credited to your account it's the language of a business transaction and what he's saying here is if you picture like a heavenly bank account with crediting for the Philippians as they've served Jesus it's growing in its credit as they give their money for gospel work not that they're earning salvation that's 100% by God's grace but this fits with Jesus' command of don't store up for yourself treasures on earth but store up for yourself treasures in heaven if we give away our money in this life in some way we send it on ahead we will reap the benefit in the next one a heavenly reward we can hope that we will meet people in glory in eternity and as we ask them their story of how they heard about Jesus there'll be connections with some of them as they explain where they heard about Jesus and we can think hang on

I gave some money for that I helped support that and hearing Jesus say to you of how you use the money he's given you well done well done good and faithful servant these are the benefits to invest for with the money God's given us so that you know a few some time ago I had a friend who I looked at some of their decisions about money and they were opting for luxurious lifestyle decisions and I was really sad about that I was discouraged but the reason I was discouraged was because I thought doesn't their church kind of need that money that they're spending on this luxury and I spoke to a Christian friend about it because I was struggling with it and he said you don't need to worry about the church if God needs that money he'll get that money from somebody else the thing the thing you should feel is sadness for them because they're missing out themselves really the better way for them to be giving their money is to have the joy of gospel partnership and to be having that money credit their account in heaven and they're missing out and then we get the assurance in verse 19 that we can trust God as we give generously he is no one's debtor verse 19 and my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus so as we look at that idea of our money crediting

[ 30 : 17 ] God's crediting our account in heaven in verse 18 Paul describes it with the language of worship he says of their offerings they are a fragrant offering an acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God that's the kind of language of the Old Testament when people would take an offering to the altar to say thanks to God and Paul is saying our giving our Christian financial giving can be our act of worship out of thanksgiving to God and when we think of it like that and God being pleased with what we give it reminds us that the actual amount we give matters a lot less it's about the heart in a very real way a student giving ten pounds might be just as meaningful as a worker giving five thousand pounds if it's being given to God out of a thankful heart from what they have and it pleases God and is credited to their account so folks when we think about money as Christians

