

Giving Sunday

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[0 : 0 0] And so we've interrupted our series in 2 Samuel to consider the topic of giving and what that's going to look like for the Christian.

But before we start and look at this topic, I'd like to just give us a suggestion on how we should be thinking as we start and look at this topic tonight and how we think about the Bible.

So by way of illustration, I was having dinner with some friends the other night and I wonder if you've, has anyone seen the movie Up? Yeah, yeah. I was having dinner with old people. I love old people. I love watching them, how they interact and how they relate to one another.

And what I noticed in the meal was, was a lovely godly Christian couple is that the husband, he is forever getting up and serving others throughout the meal.

And it was my guess that when he was a young man, that wasn't how he started life. He maybe started life looking to get stuff himself. But now in his old age, having been shaped and molded by the gospel and by long years of learning what it is to live well in the context of people in marriage, he sought to serve others. He sought to look after them and care for them.

[1 : 1 8] He can only smile because it really is a miracle, a miracle that the gospel has worked in his life. And it's the same really for us, isn't it, a bit.

So it might be a bit of a shock to you what I'm about to say, but brace yourself for it. The Bible is not about you.

You see, the Bible is all about Jesus. When we read the Bible, we don't read it thinking how Jesus can help me be the hero in the movie of my life.

It's very easy to do that, to read ourselves into the story of the Bible, to imagine that we're Davids conquering Goliaths, and that Jesus helps us conquer the Goliaths in our lives.

No, the Bible is all about Jesus. It's how great King David points not to me, but to a greater king, Jesus.

[2 : 2 1] So it's a bit like this picture. Hopefully you'll come up behind me. You're sitting here, you're looking at the picture. Some of you will be seeing an old lady. Maybe you've seen it before.

And some of you will be seeing a young girl. Why don't you turn to your neighbor and just chat about that now quickly. Are you seeing a young... Is it up? It's not up.

Robbie, you snatched me up. Right. Well, we'll move on. Right. So there's a picture. It's one of those optical illusions.

You look at it. Sometimes it looks like a young girl. Sometimes it looks like an old lady. But however you look at it, that's how you're going to see it. And no matter what happens, you're going to see the young girl.

Or no matter what happens, you... There we go. You're going to see the old woman. Can you see it now? And so when we come to the Bible, we need to be careful about how we're looking at it and how we're reading it.

[3 : 22] And not that we're not reading it, reading it as if the Bible is all about me and as if I'm the hero. So here's three ways that we might do it. We might say that the Bible is all about how I can be healthy and wealthy.

And I'm going to look for all the verses that tell me about that. Or we might say that the Bible is all about how I can live out the fullest expression of my best life now. It's all about me being me in every way that I want to be.

Or we might say that the Bible is about how I earn my salvation. I do by the things that I do. And all of these are putting faith in ourselves and not putting our faith in Jesus.

You're not the hero. The Bible is not about you. It's about Jesus. And Jesus is not there to help you be the hero.

In fact, that's the exact opposite of the gospel. Jesus has come to save you from yourself, from your attempt to be the hero.

[4 : 30] The gospel is not a list of do's and don'ts that you do in addition to your faith in Jesus to help you be the hero. No, the gospel is how Jesus has come to save you despite yourself.

The gospel is a person. It is Jesus. And the context of 2 Corinthians is exactly this. You see, the Corinthians were very progressive.

They're modern. They looked down on Paul and his gospel because Paul was preaching to them, well, you need to die to yourself because Jesus died to save you.

And the Corinthians were like, well, die to myself. Don't live for wealth and health. Paul, my mate's got a Benz. What are you going on about? Say no to my desires.

Say they're sinful. Paul, it's Corinth. We're progressive. We're free here. Stop trying to earn my salvation. Paul, I'm a self-made lady.

[5 : 31] I'm a self-made woman. I've got a good job. I've earned everything in my life. How can I not earn my salvation? What are you saying, Paul? Don't be daft.

You see, that gospel of dying to yourself was not very attractive to the Corinthians. Instead, they were attracted to these people called the super apostles. And while they were super because they charged top dollar to serve the Corinthians, they were very expensive.

They asked lots of money. Instead, Paul, on the other hand, refused money. He was supported by other churches. But he refused the money of the Corinthians that he might tell them the good news of Jesus, of how Jesus was crucified for them.

And so in the context of the letter, what we see is the Corinthians, rather than looking outwards, looking how they can serve and love King Jesus, they turn inwards and they look to be impressive and look like everything, exactly like the world around them.

And so they turned away from gospel-hearted, self-sacrificing, other person-centered generosity. And they were tempted not to do what they had said they would do in giving a financial gift to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering in the midst of a famine at that time.

[6 : 59] And that's the context that Paul's writing in. So let's turn to our passage this evening and consider just a couple of points about Christian giving from the passage. And so the slides should come up.

And the first point there is the manner of giving. So how we give, verses 6 and 7 there. If you've got to keep your Bibles open, that would be a massive encouragement to me.

So we'll just read there from verse 7. So in the previous chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul gives three examples of radical, sacrificial, God-centered giving.

He gives the example of the Macedonians, of Titus, and of Jesus. How Jesus gave everything to save the Corinthians. And here he paints the picture of giving within the church is always other person-centered.

And that the goal of Christian giving is not that someone lures it over another person, but that there is equality within the church.

[8 : 13] That each person has enough to serve and love the Lord Jesus. But here he says how that equality is reached, how that should be done.

So firstly we read there, each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give. That is, it's a private thing between you and the Lord.

And once prayerfully and secretly decided, you should do what you've decided to do. And you should be true to your word as God is true to his.

And then we read, not reluctantly or under compulsion. That is, giving is not a work. It's not like having to stay indoors studying the books when all your mates are outside watching the rugby and having a good time.

It's not like that. It's not something that you need to be dragged to. Giving is not like a work. God does not need our giving. And he's not served by human hands.

[9 : 16] See, everything in creation belongs to God. And all we do when we give is give back to God what is already his. See, giving is for our spiritual benefit.

It's a spiritual act of worship. And like every act of worship, it is done, and we read there finally, cheerfully. It's done with great joy and cheer.

See, if we're not worshipping joyfully, if we're not enthusiastic about the thing that we're giving our worth to, then we're not worshipping it. So let me try and illustrate it.

I hope I haven't used this illustration before. But my mum, she's coming over in a couple of months' time. So don't tell her I told you this. But she's a bit of a hoarder. So she's got these boxes with all the cards and all ours.

And I went home a couple of summers ago, and I found one of these boxes with the cards. And I whipped out this box, and I opened it up. And lo and behold, there was my name on the cover of this card. And I was like, whoa, there's a card that I've not seen before.

[10 : 22] I don't, where's it come from? And I opened it up, and it was from my brother. And I'll just give you the context. My family growing up weren't massively well off. So my brothers had to sell jackfruit or pawpaws and bananas for pocket money on the side of the road.

But the card was addressed to me when I was six months old. And it says, Dear James, I hope you like the present.

It cost me all my money. I love you, bro. Simon. And that's my older brother. He's ten years older than me. And that's what Christian giving is like. It's sacrificial.

It's other person-centered. It's given expecting nothing in return. When you're six months old, you can't do anything. And it's motivated by love and joy.

Now, for each of us, this is going to look utterly unique. But it's always going to be cheerful, Godward, and decided. It might be money. It might be time.

[11 : 25] It might be gifts and abilities. Art, music, friendliness. And it's going to be motivated by wanting to see equality within the church.

Whatever that may look like. The next thing that we see about giving, and this is our second point there from this passage. The reward for giving. So verses 8 to 11 there.

And I just want to draw our attention to verse 8. And God is able to bless you abundantly. So that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Now, if I read this verse with myself as the hero of the story, how am I going to read that verse? God, bless me abundantly in whatever I want to be blessed in.

In money, health, self-expression, earning my salvation. But if I read that verse from God's view, then how am I going to read that verse?

[12 : 31] God, will you bless me to do your good works? You see, by blessing us, God is merely giving to himself.

As only he can do, because, well, he is God. And the whole universe is his. Everything is his. And belongs to him already.

But he allows you to share in giving. And he covers every type of good work possible in this giving.

So at all times and all things. And he blesses you with the spiritual joy of giving. So can you see how radically transforming that is going to be for your life?

I have no idea how God will bless you in the future for good works. It might be that you discover the cure for global warming.

[13 : 28] It may be that you work a long, productive life as an accountant in a factory. It might be that you work in Starbucks your whole life.

It might be that you invent the next Snapchat. I have no idea what God is going to bless you with that you might do good works. But I do know that God blesses you for the purpose that you might do these good works.

And notice there, verse 9 and 10, what do those good works have to do with? But with righteousness. With living holy lives. And in getting others to be right with God.

And why is this? Well we look at the end of verse 11 and what do we read there? You'll be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.

And through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. It's all Godward. So that the people are thankful to God.

[14 : 33] They worship the God of the Bible. It's not about us. It's not about us. They're thankful to God. They lead holy lives. And they turn others away from sin towards the living God.

And there we see the third reason for giving there. And that's the reason for giving in verses 12 to 15. And I just want to turn our attention to verse 13 there.

So because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others 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. See when we give, when we serve, when we live in a way that lines up with what we say about Jesus and what he has done for us.

What happens? People praise God. People praise God that you're sharing what God has blessed you with with them. But they also praise God when they see your generosity in sharing with others.

[15 : 40] And notice here that this generosity is simply an outworking of the gospel. So what do we read there? Your confession of the gospel of Christ.

That Jesus was crucified. That he died in place for our sins. That dying the death that we deserve and living the life that was impossible for us to live. And because he was resurrected, we can be assured that he is in heaven speaking to God the Father on our behalf.

And that gospel motivates our giving. That Jesus died for us. So when we look up to the resurrected Jesus, we look up to Jesus, we lift our eyes.

And what do we see? We see all the people around us that we can bless with the good works, with the things that God's blessed us with. But when we turn inward, when we look at our own lives, we self-focused and we look down, what do we see?

We only see the mud in our shoes. We don't see other people. So Paul is saying that people praise God for the Corinthian generosity, which is in obedience to the gospel that Paul has told them.

[16 : 56] And it's a gospel of weakness, as Jesus was weak for us. Of dying to ourselves because Jesus died for us. And perhaps it's helpful to point out that many will give in the expectation of receiving something.

So that's why gyms do so well, isn't it? We want the big body. We want to be fit and strong. But very few people give as a sign that they are dying to themselves.

Many will give to good causes, but only Christians will give out of acknowledgement that they are sinners who have been saved and forgiven by King Jesus.

Only Christians will give to that message. And the second reason that we see here for giving is that their giving, the Corinthian giving and our giving, gives unity.

So look at verse 14 there. And in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

[18 : 05] So when we give, those who get that gift, and here Paul means those Christians that were suffering in Jerusalem at that time, what will they do? Those Jewish Christians, they will pray for the Gentile Christians in Corinth.

And it's a radical gospel unity. So there's been a lot of flack in the paper about sectarianism and football. Here we see gospel giving transcending that sectarianism of that great Jew-Gentile divide of bringing people together in unity.

And it's in total contrast to the strife and division that we see earlier in the letter to the Corinthians. But it's not a unity simply for being united, for unity's sake.

It's caused by genuine love and concern for others that moves our lips to pray, our hearts to go out to people, our hands to work and to give.

Why? Out of reverence for Christ and what he has done for us. And so Paul writes there. Why? Because of the surpassing grace that God has given them, given the Corinthians.

[19 : 21] And that grace that God has given us in Christ Jesus. So although Jesus was unimaginably rich, remember Jesus was in heaven.

Perfect relationship. His life was amazing in heaven. And what did he do? He gave it all up. Came down to earth for your sake, for my sake.

And died a humiliating death on a cross. Naked, ashamed, and abandoned for our sake. No wonder then that Paul calls this sacrifice that Jesus did for us the indescribable gift of God at the end of verse 15.

That was going to motivate our radical other person centered giving within the church. So we've had a couple of principles there on giving.

The manner of giving. The reward of giving. The reason for giving. But let me just draw us to a close there. When we put ourselves at the center, when we're reading the Bible and those kind of things.

[20 : 25] When we look to God for him to do the things that we want him to do. We want our God to give us gifts. Rather than seeing him as the great giver.

We are actually robbing ourselves. We're making ourselves poorer. But when we put God at the center, a strange thing happens. And it's entirely unexpected.

That is, God becomes his own best gift. The gift that God gives us of himself is more ravishing, more radiant, more beautiful than anything else that you might ever want apart from God.

That you might have wanted God to give you. He's more radiant than beauty and health and wealth. He's more fulfilling than any identity of our own best self that we could ever dream of.

Seeing, being saved, that salvation that we might work for is just the side thing. The real gift is God himself. Rather than having us serve him, do stuff, that we might get stuff.

[21 : 37] God gives us everything. He gives us himself. Himself. And it's absolutely astounding. Why would you run after a Benz when you can have God?

Why would you not do everything you can to share that message and that great joy of being able to call God Father? And of being in a personal, intimate relationship with a heavenly God.

You'd do everything for that. And what might it look like to pursue gospel-hearted giving? Well, let me tell you. End with a story.

My friend Beavis. I'm sure I've told you a story about Beavis before. But I've got this friend Beavis. He lives in America. He lives in southern Germany. I'll see him over the summer. I'll go do some climbing with Beavis in America.

And Beavis, he trained for Bible college in America. And he went out to Germany to tell the gospel to the Germans there. And he found it incredibly difficult.

[22 : 36] Alone. Not many mates there. He had to learn the language. He went out there as a single man. No prospects of getting married and that kind of stuff. But how did he get to Germany?

Well, when he went to college, he studied history as an undergrad. And one of his professors there was this single lady who had been a professor at the college for all her life.

And then when she came to retirement, she wrote Beavis a letter saying, Look, Beavis, I hear that you've gone off to Bible college. I've got these funds that I've been working for that I've saved up my whole life.

I'd really like to put them towards your education that you might be able to go and tell the nations about what Christ has done for you.

And that's a radical example of gospel-hearted giving by someone very unexpected and very ordinary in lots of different ways.

[23 : 33] And a great motivation for us to motivate our giving as we seek to be other person-centered, and lifting our highs to the resurrected Jesus and loving and serving one another.

Let me pray for us as we close. So, Father, we thank you for the great examples of giving that we see in Scripture, Father. We thank you for the great indescribable gift that your Son gave us, of giving us himself, Father, of dying that death for us in our place, of living the life that we could never live, that we might know you intimately as Father.

We thank you for all these great things. In Jesus' name. Amen.