

2 Corinthians 8:16-24, "Aiming at What is Honorable"

8.8.21

I heard the story of a young man who was madly in love with a young lady and he sent her this text:

"I just want you to know that I would cross the widest ocean for you. I'd swim the deepest river for you. I would scale the highest mountain for you. I'd crawl across the burning sands of the hottest desert for you." The young lady received the text and beamed with love and joy! And a moment later this text came through: "If it doesn't rain tonight, I'll be over." ☺

Oh, it's easy to SAY we love someone...to use flowery words; but, it's quite another to prove it. ☺ The same is true in our commitment and love for Jesus and His work. It's easy to say we love Jesus, but quite another thing to prove it with our actions. The young man seemed committed, but his uncertain, future actions certainly would leave doubt in the young lady's mind about his ultimate desire to honor that commitment.

The title of today's message is: "Aiming at What is Honorable." Yes, it's easy to say we're going to be committed and dedicated, but quite another to honor that commitment. And you see, the Corinthian Church was a lot like that young man. They talked the talk, but weren't walking the talk. They were not totally committed...they had said they were going to take up an offering to help their brothers and sisters in Christ down in Jerusalem, who were suffering under persecution and famine, but they had not followed through...their commitment hadn't been honored by action!

Therefore, the Apostle Paul has been seeking to inspire them to DO what they SAID they were going to do, because it's been over a year and they still hadn't come through. The question arises: Why? I mean we know that they weren't following through in taking up the offering (most likely they specified an amount), but they hadn't done it. Why? Something was going on!

Indeed, there was...there was a battle going on...a battle for honor. A battle between the honor of the Apostle and the false teachers, (called Judaizers), who had wormed their way into Corinth. There has been a great assault on Paul's character, integrity and honor. And because of the severity of this attack, (apparently these lies had been believed), many in the church had become hesitant to do what they had **committed to the Apostle Paul** that they were going to do.

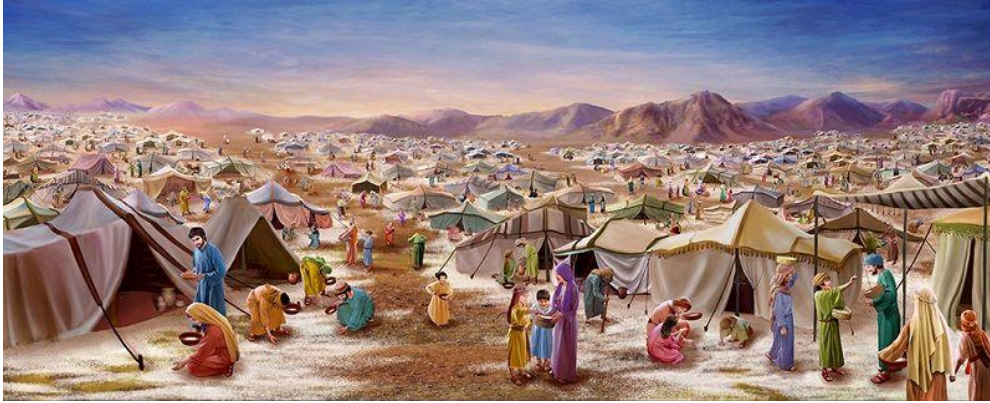
Now, church family, in order for us to move forward with our text this morning, we need to have a quick review, because we've covered a lot of ground over the last several Sundays in regards to GIVING...as we've looked at various principles outlined by Paul to the Corinthians. What have we learned?

First, we're to give consistently on the FIRST day of the week...the Lord's Day. We've also learned that we're to give voluntarily. There is no prescribed amount. You don't have to give 10%. Oh, and please don't wipe your brow...because as we've learned, the tithe is the floor, not the ceiling in our giving. The tithe is OT. 10% should be our starting place, not the ending place. No...starting at 1% is not "Grace Giving." We give a good waiter 15%. But, Grace Giving is also not going into debt! No! Grace Giving is giving from what you have.

But, to do so, we've seen that we must not live wasteful, selfish, frivolous lives: overspending...going into severe debt and then using that as an excuse for not giving. That's a lack of self-control. No! Scripture teaches that we give according to our ability. God is not asking for what you don't have. God is not trying to make you poor; God is not trying to strip you and take

away your food, your clothing or your house. It's proportionate giving. Meaning: if you have little, give little; if you have much, give much. He's after your heart...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Finally, we finished up last week learning that we can depend on the Lord DAILY for what we need. Remember the example of the manna...



God provided food for His people EVERY MORNING for 40 years in their Desert Wandering. Church family, please don't get afraid that God won't come through for you? He will always provide. Don't live believing that you've got to keep storing up more and more and more...out of fear of what the future may hold? Plan and save, yes...but, there's a time that that becomes hoarding.

You see, I believe the Corinthians were living like that. They were afraid of not having enough and so they had not followed through on their commitment to help in the relief offering...AND SO, their good intentions meant nothing...like our young man from earlier... (I'll see you tonight, if it doesn't rain!) ☺

And this brings us to a place where we can look at today's passage...and see, yet again...a wonderful young man, named Titus, whom the Apostle Paul has sent in his place to Corinth to help the Corinthians finish the job.

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

¹⁶ But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going^[d] to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ With him we are sending^[e] the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹ And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. ²⁰ We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. ²² And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers^[f] of the churches, the glory of Christ. ²⁴ So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

Titus, (if outside of the Apostles in the NT), there was ever a man of honor, it would have been Titus. We see his name mentioned over and over in the NT as man on the move for the Gospel. Titus was one of Paul's chief protégés...a helper...a trusted confidant...an amazing servant of

God. Titus loved the Lord and he loved the Lord's people and he was obviously a man that the Corinthians had grown to trust and love as well. A man of honor indeed.

Now as we think about what we just read, I had a thought come to my mind as I studied this week. Back in verse 17 Paul said, "He's coming to see you OF HIS OWN ACCORD." Why do you think Paul had to say that? I'll tell you why...because, I believe as soon as Titus arrived into town, the Judaizers were likely saying, "Oh...here comes Paul's whipping boy...coming to take your money."

We were here a few weeks ago, but I want to remind you of something. Titus was his own man. He was an encourager and the Corinthians had grown to love him. Watch verse 6.

2 Corinthians 7:6-7

⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.

Yes, Titus was known as a man who comforted and encouraged people. He had a heart of compassion and a zeal for the Gospel...that's evident in what we just read. But, if we're not careful, we'll pass right over the good news that Titus brought back to the Apostle Paul when he returned to Macedonia. Did you catch it in verse 7? "...he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me (Paul)," and so, Paul rejoiced! I know Paul had to breathe a sigh of relief that the whole church hadn't turned their back on Paul while he had been away. I can almost see Paul with his head down in tears as Titus said: "Paul...they still love you."

You know it's such a blessing when the church loves their leaders. That is such a joy! I feel that and so does Pastor Dale! Now, that doesn't mean that we'll never disagree or that everything will always be perfect...after all, we're imperfect people (I surely am)...but, the joy of being comforted by your church family, as a pastor, is priceless. Thank you!

You see the point of Titus' coming to Corinth in the first place was because Paul couldn't. Paul was locked in the work in Macedonia and couldn't get to Corinth to finish collecting the offering. So, Titus said, "I'll go...I'll get it done Paul." And so, Titus went to Corinth, but he didn't go alone. It's as if Paul anticipated the further objections of the Judaizers... I'm sure the Judaizers were still saying: "Oh...Titus...he's in cahoots with Paul...they're like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid...no you can't trust those two...they're going to take your money." So, watch verse 18.

2 Corinthians 8:18-19

¹⁸ With him we are sending^[e] the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹ And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will.

Paul wanted to be totally honorable and above board...and so did Titus... And that's why Titus came into town with this other man... a man that was "famous among all the churches" as a preacher. He needed no introduction. You ask, "Is there any way to know who this is?" Well, some scholars say it might have been Tychicus or Trophimus, (two other great workers in Paul's ministry), but that's purely speculation.

You might say, "Well, how did the Corinthians know who it was?" Well, that man would have been standing right beside of Titus, when Titus delivered this second letter to the Corinthians. He's famous...they would know him...they would recognize him...like if someone famous (Billy Graham)

were to walk in here. Paul didn't need to give his name because he was a famous preacher known by all the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. This man was a distinguished preacher, highly esteemed and very prominent. And that would have been a good thing. Another honorable man!

In other words, his character speaks for itself, and that was needed in this endeavor to get this HUGE offering to Jerusalem. Titus and this unnamed man had a reputation for honesty and integrity. Do you? Would people trust you with their money? Are you a person of honor?

You know, (I'll stop here for a second and share, as a side note something that might not readily be known). Those men, in transporting all that money, really needed was one of these things...



Yeah, an armored truck...because they were transporting a lot of money. Folks they didn't deal in paper...they dealt in coins back then...and this offering...would have been heavy and in sacks that would have to be carried on the backs of donkeys. I would imagine this was quite an undertaking, **EVENTUALLY**, just to get it to Jerusalem.

The point is...you need some really trustworthy people to pull this off. And the thing about Titus and this man is that they weren't described as accountants, or financial wizards, they didn't work at a bank. They were chosen because of they loved the Lord and preached His Gospel. See vs 18 again:

2 Corinthians 8:18

¹⁸With him we are sending^[e] the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.

You know the first Church in Jerusalem laid their money at the Apostles' feet every Sunday because they wanted to put it into the hands of the godliest men. Titus and this preacher could be trusted...that's the point. Paul needed someone to help protect him from the false accusations of the Judaizers, so there would be no look of impropriety.

Now, church family, I'm thankful this morning, that I have a background in business and finance. Some of you might not know this, but I was assistant Treasurer at local apparel manufacturer for several years. I'm grateful for that background, because it helps me to think about how to efficiently and wisely use church resources. And that's great...but, you can have all the financial knowledge in the world...you can be a financial guru...but, what you really want is someone spiritual handling your money...that's **TOP PRIORITY!**

You see, church family, we're supremely blessed to have wonderful people handling our money as a church. That's a blessing because I, nor your staff handle want to handle money...our financial staff does that for us. We have a fantastic Church Treasurer, Assistant Church Treasurer; we have bookkeeper, and a lady who helps with our deposits. We also have a fantastic Budget/Finance Committee, which you, the church has elected. Our Budget/Finance Committee gets a monthly report of every line item in our church budget and that is wonderful accountability. We also have a local accounting firm that handles our accounting for us that's totally separate from the church.

All of these things are in place to provide good oversight of our finances. And yet, there are many churches that don't have these checks and balances in place and that's how churches can get into trouble. There's an old saying: "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." Listen, don't ever put yourself in a position where you have absolute power over money. It's too dangerous. We need checks and balances in our lives. Do you have those in your life? Do you have people who provide accountability in your life? If you don't want that...why? We need people to help us see our blind spots.

You see, what Titus and this unnamed preacher provided for in the collection process in Corinth was accountability and propriety. That's verse 20.

2 Corinthians 8:20

20 We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us,

You see, Paul was wise. He knew he couldn't trust his enemies. These men who would seek to levy all kinds of accusations against him about misappropriation or mishandling the money. And church, accusations don't have to be true to cause doubt in the minds of people and this is why Paul never took a dime from the Corinthians while he was with them.

I want to remind you of something we saw when we were studying 1 Corinthians. Paul gave a detailed defense of his ministry in chapter 9 and it's a good time to be reminded of that.

1 Corinthians 9:3-18

3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. **4** Do we not have the right to eat and drink? **5** Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife,^[a] as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? **6** Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? **7** Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? **8** Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? **9** For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? **10** Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. **11** If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? **12** If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. **13** Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? **14** In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. **15** But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. **16** For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! **17** For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am

still entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Paul made sure no one could accuse him of being a gold-digger...in it for the money. Because I'm convinced these false teachers were constantly keeping things stirred up against Paul with all of these swirling accusations. They just kept the criticism coming! They wanted to destroy the people's trust in him, and that's why Paul takes such major precautions. **Go back to 2 Corinthians 8. Look at verse 21.** Here's Paul's goal:

2 Corinthians 8:21

²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.

Now, you might say, "Well, as long as we act appropriately before God, who cares what people think?" Well, I get that...there's a lot of truth in that...but, when you are handling other people's money, you have to be above reproach. It's not that you don't trust yourself to be honorable before the Lord, rather it's that we don't trust the criticisms of those would seek to tear us down and tear down the gospel for the sake of rumor and innuendos.

And Paul goes one step further. He's got more back-up, more accountability-support.

2 Corinthians 8:22

²² And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.

Wow! Now we've got a third member of the delegation heading to Corinth. Just to take even an extra precaution, here's another man. But, again, no name is given, yet again, that would obviously be known to them as soon as he arrived. Paul describes him in glowing terms as well: "Whom we have often tested" – that word "tested" in the Greek is the word that's used when you test the purity of metals. You heat it up and see how pure the metal really is. This man had been heated up and tested many times and this man had great confidence in the Corinthians. So, they knew him too!

So, we've got Titus, and another brother whose fame has spread through all the churches because of his preaching, and now you've got a third brother, who has been tested many times and found zealous. What a great group to provide tremendous accountability.

Now, Paul sums up his confidence in this little group...this financial committee...verse 23.

2 Corinthians 8:23-24

²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers^[f] of the churches, the glory of Christ. ²⁴ So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

Literally, the Greek construction for that last verse says, "in the faces of the churches." Let everybody see the proof of your generosity. And that's why Paul spoke so highly of Titus, his trusted partner in the Gospel. Paul said, "You know him...he's been with you many times...you know his character. He's always been a benefit to you. And these other brothers...they are "messengers of the churches." Some translations say: "apostles." Now that's not like capital-A "Apostles" of Jesus...hand-picked men of Jesus...but, instead, "little-a" apostles...messengers...hand selected by the churches, who then charged and commissioned them with the official duty of taking up this offering and transporting this money to Jerusalem.

But, the thing that struck me about these men, was the last part of the verse. **“They are messengers of the churches, THE GLORY OF CHRIST.”** Wouldn't you like that on your epitaph? What more could be said? They are a glory to Christ. They bring glory to Christ. Do you? Do I? Can that be said of us?

Are we pointing to the glory of Jesus by how we live? Are we honorable in how we're living? That's to be our aim, church family! Can we be trusted? Are we living lives of integrity? Can people take our word to the bank...or will we be like our BIG TALKING fella...from the beginning with his girl... Hey dude...even if it rains show up! Church, if we're the real deal...show up...live for Jesus...be honorable...people of integrity...trustworthy...for THE GLORY OF JESUS!
