
Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 8.

I want to ask you a question as we begin this morning: Do you think Jesus cares if we give to His Kingdom work...does it matter to Him? Yes? I agree...so, we believe Jesus wants us to give? Is that what we're saying? Well, I think that's a good plan, because Jesus said... See the screens:

Luke 6:38

³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

So, yes, Jesus cares if we give... It's actually a command! GIVE! Jesus, we, also know said:

Acts 20:35

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Listen, as followers of Jesus we know that if we love Jesus, we will keep His commandments. AND that being the case, there THEN, is no choice for the believer! If we love Him, we'll be a giver.

Yet sadly, I must say, many Christians don't give. Instead, they protect. They live trying to hold-to and protect everything they have so that they'll have enough and never be close to being in want. They become hoarders and they become stingy and they become self-indulgent, ultra-protective and unwilling to give. You see, it's really a matter of faith. Many Christians simply don't believe the promises of Jesus in His Word.

No, we don't want to admit it...but, it's easier to trust our souls to Jesus than it is our money. It's a question of trust and belief. Remember the old song: "Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." I guess we could say it this way, "We either believe or we don't, because if we do, we'll give...if we don't, we won't and that's to our own detriment." Jesus says, "Give and it will be given back to you." Problem is: we want Him to give first. But, Jesus says, "Show me that you trust me...you go first."

Dear church family, here's the issue with giving...we'll never have the desire to give with a sincere and joyful heart, if Jesus doesn't FIRST have our hearts. In other words, if we're not surrendered to Him...if we don't FIRST give ourselves to Him, we're not going to give our treasure to Him. And yet, Jesus said: "For where our treasure is...there your heart will be also."

Today we begin a New Series we're calling: "Giving Ourselves First to the Lord."



And we're going to see the example of those who surrendered to the Lord and those who didn't. Let's pick up in verse 1.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

¹We want you to know, brothers,^[a] about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme

poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor^[b] of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Now as we think about what we've just read, doesn't it seem that Paul almost changes the subject abruptly? From talking about changed lives: "The old being passed away and all things becoming new," "Godly grief and repentance," to giving money?? What's that all about? Well, church family, I'll say AGAIN exactly what Jesus, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Jesus doesn't want what's in your hand if He doesn't have your heart. Yet, what's in your hand...your money, your possessions, your stuff...WHAT YOU AND I DO WITH THAT STUFF is an indication of what we love and whom we love. If we love Jesus, we will treasure what He treasures...it's that simple.

And that's what the Macedonians knew. They gave themselves FIRST to the Lord! They loved Jesus above all things. He came first! See it again...

2 Corinthians 8:5

⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Now let's be reminded of who the Macedonians are. See the map...top left...



You'll see the area of Macedonia and the towns of Thessalonica and Berea and over to the right, Philippi. These are the towns that we know from Scripture where Paul had planted churches in that region. Then if you look to the bottom-left, you'll see Corinth in the region of Achaia. Paul was actually writing from Macedonia. Scholars think he was likely writing from Thessalonica or Philippi...and as he writes to the Corinthians, he uses the Macedonian churches as an example to the Corinthians in showing commitment to give to the Lord's work. Look back at verse 1.

2 Corinthians 8:1

¹ We want you to know, brothers,^[a] about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.

Rome, who was in power, had reduced most of the cities under their dominion, like Macedonia, to places of poverty because of their oppressive taxes. The people were very poor and struggled day-to-day to make ends meet. Life was hard in the Roman Empire. You had the "have's and the have-nots." The "haves" were in power and the "have-nots" were the common people who labored for next to nothing. Vs 2 says the people were under a severe test of affliction and extreme poverty. See it.

2 Corinthians 8:2

² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

It's an amazing equation that commentator Warren Wiersbe sights about the Macedonians:

Severe Affliction + Extreme Poverty + Grace = Abundant Joy and Generosity

The Greek word for poverty, used in verse 2 means: “a beggar...to be destitute.” Scholars believe part of the reason for the extreme poverty is that many may have lost their jobs because of their new-found Christian faith. They may have lost their job or been excluded from the trade guilds because they refused to have anything to do with idolatry and bow down to Caesar. That may eventually happen in this country. If you don't bow down to the elites, the “Caesars” of our society, you may no longer have a job. Will you contend for the faith or bow the knee denying the truth of God's Word?

Can you imagine the Macedonian's plight? People who have next to nothing and yet give so generously? It doesn't compute, does it? These are people who are barely getting by. It reminds of the widow who gave the “widow's mite.”



Jesus pointed her out in the Temple one day to His disciples. He said, “Watch her. She's giving all she's got because she trusts God to supply her need.” Do you? Do you trust the Lord to supply your need or are you relying on yourself and your own resources? How is it today? Is it hard? Money tight? Not sure how you're going to make ends meet? Listen, just as Jesus saw the widow, He sees you. He knows your need. The question is: will we, like the widow, like the Macedonians trust Him? Will we give ourselves to Him first? Oh, how many times have we shared this verse on these screens?

Matthew 6:33

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Jesus said those words to people on a mountainside outside of Capernaum who very poor. Would you **turn to the Sermon on the Mount...would you go to Matthew chapter 6**? The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew chapter 5, 6 and 7 and it's the greatest sermon ever preached. It's powerful in its simplicity; and yet, it's some of the most profound words ever uttered and I want you to see the context of Matthew 6:33. **Pick up in verse 25.**

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?^[q]²⁸ And why are you anxious about

clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Comforting words from our Savior to a people who were poor and haggard, overtaxed, over worked and struggling to make ends meet...and yet, they were just like the brothers and sisters in Macedonia some 25 years later. And the same conditions existed for the brothers and sisters in the mother church in Jerusalem, for whom Paul was taking up an offering.

You see, at the time of the writing of this letter, there was a famine in Israel...and the church in Jerusalem was struggling mightily. The church (the first church) had grown from...120 people (Acts 1:15) at the time of Christ's ascension to 3,000 being saved on the day of Pentecost, (Acts 2), to another 5,000 being saved by the time we get to Acts 4, which could have been only a few months removed from Pentecost.

So we have many, many thousands of people at the Church at Jerusalem at the time of the writing of this second letter to the Corinthians. And by the time we get to Acts chapter 6, you remember they had to get them some Deacons to handle a food distribution system to feed the widows some bread each day. I believe the Apostles in Jerusalem were fighting fire with fire to try to keep all of those people fed and cared for in such dire straits. But, like anyone, sometimes your resources just run out and you have to have help. The Apostle Paul saw this and said, "I'm going to take up an offering for the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem"

Now think about this with me. Who are the majority of the believers in Jerusalem, are they former Jews or Gentiles? Jews, right? Okay...who are the majority of the believers over in Europe, where Paul is in Macedonia and Achaia? Gentiles. Look at this map of Paul's missionary journeys. I know it's real busy...but look at the colors...



Look at the yellow at the top. See where it says Macedonia...that's where Philippi and Thessalonica are? See Achaia right under it? That's where Corinth is. Now look to the right side of the map...see the Green? See the bottom-right, Judea...that's where Jerusalem is, and it's

Jerusalem where the Gospel started and if it wasn't for the church at Jerusalem, there would be no Gospel to spread to Europe in Macedonia and Achaia; and thus, Paul was saying, "Gentiles" you owe a debt of gratitude to the "Jews" who are now Christians...in Jerusalem. Paul described this sentiment to the church at Rome in Romans 15.

Romans 15:25-27

²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷ For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

Okay...get this now...who is in Corinth running Paul down at every breath? The Judaizers right? Remember those guys...these are the fellas that were fleecing the flock and taking money from the Corinthians and spreading lies about the Apostle Paul while they were doing it. You remember that Paul never took a dime from the people in Corinth. He established the church in Corinth and stayed there for 18 months and never took a penny from the people there. See the screens...watch this...from 2 Corinthians 11. Paul reminds them that he came to them "free of charge."

2 Corinthians 11:7-9

⁷ Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.

And down in verse 20 he says:

2 Corinthians 11:20

²⁰ For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.

Paul said, "These Judaizers are taking you to the cleaners, and you ought to be ashamed for being so duped." Paul said, "I've never asked a penny from you, other than to ask you to help your brothers and sisters in Jerusalem." And that would fly in the face of the narrative of these Judaizers...men who were saying that Paul didn't care about the Jews... They said, "Well, Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles...it's Peter who is the Apostle to us...the Jews." No...Paul said to the Gentiles, turned Christians in Achaia, we need to help our brothers and sisters...former Jews, now Christians in Jerusalem. Former Gentiles helping Jews! That's what the love of Christ does...that's the grace and mercy of God in action!

You know we helped our brothers and sisters in a far-away place...Texas and Mexico 2 weeks ago.



1

Taking back Weslaco for Jesus with our sister church, New Life Baptist of Weslaco



2

here's pastor Jason Church.



3

We did two nights of outdoor block party with our praise team singing.



4

We had great food for all, and games for the kids.



5

We had great crowds both nights. I spoke the first night



6

Leah Church and her dad, Craig, spoke the second night. Total-12 professions of faith.



7

We had tickets for prizes



8

And thanks to Josh Paul and Anchor Ridge Ministries, we had lots of give-a-ways.



9

We love New Life and our brothers and sisters and we love MPBC of Progreso, MX



10

and Pastor Oscar. We've known Oscar and his wife Miriam for 12 years



11

That's them in the middle as we were praying for them in the church we built, and while



12

we were there...we built them a house from the ground up for \$6,000.



13

It was a lot of work. But we got the walls up...



14

Pastor Oscar's and Miriam's house (along w/their 2 boys) is right beside the church



15

And here's the team with those of the church whom we worked alongside.

What a blessing! That's brothers and sisters helping brothers and sisters, and you made that possible with your giving. BTW contact Pastor Dale if you'd like to go with us. \$400/per person to do international missions!

Unfortunately, for the Corinthians...they hadn't stepped up to the plate to help their brothers and sisters. And that's the point. Paul was using the Macedonians as an example of grace and trust in Jesus. You see, we can't look at our brothers and sisters in need and turn a blind eye...we must help them...even if we're in a tough spot ourselves. Jesus taught this: RELY on ME...seek me first...not anything else and I'll take care of you. Are you relying on him? The Macedonians were and they trusted Him to provide for them as they helped their brothers and sisters in need. You may ask, "How did they do this?" Look back at verse 1. GRACE.

2 Corinthians 8:1

¹We want you to know, brothers,^[a] about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.

The Greek word for "grace" used there is the same Greek word that's used in verse 4 for the word "favor." See it...

2 Corinthians 8:4

⁴begging us earnestly for the favor^[b] of taking part in the relief of the saints—

The Greek word for "grace" and "favor" is "charis." See it...

Charis: of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.

Listen, when you have experienced the grace of God in your life, you will not use your difficult situation as an excuse for not giving. In fact, it's our need, like the widow, that brings great opportunity to show faith and trust in our Heavenly Father.

Are you in need today...oh...I know it sounds counter-intuitive...but GIVE and it will be given to you...pressed down, shaken, over-flowing, right into your lap! The Macedonians believed this and they were constantly helping Paul.

The Macedonians were always chomping at the bit to help in Paul's work because they knew people were being saved. They wanted to see people come to Jesus, just like they had. Do you see the contrast with the church at Corinth? The contrast couldn't be more stark! The churches in Macedonia were giving, but the church in Corinth wasn't. Go back to **2 Corinthians 8. Look at verse 10**. We'll see this in more detail next week, but I want you to see it now.

2 Corinthians 8:10-11

¹⁰ And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹ So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

So, here's the cold-hard truth, church family, the Corinthians had been carnal and it showed. This has been obvious...just look at all the problems in that church...the infighting...back-biting...arguing over who has the greatest spiritual gift...sexual immorality being tolerated. What a mess and that's why Paul had been questioning their faith. Remember back in chapter 5 he asked them, "Have you been made new? Has the old passed away? Are you a new creation?" In other words, Paul said, "Test yourself." Because you see church family, one of the greatest tests of our conviction of belief is to what or to whom we give our money. Remember...where your treasure is...your heart will be also.

For the Corinthians, their delay in taking up the offering clearly showed their lack of spiritual depth and lack of zeal and commitment for the Lord and His work. Oh, listen...whether it's a church or a person, when we're not spiritual, we're NOT likely to be generous. And that described the Corinthians. They were not doing their part. They said they were going to, but they hadn't. They hadn't kept their word. The Macedonians on the other hand, were supremely generous even in their extreme financial poverty. Yes, Paul was hoping to inspire the Corinthians to follow the lead of their brothers and sisters up north in Macedonia.

2 Corinthians 8:3-4

³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor^[b] of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

The Macedonians gave themselves first to the Lord and Paul said, "then to us." In other words, they trusted Paul and Silas and Timothy...their leaders. The Corinthians were waffling on their trust on both counts...with the Lord and the leadership of Paul and his team and it showed. For the Macedonians they trusted God and their leaders and they gave "beyond their means of their own accord." No one pressured them or coerced them, and it's because of the Grace of God that was upon them. Yes...Jesus said:

Luke 6:38

³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

Church, it's the grace of God that brought us salvation. For by grace through faith, we have been saved, and that not of ourselves, lest any man should boast; and thus, it's out of a heart of gratitude that we should give ourselves FIRST and wholeheartedly to our Lord and Savior. Because when we do, we'll be like the old song says: "Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."
