

An Example of Giving—Romans 15:25-29—3/10/2013

Copyright by Mark Vaughan 3/2013

Keywords—giving, money, finances, stewardship

As we return to our study of Paul's letter to the Romans this morning, we're going to start with a little background history.

Open your Bibles to the NT book of Acts, which records some of Paul's travels and I thought it may be helpful to fit his comments in Romans in the history of Acts.

If you struggle to remember when each NT book was written and how the history flows of Paul's missionary journeys, I pray this is helpful.

Look with me first at Acts 11:27-30 where we find a trip to Jerusalem mentioned by Paul to provide relief from a famine.

Recall that Acts began with Jesus' ascension back to heaven and then the Holy Spirit came upon a gathering of disciples to begin the church.

The church was a new work of God in people from all nations as evidenced by the speaking and hearing of many languages.

The diverse languages attested to God doing a new multinational work that was distinct from His previous focus on Israel nationally.

Then the church spread as people trusted Christ and scattered taking the Gospel wherever they went.

And Acts 9 records the salvation of a great enemy of the early church, the persecutor named Saul whom Jesus confronted and converted.

That transformed Jewish man is the one we know as Paul whom Jesus then appointed to be the Apostle to the Gentiles.

As Paul began preaching & Gentiles were confirmed as welcome with Jews in this new people of God, churches were planted elsewhere.

Acts 11 records the founding of the church at Antioch as it was affirmed by the first church in Jerusalem through Barnabas.

Then Barnabas and Paul or Saul taught there for a year and the disciples were first called Christians there at Antioch.

Acts 11:26 reports that fact & then let's read what happened next in relationship from Antioch to the church in Jerusalem.

Follow along with me in Acts 11:27-30 as I read. [READ]

There was a famine, which means they did not have food.

Other historians mention this wide-reaching famine also.

And it was particularly bad for Christians in Jerusalem because they were persecuted by unbelieving Jews and had faced poverty when the church began.

So the new Christians in Antioch sent the Jerusalem Christians financial help and Barnabas and Saul delivered the gift.

That's the first gift Paul delivered to Jerusalem to help the poor there and Acts 12:25 mentions that being fulfilled.

Then turn to Acts 19:21 after Paul had completed a second missionary journey and was on his third one—read Acts 19:21. [READ]

Here we see the mention of going to Jerusalem again and then going to Rome and that is where we connect with the time that Paul wrote his letter to the Romans.

He probably wrote Romans from Corinth because people mentioned in Romans 16, like Phoebe, were from Corinth.

Probably it was written in the timeframe of chapters 18-19 in the flow of history in Acts.

Acts 20:16 mentions him hurrying to get to Jerusalem and then chapter 21 reports what happened when he arrived in Jerusalem.

Why am I telling you all that?

For several reasons—first to remind you that Paul was a real, historical person and the Bible has coherent records that can be pieced together to understand how God used Paul through his travels.

Not only are the 66 books of the Bible all interrelated in the story of redemption in Christ in God's plan for the ages.

But even the details of books and people weave together stories of God working in various places and groups over time.

And seeing the history in Acts also reminds us of Paul's travels and relationships and shows us that you can figure this stuff out if you take the time to study it.

Now turn to 1st Corinthians 16 and let's put some more pieces to this puzzle together about Paul's travel to Jerusalem to take another gift to meet the needs of the saints there.

Read 1st Corinthians 16:1-2 with me. [READ]

This is a collection for a 2nd gift to be taken to the poor in Jerusalem.

And just note here—do you ever wonder where we get the idea to take up a collection the first day of every week?

Here's one example of it in the NT.

And if you wonder where the idea of planned giving comes from, this is an example of that also.

Paul told them to look at what they earned and set aside and save some of it so that they might give.

Giving was not an afterthought—like, “oh, yeah, what do we have leftover to give”—but it was a forethought—like “ok, let's not spend on other stuff so we can save and plan to give.”

We'll see that again, but while we're here I wanted to highlight it.

But I had us turn to this passage because I want us to set up this planned gift for saints in Jerusalem as a big deal through a number of NT letters and in a number of churches.

In 2nd Corinthians, Paul wrote two whole chapters—chapters 8-9—related to giving in connection with the collection he was gathering from Gentile churches to take to the Jerusalem church.

It was from largely Gentile churches for saints in Jerusalem, which was largely made up of Jews—remember that.

1st Corinthians 16 tells us that Paul had said similar things to the churches in Galatia so you might picture this as an offering plate that traveled far and wide before it was given to Jerusalem Christians.

And in the flow of Acts and NT history, this was a second gift taken by Paul to Jerusalem to help the poor Christians there.

This one was probably from more churches and Paul gave it a deeper significance in Romans 15.

So let's turn now to Romans 15 and I'll tell you more of why this extra background matters to us today.

Here's the underlying theme that's easy to miss—money matters.

Money mattered to Paul and to the churches he founded.

Money mattered to the Jerusalem church as the Jewish root from which all these Gentile churches grew out of.

Money mattered in the obvious daily needs of the poor there.

And money also mattered in the relationships between those churches with diverse ethnic groups coming together in Christ.

Money also mattered enough for Paul to be the one who would use his valuable time and his significant influence to carry the money securely with right perspective to those receiving it.

As we've seen and we'll read again in Romans 15, Paul wanted to go to Rome and then head on from there to Spain because his calling and passion in life was to preach where Christ was not named.

He was a frontier missionary, one who took the Gospel to unreached people groups and he longed to continue the westward expansion of the church for the glory of Christ.

But before he did so, he had to deliver some money to Jerusalem.

He had to leave Corinth and go 1000 miles further away from Rome first to Jerusalem before he then headed for Rome.

And the main reason revolved around money—it was this gift and how it was given and viewed and received and used.

Money mattered to Paul and it mattered to Jesus because He talked a lot about it too.

And that leads into our topic for today to remind us that money matters to us—money matters to you.

How you view money, use money & give money all matters.

How you feel about money, how you plan with money, how you feel about giving money, and how you value money in relation to spiritual blessings—all of that matters to God and to your life & your eternity.

Money and giving are not a side issue—they are a vital issue that shows what is inside.

Or they may show what's not inside.

We traced through some NT history to begin today to see how money and the interrelationships of this gift between churches dictated the Apostle Paul's travel plans.

In the urgency and opportunity of spreading the Gospel far and wide, Paul's agenda was also governed by faithful management of money.

With that in mind, let's connect all that back into Romans 15 and then we'll start into the example of giving in verses 26-28.

Follow along with me as I read Romans 15:22-29. [READ]

Ok. Now I'm going to give a first outline point for today.

I've already explained how we arrive at this 1st point of application with all the background history we've covered.

But that background infuses significance into verse 25 when Paul said he was going 1000 miles further away from Rome to Jerusalem before he headed for Rome.

His goal of frontier missions to Spain was subjected to the priority of money being rightly handled and this gift being rightly viewed.

So he was personally going along to insure its stewardship.

I've already mentioned today how that teaches us that money matters, but since the other verses here teach us about this gift and about giving, let's frame up our 1st point in terms of giving.

And we'll just say this—point #1—your giving matters.

If you grasp how Paul altered his whole travel schedule and how he delayed his passion for frontier missions all for proper stewardship of this gift, then you can see how this teaches that your giving matters.

Just as we read in 1st Corinthians 16:1-2 where Paul urged them to plan and save in order to give, we know giving matters.

So we're going to take this week and next week to walk through these verses and other connected passages to see HOW your giving matters.

Today and next week we'll cover 5 points about giving from the example of giving we find here in Romans 15:25-29.

But today we'll only have time for the 1st two points and the first point is that broad heading to get us into the topic.

So note point #1—your giving matters.

With that in mind, as we study giving today and next week, I want to challenge you to sit down and evaluate your giving.

And in case you wondered, I don't know what anyone gives.

The deacons are on a rotation of who counts the weekly offering and then Greg manages the tracking of the finances.

You can see the overall numbers and expenses posted in the foyer all the time, updated at least every month.

So you know basically everything I know.

I haven't gone digging into your budget or your giving records.

We talk about giving today and this week because it's in the text.

And I'm glad it's come up in the text because we need the reminder and the teaching on a topic that is vitally important.

We are daily bombarded with advertisements and people and pressures to spend money on this or that and to view money in wrong ways.

We have a government that spends more than it takes in and prepares a debt for younger generations to force them into harder times and very few people realize that's wrong.

We are still now among the richest people on the planet in history and yet we send and support far fewer churches and missionaries per capita than other countries and than in history.

So it's probably an accurate guess that at least some of you do not consider giving to be a priority.

I don't say that as a guilt trip or manipulation—I only want you to give if you want to—but I say it to note that this issue needs addressing.

In our response to God and our faith in God and in our response to needs and opportunities and in our priorities and what we treasure, we need to remember that our giving matters.

We need to ponder biblical truth about money and giving so we can battle against all the wrong ideas that surround us and assault us and even come up inside of us.

We need the challenge of this example of giving in Romans 15.

For some of you, God may just want to remind you why you are doing what you've been doing and affirm you in your faithful giving.

I thank God for how He has provided for the work of this church through faithful givers and how we can support the ministry and outreach of staff and facilities and missionaries.

It's a joy to be a part of and I'm grateful for your part in it.

And now as we study giving, I pray you are excited and open to what God wants to do next.

We start with that 1st overarching point that our giving matters.

Point #1—your giving matters.

But why? And how?

Why does our giving matter and how does it matter?

We'll see more next week, but consider one more point today that moves us into answers about how our giving matters.

And that is point #2—that your attitude about giving matters.

Point #2—your attitude about giving matters.

Not only does giving matter, but so does our attitude about it.

Read verse 26 again to see this 2nd point—Romans 15:26. [READ]

The first word 'for' tells us this is explaining why Paul had a gift to be delivered.

Macedonia and Achaia were Roman provinces, regions in what's now Greece and the idea is that Christians in those regions gave.

And the key is HOW they gave and how their gift is described.

Paul wrote that they had been pleased to make a contribution.

Literally, they have taken pleasure in doing this—they thought it was good and determined to do it.

They were not forced, but they were presented with a need and opportunity and they gladly responded.

That's where we get the point of application for our lives—that our attitude about giving matters.

The churches in Macedonia and Achaia were examples of the right attitude to have in giving—they were glad to give.

And the word for contribution is the word for fellowship.

It's the Greek word koinonia that you may have heard before for fellowship or sharing in life together.

The churches in Macedonia and Achaia had been pleased to share, to do sharing in the needs of other believers.

They decided that it would be joyful and good to view the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ as their own.

They thought it loving and wise to share the load of care for the church from which the Gospel originally spread.

They saw this as desirable because these were fellow saints, meaning they were those purchased by Christ to be declared holy and be made progressively holy in their testimony before the world.

And as fellow believers, they were in connection with them in a way that they felt the link to love them in this tangible way.

The opportunity existed because the saints in Jerusalem were poor, meaning they did not have the money needed for their basic needs.

Because of the past famine and past and present persecutions, the Jerusalem saints were financially and physically needy.

And their spiritual brothers and sisters in Macedonia and Achaia had the love and joy and compassion and kindness to be generous.

That's what's conveyed in verse 26 about their attitude.

That's how we learn that our attitude about giving matters.

And since today's sermon has already included flipping around to a lot of other places to study this gift, let's flip to another place where this collection is mentioned in the NT.

Turn to 2nd Corinthians 8 where Macedonia is mentioned.

2nd Corinthians 8-9 are some of the richest & clearest teaching on giving in the NT and they start with explaining how the churches in Macedonia responded to this chance to give.

When we read in Romans 15:26 of the glad, gracious attitude of the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to share with the saints in Jerusalem, we're only getting a small peak into their attitudes.

2nd Corinthians 8-9 expand on that attitude in ways that are amazing and challenging as we consider our attitude as well.

So I want to walk quickly through parts of these amazing chapters.

Start reading with me in 2nd Corinthians 8:1-2. [READ]

First note that giving is a work of God's grace given to people so that the givers are also receivers of blessing from God.

As Paul quoted the Lord Jesus' promise in Acts 20:35—"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

It is more happy, more blessed, to give than to receive.

So when God works in a heart to move us to give, we are blessed with happiness as givers.

The giver gets the joy and that joy is a gift from God—it is a grace of God's Spirit moving in our hearts to transform our attitudes.

And that's what the churches in Macedonia experienced so amazingly that they gave even though they faced affliction.

It didn't even make sense that their deep poverty could do so, but it coupled with abundance of joy to overflow in generosity.

And not just a little generosity, but a wealth of it.

Read on in verses 3-5. [READ]

Their generosity happened because they first gave themselves to the Lord—they knew He owned them and He would take care of them and that freed them up to give lavishly.

They didn't just consider what they could spare—what their ability to get by comfortably could allow them to offer a little.

No. They gave according to their ability AND beyond their ability—meaning they gave more than they thought they could.

And God provided for them in doing so.

But verse 4 gets at the attitude we should have toward giving—we should WANT to give.

They wanted to give so much that they begged for it.

We should long to worship God and love others with our gifts.

They considered it a grace—that's the word 'favor'—to be able to give and they wanted to share and minister in that way.

And participation is that word for fellowship again—koinonia.

And the word support or serving is the term used in Romans 15:25 for serving the saints that is the verb form of the word for deacon.

The idea is that they had such a heart for other Christians and for Gospel ministry that it was an absolute thrill to give to share in the lives of other Christians.

That's a compelling example of how our attitude about giving matters.

How does your attitude about giving compare?

My sons went around our neighborhood yesterday handing out flyers to get jobs mowing lawns.

They said they rang one doorbell and a dog started barking and then a baby started crying and a man came to the door with the baby in his arms and the dog at his feet and told them to leave.

He told them he wasn't interested, he didn't want any.

So much for neighborly marketing.

But I encouraged the boys it was probably because he was tired of neighborhood kids doing fundraisers for their sports & clubs & such.

That man's response to such fundraisers and to my sons yesterday was the exact opposite of the Macedonians.

He was like—get out of here, I wish you never came.

And the Macedonians were like—Come here, tell us more and share how I can give to God and His work and I'll keep asking and giving beyond my comfort zone.

I think we see so many fundraisers in our country and so many Christian things that are not legitimate ministry that we can get exasperated or suspicious every time we hear another one.

And we need to be discerning and guard against throwing money at every supposed need that comes along when all we truly need physically is food and shelter.

That's why our mercy fund ministry strives to help with budgeting first and giving help that lasts rather than just throwing money.

But even with such considerations and with precautions against big-box ministries that always seem to be fundraising, we should be glad to welcome and give to true Gospel causes.

And we should be eager to meet real needs of fellow believers.

Paul went on in verses 6-8 to discuss how the Corinthians' giving would prove their love and then later in the chapter how they should finish the commitment to giving that they started.

But verse 9 gives the foundational motive behind giving that can fix our attitude when we need it—read verse 9. [READ]

The Lord Jesus, who was infinitely rich in the glories of heaven in every meaningful way, showed grace by becoming poor in the humble, dirty life of a 1st-century Jew in this fallen world.

In His human life, Jesus lived perfectly and then suffered and died to pay the infinite debt of sin on the cross.

And through His poverty in those ways, He welcomes believers to become rich spiritually in Him & what He's earned.

That's the Gospel—the Good News of Jesus Christ.

That's what it means that Jesus was rich but became poor.

And He did it so we might inherit His riches spiritually & eternally.

That level of generous giving by Jesus is what can reshape everything to motivate us to be gracious in giving.

So what matters most in our attitude about giving is that we are responding to and displaying the Gospel.

Are we believing that we have received so much spiritually and in every other way that we should gladly give to others?

And are we believing that our good God who saved us in Christ will also provide all we need in this life if He gives us opportunity to give?

And are we believing that the spiritual riches we've received and the eternal rewards of giving are far greater anyway?

All those Gospel truths are what motivated the Macedonian churches in God's grace to move them to give.

And that's what we want.

Look at 2nd Corinthians 9:6-7 to see the attitude of the Macedonians turned into a command for the Corinthians that applies to us too.

Read 2nd Corinthians 9:6-7 with me. [READ]

Cheerful—God loves a cheerful giver.

It's not that He doesn't love all who are His, but in a deeper experientially way we enter into a fuller pleasure of God's love when we are cheerful givers.

And we have that cheerful attitude by not grudging giving like it's a chore or forced compulsion we have to endure or succumb to.

We have pleasure as we purpose in our hearts by faith to give.

We trust that we cannot out-give God and we sow bountifully and wait on God to let us reap bountifully.

Giving is an act of faith in God that He is better & He provides.

That's what verses 8-11 explain—read verses 8-11. [READ]

We don't have time to unpack all these lavish words of promise from God about who He is and how He provides.

But rest assured that the point is that we can't out-give God.

That's what Jesus said in Luke 6:38.

Luke 6:38 says, "Give, & it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, & running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

And it's not that God gives to us so that we can store up earthly treasures and have false prosperity gospel ideas of homes and cars and fame and fortune.

He gives so that we can provide for what's needed and then so we can get the greater thrills of giving even more.

Around here, we call it the fun of being a funnel.

God pours it in so that we can pour it out & it is so fun to be a part of.

And you can read the rest of the promises in chapter 9 later and how they culminate in praise of God for His indescribable gift.

So again the emphasis goes back to the Gospel—that the right attitude in giving flows out of our response to the Gospel.

We were poor spiritually—we owed everything to pay the penalty for our sins and we would spend eternity paying it.

But Jesus was rich in the infinite, eternal glory of heaven.

Yet He became poor in His humanity and in His suffering and death to pay sin's penalty.

And He did it so that we who trust Him might become rich spiritually and inherit what His life earned in heavenly riches now and forever.

Receiving that abundance of generous grace changes our attitude about giving to others in need.

Knowing what we deserve and how much blessing we've been given moves us to be gracious with others.

And that's how our attitude our giving matters.

It is a pleasure to give.

It is a happy experience of God's grace to give.

It is a privilege to invest in relationships by sharing in the needs of fellow believers in God's family.

So our giving matters and our attitude about giving matters.

We'll dig into how we give and why more next week.

But for today, consider first your response to the Gospel.

If you haven't realized your poverty and come to trust in Christ's riches, start there.

Then consider your giving and your attitude about giving.

Do you give?

Do you prioritize giving as so important that you set aside and save for it and sacrifice other things in order to give more?

Do you give regularly out of faith in God that He will provide and out of gratitude for all He has already provided?

And do you get excited about giving?

Are you joyous about giving & thrilled to be generous & meet needs?

Do you love the fun of being a funnel?

For those of you who know that fun and who love to give, I just want to encourage you to keep it up and excel still more.

I want to commend those of you who give to meet needs in secret ways and in personal relationships.

I want to rejoice over you who live gladly in these truths.

And I want us to pray that we'll all embrace the priority and pleasure of giving biblically for God's glory.

Pray with me as we close.