

Giving: Unlocking Contentment

Giving, as an expression of love

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

November 10, 2019 am

HDBC

The believers in Jerusalem were in trouble. By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians they had experienced a couple of decades of life in a culture that not only resisted Christianity but violently reacted against them. They were increasingly shunned, ostracized, boycotted, persecuted, arrested and even killed. What Jesus had revealed to his band of 12 had indeed come true.

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. Mt. 10:34-36

This was happening in the very city where it all started. The church there was struggling. The same power brokers who sent Jesus to the cross were still in control and were trying desperately to put an end to the growing movement. They brought physical, emotional and financial pressures against believers. They boycotted Christian businesses and refused to hire Christians. Things were hard. They lost homes and businesses and were beginning to starve.

As Paul traveled among the churches in Asia, he suggest that they take an offering to help their brothers and sisters in Christ. We read about this in 1 Corinthians 16. There he offered some guidelines for this offering.

In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul returns to this issue and encouraged the Corinthians to complete the offering and to be prepared when he came. He must have sensed that their enthusiasm had begun to wane. He wanted to fan the flames a little and motivate them to excel in their giving.

Read Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1-9

Note three things in the text:

1. The Example (1-5)

Paul offered a surprising example to the Corinthians, as a way of motivating them to complete what they had started. He points them to the churches of Macedonia, probably in Thessalonica, Berea and Philippi. In contrast to the relative wealth and prosperity of Corinth, the believers in Macedonia had very little. They were more like their counterparts in Jerusalem than their brothers and sisters in Corinth. Yet, they gave generously, liberally and sacrificially.

Lessons from those precious givers. I'll only mention 4, now.

1) Their giving was a response to grace

As these believers gave their money, they were actually passing along the grace of God which they had received. Giving is one of the greatest indicators that a person has truly been born again.

Zacchaeus was the kingpin of the Jericho tax cartel. He had made a fortune at the expense of his countrymen. He had everything money could buy. But there was a **gnawing realization** that money could not buy contentment or peace. Something was missing. So, when Jesus came to town the little big man just had to go and see him. You know the story. Zacchaeus met Jesus that day and was absolutely transformed. How do we know? Look what he did!

He immediately gave half of his fortune to help poor people. He probably had helped many of them become poor. Then he took what was left and restored to everyone whom he had defrauded four times the amount. Understand that this placed his entire fortune in jeopardy. But he was not concerned because he was now a genuine follower of Christ.

Jesus' assessment? Salvation has come to this man today.

2) Their giving was not limited by their poverty

Note two descriptions. *Great ordeal of affliction* and *their deep poverty*

Ordeal speaks of a test or a trial. **Affliction** refers to extreme pressure, as in crushing grapes or olives. **Poverty** describes a condition where a person has almost nothing and is forced to beg to survive.

When you consider this, you would not think that these people could give at all. But they did. Their actions **strongly condemn the popular notion** that if I have little then I can't give. Not so!

3) Their giving was joyful and generous

In spite of their poverty, they gave joyfully. The joy in their hearts caused them to give without reservation and without holding back. What made their giving generous was not the amount, but the joy with which they gave it. Paul uses some really descriptive words.

Overflowed refers to an abundance, more than necessary, more than can be contained. **Wealth** speaks of riches (money or spiritual riches). **Liberality** indicates generosity and sincerity. In other words their attitude was right. God is not impressed by numbers but by hearts.

In a later message we are going to come back to this example when we consider the key New Testament principles of giving. So I want to mention only one more thing at this point.

4) Their giving was a privilege

Apparently, at first, Paul discouraged them from giving because of their own lack of resources. So, they **begged** for the opportunity to give. They saw it was a privilege to participate in this effort. They were not coerced to give. They **wanted** to give. They were not to be denied.

What was the key? *They first gave themselves to the Lord!* Their giving was the fruit of a passionate commitment to Christ. When you have surrendered yourself completely to the Lord, giving is not only not hard, it is desired!

2. The Challenge (6-8)

Paul then moves to his point. Having used the Macedonian believers as a great example of giving, he calls for the Corinthians to step up and do the right thing. Paul brags on how they were abounding in so many other areas, and now challenges them to do the same in giving.

In sales lingo, he is making the ask. Successful salesman never fail to

make the ask. He does not want there to be any ambiguity about what they should do. But note that in verse 8 he points out that this is not a command but a challenge for them to **act in love**.

Ultimately, giving is about loving. We give to those whom we love. When we give, we are denying ourselves in order to help or bless others. Paul wants them to give because they love, not because they feel compelled.

He has made the ask, now Paul moves in to **close the deal**. He does so by offering the ultimate example, Jesus Christ.

3. The Motivation (9)

The ultimate motivation for our giving is Jesus Christ and His giving. Paul has used the Macedonian believers as an example of the lesser to the greater. They were poor, yet they gave. Now he uses the opposite example. Jesus was rich, yet became poor for our sakes. He embraced poverty that we might be made wealthy. He took on our sin and died a criminal's death, so that we might be adopted into the family of God and have access to God as our father.

Paul uses the word **grace** for the fifth time in this short section. Jesus' incarnation was the ultimate act of grace. The king becoming a pauper in order to feel what we feel, experience what we experience and suffer more than we could ever suffer.

Don't miss the contrast here. The Macedonians were poor, but they gave as if they were rich. Jesus was rich, but gave in order to become poor. In both cases they did what they did for the sake of others.

In 1908, the Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton was the leader of an expedition attempting to reach the South Pole. They came closer than any before but, 97 miles short of the pole, had to turn back.

In his diary Shackleton told of the time when their food supplies were exhausted save for one last ration of hardtack, a dried biscuit, that was distributed to each man. Some of the men took snow, melted it, and made tea while consuming their

biscuit. Others, however, stowed the hardtack in their food sacks, saving it for a last moment of hungry desperation.

The fire was built up, and exhausted men climbed into their sleeping bags to face a restless sleep, tossing and turning. Shackleton said that he was almost asleep when out of the corner of his eye, he noticed one of his most trusted men sitting up in his bag and looking about to see if anyone was watching.

Shackleton's heart sank within him as this man began to reach toward the food sack of the man next to him. He sadly assumed that this man was about to steal the last of his neighbor's food. Instead, Shackleton watched as the man opened the food sack and took his own hardtack and put it in the other man's sack.