

XLV. Traveling Route 66: The Bible in Biblical Perspective  
*The Journey with Christ, the Promised One*  
“II Corinthians—The Book of Gospel Generosity”  
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III  
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We are in II Corinthians for this study. Do you think we need a redeeming, awakening work of the Gospel in our country? If we’re looking at missionary work in other countries and our own country, I thought it would be a great idea to follow a missionary who was disciplined by John Calvin, helped write the Bible that settled in America with its study notes, the Geneva Bible of 1569 and after he finished he went back home and said “Give me Scotland or I die.” His name was John Knox. There is a new biography out on John Knox titled Sharpening the Sword and it’s written for children from the ages of elementary to Junior High. I’d like to do something different this year. This is not a long biography but a good one. It’s written at the level for the family to go through together so I ask for those with families to consider going through this biography together by May 10<sup>th</sup>. If you’re single then I would ask that you consider reading it on your own. It is only \$7 so I encourage all of you to take advantage of that.

We have for over a year now walked our way through the Bible travelling route 66. The 39 books of the Old Testament were our journey to Christ and now we are on our journey with Christ in the New Testament books. We have now arrived at our 45<sup>th</sup> study and our now our 8<sup>th</sup> book in the New Testament which is the second letter to the Corinthians. The first letter dealt with Gospel order and Gospel ardor and now we’re at the second letter. Let’s start by looking at the introduction found in II Corinthians 1:1-2 which says [1] *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Then Paul gives this glorious doxology in II Corinthians 1:3-11 which says [3] *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, [4] who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. [5] For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. [6] If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. [7] Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.*

[8] *For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. [9] Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. [10] He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. [11] You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.*

This is an interesting and very rich epistle. One of the reasons I love this epistle, other than the book of Romans, is this is the book I use more than any other book in the Bible when I do evangelism and counseling. It has both an evangelistic impact and a

marvelous counseling impact in the lives of those who are facing difficulties in life as the Apostle Paul lays out this book of generosity. Even in affliction, what does it mean to be a Gospel giver in life? This particular epistle is an informal epistle, not very formal at all. Secondly, it's very personal. Paul had a relationship with this church that was very tenuous. This is a church that had rejected and criticized his ministry and the majority at one time totally rejected him. By the time this letter is written the majority does not reject him but there is still a significant minority that criticizes him and rejects his ministry. Yet personally he is engaged in this church because he was personally engaged in the founding of this church in 50 and 51 A.D.

It is a highly theological book. Believe it or not theology can be delivered personally, informally and extremely emotional. It is also highly Christological. Other than the book of Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Galatians and Hebrews which are highly pointed to tell you how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ, this book which was not written for that purpose has some of the greatest Christological truth, that is how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is rich, particularly in chapters 4 through 7. It's rich in its Christological message. We'll look specifically at this later in chapter 5.

One other point about this epistle is we are assured that Paul wrote three letters to Corinth and two of them are in your Bible. He will refer to a third one and he indicates that there probably was a fourth letter. Of the four letters he writes to the church at Corinth this is one of the two letters that are preserved for us, for us to see about his relationship with this church. It's not like the church at Rome which was ready to receive him or like the church at Ephesus where he stayed for three years but here was a church that he had given 18 months of his life to and they rejected him. It was a really different relationship that you are seeing here.

Who wrote this book? We have already been told that in the salutation. Paul wrote this letter. He also refers to Timothy's presence as being with him as well. There is a reason why he does that.

Where was Paul when he wrote this? He was in Macedonia. This would be an interesting 45 minute study in and of itself. I'll have to boil this down to about 3 minutes and ten sentences here on this. How do we know it was written in Macedonia when it doesn't say it was written there? That's where you have to study the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. On the first missionary journey he and Barnabas move up the Mediterranean toward Asia Minor and the Lord blesses them extraordinarily. They come back and make their report at Antioch. Then they go to the General Assembly of the church in Jerusalem where they come up with recommendations and they come back to go on a second missionary journey but Paul and Barnabas split up. Barnabas takes John Mark with him and Paul takes Silas with him and later picks up Timothy. It is at the conclusion of the second missionary journey in 50 to 51 A.D. that Paul arrives at Corinth which is right below Athens and it's there that he plants this church. Paul gives himself to the development of this church over a period of about 18 months. The only other place he stays longer that we know of is Ephesus. He is completely absorbed in this church's planting.

My trips to Corinth have always been very joyful because I'm one of these romantic historians who love to *feel* a place and what happened there. There is this one place I particularly love to go and that's the market place. As you walk down the market way that Rome built the first thing you see are the public latrines and I emphasize 'public

latrines' where you would just go over and handle your business while everybody walked by. That had to be an interesting thing for me for someone who is probably the most private person who has ever lived, because I can't even imagine that as being a part of my life so I stand there and think did the Apostle Paul ever use this. The reason he would have had the opportunity to use this is right next to that is the area where the tent makers made and sold their tents. In fact, the holes where they put the pegs are still there. There he made tents to support himself while he planted this church at Corinth.

I see the temple where Christians would come out of their prayer meetings, go and have relations with prostitutes and then go tell Paul "It didn't matter because that was just my body and my spirit was still back here at the church." So Paul has to tackle that issue. Then I love to see the Bema, the Judgment Seat where the Apostle Paul is using that word to talk about a day where everyone will face. He will say in the book of Corinthians "For we must all appear before the Bema" (II Corinthians 5:10). You get those insights there at the place of Corinth where he planted that church.

As Paul left Corinth he then went back to Antioch and after that he went on a third missionary journey. His third missionary journey would lead him to a place called Ephesus where he would be spending an enormous amount of time wanting to get back to Corinth for a second visit. While he is in Ephesus, sometime in that three year period, he received word that things were falling apart in Corinth. In fact, the majority were rejecting him because some teachers who opposed him said Paul wasn't an Apostle and that they were the super apostles. Those teachers claimed to be apostles like Peter and James and that they were the ones the people should really listen to. They attacked the Apostle Paul's character and then divisions and factions began to happen at the church at Corinth. They even began to make fun of each other while taking the Lord's Supper, in terms of racial, economic and social standings in life.

Paul heard about these deep divisions so he sent Timothy down to talk to them. Timothy basically came back and said it was worse than he could imagine. I would love to take you from Acts 18 to Acts 21 to show you this but I'm just giving you the synopsis of some things you need to put together from that text and other epistles to get this. So when Paul hears what Timothy says he writes a second letter, this book of II Corinthians. The first letter was written from Ephesus called I Corinthians where he is trying to address the issues and their questions. He now writes a second letter and we're not sure exactly where he was when he wrote the second letter but he calls it his painful letter. He calls it his letter of sorrow because of what Timothy had come back and reported. So Paul sent a very direct, challenging, loving letter that challenged them concerning their sin against God and what was happening in that church.

He sends that second letter to them by way of Titus. Titus takes the letter to them and reports back to Paul saying it's even worse than before. Paul makes a quick second trip back to them and when he got there they personally rejected him. As you read II Corinthians, you see that when he made that unplanned trip they not only rejected his first letter and his second letter but they rejected him as well. So where is that second letter? That is a great question. We don't know where that second letter is. We find out in II Corinthians that the Apostle Paul decided not to make an issue while he was there. For whatever reason, the way they rejected him and what they were saying, instead of challenging them while he was there, he left but he left that second letter that painful letter with them and goes back to Ephesus.

He determines to make another visit. So he leaves Ephesus on his way to Corinth and somewhere between Ephesus and his way back to Corinth, on his third missionary journey, he gets another letter from the church at Corinth. This letter says that God has intervened and now the majority have accepted Paul's ministry. Now what he wrote in I Corinthians and his second painful letter, they have now begun to respond to. They have begun to repent of their sins with a vengeance that they would deal with their sins. There is still a significant minority against him and some false teachers that are there that have some people's ears, leading them astray, but now the majority movement is honoring the Lord. The Apostle Paul is so overwhelmed that even before he gets to Corinth for his third visit, he writes a third letter to Corinth and that's the one we're about to look at (II Corinthians). He writes it sometime between 54 and 56 A.D., very likely right in between in 55A.D.

Why did he write II Corinthians? I have given you the background already so let me give you this simple statement to tell you the thrust of this letter. II Corinthians 2:1-4 says [1] *For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. [2] For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? [3] And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. [4] For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.* So he had determined not to come back to them because of the painful letter and the painful visit but now he is on his way back because he has heard that something new has happened. They have responded so now he writes a letter to confirm the Godly response of the Corinthians to his second visit, his second letter and to affirm their obedience to Christ as he lifts up Christ and that they would do so through God ordained ministers in general and Paul defends his own apostolic ministry in particular.

Now I'd like to look at II Corinthians 7. I believe this is probably, other than Psalm 51, the greatest exposition of Godly repentance in your Bible. What's the difference between Godly repentance and worldly sorrow? Worldly sorrow is when you're sorry for your sins because you got caught. Godly repentance is when you're sorry for your sin because of its sinfulness against God. That's the difference. II Corinthians 7:8-16 says [8] *For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. [9] As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved (conviction) into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.*

[10] *For godly grief produces a repentance (a turning from your sin) that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. [11] For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. [12] So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.*

[13] *Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. [14] For*

*whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. [15] And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. [16] I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.*

In other words, Paul is telling them he went there, Timothy went there and we were both rejected. He sends them a painful letter and when Titus returns he finds out that this painful letter written out of love has produced in them a Godly repentance that they have turned from their sins and done the deeds appropriate for their sins. It manifested so that it wasn't worldly sorrow where it's just over the consequences of sin but they had a Godly sorrow over the sinfulness of sin. So he is affirming their response to the second visit, the second letter and their obedience to Christ that Titus has reported back and now their desire to follow God given ordained ministers in general. The majority now want to honor God and work through the Apostle Paul.

So how should you study the book of Corinthians? I want to give you a simple outline of it. There is the salutation in II Corinthians 1:1-2. Then there is Paul's apostolic ministry in II Corinthians 1:3 through 7:16. Then there is Christian stewardship and mercy ministry in II Corinthians 8 and 10. Then there is the subject of unmasking false apostles while Paul affirms himself as a true Apostle in II Corinthians 11:1 through 13:10. Then comes the marvelous benediction, affirmation and notation that Paul gives to this church in II Corinthians 13:11 through 14. I want to give you the themes from this book but before I do I want to walk you through some wonderful passages of Scripture.

This first theme is found in II Corinthians 4. The first theme is God's sovereign grace extends over and is even enhanced through suffering in the lives of His people. In that first part I read he said "I know you've been afflicted and have been suffering, so we have suffered." Basically he is telling them the suffering we prayed to God to deliver us from was actually a gift of God because it did three things. One it taught us to depend on Him alone, that He is, hallelujah, our life. Secondly, God was preparing us for a ministry that puts no confidence in ourselves or our circumstances but in Christ alone. Thirdly, as God ministered to us, He was giving us the perspective and the instruments to minister to you. In other words, as He brought us through our afflictions and comforted us, now He was allowing us to comfort you with the comfort with which He had been comforted.

How many times as a pastor have I had the privilege to sit down with people who are going through a difficult time? I have done my best to minister to them and I think I've been of help with the truth but then I have the privilege as a pastor to know other believers who went through the same thing and they came out rejoicing in God's goodness. Then I say to them "here I want you to meet these folks. I've given you a Biblical theology of it, now go sit with someone where the theology took them through it and let them share it with you."

I'll never forget right before I left Covenant College to go to Westminster Seminary and Dr. Schaeffer came back. We were sitting there with Dr. Schaeffer who was incredibly wise and prescient. He was so enormously effective in his writing, warnings and equipping. He had just been diagnosed with leukemia and he was going through treatments at the Mayo Clinic. His diagnosis and treatment had coincided when he was beginning to write a book on biological ethics from a Christian perspective and how to care for the ill and the dying. If that had been me, here is how I would have

responded. “God, I have written wonderful books and here I’ve got maybe one of the most needed books to be written in this day and time, ever before and You’re about to give me a death sentence with leukemia. Why would You do this to me when I’m trying to do this for You?” That’s me.

Here was Dr. Schaeffer sitting before us during this Q and A. He said “I was utterly amazed at the Providence of God, how kind and good He is that He afflicted me with a terminal illness so that I would not write about ethics for the ill and the terminally ill from theory but I received the opportunity to write from life, experience.” That is what Paul is saying here. This affliction wasn’t God’s punishment upon me. This affliction was God’s gift to me to make me more effective in ministry and that doesn’t mean it was wrong to pray for deliverance. In fact, God ultimately delivered us but it was now right for me to understand why He was putting me through it. Now I can comfort with the same comfort I was comforted with and now I can minister the same way God ministered to me. Now I can be not only accurate but empathetic and I can actually say “Yes, I know what you’re feeling because I’ve been there.” So the Apostle Paul is telling about this marvelous ministry where God’s sovereign grace extends over our suffering, uses our suffering and enhances the work of grace through the presence of suffering in the lives of His people.

Let’s look at II Corinthians 7:5-6 which says [5] *For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. [6] But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.* In the midst of Paul’s affliction he received the comfort he wanted to give to them through the things that were happening in their lives.

Now II Corinthians 12:6-10 which says [6] *though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. [7] So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.* (Satan is God’s Satan and God is sovereignly using what Satan means for evil for Paul’s good. What Satan thought would discourage Paul and distract him, actually was an instrument from God to keep Paul humble and not conceited. That didn’t mean he’d like the thorn in the flesh. Look what he says.) [8] *Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. [9] But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. [10] For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

The lessons are enormous here, aren’t they? Is Satan given opportunities in the sovereignty of God to attack God’s people? Absolutely. Is God sovereign over what Satan is allowed to do in which God has a greater purpose than Satan’s malevolent purposes? Absolutely. We don’t know exactly what Paul’s thorn in the flesh was. He complains about his eyes, a couple of other things and he went through many other things. There could be a number of thorns in the flesh that he had. It does seem to be something physical when it’s referred to as a thorn in the *flesh*. It was such that he wanted it to leave him, whatever it was because it was afflicting him. So three times he asked the Lord to remove it and the third time the Lord says “no, My grace is sufficient.”

“Well, Lord yes I know Your grace is sufficient to take it away for I thought you loved me.” “No, My grace is sufficient to use it in your life so that when this affliction comes upon you people will be touched by My power in your weakness instead of you conceited and relying upon yourself. That’s what I’ve done for you. I have positioned you for a more effective ministry with this thorn in the flesh that Satan has been allowed to do. He has his purposes but I am the Lord God. My grace is greater and My power is greater. My power is not going to remove it but My power is going to make you an overcomer with it.”

A second theme is that God makes Himself known in power through our weaknesses. There are many places I could take you to in this epistle on this but I’ll just use the one I just read. God delights in making His power known in our weaknesses. It’s interesting to note that God loves to take the weaknesses of our sin and turn them into the virtues of His ministry. Paul a religious terrorist killed Christians and tried to destroy the church. Paul was converted. He was an evangelist and led people to Christ and planted churches. I have many illustrations on this but I’ll just use myself.

I was just sharing my testimony recently with some people who visited the church. If there is any part of my life I’d love to undo it would be when I was age 14 to 20. I wasted academically, athletically and everything else in my life at that time. It was an utter waste as I went headlong into immorality, blasphemy, profanity, violence and being self-consumed. One of the most obvious sins of all was the constant stream of blasphemy and profanity that came out of my unbelieving heart as it flowed in my language. This same guy gets converted and gets the opportunity to teach the Bible with the same mouth. Isn’t it amazing what God does? Beyond that I even get paid to do it. God loves to use His power in this way.

So should you go look for your weaknesses? I’m sure you have plenty but I have an even better idea. God here are my weaknesses so make Your power known. God, here are my strengths, I will see them as weaknesses so that You will use them because I won’t put my confidence in them. I will put my confidence in You. Lord, not only will Your strength be seen in my weaknesses but I’m going to call my strengths weaknesses so You will use them too. That’s what I think I’d like to do. I’m going to give you five themes and we’re almost there.

The third theme is that Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and the Mediator of the New Covenant. Let’s look at II Corinthians 4. We could stay here for years because of the richness of this but we’ll only stay a few minutes. II Corinthians 4:1-12 says [1] *Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.* [2] *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.* [3] *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.* [4] *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* [5] *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.* [6] *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

[7] *But we (believers) have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* [8] *We are afflicted in every way, but not*

*crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; [10] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. [11] For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. [12] So death is at work in us, but life in you. So he lifts us this glorious Christ centered life.*

*He goes on to say in II Corinthians 4:16 – 5:5 [16] So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. [17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. [5:1] For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. [2] For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, [3] if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. [4] For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. [5] He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

*How do we know all of this is true? II Corinthians 5:11-21 says [11] Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. [12] We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. [13] For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. [14] For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

*[16] From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. [18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*What a glorious, magnificent statement about the centrality of Christ and now in the New Covenant. All of that Old Covenant was fulfilled in Christ and if you're in Christ now He has filled you up and now you're temples of the Holy Spirit. He says this in I and II Corinthians. II Corinthians 6:14-18 says [14] Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? [15] What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? [16] What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; (In other words, get rid of the idolatry of marriage that would lead you to marrying someone who doesn't know the*



Lord. Get rid of any idolatry in life. Why?) as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [17] Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, [18] and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” He says, “You are My family and you’re the temple of My presence. You have no fellowship with idolatry. Your fellowship is with Me by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit that is within you. Christ is the fulfiller and Christ fills us up in the New Covenant by the outpouring of His Spirit.

The fourth theme is God delights in blessing the gift and the giver as His people worship Him and minister to one another with joyful stewardship and sacrificial giving. Let’s look at one more passage. II Corinthians 8:1-6 says [1] *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, [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. [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 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. [6] Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.*

They gave according to their means. That’s the tithe from the Old Testament. Someone makes \$500 a week and another makes \$100 a week. The tithe on \$500 would be \$50. The tithe on \$100 would be \$10. Let’s say the person making \$500 went down to \$100, then his tithe would now be \$10 which is giving according to your means. Then Paul said out their affliction and poverty they begged us to give beyond their means. They gave out of their poverty and now they gave sacrificial offerings for the ministry of mercy. They gave not only the tithe in worship and praise but they gave offerings in worship and praise as evidence of God’s gift and grace to them. It is the joy of Christian stewardship and sacrificial giving, impacting people with the ministry of mercy.

The fifth and final theme is while faithfully responding to Godly leadership they are consistently called to reject false apostles and teachers. Let’s look at II Corinthians 12. Paul has been personally rejected and his ministry has been rejected. Actually I want to start at II Corinthians 11. Paul says I want you to know I’m an Apostle and here are my credentials. This is the resume of the next pastor at Briarwood and here are his credentials. Here is Paul’s credentials as an Apostle. II Corinthians 11: 16-33 says [16] *I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. [17] What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. [18] Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. [19] For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! [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. [21] To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. [22] Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. [23] Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. [24] Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes*

*less one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; [26] on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; [27] in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. [28] And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. [29] Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?*

*[30] If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. [31] The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. [32] At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, [33] but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.* Then he goes on to talk about his apostolic ministry.

I wish I had more time to go through this but I don't but how do you like that? By the way, I just wrote a book titled *Your Best Life Now*, believe in Jesus and get what you need, name it and claim it. This is the guy, the Apostle. Do you see how far adrift we've gotten from the Gospel and what it means to serve Christ? Paul say let me tell you what it means to be a servant. I'm boasting on my service. I'm dying every day. With those who have eyes to see I can bring life. With those who do not have eyes to see, they not only reject but they'll try to kill me, but my commendation to you is that God is my strength. Christ is my message. He is my glory. He alone is my hope. That's what Paul does in this text. The other apostles put on airs, they have all of these endorsements and make all of their claims. Here is my claim. I'm nothing but my Savior is everything. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for these moments we could be together in Christ. Thank You for the privilege to get somewhat in this letter. O Lord, what a rich letter! I think of how many times You have allowed me to open up II Corinthians 5 which talks about being a new creation. Would you like for the old to pass away and the new to come? Would you like to know what it means for your sins to be forgiven because Christ has taken them and you receive it by faith? Many times I have come to this text and O how it has refreshed me just to see how gloriously Paul has challenged us. God how many time have we as believers walked right past II Corinthians and this rich, personal, emotional, transparent, Christ centered, theologically rich letter? It begs for us to spend some time and through Paul dying to self, meet Christ, as he cares for a church that didn't care about him, but by Your grace cared eventually about Jesus and then began to love Paul. Father, thank You for this sweet, wonderful letter, in Jesus' Name, Amen.