

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Biblical Model for Giving, Part 1

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1-3

Code: 47-55

Well, we have a wonderful privilege this morning of returning to our study of 2 Corinthians. As you know, we have digressed a little bit from the text in order to lay a foundation for chapters 8 and 9. And now, we come back to the text itself. And I confess to you that I am most happy, most fulfilled, and most blessed when I am studying the actual text of a passage. And this has been a great week, filled with anticipation, as I come to share with you what is in this 8th chapter of 2 Corinthians. By necessity this morning we're going to be dealing with some of the introductory material, but you're going to get a great feel for what is coming in the richness of this wonderful section from Paul to his beloved Corinthians.

Before we look at the text and discuss some of the background, let me ask you a rhetorical question. You don't have to answer it out loud. When you think about coming to church, what aspect do you look forward to most? Now that might be somewhat of an indicator of where you're at, spiritually, but I'm not really driving at that.

Let's assume that it's something noble. Not like being seen in your new dress or seeing somebody you really wanted to see because you want to sell them a policy in life insurance, or you wanted to drive your new car and you had an opportunity, or you were looking right through church to taking the family to a new place for dinner. Not that kind of thing, but assuming the best, assuming it had something to do with the ministry here in the worship center or something to do with a class or something to do with some kind of spiritual reality, what is it that you look forward to most?

Some of you might say, "Well, you know, I like the sermon." I hope there's a few who would say that. Some of you might say, "Well I really like the music. The music moves my heart and lifts my spirits." And somebody might say, "Well I enjoy the fellowship. We sort of sit in the same place and we have made a lot of wonderful friends, and we share our lives together and prayer requests and answers to prayer, and it's just good to be there." And I can imagine you would all sort of line up somewhere along that line of lists. Some of you might say, "I just enjoy being distanced from the pressures of life and just being open to the Lord," and et cetera, et cetera.

But let me suggest something to you. If you really understand Scripture and you really understand what God has promised, the thing you should most look forward to is the offering. Any of you think of that? Well that's really what you ought to look forward to most because according to Scripture it is a direct pipeline to blessing. In fact, every Christian should be eager, anxious, thrilled about the

opportunity to give at the offering if based only on two statements that Jesus made. If there was nothing else in the Bible but those two statements, they ought to cause us to line up for the offering. They ought to cause us to be generous and abundant and sacrificial.

Let me give you just those two statements. Statement number one is recorded in Luke 6:38. Jesus said this. "Give and it shall be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over. They will pour into your lap, for by your standard of measure it will be measured to you." Now some people might think that that's purely an Old Testament principle, an Old Testament idea that when you give God pours out blessing in return. But it is not.

You find the same principle in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 in verse 6. "He who sows sparingly shall reap sparingly. He who sows bountifully shall reap bountifully." It's the same principle. God is going to measure out to you in accord with what you've measured out in your giving. And if you give a lot, you receive a lot. And what you receive is good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over and it will pour into your lap.

Now the symbolism there is taken from the ancient Middle Eastern grain market. And people would literally go into the grain market ready to receive a lap full of grain. Here's how it worked. Both men and women wore rather a loose material garment that went all the way down to their feet and it was belted with a sash. When they went into the grain market, they would simply pull some of that garment up through the sash and they would make it sort of a bloused effect. They would take two hands and pull that up and they would create by that a huge pocket. And that's why the Bible says it will be poured into your lap because that's exactly what would happen. They would fill that garment with grain.

We have that very thing specifically noted for us in the wonderful story of Ruth back in Ruth chapter 3. I'll just read you verse 15. It says, "Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it," and that's exactly what they did. Hold your cloak out. So she held it, "And he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her and she went into the city." She would pull her garment, six measures of barley were poured in, and away she would go carrying this abundance of grain. That is the imagery of Jesus' words in Luke chapter 6. God wants to fill your lap with abundant blessing to overflowing.

The principle is simply this. Generosity in giving results in a greater reward from God. You want blessing from God, you want it poured out, you want it overflowing, pressed down, shaken together, packed in full, then give. That is the most direct route to blessing from God. That's the first verse, and if it was all there was in the Bible, it should make generous sacrificial givers out of all of us because what it tells us is you can't out give God. You give and He gives back more. You give, He gives back more. That's the principle, that's how it works.

But there's a second verse that we would add to it and that is Acts 20:35. It says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." By the way, that is the only quote from the lips of Jesus recorded in the New Testament outside the four gospels, unless you include those glorified statements where Christ is speaking in the book of Revelation. But earthly statements quoted from the lips of Jesus are all in the gospels with this one single exception. And of all that Jesus said, which John tells us the books of the world could not even contain all His words and works, of all that He said, of all that could have been quoted, of all that could have been rehearsed and recorded after the gospels, only this, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

In other words, what you give away brings you a greater blessing than what you receive. That should be enough. That should be enough to make us line up to give. Do you want to be most blessed? Then give. Do you want to receive pressed down, shaken together, and running over so that your lap is filled? Then give. Those two monumental promises of blessing and generosity from God, who is the source of everything, who is the giver of every good and perfect gift, who has the power to get you wealth, who gives you all that you have, those promises from God should make us sacrificially generous.

Now, apparently, and we have to say this sadly. But truly, apparently many Christians don't believe those promises. They carry around the idea that they have to protect everything they have and hang on to it. They become hoarders and they become stingy and they become self-indulgent and protective. And it's really a matter of faith. They don't believe the promise of the Word of God or they would give. It's a question of faith. It's a question of trust. It's a question of belief. You either believe it or you don't. If you do, you give because giving is more blessed and giving causes God to give back in greater abundance.

It should be noted, by the way, that for those, however, for whom the motive of promise doesn't work too well, for whom the motive of promise doesn't elicit faith and trust, there is also a command. Luke 6:38 does say, "Give," that's imperative. So it's not just a question of faith; it's a question of obedience. Trust and obey, those are the two keys to Christian living. Believe God's promises and obey His commands, and you have both there. The command is give; the promise is He will give in return. Giving then is an issue of faith and obedience. It is an issue of trusting God. It is an issue of believing in His commandments. It is believing that if you give He will give you back in greater measure than you could ever give away, which means you're always replenished. It is also a question of obedience.

In either case, not to give is a sin. It's a sin against God in the sense that you don't trust Him. It's a sin against God in that you don't obey Him. These simple verses ought to be enough to make us line up to give as generously, as magnanimously, as unselfishly, as sacrificially as possible. Now, in the two chapters before us, 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, we're going to see marvelous teaching about this matter of giving. In fact, this is going to be a model for Christian giving, a theology of Christian giving.

We're going to meet some believers who both believed God and obeyed God.

Now, let me remind you of what we've already done. For four weeks we've been through a little introductory series. Before we talk about giving, we wanted to teach a little bit about what the Bible says about money. So we laid a foundation. We talked about the morality of money, the love of money, the right to money, the acquiring of money and the use of money. And we saw what the Bible taught about all of that. And this morning we come to the series in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 on the giving of money, the giving of money. And everything we've learned up to this point is foundation we will build on and will build a theology of Christian giving, a theology of Christian giving.

Let me read you the first three verses of chapter 8 and then we'll talk about some introductory aspects. "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality, for I testified that according to their ability and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, or their own will." That introduces us to two chapters about giving, Christian giving.

Now, at the outset, let me make some things clear. And we're going to deal with some introductory things that I find absolutely fascinating in setting up an understanding of this text. At the very outset we must remind you that believers early on gave to the church. They gave to the support of the church basically in two ways generally. First of all, they gave that the leaders might be supported. They gave in order that the leaders might be supported. That is apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, those who were responsible for leading, serving, working in the church. And they no doubt supported those who worked alongside them.

We find that, for example, in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Paul, already having addressed this aspect of giving to the Corinthians themselves and to all of us, listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians 9 in verse 6. He's talking about his own ministry, his own apostleship, his own work, his own labor and the labor of those who are with him, Barnabas and others who traveled and served with him who were a part of his ministry team.

And in verse 6 he says, "Do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?" Look, are we the only people who should be supported? "Who at any time serves is a soldier at his own expense? Nobody. A soldier serves his government; his government supports him. Who plants a vineyard and doesn't eat the fruit of it? Who tends a flock and doesn't use the milk of the flock?" In other words, he's saying there are certain things that we do that have a living built into them.

And verse 8, "I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Doesn't the law also say these things? For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.' God is not concerned about oxen, is He?" In other words, God is speaking in an analogy

but He's talking about something other than an ox. "Or is He speaking – " verse 10 " - altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written because the plowman ought to plow in hope and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops."

In other words, the ox who plows should be fed for his plowing. The plowman should enjoy the crop, the thresher the same. There are built into certain functions and certain jobs the reward. And in verse 11 he brings it to its point, "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?" In other words, you ought to support the preacher. You ought to support the apostles and those who travel with him, and those who minister and those who teach and those who lead you.

And down in verse 14, he says it more directly. "So also the Lord directed those who proclaimed the gospel to get their living from the gospel." It certainly was true in the Old Testament economy. The priests received their living from the tithe that the people gave. And so he is saying we support through the church the leaders and teachers that God gives to us. Galatians 6:6 says the same thing. "Let the one who is taught the Word share all good things with him who teaches." Make sure that all the needs of the teacher are met by those who are the taught.

And then in 1 Timothy 5:17, again the same principle, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double *tim*, double pay, "especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." Why? "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing and the laborer is worthy of his wages." So the church had the responsibility as Israel of old did to support its spiritual leadership. So when the people came on the Lord's day, they gave for the ongoing support of their elders and pastors and spiritual leaders.

But, secondly, they gave for the general population of the church as well, to meet the needs of the people, to meet the needs of the people. Support of the needy was a very, very important aspect in the life of the early church because the early church was filled with poor people, with needy people, with widows, with orphans, with folks who didn't have a lot of resources and they needed to have their needs met. In fact, in 1 Timothy chapter 6, just beyond where we were reading a moment ago, Paul instructs the rich, in verse 18, "to be generous and ready to share," and thus store up treasure in heaven. There was a great need for sharing. There were many people in the church who had needs, many poor people.

Now, I give you those two aspects of giving. One, for the support of the ministry and leadership of the church, secondly for the support of the people in the church who had need. That was basically why they gave in the early church, those two aspects. And it is still so. We give for the leadership and the support of the staff and those who minister and lead and serve among us, including our missionaries around the world. And we give, also, to include the facilities we have. Of course, the early church didn't have that. They met outdoors. They met at various homes. They met in the temple ground, in

public places.

We give for the support of the life of the church and we give to care for those who have needs. That, too, an important part of the church. And in some parts of the world today it's as important as it was in the early church, though in America we have most of our needs met because we live in such a flourishing society. But the principles for giving then have to do with those areas of giving. Give for the support of the church and the meeting of the needs of God's people in the church.

Now, as we come to the text of 2 Corinthians 8, and we're going to look at it now, the issue here is meeting the needs of poor saints. The issue here is not supporting the leadership. The issue here is meeting the needs of the poor saints. And, in fact, it has to do not with the Corinthians meeting the needs of poor saints in their own church, apparently they were already doing that, but the Corinthians meeting the needs of poor saints in other churches. In fact, in one particular church and that is the church at Jerusalem.

In chapters 8 and 9 Paul is endeavoring to get the Corinthians to make significant generous gifts toward the poor saints in the Jerusalem church. That's the issue here. But what comes out of this is a general pattern for all Christian giving. It wouldn't matter what the issue was, or what the request was, or to what church the money was directed or for what purpose. You see here the heart of giving, the heart and soul of Christian giving, a theology of Christian giving. But here the specific issue is the church in Jerusalem and its poor saints.

Now let me tell you a little bit about the church in Jerusalem. It had many, many poor Christians, many in great need. From its beginning, you remember, on the day of Pentecost, the church had to face the problem of extreme poverty among its people. It was as poor as poor could possibly get. It was not an upper class church. It was not a yuppie church, to borrow current terminology. It was an impoverished congregation of people. And I'll tell you why. There were three causes, very important as a background so you understand this.

Cause number one was that the church was populated by pilgrims. That is people who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish feast. It followed forty days after Passover. And you know, from knowing a little bit of Jewish background, that the Jews liked to migrate or to pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the great religious festivals. They came not only from around the land of Israel itself, but many of them came from all over the place where Jews had been scattered in what was known as the Diaspora or the Dispersion.

There were Jews scattered all over the Gentile world. They were called Hellenistic, *Hellene*, meaning nations or Gentiles. They were called Hellenistic Jews. They were Jews scattered in Gentile parts of the world. Whenever there was a big festival in Jerusalem, they migrated or they pilgrimaged to Jerusalem for that very event. We are introduced to these Hellenistic Jews, right away, on the day of

Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. The Holy Spirit comes, you remember, and the hundred and twenty in the upper room began to speak. They spoke in languages; they spoke the wonderful works of God.

And it immediately says that everybody heard them in their own language: Parthians – “verse 9” - Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, the districts of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs heard them in their own languages. Now that just gives you an idea of where the pilgrims came from. All over the world they traversed into Jerusalem for this great event. And there they were, all these pilgrims gathering for this tremendous Pentecost feast.

What happened? Three thousand people were converted on the day of Pentecost. Listen, many of them were these pilgrims. Over in chapter 4 in verse 4, 5000 men are converted. Probably additional women converted. Now the church is in the thousands and many of them are these pilgrims. Now think of it, this...very simple to understand. There was only one church in the whole world and that was the church at Jerusalem and it was only a matter of a few weeks old. There was no other place to go in the world to go to church. There weren't any other Christians in the world. There weren't any other apostles in the world. They had just been born into the church; the church itself had been born. They had just received the powerful expressions of the Holy Spirit.

Miracles were a constant daily experience at the hands of the apostles. There was a joy and a euphoria and a bliss and an excitement and an enthusiasm that caused them not to want to go home. There was nothing to go home to. No church, no miracles, no apostles, no teachers, no nothing. Miracles is a daily occurrence. Joy and exuberance, meeting every day from house to house and in the temple, rejoicing and praising God and eating and celebrating communion and rejoicing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the birth of the church, the only Christians, the only fellowship, the only apostles. They didn't go back.

Well, when they had come as pilgrims they stayed in inns. But they couldn't afford to stay there permanently, and so they would have to vacate the inns they stayed in. Or they stayed with Jewish relatives, people from their family heritage. But they couldn't stay there any longer because now they had become Christians and that made it very, very difficult because now they would be alienated from their families. And though they were outsiders staying there and should have been treated with hospitality, once they became Christians they would no longer be received into those Jewish homes and so they would be dispossessed and where would they go?

Well they would have to go live with believers. And so they would have to move in with the Jewish believers who lived in the city of Jerusalem and its surrounding villages. Well, that little band of Jewish believers trying to absorb all of these thousands and thousands of converted pilgrims made a valiant effort to do this but it was no easy task. It got very complex. As chapter 6 of Acts tells us, “there were many Hellenistic widows.” That means that there were many pilgrim widows who had

come in, converted to Christ, and stayed. And I'll tell you, you can be sure that the people who stayed tended to be the poor people, the widows, the orphans, and the people who had nothing to go home to.

Maybe many of them had become Jewish slaves in the Roman Empire. They wouldn't go back to their slavery. The people who would go back would be people who had an estate, who had a business, who had a very important job in government somewhere, who had great responsibility, who operated their own environment. Those people would go back to what was pressing for them. And so those would stay, most of those who would stay would be the poor who had nothing to return to. And so they're all really there on the hands of the Jerusalem church; the poor, the widowed pilgrims who stayed and had nothing to return to.

James chapter 2 in verse 5 says "Listen, my beloved brethren," here's another problem, "did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" When God went about to choose His own He chose mostly the poor. First Corinthians 1:26-28 said, "Not many noble, not many wise, He chose the base and the ignoble." And so the church was populated by poor people. He came to reach the poor, to preach the gospel to the poor. He said that Himself, Jesus did.

So that's the first reason that the church in Jerusalem was extremely impoverished. The people were poor and now they had to take on the full support of all these pilgrims in their midst and it made it very, very difficult. In fact, they had so much difficulty just finding these Hellenistic widows that in Acts 6 they had to pick out seven men and put them over the responsibility, so none of these new widows who had recently come in and were pilgrims got missed in the allocation of daily food. That church had to buy the food and prepare the food and distribute the food to all these widows.

There's a second component that made them poor. The church was made up of pilgrims, and secondly, persecuted Jews. Jerusalem is the holy city. There's no question about it. And it is the most sacred place on the earth to devout Jews. It is there that they are more concerned about their religion than anywhere else. It is there that their exclusivism reaches its pinnacle, their legalism, and their animosity toward anyone who rejects Judaism. You can see it even to this very day. And if anything, it was even more fierce in this time.

And the people who were converted from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be immediately rejected, even as they are today. When someone in an orthodox Jewish family in Jerusalem comes to faith in Jesus Christ, they are immediately rejected, they are alienated. They would become the victims of hostile hatred, social alienation, excommunication from the synagogue, complete rejection. They would lose their businesses, they would lose their jobs, they would lose their source of income. Everything would disappear. They would be disowned by their family. And so what you had there was a whole lot of pilgrims with nothing and a whole lot of dispossessed Jews who had nothing either.

According to John chapter 15, our Lord Jesus told them to expect this. In John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said to you, a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me they will also persecute you." And down in chapter 16 verse 2, "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue." That's what they'll do and that's what they did. And in Matthew when Jesus was promising in chapter 19 that His disciples would receive the kingdom some day, He also promised them that many of them would have to leave houses, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, farms for My namesake," Matthew 19:29. It would cost them everything. So you can see that the poverty is compounded now because even the Jewish believers who live at Jerusalem lose everything.

Now let me throw in a third component. The Roman economy, the Roman economy. The economy of Jerusalem and the area around Jerusalem, the area of Palestine was as poor as any part of the Roman Empire. And don't for a minute think that the Roman Empire was wealthy. Rome was fine, but the Empire was poor, very poor. And it was made even poorer by the Romans who managed to extract everything out of all of the territories they occupied for their own aggrandizement. The economy of Jerusalem and the surrounding area was as poor as any in the Roman Empire.

To add further to that, not only did they take natural resources, not only did they take the products of those countries and use them for Roman enterprises, but the Romans also overtaxed the people by hiring Jews to go extort money from their own people to pour into Roman coffers and to keep for themselves. The result was there was rampant poverty in the land of Palestine. And as if that weren't enough, you can add another component from the economic side, according to Acts chapter 11. In verse 27 we read this, "Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch and one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world." Here was a prophet from God named Agabus who prophesies a worldwide famine and it took place in the reign of Claudius. It did take place.

In response to that...listen to the next verse, verse 29. "And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, or money, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea." Why? Because that was the largest population of believers, first of all, and because Judea was already so impoverished. And the famine was coming. They sent the money there because the poverty was so great. Now all of those things lead us to understand that a major problem in the Jerusalem church was a large population of poor Christians who just could not survive on their own. This is a concern to God. This is a concern to God. And I believe the Lord, in part, has chosen so many poor in order that He might teach us love at its most tangible level, and that is sacrificial giving and sharing. This has always been a concern to God.

Go back to Deuteronomy chapter 15 and let me read you just a few brief verses. We could read many on the subject of taking care of poor people, but just a couple in the Old Testament will suffice to give you the sense. Deuteronomy 15 verse 7, "If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers in any

of your towns, in your land which the Lord your God has given you.” In other words, a fellow Israelite, somebody who is a part of the chosen people of God. “You shall not harden your heart,” same language as 1 John 3:16, “nor close your hand from your poor brother, but you shall freely open your hand to him and generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.”

And verse 9 talks about the attitude of your heart being right in doing it. Then in verse 10, “You shall generously give to him. Your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings.” You want to be blessed in your work? You want to be blessed in everything you do in all your enterprises? Then give and God will bless. That’s the same principle, isn’t it, as Acts 20:35, “It is more blessed to give than receive.” It’s the same as Luke 6:38, “Give and it will be given unto you.” It’s the same principle. Verse 11, “For the poor will never cease to be in the land, therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’ ” That’s God’s will. That’s God’s desire.

Psalm 41, and again there are a number of places where this is reiterated. But listen to Psalm 41, the first three verses. “How blessed is he who considers the helpless.” Same principle again. “The Lord will deliver him in a day of trouble.” You want deliverance from trouble, then take care of helpless people, meet needs, give to the body of Christ. Verse 2, “The Lord will protect him and keep him alive, and he shall be called blessed upon the earth.” You want to be protected in the day of trouble? You want to be kept alive? You want to be blessed? Give.

In fact, it says the Lord will protect him, keep him alive, he shall be called blessed upon the earth and do not give him over to the desire of his enemies. He’ll be protected on every front. Verse 3, “The Lord will sustain him upon his sick bed.” You want to be healthy? “In his illness Thou dost restore him to health.” God takes care of people who give generously. That’s what it says. Look at Proverbs for a moment. Proverbs chapter 14 in verse 31, “He who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.” You want to honor God, or do you want to bring a reproach on Him? You say you belong to Him, you say you identify with God, God is gracious, compassionate and generous. If you’re not, you bring a reproach on God whom you say is your Father. That’s Proverbs 14:31.

Proverbs 19:17, “He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord.” You want to know something about the Lord? He repays all His debts. And He will repay him for his good deed. Every time you give to someone in need, God repays you. In chapter 21, verse 13 of Proverbs, “He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.” You’ll shut heaven’s blessing off if you shut off your generosity. And then one more chapter to look at, in Proverbs 22:2. “The rich and the poor have a common bond, the Lord is the maker of them all,” God made both. But look down at verse 9. “He who is generous will be blessed for he gives some of his food to the poor.”

Beloved, those of us who have a potential of blessing that people who don't have miss. We can be blessed in our giving. That's the principle. It is a command to give. It is a promise of great blessing. The church in Jerusalem knew that and believed it and attempted to fulfill it. But, you know, they made an exceptional effort. They made a noble effort. They made probably as an exceptional...as exceptional and noble an effort as has ever been made in the history of the church. They did everything to try to meet these needs. They were formidable.

Starting in Acts chapter 2 we see what they did. Verse 44, "And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common." There's where it starts. There was unity and everybody possessed everything in the sense that it belongs to the common good. Whoever needs it most can have it. Anything that anyone possessed they held for someone else if they needed it. And verse 45, "They began selling their property and their possessions and sharing them with all as anyone might have need." That's how deep their generosity ran. They understood you can't out give God. They sold their property. They sold their possessions. And they gave.

Over in chapter 4, it's so beautiful to see this. Verse 32, "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own." Isn't that marvelous? Nobody said, "It's mine. That belongs to me." Nobody claimed that. They knew the principle that we've already covered, that everything belongs to whom? To God, and it's just to be moved around dependent on who needs it. So, all things were common property to them. It doesn't mean that they split it all up equally; it just means they held it with that perspective. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and abundant grace was upon them all. Sure, generosity always results in abundant grace.

Verse 34. "At the very beginning in the early times there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need." And that's how they covered the early years. But you know what? After you had sold everything you had, after everybody had sold everything they had, there wasn't anything else to sell. And, finally, it came to a point where the apostle Paul recognized there weren't any resources and he had to go somewhere else to get the help for this beloved church. But they made a valiant effort.

You can add, as I noted earlier, chapter 6, where they were concerned about feeding widows every day. You can add chapter 11 verses 27-30 about the famine. Galatians 2:10 is a good verse to give us an idea of this. Paul says, "They only asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I also was eager to do." That's Paul's heart. He was really concerned about the poor. Why? Because he loved them as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, because he understood the command to meet their needs. He understood that God wanted their needs met. He didn't have any more he could give. They had given all they had.

You know what happened to that Jerusalem church? It wasn't very many years until the rich weren't rich, until it was just a whole bunch of poor people because they had all given it away. It was so overwhelming for them, then, to try to sustain the needs of that church as persecution elevated and escalated. And as pilgrims now stayed and couldn't find work, of course, that Paul took upon himself the burden. He understood it. He even classifies himself in 2 Corinthians 6:10 as one of the poor.

And, occasionally, in his life that's how it was and he was dependent on the gifts of others many times in his life when he was not able to work. So when he began his third missionary journey, he determined that he was going to collect money for the poor in Jerusalem because they had no more resources left. So as he goes on his third missionary journey, this high priority of collecting the money is on his heart. He wants to collect it from the Gentile churches and take it back to the poor in Jerusalem.

Now, let me take you one step further. It wasn't only economics; it was also spiritual love that he wanted demonstrated. Do you remember that in Ephesians chapter 2, Paul said that the Jew and the Gentile were separated by a wall, but in Christ the wall had come down and they had been made one new man in Christ? Well, racial bitterness and racial animosity and racial hatred run real deep, even in converted people. Even in converted people. And there was still lots of latent hostility between Jew and Gentile.

And Paul knew there needed to be a real reconciliation and that what had happened spiritually needed to happen personally. And so he knew that if he could collect money from Gentile churches and bring it as a love gift to the Jews in Jerusalem, it would go a long way to elicit a mutual affection. It would express the spiritual unity of the church which is the true body of Christ. It would also afford tangible evidence to a watching world that that middle wall of partition had been shattered and the Jew and the Gentile had come together. It would also be a dramatic setback to the Judaizers and it would be a dramatic setback for the Hellenizers, both of which wanted to perpetuate the division.

K.L. Schmidt (sp?) writes, "As the Jews of the dispersion year by year sent their contributions to the temple at Jerusalem, thereby proclaiming those scattered their national and religious unity, so the bringing of these contributions to Jerusalem would throw into relief that unity which transcends all other unities, the everlasting oneness in Christ of those who are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, the living stones of a holy temple for the offering up of spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." End quote. It would make a tremendous statement of solidarity, a statement of unity.

Now the first reference to this collection is in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 verses 1 to 4. That's the first reference to it in print. It's not the first reference to it in actuality, because Paul had already asked the Corinthians to participate when he went there. And most likely they wrote him a letter...it's referred to

1 Corinthians 7. They wrote him a letter and they asked him questions. And most likely one of the questions they asked him was about this collection. "How do you want us to do this?" So he wrote 1 Corinthians back and answered a lot of their questions.

One of the questions he answers in chapter 16. He says, "Now concerning the offering, I want you to do it this way. On the first day of the week, make all the collections and do that before I come so that when I come there doesn't have to be collection." He gave them some instruction on how to do it, so they knew about it. They had been told about it. In the letter called 1 Corinthians, they had been instructed how to give. So they had already started their giving.

In fact, when Titus went...if you're in 2 Corinthians, look down at chapter 8 verse 6. When Titus went he discussed it with them. And you remember Titus had gone at the behest of Paul to visit them to see how they responded to his severe letter that he wrote between the first and second letter. Verse 6, "We urged Titus as he had previously made a beginning so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well." Apparently, Titus had already made a beginning in collecting this offering and when he went back to visit them he was to encourage them to keep it up.

Down in verse 10 of chapter 8, "I give my opinion in this matter. This is to your advantage who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this but also to desire to do it – " verse 11 " - now finish doing it." So when he was there he told them to do it. Titus told them to do it. They asked how to do it. He instructed them how to do it, 1 Corinthians 16. Titus went back to them and said, "Keep it up." Now he writes and says, "Finish it." It was a high priority. He had been working on it for over a year, he says.

Now, the fact that in 1 Corinthians 16 he speaks of *the* collection, definite article, indicates that it was a collection they most likely already knew about and thus we assume they had been told, and it was part of their query when they wrote him and he responded to them by writing that letter. So he's been collecting these funds for over a year. He makes reference to them also in Romans chapter 15, verse 25. "I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased to do so."

So he's already collecting money in Macedonia. He's collecting it in Achaia, and now he wants to collect it down in Corinth as well. In Acts chapter 20 in verse 4, we are introduced to a committee who were taking the money. And in Acts 24:17, it mentions that Paul is going to Jerusalem with the money on his fifth trip to that great holy city.

So enough of that. The collection was very important in his heart, and he spent over a year getting all this money together and taking it to Jerusalem. So the specific issue that is being addressed with the Corinthians here is the matter of giving their money, not to support the preachers, not to support those who lead, but to support the poor in the church, and, namely, the church at Jerusalem. But no

matter what the specific issue was, the pattern for giving is general, universal, and instructive in all of our giving. And when we give to the church we give to the leadership, to support the ministry of the church, and as the church disseminates that to those in need.

We give to all of that when we lay our money, as it were, in the offering plate which is like laying it at the apostles' feet. And the principles that rise out of these two chapters with regard to giving transcend the specifics but the specifics are important to understand the context of what we're learning here. Now, in chapter 8...and we'll just deal with that by way of introduction this morning. We're not going to get into specifics. Chapter 8 gives us the motivation for giving. Chapter 8 we hear the motivation for giving, it's a great chapter. And there are about six motivations.

First of all, in verse 9 we should be motivated because giving is Christlike. Verses 10-12, giving is the desire of the regenerate spirit. Verses 13-15, giving is the compassionate response to need. Verses 16-21, giving is honorable before God and men. And verses 22-24, giving is the proof of love. So we're going to learn all those things. Notice I started at verse 9. The first eight verses show that giving is the behavior of devout Christians. Giving is the behavior of devout Christians. It is the behavior of devout Christians, it is Christlike, it is the desire of a regenerate spirit, it is the compassionate response to need, it is honorable before God and men, and it is the proof of love. That's what we're going to learn in chapter 8.

Now, how do we learn that giving is the behavior of devout Christians? Isn't Paul talking to the Corinthians and telling them to give? Yes, but he uses an illustration. Look at verse 1. His illustration is the churches of Macedonia. "We wish to make known to you how the churches of Macedonia have given to this offering." He uses them as an example. And, beloved, they are a marvelous, marvelous example of giving. They become then the model of Christian giving that sets up our understanding of how to give.

Let's look at verse 1, just briefly. "Now," he says. That word, by the way, is a Greek particle that indicates a contrast into a new topic or a new subject and he's progressing in his discussion. It flows out of the prior text in which he spoke of a restored relationship with the Corinthians. And now that they're relationship is restored, he can talk to them about giving, and he can have a little authority again in their lives. He's saying, in effect, since we have a restored relationship and you're now submitting yourselves to me as God's servant and God's voice, you are recognizing that God's word and will is through me, I must call you back to the matter of giving. He calls them brethren, a term of endearing affection, and then he says, "I want you to look at the Macedonians."

Now do you know where Macedonia was? Greece encompasses Macedonia. Greece is divided into two parts. It's like two sort of circles like this, with a small, small little neck between them. In modern times a canal runs through the length of that, going between the seas on either side. The northern part above that little...that little neck, the northern part was Macedonia. And Macedonia was the north

part of Greece. There were basically three churches in Macedonia that he's speaking of here. The church at Philippi to which Philippians was written, the church at Thessalonica which received the two Thessalonian letters, and the church at Berea. Those three churches were the churches of Macedonia.

Now Macedonia was the ancient kingdom of Alexander the Great that had now come under Roman control. It included all the northern provinces of Greece. Now, let me tell you a little about these churches, just a very brief word or two, and we'll see more as we go. There is nothing in the Thessalonian letters and there's nothing in the Philippian letter dealing with the rich. There's no word about how the rich are to behave or what they're to do with their riches; there's no warnings about any of that. And we can know why. Because the area was abysmally poor. It was an utterly impoverished area. As I noted for you, the Romans did that all over the Roman Empire. They basically impoverished the people.

Since 148 B.C., about 200 years before the Corinthian church found its place, it had been a Roman province for 200 years. And the Romans had been exceedingly cruel to the Macedonian population, as they typically were. Very, very cruel. We know about the peace of Rome, well a lot of the peace of Rome was due to the fact that people lived in terror of the Roman sword. Now, what the Romans did when they came in there was literally impoverish the Macedonian area by a couple of things.

One, the greatest source of wealth was gold and silver mining. The Romans completely took it over. All they allowed the Macedonians to do was work. They allowed them to dig out the ore and smelt it. And on the smelting process which remained a Macedonian industry, the Romans attached exorbitant taxes. So they took all the profit out of the gold, all the profit out of the silver and then taxed the smelting process which, in effect, impoverished the people.

Following that, salt, timber and, consequent to the timber industry, shipbuilding were the greatest industries in Macedonia. The Romans took them all over, operated them, and made all the profit in order to build their armies, to continue their conquering and to build the great city of Rome. This reduced the Macedonian region to great poverty. This, then, becomes a perfect example for giving because they are giving out of their own poverty, to a more impoverished group of believers in Jerusalem. So you're not dealing with some people who have a lot, you're dealing with some people who have a little.

Verse 2 says, "That in a great ordeal of affliction," remember, the churches were persecuted as well. "But in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty." They were profoundly poor, and we'll say more about that phrase next time. "And yet their giving overflowed in a wealth of liberality." In fact, verse 3 says that they gave according to their ability and beyond their ability and they did it of their own free will. Generous, though poor, the perfect model for Christian giving.

So Paul says, “I want to *gnriz*...I want to draw your attention to the giving that’s been done by the churches of Macedonia, and I want you to give like they have given. That’s the standard.” That’s the standard. Over in chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians in verse 9, Paul says, “When I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone.” Why? “For when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you and will continue to do so.” I don’t want to be a burden to you. I don’t want to be a burden to you at all, not in any way, shape or form. And in order to prevent myself from being a burden to you, the Lord has provided the Macedonians’ generosity.

Apparently the Corinthians didn’t even give like the Macedonians, but needed to. So they become the standard. We’re going to find out how they gave in the first eight verses, and it is a model of Christian giving, and that’s for next Lord’s day. Let’s bow together in prayer.

Father, again we’re so blessed. You have already poured out such abundant blessing on us. We have so much and more. And, Lord, yet there is blessing we haven’t received, riches we haven’t experienced because we haven’t given. We think of these poor Macedonians who had so little and gave the little they had, and thus were always replenished to give again and give again. Father, we pray that You might teach us that if there was nothing else said we would give if we believed the promise, “Give and it shall be given to you.” We would give if we obeyed the command, “Give.” We would give if we believed that it was more blessed to do that because we crave so much to be blessed.

Father, You have shown us a path to blessing, a path to abundance, a path to obedience, and You ask us to trust You and obey You and walk it. May we do that. And teach us, continue to teach us that we might know the fullness of Your blessing and eternal glory for that treasure in heaven which can never be corrupted and never rusted and never stolen, but which we shall enjoy forever and ever in Your presence. Thank You, Lord, for Your Word to us. In Christ’s name, amen.

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