

**PP 360° Giving: Give Big and Break the Grip of Evil**

**2 Corinthians 8:1-15**

**3/14-15/2015**

There's an old legend of a Persian monarch who reigned in wealth and glory in the comfort of his palace. Yet his concern for the common people frequently drove him to dress as a poor man, and mingle with his lowly subjects. One day he visited a fireman, whose job was to heat the water in the bathhouse. Dressed in tattered clothes, the shah descended a long flight of steps down to the tiny cellar where the fireman sat on a pile of ashes, tending the fire. Disguised, he sat beside the man to talk. At noon the fireman shared his meager meal of coarse bread and water. The shah left, but kept returning, his heart filled with sympathy for the lonely man who opened his heart to the Shah. Finally, he couldn't bear to keep up the pretense any longer and revealed his identity to his fireman friend. He asked the poor man to name a gift he could give him, but the man said nothing, just sat looking at him with love and wonder. Thinking he had not understood him, the shah offered to make the fireman rich, give him a nobleman's rank, or make him ruler over a city. But the man replied, "My lord, I understood you. But leaving your palace to sit here with me, partake of my humble food, and listen to the troubles of my heart—even you could give me no more precious gift than that. You may have given rich gifts to others, but to me you gave yourself. I only ask that you never withdraw your friendship from me.

***“Know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.” 2 Corinthians 8:9***

In one of the Bible's clearest glimpses of the gospel, we see the incredible generosity of God And one of the most beautiful ways to see the gospel today in the church, is when churches rise up to generously give to one another

This was the way of the New Testament church and we're about to see it unfold

**PP 1-A generously giving church is full of God's grace**

***“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia,***

The ***‘brothers’*** that Paul refers to are the saints at the church at Corinth, the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important city in the Roman Empire

Corinth had been destroyed by Rome in 146 BC, left uninhabited for 102 years when Julius Caesar had it rebuilt

When Paul visited Corinth in 49 AD, it had a population of 80,000 people and because it was situated on the isthmus of Greece, it was called the *‘masters of harbors’*, the *‘crossroads of Greece’*, and *‘a passage for all mankind’*

It was the boom town of Rome where wealth became the sole factor for respect and power It had a sports and entertainment culture, with an 18,000 seat theater, a 3,000 seat concert hall (Fisher Stadium 13,000 seats; Goodman Stadium 16,000; State Theater 1500 seats)

Travel, tourism, sex, and every religion on the planet was woven together in Corinth

Into this city came the Apostle Paul with his mission team of Timothy and Silas, and together with husband and wife Aquila and Priscilla, they established a church

But this church rapidly assimilated its culture and a few years later Paul paid a visit and soon after wrote the painful letter of **1 Corinthians**, spurring most back to Christ

A year later, he wrote **2 Corinthians**, his most transparent and emotional of any of his writings, his pastoral heart on full display

**PP** The phrase ***‘grace of God’*** means the grace of giving, the desire of generosity  
It is God’s grace, His unmerited favor that is the source of a Christian’s financial generosity  
And it was clearly being seen ***“among the churches of Macedonia” (8:1)***, the ancient kingdom of Alexander the Great, located in the northern part of modern Greece  
It’s where Paul was staying when he wrote 2 Corinthians  
We first hear about the Macedonians in Acts 16, when Paul had a vision from the Holy Spirit of a Macedonian man, asking him to come help them, and so he traveled there  
He started the churches at Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea  
It was an area of intense persecution, where the church was experiencing a ***‘severe test of affliction’ 8:2***

**PP** ***‘affliction’*** means pressure, like the crushing of grapes, and this pressure was severe  
The Macedonian churches were suffering greatly for Christ, but they rose above their circumstances as ***“their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.” 8:2***

**PP** ***‘Extreme poverty’***-the word ***‘extreme’*** gives us our word bathysphere, a specially designed ship to plumb the depths of the ocean  
It is rock bottom poverty, which like the ocean’s depths brought crushing pressure and affliction

So how incredible it is that the Macedonian Christians gave generously though extremely poor  
Have you ever seen someone do that?  
When the wealthy give big dollars, that is great and it is necessary for God’s work  
But when the extremely poor give, it is amazing to observe, it is the work of God’s grace in them  
Generosity is to be the action of rich and poor, but it takes great faith in God to give out of

**PP** extreme poverty, faith in God’s promise that He will ***“supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19***

The Macedonian churches show us how we will give when we are utterly convinced of this truth  
***“For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” 2 Corinthians 8:3-5***

Church, I want to call you to become generous givers, letting the Word of God work in your hearts to be free from selfishness, worry, and materialism  
And when God moves in our hearts to give, it’ll often be ***‘beyond [our] means’*** but always ***‘of [our] own accord’ 8:3***

Because we want to, not because we are compelled  
There is a pressure to give that churches and organizations can try and exert on us, and then there is a desire to give that the gospel works inside of us

Years ago I took some of the teens in our youth group to a very famous church in NYC  
We were all excited, and it was a long service, 2 hours long  
But what made it so long was the giving portion of the service, which lasted nearly an hour,

Emotional testimonies, music from their choir, appeals and admonitions from the lead pastor, a review of the ministry needs, and finally, the offering, passed to a professional singer Cornerstone, generous giving should not require any of that, it should be motivated by love The Macedonian churches gave generously despite their poverty for *'the relief of the saints'* Their hearts broke and erupted in generosity for the *'saints'*, the Christians in Jerusalem

**PP** We learn this at the end of **1 Corinthians**, *"Now concerning the collection for the saints...when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem."* **16:1-3**

The Christians in Jerusalem were suffering greatly, and adding to it was a world-wide famine

**PP** that was predicted in **Acts 11**, *"Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea."* **28-29**

In AD 45, the Nile River flooded, decimating Egypt's grain harvest, sending prices soaring through the Roman Empire

Then we learn from Acts 8 that persecution toward Jerusalem Christians had increased and many Christians could not get work, viewed as heretics by Jews and pagans by Rome

Economic difficulty permeated everywhere, yet the Christians gave despite their difficulty

There was no, *If I have some to give I give*, they gave generously whether they had enough or not The Macedonians were *'begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints'* **8:4**

Incredible generosity despite incredible poverty...what amazing things can we do in our church?

### **PP 2-A generously giving church demonstrates the gospel**

*"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."* **2 Corinthians 8:9**

This is the good news of Jesus Christ, the Gospel...He descended from riches to poverty so that believers might ascend from poverty to riches

Our God is an exceedingly generous God, and it is difficult to understand how so many

Christians are not giving generously when they see this truth

Paul is not describing a physical poverty of Christ, but His spiritual poverty

He was rich, not *just* that He owned everything in heaven and on earth, but He is rich in glory

But He became poor, laying aside His divine prerogative to freely exercise His divinity

He left the throne and became a servant

Infinitely greater than the Persian Monarch in our opening story, God became human, suffered for us, died for our sins, becoming the poorest of the poor bearing all our sin

Friends, before our salvation we were spiritually bankrupt, no righteousness in our account before God

Yet for those who trust in Him for salvation, He pours into them spiritual riches, His riches that He gladly shares with His people for eternity

Here is the incredible point of Paul: our generous, sacrificial giving makes this gospel visible to others

When we take an offering every Christmas Eve for a struggling ministry, we are demonstrating the gospel!

When you sacrificially give to a ministry that is spreading the gospel of hope in word and deed, you are not only making friends for eternity, but participating in the gospel

And this leads to the third and final lesson I present for us to learn to live from this passage

### **PP 3-A generously giving church seeks partnerships for the work of Christ**

18,000 people came into the Coca-Cola Dome in Randburg, South Africa to Benny Hinn's Miracle Crusade, and the Pastor Todd Koontz was up first, priming the crowd to give. He assured them that God wanted to make them rich, that 500 people in the crowd would receive 'exceptional blessings' that this service would yield 'millionaires and billionaires within 24 hours' for anyone donating up to \$1,000. To motivate them, Koontz said that the blessing would be poured out for only two minutes, and credit card machines were ready to receive the donations

Friends, giving is to be entirely voluntary, impelled by desire, not compelled by manipulation so Paul tells the Corinthians, *"in this matter I give my judgment"* (8), not a command. He had just shown them the highest example of giving, the example of the Son of God, and then he appeals to them to finish what they *'a year ago started'* (10), a collection for the Jerusalem saints

*Be generous, the Christians in Jerusalem need your gracious gift! You are their partners for the gospel despite the hundreds of miles that separate your people*

And this is what partnership looks like: *"For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness."* 8:13-14

Listen to what Paul wrote in **Romans 15**, a book he penned while in Corinth: *"I am going to*

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

This is church to church partnership, the responsibility that churches gladly bear for one another. They wanted to give to the suffering church in Jerusalem, and they owed it, were obligated. The Gentiles in Macedonia and Achaia (Corinth) were being spiritually enriched by the Jews, so the Jews should be materially enriched by the Gentiles.

When a church is blessed materially, they should share it with others who aren't, and the day may come when there is a reversal.

And when churches gladly give to one another, no one is burdened.

*"Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."* 15

These are churches living by the principle of a zero sum balance.

There is wisdom in a savings account, after all God positioned Joseph as the number 2 man in

Egypt to prepare that country for a 7 year famine which would take care of God's people.

Yet, what purpose is a million in the bank when the money can further the gospel around the world, and break the grip of evil, both here in our Jerusalem, in the Judea and Samaria of our country, and in the DRC of the world?

When I was mapping out this sermon series a few months ago, I deliberately placed this sermon on the day of our semi-annual meeting where we will decide whether to give \$250,000 to the Restoring Hope Ministry in Dungu, DRC

The reason I did that was so that the Word of God would guide us into this decision, to fill our hearts with the faith to trust Him in such a big step

If you were to talk with me, I think you would quickly realize what a simple faith I possess, one that was helped a long time ago with the example of Hudson Taylor, missionary to China

**PP** *“God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.”*

His supply is His confirmation of His vision, it always is!

And He doesn't poof money into our church's account, where it mysteriously appears

He stirs His saints to give generously, occasionally even doing the same in unbelievers

If we all became generous givers, there is not a ministry in our church that would lack funding

I have never seen an exception to this...how could there be?

Friends, be motivated by the Macedonian churches who gave so much despite being caught in the crushing grip of deep poverty

**PP** Give generously, because the grace of God is producing that desire in us

**PP** Give generously, because the gospel of Jesus Christ is our example

**PP** Give generously and partner for the gospel, because we can help break the grip of evil around the world

Amen?

Pray