

Well, it's good to be back. As you know, we've been on holidays. And while we were away, we visited the Glasshouse Country Baptist church, we met up with a few folk who regularly listen to the BD Podcast (really encouraging). And when they saw us there, they said, "Well that explains why there was no message for us to listen to last week". (Mark & Sue & Barnabas & Paul)

Anyway, I haven't preached for 3 Sundays in a row, and so early this week, I had to re-visit where we were up to. But before I did, I thought I'd better catch up on my **Daily** Bible readings.

You see, each day, I read a little bit from various sections of the Bible:

And this is what I read:

Isaiah 5:

<sup>8</sup> Woe to those who join house to house,  
who add field to field,  
until there is no more room,  
and you are made to dwell alone  
in the midst of the land.

And then it went on to talk about how God was going to judge the selfish and the wicked and the drunkard... And then it said:

V17

<sup>17</sup> Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture,  
and nomads shall eat among the ruins of the rich.

And then in Matthew 16 I read:

**26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?**

And then, in Matthew 17, Jesus was talking about paying the Temple tax.

And then in Proverbs 3:9–10 (ESV)

**9 Honour the LORD with your wealth  
and with the firstfruits of all your produce;  
10 then your barns will be filled with plenty,  
and your vats will be bursting with wine.**

Alright, that all came in my daily Bible readings.

And then, Robyn brought the mail home, and there was a letter there, which I haven't yet opened, but on the envelope it said:

*Special Invitation to Stewardship Summit 2020 : Grow a Generous Church*

And then I opened the Scriptures, to see what I was going to be preaching on this week... And it was all about giving. And in fact, it goes on for a whole 2 chapters. This morning, we're just going to be taking most of the first chapter, but there's a bit of a heads-up – over the next couple of weeks, we're going to be learning about giving and generosity...

Now, some people would say that all of these Bible readings were:

- coincidence.
- “God was speaking to me”.. And I have no doubt that He was. Every time we read the Scriptures, God is speaking to us, if only we're willing to hear what He has to say...
- Or maybe, this could simply be, an example of how often the Scriptures openly teach us and challenge us, about what we do with our money.

*For many of us, the last part of us to be saved, is our hip pocket, And so it shouldn't be any surprise that Jesus had a lot to say about money.*

So, let's set the scene:

Most Christians will have a certain passion, or a certain cause, that they like to support... And it's pretty obvious what Paul's was. The Apostle Paul, had a great love, and he had a great concern, for the Christians in Jerusalem...

The Christians in Jerusalem were being persecuted pretty hard. And usually, **with** persecution, comes poverty. And that was the case here. Many of them had been cut off from work, and they weren't able to support themselves. And several places in the New Testament, we can catch glimpses of Paul organising a collection here (or a collection there), to be taken as a gift to Christians in Jerusalem...

They were in dire need. And that was something that really tugged at Paul's heart-strings. And so he had the practice, of encouraging the Gentile churches, to support their Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

Anyway, on one of his prior visits, he'd shared this need, with the church in Corinth. And at the time, they were very keen to 'chip in'. Even though they didn't personally know the Christians in Jerusalem, the Body of Christ, was suffering, and so they began getting a collection together...

**But...** Something changed...

So far in this letter, we've seen that when Paul moved on, (to plant more churches in other places), some **false** apostles moved into town. And it seems that they were running Paul down, and it seems like they might've been making a claim on the Corinthian church (for financial support for themselves)... And so the Corinthians had become a bit 'distrustful' of Paul, and maybe their money was being re-deployed to support these false apostles. And the collection (that they'd been gathering together a little bit each week), stalled...

And so, in this section, Paul is urging them, to complete what they'd begun...

Alright, so that sets the scene.

Righto. Generosity. Giving. Why do we do it? Or maybe **you** might want to know, "Why do those dastardly preachers, keep preaching about it???"

*I heard one pastor of a mega-church explain his preaching program. (4 week rotation)*

- *Evangelical*
- *How to share your faith;*
- *Spiritual gifts & being involved in ministry*
- *Tithing or giving*

*Alright, so every 4 weeks, he gave a message on tithing (or giving). (Tithing BTW, is the Old Testament principal of giving back to God, 1/10<sup>th</sup> of your gross income).*

*In most Pentecostal churches, it happens **every** week. Just before the offering's taken up, you'll hear an offering message, telling you why it's a good idea for you to give money... You'll notice that we don't do that here. In fact, we don't even take up a collection... We're not going to shake the offering plate in front of you, and say, "Come on, pay up."... If the Lord is prompting you to give, just pop it in the offering box down the back, or do what most people do, and set up a regular bank transfer...*

So, when it comes to money, and when it comes to giving, I only teach about this stuff, as often as it comes up in our Bible readings. That way, the topic of giving, gets brought up, only as often as God brings it up in His word...

But the thing is, He brings it up pretty often...

And today's bible reading, I think, stands alone, in the depth of theology about why we give. When we give, it's an expression of the grace of God. Most often, we think of our giving as a response to the grace of God, but it's actually an expression of the Grace of God.

Why do people give?

- Want to make a difference. And on one level, a person's intentions can be very noble, but it actually plays to our vanity and our self-importance – look at the difference I was able to make...
- Leave a legacy. They want to have their name live on some kind of philanthropic achievement that they've made...
- Want to feel good about themselves, and achieve a tax deduction at the same time. They've got more than they want, or more than they need, and so they feel good about giving some of it to charity, and get a tax deduction at the same time.
- They want to be part of something bigger – part of a movement... Telethons are a good example of this, where over a couple of hours, millions of \$ are given by hundreds of thousands of people to aid those less fortunate than ourselves. (usually in response to some kind of tragedy or disaster)
- To relieve guilt... The picture of a malnourished, sickly child – and a message, that if you give just \$50/month, you can lift this child out of poverty...  
And here you are, your cup of coffee costs more than a bag of rice that would feed that starving child for a whole week...
- There's all sorts of reasons why people give, and most of them are good reasons.

But Christians give, because it's an expression of the Grace of God.

And for Christians, there's all sorts of giving:

- Regular giving (some tithe / like to give more) to support the local church and ministry;
- Regular giving to support some other ministry or mission.
- Giving to the poor

And what we're looking at today, can be applied to any of these, but the specific instance of giving here, is supporting other Christians who are in dire need... As Christians, give to other Christians who are in need, this is an expression of the Grace of God.

So, as Paul introduces them to the topic of giving, he gives them a really good example, for them to look up to – and that's the **Macedonian** church. The Macedonian church, were being persecuted themselves. They were going through severe affliction, and because of this, extreme poverty...

But when God does a work in our hearts, God has a way of turning everything up-side-down. In a **severe test of affliction**, they had an **abundance of joy**. And in their **extreme poverty** (not just a little bit poor – in the Greek this means “rock-bottom”) – in **their extreme poverty**, they **overflowed**, in a **wealth of generosity**...

Now that doesn't mean that they were able to give a lot (numerically), but compared to what they had, they gave a lot. They gave according to their means, and Paul says, they actually went beyond their means...

I'm reminded of the widow's mite... She dropped 2 tiny copper coins into the offering, and only one person noticed it. And Jesus said, "She's given more than anybody else, because out of her poverty, she gave everything that she had."

Now, here's the thing with giving: As a preacher, I really baulk at giving a hard-hitting message on "giving"... I don't ever want to be, 'that preacher' – you know, the one who leaves you feeling, "They just want your money"...

And yet I know the **importance** of giving. As disciples of Jesus, you and I, should be really generous... It's the way of Jesus, and it should be the way of His disciples... And I should leave you, in no doubt about that. If generosity, isn't part of our character, then there's something **seriously deficient** in our relationship with God.

And so, it's important that I teach this. But if you only start giving, because you feel pressured, or because I've put the guilt-trip on you (or whatever), we've missed the whole point... This Macedonian church – they gave of their own accord. Paul didn't make them give – they **wanted** to give. They begged Paul, "Let us contribute – let us take part in this relief collection."

And I 'get' this. There have been times when, (actually not that uncommon), when those who have the least, are the first to give... Some people give what they can spare – they give

what's not going to impact negatively on their own plans too much (because they're saving up for something, or they're paying something off), while those who have very little, give the most.

And there's been times when someone I know (who doesn't have that much) (and they're doing it pretty tough themselves), and yet they want to give... And there's a part of me that wants to talk them out of it, but they don't want to be talked out of it. They want to give. They beg to be able to contribute... And that's what the church in Macedonia did.

Now, why did they so much want to give? Why did they so much want to contribute to the needs of the saints in Jerusalem??? It's because they'd already given **themselves** to Jesus.

Paul said, "They didn't give *as we expected*, but they gave **themselves first to the Lord**, and then by the will of God to us..."

The reason they gave what they had, was because they had already given themselves to Jesus... You understand this, don't you?... To give ourselves to Jesus, means we give **our everything** to Jesus. ...

**First**, we give **ourselves** to Christ, and then, because we are now His, we give to our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are in need... And in that way, **we** are the grace of God in action.

Now, some people find it really hard to give... And the lesson that I'm learning from this, is "If I feel burdened by giving" – If I just don't want to give – If I look for reasons to **not** give, and if I look for reasons to keep stuff for myself (instead of giving generously) then, I really need to ask myself the question, "Have I done the first step of giving? Have I truly given myself to Christ?" Because to give yourself to Christ, means you've already given everything to Him... You're no longer administering your own stuff – you're administering God's stuff... And that's why when you give, it's an expression of the grace of God.

χάρις Charis (grace) – charity.

And we give ourselves to Christ, because **He first** gave **Himself** to us. Paul says: <sup>9</sup> For you know the grace (charis) 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.

Now, of course, he's not talking about being financially rich: Christ left His rich, heavenly existence, to become so humble, and to die, so that (in Christ), we might become spiritually rich... He lifts us up from the poverty of our human existence, and He blesses us with the richness of glory...

Some people all caught up in prosperity theology look at that verse, and make the claim that Jesus became poor so that they

could have lots of money.... What a Godless and spiritually bankrupt belief that is...

OK: So, that was the example of giving, expressed by the Macedonian church... Out of their extreme poverty, they gave abundantly, because they'd already given themselves to Christ... And as they gave, this was an expression of the grace of God (in action).

And so now he turns to the **Corinthian** church. And he urges them to do likewise. He urges them to complete what they'd already begun. "**complete this act of grace**", he says...

Now, the Corinthian church, was a church, full of Spiritual gifts – Paul mentions the way they excel in:

- Faith
- In speech
- In knowledge
- In their zeal (passion) (earnestness)

You excel in all this, but there's something lacking. You haven't excelled in the grace of giving.

Some folk have the attitude, "Giving isn't my gift".

- I'm the preacher;
- I visit people;
- I do this, or I do that
- This is my ministry

And giving isn't it... But the fact is, that as a disciple of Jesus, if I'm not giving generously, there's something missing in my relationship with God.

And Paul drives this home. And it's almost like Paul is giving them a command, "You've gotta be giving". But in V8, he specifically says: <sup>8</sup> I say this **not** as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.

Alright, so he's comparing them to the earnestness of the Macedonian church... Their love was genuine, because they gave.

- Faith, isn't faith, unless it's practical; and
- Love, isn't genuine, unless it's accompanied with actions;

We learn that in James 2:

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Alright, how can we know if our love is genuine? Jesus said: John 13:<sup>35</sup> **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

Authentic Disciples of Jesus, love other disciples of Jesus.  
How do we know that our love is genuine? Genuine love gives, and it gives generously...

Righto:

So, it was a year earlier, that they'd decided that they **would** contribute to the needs of the saints in Jerusalem, but they'd never finished the collection. And sometimes, **we** know that God is wanting **us** to give. We might even make a decision to give. But for some reason, we just never get around to it – we delay, and effectively, don't give.

And sometimes, we know that the Lord is wanting us to give, but we feel, "I'm just not in a position to be able to do that at the moment... I can't afford to give."

But you know, it's not about what we do or don't have. It's about readiness. It's about willingness.

Paul didn't expect them to give what they didn't have. He wanted them to complete their commitment to give, out of what they **did** have. He could see that the issue wasn't that they didn't have what was needed – what they didn't have, was the readiness to do it...

*A preacher stood up before his congregation one Sunday, and he said "I've got some good news, and I've got some bad news." The good news is, that God has provided all of the finances, that we need, to meet our budget this year." And the*

*Congregation cheered. And then he went on, "The bad news is, that it's still in your pocket..."*

V <sup>12</sup> For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

God doesn't expect us to give what we don't have... He only wants us to give what we do have... All God is asking, is for readiness to contribute what we do have.

It's about giving according to our means... If I have a lot, I should be able to give a lot. If I have a little, I can still give a little...

And circumstances change... Living in the agricultural sector, we know this, don't we... We've just gone through the most hideous drought. We've had some really tough years. And yet some of you, out of your poverty, have given. It might not have been as much as you wanted to give, but you found a way to give anyway (because there was a readiness to give)...

But in the last 3 weeks, (and especially in the last week), hasn't the situation in this district changed.

- There's been rain.
- The grass is growing.
- The river is running.
- Dams are filling.
- Cattle prices and sheep prices are booming

There's going to be plenty of work...

Situations change. And Paul recognises this.

<sup>13</sup> For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness  
<sup>14</sup> your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. <sup>15</sup> As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

God doesn't expect us to give what we don't have. All He wants, is a readiness for us to give what we do have. And when a whole church has an attitude of generosity – when a whole church have a readiness to give generously, because they've already given themselves to Jesus, there is always enough.

There's always enough:

- for ministry
- for missions
- to support those we send off to Bible College
- for helping the persecuted church
- for us to give to our brothers and sisters in Christ, who have nothing.

All it takes, is a readiness to give. The Macedonian church (even in their extreme poverty), **overflowed in a wealth of generosity**

Sometimes we will be supporting other churches who are in need. And at other times, we might be the ones who are in need...

It's all about having a readiness to give...

Next week, we're going to talk about what we give to. How do we know, if a need is genuine, and how will we know if those who are taking up the collection, can be trusted?

That's next week. But for this week, let's start by giving ourselves to Jesus. And let's have the readiness, to be an expression of the Grace of God, by giving generously.