

## Godly Giving

*preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on February 17, 2019*

This morning we turn to the fifth sermon in our seven part sermon series on 2 Corinthians. And now, turning to today's reading, let us hear the Word of God as found in 2 Corinthians, chapter eight, verses one through fifteen.

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

8 We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; 2 for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, 4 begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints - 5 and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, 6 so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. 7 Now as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you - so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. 8 I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. 10 And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something - 11 now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. 12 For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has - not according to what one does not have. 13 I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between 14 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. 15 As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."

One of the things for which churches are best known is our continual engagement in raising funds for people in need. As a case in point, when I looked through the annual reports of EPC and Knox Flos I counted at least fifteen different mission projects that we have supported over the past year. It's quite remarkable when you stop and think about it.

During the past year we have raised money for the Elmvale Food Bank, Hospice

Huron, EDHS retrofit project, RVH Cardiac Care, RVH Child & Youth Mental Health, Wheels of Hope, the Alzheimer Society, Canadian Bible Society, Team Broken Earth who were in Guatemala last year. I'll stop there. But keep in mind, this is no where near the full list. And I haven't mentioned the substantial contributions we make each year to Presbyterians Sharing, PWSD, and our Lenten and Advent mission projects.

In order to raise money for these worthy causes we have sold meat pies, catered meals, hosted community gathering events like "Let's Do Lunch," held BBQ and Bake Sale fund raisers, and of course, our bread and butter means of raising money for mission, we simply ask the church to give generously. And we do it all the time. Rarely is there a month where we don't have some special mission project that we are appealing to the congregation for support so that others who are in need may be blessed by our generosity.

In our Scripture reading this morning, the Apostle Paul was making a special appeal to the church in Corinth to offer financial assistance to the church in Jerusalem. The reason for the appeal was that a severe famine had left the Jewish believers in Judea in a state of poverty. Being aware of their need, and being deeply attached to the people, Paul asked the Corinthians (as well as the believers in all the churches that he had planted) to give money to help relieve the suffering of the Jewish Christians.

However, before he introduced his financial request in today's reading, Paul boasted about the sacrificial gift that he had received from the Macedonian churches on behalf of the church in Jerusalem. Playing on the longstanding political rivalry that existed between the Greeks and Macedonians, Paul mentions their good deeds knowing that the Greek Corinthians would not want to be bested by their political rivals.

That being said, the most important thing that Paul mentions about the Macedonian's gift was not who it came from, or how much it was, but, the fact that the Macedonian Christians were willing to give even though they were experiencing great adversity themselves.

The severe trial that the Macedonian churches experienced was of a sort that left them in a condition of extreme poverty. Like many other Christians in the first century who were enduring the hardships of Roman persecution, the Macedonians were going through difficult times. Perhaps they themselves had experienced some of the adversity that Paul himself had recently endured, which he described

in earlier chapters.

And yet, even though the Macedonians were suffering themselves, by the grace of God, they were still able to give. And they were able to give beyond measure. Far more than anyone would have thought to be possible.

This grace that God had given them was further reflected by the fact that the gift they offered came from the heart. This means they offered their gift willingly; motivated by Christian compassion. They did not give because they were looking to show off. They did not give because they felt compelled by guilt or duty. They did not give because they were pressured into it.

Rather they gave because the grace of God was upon their lives, and the joy of the Lord was so abundantly present in their lives that there was an overflow available to them that allowed them to bless a group of people whom they had never met, and whom they would never know. In fact, Paul tells us, that the desire of the Macedonians to give was so strong that they begged Paul most earnestly to let them partake in this ministry. This was a wonderful demonstration of the grace of God.

And Paul hoped to see it replicated once again, this time, in the church in Corinth. As noted in today's reading, the seed had already been planted in the past. For a year already, it had been on the minds of the Corinthians to make a financial contribution. However, up until this point, they had failed to act. In today's reading Paul encouraged the Corinthians to take the next step in their plans to live generously and finally do what they had already determined to do.

In his encouragement to the Corinthians to live generously, Paul highlights a few principles to help guide them along the way. The first is that we must give ourselves to the Lord before we can give of ourselves to our brothers and sisters. Here is how this principle works. When we give ourselves to the Lord, we recognize that all we have belongs to God. So, when we give, we are not giving away our possessions, we are giving away God's possessions. And giving away God's wealth is a whole lot easier than giving away our wealth, so, this should be our mindset. When we give, we are not giving away our finite assets, instead we are assisting God distribute His infinite riches for the benefit of all.

Another way of saying the same thing, when we recognize that all that we have belongs to God, we begin to realize that when we give God's possessions away we don't become poorer, we actually become wealthier. Because, if all that we have

has been surrendered to Christ, than all that Christ has is ours.

As Jesus tells his disciples in Mark chapter ten, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.”

A second principle Paul gives the Corinthians to guide them in their giving is the standard set by Christ himself. As the Apostle John instructs the church “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

A third principle Paul gives the Corinthians to guide them in their giving is, after they have considered principle one and two, make a sensible decision. In other words, don't over do it. Like anything good in life, we can do too much, which brings harm, and not help. In our giving, we must exercise wisdom. And in some instances, the most loving thing to do is not to give. This requires real discernment.

These were the principles that Paul gave to the Corinthians in today's reading to help them grow in their generosity. These were the principles that Paul gave to the Corinthians to help them in their discernment. These were the principles that Paul gave to the Corinthians, in faith, believing that God would use them to bring to about another miracle of grace, just like the one he had experienced among the churches of Macedonia.

And these are the principles that God has delivered to us, through the Apostle Paul that we too may be guided in our generosity. Therefore, as we continue to recognize the needs of others in our community, in our country, and throughout the world, may God continue to use us as a means of bringing blessings to others. May we not grow tired or weary of doing good and serving others. May God continue to sustain the spirit of generosity that exists in this church. And as we grow in our generosity, may the joy of the Lord increase in our hearts, and may the riches of Christ our Lord be ours.