

**What Your Joyful Giving Brings:**

Joy to God's Heart, Overflowing Praise to God,  
and Thankful Prayer for the Givers

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

August 26, 2007

The roof of the church hall in Idaho was falling down. So the members of the church held regular prayer meetings in the hall after the service to pray for funds to repair the roof.

There was an old man, known to be very tight with his money, who used to attend and sit near the back of the hall. He could sneak out just before the collection plate came round at the end of the prayer meeting.

Once he was held up on his way to the prayer meeting and could only find a seat at the front of the church.

During the prayer meeting, a piece of the roof fell and hit him on the head. Feeling that the Lord must have spoken to him, he stood up and said "Lord, I'll give \$1000."

A voice at the back of the church was heard to say, "Hit him again, Lord!"

Well, this Sunday, I'm "hitting you again" on giving as we make our way through 2 Corinthians. Today, we're going through the whole 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of 2 Corinthians.

Verses 1-5 kind of bring us up to date:

***1**There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. **2**For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians [the churches in northern Greece], telling them that since last year you in Achaia [southern Greece, where*

*Corinth is] were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. **3**But I am sending the brothers [Titus and some others] in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. **4**For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. **5**So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.*

We don't have the time to say much about this section, just a reminder of the circumstances of what I've called the Great Offering. We covered that a few weeks ago. The teaching heart of the passage, and where we'll spend most of our time, is vs. 6-12:

***6**Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. **7**Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. **8**And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. **9**As it is written:*  
*"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."*  
***10**Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. **11**You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

Richard Halverson, former chaplain of the U. S. Senate, pointed out something that bothers a lot of people and excites a few. He said,

*Jesus Christ said more about money than about any other single thing because, **when it comes to a man's real nature, money is of first importance. Money is an exact index to a man's true character.** All through Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of a man's character and how he handles his money.*

That is a good paraphrase of Matthew 6:21 where Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." In other words, what your money goes after is a signal of what your heart goes after. **And Jesus cares more than anything about what your heart is going after.**

What our hands do with our money shows what our hearts are doing with God. Or to get right at the heart of the matter: **what we do with our money shows what we believe God is doing with us.** What **money** is to us shows what **God** is to us. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). No, it consists in his relationship to God. What we do with our money shows where we believe life--and joy and love and hope and security and meaning and freedom--is found.

Alongside everything else that the apostle Paul did in his amazing ministry of spreading the gospel, he also taught the churches to give money regularly--and to support at least **three things** by their giving.

One was to help **take care of the poor.** For example, when Paul shook Peter's hand to agree that he would go to the Gentiles and Peter would go to the Jews, Peter reminded

Paul that in all his ministry he remember the poor (Galatians 1:10). And Paul said he was eager to do that very thing. So for example in Romans 15:25-26 he wrote, "At present I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contributions for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem." And today's text in 2 Corinthians 9 is an example of how he tried to motivate the churches to give to support these poor Jesus followers.

Second, Paul taught that the churches were to give to **support missionaries** who go from place to place and plant churches. Check 1 Corinthians 9 for that.

Third, Paul taught that the churches were to give **to support the ministries of the local church**. For example, In 1 Timothy 5:18 he said, "The Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'" And he was referring to the pastors of the church who make the ministry of the word their vocation.

So Paul taught the churches to give to sustain the poor, to send missionaries and to support the vocational ministers of the word. And he taught them to give regularly--in a systematic way week by week. Again, we looked at that a few weeks ago, and you can check it for yourself in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

So Paul is following in the footsteps of Jesus when he teaches us to show where our heart is on the first day of the week--the Lord's day, the day of worship--by setting aside part of our earnings week by week as a testimony of what we love:

*We love the poor, and want to reach out to those in desperate circumstances;*

*We love the lost and the people who have no chance to hear the greatest news in the world so we support missionaries;*

*We love the church, the body of Christ, the family of God, and so we support its leaders and its ministries.*

I pray that those of you who want to be Biblical people will hear this: the Bible calls us to regular, systematic, proportionate giving to the cause of Christ. Many of you did not grow up in homes where this was a priority. Your obedience in this matter does not come nearly as easily as if you had been shown and helped to give each week as a child. I pray that you will take the Biblical teaching to heart and move as rapidly as possible toward this kind of giving.

I thank God with all my heart for all of you who know and love this Biblical way of life. God has used you, more than any of us knows, to spread his praise to all nations.

So what I want to do is take our text this morning and encourage you with the promises that God makes to cheerful, generous givers who trust in him. My prayer is that this will increase the joy of veteran givers to press on, and that it will increase the courage of sporadic givers to join the joy of regular, systematic, proportional giving.

**Here is the basis of the joy and the courage:**

***1. In God's mathematics the best way to increase a sum is to subtract from it.***

*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

Most people operate on exactly the opposite principle to this one, namely, I'll have more if I give less. But the Bible says that you will have more if you give more. This doesn't sound like good mathematics. Ten minus one is nine. And ten minus zero is ten. So if you want to have ten instead of nine, you subtract zero from the checkbook on the first day of the week. Right?

Wrong! **The problem with that math is that it leaves God out.** That's what I am trying to change this morning--to put God and his promises back into your finances. God says: if you subtract more seed from your bag, then you have more than if you subtract less seed from your bag! That's God's promise to you. Put him to the test. If you ask, "How can this be?" Well, we will see more as we move on.

## ***2. God loves for you to be joyful in your giving.***

*7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

This is an utterly wonderful truth about God. You may feel it if you imagine what the universe would be like if God were not like this. **What if God were like a father who was basically irritated by happy children?** What if on Christmas morning a little child has wrapped up some clay hands in a praying position that he made in pottery class at school as a gift for his mother?

And what if he is so excited about giving this gift to his mother that he can hardly sit still and says, "Open this one next, mommy, open this one!"--and the father snaps at him, "Just shut up and be still. She'll get to it!" Or worse, what if his joylessness was so great that he said, "What are you so excited about! They're just some crummy praying hands"?

If God were like that the universe would collapse into a black hole of nothingness! So you can see why I love verse 7. **God loves a cheerful giver.** God loves when his children are happy in their giving. God joins every childlike saint on the edge of his throne to see and savor the joy of every gift given and every gift received. God cannot be irritated by excessive joy in giving because there is no such thing. The heavens are the limit, and He is pushing us in this text to as much joy as we can possibly experience.

**God enjoys your enjoyment of generosity!** Isn't that great? His will is that He will have a happy and generous people. When you set your heart to be a part of this rhythm of generous joy, you tap into an infinite source of divine power--God's sovereign love of cheerful giving.

***3. God's power and grace combine to give cheerful givers enough for themselves and abundance for others.***

*8And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

The point is that God gives us more than we need, and the reason he does that is **not** so we can store up the excess, but so that we can **provide for good works**--the poor, missionaries, ministries. The verse can be summed up: **God gives enough for us, abundance for others.**

Or to link it up with verse 7: the reason God gives you more than you need is not so that you can **reduce** your joy by **keeping** it, but **increase** your joy by **giving** it. Remember, in God's wonderful way of calculating, if ten

minus one is more than ten minus zero, then 15 minus 6 is lots more than 15 minus zero!

Verse 8 makes crystal clear what the meaning of wealth is. **Wealth is the God-sent possibility of multiplying the joy of providing for all kinds of good works**—things that relieve the poor, support world outreach and which strengthens the local witness of the church.

#### ***4. Compassionate giving confirms our eternal righteousness.***

**9***As it is written:*

*"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."*

That is a quote from Psalm 112:9 and the context there makes plain that it is talking about the person who trusts God with his future and gives generously. The point comes out when you see the connection with verse 8: notice the "as" that connects the verses. Verse 8 said that God makes us abound so that we can supply abundantly for good works. Verse 9 says, "just as" the man who gives abundantly to the poor will have a righteousness that goes on and on and on into eternity. In other words **God will go on giving what we need to fulfill righteousness if we go on giving it out, and that will take us right into eternity.**

If we act as **conduits** for God's grace (instead of **cul-de-sacs**) then there will be an unending supply of righteousness. Compassionate giving confirms our eternal righteousness.

***5. The cheerful generosity of faithful giving leads many people to give thanks to God--and that is the goal of all our lives, that God be glorified and thanked.***

Verses 10-11 repeat the previous points and add this one:

***10**Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. **11**You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

Verse 7 says that God loves a cheerful giver--a person who finds satisfaction in giving, a giver who really loves to **splash** people with the goodness of God. And therefore God promises to provide abundantly for people like that so that they can splash and pour for every good work, and make their joy go through the roof. And now verse 11 says that in all this God is the one who gets the thanks--God gets the glory. Christians, the generous **channels**, get the joy. God, the generous **spring**, gets the glory. **It is the best of all worlds: our generosity, our joy, and God's glory all rising together.**

What happens when this all comes together, as Paul anticipated in the case of the Great Offering for the needy believers of Judea? It results in thanks to God, and praise to God, and those who are so blessed return their blessing in their prayers for the ones who provided their needs. Look at vs. 12-15:

***12**This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. **13**Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. **14**And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the*

*surpassing grace God has given you. **15**Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

This is the wonderful circle of giving. The Lord provides us with everything we need, and then some; then we are able to bless others, and bring joy to the heart of God in our giving, and multiple our joy in the process. That giving leads to God being thanked.

Now, in the case of the Corinthians and the Judean believers, the poor in Judea gave thanks that that had bread to eat, and gave praise to God, and showed their grateful love for the Corinthian believers by their faithful prayers for the believers.

What I've done today is ask some people who have received the blessing of your giving to thank you and to offer a word of prayer for all of you who have given:

*Don Buchanan on behalf of the needy*

*Keith Allred on behalf of missionaries*

*Sam Hodson on behalf of the pastoral staff*

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

**END/PRAYER**