

Generous

Joyful Generosity * 2 Corinthians 9

Well, if you weren't here last Sunday you need to know that you missed something big. We had a second offering after the message but instead of asking the congregation to give, we gave \$10 to every family to use to be a blessing in whatever way they chose. And no, we are not doing it again today. We actually thought our attendance might be up a little this morning if word got out about the church that was giving away money.

All right, this morning our text is the entire chapter of 2 Corinthians 9. Let's start with the first five verses, which will serve as a review of the last two weeks as well as an introduction to the main part of the message today.

*Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, **2** for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. **3** But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. **4** Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. **5** So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction. (2 Corinthians 9:1-5, ESV)*

I want to point out a few things from these verses. First, Paul is reiterating to the Corinthians that he wants them to restart the giving campaign for the poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem that he had initiated about a year before. This is pretty much just a review of what we saw in chapter 8, and is the underlying context of this section of 2 Corinthians.

Second, Paul is once again emphasizing that this offering isn't really about the money but rather about whether or not the Corinthians had come to

truly embrace the gospel. Note that verse 3 says he hopes that his boasting about them does not prove empty. This is specifically in reference to his boasting about the fact that they were truly following Jesus. As he travels from church to church, Paul is apparently bragging about the incredible work of God's Spirit in Corinth, and he is very much hoping that the Corinthians generosity will prove that this is the case. This brings us to the two main points in our series so far. One, generosity is about the gospel. It's about the fact that Jesus has been generous in becoming poor so that we might become rich. Two, those who have experienced Jesus' generosity will be generous themselves.

Now, that leads us into the main portion of our text today, which is verses 6-15. Follow along with me as I read:

*The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **7** Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, 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 having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. **9** As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."**10** He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. **11** You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. **12** For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. **13** By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, **14** while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. **15** Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (2 Corinthians 9:6-15, ESV)*

Now, the main point in these verses is that there is a way to give and a way not to give. You know how I know this is the main point? Well, Paul says in verse 6, "The point is this." Pretty simple, right? Sometimes Bible study isn't

that difficult. I think Paul is giving us here his *Dummies Guide to Generosity*. So, there is a way to give and there is a way not to give.

How to Give and How Not to Give

1. Give generously, not sparingly

First, we should give generously and not sparingly.

Look at verse 6:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Now, we talked about what it means to give generously in detail last week, and we will talk about it more in just a minute. But I do think it might be helpful to first talk about what it means to give sparingly. If I say, "I spent sparingly on Valentine's Day this year", it would mean that I went the cheapskate route; it would mean I held back and didn't spend everything I could have. Now, to be honest, I think Valentine's Day is basically a made-up Hallmark holiday, so guys don't feel bad if you didn't go all out. I'm just trying to make a point: to give sparingly means holding back. This of course, is just the opposite of what God did for us. In Romans 8:32 Paul tells us this:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32, ESV)

When God gave His Son He gave Him completely without holding anything back. Therefore instead of giving sparingly to meet the needs of others, we should give generously. We should give without holding back.

2. Give cheerfully, not reluctantly.

Second, we should give cheerfully and not reluctantly. We see this in verse 7:

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

This is a pretty familiar verse. Most of us know that God loves a cheerful giver right? But what exactly makes a cheerful giver? Well, a cheerful giver is someone who gives because they want to. A cheerful giver is someone who doesn't give because they have to, but because they get to. As we talked about last week, a cheerful giver is someone who sees giving as a privilege, and because they see it as a privilege they don't give because they have to, but rather because they want to. They give because they receive joy in doing so. Here's another holiday illustration. Consider the difference between Santa Claus and Ebenezer Scrooge. Santa Claus is joyful because he loves to give. Ebenezer Scrooge on the other hand is grumpy. He gives very reluctantly if at all. So, let me ask you, when it comes to giving, are you more like Santa Claus or Ebenezer Scrooge? Which one is it for you?

So, to sum up verses 6-7, Paul is urging us to practice joyful generosity. Did you catch that? What is Paul after here in our text today? What is he after in chapters 8-9? Very simply Paul wants us to practice joyful generosity. He wants us to give generously to meet the needs of others, and he wants us to do so with joy.

Now, there is something else important to see in verses 6-7, and that is *why*. Why does Paul urge us to practice joyful generosity? What's the big deal? Well, there are two reasons we should practice joyful generosity.

Why We Should Practice Joyful Generosity

1. God loves a cheerful giver.

First, God loves a cheerful giver. Once again, God isn't after our money, He is after our hearts. I want to keep saying this to you: giving isn't ultimately

about how much you give, it's about the heart with which you give it. To show you this is the case, look back at 8:12:

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

So please get this. Generosity is not about an amount but rather about what's going on in your heart. If you give with joyful generosity, whether you give a little or a lot, God is pleased.

Let me ask you this; what is better than knowing you are pleasing God in the way that you live? What is better than knowing God is looking on you with love? And I know what you are thinking: "well, God loves everybody." That is true. But He has a special love for His children, a love that is particularly shown to those who give cheerfully. Let me put it this way. When we practice joyful generosity we experience God's love in a unique and special way. And you know what, of all the great needs we have here today, knowing and experiencing God's love is right there at the top. If you want to know the love of God, be generous to others as He has been to you.

2. We reap what we sow.

The second reason we should practice joyful generosity is that we reap what we sow. Look at the end of verse 6 one more time:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Here Paul is expanding a well-known proverb and in doing so tells us that God promises to generously bless those who are generous. In fact, the word *bountifully* here could also be translated *blessings*. Those who give generous blessings to others will reap generous blessings from God. Notice that this is not a possibility, it's not a maybe, it's a promise. It's a given. When we generously bless others, God guarantees He will generously bless us even more.

Perhaps you have heard the story of the farmer who was known for his generous giving and whose friends could not understand how he could give so much and yet remain so prosperous. One day one of his friends said, "We can't understand you. You give far more than any of the rest of us and yet you always seem to have more to give." "Oh that is easy to explain," the farmer said. "I keep shoveling into God's bin and God keeps shoveling back into mine and God has the bigger shovel."¹

Let me ask you friends, do you believe the farmer? Do you believe that God's shovel is bigger than yours? Do you trust that if you sow generously you will reap generously?

Note what God tells the people of Israel in Malachi 3:

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. (Malachi 3:10, ESV)

Or how about this verse from Proverbs:

One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. (Proverbs 11:24, ESV)

Now, I assume that most of us have heard this before. We know, or at least we have been taught, that we can't out give God. However, I think we often misunderstand what God promises to give to us in return. One thing we can't get caught up in thinking is that reaping bountifully is primarily about financial gain. That's not what Paul is talking about here in 2 Corinthians 9. He's not promising that if we are generous with our money God will make us rich. This is not a wealth-building scheme. Now, it's possible that God will bless us in this way, but if we think in only that way or primarily in that way we have missed what it truly means to be blessed. And this is where the rest

¹ <http://www.theblazingcenter.com/2013/07/gods-shovel-is-bigger-than-mine.html>

of our text today is so helpful. Let's look now at three blessings that God promises to give to those who are joyfully generous.

The Blessings of Joyful Generosity

1. Provision

The first blessing is provision. Look at verses 8-11:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 9 As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

Let me ask you – what's the key word in verse 8? Look closely. It's repeated four times. It's *all*. God is able – the word means has the power – to give us all the things we need at all times so we can be always be generous. And not just a little generous, but abundantly generous.

Let's look at verse 10 closely to see if we can put this all together. Who provides the initial seed for giving? God. And then when we take that seed and give, what does God do? He multiplies that seed. He gives us more seed to give. And what is the result of us sowing more seed? An increased harvest of righteousness. So, what is one of the blessings of being generous? It's the blessing of having the opportunity to be more generous, which is the ability to be able to give more.

Now, let's look at one more thing in verse 10. Notice that the *all things* God promises to provide us with include bread for food. One of the primary reasons we struggle to be generous is that we worry that our needs are not going to be met. We worry that, well if I give to the Lord how will I pay my bills? How will I have enough money to do this...well, here in verse 10 we

see a truth that the Bible repeats over and over again. Do you know what that truth is? It's a very simple one. God's got it. Did you get that? God's got it. Do you remember what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount?

*Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:31-33, ESV)*

When we do things God's way we can trust Him to do things His way – and His way is to always be generous and take care of everything we need.

2. Impact

The second blessing of joyful generosity is impact. Look at verses 12-14:

*For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. **13** By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, **14** while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.*

Now, I have talked about this quite a bit in this series already, so I will only touch on it here. When we practice joyful generosity we have the incredible opportunity to be involved in what God is doing on this earth. And Paul describes what God is doing here in verses 12-14. God is bringing glory to Himself by meeting people's needs. When we give to meet the needs of others, they in turn give glory to God.

And so I just want to impress upon you yet again the tremendous impact you can make with your resources. That is one of the primary things we are hoping to accomplish with the generosity challenge. We want you to see the impact that you can make when you pour yourself into meeting the

needs of others. By the way, have you noticed what impact can be made with as little as \$10? It doesn't take a whole lot of money to meet others' needs and bring glory to God.

3. Assurance

The third and final blessing of joyful generosity is assurance, specifically assurance of salvation. Look at verse 13 again:

By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution to them and for all the others.

The key part of this verse is right in the middle – look closely – *because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ.* Perhaps the greatest blessing we reap when we practice joyful generosity is confirmation of our salvation.

Paul says that when we meet the needs of others they in turn bring glory to God; however, he doesn't say they glorify God primarily because their needs are met but rather because our generosity shows that we have truly embraced the gospel. Did you catch that? Glory to God comes when others see the gospel shining in our lives. Remember what Jesus says in Matthew 5:

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16, ESV)

Look with me back at verse 13 for something essential. Note that embracing the gospel includes both submission and confession. It includes both belief and obedience. Now, I try to make this clear all the time; obedience isn't required for salvation, it is a result of salvation. Let's go to Ephesians 2 for a moment. *We are saved by grace through faith, and this is not of ourselves, it is a gift of God... for we are God's workmanship created to do good works.* Salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone, but true

salvation is never alone. It is always accompanied by obedience. It is always accompanied by a changed life. And in the context of 2 Corinthians I think we can say that salvation is always accompanied by the good work of generosity.

So, if you are currently expressing joyful generosity - if you are joyfully giving because of what Jesus has given to you – then you have great reason to be affirmed in your faith. You have great reason today to celebrate the fact that you have come to truly embrace the gospel.

On the other hand, if you are not expressing joyful generosity, you need to ask some hard questions. Why aren't you being generous? Are you just off track and need to get some things straightened out? Is it because you don't know how to be generous and need some help in figuring it out? If so, next week's message will be a big help to you. On the other hand, and here is the big one, are you failing to be generous because you have never truly embraced the generosity of Jesus? Is it because you haven't come face to face with the reality that you are spiritually broke? Is it because you haven't accepted the fact that, in love, Jesus became poor so that you might become rich? If this is the case brothers and sisters I would urge you today to put your pride aside, to recognize your poverty, and to ask Jesus to make you rich. Accept His wealth and begin to experience all of the blessings that come from being a joyfully generous follower of Jesus Christ.

Kent Hughes in his commentary on 2 Corinthians explains it well:

What we must understand from this is that Paul's call to ready, willing, generous giving is not a call to reach down deep within our beings and rise to the best that is within us. Rather, it is a call to authentically come to Christ in true belief and repentance. It is a call to contemplate Christ's giving as the example for our giving—his embrace of poverty that we might become rich. It is not a call to legalistic observance but to grace, as Paul's repeated mentions of

*grace emphasize. It is a call to rise to his best within us. It is not a call to save ourselves but to demonstrate by our giving that our faith is not in vain.*²

In conclusion, let me give you a great test you can take to see if you really do get this. Look at verse 15. Paul finishes this chapter by writing:

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Let me ask: what gift do you think Paul is thanking God for here? Let me give you a little hint. Before Paul wrote this verse the Greek word for *inexpressible* did not exist. Paul made the word up. Don't you wish that you could do that? Actually in the South they do all the time. Anyways, when he was trying to express how great the gift was that God has given His people, Paul essentially decided that human language couldn't express how great it truly was – hence the translation here *inexpressible*. So, now do you have an idea of what that gift is? It's Jesus. It's not food, clothing, shelter, money, or even life, as wonderful as those things are. God's greatest gift, the gift that is just too magnificent to express is the gift of His Son. His Son who became poor so that we might become rich. And so here is the test. Is God's gift of Jesus inexpressible to you? Is He worth more to you than all the riches of this world? Can you say with Paul:

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

If so, you can have great assurance of your salvation today. If not, it's time to repent and receive that inexpressible gift right now.

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² Hughes, R. K. (2006). *2 Corinthians: power in weakness* (pp. 176–177). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

