

## 2. Gracious Giving

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let's pray together. Our gracious Lord, we do give you thanks with a grateful heart. As we gather today, we thank you Lord for this midweek fellowship, for our partnership in the gospel.

We thank you that by your grace we are one in Christ, united in one spirit. And we thank you Lord that through him you have shown us kindness week after week, giving us the freedom and the strength to gather in his name.

We thank you Lord for him that though he was rich, for our sake he became poor, that by his poverty we might become rich. We thank you for his grace in stooping down to lift us from the ash heap and to seat us with princes.

We thank you for the forgiveness of our sins. We thank you for the indwelling of your Holy Spirit. We thank you for bringing us and adopting us into your family, that we might call you our Father.

And Lord, we pray that as your people, as the recipients of your grace, we might show that same grace in the world outside. We pray that we will show kindness to the poor, care for those who are physically, materially in need.

[ 1 : 1 5 ] We pray Lord that you will minister your love to the lonely, perhaps those from other countries, those from broken homes, those with few friends. We pray Lord that we will welcome the stranger into our midst.

And we pray for the lost Lord, those who are living in darkness and in sin, that we will point them to Christ, who is the way and the truth and the life. And especially Lord, we do remember those among our number, or those known to us who are sick.

We pray that you will be very near to them, that you will be speaking words of comfort and love into their ears, and that they might know they have a hope and a future in Christ.

So we thank you Lord for your grace, and ask you to minister that grace among us as we meet, in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Well this is our second study under the heading of the imitation of Christ.

And what we have been trying to do, and will try to do, is look at four passages in the New Testament, where the inspired writer points his readers to the example of Christ.

[ 2 : 2 7 ] When they are facing a particular issue in the local church, he reminds them of the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ, and urges them to walk in his way. So we want to continue our studies, and today we'll be looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

And we're going to read verse 1 down to verse 15. That's on page 967 of the church Bibles, 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

Paul writing to the church in Corinth, he's planning on returning to see them on his way to Jerusalem, to pick up the collection for the saints.

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy, and their extreme poverty, have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favour, for the grace, of taking part in the relief of the saints.

[ 3 : 45 ] And this not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus, that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.

But as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of grace also.

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others, that your love also is genuine. 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.

And in this matter, I give my judgment, this benefits you, who a year ago started, not only to do this work, but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it, may be matched by your completing it, out of what you have.

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

[ 5 : 16 ] As it is written, whoever had gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. We thank God for his inspired word.

Last week we were introduced to the colorful character of Baron von Kamp. He was a 19th century aristocratic believer in Prussia, what is now Germany.

And he was a great servant. He had a young student visit him, and we saw how by modeling Christ's pattern of service, he led that young man to a saving faith. But he was also a very generous giver.

And at the time he lived, there was a war, and there was a bit of a recession among the weavers of Prussia. And the Baron was very perplexed by this.

He thought, oh, this is terrible. But he had a lot of money, so he began to create weaving business. And he managed to find, I think, 6,000 jobs for the Prussian weavers at that time.

[ 6 : 19 ] Now this was not, unfortunately, a profit-making exercise. And he knew that he was going to lose a considerable amount of money, and in order to finance it, he had to sell almost all of his property.

Here he was a rich man, yet he made himself a little poorer on behalf of the poor. And it's a very imperfect example, isn't it, of 2 Corinthians 8, verse 9.

In describing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul says, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

These two chapters in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are really a very full treatment of Christian giving. What should be the Christian attitude to money?

How should we give to other believers and to the work of the kingdom? Paul is about to return from Macedonia in the north, travelling through Corinth on his way to Jerusalem.

[ 7 : 21 ] And he's been organising this collection for the saints, and as he passes through Corinth, he wants to pick it up and to take it straight on to Jerusalem to share with the believers there. So he's writing really to stimulate them to give and to encourage them to complete the act of giving which they had promised to do a year earlier.

But how does he do it? It's a sense of subject money, isn't it? It's not something we like to ask people for. Apparently we Scots have a reputation for not wanting to part with it as well.

But Paul tackles the issue. And he does it in a very interesting way. He holds before the believers two examples of gracious giving.

The first is the church in Macedonia, and he shows the grace of giving of a poor church. And the second is our Lord Jesus Christ. He shows the grace of giving of our Lord Jesus Christ who was rich.

So we'll look at these two things together. We've maybe read recently about the giving pledge. It's not something we're organising. Don't worry. This is the policy of Bill Gates and his friend whose name has completely escaped me in America where they're trying to encourage American billionaires to give a half of all of their riches in their lifetime or after their death.

[ 8 : 48 ] They're trying to sign up as many of their billionaire friends as they can to stimulate generous giving to charities. Well, that's admirable, isn't it?

It's commendable. I still can't remember his name, but whoever he is he ought to be commended for his Warren Buffett, that's it, for his generosity. Rich people giving considerable sums of money.

But Paul takes a different angle and in verses 1 to verse 5 he demonstrates very poor people giving considerable proportions of their wealth.

The churches in Macedonia were told verse 2 in a severe test of affliction. Their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

So we know from Acts these people were persecuted, they were facing affliction, yet in the midst of that they had an abundance of joy. Probably as a result of that they experienced extreme poverty and yet that overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

[ 9 : 55 ] Verse 3 they gave according to their means as I can testify and beyond their means of their own free will begging us for the grace for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints.

They were quite literally throwing their money at Paul saying please can we have a share in this collection which you're taking to Jerusalem. Reminds us a little bit doesn't it of the widow in the temple.

Pharisees like these billionaires were very rich and they gave a considerable sum but they gave out of their abundance. The widow on the other hand gave all that she had to live two small coins and the Macedonians it seems gave not out of their abundance for they had none but they gave all they had to live on verse 3 beyond their means of their own free will.

The question is why did they do that? It doesn't really make economical sense does it? But Paul says the answer is the grace of God chapter 8 verse 1 we want you to know brothers about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia and in verse 3 as we've read verse 4 sorry the grace of taking part in the relief of the saints.

The Macedonian churches had come to know and experience the grace of God in their own lives. They knew that God had freely given his own son and that through faith in him they could freely have their sins forgiven and they could receive that wonderful free gift of eternal life.

[ 11 : 29 ] And as they had received freely they wanted to give freely and they now demonstrated that same grace to the church in Jerusalem freely giving of what they have for their benefit.

Grace filled living led to grace filled giving. They were modelling the grace of God in their donation. And it's a little bit isn't it?

I suppose like the Israelites in the wilderness you recall that after they'd come through the sea and they'd been taken to Sinai and God gave Moses the instructions for the tabernacle this people newly redeemed and Moses put before them all that was required and in Exodus 35 we find the people coming forward giving what they have those who had gold offered gold those who had silver the silver those who had wood the wood those who had the fine linens presented the fine linens and the people who were making the tabernacle said well you've got to stop the people have brought much more than enough for doing the work the Lord has commanded us to do.

They understood the grace of God in saving them and they wanted to show their gratitude in giving back something which they had for the work of God. the Macedonian believers had come to know the spiritual blessings of the gospel and they wanted to repay those Jerusalem Christians with material blessing.

And so Paul says to the Corinthian church who are far richer in comparison verse 7 as you excel in everything in faith in speech in knowledge in all earnestness and in our love for you see that you excel in this act of grace also.

[ 13 : 18 ] There is a grace in giving. And then he turns to his second example not a poor church giving all they had but rather the Lord Jesus Christ who though he was rich for our sake he became poor that they might become rich.

The US billionaires will become a little less rich with their charitable giving but they'll still be pretty well off I think by anyone's standards. But the Bible says the Lord Jesus Christ though he was rich didn't give away half of his incomes after his death.

He became poor. The word quite literally is he impoverished himself. A rich man becoming completely impoverished so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Christ enters into the poverty of his people and he takes that poverty upon himself giving to them his riches in order that they might share in those riches and become rich.

What does that mean? It doesn't mean literally rich of course we're not beginning to preach a prosperity gospel in this church. What it means is this. Christ we're told in John's gospel was with God in the beginning.

[ 14 : 40 ] In the beginning the word was with God, the word was God. He is the heir of all things. For him and through him all things have been created. And yet the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And Christ swapped the glories of heaven for a stable and a workshop and a wandering ministry with nowhere to lay his head. And he traded the praise and the worship of the heavenly court and all the angels of heaven for the insults and mocking and rejection of men.

He traded his riches for our poverty. For our sake he became poor. poor. And we see that elsewhere in scripture.

We see it in Peter. Peter reminds us that Christ, the righteous one, the innocent one, he committed no sin. No deceit was found in his mouth. And yet he was willing to be numbered among the transgressors.

He died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. For your sake he entered into our situation and took it upon himself.

[ 15 : 59 ] The writer to the Hebrews says the same, reflecting on our predicament as human beings living in anxiety and fear and in the very shadow of death. He says that Christ shared in our flesh and blood, partaking of the same things that through death he might destroy the one who has the power over death and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

He sees his people dwelling in sin and he enters in taking their sins upon himself. He sees them living in the shadow of death and permanent fear and he enters into that valley and dies himself freeing them from the fear of death.

For your sake, says Paul, the rich man became poor that by his poverty you might become rich. Christ enters into our misery that we might share in his joy.

And so Paul, he doesn't spell it out to the Corinthians but the implication is clear, isn't it? What is to be their response? Will they be gracious like their poor neighbours and give not out of their abundance but out of their means?

Will they be gracious like the Lord Jesus Christ and be willing to endure a degree of poverty, a degree of sacrifice for the sake of others? Well, that seems to be the pattern of genuine Christian giving.

[ 17 : 28 ] We've been encouraged recently in this church, I think this building, isn't it, is testimony to sacrificial giving, people giving, making sacrifice in order to give money for furthering the work of the Lord in the kingdom.

We've seen it recently in the donation to Pakistan, the donation to India, giving to the saints elsewhere and we see it every time people make a financial sacrifice, something that bites in when they sell the second home, when they give up the expensive hobby, when they decide to take a lower budget holiday, when they trade in the sports car, when people make a sacrifice.

We see something of that grace of God for others. David knew that, he knew that giving was costly, as he bought the threshing floor in Jerusalem and he was offered it for free and he said, no I won't take it for free, I will buy it for the full price, I will not take for the Lord what is yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.

Paul says to the Corinthians, I do not want your giving to cost you nothing. Gracious living leads to gracious giving. But it's a principle of course that doesn't just work in finance, really whenever as Christians we're called to do something for others we hope to see that grace at work.

Just three weeks ago the chap who when I was a student loved me enough to tell me about Christ, he and his wife recently married, moved to a very poor country in the Middle East.

[ 19 : 09 ] This chap is a very privileged background, very wealthy family, very well educated and yet they now live in a small flat in this sort of dusty place in the Middle East leaving behind the comforts of England in order to experience discomfort that other people might know the comfort of the gospel.

Whenever Christians suffer loss on account of others we see in them the imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Paul goes on very finely and the remainder of the chapter he spells out really some very helpful practical advice for giving.

John Stott spells it out far better than I could do and this book *The Grace of Giving* is available in the book store, £1.80. You'll have to buy it I'm afraid but that has some very helpful advice from these two chapters.

Essentially he goes on to say, verse 8, not as a command, he's not being directive, but he says to prove that by the earnestness of others that your love is genuine.

His concern is not that people bankrupt themselves but that they give eagerly what they have. Verse 12, if the readiness is there it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

[ 20 : 32 ] What Paul says is the eagerness is what is required. Giving what people have will be acceptable to God. And his concern is not that the saints in Jerusalem can relax and sit by the pool but that there will be equality.

Verse 13, 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 will be fairness.

His concern is that the Gentile Christians provide for their Jewish brethren that neither of them will be in need. He is not saying he wants them all to have exactly the same amount but that what they have will be equally shared that there might be no need among them.

And the fruit of all this in verse 11 of chapter 9 is more than just a financial transaction he says. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

The Jewish believers will thank God for their Gentile brothers and sisters. Verse 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.

[ 21 : 49 ] By their approval of this service they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others.

While they long and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. Paul says giving is a grace.

It is exemplified by the church in Macedonia giving out of their poverty and it is exemplified by the Lord Jesus Christ becoming poor for the sake of others.

How he says to the church in Corinth will it be exemplified in you and how he says to the church in Glasgow will it be demonstrated among ourselves. Let's pray together.

Amen. Lord we do thank you that you are a God of such grace that in sending your son he was willing to impoverish himself that we might share in the riches of glory and have an inheritance in the world which is to come.

[ 23 : 04 ] So Lord we pray that you will help us to look carefully at our lives at our time and our finances and to know how best we can model that grace Lord. How best we can offer a sacrifice of praise to you in the service of others.

So we thank you for our time. We pray that our fellowship around the tables now will be pleasing to you. That we might seek to encourage and build one another up in love. That there might be a quality among us.

We thank you for this. We thank you for your word. For your indwelling spirit. And for this opportunity together in the name of Christ. Amen.