

September 10, 2006

“The Giving of the Rich”
2 Corinthians 8:1-9

FCF: Not recognizing and living out the riches we have in Christ

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Having been made rich by the grace of Christ,
(magnet) we must then give to others – especially to His work in this world.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

There are an estimated 150 million abandoned, abused, and homeless children in the major metropolitan centers of the world. 150 million. How should we respond to this? Certainly, we should be pursuing avenues of alleviating such suffering. “*Operation Street Child*” is one such ministry of which you’ll be hearing more in the coming weeks.

But another way God would have us respond is simply this. Not only to alleviate it, not only to avoid contributing to it, but also refusing to imitate it. Refusing to live as though we were utterly impoverished orphans ourselves. But sadly, we do it all the time.

SCRIPTURE READING: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

([READ Faith Promise, pp.4-5](#)):

Dr. Hugh McCain, a missionary who served in Chiang Mai, Thailand, told of an impoverished church in an isolated area of Thailand. The 400 members, each painfully poor, were diligent to give at least 10 percent, usually more, of their meager income to God’s kingdom work. Though their weekly wages averaged less than 20 cents, they had done more for Christ than any other church in Thailand. They paid their own preacher, supported two missionary families in an isolated community, and were intensely interested in all forms of Christian work, especially work for unfortunates of all kinds. Their love for Christ overflowed with joy to make Him known. This “church of overflowing hearts,” was a church of lepers. Every person had leprosy.

Startling as this may sound, we see much the same joyful generosity in Paul’s description of the church of Macedonia. He was writing to the church in Corinth, a church with which he had had problems and with whom he had exchanged visits and correspondence. Finally, light had broken through. God’s grace had become evident in their lives. This then brings a shift of subjects from describing God’s work in Corinth to His work in Macedonia ([READ 2 Corinthians 8:1](#)). I must tell you that when I read this text, a question came to my mind. *What would cause people so poor, who seemingly had so little, to give as though they were so rich, as though they had so much?* The answer can only be that they knew themselves to be rich, to have more than the eye can see.

They were poor. But far richer still ([READ 2 Corinthians 8:9](#)). They were rich because Jesus had made them rich. Though He was rich – having possessions, power, honor, and love to heights we can hardly imagine – He became poor for their sakes. Poor to depths we can hardly imagine – born and in the humblest conditions, enduring temptation, rejection, and all the humiliation and pain of His crucifixion and death. He made Himself poor that through His poverty they might become rich. Rich in the hand of providence and the plan of salvation working for them. Rich in their new status before God – declared righteous, forgiven, free, and His. Rich in promises and an inheritance.

They were rich. That’s why they gave as they did. What about us? What could cause us to give so extravagantly, beyond all reasonableness, defying all logic or calculations? Hearts gripped by the same realities. Hearts gripped, affections moved, priorities shifted, lives changed. Such is what would cause us to give in such rich ways. What we see clearly from our text is simply this: as we grow in our understanding of the gospel, we should also grow in our desire to give abundantly to the work of the gospel.

I. GENEROUSLY

What we see here are three “giving trends” – the first being that of generosity (**READ 2 Corinthians 8:1-4**). What form this “severe test of affliction” took we don’t know. Was it something the general populace went through or something thrust upon the church specifically? We don’t know. But we do know how these believers responded.

A) *Not According to Circumstances*

Seeing beyond their circumstances, they responded with a “wealth of generosity.”

1. Not insisting on help themselves

Now given their condition, “their extreme poverty,” it would not have been surprising if they had insisted on receiving help themselves. But that’s not what we see here.

2. Not refusing to hear the needs of others

Nor do we see a refusal – again, despite their own needs – to hear the needs of others.

B) *But According to Opportunity*

They saw not the circumstances around them but the opportunity before them.

1. To love God

The opportunity to glorify God – to show forth His glory, His majesty, His love for the world. The opportunity to serve Christ – to join with Him in the Great Commission. The opportunity to show love for Christ and express it in tangible, practical ways.

2. To love others

The opportunity to love others. Knowing that they had been blessed, they longed to be a blessing themselves and they could not bear to let this opportunity go by.

And so they earnestly begged Paul to let them take part in this offering.

Illustration:

Somehow these Macedonians remind me of Reepicheep, the talking mouse from C. S. Lewis’ “The Chronicles of Narnia.” Reepicheep stands between one and two feet tall, ears as long as a rabbit, and a heart as great as a lion. He epitomizes courage, his head filled with battles and strategies, honor, and adventure. He plunges ahead, knowing no fear, giving himself totally for the honor of those he loves. And he’s a mouse.

Application:

Oh, that we had the heart of this mouse – not squeaking with fear in our timid following of our Lord but roaring with delight in His cause. Given not to hesitation in boldly giving but with longing, with looking, with insistence that we not be left out. For we have been made rich by the grace of Christ. And clearly we must then give generously to others – especially to the work of Christ in this world. Giving generously.

II. TRUSTINGLY

And giving trustingly as well – emboldened by the Lord’s grace, giving with faith to His work. This is the second “giving trend” we see here (**READ 2 Corinthians 8:3**).

A) *Not According to our Possessions*

They did not determine how much they would give according to their possessions.

1. Not looking merely at what they had

They did not look merely at what they had. Violating every bit of “practical” wisdom, going against the urgings of all sensible advice, they threw the calculator out the window.

2. Not limited in their response by what they had

They did not look merely at what they had. And so their response was not limited by what they had. It was a response not of fear and holding back but of faith and giving out.

B) *But According to God’s Promises*

They refused to determine what they would give according to their possessions but rather according to God's promises. This was about His working, not theirs.

1. Knowing that He would provide for their needs

His promises to provide for their needs as the Lord and Creator and Sustainer of all.

2. Knowing that He would enable them to be generous

His promises to enable them to be generous. Now, think with me. In every aspect of our following Christ, we can truly say that He always supplies what He demands. He calls us to be merciful, humble, and gracious. He also makes us merciful, humble, and gracious.

In every aspect of our following Him, including our trustingly giving to His work, blessing His people as they seek to be a blessing (2 Corinthians 9:8-11). This is so beautifully counter to how we typically think. What then does this mean? We need not a materialistic mindset – seeing nothing but what's in front of us – but a Macedonian one.

Application:

We need to be able to say, with these Macedonians, “*I'm His and He's made me rich. I'm able to give, knowing He has promised to enable me to be generous – just as He enables me to do everything else.*” We need to say this and model it for our children.

Now, I know this raises questions. “*How much does God want me to give?*” More than you think. For He wants to stretch our faith. And so it's more than you think. Actually, that's really not the right question. The issue is not “what can I do?” The issue is “what is God calling me to do?” That is always the issue. We leave the details to Him.

Another question – “*Where will it come from?*” Good question. Simple answer – from God. All things come from Him. Which means He may see fit to provide for you in extraordinary ways. He's free to do that. And some of us here can attest to that – to checks arriving at just the right time and in just the right amount, to gifts given, even the very words needing to be spoken. He can do that. He can also do it in very ordinary ways as well. Blessing our seeking out creative sources of income. Helping us in our adjustments to our lifestyles. God is God. He is free to supply how He will.

Now we may counter, “*But it seems so little.*” Well, it is. And He doesn't need it. But He promises to multiply it. And besides, you don't know what effect it will have.

Illustration:

Amy Carmichael brings this out in a quotation from “the wise and well-loved Robert Wilson of Keswick” (READ [Faith Promise](#), p.17):

...he stopped near a stone-breaker, who, squatting beside his pile of stones, was hammering steadily. “I will tell thee a story,” the dear old man said, pointing with his whip to the stone-breaker who tapped stolidly on and never looked up. “There was one who asked a stone-breaker at work by the roadside, ‘Friend, which blow broke the stone?’ And the stone-breaker answered, ‘The first one, and the last one, and every one in between.’”

Don't despair of how much or little you give or what effect it may bring. The Lord is the One who alone can take it and use it that stony hearts might be broken and made flesh. Leave that to Him. We have been made rich by the grace of Christ. And clearly we must then give trustingly to others – especially to the work of Christ in this world.

III. FREELY

We must give generously, trustingly, and the third “giving trend” we see is the need to give freely (READ 2 Corinthians 8:5). They gave themselves and what they had.

A) *Not as Owners*

Ultimately, they knew themselves not to be owners. Not anymore.

1. They were not their own

They knew themselves not to be their own (READ 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a).

2. What they had was not their own

They had been bought. And so too had all that they had once thought of as their own.

B) But as Stewards

Which was never really theirs to begin with. For when it comes right down to it, they were but stewards, every one of them. For it is God who ultimately owns it all.

1. They were His

The Macedonians knew themselves not to be their own but His.

2. What they had was His

They held what they had not as their own but His (READ Psalm 24:1; 50:10-12).

The Macedonians understood this and that freed them to give. And to give freely.

Illustration:

Jesus told a story that makes this very point – both the reality of God’s ownership and the right response on our part (READ Matthew 25:14-30). We are servants and stewards and will be held accountable for how we have discharged our responsibilities to our Lord and Master. Which presses a question – what are we doing with His money?

Application:

We are not ours to do with as we wish. We’re His. These things are not ours to do with as we wish. They’re His. That we would be freed to give, we must say of it all, “It’s not mine. It’s His.” All of it – the bit we put in the plate as well as the part we hold back. We need to remind one another, to tell ourselves that. And Him. That nothing is off limits. We need to live as people who have God at the center of everything we are, nothing held back. There are no “Pluto’s” in our lives – no orbiting bodies denigrated to some lesser stature as though they weren’t included. Nothing too far away or too small. This is not where our riches are. We have been made rich by the grace of Christ. And clearly we must then give freely to others – especially to the work of Christ in this world.

CONCLUSION:

(READ 2 Corinthians 8:9) Such is what gripped the hearts of the church of Macedonia. Such is what impelled them to give as they did – so generously, so trustingly, and so freely. Such is what will impel us to do the same – giving as those who have already been given all we need and who will be given yet more. For we are wealthier than the wealthiest, our hope more secure than the most hopeful of this world.

That’s not to deny financial struggles we face. Paul isn’t advocating some low grade Buddhism here – denying reality, making pain an illusion or claiming we already have the things others can see we so obviously lack. No, this is embracing reality, recognizing we have all we need and whatever else we need in this life, He’ll provide. Wealthier than the wealthiest, more secure than the most hopeful. Christ, by His poverty, has made us rich. And that impels us to give richly to His work in this world.

Think of the lepers, “the church of overflowing hearts.” Think of Bill Gates – in terms of money, the richest man in the world. And one of the world’s most generous philanthropists. You don’t think there’s a connection between the two? Do you really think he would give as he does if he wasn’t so rich? Of course not. But if Bill Gates has not Christ, he is a pauper. The wealth he has earned is nothing compared to the wealth Christ bestows – so much greater, so much more lasting. Which should impel us all the more. May it be – for each one of us here and as a church together. Let’s pray.

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