



Stewardship.Simplified.

Florida Baptist Financial Services

Generosity Message Series

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Fruit Cove Baptist Church

Message II - The Grace of Generosity

The Grace of Generosity (2 Corinthians 8:1-9)

Alright, this is sermon #2 in our three-part giving series. I've given you notice we would be doing this, and some people would say, "Well pastor you should just be preaching the Gospel." I certainly don't disagree with you, but last week alone we had almost twenty people respond to the invitation with their families! I have seen more people respond to the call to follow Jesus during stewardship sermons than anything else I preach!

A church office got a call one time from a guy who wanted to talk to "the Head Hog of the trough." The receptionist was taken back, but she politely said, "Sir, we don't call our pastor 'the Head Hog.'" "You can refer

to him as pastor, or reverend, or even Dr, but not “the head hog.” The man on the other end of the call said, “Oh ma’am I’m sorry. You see, I own a large pig farm, and just sold several of my prize sows. I wanted to donate \$10,000 to the offering out of what I sold.” The receptionist said, “Just a minute sir. I think I just heard the Big Pig walk in.”

“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 accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— 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.”

(2 Corinthians 8:1-9 ESV)

I have shared with you before that 2 Corinthians is my favorite book in the Bible. It has brought more direction to my life and ministry and if you count back over the years, you’d probably learn that I’ve quoted it more than probably any other Biblical book.

But right in the middle of this letter is a two-chapter focus on stewardship. Now actually, 2 Corinthians is a book about reconciliation:

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself...not counting their sins against them...”

But while 2 Corinthians 8 is talking about money, it is doing so in the context of Paul’s effort to reconcile Jewish and non-Jewish background

believers. Paul's passion, as was Jesus' passion, was for unity in the church.

You see, racial tension and racial conflict and other issues related to race and racism are not the invention of white American Christians. While we still see it far too often, it is an issue that has haunted the church since it's earliest days. It is the handiwork of Satan, and sadly it's a trap that even Christian people can fall into at times.

Paul decided to take a special collection from the newly formed Gentile churches and he planned to take the offering to Jerusalem and present it to the Jewish leaders there to address the poverty and hunger among Jewish Christians. Paul was a "two birds with one stone" kind of guy. The offering was practical, but highly symbolic and intended to heal.

The Corinthian church was one of the strongest of the newly formed churches. They had promised to participate in the offering, but had lagged behind in their giving. So Paul was actually addressing and challenging them and reminding them of the importance of their gift.

You know, we encounter some mental barriers when it comes to giving in our culture:

One barrier is MATERIALISM. We never think we have enough. We can never get enough. We don't ever see ourselves as wealthy enough.

The mean household income in the US is about \$78,500 a year. When you compare that to household income around the world, you just need to know that's near the top. We're in the upper 2% of wage earners in the world. But did you know the median household income within a few miles radius of this church is \$114,000 per year? Are you rich? By most measurements, yes we are.

Now most of us aren't crazy rich. I was reading an article last week that talked about what the richest people in America make WHILE THEY SLEEP. Elon Musk makes \$88.3 million a night over 7 hours. Bill Gates makes \$18.4 million. Oprah Winfrey makes \$33.8 thousand.

Most of think a rich person is a person who makes about \$50 K more per year than we do. But many of us, by most comparisons, are rich.

I've been grateful as several have approached me wanting to donate their promised stimulus check to a COVID relief offering. There are 30 million Americans are living in hunger.

A second barrier is SOCIALISM. Some think everybody should have the same. This is becoming a popular theory in our culture today. Socialism means you shouldn't have more than anybody else. To be fair, if you have more you ought to give it to somebody who doesn't have as much. Just a little lesson in economics, every time socialism has been attempted in history, it has failed miserably.

The Bible does not advocate socialism. Jesus, though poor, had a seamless robe that was valuable enough for soldiers to gamble over at the cross. Mary, a friend of Jesus, had a home where Jesus and his disciples would come and stay. It was large enough to accommodate thirteen extra people! Mary had a jar of ointment worth a years wages which she poured on Jesus' feet. Judas was a socialist. He said, "She should have sold that and given the money to the poor." But Jesus got in his face and said, "She has done a good thing.."

A third barrier is COVETOUSNESS. Greed. Just good 'ol fashioned selfishness. This is MY money. MY house. My cars. MY stock portfolio. Mine all mine. Jesus warned, "Be on your guard against greed. For life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions." (Luke 12:15). God owns it all. We use things, but we own nothing.

In the text we're looking at, he uses the Macedonian believers as an example of giving sacrificially as Paul was hoping the Corinthians believers would do. He pointed out some important attitudes among those Christians that we need to take away today.

THEY GAVE FROM THEIR POVERTY

Macedonia's Christians were not wealthy by any means. They aren't today. We've done mission work with Christians in Macedonia. They are still impoverished. But you know what I've experienced over and over

again? Sometimes the most generous people on earth are the ones who have the least to give.

Now there are exceptions. Sometimes poor people can become resentful and miserly. But in reality, many show “the grace of generosity” that the Macedonians showed. “Out of their severe trial...” they gave joyfully and generously.

The widow who gave all that she had at the temple is an example of that. Jesus said to the disciples, “she gave all that she had.” But I don’t think she walked away from the offering table in sorrow. I think she was joyful! She knew God would take care of her.

THEY GAVE FROM THEIR HEARTS

“They gave themselves first to the Lord...”. You know giving should never be motivated by external pressure. I try really hard not to apply guilt when we talk about giving. I try to make you aware of needs. But “God loves a cheerful giver...” not someone who has been pressured into an offering.

Pastor was getting excited and yelling a bit in his sermon. A little girl leaned over to her Mom and said, “Mommy, do you think if you give him some money he’ll stop yelling?”

When David Livingston died, known as one of the greatest missionaries to Africa, his followers cut out his heart and buried it under the tree near where he had died. His remains were then sent home. “His heart belonged to Africa.” Where will it be said your heart belonged when it’s all said and done? Here on this passing planet we occupy? Or does your heart belong to the Kingdom of God?

THEY GAVE FROM THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

They gave with their eyes on Jesus. It was His example who “though He was rich, yet He became poor that we through His poverty might be made rich.”. (8:8-9)

You know as you give, you are showing your remembrance of that very thing. Though we may have much in the way of this world’s goods, are

you willing to become a little more impoverished than others, through your giving, might be made eternally rich?

Are you rich in Christ? You'd better know you are! Because of Jesus, we are rich in **forgiveness**. Our sins have been forgiven and our debt wiped clean before God. WE have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ! I wonder how much some of the world's richest people would give for PEACE in their hearts?

We are rich in **fellowship**. There are those who don't really have a healthy family, or any family on earth. But when you come to Jesus, you receive the riches of Christian fellowship.

We are rich in **hope**. I don't know if you've noticed, but the world we're living in right now is pretty depleted of hope, and with no promise of more hope coming any time soon. If at all. But in Christ, "this world is not your home," and we have HOPE because of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus really has your heart, giving is never going to be much of an issue.

If giving is an issue, the real question is "does Jesus have your heart?"

“Were the whole realm of nature mine

That is an offering far too small.

Love so amazing so Divine

Demands my soul, my life, my all.”