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2 Corinthians 8:1-15 – *Giving, the Macedonian Way*

Preached at Trinity CRC

November 17, 2019

This morning we're talking about money...

And giving it away.

But my hope for this sermon is not to fill the offering plate.

If we double our offering today—

But do not grow at all in our understanding of the Lord's grace—

Then this sermon does not accomplish its goal.

What I want for you is to know how much the Lord loves you...

And how much he's given to be back in relationship with us...

And then out of *this*...

Comes a desire to live wholeheartedly for him in everything we do...

Including giving our money.

## 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. <sup>2</sup>In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. <sup>3</sup>For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, <sup>4</sup>they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. <sup>5</sup>And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. <sup>6</sup>So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. <sup>7</sup>But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

<sup>8</sup>I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. <sup>9</sup>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 through his poverty might become rich.

<sup>10</sup> And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. <sup>11</sup> Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. <sup>12</sup> For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

<sup>13</sup> Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. <sup>14</sup> At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, <sup>15</sup> as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Since I'm a dad of 2 young girls...

I read a lot of children's books.

One of them is called *Goofy Goes to the Fair*.

It's the first day of the county fair and Goofy is headed there in his car, “Old Faithful.”

Old faithful isn't in the best shape...

In fact, Goofy has some trouble along the way:

First, the radiator “acts up” sending smoke from the engine;

Then, the oil runs low;

And finally, they blow a tire.

They stall out a few times on their way to the fair.

Maybe you've had “Old Faithful” type cars or experiences in your life...

Where you plan on going somewhere—

Or doing something—

Only to stall.

### **The Corinthian church stalled.**

See, earlier some of Paul's fellow workers took up a collection of money for the church in Jerusalem...

And the Corinthians were eager to help out...

Champing at the bit to get involved.

In fact, they were the first to have the desire and the first to start giving. (8:10)

This was last year.

Then their radiator started acting up;

The engine ran low on oil;

They blew a tire;

Their giving stalled.

They started really strong...

Only to putter out before the finish line.

We're not told what happened that caused them to stall...

Maybe they became lazy;

Maybe they came up with some excuses for reasons *not* to give their money;

Maybe they kept pushing it off...

Saying they'd eventually get to it, but never did. (these suggestions come for  
George Guthrie)

We're not told why they didn't finish what they started...

But I bet we can relate.

### **Because we stall too.**

When it comes to money—

And giving it away—

There are a lot of reasons that come to mind for why we don't do it—

Or why we've reduced our giving or even stopped:

Maybe it's fear...

We fear economic insecurity:

“I don't have enough to give...”

“I'm already struggling financially...”

“How can I give it to someone else?!”

Maybe we're young and we don't have a job...

Or we don't think giving applies to us.

Or maybe we're just plain confused about giving.

Who here has wondered at these questions:

“Is the tithe still in effect in the New Testament?”

“If I *am* required to give 10%, is that before or after taxes?”

And, “Does that 10% go to the church, or can I give it to other charities?”

Sometimes we're confused...

And these questions stop us from giving.

When we first started living for the Lord—

When it finally clicked and our hearts understood grace—

We would've given up everything:

We were ready to move to a foreign country to do missions work;

We were ready to give all of our time volunteering...

Not wondering why we weren't getting paid.

We gave away a lot of our money...

Knowing that the Lord would take care of us.

But somewhere along the way we stalled.

The church at Corinth fizzled out in their giving...

So Paul uses this portion of his letter (chs. 8-9) as an encouragement to them.

And what he says, in essence, is:

**“God is the ultimate giver.”**

The motivation to give has to be grounded in the gospel. (George Guthrie)

Paul says, “I'm not commanding you to give, but I want to test the sincerity of your love...”

“Do you really understand all that's been given to you?” (8:8)

“Are you really grasping the gospel?”

God is the ultimate giver:

“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 through his poverty might become rich.” (8:9)

Jesus Christ—

God the Son—

Was in perfect fellowship with the other two members of the Trinity.

In the Trinity there was life and love and perfection.

When we think about heaven—

And the comfort and joy that we know comes along with it—

We are essentially talking about entering into this perfect relationship with the Triune God...

Unhindered fellowship with the One who gives us all of our meaning and worth.

This is what Jesus had.

And this is what he gave up.

Though he was rich, he became poor.

He became a human...and not just any human...

But a human who experienced extreme suffering:

He knew separation from God;

He knew what it was like to have his friends turn on him;

He knew what it was like to be beaten and crucified.

Out of love for us, this man became poor...

So that we could become rich.

Jesus Christ took on death so that we could have life...

He is the quintessential giver.

Could you imagine God stalling out on giving to us?

Jesus still comes to earth...

He still teaches us a lot of good things about who God is...(e.g. Matt 5)

And he still promises that he's going to die for the sins of the people...

But then he stalls.

He doesn't endure the suffering of the cross.

He doesn't actually go through with dying for our brokenness...

Instead Jesus decides to live a comfortable life in a cabin by the Sea of Galilee.

Can you picture that?

Can you imagine God stalling?

God doesn't stall.

God follows through with the promise...

And in turn his people are to live the same way.

All of our living is grounded in the good news of the ultimate giver.

A church who does this—

Who really “gets” the gospel and lives it out—

Is the church at Macedonia. (Thessalonica, Philippi, Berea)

Paul uses these churches as an example to the stalled Corinthians.

We're going to spend the rest of our time looking at what we can learn from them.

### **First, it always starts with God.**

V1: “We want you to know about *the grace that God has given* the Macedonian churches.”

As we've been saying, God is the ultimate giver...

He is the source of all gifts.

Anything that is happening in the Macedonian church...

Is because of what they are receiving from God.

Not only does God give grace through Jesus Christ...

God continues to give...allowing them to participate in his continued work...

Which in this case involves supporting fellow believers.

And the same goes with us:

It all starts with God.

God continues to give and pour out and overflow his gifts onto us.

But it's not so that we can become the end of the giving...

It's so that we can participate in his work to the rest of the world.

God is the source, we are the recipients, but we are not the end...

The gift merely passes through us.

**Second, giving doesn't have to start from a place of comfort or wealth.**

V2. "In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."

Did the Macedonians give from a place of comfort?

Did they make sure they could afford their luxuries before they gave?

The word used here for "extreme" poverty talks about something out of the ordinary...

Sure, there was poor...

But this is an unordinary poor...

This is rock bottom poverty. (George Guthrie)

God isn't using a wealthy church to provide for the needs of his people in Jerusalem...

The Corinthian church can't say, "Yeah, but look at how much money the Macedonians have..."

No, God is manifesting generosity in some of the poorest people.

But it is out of *this place* that their joy overflows...

And it's *here*, that their giving is in its purest form.

The Macedonian churches gave in the midst of a severe trial...

So, for us, I think we can say that none of us are exempt from giving if we are the church of Christ.

But realistically, what does this look like for us?

**Third, the Macedonian churches gave as much as they were able.** (v. 3)

This is what Paul commands the church in Corinth to do:

"Finish the work...*according to your means*. For if the willingness is there, *the gift is acceptable according to what one has*, not according to what one does not have." (vv. 11-12)

Is there a set amount that Christians are biblically required to give?

Asked in a different way, is the tithe still in force today?

Depending on what biblical scholar you agree with...

This answer could be either "yes" or "no."

Some well-respected scholars, like William Barclay, say “yes” the 10% tithe from the OT is still valid today...

Every Christian is supposed to give 10% of their income.

But, some other well-respected scholars, like Thomas Schreiner, say “no” it’s not required in the NT...

This law is gone.

Whatever camp you find yourselves in, I think we should say a few things:

First, should we measure our gratitude in percentages?

Remember we’re talking about our response to God’s giving...

Christ becoming poor so we can be rich.

Is there a percentage that captures the right amount of gratitude?

Second, if you’re using the OT guide of 10% to check off your “giving” to do box...

Some scholars say that the actual amount of the tithe is closer to 20%...

And finally, what we’ll say on this issue of tithing...

The OT did have a tithe in place to guide people in their giving.

Now, per the pattern of Scripture, do the laws get easier to live by?

When Jesus interprets the 10 Commandments for the people, does he ease up on them?

No! “You’ve heard it said, ‘You shall not commit adultery, but I say that anyone who looks at a woman with lust has committed adultery with her in his heart.’”

When we move from the shadow of things to their fulfillment...

The stakes are usually raised.

God’s people were commanded to give a tithe after they were freed from slavery in Egypt.

What should our response of gratitude look like now that we’ve been freed from sin and death?

How high are the stakes raised?

Paul doesn’t command a certain percentage...

Rather he says, “they gave as much as they were able, and *even beyond their ability.*”

“How is this possible?” we ask...

This rock-bottom-poverty-church...

How can *they* give beyond their ability?

And this is our fourth and final point:

**Generous giving comes from a singlehearted devotion to God.**

We see these words, “rich generosity” in 8:2.

What these words really means is “singleheartedness,” “simple,” or “straightforward.”

Paul is not just commending their generosity in regards to money...

This word tells us of their overall spiritual condition:

The Macedonian churches had a singlehearted devotion to God...

The deep-seated purpose of their soul was to do the will of God...

This is what they made their lives all about...

A single focus.

So when they were able to give—

It brought them an abundance of joy—

And they gave as much as they could...even beyond their ability.

Goofy’s simple purpose in the children’s book is to get to the fair...

And even with the faulty radiator, low engine oil, and flat tire...

He never takes his eyes off of the goal.

He is singlehearted in his pursuit...

This is where his eyes are focused the whole time...

And in the end, Goofy manages to get not just himself to the fair...

But Mickey, Minnie, Daisy, Donald, Huey, Dewey, and Louie all to the fair.

The motivation for our giving is always rooted in our commitment to Christ. (George Gutherie)

When we know the length that God went to save us...

When we understand how much the ultimate giver gave to get us back—  
Then we begin to get a clear perspective on our giving.

May you be filled with the love and strength of Christ...

As you live your life singleheartedly for him.

Amen.