

# Grace - Evening Sermon

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm going to read now a portion of 2 Corinthians chapter 9. I'll pick up reading from verse 6 and then read to the end of the chapter, verse 15.

So 2 Corinthians 9, this is page 1164 if you have one of the Red Church Bibles. Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.

And whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things, at all times, having all you need, you will abound in every good work.

As it is written, they have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed, and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

[ 1 : 13 ] You will be enriched in every way, so that you can be generous on every occasion. And through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people, but it is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

And through the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

And in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

Amen. This morning I noticed the fact that love seems to be the thread which binds the Bible together. So too, this word that we see both in chapter 8 and chapter 9 of 2 Corinthians is a key link throughout the Bible.

[ 2 : 27 ] 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9 and 2 Corinthians 9 verse 8, these are the two texts that I'm going to be focusing on. And in my memory, I find it easy to remember both of them just because of the reversal of the numbers.

8 verse 9 and 9 verse 8. Chapter 8 verse 9, 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.

And then 2 Corinthians 9 verse 8, and God is able to bless you abundantly, or God is able to make all grace abound to you.

It captures the same theme and the same word, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

You see, grace is very difficult to illustrate because it's so unique to God that it's difficult to explain what it looks like apart from what God himself says.

[ 3 : 35 ] Yesterday, I was at a wedding, Kirstie Ann McPherson and Tom Cox, and the ring bearer was a small child.

Now, I've done a lot of weddings, and I've had dogs as ring bearers, I've had small children as ring bearers. As a rule, dogs are more reliable, they're more likely to get the ring to the right place at the right time, but it became quite clear that there was an agreement between the groom and the ring bearer.

The groom had a packet of stickers in his pocket, and he made it quite clear to his nephew that should the ring be delivered at the appropriate time, in the appropriate way, that he would exchange the stickers for the ring, and it worked a treat.

Because at the right time I asked for the rings to be given, young Tommy came forward with the rings, and with a handout for the stickers. A quid pro quo.

But that's not what grace is like. You see, we're used to things like that where you do something and you get something. You give something and you receive something. So, every month, the Free Church of Scotland generously puts money into my bank account.

[ 4 : 49 ] But that's not grace. That's my salary. I do something in return for my salary. So, when it comes to illustrating grace, it's really difficult because all of the illustrations that we might think of don't really capture it.

You see, when we think about God and his nature, he is so different than we are. You see, God, for example, is inexhaustible.

You know, you and I, we expend energy and we get tired. God expends energy and he never gets tired. God's resources are inexhaustible.

You see, if I give you 10 pounds, you're 10 pounds richer, but I'm 10 pounds poorer. God expends resources, but he's never impoverished.

I can't explain that. I can tell you that it's true, but I can't explain it how it's true. Because every idea that I have is that if you give something, that means you no longer have it.

[ 5 : 53 ] Whereas God gives and gives and gives and never has less. God works and works and works and is never tired. And we come to this text. And before we get to the two texts that I've highlighted, let me just give you a little bit of the flavor or a little bit of the context.

Because the context is quite remarkable. You see, Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. And the church in Corinth has a lot going for it.

It's in a strategic place. It's in a place where there's a kind of a crossroads, a trading crossroads. It's quite a prosperous city.

And it's also a place where the gospel shines brightly. Because the spirit of the age and the culture is so contrary to the gospel.

It's a place where immorality is high. It's a place where spiritual light seems to be in short supply. And yet the gospel takes root in Corinth.

[ 6 : 55 ] It's kind of like that song of New York. If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere. If the gospel can take root in Corinth, it just can take root absolutely anywhere. But you see, the Corinthians, they may have had resources.

They were, generally speaking, a more affluent church than some others. But you see, these were the kind of folks that would quickly make promises but not fulfill them.

They would make commitments quickly but find it difficult to keep those commitments. And Paul, in chapter 8, at the beginning, he says, And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

Grace. Undeserved favor. Unmerited love. Again, it takes several words to describe this one word. The grace that God has given.

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

[ 8 : 01 ] Paul says, let me tell you a story. Let me tell you a true story. They're the most interesting ones. Let me tell you a story, Corinthian Christians. Let me tell you about a poor group of people who, by the grace of God, became generous.

And you think, that doesn't really make sense. Poor people don't have stuff. So therefore, poor people can't give stuff. Well, yes and no.

Humanly speaking, yes. But when God enters a situation, God has a way of doing impossible things in impossible situations. And God has a way of transforming people.

He says, for I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability entirely on their own.

So Paul is teaching a lesson about giving. That's the practical lesson here. But he's teaching an even more profound lesson about grace. This is what the grace of Jesus looks like.

[ 9 : 06 ] And that's where he brings his argument to its kind of crescendo in verse 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, Jesus Christ is full of grace. Full of grace and truth. As we heard this morning in John chapter 1, verse 17. He is full of grace.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. The apostle Paul never gave us an account of the birth of Jesus. We see that in Matthew. And we see that in Luke. So we don't have the Bethlehem story captured for us by Paul. And yet we do have Paul here reflecting on the reality of the incarnation. God is in heaven. And now God in the person of Jesus Christ comes down. And he dwells on earth. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That though he was rich.  
[10:08] Rich in glory. Rich in heaven. Right hand of the majesty on high. All power. All authority. All wisdom. All honor. Was his. By right.

But what did he do? For your sake he became poor. So the grace of Jesus is the rich one becomes poor. Why? So that the poor ones become rich. So that through his poverty you might become rich. This is what the gospel of Jesus looks like. The one with all power.

With all authority. The one with all majesty. With all might. With all glory. And with all honor. Takes a position. A humble place. You see that's why Jesus often preached that theme. Remember? He says those who humble themselves will be exalted. And those who exalt themselves will be humbled. You see Jesus practices what he preaches perfectly.  
[11:04] Every other preacher is inconsistent. But this preacher is perfectly consistent. He preaches about humility. Being humble. And he does exactly that.

He takes a position of humility. Why? So that others might be exalted. Others might be raised. He comes down so that we can go up. And you see this is why it's so difficult to illustrate. Because this is not the way things are. This is not the way we tend to think of things. We kind of love those rags to riches stories. Poverty. Difficulty. Challenge. So the man or the woman is in these difficult situations. And all of a sudden they persevere. They get an education. They find an idea. They start a business. And all of a sudden they once were in the slums. They're now in the palace. But the gospel is the exact opposite. This is not a story of upward mobility.  
[12:03] This is a story of downward mobility. But it's deliberate. That he becomes poor. So that we as a people might become rich.

So you see when Paul is teaching a lesson. He's teaching a lesson. A theological lesson. With a practical outcome. And the foundation is none other than Jesus. So you see when we want to know what it looks like to live the Christian life.

We look to him. He's our example. He's our motivation. He's the foundation. He is the object of our desire as a pupil.

He's the teacher. We're the pupils. We want to look more and more like him. He took a humble place. Why? Because he had a care for others.

And what he did, he did uniquely. We can't repeat that. And yet there's a model here. He becomes a model for Christian living. He becomes a model of Christian discipleship.

[13:05] Jesus became poor. So that the poor could become rich. So the Macedonian Christians are poor. For example, Philippi is a city in Macedon.

If you know your ancient history, Philip of Macedon. The father of Alexander the Great. So a lot of cities are named after Philip. And at the end of chapter 4 in Philippians, Paul said this.

He said, It was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, Macedonian church, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.

For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts. What I desire is more be credited to your account.

Strange, isn't it? The Macedonian churches gave to Paul. That means they had less. And Paul says, Actually, no. That means you have more.

[14:17] You know, I used to be an accountant. Most ministers, Alec MacDonald accepted, most ministers become ministers because they're not able to do much else. Right? So I wasn't that good at accountancy.

But I understand debits and I understand credits. Debits is what you don't have. Credits is what you do. And Paul is saying, What you've given, which is a debit, is actually now a credit.

So you see, there's an economy here of grace, which is difficult to explain because it goes against standard accounting procedure. He says, Not that I desire, but what I desire is that more be

credited to your account.

I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. So Paul says, I want to say thank you. Thank you for your generosity.

[ 15 : 22 ] Thank you for your gifts. But these gifts actually are a credit to you. And they're a credit in that now, you can write a check against the bank of Jesus Christ.

And you see, the bank of Jesus Christ has an infinite balance. It never decreases. It's never at risk. Economic crisis, tariffs of one sort or another, there's no danger here.

So Paul says, I want to thank you for your generosity. Not that I needed it, but your generosity actually now becomes a credit to your account. And he says, my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of glory in Christ Jesus.

I wasn't able to get there yesterday, but yesterday was an open day at the Leith Church, the new Hope Church, Leith, Castle Bank Street. Derek and Katrina are the oldest church planters in the free church in their 60s.

And it was an open day to see this newly refurbished church. It's light, it's bright, it looks new, it's exciting. But one thing I'm often reminded of when I'm in Derek's company is that Derek often repeats this phrase.

[ 16 : 36 ] He says, God is no man's debtor. God has a way of giving back in a way that is completely out of proportion to whatever might be given.

Spurgeon captured this 150 years ago. He said, in all my years of service to my Lord, I have discovered a truth that has never failed and has never been compromised.

That truth is that it is beyond the realm of possibilities that one has the ability to outgive God. Even if I give the whole of my worth to him, he will find a way to give back to me much more than I gave.

So grace, the economy of grace, the accountancy of grace, grace doesn't seem to make sense, doesn't seem to fit with our understanding of credits and debits.

But God has a way of taking whatever might be given and multiplying it to the giver. Not just to the receiver, but to the giver.

[ 17 : 42 ] So you see, if we grasp the gospel, the incarnation of Jesus is the rich one became poor. Why? So that the poor ones might become rich. He in heaven now dwells on earth, lives a life characterized by poverty.

He had nowhere to lay his head. Almost immediately, he was a political refugee. He was fleeing with his family. They had to go to Egypt because it was dangerous to stay in Judea.

So the one who had everything had nothing in order that we, spiritually speaking, who have nothing might have everything. So the grace of Jesus Christ is the foundation for all generosity, all giving, all Christian service.

He is the model. He is the exemplar. He is the goal of, or he is the object of our focus here.

But in the next chapter, Paul goes on to describe not just the grace of Jesus Christ, but the grace of the people of Jesus Christ.

[ 18 : 51 ] You see this in verse eight. And God is able to bless you abundantly or to make all grace abound so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

There are five alls there. Five everys there. This is Paul saying to the people of Corinth, if you think that giving makes you poorer, if you think that expending resources impoverishes you, Paul says, I want to tell you something different.

When you give, you receive. And when you give, you receive in such a way as to make the giving completely out of proportion. Billy Graham, the American evangelist, put it this way.

He said, God has given us two hands. One is the hand that we receive and the other is the hand that we give. The gospel is a gift that must first be received.

And we receive the gift of God by faith, with gratitude and with thanksgiving. And we then give with the other hand. He says, we are not cisterns made for hoarding, but we are channels meant for sharing.

[ 20 : 08 ] And that's the argument that Paul is making here. He says, here's the grace of Jesus Christ and here's the grace of Jesus' people. And it's the same measure.

The poor, the rich one becomes poor, the poor become rich, and those that give have a blessing and have abundance that's completely out of proportion to what they themselves have given. John Wesley kind of paraphrased this verse. He says, do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.

All grace abounds so that all things, all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

You see, as followers of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, when we look at the phrase good work, we are often inclined to say, good works do not save.

[ 21 : 18 ] And that's true. And the Bible makes it quite clear that good works do not save us. We are not saved by what we do, we are saved by what Jesus does.

But most of the time that we see this phrase good work, it's not negative, as in this doesn't save, but it's seen positively as this is what the outcome of a saved life looks like.

Good work. kindness, generosity, thoughtfulness, care, compassion, not to be saved, but because we are already saved.

We have already been set free. So the grace of Jesus Christ prompts gratitude and generosity in the people of Jesus Christ.

John Wesley practiced what he preached. He once said, it's not how much of my money will I give to God, but how much of God's money will I keep for myself?

[ 22 : 19 ] Through his writings and through his sermons, it was big business then. These, George Whitefield, John Wesley, Latterley, D.L.

Moody, Sankey, publishers made a lot of money by publishing reminiscences, biographies, autobiographies, and it was estimated that during his life Wesley earned 30,000 pounds through his writings, which exceeds five million pounds today.

And when he died, the only possessions he had, he had a few coins in his pocket and a few coins on his dresser. So he gave away all that he ever earned.

He gave away all that he ever received. He lived on approximately 30 pounds a week, having earned 30,000 during the course of his life.

Do all the good you can. You see, as I stand here today, I'm very much aware of the passage of time. Came to this country at age 23, I'm now 58.

[ 23 : 30 ] If I live another 35 years, I would be 83. That may or may not happen, but time just goes so quickly.

The opportunities that we have for service, the opportunities that we have for witness, the opportunities that we have to demonstrate the goodness and grace that we have received quickly pass away.

You see, it's not so much what we receive or what we have at the end of the day, but what have we done with what we've received? What have we done with the gifts?

What have we done with the talents? What have we done with the time? what have we done with our resources? It so happened that the Corinthian church was blessed in terms of practical or financial resources.

And they had a desire. They made that desire known that they wanted to give. They were one of the first to sign up for this contribution for the needs of God's people.

[ 24 : 29 ] Paul had to remind them that the offer was great, but actually the reality was even better. Offering and doing can be two very different things.

There's a time coming, as Jesus said, night comes when no one can work. It's still daytime. We still have time. We still have resources. So the people of God are encouraged to serve, to give, to speak.

Whatever your gifts, whatever the talents God has instructed you with, he wants you to know that he is able. Not that you're able, but he's able.

You see, it's all of grace. It's not what we do for God, but it's what God does for us, and then what God does in us, and what God does through us. God is able to bless you abundantly, to make all grace abound, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

We live in an age of skepticism. We live in an age of doubt. People are not certain that the Bible is the word of God. People are not necessarily all that interested in who Jesus is or what Jesus did,

whether he was a real person, whether the actions or the miracles were genuine, but something is powerful, and I think today, more than ever, when people see lives that have been changed, hearts that have been transformed, priorities that have been turned upside down, they cannot but help seeing the reality of the gospel in the lives of the people of God.

[ 26 : 13 ] By all means, we invite people to come to church, we invite people to come to Christianity Explored, but I think the great challenge and the great opportunity that we have is wherever we go, where you work, where you study, where you live, wherever God places you, that we bring the gospel with us.

We bring the gospel with us in word, and we bring the gospel with us in action. Words are important. God loves you. Jesus Christ died to forgive sin.

Jesus came into this world to seek and to save the lost. These words are incredibly important, but when those words are accompanied with action, when those words are demonstrated by the quality of a life changed and transformed, watch out.

Watch out what God can do. Watch out how God can use you. You might think that your gifts are few. You might think that your resources are limited. You might think that your talents are not many, but when God works in you, by his grace, he works through you by that same grace and by that same power, and he can use the small gifts with which we have been entrusted to demonstrate his great power, his great mercy, his great capacity.

We can take the opportunity that we have. Each one of us has opportunities that are unique. Opportunities to speak, opportunities to serve, and opportunities to give.

[ 27 : 50 ] And when we take God at his word, we have every guarantee that he indeed is able to make all grace abound. He, when he says, when Paul says, my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ.

Whatever your need, whatever your lack, whatever you are requiring, God is able to provide, and God is able to work in such a way that it's beyond illustration.

It's not what you can do, it's not what you can, how you, God gives and you give back, it's not like that. It's the grace of God at work in the hearts of people that multiply the work.

Whatever we might give in his service is so small, but he can multiply those small gifts, he can multiply those words in such a way to demonstrate his power and his grace and his glory.

If we take him at his word, the grace of Jesus Christ and the grace of the people of Jesus Christ, you put those together and watch and wait to see what God can do in us and what God can do through us because I'm convinced that we are here in this place at this time for a reason.

[ 29 : 12 ] Just as there were believers in Corinth in the first century A.D., an unlikely place for an unlikely setting, the people of God were gathered there.

Paul wanted to encourage them to practice the generosity of grace, the grace received, the grace given, to demonstrate the reality of Jesus in Corinth.

Let's demonstrate the reality of Jesus on the south side of Edinburgh, in this city, among these people, a people skeptical, a people who doubt, a people who do not read the Bible but who see us as the people of Jesus.

Let us be credible witnesses to the grace of God, a grace received and a grace shared and a generous people will be a people that will know the blessing of God and whatever might be expended will be returned manyfold.

that's the grace of Jesus Christ and that's the power of the gospel and may he richly and abundantly bless us and make us a blessing in the lives of others.

[ 30 : 19 ] Let's pray. Father in heaven, we come to you in that precious, powerful name of Jesus. We recognize that he had everything and he placed himself here on earth.

He gave up all of his privilege. He gave up all of his riches in order to make a poor people rich. We thank you that in his humility we have been exalted and he is now exalted to that place of ultimate honor and glory at your right hand and as we come to you in his name we come in the name in that powerful name of Jesus asking that you might do as you have promised that you might make us vessels in your hand that we might be used by you that you might work in us and through us and that the grace of Jesus might be demonstrated in the words that we speak in the lives that we give and in the actions of our hands that you might indeed make all grace abound and these things we pray in the precious name of Jesus.