

God's Beautiful Gift of Giving

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[0 : 00] So I'm going to tell you just a little bit about the final gift day which is next Sunday. The money which is needed to be expended including the professional fees and charges of 165,000.

! The money that's been raised so far is 159,000. The shortfall is 6,000 and that's the target for next Sunday. So we look for that to be met and if there is an excess we'll go to the general fund which has lots of aspects behind it as we look forward to the future.

So that's the picture and we're coming now to speak on the subject of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 and the grace of giving.

Let me pray. Our Father, please help us as we come to your word. We ask that you would speak your word into our hearts.

Please help me to speak helpfully, appropriately. We pray that you would put a desire in our hearts to know what you have to say and to want to follow what you say.

[1 : 13] We know that that is the very best for us. We ask this for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen. So it is a bit of a special moment and this is why we're having this message this morning.

It's the end of a 12 month process. We've also recently been doing a spiritual gifts questionnaire. We've put that in and I've been interested to note that some amongst us really feel that this issue of giving is something that God has given them as a special opportunity and responsibility.

We might also ask the question, well what next? Some people have said, well it's all a bit of an anti-climax. We suddenly popped out at the end. So you know, what happens next?

We all go off to have a holiday or something. Well there are many challenges that we're going to face and I think that we're going to find that 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is clearly about this matter.

And will help us, has something to say about these points. I hope you picked up as we heard that reading this morning that the Apostle Paul said, you started something a year ago.

[2 : 30] It's now time to finish it. It's a big message. It's a big message. There are two chapters here and I think you can sense the enormous energy, heart that the Apostle Paul puts in to this.

He's not just ticking a box here. He's really got a great heart and a desire for the church in Corinth, but not just that church, to do the right thing.

It's a message for every church. This is about giving in a church context. And it's an expectation that every church will be a giving church.

Although he's writing to the Corinthians, he had the same message to write to the churches of Macedonia and the churches of Galatia. It's a message for all Christians.

There are no individuals singled out in this story. There are no personality types. There's no bank balances singled out. This is a message for everybody in the church.

[3 : 37] So, whilst there is undoubtedly a particular opportunity and enabling that's given for some, and you can read of that in the list of gifts in Romans 12, this is actually a message for everybody.

And I'm quite sure that if the Apostle Paul was here today, standing on this place here, he would give exactly the same message to us as he would to the church in Corinth.

It's also a message for everyone. You might be here today and thinking, well, this is very much to do with Christians. It's to do with the church. And I feel a bit excluded from this. Is this my church? I'm not even a Christian. What has this got to say to me? Well, it tells us something of what powers the Christian life. It's a life of response to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

That's dynamite. That's an amazing power that invigorates and directs and strengthens every day the way that we live our lives.

[4 : 46] And it's also a lifelong message. So you might well be thinking, well, this is the end of giving. We've done the big thing. Actually, this passage has to say to us, you haven't just done the big thing.

The big things are ahead. So to start, I'm not sure whether you'll see some of these pictures on the screen adequately.

A whole bundle of money there. And you could think, well, is this rather just a sort of a crude linkage of the fact that we need some more money next week and just bringing a message about money.

But actually, this passage is not just about money. In fact, the word money isn't ever used. But what is used and right at the beginning of the passage is the word grace.

The grace of giving. And the Apostle Paul has this to say about this topic.

[5 : 50] That God has given these people something very special. He's given them a gift. And it's a free gift. And the gift that he's given to them is the opportunity for them to be givers.

It's interesting, isn't it? That's the gift that God gives to us so that we should be givers. God is a giving God.

And so his people are a giving people. Now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

It's a grace. It's a gift. And as he goes on in that passage, he has more to say about the fact of how this gift should be operated. This giving gift. It's a heart thing.

So, we won't draw attention to all the individual verses. But let me just pick out some of the descriptions that are given about the way in which giving is to be undertaken.

[6 : 51] Earnestness, desire, eager willingness, love, enthusiasm, cheerful giver. Strong language.

The right picture of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is, I believe, to be found in the Gospel of Mark and chapter 12, verses 41 to 44. So, please look at that.

It's on page 1018. Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury.

So, you've got the picture there. Loads and loads of people flooding in to the temple. They all want to make their offerings. There's a place where they can do so.

Many rich people threw in large amounts. Quite descriptive, isn't it? Sort of with a great flourish. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a fraction of a penny.

[8 : 06] What difference is that going to make to the running of the temple? Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, I tell you the truth. This poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.

They all gave out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything. All she had to live on. And she said, Jesus noticed, and I love the arithmetic.

She's put more into the treasury than all the others. That's an extraordinary thought. Because what really matters is what God sees.

And what he counts to be precious. It's this grace of giving, which this widow had. And which Paul says to the Corinthians, I really want you to excel in.

2 Corinthians 8-7. Ensure that you excel in the grace of giving. You excel in lots of other things. But this is really important.

[9 : 18] It's right up there with the rest. And it's most important, Corinthian church, Calvary church, that we should excel in the grace of giving.

Now about the collection. That's a rather famous phrase that we find in 1 Corinthians 16 verse 1.

And in fact, we actually know quite a lot about this particular collection.

That Paul is referring to in the passage we've just read. There are two more passages there. I'm not going to refer to them. But I am going to point you to this map on the screen.

So you can see that here is Corinth in the bottom end of Greece. And Greece was at that time divided into two areas.

The bottom area here is called Achaia. The top area is called Macedonia. And I want you to also notice the number of the scale down the bottom. As you can see, it's quite a distance between the church in Corinth and the church up in Macedonia.

[10 : 24] Other passages also refer to the churches in Galatia. And that's over here in modern day Turkey. And all this is about something going on down here in Judea.

Judea. So we know from the Bible record that in Judea in AD 55, there was great persecution occurring to the Christian people.

Many of them had lost jobs or had to leave their homes. And there was also famine occurring.

Whether those two things were sort of linked together because they didn't have the jobs or whether there was a sort of famine across the land, I can't say.

But the two things together created a humanitarian problem for the church in Judea. And you can see it's a long way away. But Paul was saying, I want you people here, and I want you people here, and I want you people here to be concerned about your brothers and sisters in Judea. Quite important also to remember that the people down here were Jews, were mostly Jews. The people up here were mostly Gentiles.

[11:30] So they were going to be a bit countercultural. Christian people are countercultural. They don't just look after their own ethnically, but they look after their own spiritually.

And that's what Paul was encouraging to happen in this case. It was actually a big project, and it went on for a long time. And it's quite clear that he involved these churches, these churches, these churches, all in this process.

And it's interesting because you can get the impression sometimes that the apostles, because of what we read in the Book of Acts about the way they said, we've got to devote ourselves to the word and prayer, and let others look after the tables and the distribution to the widows.

You might get the impression that someone like Paul, an apostle, wouldn't actually be that interested, or we would delegate the matter of encouragement and administration of this matter of giving.

But he doesn't. He takes it as a personal responsibility. And it's one of the messages that he keeps on bringing to the churches. Because he had already spoken to the Corinthian church about it in one Corinthians, the first letter.

[12:47] And now this second letter, which is probably about nine months later, this second letter comes and he reminds them about it again. It's pretty high on his agenda. And as we shall see later, he takes it as a personal responsibility.

Now about the collection. So something had to be done. And so it was. Doing it right. 2 Corinthians 8 verses 20 and 21.

Paul says, The first thing I want to draw your attention to in this, this doing right, is the fact that Paul encourages them to give in a methodical and a planned manner.

So you might just turn back to 1 Corinthians 16 verse 1. Where he says this. Now about the collection for God's people. Those are the folk in Judea.

Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week. That's today. Each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.

[14:14] Saving it up so that when I come, no collections will have to be made. So just want you to notice what is actually being said here. He's saying, on the first day of the week, I want you to get into the habit of setting aside a sum of money in proportion to your income.

And you keep it in your home. You save it up. And then when the time comes, when Paul arrives, there will be a bringing together of all that home saving that's taken place.

And it will all be passed over, safely carried, and distributed to the folk in Judea. Methodical planned giving. Secondly, very important for all this to be done in an above board way.

There needs to be protection of the money and close accountability. So it's interesting, we won't look at it in great detail, but these two passages, the first one in Corinthians, says what his plan was about nine or ten months previously.

This plan was that there should be accredited people from Corinth, plus Paul, taking the gift to Jerusalem. So he thought that through, and he said, it's so important that this is right.

[15:37] I'm not going to leave it in the hands of one person, but more than one needs to be involved. So there can be proper accountability. And so there's at least three people who are going to be in charge of taking this gift to Jerusalem.

There's a change of plan. So when he comes to write the second letter, he writes in great detail about what his plan is. You'll find it in chapter eight, verses 16 to 24.

He says, this is the way that it should be done. I'm going to send Titus. In fact, Titus has wanted to do this. He's going to make this journey. Titus was probably at that time in Ephesus, so he's going to make a long sea journey.

And he's going to come, and there are going to be two other brothers with him who are honored by the churches. Good people. They're going to come to Corinth. They're going to take the collection. And those three people, plus Paul, are going to take this offering back to Jerusalem. Now, to me, that sounds like a lot of effort.

[16:40] That's an enormous expenditure of Christian, good Christian resource for the purpose of taking some cash to Jerusalem. But it's actually a demonstration of how important it is that things should be done right, not just in the eyes of God, who sees everything, but also in the eyes of men.

So let me make some application of these two points. That giving should be thoughtful, deliberate, and acted upon. Apostle Paul does not encourage spontaneity.

Now, it's interesting, isn't it? Because there is a kind of a school of thought that says, the best and most spiritual sort of giving must be the stuff that sort of rises out of a groundswell of response to some sort of message or need.

So that we should, at that moment, respond in a very spontaneous way. But Paul says, I just want it to be very down to earth, very practical, very planned, very methodical.

That's a very spiritual way of doing giving. So I ask you, do you have a handle on your finances?

[17:57] Do you have a handle on your own finances? So that you know what it might mean to give in proportion to your income. I have to say, if you've never sort of written it all down and have a sense of a budget in your life, you won't know how much you can give in proportion to your income.

And it won't be helpful when it comes to the question of gift day like this, if you don't know what your income and expenditure is.

It's important that it's a Christian duty to work these things out and ask for help if you need to, to do so. I think you'll find it very liberating to get that right.

You can't plan your giving without knowing what your income and genuine expenditure needs to be. Plan giving.

Secondly, looking after the church's giving is a task that demands utter integrity. So, interesting that we find when the issue of appointment of deacons is raised to the elder Timothy, in 1 Timothy 3 verses 8 to 10, Deacons likewise are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.

[19:34] Why would he have to raise that point? Would you think that was top of the list? He has to raise that point because this is such an important matter.

It is so important that the affairs of the church be done in a completely above board manner, and especially when it comes to issues of finance. Failure here is absolutely disastrous for the gospel. Totally disastrous for the gospel. We need to pray for people of such integrity as we go into our future here. We are going to be praying next week about future.

We will in the future need another treasurer. At some point that's going to be needed. And one of the prime qualifications of a treasurer, it's not just that he's familiar with Sage software and so forth, but fundamentally that he or she is a person of integrity.

And it's completely above board. And we need to be very scrupulous in this matter. Looking after the church's giving is a task that demands utter integrity.

[20:51] I trust that we should all have utter integrity in our financial dealings as well. So that it shouldn't come as a kind of a difference that when it comes to things of church, there's different sort of integrity level to the general life of us as Christians.

But we do need to be very careful on that point. And there needs to be checks and accountabilities in place. Which is why it's important that when the money is counted on the end of a morning or an evening, there are two people present to do the counting of it as well.

By the way, if you don't know where to put your money, there is a very small box. It is remarkably small, but it does say offerings on it. And it's at the back. And if you want to give, you can do it that way.

But you don't have to just do it that way. In fact, that's quite laborious to do it that way. You can use a system of putting your money directly into the church's bank. And that is very helpful for doing that.

So here's an action you may need to be just getting a grip of here. Is your giving thoughtful, deliberate, and acted upon? Please don't get into the place of saying, well, I just haven't got around to it.

[22:02] Just give me a few more months. You need to sort it. You need to sort it. Especially if you consider this church to be your church. And it's a church member's responsibility to hold us all accountable, to hold one another accountable.

Let's move on. And he's also stirred by stories. Interesting when he's encouraging this giving by the Corinthians, that he doesn't give them great visual imagery of starvation in Judea.

He could have done that, couldn't he? I'm quite sure he could have painted a pretty bleak picture. He could have said, I want to tell you about this couple. They've got a young baby. The guy has lost his job.

They've had to travel a long way. They've got no family to look after them. They're just living off scraps and so forth. He could have given that sort of language. But it's interesting, he doesn't do that.

Now that's the way in which the world promotes giving, isn't it? It started off very sort of dramatically in 1984 when there was the Ethiopian famine. Michael Burke's television transmissions from that time, you know, stirred an enormous groundswell of compassion, as it were, from the British public about that.

[23 : 20] But it's not the way that Paul addresses the issue. I'm not saying it wouldn't have been right to do so, but he's somehow got something more important to tell them.

And he stirs them by stories. But not stories of the starving Judeans, but by being encouraged and even shamed by the giving attitude of others.

2 Corinthians 9 verse 2. I know your eagerness to help, and I've been boasting about your eagerness to help, to the Macedonians.

Do you remember all those churches up the north? 200, 300 miles away. Paul said, I went off to the Macedonians. When I was encouraging them to start giving to this cause, I said, I just want to tell you how wholeheartedly the church in Corinth has responded to this.

It's a wonderful thing. And he kind of stirs them up by the picture of what's happened in Corinth. 2 Corinthians 8, 1 and following.

[24 : 28] The Corinthians are now being stirred up by the Macedonians. He says, I really want to tell you about the Macedonians. They're a poor lot, but they're so willing to give.

Even out of their extreme poverty, they're giving as much as they're able and beyond their ability. What do you think of that? 2 Corinthians 9 verse 4.

He says, by way of a shame thing. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we not to say anything about you would be ashamed of having been so confident.

Now I think of a church because Macedonia is a long way away. And it's 1950 years ago. But maybe there's a church in Hemel Hempstead.

I'm sure there is a church in Hemel Hempstead. I don't know of a church in Hemel Hempstead. Let's call it the Hemel Hempstead Baptist Church. And they've really given generously to a cause which is also dear to our hearts.

[25 : 28] And it's like Paul is saying, I really want to commend to you that church in Hemel Hempstead. Oh, by the way, they're coming down next Sunday. They're going to see just what great givers you are.

You read that, you think it's a bit strange, isn't it? But it's the way Paul goes about it.

And it's a kind of a, it's kind of encouragement for us to be stirring one another up by the stories that we hear. There was a young girl in my first church, small church.

And we had a, we had a project and it was going to cost about 10,000 pounds. It was quite a big project, it was a long time ago. So 10,000 pounds is worth a lot more. And this young girl, she was in her early twenties.

I happened to find out that she signed off her life insurance. She cashed it all in and gave it for that particular gift.

[26 : 42] I don't know, that just sort of struck me. She didn't have to do that. It was giving sort of well beyond her income, as it were.

She was doing something pretty sacrificial at the time. But it really said something to me and I've always remembered that story subsequently. And I've needed to ask myself the question.

Well, do I give out of what, of my abundance in a way that hurts me?

That actually causes me a real dent in my life? I have to very seriously think about, you know, what I have.

Do I give in that way or do I? Well, David said, didn't he, when he was offered something for free. He said, I won't offer to the Lord something which costs me nothing.

[27 : 49] There was a cost involved. So that story of that girl, 40 years ago, has just remained with me. They're stories to be told.

Don't have to name the individuals. It's just a story to be told. And here, Paul just sort of lobs in something.

In 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9. Where he says, wow, the supreme example. If you want a real story of sacrificial giving. Think of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though he was rich, so rich, yet for our sakes he became poor.

I'm going to stow you by that story. And that's why I said earlier, Christian life is a life which is empowered and overwhelmed and continually directed by the overwhelming love of God to us in Jesus Christ.

[28 : 52] Finish the job. Formula One again today. Fantastic to run the race well, but hopeless if you don't get over that finish line.

The danger of giving up, we need to be finishers. I found out in my working life that there are some people who are great starters, but I find it very, very hard to finish a job.

Actually, it's quite a rare ability to get to the point where you just make sure the job is properly done.

I think the Corinthians were a bit in the category of great starters.

Well, that's great, you know. Count us in. We'll be right there for you. But they just never quite got round to doing it. And so Apostle Paul says here, make sure you're a finisher.

And those verses there are all about completion. Completing. What does completion look like?

[30 : 07] Well, actually, completion is not getting 6,000 pounds next Sunday. As nice as that would be. But completion is each one of us checking before the Lord that we've done what he put on our hearts to do.

Or if we didn't deal with the issue properly before, to do so now. So 2 Corinthians 8, 11 and 12 says this.

Now finish the work so that your eager willingness to do it, a few months ago, may be matched by your completion of it according to your means.

I have to say about that widow, she had a choice. Even with those two very small coins. She didn't need to go into the temple that day.

It might have been in her heart to do so, but she might never have made that journey. But she did.

Whatever God put in her heart to do, she actually did it.

[31 : 09] According to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Right throughout this whole process, we try to take pains to say to everybody, look, it's not your job to be raising 162,500. The Lord will provide, but it's your job to find out what it is that God wants you to do.

And to use the methodology and the rules and guidance given in his word about that. And if you do what God tells you to do, and you make it a serious matter before him, that is completion.

That's exactly what God is looking for. Christian giving is sowing. It's quite a long passage, isn't it?

And I have a kind of sense that at the end of 2 Corinthians 8, Paul went out and had a walk, or had a cup of tea, or might have even gone to bed, or whatever. I just think there was a kind of pause at that point in his thinking.

[32 : 27] And he came back to it with renewed vigor the next morning, as it were. And he just wants to add this point about it. Because everything that's been in 2 Corinthians 8 has got to do with this project.

But he's saying, actually, it's not just about this project. It's about the future. It's about a lifetime of abundant and growing generosity.

So 2 Corinthians 9 verse 6 says this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Christian giving is actually sowing.

You may say farewell to the gift, but you're anticipating that as you give in a Christian manner, God will give you more and more opportunity to keep on doing this.

That's the plain reading of this. Now, it may be that God will bless you in other ways, but I'm really rather convinced of this. That this particular chapter 9 is about the fact that as we learn the grace of giving, as we keep on being obedient in this area, as we keep on responding to the encouragements of God's word, that he will give us more resource, so that we can be more and more able in this area.

[33 : 53] I'm not thinking quantum, as in a sort of a crude relationship, give a pound today, you'll get two pounds from the Lord, and you give two pounds, you get four pounds.

I'm not thinking that at all. I'm just thinking about that ability to be generous on every occasion, so that rich supply can be made. How many of you have proved that to be true?

How many have proved that to be true? Some of you may be doubting that reality. Say, I can't afford to do this. You can't afford not to do it.

Because this is God's gracious methodology and encouraging the gift of giving inside his churches. Thanksgiving and praise to God.

2 Corinthians 9, 12 to 14. It's a great passage. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ.

[34 : 59] 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.

So last week, I heard from one of the trustees of the railway mission who said that Liam, the head guy, had a check.

Had a check. Had received the check. 162,500. Had received a check. What a great moment. That's a reality that has happened.

Do you know what that means? That means money to pay the wages of chaplains of the railway mission who are going about their daily work being Christ's ambassadors in the United Kingdom network.

Fantastic. We've given here blessings also from numerous friends and past acquaintances who've joined with us in this great task.

[36 : 11] And thus has freed up, not a developer to build a great block of flats somewhere else, but freed up Christian ministry, thanksgiving to God, provision to be made.

Those who couldn't be paid before being paid now. Our Christian solicitor was so impressed by this story. Not the fact of the money, but the fact that we, as Christian people, had managed to come to a very healthy Christian resolution of this.

He said, can I tell the church about this? Can I tell my church about this? Absolutely. The ripples of blessing, the ripples of encouragement, all turn to great praise to God.

That's why God loves cheerful givers. Brings praise to his name. Many will give thanks on your behalf. Christian giving is such a marvelous, generous, sacrificial, thoughtful thing that Paul is instinctively and obviously reminded of the supreme example of all of this in the God's giving of his own son for us.

2 Corinthians 9 verse 15. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. Amen.