

2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 9:6-12: The Pattern of Generosity

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Preacher: Jon Dennis

[0:00] Good morning. Children from three years old to fifth grade are now dismissed for Team Tots and Team Kids. Our scripture reading this morning is taken from the book of 2 Corinthians, chapter 8, verses 1-9, as well as 2 Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 6-12.

These can be found in the Blue Bibles for you on pages 967 and 968. Again, the scripture text is 2 Corinthians, chapter 8, 1-9, and chapter 9, 6-12, on pages 967.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. 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 has 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 free will, 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 urge Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.

[1:43] 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 is also 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.

And now chapter 9, verses 6-12. The point is this. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency and all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

As it is written, he has distributed freely. He has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

[3:02] You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but it is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Thank you, Chelsea.

Holy Trinity is mourning for Haiti with the rest of the world. For as the watching world knows, on last Tuesday, January 12th, the worst earthquake in more than 200 years crippled what was already the most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere.

Haiti holds a special place in my own heart. At a formative time for me, when I was in high school, I took a trip with about 10 others to Haiti and walked the streets there.

And our mission was to install a well. Now, the well that was in the community where we were working was called, and you'll understand in a second what this means, it was called the Bat Cave for obvious reasons.

[4:40] There were thousands of bats living in this cave, and it was the one local source of water. So the community would, on a daily basis, wash their clothes in this water.

And then walk for two or three days to get other water. What struck me the most while being there was, yes, the crippling poverty, but also the exceeding joy of the people.

I felt like I had not seen that kind of joy in my experience among the Christians until I went to church with those who we were working with in Haiti.

It's also a special place for me, holds a special place in my heart, because it's the place where I first felt the sense of God's call for me to go into ministry. I remember somebody on the bus, riding along a dusty road, bouncing along, asking me if I would ever consider full-time ministry.

And I was much cooler than he was in high school. And so I felt ashamed by his impertinent question, and so said, of course not.

[5:52] But inside, I felt God saying, ah, I have another plan for you. And that's when I first sensed my own call to ministry about 25 years ago. So we're currently working to do what we can to assist.

Last night, someone flew from Chicago. One of our doctors, who's a community group leader here, is in Fort Lauderdale. And he is waiting. His name is Ryan Carroll. And he's waiting to get into Santiago today if they will give him clearance.

But he's working on a connection. So I'd ask you to pray. If you saw me checking my phone earlier, I'm trying to get texts from him and from a couple others to see if they'll let him in.

If he's allowed in, he'll go into Santiago. And then tomorrow morning, spend a day going into Port-au-Prince. And then he'll be helping World Relief, where he's going. And my understanding is his specialty is pediatrics ICU.

So he would be very helpful in that situation. So pray for Ryan. Chicago, in one sense, owes a kind of debt to Haiti. Maybe you know why.

[7:00] But the founding father of Haiti is Haitian. I'm sorry, Chicago is Haitian. And of Haiti as well. Jean-Baptiste du Sable, the explorer and pioneer, is often called the father of Chicago.

His father was French and his mother was an ex-slave. And he moved, not too many blocks from here, actually, to the mouth of the Chicago River in the 1700s, 1770s.

Married a local Pottawatomie woman and then helped to found Chicago and Fort Dearborn. So we owe, in one sense, a strange debt back to Haiti.

Chicago does. So it's appropriate, in one sense, that our city and our people do what we can to extend grace back to the people of Haiti.

Our world, including you, have responded in many ways and will respond in a few minutes. But this disaster raises questions, including, how do Christians respond in a disaster?

[8:13] Interestingly, in this passage, by no design of mine, because this text was chosen a long time ago, we find that Paul is actually writing to answer the question of how particular Christians should respond to a natural disaster in that day.

The natural disaster of a famine. And he's writing to a church that he planted in Corinth. And he's using the church of Macedonia, which is a poor church, as an example to stimulate the generosity of the people in the church that he has planted.

And there are principles here that we had intended to study on generosity that transcend the situation, but are particularly helpful as we think about the situation that we are in now.

Paul writes to stimulate a pattern of generosity among the Corinthians to ask them to help to support the church in Judea.

And what we're going to do today is just learn a little bit from this passage about that pattern of generosity. And I'm going to put it under a few headings. One has to do with the motivations for generosity.

[9:32] That is, how does Paul motivate people to generosity? And then some principles of generosity that he lays out how to give. And then the purpose, or really the outcome of generosity.

Where is it going? So we're going to look at this motivation of generosity, some principles of how to put it into practice, and then the purpose, or the outcome, and I'm going to ask you to pray with me.

Father in heaven, we ask that you would once again amaze us with who you are and with what you have done for us.

And that you would again soften our hearts, which are prone to wander, are prone to harden. Bind them to you. And we pray for all the doctors who are there today, in Port-au-Prince, who are ministering in various ways, particularly those that we are somewhat associated with, with world relief, and ask that you would open the floodgates and allow more medical experts to come in, Lord, that you would provide more relief.

Give us wisdom from your word today. In Christ's name, amen. So first, the motivation for generosity. How does the Apostle Paul motivate? And it will be interesting to look at, because we have a way that our world tends to motivate, which is often by guilt or by need.

[11:00] It's very different from how the Apostle Paul motivates here, which is, first of all, by grace. Take a look at verse 1 of chapter 8. Keep your Bible open if you would.

He writes there, chapter 8, verse 1, We want you to know, brothers, that is, brothers and sisters, about what? About the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. That's a very important word in this passage. Not only in chapter 8, but also in chapter 9, the word grace. It's an overarching principle for the Apostle Paul.

That giving should be a response to grace and a manifestation of grace. Grace is, you could define it this way, you probably have heard the definition, unmerited favor.

Another way of thinking of it is, undeserved, unexpected kindness that is given to you. Something that is completely unexpected and completely undeserved.

[12:07] Take a look at the text again. You'll see the word grace in verse 1. I showed it to you. Verse 4. Verse 6. Verse 7. Chapter 9.

And verse 8. Grace. Grace. Grace. Grace. I'm going to illustrate it this way. Perhaps you've seen the play or even the movie based on the book by Victor Hugo, Les Miserables, written in 1862. Jean Valjean is the protagonist there. And for 20 years, Jean Valjean has been struggling with the law because of a deed that he did, which is stealing bread in a time of social oppression and social deprivation.

He was in need. And he tried to escape a number of times, which meant that he was in prison then for these 19 years. And he was given the label 24601.

So he became anonymous. No name. Just a number is who he was and what he was. And one night when he is released from prison, he goes and shares a meal with the Bishop of Dean, who is a kind man, accepts him in, and breaks bread with him, shares a meal with him, and then gives him a bed to sleep in.

[13:36] And then in the middle of the night, in the morning, Jean Valjean decides to return the gift that the Bishop has given to him by stealing the silverware, actually made of silver, and the silver platters from the Bishop.

He moves off into the nights and he is arrested. And the constables, the police, bring him back and have him face the Bishop of Dean in order to be identified.

And he has, in the movie version, he has a hood over his head that is pulled back and they ask the Bishop, the police do, is this the man? And what happens is the Bishop looks him in the eyes and says, Jean Valjean, you took the silver, but you forgot the silver candlesticks and gives him some silver candlesticks.

That is grace. It's unexpected. It's undeserved. And it's kindness given to him.

Well, for Jean Valjean, that moment changed his life. So that from that moment on, he was trying to, in a sense, repay a debt that he owed to the Bishop who actually said that he had bought his life at that moment from the devil and given it to God.

[15:08] So for the rest of his life, he is trying to help those who are less fortunate, trying to take in those who are in need. He becomes the mayor.

And his life becomes, in a way, an outpouring of righteousness because of this one deed. That's grace. And that's a life that has been changed by grace.

What the Apostle Paul is speaking of here in this passage is not two candlesticks made of silver, but the entirety of the riches of heaven, which were, at a cost to himself, given up by the Lord Jesus

Christ and then offered to share with you.

So profound in verse 9, the way the Apostle Paul appeals to the church in Corinth. Look at verse 9 of chapter 8.

He says, I say this not as a command. Think of grace as something also freely given. This is part of what is different about giving in the New Testament versus the Old Testament.

[16:19] Last week, we looked at this command to tithe. Paul here says, I don't, I'm not telling you. I'm not commanding you. He's speaking as a father. I'm not commanding you.

I say this not as a command, but verse 8, to prove by the earnestness of others that your love is genuine. For then he says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor so that you by his poverty might also become rich. that is, he was born as a naked child into a manger. He who was clothed with the robes and splendor of heaven, he who spoke the stars into being and ruled from his throne over our galaxy, over all galaxies, over the universe, who sees the rebellion of man from on high became poor that we might become rich.

Hung naked, as I mentioned last week, upon a cross. The poorest that you can be, owning absolutely nothing. Why? So that we might become rich.

That's where generosity in the New Testament is rooted. You contrast that with what we often see. If you're watching television and you're flipping channels, what do you see?

[17:46] Not just this time of year, not just because of this crisis and this tragedy, but frequently you see the distended bellies of those who are hungry.

And that is a way to appeal, but all it can appeal to is in one sense our guilt. And I'm not saying that's wrong at all. That is a way to appeal, but I'm contrasting it with the grace of God that is shown here.

One who became poor so that we might become rich. It's actually counterintuitive. There's another kind of second counterintuitive motivator in this passage.

Look at verse 2. Besides this idea of grace is this idea of joy. Look at verse 2. It says, He's speaking of this very poor church.

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. Now, I'm hoping that there are some people who are mathematicians here because this is, in one sense, a theological math problem.

[18:53] The sum that is what is given away is at the end of verse 2. It's overflowing generosity. And he, Paul argues that there are three things when they are added together for the Macedonian church result in overflowing generosity.

Look at what they are. Number one is severe affliction. He says, when this church, the Macedonian church, saw their severe affliction, number one, and added that, number two, to their overflowing joy, and number three, their extreme poverty, it resulted in this overflowing generosity.

It doesn't make any sense at all, does it? He's saying that the poorest of the poor gave beyond, really beyond the Corinthians. Part of the reason why he's writing this letter is because the church that he's planted is not a generous church.

And he's trying to stimulate this church towards generosity. It's interesting if you think about it, if you think about it in contemporary terms or you apply it to ourselves, what keeps us back from generosity?

It's not that we have too much money, really, right? It's that we have too little joy. What he says releases the generosity is their abundance of joy.

[20:18] Their overflowing joy means that they're not concerned about how much they give. In fact, they're able to give, he says a little bit later, according to their means and beyond their means as well.

See that word there in verse two, their abundance of joy. It's related to the word that says overflowed. There's this overflowing joy, joy that becomes an overflowing of generosity in their lives. So, if you want to think about what motivates us to give, it's not actually guilt, biblically speaking. We don't give out of guilt. And we don't give because it's a commandment in the New Testament.

We give because of the massive generosity of God giving his only son for us. And when we see how much he gave, then it results in joy.

So, it's different than how we normally think about how we are to give. So, that's the motivation. Let me move next to this idea of some of the principles in terms of giving, in terms of this pattern of giving.

[21:27] I want to just show you a few things in this passage on this pattern of generosity and related to these principles. Look at verse 5.

I'm going to just put it under this header. Give worshipfully. Look at verse 5. And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

In other words, especially if you're not a believer here today, this passage means for you that you're not supposed to give generously to Holy Trinity Church.

What is more important and what is fundamental, what is foundational, is the giving of yourself to God first. He says that they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us.

In other words, generosity is an outcome of worship. I surrender my entire self to God. Say, all that I am is God's.

[22:29] And money then flows additionally to that. We were training some of the leaders last week and looking at this passage looking ahead and a couple of the businessmen shared about their growth in understanding what stewardship is.

And both men, both of these two men who responded, spoke of a little book that I mentioned last week called The Treasure Principle by Randy Alcorn. and one of the business guys said that the first time that he read one of the chapters, he was a little mad actually, because it claims there that everything that you have belongs to God.

And what can be very easy when we start to think about tithing or giving 10% is thinking this 10% belongs to God and 90% belongs to me. What Alcorn points out, this is what the other businessman picked up on, he said, is that we're just God's money managers.

So that every dollar that you have in your purse or your pocket or your bank account is God's. And he's asking you to invest it. And once you begin to give yourself fully to God, that begins to make sense.

It actually sounds a little cultic here what he says next. He says, at least for modern day Chicago, and he said, he says, we gave ourselves to you as well. A component of generosity flows from giving yourself to others.

[24:02] And in our modern, individualistic, somewhat isolated urban existence, it's very hard to think about giving ourselves to one another.

But that's actually what builds the church. That's actually what makes strong churches, is saying, we're family, and I give myself to you.

So, principle of generosity is give worshipfully, in a sense, that worship flows over into community. I want to ask you to look at chapter 9, verse 6, and we're going to pick it up there, and show you a few other principles on generosity from that section.

Besides giving worshipfully, you could call it chapter 9, verse 6, give bountifully. Look at verse 6.

The point is this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound. There's that word abound again.

[25:15] He's able to make this kind of overflowing existence of grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may be able to, what?

Abound in every good work, as it is written. He is distributed freely. He has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. He says give bountifully.

Let me illustrate it this way. If you're a farmer, and none of us are, but some of us may have been, may have grown up on a farm, or may have been around farms, may have grown up in Iowa, or Ohio. When you're going to plant a field of corn, or a field of grain, you sow bountifully, you sow widely.

Imagine the farmer who says, I am going to plant one corn of stock. What does he need to do in order to plant one corn of stock? Just put one or two little seeds here, and cause that one to grow.

What Paul is saying is that is not the way you are to think about generosity. He uses the imagery of the wide scattering of seeds to base the expectation of the farmer or the Christian giver differently. [26:31] He says those who sow bountifully will also reap bountifully. And we'll see in a minute when we come to outcomes or purpose what it is that we reap.

So it's this idea of giving worshipfully. First you give yourself to God, that's the first principle, and then you give bountifully. You spread widely your gifts and your seed. And then he says give decisively and cheerfully.

Verse 7, each one must give as he has made up his mind or her mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion. What that means is this is actually the way one of our guys put it last week, is figure out with God how much to give and then give.

Right? That's giving decisively. This is something that you are to determine. It takes prayer and reflection and communion with God.

You're to give decisively. He says you are to make up your mind when you are giving. And then he says not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

[27:40] He added to it. He's actually part of it. We saw that with the Macedonian church. They were giving joyfully. God doesn't want begrudging gifts. He wants joyful gifts.

Some of you might remember when you were a child and your parents asked you to do something and then your question is, well, do I have to do this? Right?

Do I have to? And sometimes parents say, no, you get to do this. This is something that you get to do. Your parent is going after attitude.

Right? The parent wants a cheerful attitude. That's the same with the Lord. Sometimes Christians get so dour. Right? Do I have to give my money? No, you get to give your money.

That's what grace says. It's an eagerness saying, God, I get to give a little something to help the poor in Haiti. I get to give a little something to help Hope for Chicago touch the lives of the homeless.

[28:41] I get to give a little something to see churches planted throughout the city of Chicago. I get to give. It's not, do I have to? There's a cheerfulness to generosity in the New Testament.

There's a worshipfulness, there's a bounty to it, it's decisive, and it's cheerful. So the motivation is this grace and joy, and then it results in these kinds of principles.

Saying, God, I give myself to you, I give myself to my brothers and sisters who are around me, and I'm going to do it decisively, Lord, so talk to me.

Confirm with me what I am to give. And to do it cheerfully. Third question. Third question is why? Why does God want us to be generous? That is, why does He want it to flow from grace? Why does He want it to be bountiful and cheerful? What are the outcomes of the intended results?

[29:43] Take a look at verse 8, and this is very interesting because it focuses on the very same word, abound. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that is, He is able to pour out His goodness on you.

Why? So that having all contentment in all things at all times, that is, when you know that God's the one who has given you what you have, and you know it's from Him, then contentment comes.

There's a sense of peace, because it's His. Everything is His. There's this kind of contentment in all things at all times, He says, you may abound in every good work.

What God wants is this, if you think of the harvest again, think of the harvest as a harvest of righteousness, that the grain is the grain of good deeds being lived out in the world today.

That's the idea. This is the opposite of, I wrote in my notes, this is the opposite of the kick-the-dog syndrome, right? You know what the kick-the-dog syndrome is?

[30:52] It's where your boss chews you out at work because he had a bad day or she had a bad day and so they rip you apart and you can't respond to your boss the way you want to, so when you get home, you kick the dog, right?

Anger is transmitted to you and then anger is transmitted from you. This is the opposite. Grace and goodness is poured out upon you and so grace and goodness is poured out from you.

Does that make sense? I guess that's the pat-the-dog or the feed-the-dog syndrome. I'm not sure exactly what it is, but it's the opposite of the other one. Look at this. I want you to see here in verse 9 and ask yourself, who's the he in verse 9?

It says, and God is able to make all of his grace abound to you, that is, he can pour out undeserved kindness, unexpected kindness on you, especially if you understand that all things are from him, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Then he says, as it is written, he has distributed freely, he has given to the poor, his righteousness endures forever. Who's the he there?

[32:13] Of course, if you're in Sunday school class, you say, well, you know, it sounds like a squirrel, I know, but I'll just say Jesus, right? It's not actually Jesus in this context.

I want you to turn back to Psalm 112, if you would, with me, to the left, and I'll tell you what page it's on in just a moment. It's on page 509, 509.

The Apostle Paul, in order to boast his argument that grace poured out on you results in the multiplication of righteousness and gifts towards others, quotes Psalm 112.

So if you're at page 509, now you can look at Psalm 112. Verse 9 is where he quotes from, but verse 1 sets the context of the passage, and here's what it says.

Praise the Lord. Blessed is the man, or the woman, who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commands. The context Paul is quoting from, when he says he is somebody who fears the Lord, somebody who loves God's word.

[33:28] And then listen to what he says about this person. His offspring will be mighty in the land, the one who fears the Lord. The generation of the upright will be blessed. And then surprisingly, verse 3.

Look at verse 3. Wealth and riches are in his house. He's been blessed, in this case, financially. A lot of times we think, especially from the New Testament perspective, that wealth is always bad or always wrong.

Here, no, no, no, a man who fears the Lord is blessed with wealth. And then what does it say? His righteousness endures forever. That's going to pick up in verse 9.

Light dawns in the darkness for the upright. He's gracious and merciful and righteous. It's well with the man who deals generously and lends, and he conducts his affairs with justice.

And then, verse 8, I love this verse, and claim it often. His heart is steady. He will not be afraid. He looks with triumph on his adversaries.

[34:30] And then verse 9, he has distributed freely. This is what Paul quotes. And he is given to the poor, and his righteousness endures forever. who has distributed freely back to 2nd Corinthians?

The one who fears the Lord, who has been blessed with wealth in his house. You could just insert Americans there, okay? You might think, well, I'm not a wealthy person, but then, comparatively speaking, with the rest of the world, we are, right?

In the top 2% of the entire world. what he says is that the righteousness of those who have been blessed materially, who then distribute freely, verse 9, chapter 9 of 2nd Corinthians, he is given to the poor, and his righteousness endures forever.

There's a eternity to those good deeds that are done on behalf of those who are in need.

So remember, the Apostle Paul is now trying to stimulate this church to generosity, and he holds up this other church, the Macedonian church, and says, look at their lives. They give, they're extremely afflicted, they're very poor, but they're abounding in joy, and it overflows with this kind of generosity.

[35:53] So you, I want you to be the same as them. Worship the Lord, give yourself completely to God, then give bountifully, but not out of duty. Do it cheerfully, deciding in your own mind how much to give.

Those are the principles that he lays out. And then he says, here's the result. The whole overall aim is that righteousness would take root in the world so that the rest of the world can see, so that kindnesses are done to others, so that this word here in the Hebrew is tzaddik.

It's a word that has to do with deeds of kindness that reflect who God is. That's his overall aim. His aim in seeing us be generous is that lives could be helped and healed and touched in another place.

For the Corinthian church, it's the Christian, it's the Christians in Judea who are being affected by the famine. There's a cycle here.

So what, and it's illustrated well in Jean Valjean's life, he's shown grace, an abounding grace, and it results in grace in his own life so that he then pours out grace towards other people.

[37:11] He helps save lives, he becomes a Mary, shows kindness to a forsaken woman, and his life is changed. I remember how powerfully that struck me when I saw for the first time Les Miserables at the auditorium theater and saw the profound effect that two candlesticks could have, yes in fiction, but two candlesticks could have on one man's life.

So it was totally changed. And as I was watching it, it was a time when we were thinking about should we establish hope for Chicago, a ministry to the poor, and I felt like God was saying, absolutely.

Do you know how much grace I've poured out on you? Allow the grace of God to multiply like wheat or corn into a field of righteousness in the city of Chicago.

Verse 11, he says, you would be enriched in every way for your generosity, which will then, here's another outcome, will produce thanksgiving to God. That's actually the overall goal, is to produce a thankful people, to show that God is the one who deserves the praise.

Verse 12, for the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. That's what giving does, especially when it's attached to praise.

[38:37] Verse 15 says, they will glorify God and says, thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. So I began by saying that Chicago owes a debt, but our debt is not really to Jean-Baptiste du Sable.

It's not to Haiti. Our debt that we owe is to the Son of God, to our Father who has poured out his son's life on our behalf.

It's not to Haiti, but it is to heaven. And when the Apostle Paul wants to speak to a church about generosity, he doesn't use some kind of arm-twisting guilt to say give.

He says, look at God and what he has done for you. And then freely give. And says that God will actually supply more seed to the sower so that more deeds can be done and more righteousness can grow in the city.

He presented us, God presented us, not with two silver candlesticks, but with the death and resurrection of his son, the majestic presence of being in the presence of God for evermore, for eternity.

[40:00] It's when we actually grasp God's grace that we're motivated to give ourselves to God, to others, in this way, bountifully and cheerfully and worshipfully.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father in heaven, we give you thanks for your son, and we thank you that because Jesus came and after he came, that your way of dealing with your people was completely different, that it was completely based on an awe for your goodness and your righteousness.

righteousness. Thank you for your son, who even though he was rich, became poor, so that we who are poor might also become rich.

I thank you for this church, Lord, because I have seen their generosity in the way that you have poured out your grace through them and from them, and I pray that that would continue.

And I pray that you would use the gifts that are taken today, and that you'd use them to touch lives in Haiti, and that you would steward our resources, Lord, so that there would be not just an abundance of grace, but an abundance of good deeds.

[41:18] And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.