

# Joyous Giving

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     What a great message we have this morning in our series on giving stewardship and generous giving. I went to a comedy night last night at the Curzon Cinema.
- There was enough there to make even the most forward vicar blush, so I won't share some of those with you. However, I will share. The church treasurer stood up to address an ecumenical meeting.
- He said, in this church we welcome all denominations. He paused, held up a wad of notes and said, of course we prefer denominations of tens, twenties and fifties, please.
- It's a misprint in the church magazine, the Lord loves a cheerful fiver. There was this Baptist minister and he had done his 45-minute preach, which was obligatory.
- And on this giving Sunday, and he was moved at the giving as it came forward. But a young boy who came forward with 20 pound coins.
- [ 1 : 1 2 ]     And as he came up to the front, he whispered to the preacher at the front, the minister. And he said, I just want you to tell you that I've been saving my pocket money for this giving Sunday.
- And I get a pound a week. And here's 20 pounds. The minister was so moved. He got the microphone and thought, this is going to be an amazing testimony.
- And he said, so he put the microphone down and he said, would you like to tell the church? He said, yes, I've just got 20 pounds. He said, why did you do that? He said, well, Sunday after Sunday, my dad comes home at lunch.
- He puts his head in his hands and prays, Lord, that's the poorest minister we've had for years. As we look at this, it's going to be short.
- As we gather this morning, we just take a look to think what it means about to be a joyous giver. What does that actually mean for us to bring joy back into that ability to be able to give and to share, which is what we've heard in our reading today.
- [ 2 : 1 8 ]     And there are three main areas that speaks about God's goodness, his provision. And so we should give that back. That should be part of our heart. Giving echoes what our hearts are trusting in.
- And I think that's so true as we look at these three truths. The truth, it gave them joy to give. Secondly, that self-sacrifice, that surrender to God and his purposes, and that overwhelming outpouring of God's grace, responding to that enormity to actually give back for all that we have received and will receive from God.
- This is the meaning. Mother Teresa, who lived amongst the world's poorest in deprivation, spoke a lot. This is the meaning of true love, she said, to give until it hurts.
- And she continued saying, joy is prayer, joy is strength, joy is love. Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls.
- People catch it when we have that joy of giving and sharing. People see that because it is so counter-cultural to our communities.

- [ 3 : 35 ] People are looking behind that thing and saying, what's the catch? What's the catch behind you giving me this? I've got to give you. No, this is, I am just giving because we love.
- And that is what the Lord has told us to do. And it gives us joy to do it. And they will see it. They will see whether it's begrudgingly given or not. They will spot it a mile off.
- Here's a blessing. They will see it. Out of God's love. And joy giving out of compassion does not come from storing up possessions for ourself, as we've heard from those early churches.
- But actually storing up what we have in Christ. The perspective of abundance is what Christ has done for us and gives us that joy because we mirror that in what he has done sacrificially.
- Joy in knowing Jesus' love and grace freely given. It overflows. And that picture of filling a glass until it overflows, until it spills and it keeps going, that grace that it rolls out.
- [ 4 : 46 ] You can't stop it and you don't want to. Out of God's love for others. Paul is writing to the Corinthian church in this chapter and telling them about the church in Macedonia. We learn from Paul's first letter that he was organizing a collection.
- Why was he organizing a collection? Because sadly the Corinthian church had slipped. The Macedonian church had got it. They were a poor people. This collection he was talking about because the Macedonian church, their heart perspective, really, although they had very little, they knew what it was.
- They knew what their need of God was and had joy in it in order of sharing because they had so little. And this makes sense. It was a grace given to them by God, something that God had enabled in them.
- That mindset, that character, that culture that imbibes a church that actually can't help stop giving with joy. And this makes sense since they're overflowing plus extreme poverty equaled giving.
- That may seem strange. It's not an equation that adds up. But I sense the Macedonian church had had one thing. Maybe they had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. Maybe they had experienced that joy that comes from that sense of the fruit of the Spirit that enables them in joy to be able to do that.
- [ 6 : 12 ] Maybe they had experienced that. And maybe we have sensed that maybe in the past. You know, the team that have just returned from Uganda, I'm sure they will be telling stories and telling us, as we've heard before, of people who have material so very little, but yet they abound with joy and share what they have.
- I mean, it breaks me when I hear the testimonies coming back of I hear stories of that they'd stored up food to feed some Westerner at the detriment to themselves because they wanted to practice hospitality and love.
- You know, it breaks me. What joy and the joy in giving. It's not given with resentment. It is given with love. If I can see the team nodding, speak to them.
- You know, we want to hear more stories of that. A joy, this is a joy that came from their heart attitude. A joy that made them beg almost to be part of the privilege.
- We want to do this for the Corinthian church. We want to show them. We want to give so that they can have and see what we have. Isn't that our heartfelt desire?
- [ 7 : 26 ] That we say and we come and we worship together. We want people to have what we have, what we have experienced. And that comes from our heart. Paul continues by recalling their allegiance.
- Their calling was to God before it was to Paul. It's not that Paul's asking. I can stand, I can come down here, I can beg. I can probably sort of put the plate around several.

That's not a response. Yes, our response is to God. And the Macedonian church got that. And the Corinthians had.

But somehow it had slipped. In Jesus, we are rich. It's not in any other way.

In Jesus, we are rich because of what he gave. That second thing, not only the truth, but in sacrifice. The fact that he gave it all, that we can have everything, is the greatest gift.

[ 8 : 24 ] There is great joy in that that enables us to continue what we hear and why we're talking about this. Because you can't out-give God. I don't know whether you've experienced that in your own life.

I've experienced it time and time and time again. Once I'd had an experience of the Holy Spirit. Before then, I will totally put my hands up and say I was not a joyous giver.

I was not a joyous giver. I had to move considerably and shift from a position of self-seeking to a place of wanting to give of self and all I can.

I look back at my own life and I totally, I totally, totally didn't get that for a long time. This is the perspective and the heart attitude of the Macedonian church.

And as Paul tells us this morning, I begin to catch it. A people who didn't mind. They had so little, but they would give it away. And because of that, they knew that love of God.

[ 9 : 34 ] Encouragement to put the love that they had into action. I don't know whether, as my grandmother had this great thing, a song. Was it Count Your Blessings? She used to sing.

And she'd sing it around the house while she was doing her cleaning. With, what were those aprons they used to wear? Those, was that a house coat? I never remember my gran without a house coat.

And wandering around the house with a woodbine hanging out the corner of her mouth. Singing, Count Your Blessings. And she was a happy little soul in what she had.

And she had so few. So what was it with the Corinthian church? Why didn't they get that joy? Well, they had slipped. And as you look at the Corinthian church, they had slipped from a place of joyous giving, of walking closely with the Lord, of moving in the power of the Holy Spirit, to a group of people that had moved towards a bit of legalism.

They had started quarrelling. They had started arguing. There was promiscuity that was coming up amongst them. Suddenly, they had just taken their eyes off of the goal, of their purpose, of what they had been called to do.

[ 10 : 55 ] I was chatting with a personal trainer at a gym that I don't go to. Get me wrong. And she said, It's February.

And February is the month where everything drops off. We had the good intentions. We all wanted to build up our pecs. We all wanted a six-pack in January.

But sadly, February came. And the motivation waned. I think that's what we're seeing in the Corinthian church here. I think they started out really well.

But suddenly, they just lost their way. And I think that was the thing about the Macedonian church. Paul knew that they were walking closely with the Lord. They knew they were walking closely. And that kept them close.

And it kept them focused. The Corinthian church had wandered. And of course, we know when we wander, we wander. And we wander off.

[ 11 : 53 ] The energy, the enthusiasm, the vision fades. It's part of the human condition. And I've seen churches that have flourished, flourished well in walking with the Lord.

And then that thing called complacency sets in. We've plateaued. We've done well. We're okay. Let's sit back and enjoy.

No. We enjoy because of that joy. And we want more. And we ask for more of that in order to share and reach out. You see, the fire fades and the joy goes.

Paul wants the Corinthian church to be fit and healthy again. To catch the fire. You know, that's what I love about the early salvationists, wasn't it? You know, catch the fire.

Get it. Stay alive. Stay there. Be there. And yet the Corinthian church just... And there was that thing about comparison. I don't know what you like with comparison.

[ 12 : 55 ] Maybe the Corinthian church was saying, Oh, don't tell us about the Macedonians. You know, we know them. They do so well. You know, we've all been to those settings.

But Paul is just saying, And love and grace. You know, I'm not holding you up in comparison. But I'm saying, You know, they are here. They've got that joy. Please, Lord, find that joy again for yourselves.

Where did that go? Examine your hearts. Paul is encouraging them to reignite that heart attitude that made them so eager to give before and to share and be everything that was there.

The Macedonian church certainly give a lot, but they gave in response to God's grace. And that's what's mattered. Giving is at the heart of anything that we do.

It's all about the joy. And once you get that, then it makes sense. Once you get that joy, then the giving makes sense. Because it's not giving because somebody's put your hand up your back.

[ 13 : 57 ] It's like the people of Exodus, you know, out with manna. You know, I'll give you enough for today. You don't have to store up the rest because it'll all go off. But I'll give you what you need for today.

And it's trusting in that. It's trusting in that thing. I will give you what you need for today. And don't worry about tomorrow because that's the blessing.

And I bet there was people in that early church, well, in the desert of people. Yeah, I've got enough. Would you like a little bit to share? Because I've had enough. Would you like a little bit more? That's fine.

That's what we're called today out of God's grace. God gives to us, to his church, his people, so that it can overflow out. It always gives me a cold shiver when I see a thermometer outside of a church.

I don't know what it is. It is, we are raising money for our roof, so we want your money. I don't know whether any of you have tried that.

[ 14 : 54 ] Maybe put one outside of your house and say, would you come and pay my mortgage? You know? I think I'm going to go all over Clevedon now and say, that was a good idea.

But that sense of, you know, this was a project that God gave us, this building. We decided early that there would be no thermometers placed outside of our church, because God had called us to do this.

And it was out of people's grace. It was out of people's giving. It was out of sacrifice. It was out of sacrifice from years gone by of people that had given and stored up and blessed the church, that we're able to outflow into the community.

And this is not about keeping a building together. This sense of what we are asking and what we are saying as a church, is we are seeing it flow out. They say water doesn't run up a hill.

I'll tell you what, grace and love flows up a hill as well as it flows down a hill, because God's grace does that. So we want to bless people, not just at the top of the hill. We want to bless people at the bottom of the hill.

[ 16 : 02 ] We want to bless people in every part. We want it to flow out into Uganda. We want it to flow out wherever God's grace goes, because we are joyful givers and share.

It flows out. The possibility of what the Corinthian church could be, you see, Paul sees the potential. Paul sees the potential. That's why he doesn't give up.

That's his tenacity. He says, look, don't give up. Do it. And I think maybe through our reading this morning, I'm really encouraged by that message to us.

Don't get complacent. We won't. We promise you, Lord. But what you will is fill us with your joy to know that when we do give and when we share, it's done with a God attitude and God's heart of giving.

A love that overflows into joyful giving. It just doesn't. It just doesn't.