

The freedom of generosity

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[0 : 00] Hi everyone, I'm Linda, if you haven't met me, I'm reading from 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9 today.

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches in Macedonia. 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.

For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour 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.

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.

[1 : 13] I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is 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 in this matter I give my judgment. This benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work, but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that by your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened by that as a matter of fairness, your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

As it is written, whoever gathered much has nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.

For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he is going to you of his own accord. With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.

[2 : 47] And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our goodwill.

We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honourable, not only in the Lord's sight, but also in the sight of man.

And with them we are sending our brother, whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.

As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year.

[3 : 57] And your zeal has stirred up most of them, but I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be.

Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated to say nothing of you for being so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

The point is this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, 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 in all things and 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.

[5 : 18] You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.

Thanks be to God for this inexpressible gift. God bless you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Good morning. My name is Bo.

I'm one of the elders in the church. For those of you who don't know me, I would like to welcome David and Alison back, joining us today.

Also, Diane Davis and Jason Kimberly. Glad to see them as well. They've been, Diane and Jeff have not been well and been at home.

[6 : 30] Good to see Diane and Jason here today. And welcome also to all the other visitors. Thank you.

This world is not stable. Things don't always work as we expect it to be. And so how should we live then?

What should be our priority or what should we focus on in life? And that is the purpose of these four sermons in terms of our attitudes towards wealth and money because that is the main focus for most of us.

So for week one, Dave has talked about what we should treasure the most. Last week, he talked about the best thing that we are looking for may not be what is best for us.

If we focus on money. Today, I would like to talk about freedom in terms of how the Lord has freed us to be generous in particular.

[8 : 13] Thanks to Linda for reading the two chapters. It's quite a long reading this morning. But it tells us a pause emphasis on this matter for the Corinthian church.

So the story is that the Corinthian church, they started a project to collect money for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. This is about a year ago.

I think the Jewish Christians, they were suffering most likely because of their conversion to being Christians. And so they might have lost their jobs.

And there may be a famine there as well. And so the Corinthian Christians, being new Christians, they were very keen. They want to help. And so they started their project. But this is about a year later.

What has happened is that their project or what they wanted to do actually stir up other churches nearby to do the same. And they have collected the money and they were ready to be taken to Jerusalem.

[9 : 22] But the Corinthian church is still lacking behind. They still haven't completed their collection. And that's why Paul is writing this message.

Let us pray first before we go on. Almighty God, we are so thankful that you are the God who teaches good things and great things.

To help us to live a life that is according to what you created us to be. And also worthy of your calling. May you teach us your ways this morning.

As we consider your words. Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So I think the main words for me in these two chapters is chapter 9, verse 7, the second half of it.

It says that God loves a cheerful giver. A cheerful giver means that someone who has got the freedom of generosity. Someone who is keen to give. Someone who is keen to give.

[10 : 24] Not because it is under compulsion. But it is just one who wants to share. I think most of us are not cheerful givers.

I don't think I am. At least not most of the time. Why is it so I am thinking? Because money is so important to us. I grew up in quite a poor family.

So from young I have been hearing my parents worry about not having enough money for food or clothing. And so I straight away knew that money was very important for everyone.

And then when I was young, ice cream was introduced to the town for the first time. And I heard a lot about ice cream. But I just didn't have money.

I didn't have any money at all to buy. I mean, even usual day-to-day items. Not to mention things that we could enjoy. And so, again, it reinforced to me that I need money to enjoy, to have a good time.

[11 : 37] And then when I went to school, in primary school, there was a student in the class. She was very poor. I think from the background, she wore very old clothes, school uniform.

And she just appeared very, I mean, just a poor person. And she was made fun of by other students, including myself. I mean, we just did not respect anyone who's got no money.

And again, reinforced to me that I need money to be someone, to be respected by people. And so, money for us, I think, primarily for survival, for enjoyment, for identity, who we are.

And that's why we are reluctant to give for nothing. I mean, we might give money for recognition. And that is, that will happen.

And in Malaysia, the churches that publish the names of the people who give money are very rich. Because if your names are published, week by week, who gives how much.

[12 : 54] I think initially that's done for accountability. But eventually, people just take it as that who is given more and who is given less.

And so, those churches usually are quite rich because people have compulsion to give because of the recognition matter. And so, it's hard for us to give without any return for our own enjoyment or survival or recognition.

Even the Corinthian church, we can see that in chapter 8, verse 7, Paul says that they were excellent.

They excel in many areas of Christian life, such as faith, speech, and knowledge. But they are lacking in generosity. And so, it's possible for us to be very good and mature in different areas of Christian life, but still not being cheerful givers.

And we will consider why this will happen. And so, today, we'll cover, first of all, why the Corinthian church is not generous in giving.

[14 : 16] And then, we will look at the Macedonian churches. Why they are generous. And then, we will look at the effects of generosity, how that will affect the churches.

And lastly, then we will consider what can we do. How can we be generous? What is God doing about that? Just how I said, God loves a cheerful giver.

And this is the good news. Because whenever the Bible says God loves something, it's not that God is choosing something that's lovely, then he will love.

But it's that God is going to change things into what is lovely. And so, when it says that, the Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver, means that God will make us or make people or his people into cheerful givers.

And that's why Paul is writing these two chapters to the Corinthian churches. And that's what he's doing. Now, let's consider the Corinthian churches.

[15 : 27] If we can pull up the map first. This is, now, this part I'm saying is not strictly from the Bible, but this is from the history for us to know the background of the Corinthian church.

So, you can see on the map, the Corinthian, the location of it is at a very important spot, if you can make out of it.

So, it is a very narrow strip of land that connects the south to the north. And then there's the sea that is on both sides of the city.

So, the ship from the east will stop there, and then ship from the west, and then ship from the east will stop at the other port.

And that's very important for trade. About 150 years before this letter was written, the city was actually destroyed by the Roman army, because they rebelled against the Roman Empire.

[16 : 36] So, the whole city was gone, and all the inhabitants were taken as slaves. But about 50 years ago, after 100 years, the Roman Empire knew that that is a very important spot.

And so, they rebuilt the place in Corinth. So, first of all, this Corinthian city is quite a new city. Who would move to that city, you can imagine?

It's people who are adventurous, people who like to make money, people who are intelligent, have skills to do things.

And so, this Corinthian city is full of people who are very clever in making money.

They start, most of them start from zero. They've got nothing to start with. And then they became rich as they trade. As they trade. So, you can imagine part of the reason for them not to be generous is that I work hard for this money.

[17 : 54] Secondly, because the people in the city are quite busy making money, so, religion to them is only a side thing.

And so, whether you're Christian or not, it didn't really matter. It doesn't matter for the other people. I mean, so there's not much of a persecution. If you want to be Christian, fine, but so long as don't hinder me from making money, I mean, nobody would persecute you.

And so, the Christians in the city have relatively free in terms of being Christians and worshipping God. And so, the Christians in the city, they did not experience much persecution or poverty.

So, when we don't experience poverty or persecution, it's hard for us to imagine people who are experiencing it. So, that's part of the reason.

The third reason I can think of is that these people, they're very good at making money, but usually they don't have much cash in hand. Why? Because their money, they invest.

[19 : 09] And so, they may say, oh, I will give, maybe, wait until my fixed-term deposit matures, then I will give. I mean, isn't that the idea? We would, if for people who like to make money, they will invest, and it's very hard for them to take away part of money.

So, this is the reason we can think of why the Corinthian church is lagging behind. Now, we come back to the Macedonian churches.

The Macedonian churches are those quite not far north to the Corinthian city. They are the Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, those places as mentioned in Acts.

Those are long-established cities. And so, they have their own tradition. So, I suppose most of the Christians are not very rich, or not rich at all.

So, the rich people in those cities, long-established cities, are the land owners, usually. And it's usually hard for rich people to become Christians.

[20 : 22] That's a lot in Chelsea. And so, the church will be full of more lower class in terms of social status people. So, and the church also will be persecuted as well, because in a long established, in a city, there will be long-established tradition.

If you depart from that, then it's more likely for you to be persecuted as Christians. And so, we know that from chapter 8, verse 2, that these people were in severe affliction, as Paul said.

And they were in also severe poverty as well. But the surprising thing is that they were, in verse 4, they were begging, not to receive money, but to give money.

And that is the most unnatural thing, unusual thing that's happened. I don't know whether we can ever understand what severe poverty means.

It's very hard. If we have never been there, it's very hard to appreciate that. I couldn't, until a few years ago, when we went to the Philippines, to help out those churches.

[21 : 48] In one of the conversations, the women there were talking to Lei about the shopping habits. And when they found that Lei said that she shopped once a week, they were all very surprised.

Why were they surprised? Because they never have the money to shop for a whole week. If they have the money to shop for one day for their needs, they will be very happy. And they were rich, compared to many other people.

Because they're so poor, they basically share their resources. Because if you don't have plenty of food, you go to somebody else's house to eat. Hopefully you can get some food. And there's one young pastor with five children, young children.

So we said it would be easier if he got a fridge. I mean, most of the people didn't have a fridge, because they buy food every day, so they didn't have a fridge. So we bought them a fridge.

A year later, when we went back, we found that the fridge was used as a cupboard. It wasn't a non-recented one. We then asked why. He said we didn't have money to pay for electricity.

[23 : 03] So, well, I suppose he could have sold the fridge. But I suppose he didn't. He felt embarrassed if he sold it.

So that is the poverty that we were talking about. Unless we experience it, it's hard to imagine. And that's partly why the Messianic churches were so keen to help the poor Christians.

Because they themselves experience persecution and poverty. And they have sympathy, empathy towards that. But the main reason, I think, is in 8.5, when Paul said that they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by God's will they also gave themselves to Paul and the other co-workers.

Because they were willing to give themselves to the Lord, and so they were doing the Lord's work. They were not living for themselves.

That means they are no longer their own masters. They have a new master. When we try to experience these words, I think the Lord's call in Matthew 11, 28-29, which is familiar to us, the Lord said, Come to me, all who labor and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[24 : 45] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. You see, before the Macedonians came to the Lord Jesus Christ, they were busy making money for their livelihood.

Maybe for their enjoyment, for their identity, but they didn't have rest in their hearts, because things are all uncertain.

But when they heard the Lord's call, they came to Him. So they came to Him not only just to find rest, but they also listened to the verse 29, Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.

And they went further. They learned from the Lord Jesus Christ, and take the yoke upon themselves. Because what they learned, they learned that the Lord, though He was rich, though for their sake, He became poor, and so that they themselves will become rich, spiritually rich.

And so they learned from the Lord, that if the Lord can do that for them, they can also do that for other Christians. The Corinthian people, they came to the Lord, I think they heard the same call as well.

[26 : 19] But maybe they have not taken up the yoke upon them, the Lord's yoke. They're still being burdened by the things of the world.

They still have many worries about what they eat, what they drink, what they wear the next day. And that's why in the Corinthian church, we can see there's quite a lot of conflicts and rivalries, as we read from Paul's letter to them.

The Macedonian people are simpler, they are not sophisticated. And the Lord said that, they did that, and they found the Lord sufficient for all their desire, all their needs.

And so they are restful. They no longer need to struggle. If we just trust in money, we will struggle, because we don't actually know whether we've got enough, and we may not have enough.

But when they learn to trust in the Lord, they have rest, and they don't struggle anymore. And their generosity also have other effects.

[27 : 33] First of all, in chapter 8, verses 13 to 15, Paul said that when you are helping another church in one time, next time, the other church may come back to help you when it's needed.

In actual fact, it may not be your church. It might be other churches that they help, and it will become, it will build up, it will build up the community of the churches. There's a saying saying that, there's a saying, it is scarcity, it is scarcity, scarcity, it is scarcity that builds society.

It means that if everybody has got enough for themselves, they don't interact with one another, and so people will become quite isolated. But if there is a need, that need to be fulfilled, then people will start to interact, and that builds up the community.

And that's what we could see in the Philippines. People, they were very, I mean, a lot more closer to one another because they rely on one another for their own survival.

And what the Mediterranean churches are doing is to help the other churches and get to know them and pray for them.

[28 : 59] And then that becomes, it will come back, to them as well. Eventually, other people would appreciate what they do and might come back to help them as well.

And that's why chapter 9, verse 6, that says that whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Thanks, Alex, for mentioning that. And we would know that, I mean, the Corinthian people would know straight away about this concept.

If you invest a lot of money, obviously, you would get more return. But they also know that it may not necessarily be, you may lose all your investment.

And that is about money. But what Paul is talking about is not money that we are investing. It's investing something behind the money, behind the giving.

[29 : 57] that is, we can say, love. If you give, it shows that you love and you care.

And it will come back to you. Love means sacrifice. Without sacrifice, it's not love.

We've learned this from the Lord himself, because he loves his sacrifice. and if the church is willing to sacrifice, they will be more mature in love, in their joy, in their faith, and so that is the bountiful return to them.

And thirdly, the effect will be God will be glorified. So what will we do as a church, the final, the most important aim will be glory to God.

And that is mentioned in verse 13 of chapter 9, that not only the receiving church, but all the other churches that observe what is happening will glorify God.

[31 : 10] And when God is glorified, then people will become mature in him, and there will be joy among the people. So how can we be like this?

First of all, we need to know what Paul is talking about. He's not talking about asking us to give more than what we can afford. He's quite specific in chapter 8, verse 12.

He says that if there is readiness, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

Paul is not even asking the Corinthian churches to give like the Mishnah churches. He just asked them to give according to what they can afford, what they have.

So there's one thing. Secondly, we can see that the giving is a target, a worthy target. It's not simply give to anyhow, but they were giving to help out the Jewish Christians who were in trouble.

[32 : 18] And thirdly, the giving was managed by trustworthy persons, as Paul has mentioned. It's not simply given and not knowing how it is managed.

So it's all done properly. With that in mind, how do we become cheerful givers? saying, it will come back to verse 9 of chapter 8 when it said that, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet he for your sake became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

when God wants to change us, that usually happens in two ways. One is by grace or the power that is behind the grace.

Two is by example. So the Lord Jesus Christ gives us both the grace and the example. The grace is what changes us from inside.

what makes us different in our world view, in our desire for things. And the example is what tells us what to do and how to do.

[33 : 55] And so in chapter 8 verse 1 he says it's by the grace of God that these messaged churches are doing the giving like that. So the same grace is given to the Corinthian church and to us as well.

And we need to know that God has already done that and changing our disposition. That is what we are looking for in life in Christ.

But we need to take hold of that and follow his examples. If he is willing to give up his richness and become poor, can we do the same?

And what does that mean for Christ to become poor? We know that Christ is the source of life and the giver of life.

And when he became poor, he gave up his life. we know that Christ enjoyed the fellowship with the Father from eternity.

[35 : 05] But when he became poor, he went to the cross and said, my God, my God, why should you forsake me? And we know that Christ was full of glory, the same as God, from eternity.

But when he became poor, he let go of his glory and became a man. And what Christ has done is to help us to see that we should or we can be like him, having the joy of sacrificial love to others who have more needs than us, and that we can work as a church to, just like the Methodist churches to work together and have some purpose in helping those others who are in ministry and to bring glory to God at the end.

Galatians 5 once says that it is for freedom that Christ has set us free, stemmed from therefore, do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

If we do not submit to the yoke of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will continue to submit to the yoke of slavery in this world. Let us pray.

Father, we thank you for the freedom that you have given us in Christ Jesus. We ask that you may help us to lift up this freedom and also help us to have this care towards others who suffer.

[37 : 11] Thank you, Lord. May you make our life worthy of your calling and bring glory to your own name. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.