

THANKSGIVING (MORNING) - Thanks Be to God for His Indescribable Gift

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[0 : 00] Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have said that your word is living and active, that it's sharper than any sword penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

You've also said that it's able to judge the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. So I pray today that you'd enable me to speak from your word faithfully and that you would cause your word to do what you've promised at will.

And we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ and for his glory. Amen. Friends, I want to begin today by telling you a story. The story is of a blind boy.

He is sitting in the midst of this ordinary road with lots of people on it, but he's sitting to the side on the pavement. He's placed a hat just by his feet.

There's a sign on it and it reads like this. I am blind. Please help. Many people are walking by and there's only a few who are contributing to the hat, only a few coins in it.

[1 : 04] Then another man walks by and he takes a few coins out of his pocket and he drops them into the hat, but then he does something else. Then he picks up the sign and he takes out a pen and he turns over the sign and he writes a few words.

Then he puts it back so that everyone can see not the old words, but the new words. And then he walks off. Now, before long, the hat begins to fill up far more rapidly than it had in the past and many more people contribute.

And before long, it's got lots of money in it. Anyway, later on in the day, the man who changed the sign comes back to see just how things are going. Now, remember, the boy is blind, but he has very finely tuned hearing as a result.

And he recognizes the footsteps of this man. And so he begins to question him. He says, were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?

The man explains, he says to the boy, look, I only wrote the truth. I said what you said. I just said it in a different way. I simply wrote, today is a beautiful day, but I cannot see it.

[2 : 20] Friends, both signs told the people that this boy was blind. But the first sign simply said, that's it. But what the second sign did, told people that they were so fortunate not to be this boy.

Because this boy could not see. And so it engaged them, didn't it? It was far more effective in just engaging them and getting them to be generous. It made them identify with the blind boy.

It made them want to help. Now, I want you to notice this and hear this. We're going to come back to that story later on. You see, I think, though, our attitude as Christians to our money and to giving money is often wrong.

Now, I need to tell you, it's only about once a year I preach on money. I do so without embarrassment. And this is the Sunday I do it because I'm urging you to give money towards something else, not me.

See, I get paid by you folk or some of you, whatever. And so, you know, but I have no embarrassment about speaking about money because the Bible does openly and freely.

[3 : 24] And so once a year, generally at Thanksgiving Sunday, I do that. But I think, as I said, that our attitude as Christians to our money and our giving is often quite wrong. We often see the need and we hear someone asking for money, but we don't reflect at all on our own situation, our own circumstance.

We don't think who we are and where we came from. And so we don't respond rightly. Well, today, I want to help us think rightly. I want us to respond rightly and to help to do this.

I want us to look at this passage that was just read to us a bit earlier on. You might have your Bibles open to Corinthians chapter nine. And perhaps somewhere there's a page number or someone can yell one out for me when they find it.

Sorry. One one six two. If you're after a page number. Now, for us to understand this passage today, we need to know some background to it. First item of background is this, that Paul's ministry was a ministry primarily, though he was a Jew himself, primarily to Gentiles.

At his conversion, Paul had been appointed a messenger to the Gentiles. He therefore spent much of his ministry life outside of Israel and away from Jerusalem.

[4 : 34] However, he and the leaders of Jerusalem had met together at one point, some 10, 13 years after his conversion. And they had agreed on a number of things. They'd ended into an agreement with each other.

James, Peter and John, based in Jerusalem, would head up evangelism amongst the Jews. Paul and Barnabas would evangelize Gentiles.

However, that was not all they agreed to. They agreed to this one other thing. There was one other element in their agreement. And that element arose from the fact that many of the Christians in Jerusalem were poor.

And so both the apostles to the Jews and the apostles to the Gentiles would have another focus. Not just simply evangelizing people, though they would do that. They would also remember the poor.

And so Paul took both elements of that agreement very seriously. He went out and he evangelized Gentiles with vigor. But he also remembered poor Christians in Jerusalem.

[5 : 32] And after some years, he developed a way of doing this practically. What he did was start an appeal among Gentile churches. He would collect money from among all Gentile churches.

And he would take it as a gift to Jerusalem. It's a wonderful thing to do, isn't it, you see? Because the Jewish Christians had sent people to evangelize outside.

Those people became Christians. And they sent back some money to help the Jews back in Jerusalem. It's a wonderful bit of how the gospel causes people to be changed.

Anyway, in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 verse 1, he calls this thing a collection for God's people. In Romans 15 verse 26, he calls it a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

So Paul is traveling around raising money. Not for himself, not for his mission, but for the poor. Money from Gentile Christians for poor Jewish Christians.

[6 : 29] And from chapter 8 in 2 Corinthians, the passage we're looking at today, he's been urging the Corinthian Christians to contribute to this cause. He's still talking about that project in our passage for today, in chapter 9.

He wants the Corinthians to help him, and he's urging them to help. And so that's the background for our passage today. So have your Bibles open, have a look at it with me. If you look carefully, you'll see that Paul does three things in the passage we're looking at.

First, he gives three principles about financial giving that he wants the Corinthian Christians to consider. Second, he wants them to grasp some promises from God's word.

And third, he wants to tell them about four groups of people that will benefit from their giving. Finally, he wants to point out the very thing that motivates him and should motivate them.

So let's look at each of these elements. Look at the three principles for financial giving that Paul outlines. First principle comes from the world of nature. Can you see it? It's there in verse 6. Paul appears to be quoting some proverb of some sort, and he says this.

[7 : 34] Remember this. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Now, his point from nature, I think, is self-explanatory, isn't it?

He's saying that for the farmer, sowing seed is a down payment for the future. The more seed you sow, the better chance you have of a good harvest. And not only that, the better chance you have for having more seed to sow abundantly the year after.

If you're stingy with the seed that you sow, then you're likely to have a stingy harvest. Not rocket science, really, is it? It's fairly self-explanatory. However, if you're generous with the seed that you sow, then your chances of a good harvest are much better.

So, can you see the principle from nature? Paul's applying it to financial giving, and in so doing, he's following the Lord Jesus. For Jesus says in Luke 6, 38, Give, and it will be given to you.

A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Paul's point is exactly the same.

[8 : 40] He's saying that the more you give financially, then the more you will have to give. Plentiful giving will result in a plentiful harvest. Stingy giving, stingy harvest.

Now, Paul Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress, said it this way. He said, A man there was, and they called him mad. The more he gave, the more he had.

Now, he wasn't mad, actually, was he? Because he was just following good observation from nature. Stingy sowing, stingy harvest. Plentiful sowing, plentiful harvest.

So, there's the first principle. Look at the second one. Comes from Scripture, verse 7. Paul says, Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Now, in explaining this verse, let me start at the end of it. Look at how Paul ends this verse. He speaks about God loving a cheerful giver. The statement appears to be derived from Scripture.

[9 : 46] It comes from, I think, Psalm 22, verse 8, in the Greek version of the Old Testament, which is the version that probably most Gentile Christians would be reading, so they understand it.

This is the version of the Bible that they used, and it says, God blesses a cheerful and giving man. And from this, Paul derives a principle. The principle is, God loves a cheerful giver.

God rewards a cheerful giver. And the very next verse in Proverbs supports this. For verse 9 of Proverbs 22 says, The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.

Can you see what's going on? You see, Paul is addressing each individual in this verse, in verse 7 of our passage, and he's telling them, Make some decisions. Those decisions should flow from your hearts.

They should not be reluctant decisions, nor should they be compulsory. No, Christians are rather to be like God, not under compulsion. No, God is a cheerful giver himself.

[10 : 50] And so should his people be. They should cheerfully and freely give. Friends, we need to understand this, you see. I would argue that in no other human action than this, do we reflect God more than in our generous giving.

You see, whether it's generously giving of our time, or generously giving of our very beings, ourselves, or generously giving of our lives, or generously giving of our money, it is an incredibly wonderful thing for God to see.

God looks at such generosity, and he loves it. Why? Because that's what he's like himself. He too is a cheerful giver. He loves cheerful givers because that's what he is like.

He loves people to reflect what he is. He loves himself. He loves to give. So I would therefore argue that our financial giving is a litmus test of the genuineness of our faith.

In other words, until this has been converted, or a purse, if you're a woman or whatever, you haven't really been converted. Because that's how it, if you understand God is what God has given you, you will respond with every part of your being, including your wallet or your purse.

[12 : 10] So friends, let me urge you to do what Paul says here. That is, think deeply. Let each of you give what you've decided in your heart to give. Don't do it under duress or compulsion.

No, God loves a cheerful giver. Now, let's turn to consider more of God's character and Christian giving. Paul's encouraged us with a principle from nature.

He's encouraged us with a principle about God from scripture. Now he turns to more aspects of God's character. Look at verses 8 to 11. Let me quickly summarize them.

First, Paul makes the point that God's character is that of a provider. You see, God is ready and able to provide everything that we need to be generous. That's what he says here.

Let me read to you a more literal translation of verse 8. It's delightful in its literalness. It reads, God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times having all that you need you will abound in all or every good work.

[13 : 18] Isn't that wonderful? Can you hear the stress? God's point is that God is an abundant supplier of all good things. His great grace leads to us demonstrating that grace ourselves.

At all times God supplies us with all that we need so there is never a time when we cannot be generous. Friends, do you remember the story of the widow who gives the smallest coin?

She acts in great generosity. So even with the most trifling thing it is possible to be generous. We have an abundantly giving God.

He has supplied us with what we need to be generous. We should be abundant in our giving as well. To reinforce this Paul quotes scripture again. Can you see it?

Verse 9. He recalls Psalm 112. Now out of desire to be politically correct and perhaps to reflect the original psalm better.

[14 : 22] Our version of the Bible has not been that helpful to us here. It's turned the third person masculine into third person singular into third person plural. Let me read what we have in our text.

They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor. Their righteousness endures forever. However, the original is in the third person masculine singular.

Let me read it to you as it would sound. It goes like this. I'll use the English Standard Version translation. It goes like this. He has distributed freely. He has given to the poor.

His righteousness endures forever. Now, I wonder, I think probably as the original psalm, he has distributed freely and so on, is about the righteous giver.

however, if you look around about Psalm 112, such as Psalm 111, that term, his righteousness endures forever, is actually used of God as well.

[15 : 24] And I wonder if that echo is here as well. And I think it is because you'll see in the succeeding verse that God's righteousness is mentioned. But let me explain it this way.

As God's people give, God himself gives. As we give, God distributes freely. As we give, he gives to the poor. As we give, his righteousness is displayed as well as our own.

Friends, with that, let's remember where we are. God's now given us, Paul has given us three principles to consider in our financial giving. He turns now to two promises based on God's word that he wants them and us to remember.

First promise, verse 6, sorry, returns to verse 6 and talks about harvest. Remember the language in verse 6 about stingy sowing and so on and fruit and responses you get.

Look at verses 10 and 11. Paul promises that God will supply all that we need. Now, he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

[16 : 32] You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. In other words, the rich sowing is supplied by God himself to us.

Friends, this is our generous God. You see, he fills our hands with good things that flow from his own generous hands. Psalm 145 says God's hand is full of things for his people.

So his full hand supplies us with things to enable us to have full hands to supply other people with things. He fills our hands with good things so that our hand might be open like his hand is open.

So we might be generous even as he is generous, filled with grace even as he is filled with grace. So that's our first promise to grasp. God will supply everything we need.

But there's a second. Did you notice at the end of verse 10 and 11, Paul speaks of generosity resulting in a harvest. Do you notice what the harvest is of?

[17 : 36] Verse 10, it's a harvest of righteousness. Or verse 11, it's an overflow of thanksgiving. Friends, Paul wants the Corinthians to give generously.

This will supply the needs of a group of Jerusalem Christians, but it will do more. It will give rise to their thanksgiving. Imagine this, you see, Paul has collected a collection from all around the Gentile world.

And he turns up in church in Jerusalem one day and he says, friends, those people you sent me to evangelize, me and Barnabas and a whole host and others, they know your poverty and here's a gift from them.

Friends, in a world where Jew and Gentile were worlds apart, this nonverbal communication would have been enormously powerful. He would have said the barriers are down between Jew and Gentile and you are one together in Christ.

And can you imagine what the Jerusalem Christians would do? They would turn to God in prayer. They would be overwhelmed with thankfulness. The Jerusalem Christians would lift their voices in thankfulness to God, in thanksgiving to God.

[18 : 54] God. Now, before we finish, I want you to notice something. I want you to notice that if the Corinthians listen to Paul, there will be four beneficiaries from their generosity.

Look back at verses 8 to 11. The first beneficiaries of their generous giving will be themselves. God will bless them abundantly so that they might abound in every good work.

He will supply seed and a harvest of righteousness. The first beneficiary will be the givers themselves. That's number one. Second beneficiary will be the recipients, the Lord's people in Jerusalem.

They're referred to in verse 12. Their needs are supplied. Third beneficiary, he's named in verses 11 to 13. It is God himself.

Because remember what happens? These Jerusalem Christians, they receive this gift and they have an outburst of praise and thanksgiving to God.

[19 : 52] And God himself is the beneficiary of that. And so thanksgiving flows to him and praise flows to him. But there's a fourth beneficiary, did you notice in the passage?

It's the whole church of God. Look at verse 13. Paul speaks of others who will praise God. He says, this service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people, but is overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

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

You see, everyone who hears about this, they'll say, God, thank you for being so at work. They will praise God as a result of what has happened.

This is the long reach of Christian giving. The givers, the receivers, God himself, and other Christians who hear of that work.

[20 : 49] Friends, today is our opportunity to thank God generously and financially. And as we do so, let's think of the beneficiaries of this generosity, ourselves, those who receive the benefits of our generosity, God himself and the whole body of the church of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that wonderful? wonderful. That's just spectacular. You might not even know of it, but it will happen. So imagine one of these projects.

We fund a trainee here at Holy Trinity. We put that trainee through a year or two of his training. That trainee then goes off to theological college, then decides they'll go to the mission field or be a pastor in somewhere.

And as a result of our giving, gospel will come to places somewhere, either around Melbourne, around Australia, around the world.

Next year, your giving will send me to Tanzania to teach pastors how to preach, how to teach from the Bible.

[22 : 08] Ask their congregations, have their pastors taught, ask their preaching changes, what will they do? They will praise and thank God for whoever it was that enabled people to come and teach their pastors how to preach.

Can you see the long, long, long stretch that Christian generosity results in? The whole body of the church of Jesus Christ is built up by the generosity of you.

So, there's Paul's argument. Now, Paul turns finally to what motivates him for all of this. Look at verse 15. Here's the basis of Paul's plea. He says, Thanks be to God for his indescribable or inexpressible gift.

Now, in my view, the gift that he's talking about is the one he's already referred to back a chapter. So, just have a look at 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9. 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9.

Paul says, Friends, this is a great verse in scripture, well worth memorising.

[23 : 25] I've memorised it. It is just terrific. You see, we Christians don't give because God will give back to us. Some people preach that these days, they're wrong.

No, we Christians give financially because of what God has given us. We give out of thankfulness. God has been gracious and so we are gracious.

God has given to us so we give to others. Jesus was rich, however, for our sake he became poor and through his poverty we were made rich. What an indescribable gift is this that we are now, seated with God in the heavenly places in Christ because of this gift given to us.

So as we think of our lives and as we think of our wallets and our purses, let's remember God's indescribable grace, his indescribable gift of Jesus for us and let's be generous as God himself is generous.

And with that I want you to remember the story I began with. You remember the blind boy, remember him asking for money and he wrote down, I'm blind, please help. But the man who helped him wrote down something else.

[24 : 40] He helped people see things from another perspective. He wrote down, today is a beautiful day, but I cannot see it. Well, today we are giving you an opportunity to be thankful.

And as we do so, I'm saying the money that you give will be used for good and great purposes. God's God's indescribable gift in Jesus.

God's indescribable gift in Jesus.

If you see things that way, it will change you. It will change everything you do. It will change the way you spend money.

I want you to remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.

[25 : 53] God's indescribable gift and be generous as God himself has been generous. Let's pray.

Father, this day we remember that indescribable gift. We remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that we, through his poverty, might become rich.

Father, we thank you for the abundant richness that you have given us in relationship with you. And today we remember this with gratitude and thanksgiving.