

# Grace Upon Grace

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Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Father, we believe that every good and perfect gift comes from you.

We also believe what your son told us, that we cannot serve God and money. And so we ask, Lord, that you would help us to take both those truths to heart. And through your word, you give us wisdom in how to live them out.

In Jesus' name, amen. You may be seated. Money, money, money.

As I say that word, probably a variety of emotions are coming up in your heart and mind. Money. Maybe it's emotions of insecurity and anxiety.

Maybe emotions of desire and longing. Maybe emotions of fear. Maybe emotions of coveting, of guilt.

[ 1 : 13 ] Who knows? But just by those very words, I mean, just by that very word money, a bunch of things come up within us. We'd much rather not talk about a lot of them.

And that's not even covering all the cultural air that we breathe around money. I mean, think about some of the cultural things we know. You guys know the Tom Cruise movie, Jerry Maguire? Show me the money, he says. You guys know the famous rapper who said, mo' money, mo' problems. You know the famous saying, money makes the world go round.

But to be a bit more seriously, you know that money shapes seriously every single aspect of our lives in the way that we think about it in our culture. Think about education for a second.

Growing up, I went to this really fancy middle school, grades 6 through 8, where about two-thirds of the students were on the honor roll. I was not one of them. But it was interesting, because when you asked, why should I do well at school and why should I do well in my courses, they would say, because you need to do well here so that you can get into the top high school.

[ 2 : 21 ] And then you, so that you can get into the top university, so that you can get the top job. Why? So that you can make lots of money. That was the purpose of education.

And then you think of time. There was a lovely man who came into our St. John's office a couple months ago to help us with technology, because we're not the greatest when it comes to computers.

And he was helping us, and he kept saying to us as he was helping us, I'm making your guys' lives so much more efficient. And that's good for you, because time is money. And I thought that was so interesting, that the meaning of time in our lives is now how much money can we make.

Or think of people. How often does somebody describe another person as they are worth this amount? They're worth \$4 billion. They're worth \$3 million. They're worth \$20,000.

As if a person's assets and possessions and bank accounts somehow define who they are. Money, economics, exchange, has defined the very way that we think about human life.

[ 3 : 32 ] Our culture talks a lot about money, but very little about God. We, on the other hand, here at St. John's, and in other churches, we love to talk a lot about God, but very little about money.

And what Paul does in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 is he takes these two things. He takes God and he takes money, and he weaves them together in one conversation.

And what he does as he does that is he tells us that what we do with money is an absolutely essential and very important part of Christian discipleship. The famous Protestant reformer Martin Luther put it this way.

He said, He says, Look at verse 2.

For I know your readiness, of which I boasted about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.

[ 5 : 26 ] 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. Paul is sending the brothers.

Paul is sending the brothers. If you look back at chapter 8. And another brother is well tested to be very trustworthy. And another brother is well tested to be very trustworthy.

He has integrity. And these two brothers are being sent by Paul to the Corinthian church in order for them to receive the collection, the gift that the Corinthian people have been accumulating week after week for the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

And what Paul basically says to these people is, I want your actions to match your attitudes. If you look at verse 2, he uses this word, I know your readiness.

That's an attitude word. It means, I know your eagerness. I know your willingness to give. And then when he goes to verse 3, and he says, I'm sending the brothers to you that you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready.

[ 6 : 39 ] He changes the word that he uses there, actually. And the word that he uses means, so that you may be prepared. It's an action word, not an attitude word. It's a word that was often used in military contexts.

People that would gather together and train and equip themselves and prepare themselves for a sort of battle. Now, this isn't a battle context. But Paul uses that word to say, I want your attitude to turn into actions.

And the good work that God began in you to come to completion and bear fruit. It's as if Paul is saying in the economy of God's grace, good intentions aren't enough.

They're meant to bear fruit into holy actions. Now, no doubt when some of us read these words, we're probably a little put off by Paul.

Doesn't Paul seem to be getting a little pushy here? Doesn't he seem to be wanting to shame these people and pressure these people into doing something? I mean, look at verse 4, for example.

[ 7 : 45 ] He says, Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you're not ready, we will be humiliated. Not to say anything for you for being so confident.

It's basically saying, if we show up and you guys aren't ready, we're going to be utterly humiliated because I've boasted about you. I've talked about the grace of God in your life.

Now, friends, I don't think Paul is being heavy-handed here. I just think he's being a wonderful pastor. He's giving them an encouraging prod.

A loving prick to the heart. He's saying God's grace was at work in your life. And when God's grace was at work in your life, it was generating within you an attitude and an eagerness and a willingness to help those people who were in need.

And now something's happened to that. And it hasn't turned into an action. Get going with it. God began a good work in you.

[ 8 : 48 ] Don't let it come to nothing. And he does this in verse 5 in particular. He says, I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised.

They made a promise. They wanted to give this gift. So that it may be ready as a willing gift and not an exaction. A willing gift as a blessing and not something that comes from greediness.

Friends, I think there's an application for us here. We need this encouragement oftentimes. I mean, how many times, if I'm honest, have I in my own life spent time in a passage of Scripture, especially chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians, known the Lord in his graciousness prodding me and developing in me a willingness and an eagerness to help those in need.

And how many times have I just lost sight of it? I've grown cold. Days have gone by and I've become busy. I've forgot. I've lost vision. And I never act on the beginning desires that God actually put in me.

I think what Paul is saying to us in verses 1 to 5 is, get ready to give, guys. Don't lose sight of my grace. Don't forget what I started to do in you.

[ 10 : 14 ] Don't stop short of carrying out the good work that I've begun in you. Get ready to give. And then what he does in the rest of the passage is he gives us the logic of giving and the purpose of giving.

So verses 6 to 10, he gives us the logic of giving. And you'll notice right away that he uses an agricultural image at the beginning and the end. Look at verse 6. The point is this.

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. And then verse 10. 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.

Paul is saying to us that the logic of giving in God's economy is very much like the logic of farming. Now, why in the world would he use farming as the image to explain to his people? I think there's a couple of reasons. Simply because it was an agrarian society and lots of people knew about farming. So he's using an image that would touch everybody. They would understand it to some extent.

[ 11 : 26 ] But I think there's something deeper than this. In the Old Testament, the image of harvest was often a rich image of the kingdom of God breaking into the world.

When the kingdom of God breaks into the world, there's going to be a rich, abundant harvest and a massive feast. And so I think Paul is using this language to some extent to tell us that in Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God has broken into our lives.

And it's creating a wealth of abundance. And we see this abundance in a few different ways. We see it first as an abundance of grace.

Look at verse 8. I think verse 8 is the pivot of this whole chapter. God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Notice the language of abundance here. It's God giving grace in a lavish, extravagant, inexhaustible way. And if you're a farmer, you know that you depend on this for your very life and livelihood.

[ 12 : 46 ] If you're a farmer, you know that you can put seed in the ground, you can till the soil, you can put fertilizer, you can do everything you possibly can, but in the end, you depend on God sending rains from heaven and causing the seed to grow and actually produce something.

You depend on God to protect your flock, your crops from being utterly destroyed by a hailstorm. You depend on the extravagance of God's grace every step of the way for abundance.

And here Paul is using this image of farming to say that God's abundant grace has been showered upon us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when there's a surplus of grace, it creates a surplus of giving. And so then we see abundant giving in verse 8 as well. Notice the result of God giving abundant grace.

Verse 8. So that you may abound in every good work. Verse 9. As it is written, He has distributed freely.

[ 13 : 53 ] He has given to the poor and His righteousness endures forever. See, friends, when we are secure in the abundance of God's goodness to us, that He's the one that provides, then we are actually set free to give abundantly as well.

Because God's grace not only breaks our idols, but it breaks our insecurities. And the logic that we see here is that when God's generosity is experienced by us, it produces a generosity in us towards others.

I heard a beautiful illustration of this when I was in university in Los Angeles. I had a professor. His name was Mickey. What a great name.

Mickey Clink. Even better name. He had the last name. And he was in a little church. And in this church, they had wonderful examples of God's overflowing generosity through people.

He said he had a really good friend named Fana, who was from Samoa. Big old man. Came with his family. Came with three children. Was trying to set up a life for himself. And he wanted to buy a house.

[ 15 : 13 ] So he started saving money for a down payment. He got to the point where he saved up \$25,000 for a down payment on a house, which is pretty much good enough in Los Angeles.

And a woman in their congregation, her husband randomly left her, walked out the door, didn't say anywhere where he was going, left her with three young children.

She wasn't working, and she didn't have enough money to cover her rent and her food for her three children. The guy was nowhere to be seen. And Fana looks at this \$25,000 that he saved for a down payment for a house and says, this woman needs it more.

And he gives her the \$25,000 so she can cover basic needs for her family. Two weeks later, Fana's driving with his family in their minivan, their one car. He has three kids.

And it breaks down, and they can't go anywhere. And if you've ever been to Los Angeles before, it's the city of concrete and highways, and you can't go anywhere without a car.

[ 16 : 19 ] And so, right away, he was looking at a \$1,600 bill to fix his car, and he didn't have the money. And my professor, Mickey Clink, just had gotten a job, and he was starting to save some money, and he had \$1,700 in his bank account.

And so he gives \$1,600 of that to his friend Fana so that he can fix the car. And his family of three can drive. Mickey had a family of three as well.

And I just thought it was such a wonderful example of the way in which God's abundant grace comes in and sparks a chain reaction of giving.

It's almost like a Roman fountain, in a sense, if you've seen him before. At the very top, you have a small circle that bubbles over with water, and it spews into the next circle, which is somewhat bigger, and that spews into the next, and that spews into the next.

And each larger circle is filled with all their need and more because of the abundance that is coming from the very top. The Lord is the fountain of every good and perfect gift.

[ 17 : 34 ] And when his grace works through us, it's an amazing thing to see. And friends, this is so different from the logic of the culture in which we live. It's not the more you save, the more you invest, the more you earn, the more you work, the more you will have.

It's just not true. Not in God's economy. It's the more you have, the more you can give. And the more riches you will receive.

Because if you look at verse 6, Paul says, whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. If you give extravagantly, you will reap extravagantly.

You will know abundant gain. Now some of you, your ears may be perking up and you go, wait a second here. Is this not the health and wealth gospel?

To some extent. Is Paul not saying, if you give, you're going to get a lot in return? If you believe in God, he will give you everything you want in this life, and you'll have health, you'll have wealth, and you'll have success if you just give a little bit more.

[ 18 : 41 ] And as we look at verse 10, I hope we see that this is not actually what Paul is saying. Look at verse 10 with me. He says, He, God, who supplies seed to the sower and food for bread, or bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed, listen to these two words, for sowing.

Sowing means giving in this passage. And what Paul is saying is that God is going to increase and multiply your seed, what you have, so that you can give it away again.

So that you can sow. But he goes on. He says, And God will increase the harvest of your righteousness. Now skip up to verse 9 in order for us to understand what righteousness is.

Paul quotes Psalm 112, and he says, He has distributed freely. He has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever.

According to verse 9 and the Old Testament, righteousness means generosity towards the poor. It means right relationship with those who are in need in this context.

[ 19 : 59 ] And so we see a very curious thing in verse 10. What do we receive when we sow? We receive a harvest of our righteousness. And righteousness is generosity towards the poor, and that's what defines God.

And so most particularly, we don't get something in return for sowing and giving. We become a certain sort of person. You see what I'm saying here?

The harvest that Paul is talking about is not if you give something, you're going to get something in return. It's if you give something, you're going to become a certain sort of person who shares the righteous character of God.

You're going to start to look like God. And you're going to start to act like God. And you're going to start mirroring God to the world. And friends, this is the heart of the Christian life in 2 Corinthians. If you go back to chapter 3, verse 18, it says, we with unveiled face all behold the glory of the Lord. And in beholding him, we are transformed from one degree of glory to another.

[ 21 : 09 ] We start to look like the Lord that we worship and behold. And in this passage, that means generosity to those who most deeply need it. An abundance of grace leads to an abundance of giving, which leads to an abundance of gain and harvest.

And all this abundance leads us in verses 11 to 15 to the great purpose of all this giving. Why give? Most often we talk about who to give to or when we should give or how we should give or where we should give or what we should give.

But very rarely do we talk about why. And Paul, in verse 12, tells us why. For the ministry of this service, and that word service is a worship word, it's the word from which we get liturgy, the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but it's also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

Notice the two reasons Paul gives, a horizontal one and then a vertical one. Horizontally, he says, we give in order to supply the needs of the saints. Saints is a word for Christians. It's not super elite Christians, it's all Christians who are in Christ Jesus and consider one another brothers and sisters. And what he's saying is that we give because we see our brothers and sisters in need.

[ 22 : 46 ] And we give out of our abundance to meet their need that there may be fairness, what Paul talked about in chapter 8. And so the natural question given to us is, are we looking for ways to meet each other's needs?

And are we willing even to share our needs with one another? Because meeting needs requires knowing needs and knowing needs requires sharing needs. That's the first purpose.

And it's interesting to me that Jesus himself in Matthew chapter 25 saw meeting the needs of our brothers and sisters as an essential distinctive of what genuine Christian faith actually looks like.

Jesus said that at the second coming when it's the judgment day, he's going to gather all people before him. He's going to divide some up into the sheep and others into the goats.

And he's going to look to the sheep as the king of the universe and say, And then the righteous are going to answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you a drink?

[ 24 : 16 ] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you and naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison or visit you? And Jesus is going to look us in the eye and say, Truly I say to you, as you did to the one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.

Amen. Jesus cares deeply that we meet each other's needs. But friends, that's not even the greatest purpose of giving. You look back at verse 12, you see there's an even greater purpose. It's not only to supply needs, but it's also that there may be overflowing thanksgiving to God. Isn't that wonderful?

The greatest need, the greatest reason why Paul says we should give is because we should want people to have a reason to give thanks to God and to glorify Him and say, God, look at the amazing things you have done.

And I think it's in two different ways that he, for two different reasons, he wants us to thank God. I think Paul sees just in the simple fact is when we give and somebody receives and their need is met, they say, God, you supplied my need.

[ 25 : 32 ] Thank you. And then there's the other part of it that when brothers and sisters who are in need receive something, they look at the giver and they say, wow, that person really gets the gospel.

They've really been transformed by the grace of God so much that they were willing to give to meet my need. And they praise God for the grace of God that's at work in that person's life.

And the thing that Paul wants most in his whole entire life is that he wants to get to heaven and he wants to see a cacophony of different voices, a symphony of different voices singing praise and thanksgiving and glory to God because they have seen the wonders of His grace on earth.

And so friends, Paul ends the longest discussion of money in the whole entire Bible not with how much or when or where but with why. That we should give not out of fear and out of guilt and out of pressure and out of obligation and out of status or pride.

But we should give because we want God to be thanked. We want Him to be praised. We want Him to be enjoyed and seen as great and glorious above all others. So Paul does just that in verse 15.

[ 26 : 59 ] He says, thanks be to God for this inexpressible gift. Inexpressible gift. I think it's our Lord Jesus Christ he's pointing back to at the very end of this passage again.

Chapter 8, verse 9. 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.

It's an inexpressible gift. Indescribable. Unspeakable. Exceeds our ability to describe Him and yet we spend the rest of our lives praising and adoring Him.

because it's an inexpressible gift. So brothers and sisters let's use money as a way of making people helping people give thanks to God.

And when we receive because of other people's generosity let's love and adore and give thanks to God. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[ 28 : 14 ] Amen.