

Let Your Love Be Genuine

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] God, it is your word that brings life, as it did to the little girl.

We pray it might be to each of us. It is your word and touch that brings healing. We pray that you will touch us, so that we may reach out and touch you.

We touch your faith. In response to your love for us, we may reach out and touch each other.

With the love with which you've touched us. We are beggars who cannot live apart from your word.

Apart from your sustaining Holy Spirit.

Without you, we are nothing. So, Lord Jesus, grant us to become what we are. And we acknowledge who you are in the service of worship.

[1 : 05] In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. I want you, for the purposes of what we have to do this morning, to take the Blue Pew Bible, which you will find in front of you, to turn to the New Testament section and page 172, which is 2 Corinthians chapter 8, verse 7.

Now, Paul gives us an example here of what most ministers like me are very bad at doing.

And that is, how do you tell the congregation to give more money? Well, it's not that, really, but it's partly that.

We try and tell them to give more money. But Paul tells them a lot more. And I want you to see how much he tells them.

It begins in verse 7. Chapter 8, verse 7. He says to the Corinthians, You excel in everything.

[2 : 36] You are rich. You have an abundance. Penance. I do myself as a form of penance. I go out to lunch with Jim Packer sometimes.

And he tells me what's wrong with this congregation and what I should do about it. And it's always a great inspiration. But basically, he starts from the same thesis.

You excel in everything. Listen, you are rich. You have a great abundance of gifts. And that's true.

But what do we do about it? Jim wants me to get it all organized and get this thing working instead of messing around all the time. And he does that very lovingly and very concisely and very graciously.

And as I say, it's always an inspiration. And so I'm impressed that it's very much a Pauline pattern when Paul says to the church in Corinth, You excel in everything.

[3 : 52] And then he enumerates what it is they excel in. They excel in faith. You know, mountain-moving faith. They've got it. Then it says, You excel not only in faith, but in utterance and in knowledge.

In speech and in knowledge. You can do it. When it comes to talking, and when it comes to knowing what you're talking about, the Corinthians were outstanding.

I suppose we talk a pretty good game, too. Isn't it just agonizing that after you have been through university and you've learned to use words, you can live most of the rest of your life on the basis of that.

And apparently, that's what the Corinthian church values. Faith, utterance, knowledge, and zeal.

Faith, utterance, knowledge, and zeal. All those things. But do they have a faintly familiar ring to you as you hear that? Has he said that before at some point?

[5 : 09] Ah, yes, he has. Remember, 1 Corinthians chapter 13. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, if I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, if I am so earnest as to give my body to be burned, it's nothing.

And so what I want you to concentrate on this morning, what I want us to concentrate on this morning, is what it says in verse 8 of chapter 8.

Do you see it there in that last paragraph on the page? That your love is genuine. How do you tell that your love is genuine?

That it's real? These other gifts are great gifts to have, but is there genuine love? And the thing that wakes me up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat when I think about being in this congregation is the tremendous potential we have as a congregation for spiritual superficiality.

It's, we've got it. Nice people, nice music, nice community. The potential for superficiality is there in abundance.

[6 : 46] And I know that when I came to this congregation, I was determined that we wouldn't be superficial. And now I've been here these many years, I just feel that I have been totally invaded by superficiality and that I can do it with the best of you.

And that that superficiality erodes and corrodes the vitality of the body of Christ and that what we need is what the Corinthians need and what Paul speaks to them about.

He says, in order that you may know that your love is genuine. He wants them to have genuine love. He says, this is the test of it for you.

It may indeed be for us. The breakthrough from the vicious grip of spiritual superficiality which we maintain into the reality of genuine love, which is what it's all about, isn't it?

That that should exist. You know, I see this parish from a slightly different perspective than you do. I just want to give you a slight survey of what happens.

[8 : 14] There are people who are unemployed, and that's critical. There are people who are depressed. There are people who are totally shipwrecked by a broken marriage in this congregation.

There are people without faith and people without hope. And I meet them every week. It's not, they're not hidden.

There are people haunted by the crippling residue of profoundly unhappy home lives as children and still scarred terribly by that.

There are people caught in a titanic struggle with alcohol. And it's a terrible and lonely struggle.

There are people suffering from years of easy prosperity.

in a world where there is no longer easy prosperity. There are parents suffering from the total ingratitude of their children.

[9 : 34] It's called the parent-battered syndrome. And it happens, but there's no public outcry about it. But there's a lot of private anguish around it.

And there are parents who suddenly realize that the way their kids are behaving is the way they've been taught to be behaving.

And that's cold and sobering. There are people suffering suffering from profound physical affliction. Now, these are the people who are here this morning in Barth and some who aren't. But that's our kind of world.

It's our kind of community. And to excel in gifts of communication, in gifts of knowledge, we've got to tremendously high in PNORMING.

[10 : 39] There's a lot of clever people in this congregation. We've piled up all the knowledge that was seated in the pews of this congregation this morning. It would be a big hill. It's there.

But what about this genuine love? And are we prepared for it to be tested? Paul concludes verse 7, if you look at it.

See that you excel in this gracious work also. When he's talked about the gifts that they have, he then talks about this gracious work as another gift which God is prepared to give to them.

And this is how he puts it to them. The gift is a gift of generous love. He says, the Macedonians had it.

He said, I'm not commanding you to do this. Do you see that in verse 8? I say this not as a command. He doesn't use what we usually use.

[11 : 53] He doesn't say you must do it. I'm not sure whether they would have taken it from him or not, but I know that authority doesn't go over big in those kinds of matters.

People aren't generous because they're commanded to be. He compares them to the church in Macedonia. Not, I think, to make them feel guilty because the Macedonian church was so generous and so full of this gift which he longs that the Corinthian church should have, which I long that we as a congregation should have.

He wasn't saying, they do it, why don't you? Nor was he asking them to compete with the Macedonians.

Why don't you match gifts to show you're as good as they are? No, he says, there's something deeper than that which you have to get at. And he goes ahead to describe it.

And in order to describe it, he takes first the model of Jesus Christ. Look in verse 9. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich.

[13:17] And what he's talking about is the prince of glory laying aside his glory and being found in fashion as a man he humbles himself and becomes obedient even unto death the death on a cross.

The terrible, naked, poverty of being nailed to a cross. That's what he's referring to. And he's not saying this is the example that you must follow.

But he is saying this is the means by which God was able to show forth his love in our world.

In other words, it's something to do with when this generous spirit overtakes us that God is able to work through that to the great blessing of the whole of mankind.

He did it in Jesus Christ. He can do it in us. If we can have this generosity one towards another.

[14:38] He goes on to say in verse 10, I want to give you some advice. And now he's getting down to the particular situation of the Corinthians.

He says, this is how I advise you to handle this matter. Look at verse 10. It's best for you now to complete what a year ago you began not only to do but to desire.

It's nice to have somebody that looks up the minutes of the last meeting and says, a year ago you set yourself this course of action and your desire to do it was genuine.

Now go back there. Pick it up and let's carry on. That's his advice to them. To go back to what they desired to do a year ago but never got around to.

And how characteristic that is of our life together as a Christian community. High on desire but low and carrying it into effect.

[15:48] I blame you for that. But then I blame myself too because I can I have great ambitions but carry so few of them through.

And somehow this gift that he wants them to have is to enable them to do now what they desired to do then. Very important to trace how desire initiates things in our hearts in these verses.

Look on then in verse 11. your readiness in desiring may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

So the desire is there. Now I think what he means is that we as a congregation that the Corinthian church are to take their desire seriously.

To take it as the beginnings of God's gift. that he has created this desire in your heart to pay attention to the things that you desire.

[16:58] He wants you to look at those not to forsake and abandon them as impractical but to take them and to say alright you were given this desire by God surely the same God is going to enable you to do it.

else he wouldn't have given you the desire. But then he sees a problem. The problem which comes between desiring and doing is in verse 12 if the readiness is there it is acceptable according to what a man has not according to what he has not.

so that God doesn't give us the desire and then tell you but you haven't got it to carry that desire into effect.

You haven't got the resources. He doesn't want us to opt out. God has given us what may seem to us a desire which goes way beyond any reasonable hope that we have.

what he says is if God has given you the desire he's also given you the resources out of which that desire is to be realized and you're not he says in verse 12 to opt out of it.

[18:24] If the readiness is there it is acceptable according to what you have not according to what you haven't got because most of us say well we haven't got it.

I'm a student. I'm an old age pensioner. I'm on unemployment insurance. I don't have the family. I don't have the house. I don't have the background. I don't have the resources. That's not what the desire was given to you for to demonstrate to you what you haven't got.

The desire was given to you in order that what you have got may by God's grace bring to pass the very thing that you desire. It's the fish and loaves principle.

If you were ever to estimate how much food they didn't have that story would have come to a rapid and unhappy ending. They said what they did have fish and loaves food.

That's what he's saying. When God gives us this desire then it's that that God is prepared to work with. it's not to be we're not to opt out because we then say well we've got the desire but we haven't got the means.

[19 : 44] And then unless we get into a further trap he warns us in verse 13. I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened. In other words that you're the rich people of this world.

Now you give to the poor then they'll become the rich and you'll become the poor. Most of us have found our way around that little conundrum very quickly. You know what's the use?

There'll still be as many poor people in the world if I give away all that I have so why don't I just keep it? It won't change the statistics at all. Well that's what Paul is saying.

That's not what I mean. I don't mean that you should give it away so that you become the poor and they become the rich. but he says in verse 14 it's just a matter of equality.

Your abundance at the present time should supply their want so that their abundance may supply your want. That there may be equality.

[20 : 48] And so you have a certain abundance which you share with those who haven't. Now my problem is this.

Should we as a church institutionalize this exchange? Like we have a food bank by which we try to do it. We've set up a little thing called Nanton Enterprises by which we're trying to do it.

With dismal success I must say. The desire is there but to do it ain't there. what do we do about it? Is it something which God is going to demonstrate through us getting together and doing it or is he going to do it privately and personally and perhaps secretly with you and your neighbor and your friend and your circumstances so that the genuineness of your love may be proved because you find in your heart a desire to help this person to go to the aid of that person to stand beside that person to laugh with that person to weep with that person and having that desire you by God's grace go and do it.

I think that might be a good way to start at least. That means that we could all get started right now. We wouldn't have to wait for somebody to organize it.

[22 : 22] I would be able to say to Jim Packer it's happening don't put it on me to do it. Look and see that this thing is happening. People are finding in their hearts a desire and they're carrying that through in faith.

And then Paul ends up with an Old Testament illustration where each day the children of Israel woke up and there was manna on the ground and they went out and collected the manna and they collected it all day long and it fed them for a day and each man had enough.

He that had way more than the next person only had enough and he that didn't have very much still had enough. And so that what Paul is saying here is see that you excel in this gracious work excelling in this gracious work will prove will demonstrate that your love is genuine and the result of this gracious work is that he who has a lot will share with him who hasn't in order that when he comes to the place where he hasn't somebody may share with him.

It's a kind of a game that you've got to get going isn't it? And who starts? It would be nice to start at the poor end and receive rather than to start at the wealthy end and have to give.

But what the end result of it is is that Paul is teaching us that there will be times when we have abundance and can share where there will be times when we're in need and somebody needs to share with us.

[24 : 06] This is not the doctrine of the self-made man. I have never had to ask anybody for help. If that is your condition, may God have mercy on you.

Because we all come to the place where we need help. And if we haven't got the grace to receive it, what a terrible situation we're in. And so Paul is saying that this is what's to happen.

Now we've talked about gifts of healing and we've talked about gifts of knowledge and gifts of perceiving and gifts of understanding. But Paul here is talking about a very practical gift which belongs to the body of Christ and it is this gift which demonstrates the genuineness of our love, the reality of what we have in Christ, that the desire to do it has been given to us and with that desire the faith to share not what we haven't got but what we have got and to be willing to receive what we need from one another and that this kind of infrastructure of the community of Christ's church will demonstrate not a spiritual superficiality but the genuineness of Christ's love at work.

God grant that we may be given such a gift in our relationships to one another. We may be able to demonstrate not the increasing superficiality of our life together but the genuineness of our love one

for another.

Amen. This is for you to discuss over lunch. It's just an incidental thing which has some bearing but you may find it slightly irrelevant.

[26 : 11] I heard this week of a Jewish guy who takes people around Israel and he could not understand why when the Christians in Beirut were being massacred the Christians in the rest of the world didn't come to hell.

That's where I was left with it. I want to leave you with it too and see what you can make of it. Remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor that you through his poverty might be made rich.

Hymn number 487. a Lord Jesus Christ is God. That means he can take to know whether he is wordybhy which is a gift beneath youby who is without ironing theário in Maja teachings of Sounding d harnessing into the charts good that people go worship to the rules that people go worship Hastings a dinner gün asleep ■■■■ Thank you.

Thank you.

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[28 : 54] Thank you.

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