

Authentic Generosity

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[0 : 00] Good morning all. A carnival set up down at the concourse in Chatswood. They had a variety of side shows as you do it at a carnival, one of which was the popular strongman competition.

They had a 150 kilogram muscle bound hulk of an individual who squeezed an orange into a glass until there was, it wasn't even a drop left in this orange. And then the challenge was to throw out in front of everyone who'd gathered if anyone could come up and get just one more drop out of this orange, then they would win a prize of \$1,000. Many who spent their days looking at themselves in the mirror at Crunch Gym stepped up and tried but without success to get another drop out of this orange until that is a middle-aged man watching from the back stepped up to the platform, grabbed the orange and proceeded to squeeze this orange and managed to get another half a cup of juice out of this orange. And the crowd roared with delight as the check was handed over for \$1,000. And this muscle bound buffoon was embarrassed and flabbergasted at how this individual could possibly do that. It's not like he'd spend his days at Crunch Gym. And so he asked him who he was and how on earth did he do it? He said, my name is Andrew Smith. I'm the treasurer of the local Anglican church and I do this every Sunday with a collection.

So far in 2 Corinthians, Paul has put it all out there. His passion for Jesus and the gospel, his convictions about ministry, his concern for the church family at Corinth, his love for individuals, his fear for their long-term salvation and even his delight as we saw last week at their repentance after his previous stern letter. So having done all of that and with the church now turning around, what is left? To talk about money. See the link? See the link between what has happened to this point? Paul has been calling them back again and again to the authentic gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and having celebrated their repentance, he now highlights what an authentic embrace of the gospel looks like in practice. Authentic generosity. God's generosity to us shapes a life of generosity.

[3 : 01] These chapters are not incidental. They're not a side point. They are not an added little bit in there to the message of 2 Corinthians. In fact, a number of commentators argue that these chapters are the point of 2 Corinthians.

While money is the presenting issue in these chapters, they are more broadly a call to open-hearted, wholehearted, whole-of-life, gospel-shaped followers of the Lord Jesus. Now this is, of course, is evidenced in a life of radical generosity as God's generosity to us shapes a life of generosity.

So it does include the way we handle our money. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul gives us the longest, most rigorous, sustained treatment of a gospel-shaped attitude to money in the entire Bible.

So open up your Bibles, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. It would be great if you could follow along with me and to see what God has to say to us on this issue. So why does Paul do that here?

[4 : 25] Why does he give us this treatment here? Because he's wanting to raise money. It's easy to forget that these letters are not abstract theological essays which lay the theological foundation for Christianity.

They do that, absolutely. But they are also real letters written for pressing and urgent reasons. And in this case, it's to get the prosperous Corinthians to part with large amounts of their hard-earned cash so that their poor brothers and sisters back in Jerusalem can put some hummus and falafel on the table.

That's the point here of these. He's looking to raise money. Should not forget that. One of the main reasons 2 Corinthians was written was to ensure that when Titus and his friends showed up at

Corinth, there would be a large pile of drachma waiting for them.

So strap yourselves in, get a firm grip on your wallet because we've got a bit of ground to cover today. We'll see that in the service outline. If you've got that in front of you, you can get it on the St. Paul's app or on the sheets that were handed out to you.

The gospel produces generosity. The gospel produces sacrifice. The gospel produces servant-heartedness. The gospel produces joyful generosity. I want to close off with an exhortation to practice authentic generosity.

[6 : 03] So let's kick off. The first one is the gospel produces a life of generosity from chapter 8 verses 1 to 7. So Paul tells the Corinthians to give like the Macedonians.

There is no doubt in Paul's mind that one crucial effect of the gospel is a life of radical generosity. The Macedonians were a noteworthy example.

The Macedonians had dumbfounded Paul with their selfless generosity despite their deep poverty. Have a look at verses 1 to 5. And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability, entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.

[7 : 11] And they exceeded our expectations. They gave themselves first of all to the Lord and then by the will of God also to us. So their giving is clearly sacrificial.

They gave more than they could afford to give. And it was remarkably enthusiastic. They begged Paul for the privilege of getting involved in the collection he was organising for the struggling church in Jerusalem.

I've got to be honest with you. I dream of the day when people will crowd at my office door pleading with me to allow them to give more and more money to the work of gospel ministry through St. Paul's and beyond.

Please be that person for me this week. Please do that. Please do that.

Please do that.

[9 : 03] How quickly we can move an empty bag to the back, from the front to the back, without anyone acting like anything significant, let alone joyful, is actually happening in that moment.

We used to do it while singing so no one noticed. The Macedonians knew that giving to other believers in the work of the gospel was the overflow of the fact that they themselves gave themselves first to the Lord and then to the apostles.

I think verse 5 is a startling sentence. They gave themselves first to the apostles. It reveals a depth of commitment and gravity that we would do well to copy.

That is, this is, this is the source of their joy, giving themselves to the Lord first. They committed themselves wholeheartedly to God in repentance and faith.

They gave themselves to God. They gave themselves to one another. John Calvin makes a profound observation on this passage that our problem is that we think something is lost when we give it away.

[10 : 30] Especially when we give it to other people. The Macedonians had come to be so set free by the gospel that they really actually realized to give is to gain, not to lose.

Even though they were Paul. And so Paul wants this Corinthian church to model the Macedonians.

Verse 7, But since you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you, see that you also excel in the grace of giving.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul has plenty to say about the Corinthian church's ability to talk themselves up in speech.

And in various other ways. Now, he says, now you have a wonderful opportunity to put your money where your mouth is. Now, Paul's words must have made them squirm a little bit, as I hope it does for some of us here.

It must have bothered them to be compared to the Macedonians. It's kind of like, you know, your parents saying, why can't you be like your brother? It's kind of like that.

[11 : 48] It's always awkward. The beauty of the gospel, though, is it helps us get over our pride and over our ego and recognize what God has done for others and be spurred on by our brothers and sisters.

None of us have it sorted. And it's right to look to others in moments like this and see what they do have sorted. And what the gospel produces, we see, secondly, is a life of sacrifice.

Verses 8 to 15. Having told them to model the Macedonians, Paul then raises the stakes a little bit higher for them in these verses. Paul says the gospel produces sacrifice.

Not just sacrifice like the Macedonians, but sacrifice like Jesus. The gospel doesn't just make us generous. It makes us selfless.

Verses 8 and 9. I'm not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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 through his poverty might become rich.

[13:00] He's now telling them to act like Jesus. Not just the Macedonians, but Jesus. In this very brief sentence, Paul highlights the pre-existence of the Son of God and the grace that God has shown us in the coming of the eternal Son of God into this world, dying on a cross for us to press the Corinthian church into a life of selflessness in their generosity.

In particular, he's telling the Corinthians to follow through with the pledges in the same way that Jesus followed through for our sake, by not even balking at death on a cross for the sins of the world.

Let's keep reading. Verse 10. And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter.

Last year, you were the first not only to give, but also to have the desire to do so.

Now finish the work so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it according to your means. The point he's saying here is follow through with your commitments.

Because Jesus did, and the fact that he did empowers us to do so too. If you say you're going to support someone in ministry, an organization, a missionary, then fill out the forms and transfer the money.

[14:47] Do it. That's the point. That's the point. I think it's important to point out that at the moment right now, we are \$22,000 behind in our offertory this year.

When I say that, I mean \$22,000 behind what we said we would give in November last year.

\$22,000 behind our pledges from last year.

As Paul is here calling the Corinthians to follow through with their pledges, I want to encourage you to do the same.

Let's see that that \$22,000 deficit removed by the time that Andrew does his reporting for parish council next month. One month, \$22,000.

Let's get it sorted. A year earlier, the Corinthians had made encouraging noises about supporting the Jerusalem fund.

[15:54] Now they need to come up with the cash. Now is the time that they needed to prioritize others and to open their wallets. The extent to which we follow through with our commitments is a measure of how selfless or selfish we are.

Almost always, it is self getting in the way of us following through in our commitments. I don't do what I said that I would do because I've prioritized something else in that moment.

Something else that becomes more important to me. It's not flattering, but it's true. It's the opposite of Jesus' attitude. And what Paul is wanting to see this Corinthian church is to see a grace-driven equilibrium.

Verses 12 to 15. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard-pressed, but that there might be equality.

At the present time, your plenty will supply what they need so that in turn, their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality as it is written.

[17:14] The one who gathered much did not have too much and the one who gathered little did not have too little. When I need help, you help me. And when you need help, I help you. No one is keeping score here though.

No one's keeping score. There is a natural, what he's describing here is within the church, there's this natural grace-driven ebb and flow of dependence as we live together without the shame that would stop us asking for help, nor the greed that would stop us giving it.

Paul backs up this idea from Exodus 16 and the account of God, how God supplied manna as food for the Israelites in the wilderness. And it was every day he provided them with their manna.

It's why we pray, give us today our daily bread. But it was the law of diminishing returns. If you got greedy and tried to store up more than a day's worth of manna for yourself, you got maggots in your manna.

Now, there was always enough for each day and for everyone. And the principle of Exodus 16 and right through the New Testament is that excess is toxic.

[18 : 41] Excess is toxic. John Calvin put it like this. Those who have riches, whether inherited or won by their own industry and labour, are to remember that what is left over is not for intemperance or luxury, but for relieving the needs of the brothers.

That stings a bit, doesn't it? Our society runs on the principle that we work hard so we can get to play hard. The default is we spend as much on ourselves as we possibly can.

We budget and save so that we can spend it on ourselves. And the way of Christ is to lavish as much as we can on others for the sake of the gospel.

It is to give things up for the sake of Jesus and others. That's because the gospel also produces servant-heartedness. It's why Paul talks about Titus here in chapter 8, verses 16 through to 9.5. This kind of gospel-driven equality is revealed when Titus puts his hand up to go to Corinth to collect their part of the money, but also in the depth of care he showed them.

[20 : 05] Have a look at verses 16 to 18. Thanks be to God who puts into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.

And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. It turns out there's two brothers.

Titus and his team of two brothers go above and beyond to serve in a selfless way and full of integrity. Verse 20. Paul knows full well that fights and accusations about money will kill off gospel ministry more quickly than almost anything else.

I think it's fantastic that the church here does not give me access to bank accounts. I think that's fantastic. Not because I would run away with the money, but to ensure that there is no accusation that could be leveled at me.

Paul is keen to make sure that nothing hinders the gospel and the glory of God.

[21 : 40] So how were the Corinthians to respond to this servant hardness? Verse 24. Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you so that the churches can see it.

In other words, if you remember the movie, show me the money. Show me the money. That's how you respond to their servant heartedness.

Time for you to come through for me, for them, for the church, for Jesus and for yourself. Give like the Macedonians, live selflessly like Jesus.

And in the beginning of chapter 9, he's simply calling them to do what they know that they are supposed to do. Be people of servant hearted integrity and give.

Give because the gospel produces joyful generosity. Have a look at chapter 9 verse 6. Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

[22 : 49] Each of you should give what you've decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. In the Western world, we live under the mantra of God gives credit to the reluctant and cheerful giver.

We live under that mantra, not realizing that's what we do, but that's what we do. God gives credit to the reluctant and careful giver.

Paul has something a little bit more freeing and lavish in mind in these verses. Extravagance is good when it comes to giving. That's his view. Let me urge you to be a little bit more reckless in your giving.

Reckless in your giving. And to have a broad smile in your recklessness. Or if you cannot be in a position to do that, to be able to be reckless in your giving at this time, make sure that you see your inability to give as an incredibly sad thing.

That you are actually missing out. Not because we've had to part with our hard-earned money, but because we've missed out on the great joy from God in not being able to give in this moment.

[24 : 20] The fact is, those who sow in gospel generosity and selflessness or servant hardness, integrity, never, ever, ever, ever, ever miss out.

Have a look at verse 8. And God is able to bless you abundantly. God is able to lavish on you every kind of abundance so that in all things and at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Our God loves to saturate us in good things. Keep reading verse 10. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge your harvest of your righteousness.

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.

God will give us every resource we need for our own growth and for that of our brothers and sisters in Jesus. The illusion here in these verses is Isaiah 55 10, where God's word does not come back without accomplishing what it's designed to do.

[25 : 43] This simply means that Paul is talking much more here than trading finance for finance. You give, God will give you money. That's not what he's saying here.

He is referring to whole of life. He's referring to the whole of lives of others as well, being enriched with every spiritual blessing. Let me just follow up on something that I said last week.

The prosperity gospel, as I referred to last week, is a destructive evil and a blight on the church. It consistently promises what God does not and in its overreaching, it blames the lack of blessing on the very ones it's been defrauding at the same time.

Usually the poor and the vulnerable. From what I can understand in my leading of this church, the prosperity gospel is not our problem.

Our problem is to go the exact opposite direction and have no expectations of God whatsoever. We do not expect enough from God.

[26 : 57] We don't need our expectations of God dampened at all. We need to take God seriously when he says, now he who supplies seed for the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and enlarge your harvest of righteousness.

We need to listen to our God who says, you will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way.

When we give generously, when we give with joy in our hearts, we are demonstrating that we are trusting the God of the gospel who has promised to do us nothing but good.

It's not that we give with the plan that God will give us more back, but that in giving we demonstrate that we trust the gospel, that we trust God's promise to always do us good.

And the net result of authentic generosity is an overflow of thanksgiving to God. Verse 12, this service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people, but he's also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

[28 : 27] 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 with everyone else.

And in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

Gospel giving flows out of gratitude and it multiplies gratitude, which of course leads to God being glorified. Gospel giving flows out of gratitude and it multiplies gratitude, which of course leads to God being glorified.

Paul's response to the lack of generosity is to point this Corinthian church to God's indescribable gift to us. He's referring here to the gospel.

It is the core of the Christian faith and the heartbeat of this church. As I've said a couple of times and in fact every time through 2 Corinthians, Paul's gospel in 2 Corinthians is this.

[29 : 43] The authentic Christian gospel is the good news that God sent his son into the world to live a perfect life, to die as a substitute for sinners, to absorb the anger of God, to turn it away from humanity, to take away our guilt and our shame, provide the right standing before God as a gift and to give eternal joy through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone apart from any works of obedience from us.

That's what he says. You look at that. You remember that and it will build up generosity in your heart. Paul puts no pressure on your will in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

He doesn't say, I'm an apostle. You are the sheep. You've got to give because I'm telling you to give. He doesn't do that.

He doesn't even put pressure on your emotions. He doesn't send around pictures from Jerusalem of starving little orphan kids with big eyes.

He doesn't even do that for them. Try and move their emotions to give. He says that if you do not have the freedom to give your money away in eye-popping proportions, it's because something besides Jesus Christ is your functional Lord and Savior.

[31 : 13] you have not grasped the gospel. That's what he's saying. And the way you break the hold of money over your life is not to sit down with a calculator but to sit down with the gospel.

The radical generosity of Jesus Christ on the cross until it builds up gratitude in your heart for what you have received as a gift. when we see that we are his greatest treasure then he'll become ours. Now when Paul first introduced this collection to the church of Corinth he gave them some very simple and practical advice by terms of how to practice authentic generosity.

In 2 Corinthians 16 verse 2 he wrote this, on the first day of the week each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income. That is, what his instruction there is is regular proportional giving.

That's his instruction. Now can I just add in top of the not only are we at \$22,000 in deficit I just want to add this bit. With parish council we are noticing that the giving patterns here at St Paul's are incredibly unpredictable.

[32 : 40] Some months we have a five figure deficit and some we are in surplus. There's no regularity there's no predictability in our budget and it comes down to irregularity in giving.

That's the bottom line. There is irregularity in giving. For the most part we get to it when we think about it. That's why we encourage people to do it electronically to be thinking about it set it up because the pressing needs that come it's the first thing that gets pushed aside.

We're noticing like this all over the place and let me just say you do not run your households like that.

You cannot run your households like that. One month I've got feed for the kids next month kids let's invite ourselves to people's places for dinner.

So this week sit down with the cross sit down with 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 make a decision to take a step forward in showing gratitude for what Christ has done for you.

[33 : 58] Our grasp of the great eternal treasure that Jesus is will be reflected in a life of generosity. Some of us might be regular givers but not even looked at it for years.

Same figure just keep ticking it over. So here's my advice if you are currently a non-giver which according to stats that I've seen in research recently something in the order of 30% of people who regard themselves as mature Christians have never given a single cent to gospel ministry and to charity.

It is impossible to be a mature Christian and not give a single cent to gospel ministry and maturity. So if you're a non-giver start giving.

If you're an irregular giver start making it regular. If you're a regular giver but only doing a small proportion of your income which apparently the average is something around 2.7% of income get that small proportion and start radically aggressively putting it towards 10% which is the baseline figure that we see in the gospel.

If you are a regular and proportional giver take a step towards extravagant generosity and start giving beyond 10%. See Paul's concern here with this church and this is a really important point Paul's concern here with this church is not that they won't give to the collection his concern is that they won't excel in giving.

[35 : 45] That's his concern. They won't excel in giving. So may we follow the Macedonians and excel in the grace of giving because we have received God's indescribable gift to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.