

# Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 20/09/2020

## Mini Series – “God's new community”

### Part Three - “The result of poverty + joy”

**2 Corinthians 8:1-15** We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup> and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. <sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. <sup>12</sup> For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. <sup>13</sup> For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness <sup>14</sup> your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. <sup>15</sup> As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

We live in a culture that equates happiness with having wealth. We might think that isn't true for everyone but, deep down, we all look to material possessions to give us the happiness we crave, whether it be a more comfortable home, a new car or other 'toy', or just buying something we want, rather than need, to cheer ourselves up. However, we soon discover, that in the long term, wealth doesn't equal happiness. Many of the world's richest people are also the unhappiest. We probably know this to

be the case, but we still find ourselves striving for more, bigger and better, never imagining that anyone poor could be happy.

In **2 Corinthians 8**, we see people who were not only poor and happy, but, even more surprisingly, were generous out of their poverty (**v1-2**). Our culture's formula is **wealth = happiness**, but these believers in Macedonia lived their lives by a different formula: **extreme poverty + abundant joy = generous giving**.

The Jewish believers in Judea were struggling financially. The Gentile believers in Asia had decided to collect money for them, out of love and gratitude because the gospel had originally been brought to them by believers from Judea at great personal cost. A year on, this church in Corinth had still not fulfilled the commitment they had made to help the Judeans in return, and Paul is writing to them to encourage them to complete what they had started. (**v11**). They had been eager to start, but not so eager to follow it through. Paul knows the human heart:

- We are reluctant to give unless there is some gain for us
- We struggle to give because it would mean loss for us – less money to spend on ourselves.
- If we equate wealth with happiness, we certainly won't want to give generously.

Next Sunday (27<sup>th</sup>) is designated as a Gift Day to raise the remaining funds for the new building. This week, please be praying for God to work, so that he alone gets the glory. Giving to the new building is not about relieving physical poverty as it was in Judea. It is about **relieving spiritual poverty**, and providing a building where:

- Gospel ministry will take place
- Disciples for the kingdom of God will be grown

**We aren't giving to build a physical building – we are giving to further the kingdom of God on earth.**

What Paul writes in **2 Cor: 8 and 9** is relevant for us, not just for next week, but particularly for our ongoing giving. It will help us to have a view of money, wealth and happiness that is shaped by the Bible, rather than by our culture.

Paul uses two examples to motivate the Corinthians, and us, to give, and to view rightly our possessions.

1. **A human example (vv1-4)** – note the following three things in these verses:

**a) The extreme poverty of these believers (v2)**

Many of us imagine we aren't wealthy, because we compare ourselves to the culture around us, living as we do in a well off area. If we assume that to be true, we will think we can't give anything to the work of the Lord whether it be a regular tithe, or an additional one-off gift for a specific need. We will keep our money to improve our lifestyle to the level of those living around us. Yet, in the West, we aren't poor by the standards of the believers in Macedonia, who were begging in order to survive. Paul tells us they faced extreme poverty.

**b) What they lacked financially, they more than made up in joy (v2)**

Despite their extreme poverty, these were joy filled believers. Their joy was independent of external circumstance and wasn't linked to their wealth – it was in something far more solid than material possessions. This was counter-cultural even in Paul's day and shows us it is possible to have **extreme poverty + abundant joy** as one side of the equation. Scripture teaches us that it is possible to be sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

**c) Extreme poverty + abundant joy = generous giving (v3-4)**

Here are verses to meditate on this week, as we consider our own giving. The Macedonians' poverty was such that they could have begged for help to meet their own needs, but they were begging to meet the needs of others, even if it meant giving beyond their means. We make excuses not to give, but, of their own accord, they were making excuses to give! Grace giving means giving in spite of circumstances (Warren Wiersbe) and that gets to the heart of why these believers gave as they did. God's grace was at work in their lives (v1). They had devoted themselves and all that they had to serving the Lord, realising that they had been bought with a price and were not their own (1 Cor 6:20). Hence, God was at work in their lives, by his grace, to enable them to give.

If we are experiencing God's grace in our lives, we will want to give, no matter what our circumstances.

2. **A divine example that speaks of God's love for us (v9)** 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.

Paul is speaking in terms of our spiritual riches, not material riches – it is wrong to think otherwise. We were born spiritually bankrupt – sinners by nature with nothing to commend us to God. None of us could ever earn merit with God, since even our good works are ruined by sin. Anything good we might do is tarnished by pride. We need someone to rescue us - someone who would be accepted by God because he was righteous but who could truly represent us and deal with all our sin and guilt.

**The good news of the Bible is that God himself in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, came to rescue us.**

All things were created by Christ Jesus and for him. All that exists belongs to him so he is owed the highest honour, adoration, thanksgiving and obedience from every creature. Yet Jesus became poor:

- He left the presence of his Father where there is fulness of joy and pleasures forevermore (**Psalm 16:11**)
- He took human flesh, coming to this earth to live in obscurity for 30 years among the poor and humble
- He was despised and rejected by the people who owed their lives to him, then nailed to a cross to die

While most people are trying to climb out of poverty, Jesus climbed down from the riches of his Father's presence into poverty. He experienced the loss of his Father's presence as he took the punishment for our sin, dealing with our spiritual and moral bankruptcy so that we could find our place in God's presence where there is fulness of joy and pleasures forevermore.

It is the grace of God for us (**v9**), and Paul uses it both as an example for us to follow and as a motivation to give. We can show grace to others by using our wealth to serve them, even if that means we become poor.

What Christ did for us spiritually needs to be lived out in our lives through generosity:

- With our finances
- With our time – when we really grasp what Christ has done for us, we will give unselfishly of our time
- With our attitude – being patient and showing courtesy to others, always speaking well of them.

**What Christ did for us spiritually is not just to be reflected in our giving – it affects the whole of our lives.**

How can we possibly live up to these two examples of generous giving? It seems impossible, given the culture we live in and our own sinful hearts. How can we come to a place where we are willing to begin giving out of our abundance, let alone out of our lack of it? Then again, how do we come to a place where we obey any of Christ's commands which are so counter-cultural – sexual purity in a sex-obsessed culture, serving others when society tells us it's all about me and my needs or treating people with dignity when social media is full of personal attacks on people?

**v5 has the answer - they gave themselves first to the Lord.** The Macedonian believers could find joy in, and generously give from their extreme poverty because the Lord came first. Money wasn't their treasure – Christ was their treasure. That is what the grace of God accomplishes in the lives of those who are God's people. Christ let go of the riches of the presence of his Father in order that we might enjoy the riches of the presence of God where there is fulness of joy even in extreme poverty and severe affliction.

If our happiness is bound up with our wealth, we won't give generously and sacrificially and we will be miserable if it is taken away from us. If our security is linked to our savings, we won't give beyond our means.

If by God's grace, we have come to see the worth of Christ and have given ourselves to him, treasuring him above money, earthly comforts and our reputation then we will give generously of our money and time, and we won't fear poverty or affliction.

Unless you have a living relationship with Jesus, you won't treasure Jesus, but will look for joy in money, human approval or earthly comforts.

Next week, we will look at some practical things to do with giving (2Cor 9) but none of those will be effective unless, by God's grace, we have come to treasure Christ above wealth so that we are finding our ultimate joy in him.

**If Jesus is your treasure, you will have joy in every circumstance of life, leading to radical counter-cultural living.**

**Let us set aside worldly pursuits and make the pursuit of Christ the highest priority in our lives.**

**As you do, you will begin to find a joy even in the midst of adversity and poverty, that will lead to generosity.**

**Christ is our greatest treasure.**