

GENEROSITY AS WORSHIP

Series: "Created to Worship"

II Corinthians 8:1-9

Chadron Berean Church

If you were to ask a random person in this community, "*What is Chadron Berean Church known for?*" What do you think they would say? Our name implies that we want to be known as people of the Word. We want to be known as a people who love Jesus. This summer, we've been talking about being a people of prayer. But there's one thing that we don't often think about as something to be known for that is going to make people think there's something different about us Christians and that's generosity. Are we a *generous* people? That's what we want to discuss this morning as we revisit our theme for this year, *Created to Worship*. So far, we've talked about what worship is, how we become like what we worship, and how each of us has a different worship temperament. We worship in different ways. Giving, or generosity, is one of those ways.

Now naturally I'm a bit hesitant or low-key when it comes to talking about money in church. I think because of the televangelists and church scandals out there, it's tempting to shy away from talking about money or giving altogether. False teachers are known for fleecing their flocks instead of feeding their flocks. It seems like money is all they talk about. But I also think that because of that it's easy to go to the other extreme and not talk about money at all, creating a vacuum that leaves people without an understanding of how to glorify God with a resource we use with daily. By not talking about God's perspective on money and possessions, we can unintentionally condition a church to become consumers instead of givers.¹

The Bible talks about money and giving a lot. Jesus talked more about money and possessions than about heaven and hell combined. In the Bible there are 500 references to prayer and 2,000 references to possessions.² The reason for this is because money is directly tied to our worship. Jesus made the point that in our greed and our search for security and satisfaction, we can start to live for money and possessions. He said, "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Mt. 6:21). What we do with our time, talents, and treasure is a telling sign of where our hearts are at with God. We might say we really have a heart for something (for this cause or that cause), but if we're not investing our resources in it (time, talent, treasure), we're putting on a mask. How we spend our precious resources, then, are a gauge on our spirituality. They're an indication of whether we practice what we say we believe.³ From II Corinthians 8, we're going to look at several principle related to giving as we study the example of some first century churches.

I. THE EXAMPLE OF A GENEROUS CHURCH. (II Cor. 8:1-5)

1 Now, brothers and sisters, we make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability,

and beyond their ability, they gave voluntarily, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

II Corinthians was written by the Apostle **Paul** from **Macedonia** (northern Greece; probably from Philippi) to the **Corinthians** in Achaia (southern Greece). He writes this letter mainly because Paul was informed by **Titus** that the church in Corinth had been infiltrated by false teachers that turned the congregation against Paul. They claimed Paul was anti-Jewish and anti-Mosaic Law. In the process, they hindered a monetary collection being made by Titus one year earlier (8:10) that they promised to give towards the needy saints in Jerusalem. The saints of Jerusalem, having recently gone through persecution and famine, could use the help. Stirring up generosity in the churches to take care of one another was one of the major ministries of Paul (8:13-15). So Paul writes to refute the false teachers, re-establish these believers in the grace of the New Covenant, and to see to it that they fulfill their pledge as promised. Such an offering from these primarily Gentile churches would help refute the false charges that Paul was hostile to the Jews.⁴ The generous gift would speak for itself and foster unity within this international family of believers.

The city and the church of **Corinth** had a mixed social stratum. There were poor and wealthy just like most places (1 Cor. 1:26) but overall, it was a wealthy city. Being located on a narrow isthmus, wealth flowed into this trade city constantly. Every two years the Isthmian Games (similar to the Olympics) also generated a lot of revenue. It was one of the most notable banking and finance centers in the Roman world.⁵ To appeal to the well-off Corinthians to fulfill their pledge, he highlights the extraordinary example of the Macedonian churches to the north (Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica) who though impoverished due to persecution, contributed generously. He describes Macedonia's giving in verse 1 as "*the grace of God given in the churches of Macedonia.*" Now, if you know anything about the Corinthian church, they loved God's **grace**, God's *charis* (the Greek word; vv. 1, 4, 6, 7). The word grace has a wide range of use, but the "grace" the Corinthians boasted in was the spiritual gifts God gave them (1 Pet. 4:10-11). Well, "grace" dominates this section too, being referenced 10 times, but not in reference to spiritual gifts, but to giving.

Giving is an act of grace.

Paul views giving as an act of grace. It is a grace-work. He says that despite **deep poverty** and **affliction**, the Macedonians **overflowed** in generosity. You have to love that word-picture: overflowing. Imagine a cup brimming over. Even though they didn't have a large cup, they were still overflowing in generosity in anything they could give. It might remind us of the poor widow in the Gospels who with only 2 mites (a fraction of a cent) gave more than the rest because she gave out of her poverty. Paul says in verse 3, the Macedonians gave **according to their ability** and **beyond their ability!** They **begged** Paul to let them participate in this collection. There were enthusiastic and selfless—even a little *reckless*—in their generosity!

I'm always on the lookout for healthy movies to watch so when someone shared one recently, I looked it up. It's called *McFarland USA*. It's a true story about a high school football coach from Idaho who gets fired for misbehavior and winds up in a poor little Hispanic border town. At first,

they can't stand it there. They feel so out of place. They don't feel secure. They don't speak Spanish. It doesn't help that their last name is "White." But as time goes on and he starts to put together a state champion track team, he gets an offer from a top-notch school to be their coach. And so there's a great temptation to leave and take the offer, especially when his daughter is almost hurt in an old gang rivalry. But just when the coach is about to make the switch, his wife says, "The decision is all yours. Just promise me one thing: that you won't make this about our safety because I've never experienced family like this before." That's the Macedonians. They understood loving family community is more important than money. That's Paul's heart in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

Giving is an act of worship.

Verse 5 reveals one of the main reasons why the Macedonians could be so generous: "*they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*" There's your act of worship right there. In an act of worship, **they gave themselves to the Lord**. Romans 12:1-2 says, "*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*" That's exactly what the Macedonians did and the worship was evident in their selfless giving. See, true giving is not simply economic exchange. It's an act of worship. This is why we put up new offering boxes as you come into the worship center. We want you to see it as an act of worship. We don't want them by the doors as you leave, thinking you paid for a service we provided. We want you to see giving as an act of worship that you're participating in. We also noticed having only one box near the north entrance was creating traffic jams. But I digress. The Macedonians knew that they were not their own and neither was anything they owned because they gave themselves to Him (2 Cor. 5:15). That is the most foundational principle for giving. It's understanding that:

God owns everything, even me! I am simply a steward.

We'll never be generous people without understanding we are stewards—without seeing our time, talents, and treasure as a gift from God to be used for His purposes. Rather than asking ourselves, "Do I want to serve? Do I want to give?" we should ask, "How or when does *God* want me to serve or give?" Sometimes we think that if we just have a little bit more money or time, then we'll be generous with it. If I can just get through college or get that raise, *then* I'll be more generous. That's simply not true. If you're not generous now, you won't be generous then. The greed in our hearts that Jesus says to watch out for (beware of) keeps telling us "just a little bit more" (Lk. 12:15).

Generosity produces joy.

The Macedonians also remind us that generosity produces **joy** (v. 2). The Macedonians were joyful according to verse 2. There's real statistics out there that prove generous people are some of the most joyful people and ungenerous people are more likely to be miserable. It truly is more blessed to give than receive (Acts 20:35). Giving leaves both the giver and the receiver in a better state.⁶ You know, when I look back on my life and ministry, the most precious moments are the moments of sacrificial giving—helping someone else and meeting real needs. Those are the moments that stand out. The times when we made cabbage burgers to support missionaries in Alaska; made 400

sandwiches for firefighters; our Care Ministry trimming trees and resided a garage in one morning! Giving of your time, talent, and treasure to serve Christ is a sacrifice, but one that you never regret and brings eternal joy and reward.

Authentic generosity always surprises people.

Paul says in verse 5 that the Macedonians' giving was surprising to him. It wasn't what he expected! He was amazed by their generosity! Pure and authentic generosity like that turns heads and makes people think, "Wow, there is some good in this world. There is hope." Or "I wonder what makes them so different?" Just this week someone came into my office with a meal for my family. My wife, being 8 months pregnant, greatly appreciated that! But the first thing I said was, "Wow. Thank you." Generosity produces a wow-factor. It's winsome. It's contagious. And Paul is hoping the Macedonians' generosity will stir up the Corinthians to do the same (Heb. 10:24).

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO BE A GENEROUS CHURCH. (2 Cor. 8:6-9)

6 So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. 7 But just as you excel in everything, in faith, speaking, knowledge, and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you also excel in this gracious work. 8 I am not saying this as a command, but as proving, through the earnestness of others, the sincerity of your love as well.

So Titus, the previous year, began this collection (v. 10) and Paul informs them he's sending Titus back to complete it. He wants them to be fruitful, invested in eternal matters (Phil. 4:17). So just like the Macedonians did, he encourages the Corinthians to **voluntarily** complete this **gracious work** they started. Just like they excel in spiritual gifts, they are to excel in this "grace" of giving. To think outside their church and meet some needs. Paul makes it clear this is **not a command**. He's not exercising apostolic authority. He's not legislation giving in the churches. He says to give of your own **willingness in love**.

Giving is voluntary.

As soon as giving becomes an obligation or a rule, or if there are pressure tactics involved, it's no longer an act of grace. God wants generosity to be from the heart—something we do cheerfully. In fact, there's no quantity given in the NT for how much we should give. In the OT, Israel was to tithe (give 10%) and at times their giving was around 20%. But in the NT, we aren't given a percentage. We're just told to give generously, cheerfully. I think the tithe is a good a place to start but we should keep challenging ourselves. I know some people who give their age. But the last verse for today gives us a powerful theological reason to give:

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 through His poverty might become rich.

So, the Macedonians, an amazing example of generosity! Jesus, however, is always the greatest example in anything! He became poor so we might become rich. "*He became poor*" implies that

He pre-existed His birth. Being eternal, He enjoyed the riches of heaven, but He entered into this world poor. He was born into a poor family. He lived, as far as we can tell, a meager life. At times, He had no place to lay His head. He asked for coins when using them to teach, or, He just went fishing and pulled coins out of a fish's mouth. I wish the Lord would let me pay my taxes that way! He *borrowed* a rich man's tomb for 3 days! He became poor so that we might become rich in Him. In II Corinthians 9:15 Paul says, "*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*" The gift He's talking about is the gift of salvation. It's the greatest gift you'll ever receive. It's a gift you receive by faith, trusting in Jesus who died for your sins. I encourage you to call out to Him today and receive that indescribable gift. It will change you, making you more generous—just like He is.

We give because He gave.

Giving flows naturally from hearts that have been touched by the grace of God. Generosity in an individual or a church is a sign that we have been touched by God's grace. Grace begets grace. We imitate the One who gave Himself for us.

In summary, let's ask that question again, "*What do we want to be known for as a church?*" My prayer is that we would also be known for being generous. I'm not saying we aren't. I'm not preaching this sermon because we need to increase payroll or anything like that. In fact, I'm anxious to give some away! This church is incredibly generous. I'm amazed at the generosity of this church and the missionaries and organizations we can support. I'm blown away by it. But let's continue to excel in this area and foster a contagious culture of generosity. To see generosity as a core value. A lifestyle. A culture. One man said, "*When people in our churches have an encounter with the living God and are touched by His grace, we find no greater evidence of God's power than the existence of a culture of reckless generosity. Generosity like this is exceptional, unexpected, and provides a clear witness to the transforming power of God.*"⁷

Generosity is a lifestyle.

But even though we've been touched by grace, it's a challenge being generous today. Most of you are aware that in 2008, there was an economic crisis. Recession hit. Things were tough. During that time churches responded in 1 of 3 ways: 1) they went into denial, pretending like it wasn't happening; 2) went into survival mode, hoarding and tightening their budgets; or 3) they saw it as an *opportunity* to help people who were hurting because of it. Instead of retracting and playing it safe, they reached out and met real needs in love and God continued to bless them beyond their ability—some of which made local and national media for it.⁸ Well, things are tight again these days. I get that. But we have a God who owns everything, including us. Let's continue to advance His purposes and demonstrate His generosity. Let's refuse to squander our time, talents, and treasure and live for what's eternal. And let's continue having fun because giving is just plain fun!

As we take communion this morning, let's remember that how great God's gift of grace is in Christ and renew our pledges that we took at our baptism or elsewhere when we told Him we wanted to live for Him and be fruitful believers.

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- ¹ Chris Willard, Jim Shepherd, *Contagious Generosity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 37.
- ² Stephen Davies, *Lesson 389: When Your Heart Lives at the Bank (Matthew 6:19-34)*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0h4O_p9-Dg
- ³ Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 21
- ⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume 2* (Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Publishing, 2003), 149.
- ⁵ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 3.
- ⁶ Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 61.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.