

A Generous Church

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

In the only recorded words of Jesus outside of the Gospels Paul reminds his hearers that He said: 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). Some of you may remember my message in the May copy of 'The News' about being a Church that is 'poured out' for the world God loves and Christ died for. Such is characteristic of the Church Jesus is building. The Institutional Church believes it has a right to survive, but the real Church works more on the gospel principle of: whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it (Matthew 16:25). If St Andrews ever becomes an end in itself the alarm bells should ring for we are here, by God's grace, for a single ultimate goal of honouring Christ and introducing people to Him.

Our reading is a case study in generosity: the contrasting of the poor persecuted Macedonian churches with rich Corinth. Put basically the Macedonians were a Generous Church (contemporary examples abound of how churches in the so called developing world give with miraculous 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 saints (8:3-4).' Corinth might excel in many areas but not as yet in the grace of giving. Paul saw it as a test of the sincerity of their love: a Loving Church needs also to be a Generous Church! "But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us - see that you also excel in the grace of giving." The big clue there for you and I to pick up on re giving is that is ultimately a response to our experience of the Amazing Grace of God embodied in Jesus, which is why Paul then gives Jesus as the obvious example (v9 read).

So we need to be a Generous Church because we follow a Gracious & Generous God. To be such a Church each of us need first to get a

revelation of the generosity of God over our lives. We have sung of our Beautiful Saviour. We have given thanks with grateful hearts for all he has done. We have focused on the Cross: the heart of God's generous love towards each one of us. So generous or stingy: what's it be? Since August 1975 when I began to trust in God and walk by Faith: from that moment I said yes to Jesus I have sought to make grace and generosity the measure of my life and I won't change it for anyone.

We need to sow generously in every respect with all of our lives and the resources, which as we learnt last week God gave us in the first place: the principle is Galatians 6:7 'a man reaps what he sows'. The truth of sowing and reaping in the natural world is here applied in 2 Corinthians to the sphere of giving. It is not, of course, a straight sowing of cash and a harvest of cash as some persuasive cults want us to believe. 'Send £20 or \$40 and within 6 months you will have ten times the amount back from God' (such statements are always accompanied by numerous examples of MR X at such and such a place and Miss Y elsewhere who are now rich because they gave to this guru, prophet or organization). It is a despicable misapplication of the reaping picture in the bible and puts the Christian faith into hard cash-investment terms, resulting in our own material benefit. The NT does not rule out material blessings but does not speak in such materialistic terms as the give and get philosophy offers. Rather the harvest is in richer spiritual terms. Tens of thousands could testify genuinely to that. Giving does bring spiritual blessing as long as it is giving from the heart. In the OT, God says he despises the gifts brought because the people's hearts are so far from Him. So here Paul links the sowing and reaping quotation (which is similarly expressed in Proverbs 11:24: 'One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer - another withholds what he should give and suffers want') with the attitude. Get the attitude right and the action will follow.

So I want today to teach you the biblical principle, which undergirds a Generous Church, which I will call 'sowing generously'. Such a Spirit of

Generosity is the first fruit of renewal in any local congregation and a foundation on which much can be built.

9:6 The Principle Sow sparingly, reap sparingly, Sow generously, reap generously. See Luke 6:38 Applies to Prayer Life, daily walk with God, Giving, Family life, Marriage, the Church itself, our going out into the world, our tithing of our income.

9:7 The Individual response Give what you have decided in your own heart (Exodus 25:1: whose heart prompts him) to give (Attitude more important than action). Not reluctantly or under compulsion (heart not head). God loves a cheerful giver (Gk hilarious!). James 1:17 all our resources are from Him!

Let me give you an example not to boast but because it helps you to understand our what trusting Him means in a concrete situation: (couple in East End with family three months into our ministry (1987)/ became Christians/ Loan shark £500 £32 pw interest/ Prayed and God told Lorna and I to use £500 for holiday to pay off loan shark/ Scary night behind pub, paid off, assurance/ Couple went on with God/ three weeks later in post (cheque £500 intercessor in Basingstoke who Lord told to send us/ Went on Holiday/ Lord tested our heart/ All that happened built on that/.

9:8 Result of Generous Spirit: the God who asks is also the God who gives Generous giving for those who have very little to give seems very hazardous: but the risk tends to be forgotten when the greatness of God's power is kept steadily in mind. Verse 8 is worth writing out and putting somewhere you can see daily: He is able to make All grace abound to you in All things at All times having All you need (Gk sufficiency); You will abound in every good work (***The Result!***). See also Philippians 4:11 (I am not saying this because I am in need: I have learnt to be content whatever the circumstances). So remember Jesus: claim this promise

through your obedience. Lit: "Such a supply on the spot as to be independent of externals".

9:9 A reminder from Psalm 112:9 People who truly fear the Lord (v1-3 will never lack riches) by scattering gifts to the poor thereby increase their own righteousness: God will honour them!

9.10 God will bless you to bless others! He supplies seed to the Sower, bread for food: why? To increase your store of seed and enlarge your harvest of righteousness. Given for a purpose! The more you give the more you get to give.

9.11 More Generous and God gets the glory! Made rich in every way so you can be generous on every occasion. The result is that thanksgiving is given to God.

9:12-15 Thus the Grace of Jesus flows! Thence a circle of blessing: Givers and recipients giving to each other and praying for each other. New bonds of love are established! Supplying the needs of God's people (v12) Results in much thanksgiving to God (v12) is proof of your confidence that the gospel is true (v13) and the focus of all giving: the spotlight is on Jesus (v14)!

The final sentence of the reading points us back to the inspiration of all giving: to Jesus, to the free gift of Salvation offered to all who believe, to the greatest gift offered to mankind. Our response must be one of exultant thanksgiving - in our life on earth, in the way we live and give and share, and then with the gathered company of God's people in heaven. Now and then, we exclaim: Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!!

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