

## **Cheerful Giving – 2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

**22<sup>nd</sup> May 2011 – Christ Church, Chineham**

### **Introduction**

As we begin to look at the passage we've read this morning I want to take you immediately to verse 7 where it says "God loves a cheerful giver"! Well I don't know what you make of that because when it comes to my money I have a tendency say to myself – worked for it, I earned it, it's mine – and so I'll do what I jolly well like with it! Blow this joyful giving stuff! Actually I think if we're honest we all have a tendency to think like that from time to time. It is hard sometimes putting the words joyful and giving together. Indeed it's hard talking about money and giving especially in church. In fact I think most people find this aspect of Christian discipleship a huge challenge. So let's acknowledge a few things up front.

Firstly we don't necessarily know each other circumstances. Some of us may be struggling with debt, for others we may have been made redundant or facing uncertainty, others may have retired and seen their income drop. Some of us may have only limited control over our household income. Some may share their income with others who don't know Christ. So let's not pretend the issue of giving is easy when it comes to church – it hits at our very core of humanness and it challenges us. Secondly let me say up front - this sermon is not intended to create any sense of guilt. God knows your own situation - I don't believe he will force you to do anything that is beyond you. Thirdly when we review our giving that means asking God about it – praying about it – sitting down and thinking it through and then doing one of three things. We may sense God calling us to increase it or he may be urging us to leave it as it is or God may wish you to decrease it. Also as we look at this passage recognise it simply conveys what God is saying through Paul to the Corinthian Christians and at the same time what this means for us as Christians today.

But here is the exciting bit – over the last two weeks and today we've been looking at 2 Corinthians 8 & 9. As a whole this scripture reveals some amazing truths about Christian giving. Two weeks ago Ian preached about how the Macedonian churches gave generously, how they begged to be allowed to give and how they gave out of poverty and the trials they were going through. We asked what was their motivation, and saw that it was the grace of God. They were living in the grace of God and aware of God's generosity to them - they literally overflowed with generosity in response to His grace.

Last week Ian turned our attention to the churches in Corinth and Paul's message to them and how that same message encourages us to give out of love, to give proportionately in line with our income and that we should give together. That together we can achieve great things for God.

Giving is of course much more than money but these passages from 2 Corinthians centre on financial giving. It's no accident there are 2,350 verses in the Bible on how we should handle money, wealth and possessions. With the exception of love that is more than any other subject – that is probably because God knows we struggle with this part of our discipleship and it figures therefore that God wants us to hear about it. It's challenging but it's important.

Giving is really important – its about getting involved in what God is doing – and making mission and ministry happen – for example every bereaved family comforted, every person served through the oasis café, every youngster shown the love of Christ through the Street pastors. Every third world child sponsored, every person shown the love of Christ through your care, comfort and compassion and loads, loads more. Our financial giving as well as the giving of our time and expertise enables those things to happen.

Paul tells the Corinthians that giving is about growing in faith it's about excelling in this area of their lives. But most importantly of all Paul reminds them that giving is rooted in the best gift of all which is the gift of Jesus Christ who became poor for our sakes that we might become rich in Him.

So let's look in a bit more detail at the passage before us this morning where Paul spells out three exciting and compelling reasons why Christian giving is so transforming.

1. Giving helps us receive God's generosity
2. Giving helps us to thank God
3. Giving proclaims our commitment to God

### **1. Giving helps us receive God's generosity.**

In verse 6 Paul begins by saying 'Remember this' – It is clear he wants the Corinthians to recognise the importance of what he is about to say : 'Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously'. I'm no gardening expert but I know the more you sow the bigger the harvest. Paul develops this truth by saying what is true physically in agriculture is also true spiritually with God. God gives to share, God sows to reap, and God invites our participation. Our giving is the sowing of the seed. There is no false distinction between the spiritual and the financial – if God is to be centre of our spiritual lives, then he has to be centre of our financial lives as well - the call of the harvest is all embracing.

Now notice three times Paul says that as the Corinthians give as they sow so does God do something in return. In verse 8 Paul says: God is able to make all grace abound to you. Then in verse 10: Now he who supplies seed for the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. And thirdly in verse 11 – You will be made rich in every way.

We have to be careful here – Is Paul telling the Corinthians that all they need to do is give a bit of money to Paul and God will pour money into their pockets as a result? Some just read this passage in that way – they develop the so called prosperity Gospel. The teaching of those churches is that God wants to make you financially rich and the way to get rich is by giving to God who is then duty bound to give you more in return. But that is a distortion of this passage. Let's look a little bit closer at Paul words to the Corinthians.

In verse 8 Paul says: God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need you will abound in every good work. Recognise Paul saying 'having all that you need'. He's not saying all that you want. Also he says: 'you'll abound in every good work' – what is the good work the Corinthians are doing? It is giving - 'God will give you all you need so you can carry on the good work' – in other words 'carry on giving'. Now look again at verse 10: Now he who supplies seed for the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

God gives us resources to use and invest for him. Paul uses the illustration of seed to explain that these resources God gives us are not to be hidden, foolishly devoured or thrown away. Instead they should be cultivated in order to produce more crops. When we invest what God has given us in his work, he provides us with even more to give in his service.

Now look at verse 11 again: You will be made rich in every way (why) so that you can be *generous on every occasion*. Paul is saying: God gives in response to the individual giving but not for that person's own self indulgence but so they can continue giving. God gives so that generosity can continue. This isn't prosperity gospel this is generosity Gospel!

Paul is saying to the Corinthians and to us today – if the objective of our giving is genuine generosity then God will enable you to keep on giving. Giving generously opens us up to the fresh generosity of God. He will give us more than we need so we can continue giving. But God also calls for authenticity - our attitude when we give is actually more important than the amount we give. As verse 7 reminds us "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver".

For example - think about the joy you experience at Christmas when you give a really appreciated and carefully thought about gift..... Now think about when you've given a gift reluctantly or because you've got to – There's a difference isn't there. The have too's and the want too's! - The

gifts that are carefully chosen and thoughtfully given.... and those bought for convenience and expedience. Generosity is born from the heart of the giver not an over concentration on the need for the gift. The sower must decide **how** to sow. If we give grudgingly we close ourselves off from receiving God's blessing. But when we give generously and genuinely we open ourselves to receive back from God.

What blessings do we receive back from God? Not necessarily money although it could be, it might be spiritual blessing or the gift of contentment or peace of heart and mind. It will be different things for different people. What ever the situation as we give generously – cheerfully somehow God gives back. Jesus says it very clearly in Luke 6:38: Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

## **2. Giving helps us thank God.**

Verse 12 says: ‘This service that you perform is not about only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God’. Here Paul describes two effects of giving. He talks about giving outwards and upwards. Outward giving supplies the needs of God's people but then upwards giving is expressing thanks to God. The point Paul makes is really important. Christian giving is not simply looking at the budget needs of the church and working out how much we feel like giving. It's also an upwards exercise as we express in our giving our thanks to God for all that he has done for us.

Think about what God gives you? The air that you breathe, the sun that warms us, the rain that showers us, the food we eat, our homes, our families, our friends, our jobs, our schools, our whole lives. Think about all the blessings he pours on us at Christ Church. But most of all think about what God has done for us in Jesus. Think about what it means to be thankful for Jesus. Because that is the gift Paul describes as ‘the indescribable gift’ in verse 15.

RT Kendall in his book the Gift of Giving sums this up really well: ‘God accepts us as we are, not as we should be. There is nothing so thrilling as knowing God really loves us as we are. This realisation is emancipating and paves the way to please God by voluntary obedience. This obedience, however, adds nothing to our being saved. We are saved by Christ's righteousness. The reason our obedience pleases God is because we demonstrate how much we appreciate Him for accepting us as we are. It pleases Him because He sees that **we** see that our obedience does not count for righteousness.....so when we do what we do as a way of saying ‘Thank you’, God delights in us. This is why Paul exhorted that we should give cheerfully, God not only delights in us, He shows it.

Christian giving is responding to God and thanking him for what he has done for us – and not expecting something in return but simply giving in response to his love, grace and mercy – for what he has done for us in Jesus. What that thanks-giving looks like will be different for each one of us. Look at verse 7. ‘Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give’ – in other words we need to pray about it and ask God how our giving will reflect our thanks to him and the answer will be different for each of us. But importantly the gifts we offer are not then given out of duty or compulsion but out of thanks. We can be cheerful because we are not just meeting a budget we are actually giving thanks to God for what he has done for us.

## **3. Giving proclaims our commitment to God.**

Verse 13 says: Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ. In other words when others see what the Corinthians give they will praise God – why? Because they will see the tangible evidence of the Corinthians faith. They'll see proof, physical proof that for the Corinthians Jesus is Lord. Not just in their lips but in their lives. And this remains a truth for Christians today. Giving is a practical and visible outworking of our faith.

Every time a Christian gives to God's work he or she is making a statement of faith. They are saying Jesus is Lord. In choosing freely to give money to God's work we are saying that money does not rule us but that Jesus does. To put it bluntly when we give we are putting our money where our mouth is. We can say the right words, we can sing the right songs. But when it comes

to addressing our giving we actually find out how real our faith is. We demonstrate the truth Jesus said: You cannot serve both God and money.

We demonstrate where our real commitment lies – and it is to Jesus. We demonstrate to ourselves and others that as a church we are walking in obedience with Jesus as Lord. When we choose to give to God's work we declare - Jesus is Lord. That I myself really am walking the walk and not just talking the talk. I'm not just part of a church that is obedient but I'm obedient.

Now that can be a really challenging step to make for the first time. Perhaps you are here this morning and thinking about giving generously for the first time. It can feel like a huge step. But when we do it for the first time, every time we do it after that I think it's a joy because we are affirming that Jesus is Lord of our lives and that money is not lord. We are affirming who is in control and I think there is perhaps nothing more important in our lives than to be clear about who is Lord. We can give cheerfully because we are pleased to affirm that Jesus is Lord of our lives.

### **Conclusion**

So to finish let me pose you a couple of questions. First question – How are you sowing – richly or reluctantly? The promise in this passage is that God will multiply what you sow back to in everything – not just in money, or even spiritual blessing but also in the gift of contentment, of peace of heart and mind. The challenge for us is that we need to sow before we can reap. There is a domino effect in giving; when we learn to give it releases lots of other areas of our lives. Are we ready to put God to the test, to trust his promises?

Second question: Which field are you sowing in? Yours or Gods? We cannot separate money from lifestyle. We may have seed but if it is all sown in the field of our own personal choices then we miss out on the blessing twice. Once because no matter how much we sow in our own field it will never be enough. Secondly because there will be little left to be sown in God's field.

Paul said that deciding to give was a test of the faith of the Corinthians. I can give my time and my expertise but the acid test is whether I will give my money to God's work as well. Do we wish to be associated with his work? Will we trust God sufficiently to put him first in our financial lives as well as our weekly worship? Do we wish to contribute joyfully and generously to Gods action in the world by being generous sowers of the seed and enjoying the harvest - not only here at Christ Church receiving your ministry of giving but also in our own hearts as well!