

THE JOY OF GIVING

2 CORINTHIANS 8: 1-9

Joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness generally comes from things or circumstances. Joy comes from loving God and neighbor. Happiness is quick like a flash of lightning, then gone.

Joy is steady and abiding, like a fixed star. Happiness depends on external circumstances, such as money, food, travel, etc. Joy is independent of them, for it comes from love of God and obedience to God.

In a second letter written by Paul, he encourages the Corinthian to learn the joy of giving by telling them of the generosity of the Macedonian churches (read 2 Cor. 8:1-9).

The church in Jerusalem was going through hard times and a collection was being taken for their relief. The Macedonian churches responded most generously.

Some of us have questions about giving—the tithe, offerings, and other kinds of giving. We'll talk about this a little bit over the next couple of Sundays. In the meantime here are three lessons the Macedonians teach us about giving:

1. What to give.

1 Cor. 8:5, And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

This is always the starting place—joy comes when we first give ourselves to the Lord. Why? Because...

(1) We belong to God.

Paul is somewhat surprised at the response of these people when they were asked to help. He figured they would give something out of a sense of duty, and would say, "We've done our part, good luck with the rest of the collection."

Instead, he says, “They gave themselves first to the Lord.” The Macedonians learned a great lesson. All they were, all they had, all the blessings of life were from God and Him alone.

If I said to you, “God is the owner and we are the stewards,” probably we’d all nod in agreement. But we don’t really believe it.

We’re willing to allow God ownership of the dirt, the mountains, the oceans and all the stuff we can’t personally lay claim to. But if I said that your car, house, money, investments, whatever, it’s a different matter.

I’ve even heard preachers say the tithe is God’s money, and the rest is ours. No, the tithe and everything else belongs to God. Look at Psalm 24:1, The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

The Macedonians understood this. God owns everything! You don’t believe it—think back to your birth. Did you bring anything into this world? No! The world was operating fine without you, but you came anyway, created by God.

God made you what you are—eyes, hair, skin color, tall or short. He gave you your personality. He gave you abilities to learn and develop and earn and accumulate.

God does all that. But our problem is our pride—we think all these things are ours—and that all by our own efforts we are what we are.

What a shock when we come to the end of our trip. We leave the world exactly as we came into it—with absolutely nothing.

Everything we’ve earned and accumulated will be left behind. It will be turned over to someone else to manage. We literally do not own anything. The Macedonians also knew that...

(2) We belong to a community of believers.

The Macedonians knew that as members of God’s church they had great privileges as well as responsibilities to one another

Paul explained it best in 1 Cor. 12:26, If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. In the church, the pains as well as the joys are felt by all.

The Macedonian believers didn’t give in order to get anything from God, or more of God’s grace. They had already received that. They gave because they were in the family of God.

They knew that they had become indescribably rich the moment Christ came into their lives

(2 Cor. 8:9). They were overflowing with the joy of having received Christ.

When they gave, they knew that it was God's grace which was being given through them to others. So first, what to give? We give ourselves to God! Secondly...

2. How to give.

(1) Faithfully

The Macedonians learned to separate their giving from their circumstances. Terrible troubles had come to them. They had been pushed to their limits. But their trials showed them for what they were—Christians.

Though desperately poor they were overflowing with joy, and out of that joy something unexpected happened—an outpouring of pure generosity.

They faithfully gave whatever they could, no, beyond what they could, pleading for the privilege of giving and sharing. It was totally spontaneous and completely on their own. Paul was overwhelmed by their generosity.

They refused to use their poverty as an excuse; they refused to make excuses. They just wanted the opportunity to give. They were faithful in their giving. They gave faithfully, and they gave...

(2) Willingly

The Macedonians surpassed even Paul's expectations as they begged to give even more. No one forced them to give anything. They simply understood the need and willingly did all they could to meet it.

Paul probably still had the Macedonians on his mind when he wrote in 2 Cor. 9:7, Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Underline God loves a cheerful giver. Nothing pleases God more than when we recognize that all we are and have are from Him. God wants us to cheerfully give to the church.

This doesn't mean we only give when we are feeling cheerful. The cheerfulness often comes during and after the act of obedience, not before it. When we willingly and faithfully give, we feel better for it.

I know of people who are afraid not to give. I've heard them say, "I'd be afraid not to give the tithe to the Lord." God is not an extortionist. He isn't holding a gun to our heads.

Some people think by giving they are earning God's favor. They give out of greed thinking that the more they give the more God has to bless them materially.

God knows what you give, but He also knows your motivation. He will bless out of the joy of belonging to Him, but much of our reward will be heavenly, not earthly.

You already have His favor and grace. Our giving should be a reflexive response to His grace in our lives.

(3) Sacrificially

2 Cor. 8:3, For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

These early Christians were dirt-poor but came up with every reason they could to give. They begged for the privilege of giving.

They did this on their own accord. They wanted to give to Jesus who gave everything for them. Without conscious knowledge that this is what they were doing, they were proving the sincerity of their love for Christ (v. 8).

In recent surveys of college students, Alexander Astin of UCLA said, "The level of personal greed is very high." The surveys show a complete turnaround from the 1970s when students indicated they wanted to make a positive difference, to help others and so on.

Many students today have become strong supporters of gender and racial equality and gay and student rights. At the same time they are becoming more focused on making lots of money and less interested in sharing it.

The desire now is to make a 'fast buck'. Power and status are motivating more and more people. What a contrast we see in the Macedonians with the students in the surveys.

First we learned what to give, secondly, how to give, now the third thing is...

3. Why to give.

(1) In response to God's grace.

2 Cor. 8:1, Now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

This whole message begins with God's grace. Our joy comes from our salvation in Christ. The Macedonian's generosity was from their joy in receiving God's grace.

Grace simply means “undeserved favor.” Our salvation is God’s gift to us. By definition a ‘gift’ is undeserved or unearned. God has freely given us salvation in Jesus Christ.

He also continues to give us every breath of our life, every drop of water we drink, every ability and intelligence to earn and accumulate and support ourselves and our families.

No matter what our circumstances, if we would take the time to count our blessings from God, we would be amazed.

(2) Because we love Jesus.

2 Cor. 8:9, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

How can we possibly thank Jesus Christ enough, how can we ever repay him for what he did for each of us? The fact is we cannot.

But we can demonstrate our love for him through obedient living and joyful giving. Just as Christ gave himself for each of us, and just as the Macedonians did, we can give ourselves wholeheartedly to him.

When we come to the end of life, the question will be, “How much have you given?” not “How much have you gotten?”

We have an opportunity to demonstrate our love for Christ through a special offering next Sunday. As you know, our benevolence fund is not part of the church budget.

Usually we maintain this fund through small offerings taken after Lord Supper times and gifts. However, in January some things came up that have depleted the fund. And we need to rebuild it.

Make a note to yourself—next Sunday, Feb. 28, we will take a special offering just for this. You may put it in an envelop and mark it “Del Norte Baptist Benevolence Fund” and you will receive tax credit for the gift. And you don’t have to wait until Sunday.

Application:

When you simply “give” to the church, that is charity; but when you give as an act of giving to our Lord out of love and thankfulness, that is worship. Giving is not God’s way of raising money; it is God’s way of raising us into the likeness of Jesus.

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