

Transcription of 19ID3220

II Corinthians 8:1-8 "The Grace of Giving" June 16, 2019

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to II Corinthians Chapter 8 verse 1.

It was about five years after Paul had planted this church in Corinth where he had spent a year and a half that news came that the false teachers had taken over. Not only taken over, they had taken hold. And over the next year, four letters, including this one -- we have two of them in total -- an unscheduled visit and lots of prayer, Paul finally got the news that these -- the vice grip of these false teachers who had been leading people away from the Lord and away from Paul had finally turned the corner anyway. And there were some holdouts, some influential folks, but for the most part things were getting better.

For seven chapters Paul wrote about His love for the people, his call to have them compare him with the false teachers who were using them. And finally getting this good news after he and Titus met up in northern Greece, in Macedonia, Paul would write this letter and then follow it up with a visit a couple of months later, where he would stay three more months in town.

Chapter 8 and 9 is kind an insert in the middle where Paul goes back to an issue that he had begun with them a year earlier about their giving towards the poor in Jerusalem, which was one of Paul's greatest goals on his third missionary journey, and then Chapters 10 through 13, the rest of the book, Paul goes after the hardliners, the guys that just are, they're incalcitrant. They can't seem to be rooted out of the church. And Paul goes from a very humble and quiet and meek Paul from the first seven chapters to a very authoritative and assertive and threatening Paul in the last four chapters to these who would destroy the church. But these two chapters in the middle are on that one subject.

When the church was born in Jerusalem on Pentecost, some

3,000 people came to the Lord on the first day. Most of them were in town for the feast day. They were pilgrims. They weren't really living there. And so, when they came to the Lord there was no really other church to go to. No other churches existed. This was a work of God's Spirit. And some, it seems, stayed in town for quite a while, and the influx brought hardship and poverty and difficulty for them. If you read early on in the book of Acts and a couple of other places, some of the epistles, you find that the early church in Jerusalem sought to support itself through a couple of means: communal living, sharing of the things that they had. Some sold everything they had, houses as well, just for the common good. But all of that was certainly a temporary solution. You couldn't sustain yourself that way. And the church in Jerusalem was struggling, and it wasn't just struggling because of the influx there. There were lots of other reasons for them to struggle, not the least of which is when a Jew came to Christ, more often than not in first Century culture they were set aside and ostracized, both by the family and by the society. It was impossible almost to get employment, to get medical care, to have any kind of social support.

Paul had a great heart for the poor, and so did the early church. In fact, when he wrote to the Galatians and he mentioned he and James, Peter, John and Barnabas, he said, "They just asked that we would remember the poor, and we were eager to do that." Well, in light of that Paul was motivated in the sense that being the apostle to the Gentiles, he realized that the early church in Jerusalem was not so fond of the gentile converts who came to Jesus without ever becoming Jews. And so, there was a religious prejudice, a difficulty in just embracing grace. It took a while. Paul was all right with it. He saw it first hand; so did Peter. But outside the structure of Judaism -- and Paul believed one of the ways that they could close the gap was to now, after 20, 25 years, go back to the gentile churches that he had helped establish and ask them to donate to the care of the poor, especially there in Jerusalem.

Paul believed that the Gentiles were indebted to the Jews. In fact, he wrote in Chapter 15 of Romans, "When I go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints, it pleased the people that were in Macedonia," northern Greece, "and in Achaia," where Corinth was in southern Greece, "to make a contribution to the poor in Jerusalem," he writes. "And

it pleased them indeed, because they are debtors," he writes. "Because they," Gentiles, "have been now made partakers of their spiritual things, and so that they should then minister to them in material things. And that's what I've been telling you; that, you ought to be thankful to the people that God chose, because through Him he brought forth the gospel, brought forth His Son." So that was his message towards the end of his ministry, if you will, as he was traveling.

Add to that the fact that Paul felt personally responsible for having created havoc for years before he got saved. We read in the book of Acts that he put fathers to death and ripped kids out of homes and imprisoned moms, he was a horrible. There's nothing more horrible than religious hatred, and he had it all. And when he came to the Lord, at least the things that you read in the scriptures, that ministry of how he had been before he was saved haunted him. That religious madness that he experienced in his own life, he knew he couldn't make up for it, but he could try.

All of those factors, drove Paul to hit the road, and in Chapter 8 and 9 he talks about, to the Corinthians in particular, a promise that they had made a year earlier to be involved in this project. That's when things were fine, before these false teachers got there. In fact, you can read in verse 10 of this chapter, "And this is the advice that I give you: It is to your advantage not only to do what you began and were desiring to do a year ago, but now that you should complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so you may also complete out of what you have. For if there's a willing mind, it's acceptable to what you have, according to what you have, not according to what you don't have." He says in Chapter 9 verse 2, "For I know your willingness, which I boasted about it in Macedonia," again northern Greece, "that Achaia," southern Greece, "was ready a year ago, and your zeal actually stirred up the majority of the other churches there in the north."

Paul's earlier letter had made mention of this in Chapter 16, I Corinthians 16, about how when he came, he wanted them to take up an offering, but not when he got there. He didn't want to pressure them or have them giving out of pressure, which is never a good idea anyway. But he wanted them to plan ahead and to purpose in their heart what they were going to do. And it had been a year and a

lot of that had transpired, the influence from these false teachers. With things getting better, Paul now returns to this issue, because it was still burdened on his heart. He wanted to repair the breach and bring the church together as one. As such, this is the largest single section in the Bible on giving and stewardship. There's no greater amount of concentrated verses than these two chapters found together about stewardship and oversight.

I wrote a book a few years ago, "God's View of Money," because I got so angry and how the church was perceived as always had your hand out or, reaching for give give give, as if God couldn't pay His own bills. I wrote a book out of anger -- which is good. But I don't think that the Bible view of God and money is very much what you see from the television evangelists or the hustlers that would use the church to gain.

Having said that, our view as Christians of money will reveal a lot about our spiritual depth and our maturity. Money by itself isn't good or bad. Bad people can use it for corrupt things, good people can use it for righteous things. But it's all -- it really is a neutral issue. And the only thing that reveals our hearts is our attitude, I think, towards what we have.

The Bible has a lot to say about it, far more than we're going to cover here. I'm going to try to stick with just the verses that we are given. Suffice it to say, God does not forbid the possession of money. There are plenty of very poor people in the Bible you can follow, and there are plenty who are extremely wealthy; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Boaz, Job and Solomon, very wealthy.

The warning from the Lord in literally every place is to be careful not to love money. Paul wrote to Timothy, "It is the love of money that is the root or at the root of all evil, and some having strayed from the faith have done so through greediness, and thus pierced themselves through with many sorrows?" Paul said, "Command the rich in this age not to be haughty, or to trust in their uncertain riches but trust in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy." And it really kind of covers the gamut, if you will.

Solomon wrote in Proverbs Chapter 23, "Don't overwork to be rich" -- interesting verse -- "because of your own

understanding, cease from doing that. And don't set your eyes on things which are not, because riches can make themselves wings and fly away like eagles to heaven." In other words, it's very temporary, if you will, at best. Solomon was a wise guy. He said in Chapter 5 of that Ecclesiastes book, "If you love silver, you won't be satisfied with it. If you love abundance and increase, that won't do it for you either. It's just a big empty hole." And indeed, that it is.

Love of money was the downfall of many folks in the Bible. You could probably make a list for yourself. Achan, remember that guy in Joshua Chapter 7 who hid part of the stuff when they were going to fight against Jericho? Ended up destroying himself and his family. Balaam loved money enough to defy God and it cost him his life. Delilah loved money and the reward of unrighteousness enough to bring the death upon thousands of people because of her actions. Judas loved money enough to betray the Lord, even when he found no place of repentance. And Ananias, Sapphira, early on in the Bible, in the book of Acts, lied to the church about the proceeds they had gotten from a sale of a property, because, again, the church was struggling. But rather than giving what they wanted, they put on that they gave more than they could, and more than they had, which was a lie. They misrepresented themselves. Ended up costing them both their lives. When Moses took the people of Israel into the promised land, or was preparing to take them, he said to them in Deuteronomy Chapter 8, "Be careful that you don't forget the Lord when you go into the land and you've eaten and you're full, you build beautiful houses and you're living in them, God has multiplied everything and your heart is lifted up, and you forget the God who brought you out of Egypt here. Be careful that your gain doesn't cause you to forget God. In Proverbs, I think, Chapter 30, the writer of the Proverbs says, "Lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who's the Lord?'"

There is a biblical way to gain finances. It is always articulated in the Bible as you go to work, or make good investments, or save, or plan. But this morning in the first eight verses -- I promise I'll get to them -- Paul gives us maybe three things that we could look at or grab hold of that are distinctive to our giving, or our attitudes towards finances, and it is really based upon and rooted in our understanding of God's grace.

So biblical giving is not an obligation, according to the Bible; it's a privilege. It brings God's blessing and it is promised so. Read the book of Malachi, read Chapter 6 verse 38 of Luke, where Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given you: Full measure, shaken together, running over, pressed down, into your bosom. The same measure you mete out will be measured to you again." Now, having said that, God then goes out of His way to remove that as your motivation. In other words, God promises that He will care for you, that giving is a grace. It's a work of God in the life of His people. He'll provide what you need as a result. You'll never out give Him. However, the motivation should always be obedience and love. If you're giving to gain, you've shot yourself in the foot. "Oh, I'm going to use this for my own benefit." That is the T.V. evangelist guy, and don't follow the T.V. evangelist guy. Walk with the Lord's grace.

So verse 1, "Moreover, brethren, we want to make known to you the grace of God that has been bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia," again the northern Greek areas, Philippi and Achaia, some of -- Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, those churches up there, "that in a great trial of affliction -- and in the abundance of their joy and through deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality." Paul begins by saying to the Corinthian church in southern Greece that their neighboring churches in northern Greece had been greatly supporting this idea of support to the Jews in Jerusalem. Like I said, the only three churches that we know for sure were in the north from the book of Acts were Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Paul when he wrote to the Philippian church in Chapter 4 of that little letter that he wrote to them made mention of the fact that they had been the only church that over the years had been very supportive of him in his ministry. When no one else seemed to care, they were always sending support. This was a poor church. Understand, the Corinthians lived in an extremely wealthy area, but these in the north were very poor churches. And Paul said in Chapter 4 of Philippians, "I've learned both to be content, whether I'm abounding or abased. It doesn't really matter, but you've been the only church that has stood with me all of these years."

Paul said here that the giving spirit is indeed the result of God's grace. In other words, what Paul wants

to address is the attitude in the heart of someone who has been saved, who has met God's unmerited favor, who has been saved by grace. Freely he's received.

Money is a touchy thing to cover in churches. I try to avoid it completely, because I figure if I'm serving a God who can't pay His own bills, maybe He's not the God to serve. He doesn't need your help or mine. If He does, I'm quitting. But churches need money. I mean, we pay -- well, we don't pay rent anymore. We've paid off our mortgage. We're about to get a new mortgage. Utilities and supplies and staffing and I don't know how many platitudes you want to use, but they don't pay the bills. On the other hand, if God's doing the work, then the work will be accomplished, without the hawking and the hustling and all the junk that you and I both hate. We'll see a spiritual work motivated by spiritual reasons, as spiritual people invest themselves and place their investments where moth and rust don't corrupt, or thieves don't break through and steal.

The churches in Macedonia in the north that Paul mentions here were not primarily giving because they were philanthropists, or even just simply out of a human kindness. They were motivated to help out the church in Jerusalem simply because God had helped them. In other words, they had received from the Lord. And one consequence of being saved is that God brings into your life this selfless kind of compassion. You see it almost first; right? Your life was dominated by you until you get saved, and all of a sudden you actually cared what somebody else thought. And it's an eye opener. Man, what is the Lord doing in my life? And the Macedonians were not giving like the worldly rich gave, they usually give tokens of their wealth. It doesn't hurt them. It doesn't hinder them. They do it for self-glory. And they weren't giving like some folks in the church give, where they feel like they're obligated somehow to give to God.

And I should just say to you, there's nothing in the Bible that would teach that. God's not going to go broke without you, and His projects aren't going to stop because you're not involved. He doesn't need you. He gives you a chance to get in on the ground floor, but He doesn't need your help, and He never will.

They were giving because God had done a work in their lives, and as a result they were responding to His love. Grace motivated their giving. He calls it the grace of God bestowed upon these northern churches in the fact that they were giving. But notice in verse 2, they were giving out of great affliction. The word "affliction" there is the word for pressure. It's kind of the kind of pressure put on grapes to squash them. And out of deep poverty. It's exactly what that word means. In fact, if you jump ahead to verse 9 when it talks about Jesus, it says He was rich, but for your sake He became poor, or He laid everything aside. Same word there in verse 9. So that in great pressure and with very little they were thrilled -- abundance of joy -- to be able to be a part of what God was doing. Their lives had been changed. I mean, look at the formula of verse 2. Take a dash of tough times, add some tremendous poverty, and mix in a dash of God's grace, and you find these liberal givers who with joy valued the eternal over the temporary, and as a result they were very interested that Jerusalem folks, hundreds of miles away, would see their needs met and they could play a part in making sure that those needs were met.

And so, there's that scripture in Psalms 37 verse 25 that David said, "I've been young and now I'm old, and I've never seen the righteous forsaken, nor His descendants begging bread." We are told in Acts Chapter 17, also in the letters that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and to the Philippians, those churches in the north, that their lives as Christians were extremely hard. In fact, he writes to them in the Thessalonian letter, "I know that you've come to walk with God out of great affliction." He said to them in Chapter 2 of this first letter to the Thessalonians, "I know that you're going through the same thing that we Christians are going through in Jerusalem, suffering the same things from your own countrymen, so that they are persecuting us, and that we are suffering for Jesus' sake. There's nothing encouraging about those letters to this bunch of churches. They were really suffering, and yet in the midst of all of that difficulty, God was using them to meet the needs of the church so far away, and they were interested in doing so.

It's interesting that giving is motivated by God's grace, but Christian giving is usually not affected by difficult circumstances either. Circumstances did not hinder the giving of the Macedonian churches, nor the need for self-

sacrifice.

We've been a church for 34 1/2 years, be 35 years next April. We've never once run out of money, weren't able to pay our bills, were not able to -- or had to turn away from a need in a missionary's life that we support. Not once. And I just praise the Lord for His faithfulness, because He's good, and He can certainly supply all that we need. Amen to that. We might live in a recession, but God doesn't have any problem with that, and we've seen Him provide year after year.

Notice that it says in verse 2, that in all of that distress, they abounded in the riches of their liberality.

By the way, God, when it comes to giving, never measures your giving by looking at the amount, by looking at the decimal point. In fact, He only looks at two things: The cost to the giver and the condition of the heart in which it is offered. That's it. If He owns the cattle on 1,000 hills and He doesn't need your help, the last thing He cares about is how much is the check made out for. All He cares about is, A) did it cost you something, because giving requires sacrifice and love would dictate that as well; and B) that your motivation for giving is correct.

When Jesus sat at the receipt of customs there in Matthew Chapter 12, it says He watched how the rich gave of their excess. And He just sat at the treasury up on the temple mount and watched these guys throwing great amounts of coins. Interesting, because coins made a lot more noise, and so people hear the coins dropping and they go, oh, who is that guy? Oh, very well done. And then there comes a poor widow who has two little coins, and they're so small in value that they're like the pennies that you drop on the floor and you wouldn't pick up. But this was her substance. This is all she had. And rather than putting in one, which you'd go, man, that's a big sacrifice, she threw both of them in. And the Lord said, "This woman has given out of her very existence." She's put in all that she had out of her poverty. She has put in her entire livelihood. Now, that's not an example that you should do the same, but it's an example of cost. God is interested in cost. It should cost you something.

When David had to build an offering, a place of offering,

and he had to buy a land to stop a plague that he had brought upon himself and the people, the fellow who owned the land said, "Well, just take it. I'll give it to you. Just, man, get God's judgment off of our land." And David said, "I can't give God something which costs me nothing." The cost is important to God, as well as the attitude. You don't want to give it because you have to; someone pressured you, they twisted your arm, they made you feel horrible if you didn't give.

There are some people that are pretty skilled at collecting money. When we have people that come speak here or share here or play, and they say, "Well, could we share about our ministry or could we talk to the people about what we're doing?" We always say this: "No. You're not coming here to market yourself. You're coming here to serve the body. We'll pay you what we think we can afford to pay you. If you don't like that, tell us up front. If you're comfortable with that, then that's it." We don't want to hear about money and getting people's email addresses and handing out things to have you fill out. We don't want you to be marketed. Because there's some people that are pretty good. I could get talked out of \$10 easy. Just a couple of tears and a couple of pictures. "Okay. Here you go." Not exactly a rewardable move, but the people work it out. That's not what Jesus is interested in. He doesn't -- and isn't moved by that.

God's accounting methods are in fact, you can read them in Matthew Chapter 12. He says He looked at how those people who brought their money put it in, and then He mentioned of the woman, the cost that He didn't want the disciples to miss. In fact, He called them over and says, "Look at this woman, how different she is from all of these others." And He mentioned specifically the cost. When we read down here in verse 12, for example, what I just read to you a minute ago, if you have a willing mind, a heart that's willing, then God accepts what you have, not what you don't have.

This clown on T.V. a couple of years ago -- well, he was a clown -- said, "Just give by faith and the Lord will provide it later." I'm thinking, you're an idiot. But man, you don't care about the people, and you certainly don't know the God I know, because He would never ask you to do that. He's not asking you to give what you don't have. He's asking you to be sacrificial and to be

willing. That's all. The amount matters not at all to God. But love would motivate sacrifice. If my wife wants something, and even when we're younger and we could afford nothing but a willingness to get something, I would get it for her. I went into hawk several times to get her what I thought she wanted. And I'm not advising you to do that. Don't want to get in trouble here. But I would do it again, because love has a way that says you just give all that you got. Same thing with God.

This grace in them caused them to be freely giving and even to implore with an urgency that says could we participate. Notice verse 3, "I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, even beyond their ability, they were freely willing, even imploring us as much with much urgency, that we should receive this gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." You see, there was a cost in verse 2 and a willing heart in verse 3 and 4; right? Take what we've given. We want to be a part. When's the last time you heard anybody begging to be allowed to give to something? Please let me give. It's usually not the way it works.

I've been very encouraged, and I'm sure you have too, if you've been in the church here a while. We send Christmas shoe boxes to all the orphanages that we work for in Mexico. We feed thousands of people at Thanksgiving and during the year. Our church is a giving bunch of folks. We're blessed. God has been good to move hearts. We've always had more than we've needed for the folks that have come. And it's such an encouragement. It's so cool.

Well, the Macedonians were not giving because they'd been coerced or manipulated or intimidated. Their giving was purely out of an awareness of God's grace that had been extended to them. They saw it as a privilege, not as an obligation.

Then we read in verse 5, "And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." And you should underline that. That's always the way God is interested in our giving. If He doesn't have your heart -- again, remember we said sacrifice and intent, or sacrifice and motivation. Here's the motivation: They gave themselves first to the Lord, and I think that's the key. The love for the Lord will move us to give probably more than we would ever

give otherwise, because we love Him. But on the other hand, if we're just giving to somehow make up for the fact that we don't love Him -- you know what I'm saying? In other words, you're either giving to substitute for the first part. You haven't given yourself to the Lord, but you're going to buy yourself off. "Yeah, I'll just write a big check, because the Lord, He knows I love Him. I'm never here, never interested, don't know a Bible from a newspaper, but I'll write a big check, because, the Lord, He knows." You can't buy God off.

Remember, start with this: He doesn't need your help. He's not interested in that. He's interested in your love for Him, which is exactly what the prophet Samuel said to disobedient King Saul. When he found him and he wasn't doing anything, he said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I've done the Lord's will." And Samuel said, "Well, if you're doing the Lord's will, how come I'm still hearing the sheep bleating in my ear? You're supposed to wipe them out." And then he said this to Saul, "Do you really think that God has a greater delight in sacrifices as in obedience?" The answer was no. He wants obedience first. He wants relationship first. Then whatever you bring is acceptable. Until then, nothing is.

And I say that to people all the time. In fact, I think I may have told you. I was asked to do a radio spot two years ago on a Christmas for a station back east that said, "Could you just say, 'Christmas is a hard time and if you could just give'?" And, I know it's Christmas, but the radio could really use your help." And I got irritated. I said, "Well, will you put on whatever I write?" "Yeah." So I did a one-minute commercial and I went like this, "Hey, isn't it good that God doesn't need your help? So, go buy your stuff for your family and forget about the radio this month. Go bless your kids." Oh, man, they didn't ask me next year, at all. But if you love the Lord, then it's fine. But, come on, no coercion.

Giving to them in the Macedonia area, verse 5, was an act of worship; right? Giving is not God's way of raising funds; it is God's way of raising kids. He wants you first before He'll accept anything you bring. Our supreme act of worship is not writing a check, singing along with the songs, or serving in the church. It is yielding ourselves to Him as our Father in Heaven.

That's first and foremost.

Lastly, verse 6, "So we urged Titus, as he had begun this work, that he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you have abounded in everything -- in your faith and in your speech, in your knowledge, and in all of your diligence, and in your love for us -- we ask that you would abound in this grace also. And so, I speak not by commandment, but rather am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others." Giving is just one virtue imprinted on the hearts of those who love the Lord by His Spirit. Paul says in verse 6, since Titus was the first one to come to you to talk about this, we want him to just send him over to gather the offerings. Paul would eventually show up with elders from every church. He didn't handle the money for himself. He took the leadership from all these churches that gave and said, you go with me and you deliver it to James. And to be honest with you, they took it, but the effect was not as you might suspect. But that didn't affect Paul or the others' willingness to go.

Paul thought it would be perfect to send Titus back. Apparently, Titus didn't need much urging. In fact, in verse 17 of this chapter it says "For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he actually went on his own accord." He was willing to return to a place that for a long time was very antagonistic towards Paul and his group, but now the Lord had kind of softened their hearts. Paul said, I know that you're growing in all of these areas of faith, but don't let this area of your spiritual lives suffer. Abound in grace when it comes to giving to those in need. You already have faith in Christ. Your speech is clear. Your knowledge is based on experience. Your diligence is zealous. Now, when it comes to giving.

I read somewhere that your wallet is the last thing of you that gets saved. That might be true. I heard a guy -- I'll tell you a little joke. We got time, don't we? Okay. But there was a preacher in one of these, you know, T.V. things, and he said, "God has provided for us all that we need." And he said, "Unfortunately, it's still in your pockets." Yeah, that was that guy. Get out of here.

Paul says in verse 8, and I like it, "I'm not commanding you to do this. I'm just asking that your spiritual

maturity would be clearly seen when it's set up against what your other brethren at the other churches are doing as well."

Giving, an act of worship, a gift of grace, a work of God's Spirit; not measured in the amount, ever, ever, but in the cost and in the motivation. And I would say to you, if you're giving because you feel you have to, you should just keep it. You're not going to get any reward anyway. And, you can buy a good dinner for yourself. Check your heart. Don't bother to check the amount. If it doesn't cost you anything, it's not enough. If it costs you too much, it's way too much. Go back to verse 12, according to what a man has, not what he doesn't have. God's pretty realistic. But together we can make a huge difference in the world, because the world doesn't like this, and they certainly don't give this way.

Next time we'll take a look at Jesus as the ultimate example of giving, a poverty that can make you rich, and then we will get to Chapter 8, where we read about cheerful givers, who don't give out of necessity or grudgingly. God loves cheerful givers.