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II Corinthians 9:6-15 "A Cheerful Giver" July 7, 2019

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to II Corinthians Chapter 9 verse 6.

Paul had founded the church in Corinth, spent 18 months there. And for the five years that he was gone, much of that time in Ephesus planting a church, the false teachers, the Judaizers, who had followed Paul everywhere for decades, had infiltrated the church, had turned the gospel into works, had gone after Paul to discredit him, because in so doing they could also discredit the gospel that he preached, and sought to take the church for themselves. Through four letters, we have two of them, and one visit that is documented in those two letters, Paul sought to confront the church over their error and their being deceived by these men, and after a year or so, with Titus coming back after having delivered a third letter, Paul met him in northern Greece to hear that things were straightening out.

For seven chapters Paul had written to them in a first person very personal way. He felt close to these folks. He loved them. It was the longest he'd ever spent in one place to plant a church up until that point. He would write in his first letter to them, you have a lot of teachers, but you don't have many fathers. And so, there was a personal interest; not that there wasn't everywhere else, but he felt particularly close to the church in Corinth. It was a marvelous work of God in a very corrupt place. For seven chapters, Paul poured out his heart. Compare me with the folks that are trying to use you now. He went through all of the things that were important.

When Titus came and said things were better and for the most part the tide had shifted, Paul wrote Chapter 8 and 9 to get back to one of the reasons we're on his second and third missionary journey: He had purposed to gather funds of support for the poor in Jerusalem. He was the - - really the apostle to the Gentiles. Early on the Jewish saints in Jerusalem had great difficulty with a

concept that a Gentile could come to the Lord without first becoming a Jew, and so even the Acts 15 meeting in Jerusalem was about grace; salvation by grace alone. And Paul thought this would be a great way for the Gentile churches to help the poor in Jerusalem, to gather together in love and to stand together, and Paul hoped that some of that gap would be bridged. A year earlier he had talked to the Corinthians about it and they had agreed. In fact, their agreeableness, according to the first five verses of Chapter 9, had encouraged the people in Macedonia, which was northern Greece, to get involved as well. But things had happened, and so Paul wasn't sure that they were still on board. He was happy, according to Chapter 7, to hear the good news, things were turning around. People were turning back to the Lord and back to that love that they had for Paul as well.

In the midst of this letter then, Paul spends two chapters, Chapter 8 and 9, going back to that purpose of gathering funds. As a result, these two chapters are the single greatest bunch of verses committed in the scriptures to stewardship, and the handling of money, and giving. But they are far different from what you see portrayed in life and among sometimes churches or church leaders today.

In verse 1 through 8 or so of Chapter 8, Paul said that giving for the Christian is motivated by grace. In other words, you give because you've learned what God has given to you. He said of the Macedonian churches, they didn't have much and they were very poor, but the difficult circumstances didn't change their giving. It was still proportionate, which means it was what they had, not what they didn't have. It was sacrificial. You give God something that costs you nothing, it's really not acceptable. And it was given willingly or voluntarily. He would go far in Chapter 8 as to say, giving is an act of worship and a virtue in the life of a believer that is one of the works of the Holy Spirit in making you have the heart of God.

Last week we began in verse 9 of Chapter 8 and went all the way to Chapter 9 verse 5, as Paul then considered some of the truths about giving that are so contrary to what you hear today. But he started off with Jesus' example, how He was rich in all things, and He left Heaven to become a man, to dwell among us. He emptied

Himself for our sakes. He became poor so that we could be made eternally rich. And then for the rest of the chapter he looked at the stewardship, a willing mind that would lead to action, handle money in an accountable manner, planning before what you give, not afterwards. Paul ended the chapter by talking about the proof of our salvation is just that attitude that we have towards what we've been given to be stewards over.

This morning we're going to finish this chapter. I think I've said to you before; I have great difficulty talking about money at all because of the way people have portrayed the church or God. God's not broke. God doesn't need your help. God's programs can be supported. He'll take care of it, thank you very much. I tend to stay away from it, because one of the things that bothered me most as an unbeliever is, I thought everybody was just out to get their hands in my pocket. On the other hand, you don't want to skip the verses of God's word, because they're important for us. And there is a good side of giving, there is a positive side, and great promises from the Lord. As we finish the chapter this morning, Chapter 9, we want to take the look of the blessings of being a giver and the amazing promises God makes and the motivation He looks for and the fruit that should follow.

I know that this weekend we celebrated July 4th; America's inalienable rights of pursuing life and liberty, and happiness, if you will. But I think that we as a culture can add a fourth pursuit and that is wealth. I was in a bookstore this weekend at the mall and it's interesting to me that the section that was the largest was one on finance. It had literally 12 full shelves of advice of how to get rich quick, about how to invest in the stock market, financial gurus, books, and programs, and seminars, and advice, and websites, and infomercial, just so that you can have more. And unfortunately, that pursuit of wealth has crawled into the church, especially the last 50 years or so. We place them under the health and wealth gospel or the faith movement people, who without hesitation proclaim to you that God's will for all of us is to be healthy, and wealthy, and if you're not, that's not God's fault, that's yours. You don't have enough faith. These word-of-faith kind of people, very self-centered, very interested in gaining, because the end result of all that they teach is to indulge their flesh, find themselves preaching a gospel that the Bible

doesn't preach. Paul, the most active apostle certainly in the writings of the scriptures, describes himself as being at times hungry and thirsty, and poorly clothed, and beaten, and imprisoned, and homeless. He should have got one of those books. He'd have been better off.

Jesus said of Himself, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Doesn't sound exactly like lining up to these word-of-faith people. Of course, when you're lying to people to make yourself rich, spiritual truths have no place in your life. But no matter whether you are poor or rich, the Bible does warn every one of us about the deceitfulness of riches. The word "deceit" means to put one over on you. You believe one thing and you find out it's something else. You get to Proverbs 23 verse 4 and the verse says, "Don't overwork yourself just to get rich. You'll set your eyes on things that are not. Riches will make themselves wings and they'll fly like an eagle towards heaven." Don't over work yourself to get rich. Interesting words.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that you should lay up not your treasures on the earth, where the moth can get to them or the rust will corrupt or rot it away -- or the rust will destroy, I should say -- where thieves can break through and steal. You should store your treasures in Heaven, where none of that can happen, because it is in God's provision and His care.

We should be careful, I guess, when we are faced with this giving issue, because most of what you hear about giving, at least from pulpits -- hopefully not at teaching churches, but from these men and women that call themselves God's people -- is about gain and getting forward. It falls in line with the concept of riches.

In sharp contrast, Jesus said, you can't serve God and money. He said in Luke Chapter 12 verse 15, "Take heed and beware of being covetous, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things he possesses." So, help us Lord, to have the right attitude about what God has given to us. This morning some good principles to finish up on.

And by the way, next week, Chapters 10 through 13 are Paul going back to go after the guys that are still entrenched in this church, false teachers, but he's not

coming as a guy brokenhearted as he was in the first seven chapters. He's showing up as an apostle who said, don't make me talk to you again. And let's face it, Paul spoke sometimes and people went blind. Peter showed up and people dropped dead in the church. The apostles had power. And Paul said, I'm going to come in power. You think I'm a little guy. You wait and see. I'm looking forward to those chapters and I'm looking forward to being done talking about money.

Verse 6 says this: "This I say to you, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Now, that is a basic spiritual law. God's idea of giving and sowing, much the same thing; right? Give and it will be given to you: Full measure, pressed down, shaken together, flowing out of the bosom of men.

There is certainly a truth that we should grab ahold of, and it's an obvious one. If you put a lot of seed in the ground as a farmer, your harvest is liable to be big. If you just sow a few, you're liable to get a much smaller harvest. Paul, remember, was looking to encourage the Corinthian church, a wealthy church, to honor their word that they had promised earlier, and to complete in giving to the needs in Jerusalem. He reminded them early on in Chapter 8 of what they had promised. He told them at the first five verses of this chapter how their example had encouraged the northern Macedonian churches, and now he says to them, come on, man. If we don't sow, we're not going to be able to reap. Let's give in a way that in the love for the Lord we might be in a position to just reap a great harvest.

I told you last week, and I will repeat it this week because it's bears repeating, none of the promises of God to bless your sowing of giving is ever intended for personal gain. And I know that's the way it's taught by the faith people. Give and it'll be given to you, that's all. And then they stop, because that's what they're interested in. But God's not interested in that. In all these verses I think you will find this truth to be true: That God wants to say to you whenever you are willing to be a vessel through whom God can bless others, God will give you back far more than you'll ever give out, or you can never out give God, or you'll never go broke serving God. In other words, God will always replenish, will always provide that which you need to do the work that

God sets before you. And the Bible is filled with promises like that. If you turn to Proverbs Chapter 3 verse 9, it says, "If you will honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the first fruits of the increase in your life; your barns will be filled with plenty, the vats will overflow with new wine." Moses will say to the people getting ready to go into the land there in Deuteronomy Chapter 15, make sure that you help the poor, and "Make sure that your heart is not grieved when you give Him anything, because this thing is of the Lord. He will bless you in your work and everything you put your hand to. The poor will never cease from the land." That wasn't really the target, to alleviate a problem, because they're always going to be there, but the Lord says, "Open your hand to your brother, to the poor, to the needy, in your land."

We read in Proverbs Chapter 19, "He who has pity upon the poor actually lends to the Lord, and the Lord will pay him back." That's amazing. You help someone in need, you're lending to the Lord. I think the Lord's good for it. If you have a generous eye, we read in Proverbs, you'll be blessed. As you give bread to the poor, in Proverbs 28, he who gives to the poor without lack, but he who hides his eyes from them will have many cursing's, and so it goes.

It is not God's intention to have you use this verse to somehow gain more for yourself. It is not a promise for self-interest. It is an assurance that if you are a giver, that you don't have to worry about somehow ending up without. But you will rather sow much, gain much, and be ready to sow even more. In fact, look at verse 7 where the Lord continues, and He said, "So let each one of you purpose in your heart to give, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." Cheerful giver. By the way, the word "cheerful" is the Greek word for hilarity, or hilarious, if you will. Notice that from God's standpoint, and the issue is motive and intent, God desires devotion and not duty. He's not looking for you to, oh, I should help out. Oh, I feel under pressure. No, no, no. Look verse 7, make sure that there's a purpose. The word "purpose" means to make a willful decision to give. Secondly, that you shouldn't factor into or you should look at your attitude when it comes to giving begrudgingly. And by the way, the word "begrudging" there is defined as painful sorrow. Here, take it, but I wish I didn't have to give it to you.

It's like we -- parting is not sweet sorrow. Give it back. Don't give that way. If there's a grudge, just keep it. And don't be motivated by necessity. Isn't that interesting? The usual tactic of fundraisers and faith preachers is there's this necessity, there's this pressure. But if God doesn't need your help, there's no necessity. If God can meet the needs of everyone, there's no necessity. But this is a function of how the Lord would like to work in our lives.

Make a decision, give with joy, with hilarity, and don't feel ever the pressure to give, or constrained to give. "Oh, we're doing a great work for God. If you could just help us." Well, God doesn't need that.

We sometimes see the way people give at the church. My favorite story was 30 years ago when I was a young pastor, somebody had brought in a chair and wanted to see me to give it to me. And what he said was, "This is grandma's favorite rocker." Well, the thing didn't rock. It kind of leaned. It needed to go in the trash. And then he said, "We couldn't part with it. We just wanted someone to have it that will be useful." And I looked at it and I thought, maybe this is why grandma died. You know, tried sitting in that chair.

God looks for our best; not out of pressure, not because there's a need, because there'll always be a need, but because He has led us, we have great joy. God has provided. He likes to have a cheerful giver. And I've always said, and I will repeat to you, if you can't give to the Lord cheerfully, you should just go give it to something that will make you happy. Go buy yourself a steak or something. Smile as you eat it. Because giving it worthless. God doesn't need it. He's not impressed. He's not going to be able to reward you, nor is your witness going to be very good. So just go spoil yourself if that's the best you can do.

But let me point out in verse 7 -- I want to repeat this to you -- the Bible always teaches willful giver. Never forced giving. Not careless, not casual, not as an afterthought; planned ahead, but never forced. Even the tithing laws from the Old Testament, if you go add them up, averaged about 33 1/3 percent of everything a person in the tribes had. It was political, it was governmental, it was judicial. It was used for the temple or for the tabernacle. But really the giving that

God always called upon was willing. Even when Moses began to build the tabernacle and the Lord said, "Just tell the people here's the things you need, and if someone's willing, then collect it from them, and if they're not willing, then don't worry about it." And then Moses got so much he finally had to go back to the people and said, "I know you're willing, but I'm not willing to take anymore." Which you've never heard in a faith preacher: Hey, we have enough money now. They never have enough, because that's not their interest. So cheerful giver. The Bible talks about volunteering your giving, not forced, not with grudging, not out of necessity. Give it bountifully, proportionally, sacrificially, joyfully, and willingly, or just don't.

We read in verse 8, "And God is able to make all grace abound towards you so, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance then for every good work." In other words, here's the definition of what we read in verse 6, and that is, God is able to give back to you all that you've given out so that the next time there's an opportunity, you'll still be rich. You're not going to run out. You're going to be in a position to always be supplied time and again for every good work.

What is that Proverbs 11 scripture that says, "There are some who scatter and yet they increase all the more, and then there are those who withhold what is right, and it leads them to poverty. The generous soul made rich, the one who waters is himself watered." God's promise to us here as well. While it is possible to give without loving, it is impossible to love without giving, because that defines love, doesn't it? "God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son."

Now Paul is so amazed as he writes this about how good God is at resupplying the saints that he reaches for hyperbole. In fact, notice in this one verse, he uses the word "all" and "always" and "abound" and "abundance" and "all" again. It's like he can't get the words out. God's grace giving knows no limits. It's off the scale. You would think in giving to others that you'd end up with less. The Bible would say otherwise. God is able. The word "dynatos" literally by definition is with power. In other words, God is powerful enough to enter into the life that you're living as a steward, and provides you with everything you need, so that every time a need comes

up, God will bless. And here the terms are material, because the harvest has to be the same as the seed. God resupplies, and you'll be ready for every good work. Notice, not to consume it on your own lust. Wrong faith preacher. Not just so you have a bigger house, a bigger car, an airplane, whatever it is you're going for, but that you'll be ready for every good work.

Jesus told that parable there in Luke 12 about the rich young fool who said, "What am I going to do? I have no room now to store my grain and my stuff. I had a great year." And as he was talking to himself, he said, "Here's what I'm going to do: I'm going to tear down my barns, I'm going to build a bigger storage area, and then when I'm done, I'm going to store all my stuff in there. And I'm going to say to my soul, 'Soul, you have laid up for many good years, so you just take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.'" And the Lord says, "That guy is a fool. What he doesn't know is that tonight his very life is going to be required of him; and then whose will those things be of which he has laid aside?" And then the Lord said, "So will God deal with everyone who is rich to themselves, but isn't rich towards God." The next time you hear the faith preacher give and it will be given to you, the Lord would say just the opposite. He wants to be a blessing, but He's going to use to be that blessing so that others could be honored and He could be glorified.

Notice he says in verse 9, lest you think this is a new idea, the Bible says, "He has scattered abroad, He has given to the poor, and His righteousness endures forever." Which happens to be a quote out of Psalm 112. This isn't new thinking. This is 1,000-year-old thinking.

And then Paul adds in verse 10 a quote out of Isaiah Chapter 55. Now He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, may He supply and multiply the seed that you have sown so that He might increase the fruits of your righteousness." Or in other words, God gives the increase. Obviously, no one's going broke serving the Lord in this graceful area of being a giver, and yet so often it's the last thing that we really want to do. And I think the reason is, we've seen so many charlatans and then we are turned off to the whole idea, or people trying use the system, if you will. The Bible says you don't work, you don't eat, God's given it all to us all

at once.

He continues in verse 11, and Paul says, "While you are enriched in everything because of your liberality, it has caused thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service, it doesn't only supply the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through Thanksgiving to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for your obedience at the confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and for all men, and by their prayers for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" Paul goes on and says in verse 11, your willingness to be liberal produces in people's hearts thanksgiving.

You can't begin to -- and maybe we're on the side of the letters here, but after a Thanksgiving weekend where, several thousand people are fed by the church, by you. The letters that we get from people, the folks that come back to church, the heart that is opened to hear what the Lord has to say is amazing. A Turkey for a soul; can you imagine? Wouldn't we all buy 1,000 turkeys right now? I mean, to be able to see it translate from physical needs to spiritual fruit. And that's Paul's prayer. May you be faithful and liberal. It will produce thanksgiving through us to the Lord. It's an administration of a service. It not only provides needs of the saints; it produces an abounding blessing of many to the Lord. Verse 13, and becomes a proof of our relationship with God, that we believe the gospel. And also, one other thing, your liberal giving produces prayers for you as people long for you, thanking God for the grace of God they find in you. Isn't that amazing?

I think the most notable goal that you can have as a Christian is that God would be glorified in what you do. Whatever that is, this brings honor to the Lord. Well, this ministry of giving supplies, needs to others, and brings worship to God and shouts of thanksgiving. It proves your relationship with the Lord because that's not normal, and it produces a prayerfulness in other's lives for you.

I read somewhere that someone says, well, the poor believers have nothing to offer the rich, and I would disagree with that, because it seems to me from verse 14

one of the things that you get back from helping those who are in need, you get prayer. Try buying that. I would rather have a million people pray for me than have \$1 million, wouldn't you? I hope you would say yes to that. I mean, God loves when we pray. To think that, these folks in Jerusalem are praying for the Corinthians now, and they are Gentile believers and there's a fellowship that's been developed. Pretty amazing. The prayers of the poor are the rewards to the giver, and that's the way Jerusalem would repay the givers here. The missionaries that we support, they pray for you. You should pray for them, but they pray for you. The folks you help to go to retreat, for the food you supply for folks that are hungry, to the clothes you take to the thrift store -- not the weird-looking rocker.

By the way, the only place in the Bible where indescribable gifts are defined, it's defined as Christ. I think Paul probably ends this section by saying, Jesus was the ultimate example. That's what he starts with from the chapter. Thank God for His amazing example to us, because all of Christianity really follows the example of Jesus, that we should give as we've received from Him.

When the heart is willing, God is blessed. Two things that matter in giving: It's sacrifice and willingness. That's all that God cares about. And when you run into all these faith preachers, here's my advice to you: Just turn the channel off, every time. If enough people turn off the channel, they'll go away. They really will. But unfortunately, they prey on the old people that are on fixed incomes who need help, or they promise help they can't give. But pray for the Lord to destroy them then. I don't want my grandma being taken advantage of.

Let me give the conclusion of the story, just because we're not going there now. When this letter was delivered by Titus, a few months later Paul would show up in Corinth. It would be his third visit. We know that from Acts Chapter 20 he would spend three months there with them in Corinth before heading out with this offering to Jerusalem. But in those three months that Paul was in Corinth, he wrote the book of Romans, and had that delivered as well. In Chapter 15 of Romans, Paul wrote to them this: "I'm going to Jerusalem now to go minister to the saints. For it has pleased those who live in Macedonia," that was the north, "and those who

live here in Achaia," which is in the south, "to make a certain contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem. And it pleased them indeed." Paul said, I can't wait to come help you. The churches here are just more than willing to help as well. God's word got in and it touched their hearts and it moved them to action. They were pleased to help.

May the Lord give us a willing heart, a giving heart; not like you hear about the junk in the world, but in a way that God would be honored, people would get saved, and His name would be glorified, don't you think?

Next week we'll go to something else, an angry Paul. That's going to be awesome.