

It's a Pleasure!

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[0 : 0 0] I like this morning for a little while to turn back to 2 Corinthians chapter 9. Particularly these words in verse 7.

Each man should give, each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give. Not reluctantly an under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver. It is always the kind of ministers dreaded sermon of the year.

It is when you ever think that you ought to preach or the time has come to preach on giving. And it is not any particular reason that I have chosen to do that today.

Other than that we feel it ought to be programmed into the church preaching schedule. These things because it is biblical and because it is important.

And because it is part of our act of worship. Therefore I think at that level it is important. And we have been looking in Hebrews over the last number of weeks at the theme of Hebrews.

[1 : 0 6] And Hebrews theme is the supremacy of Jesus Christ. It is how absolutely great Jesus Christ is and how worthy he is of our worship. That he is worth it.

And in our lives we want to use that as a motivation for everything that we do. And to excel for him because of who he is. And that really is what we are looking at in the morning worship.

It is also what we are looking at in the evening worship for the young people particularly. And the questions that we will follow on in identity about a better vision. I mean this vision of the gospel which helps to motivate us.

And we want the grace of God to, the empowerment that the grace of God gives us to help us to excel in our faith. So we look at ourselves and we think about our faith and we want to excel in that and ask God's grace and his help to make us more faithful to him and follow him.

We want to excel in our speech so that when we speak, when we speak to our fellow Christians or when we speak to other people. Or when we have an opportunity to share the gospel that we excel in that because of the grace that God has given us.

[2 : 1 0] In our knowledge that we want to be disciples. We want to follow Jesus Christ. We want to learn about him and excel in that because he is worth it. In our authenticity, we don't want to be hypocrites.

We don't want to sound a kind of insincere or uncertain tune when we are living our Christian lives. The way we treat others, we want to bear the fruit of the spirit.

With love and joy and peace and patience and gentleness and meekness and self-control and all these things. We want to show them and excel in these things because of what God has done. And in the grace of giving as well.

So if you flick back to chapter 8, we are looking at chapter 9, but in chapter 8 and at verse 7. That is really what Paul is saying. He is saying, but just as you excel in everything, in your faith and in your speech and your knowledge, in your complete earnestness and in your love for us, see that you also excel in the grace of giving.

And that is the kind of angle that I am going to be coming at today for us. And look at it, I hope spiritually and look at it in a wider context about a grace that is just part of our wider lives.

[3 : 27] Something not as a duty, something not as a kind of optional extra, but something as a mark of grace that reflects what Jesus has done for us and reflects what we think of him.

And reflects our understanding of the good gifts that we have been given to him. And he is talking about that throughout the passage and he is talking about that even in chapter 8 and in chapter 9.

He is speaking about that. It is all mixed in beautifully, spiritually. And it is all mixed in with the spiritual motive about why we should be giving.

So there is spiritual and practical that are mixed really well together. And that is important because sometimes we divorce the two. We think, well, there is kind of real spiritual stuff and that is kind of high floating up and it is going to be theoretical and it is kind of mystical.

And then there is the practical, gutsy stuff that is not related somehow. But we bring them both together because the motive very much for the practical outworking of our faith is based on our understanding of grace and what God has given to us.

[4 : 28] See Paul here in the context, Paul is speaking to the church in Corinth. And he is encouraging them to continue raising funds for, as it were, the mother church in Jerusalem because they are really struggling.

They are struggling with deep poverty, partly through famine, partly probably because they had become Christians. They were Jews and they had become Christians and they had been a little bit ostracised from their communities.

And they maybe lost their ability to earn money and all of these kind of things. But for whatever reason the church in Jerusalem is really struggling with poverty. And at a wider level, not only was Paul going around different new churches that had been planted and encouraged him to help the church in Jerusalem, but he was also at different points being supported by, for example, the Macedonian churches so that he could go and preach in Corinth.

He didn't take anything from the churches in Corinth because he was being supported by the churches in Macedonia. And there was other times where he didn't take money from anyone to maintain his ministry, but he worked himself as a tent maker.

But we do find that in his being an evangelist he is supported, but also we find that throughout the New Testament, the simulations about giving to the church are coming through, principles are coming through again and again to help the poor in the churches to support Christian ministry and to develop the work of the gospel.

[5 : 58] But also to show encouragement and unity. It's a sense of love, isn't it? A sense of unity. Just what I was talking about with the kids. You know, it's a really nice thing when you see, I've kind of got a big bag of sweets, you know, the temptation was just to stuff your face with them and eat them all yourself.

But it's great when you see a child taking sweets and passing them round and sharing them because that's sacrificial and it's a loving and it's a great thing to do. It shows, it's encouraging and it shows a sense of oneness with maybe other kids or with their dad that's hovering over them, desperate to get some and threatening violence if they don't.

So that's the context generally speaking for the gospel. And there's important teaching for us that is wider than simply the gift of giving. There is teaching about the gift of giving here. There's a law of grace that's spoken of here, which is a great law for us to consider as a foundation for our gift of giving. In chapter 9 and verse 6, we read this.

Remember this, Paul says, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

And that's repeated at different times in the Bible and it's a really good law of grace. It's a really good Christian principle, wider than just the grace of giving. It's a general principle that can apply to giving. But it's basically saying mean spirited Christians miss out.

[7 : 42] If we are mean spirited Christians, we miss out on the blessing that God is willing and is wanting to give to us. If you and if I make no investment of our time, of our energies, of our gifts and of our talents in the kingdom of God, if we have no time for praying, if we have no time for being disciples, if we have no time for learning about Jesus, if we are miserly in that, if we want to keep everything to ourselves, my time, my brains, my energies, I want to keep it all.

I want to keep it to progress my life. If we do that, if we're miserly in what we give back to God spiritually, then there's little spiritual return in our lives and we will struggle.

And very often if we examine our lives and there's a great, really important to spiritually examine and analyse our lives, if we're giving very little spiritually in terms of our hearts, in terms of our time, in terms of our gratitude, in terms of our being to God, and we're thinking, I really can't be bothered with my Christianity anymore.

Things are rubbish. Nothing seems to happen. There's this reality, isn't there? If we don't put much into the relationship we have with Jesus Christ because of what He's done for us, if we take it for granted, if we simply don't speak about Him or talk to Him or learn from Him, then we will struggle.

Mean-spirited Christians are Christians who will generally struggle in their lives and will miss out. We miss out so much if we are mean-spirited and I'm not speaking financially, I'm just speaking generally about our very beings.

[9 : 30] And the opposite, of course, is true. If we are generously spirited in our lives, if we are giving out of gratitude for what God has done for us, if we're giving of our love, of our time, of our prayer, of our desire to grow in faith, of our gifts, the fruit of the Spirit, of our wealth, of all of these things, there will be a return for us, there will be blessing for us in ways that we simply can't manufacture and kind of plan.

But God will bless us and very often it will not necessarily... It's not like we go and say right. It's not like we even say to the financial ones, it's not like we say right, I'm going to give a lot to God and if I give a lot, then I'm going to get a lot back. It's not like... It's not the motive, excuse me, I'm spitting that.

It's not so that we'll get more back. That's not the motive. That may be a side blessing that we receive. But we give because we recognise God is the generous giver and we recognise because we see need and we recognise that we've been given so much. But we do also receive back from Him. It may not be financially equivalent.

It may be in spiritual blessings. It may be in untold ways that we will receive blessing because as we'll see in this passage, it's all mixed in together, the spiritual and practical. But we will be and we will know rewards and we'll know blessing.

So it's important for us in our lives to examine the investment that we put into our spiritual life. We do that in everything else, don't we? We do it in every other part of our life.

[11 : 10] If we want blessing or if we regard something as important, we invest in it. We invest in our time. We invest in our talents, our training, everything. What are we investing in Christ Jesus in return for what He has given to us?

And that brings me on to the motivation for grace that we have in this passage. It's very powerful. At the end of the passage in verse 14 and the prayers for you in our hearts, they will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. That's the motivation that lies behind this whole passage that Paul is using to speak about this resourced generosity, financial generosity. He's using a spiritual motivation which is the surpassing grace that's been gifted to believers and the thanksgiving that we have from that. And it's lovely how this easily, and this makes it slightly easier to preach from, but I do always feel uneasy. I want you to know that I feel uneasy preaching about this.

But it moves easily from spiritual to practical. It easily used from this motivation of the gift of God's grace to the way we live our lives and the practical outworking of that. He is giving everything for us as believers.

We come today, if you're a believer today, you come and you know and you appreciate and you love and you receive and you understand he has lavished grace on us. That's what he says. It is lavished on us.

[12 : 48] It isn't, he hasn't made us stand in a queue and just given us rations of grace. He's lavished his grace on us. We are heirs of Christ. We are inheritors.

We have eternal life. We have an imperishable future with God. We share in His glory. We have treasures in heaven. We have a transformed life. We have forgiveness. We have peace with God.

He has changed us for good. Even in the worst circumstances, we can fall on our knees and say, to God be the glory because there's something happening here that God is sovereign over and will use for my good and for His glory.

And he is committed to that. Absolutely committed to this. He has given us His gift. We're going to look at, I hope, look at that in a fresh, a little kind of fresh way this evening as well when we talk about the sun being shared with us.

So the motivation to our financial giving to the cause of Christ is absolutely a spiritual act of worship, a recognition of what we've received from Him and the fact that it is overwhelmingly generous and kind on our behalf.

[14 : 05] It's a spiritual act of worship. Now, we often have discussions about whether we allow the giving that we give to become a spiritual act of worship. Some people think that we don't, because we don't put around an offering every Sunday that we're kind of hiding what we do.

We forget that it's a spiritual act of worship. We maybe put it in the box in the door or maybe you put it through a direct debit. And it doesn't seem very spiritual. It's the same part of the act of worship.

And I think there's pros and cons of these things. We have a collection once a month for a specific, something specifically we're raising money and support for spiritually.

And I think there's pros and cons. I think you need to remember it's an act of worship. It's good to have it as part of the worship. But I think also we're so keen to see new people coming into our churches. We're so keen to see people who are not Christians coming in.

I sometimes think that if it's something we do every week and have a collection every week, it seems like the church has been a bit money grabbing. But that's maybe just me. But nonetheless, it must remain for us a spiritual act of worship.

[15 : 15] So what is our motivation for giving? Is it duty? Is it popularity? It'll make me popular if I give. Does it feel good? I feel better when I give. Is it a learned favour with God? If I give.

There's lots of different motivations that sometimes colour what we do. So I just want to ask myself and encourage you to ask yourselves, are we giving to His cause and kingdom?

Is it for us an act of worship? Something we recognise as a grace that we can give and serve Him with? What is our motivation for doing so?

So briefly, I just want to also mention some characteristics of giving. One that's mentioned here and one or two that are mentioned elsewhere. I'll not take long on this at all. Characteristics of grace giving. One, and we read it here and Colin mentioned in his prayer, is cheerful.

For God loves a cheerful giver. That's amazing, isn't it? Just think about that for a moment. It's absolutely counter-cultural. Giving away money with joy.

[16 : 33] Cheerfully, that isn't generally what we think. To be a spiritual philanthropist. Seeing it not as a tax but as a privilege. And that's a great challenge for us.

It's a great challenge to take the footprint of grace into everything that we do, including the grace of giving. God is no man's debtor and God understands our needs and understands our poverty.

And as we'll go on to see, He doesn't demand of us. But the motivation is that we thankfully and cheerfully give. Because He is the giver. And we've received, even as we've risen this morning, great gifts from Him.

Of life and of health and of family and of friendship and all of these things. But above all, as we worship on the resurrection morning, the gift of Jesus Christ.

Because the opposite, and God knows it, doesn't it? The opposite is often the case. God loves a cheerful giver. But just before that, not reluctantly or under compulsion.

[17 : 43] And He knows that's very often the motivation for us. That we are giving to God. And I think this can be applied if you go back to chapter 8 and verse 7. The excelling things.

I think it can apply in all of these areas as well. That very often we are reluctantly or grudgingly living our life of faith. The way we speak, our pursuit of knowledge, our earnestness and our love for others.

We can live our Christian lives reluctantly or grudgingly forced. And that really spoils everything, doesn't it? If we miss the point, if we're walking the Christian walk with grumpiness.

If we're grumpy Christians, if we're forced Christians. If it's all duty, if it's all ought to be's. If it's all laws that we're following rather than cheerfully recognizing what Jesus has done.

And that is difficult for us. Because we struggle with God sometimes, and sometimes we are feel reluctant and we feel under compulsion with God.

[18 : 51] But He doesn't want that. He doesn't want conscripts. He doesn't want conscripts. He wants people who cheerfully, voluntarily, understandably know and appreciate grace and serve Him as a result.

And that's the battle that we face. Look at chapter 8, the one before and verse 4. When He speaks about the Macedonian church and their motives. He says, entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

Is that not an amazing statement? That they urgently pleaded, where's the collection? I really want to give. I've got this that I want to give to the Lord and to His work.

And they demanded joy, the privilege of sharing. And I think that for all of us is a great reminder of the motivation that is in normal, it is spiritual, it is impossible, it is miraculous.

It's not something that we naturally have. So it's cheerful, but it's also sacrificial. We recognize that from different places in the Bible.

[20 : 03] We've got the story of the widow's mite, where Jesus speaks about that, the widow's penny or whatever. People gave of their gifts from their wealth, said Jesus, but she out of her poverty gave all she had to live on.

Or even the Old Testament principle of tithe giving, which was sacrificial. Beautiful words from Malachi 3, bring into the tithe, into the storehouse.

Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the gates, flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing, you will not be able to have room for it. And great that principle of sowing generously goes right back into the Old Testament as well.

It's sacrificial, generous giving that is cheerful and voluntarily each person giving what they have decided to give. And then also I think proportionally, there are different passages that speak about proportionality, that God in Acts 11, the disciples each according to their ability sent their gift.

So it was proportional to what they had. And 1 Corinthians 16, on the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.

[21 : 14] Proportional. So God understands us, you know, he knows we've got other legitimate needs, other legitimate costs. He's simply, it might be 10 pence.

According to our needs is that sacrificial loving, cheerful, generous spirit. He knows that we can't be irresponsible. He knows we have responsibilities financially, but he recognizes the heart that we come from.

And within that, there's also the regularity, isn't there, that we give on a regular basis, both the pattern of the Old Testament and the New. Not just when we have the odd bit of spare cash or not just on a special collection, but for the gospel work, which is ongoing, which is regular and which is needed, that we share in God's work.

And I guess that's one of the good things about giving in a structured way through standing orders or something like that. But in Saint Seas, we're simply asking you to support the work of the gospel as a priority, as a mark of grace, as a mark of your commitment in membership as part of your worship.

However you choose to do that and there's practical details on the sheep, which I don't need to mention. But the grace of giving, the title of the sermon was, It's a Pleasure.

[22 : 41] And it would be good if each of us could see that in the knowledge that he will do for us immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. It's a pleasure to serve him and to give. He is no man's debtor. He is the Lord God.

And that is, his Lordship will apply in this, as in all areas of our lives. And the motive is the indescribably great gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is ours.

I mean, let's pray briefly. Heavenly Father, we ask and pray that we would understand and we would know this grace of giving, that we would see, we give thanks here for the amazing things that have been able to be achieved through the generosity of God's people here, things that we could never have dreamed of even.

And we look forward to seeing many more gospel works progressing. We thank you for the amazing gift and provision of a building and mourning side for our church plant given to us freely and fully, and handed to us by generous minded Christians. We thank you for that.

And we look forward to seeing God provide for us like that, but in a million different ways. We look forward to reaching out with the gospel to Midlothian and the prospect of that.

[24 : 14] And thank you for Tom and his willingness to consider that, and Sharlene and those who are in that part of the city, beyond the city in our congregation. And Lord, we look for your provision and help in that area and in that provision of supporting that ministry, gospel planting.

And we ask and pray that we would just be overwhelmed by your movement in our hearts to be generous, to be sacrificial, to be regular in all that we do in our giving, but also that we would take that wonderful principle of the kingdom, the law of grace, and that we would not be sparing in what we do. It would be wholehearted, committed, motivated by grace, that we would give of our time, of our energy, that we would give of our brains in learning about you, but also of our heart in loving you and in serving you, knowing that you provide for us.

You give us your spirit, you enable us to be transformed, and that you have this great vision of life to the full for us, counter-cultural and radical and revolutionary. And we pray that we would live that way, even with all the battles we face, the stresses, the financial burdens, the poverty, the strains that we live under, that we would not bear them on our own, or think, what does God know about this, or what does God understand about these things, but that we would know and appreciate that you are a compassionate and generous and gentle God, and you know exactly what we need, and you know exactly our needs.

Lord, help us, we pray, and continue with us and bless us as we sing together, and fellowship with one another together. Amen. Jesus' name. Amen.