

Has considering Jesus' words that *'it is more blessed to give than receive'* had any influence in your life this past week? You did remember to do your homework didn't you?

I haven't asked anybody to be prepared but is there anyone who would feel at liberty to share how considering these words of Christ touched their life in any way? Are there any volunteers?

\*The work of the Holy Spirit of God certainly isn't restricted to what occurs when we gather together weekly in worship. In fact most often the greater lasting impact of the Lord involves His dealings with us as we are apart and alone with Him or in close communion with a brother or sister in Christ. Does anybody have anything to share?

This morning we continue our focus on the subject of giving as we look to God's Word for His perspective on this matter which is near and dear to our wallets, or rather our hearts.

In fact at the heart of the matter of giving is that giving is a matter of the heart.

Giving is not a required mindless act of duty for the disciple of Jesus Christ; rather it is intended to be an act of devotion, a natural response to the grace we ourselves have received.

In its truest state giving is actually an act of worship.

Our text this morning comes from the Apostle Paul's second letter to the disciples who gathered in the church at Corinth.

## **2 Corinthians 8:1-7 NIV**

*1And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5And 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. 6So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

Let's pray:

We have here an inspirational example of giving in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul was receiving a collection from the various churches for the believers in Jerusalem which he first mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

Here he is again writing to the disciples in the church at Corinth and encouraging them in their giving to this cause by using the example of giving occurring in the churches of Macedonia. This is interesting because Macedonia, which is northern Greece, and Achaia, where Corinth is located, were natural rivals, and Paul mentions them a number of times in these two chapters probably knowing the Corinthians would be spurred to action by the comparisons.

The apostle chooses to share with us a good example of the churches of Macedonia [Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and others in the region], to exhort the Corinthians and the Christians in Achaia to the good work of charitable giving.

As I said earlier giving is to be a matter of the heart.

It is not required as a mindless act of duty for the disciple of Jesus Christ; rather it is intended to be an act of devotion, a natural response to the grace we ourselves have received. Our giving is an act of worship.

That being said, according to the Apostle Paul our giving is also to be expected, for when writing about the same collection he had this to say to the church gathered in Rome:

**Romans 15: 25-27 NLT**

*25 But before I come, I must go to Jerusalem to take a gift to the believers there. 26 For you see, the believers in Macedonia and Achaia have eagerly taken up an offering for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem. 27 They were glad to do this because they feel they owe a real debt to them. Since the Gentiles received the spiritual blessings of the Good News from the believers in Jerusalem, they feel the least they can do in return is to help them financially.*

Did you catch that last part? *'they feel the least they can do in return is to help them financially.'*

They had been blessed with spiritual blessings and so they were expected to share with them in their need for material blessings. 'Are you telling me I have to give? No. I am telling you that you should give as a natural response of gratitude to the Lord!'

There are not many things that you have to do in life. What, pay taxes and die, is that it? But there are many things you should do in life and giving is one of them.

\*I believe this to be one of the greatest keys awareness's a disciple of Jesus Christ can walk in: **'We are blessed to be a blessing.'**

### **Genesis 12:1-3 NKJV**

*1 Now the LORD had said to Abram:*

*"Get out of your country,  
From your family  
And from your father's house,  
To a land that I will show you.*

*2 I will make you a great nation;*

*I will bless you  
And make your name great;  
And you shall be a blessing.*

*3 I will bless those who bless you,  
And I will curse him who curses you;*

*And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

God has blessed you; now you are expected to be a blessing to others!

Let's go back to our text. I want to jump right into the middle of the passage for a second and look at what I believe is another valuable key to not only our giving but to our entire life.

Paul was commending the Macedonian disciples for their giving.

By the way, when is the last time somebody commended you for your giving? I know, we're not supposed to talk about our giving. That's bad! [Actually I am going to handle this subject at a later date and I think we'll all be surprised at what the Bible actually has to say about this!]

One of the keys to being a generous giver is found in verse 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.'*

They gave themselves first to the Lord, even the un-baptized arm.

Remember, the heart of the matter of giving is that giving is a matter of the heart. When we make it a religious duty, something we have to do out of compulsion, we falter.

The flip side is, when we attempt to make giving a 'pseudo-spiritual' experience like 'I'll give when the Lord tells me to give' then we falter as well because God has already told us to give and give generously! We have been blessed. Now let's be a blessing to others!

But the first thing we need to give, like the Macedonian church, is ourselves to the Lord! All of us. Not just the baptized body but the arm and the sword and the wallet and the pocketbook as well!

I'm not trying to be smart but what if the Apostle Paul was writing about us here? What if this narrative was our story? What would he have to say? Might 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 sound something like this from the MOV **My Own Version**

*1And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given Christ United Church. 2Out of the most severe trial, during these difficult economic times when gasoline is almost \$4 a gallon, their uncertainty and extreme challenges caused them to hold back on their giving. 3For I testify that they could have given more than they did, but they didn't. Things were tough. They even had to down grade their satellite service and sell one of their four family cars. 4they urgently pleaded with us to not ask for an offering even though they knew other disciples were really struggling. 5which is kind of what I expected because I think they missed out on the truth about giving themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.*

I'm not saying it would sound like that; I'm just asking the question. Or would it sound like this from The Message

## **2 Corinthians 8:1-7**

*'Now, friends, I want to report on the surprising and generous ways in which God is working in the churches in Macedonia province. Fierce troubles came down on the people of those churches, pushing them to the very limit. The trial exposed their true colors: They were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts. I was there and saw it for myself. They gave offerings of whatever they*

*could—far more than they could afford!—pleading for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians.*

*This was totally spontaneous, entirely their own idea, and caught us completely off guard. What explains it was that they had first given themselves unreservedly to God and to us. The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives.*

Let's look at 5 things that can happen with our giving when we first give ourselves to God:

[when we first give ourselves to God]

**1. God's grace, His unearned and unmerited favor and ability can rest upon us.** [Verse 1 *And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.*]

Matthew Henry commentary says '*The grace of God must be owned as the root and fountain of all the good that is in us, or done by us, at any time; and it is great grace and favor from God, and bestowed on us, if we are made useful to others, and are forward to any good work.*'

This commendation for their giving gave all the glory to God for the empowerment by His grace, not only received but given as well.

[when we first give ourselves to God]

**2. In the midst of adversity and tough times we can be not only able but willing to be generous.** [Verse 2 *'Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.*]

Not only able, but when they were not, they were avail-able, they availed themselves to be able.

They gave not only when it seemed like they 'could' but when they knew that they 'should' as well. There was an obvious need present and they were willing to be a channel of blessing.

### **James 2:15-16 NKJV**

*'If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?'*

\*Ex: family in need this week, unexpected blessing passed on.

[when we first give ourselves to God]

**3. Our giving can be above and beyond our own ability and by our own free will.** [*Verse 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,*]

Not giving because we have to but because we want to an above and beyond what I am capable alone because I have given, and keep giving, myself first to the Lord!

### **2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV**

*'Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.'*

\*When we handle the subject of tithing, that is giving 10% of our increase to the Lord, we'll talk more about this, because the practice of tithing can become a religious exercise, something we do because we're supposed to, or so we think, and we'd better be doing it, rather than as a natural outflow of our relationship with a Loving God, and out of our own free will.

Heck, if we allowed ourselves to give that way it might be more than 10%! Oh, is that the reason? Statistics show that Christians average around 3% giving annually.

[when we first give ourselves to God]

**4. We can be eager and honored to give.** [*verse 4 'they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.'*]

They really wanted to give and begged to do so. Consider the way we approach our giving. Do we look forward to giving or look away from opportunities to give?

Do we prepare ahead to give or is it a knee jerk response?

### **1 Corinthians 16:1-2 NIV**

*1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

Basically, have it ready when I get there. I don't believe this was a matter of convenience only but of heart and gift preparation ahead.

[when we first give ourselves to God]

**5. Our giving can be beyond expectation.** *[verse 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.*

### **Ephesians 3:20 NKJV**

*'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.'*

What can God do with 5 loaves and 2 fishes? Exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think. He might be able to feed 5,000.

EX: Gateway Vineyard passed out food to over 600 people yesterday. I talked to one of their directors of the food program and that certainly was more than they expected.

What can happen with our giving when we first give ourselves to God?

1. God's grace, His unearned and unmerited favor and ability can rest upon us.
2. In the midst of adversity and tough times we can be not only able but willing to be generous.
3. Our giving can be above and beyond our own ability by our own free will.
4. We can be eager and honored to give.
5. Our giving can be beyond expectation.

Look at Paul's last words of encouragement:

*verse 7 But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

You're going above and beyond in a number of areas: faith, speech, knowledge, and love. Great job! See that you excel or go above and beyond in your giving as well.

This kind of giving can only occur when you first give yourself over to the Lord. Have you done that yet? Are you ready to do so today?

EX: Mark surrendering his life completely to Jesus and then getting married on the sidewalk.

It's amazing what God can do through a life given over to Him.