

The Challenge of Giving

2 Cor 8:1-11

Today's services have each challenged us about giving. This morning's service was aimed at our personal response to the needs of children in various parts of the world. This evening we looked at the work of the BMS in alleviating poverty in the Sacred Valley of Peru.

In each we affirmed the fact that even the little we can give can make a huge impact to someone's life. I'm sent loads of stuff by Christian organisations on a weekly basis encouraging me to give or ask if my church will give. In this time of financial constraint, we so often have to say no or no more don't we? Both organisations today ask for our financial support and it's between us and the Lord how much we give and to whom when it comes to mission. Maybe we're already committed to regular giving in mission and I wouldn't want anybody to cease giving to something or give less so as to take on something else.

What guidance can we find in Scripture? It was a common practice for churches to take up collections to give churches going through difficulties. The distribution to the poor goes back to the beginning of the church.

What criteria do we use to decide how much to give and whom when faced with so much need. We know we should reach out in compassion. The answer I believe is held in 2 Corinthians, for giving in according to the grace that God has given us.

Look what Paul says about the Macedonian churches: *8:1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 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.*

The Macedonians give well beyond Paul's expectation or asking. They gave despite their own poverty. And the basis was this: they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. Their first loyalty was to the Lord and they sought to do His will. That said, Paul did not ask anyone to give beyond their means: *And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. 11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.*

Go down to verse 9 and there's another principle:

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

We are motivated by grace. Our devotion to God is tempered by our understanding of His grace and we see that typified by the communion table in front of us this evening.

I find Paul's description of the Macedonians in this chapter interesting as they gave out of their poverty. One of the greatest ironies is that usually the poor are the most sacrificial givers. Jesus pointed that out when he talked about the widow's mite. The widow only gave a small coin but that cost her more than the big sums of money rich people put into the Temple treasure.

I don't find it an irony at all that some of the most blessed people I've ever met are not rich people, but those who have proved God's grace not just in salvation but in day to day life. God never blessed them with riches but he blessed their lives with the presence of His Spirit, who is worth much more than gold or possessions.

So in these days where we are being challenged increasingly about money, remember the Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. Listen to his voice, perceive His will and give according to it and according to your means.