

## 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

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[ 0 : 00 ] So just to explain a little bit of what we're going to do this evening, it's just going to be a little bit different. We're going to preach a shorter sermon on the passage that we've read. And then having done that, we will then move on to just share a little bit, spend a little bit of time, not long, explaining the leaflet that was handed out to you this evening about the Bon Accord missions budget.

I should say we're delighted to have visitors with us. And of course, the leaflet's been handed to everybody. We wouldn't want to not give a leaflet to somebody and have people feel left out. But obviously, this is a particular interest for those who are part of the congregation.

So bear with us when we spend a little bit of time just explaining that. We won't give too much time to that. But having everybody together is a good opportunity just to explain a little bit about that.

And it will follow on from the message that we're going to be sharing now. From God's Word. So turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

And we want to just think a little bit about what we find or some of the truths that we find outlined in these verses. As I mentioned, in a few moments, I'm going to be talking about a budget.

[ 1 : 25 ] Now, I don't know how that sounds to you if it sounds terribly dull and uninspiring. I can't say the idea of talking about or listening to people talking about budgets is a very exciting prospect.

Maybe for some of you, and quite reasonably, you might say, well, I don't come to church to hear about budgets. I come to hear about God's grace.

That's what I need to hear about. That's what I want to hear about. Well, I hope that I can demonstrate to you from God's Word that this budget is all about grace.

It's born in grace, and it's grounded in grace, and it's intended to serve the purposes of grace. And so I hope that I manage to persuade you on that front.

As I say, the deacons' court have produced for the congregation what we're calling the Bon Accord Missions Budget. And you've got that wee leaflet that was handed to you as you came in this morning.

[ 2 : 25 ] And what's the purpose of this? Well, the purpose is to enthuse the congregation in the matter of giving for mission, and also to direct us in the manner in which we do so.

And as I say, I'll speak a little bit more about that in a few moments. The key point is that a mission budget is all about grace. It's for those who have freely received and for those who delight in giving freely.

We have received from God, and we delight to give for God. I wonder what makes giving easy. Is giving easy?

I don't know. I suppose if we were honest in answering that question, I wonder what our answer would be. But I wonder, how could giving be, if it's not, maybe it is, but how could it be easy?

Well, I think one thing that would make it easy is if it's enjoyable, if it's something that we enjoy doing. Because generally, we find easy to do that which we enjoy.

[ 3 : 32 ] So if you enjoy eating good food, then, well, that's not a difficult thing to do. You enjoy doing it. And so the very fact that you enjoy it makes it something that isn't a burden.

It's not a duty. It's something delightful. Maybe it's playing a sport of one kind or another. Of course, if you don't enjoy doing it, then it's a terrible burden to have to do it. You know, sometimes, I know some of, maybe many of you will be aware that on a Tuesday night, some of the guys here go and play five-a-side or seven-a-side football at Banks of D.

It's from nine to ten at night. Now, once or twice, I've ventured and participated. But I've got to be honest. You know, on a cold Tuesday night in Aberdeen, you know, it's freezing cold.

The idea of going to play football from nine to ten, you know, it's just, you know, it's not enjoyable. You know, and so I just, whoa, I just say, whoa. Oh, well, the list is full. They've got enough people.

I'll step back. Well, I'd never step forward in the first place. But the point is, other people take a different view because they really enjoy it. They love going. And even though it's cold and it's late, you know, they love playing football.

[ 4 : 42 ] And so it's not a burden to do it because they enjoy doing it. And we can multiply the examples. I think it's a bit like that with giving. When we enjoy doing it, then it's not a burden.

It's not some duty imposed on us. It's interesting that Paul very much has that sense. He's saying, I'm not commanding you. I don't want to command you. I want you to delight in this.

I want you to enjoy it. I think that's the whole thrust of the teaching in the New Testament on this subject. You know, we're familiar with, you know, these words from the Bible.

It's more blessed to give than to receive. And I think I may have mentioned this before, but I think often we take that truth in the sense of that it's more worthy to give than to receive.

You know, it's a better thing to do. You know, it's a good thing to do, to give rather than to receive. But actually, the word blessed has a sense of happy. It's more delightful to give than to receive.

[ 5 : 45 ] That's the heart of what is being said in these words from the Bible. So, my hope is that the very prospect of giving generously would be for all of us a thrilling one.

Not an onerous duty to perform, but a pleasurable delight. And as I just commented, that's not just my hope or my desire. It is the whole thrust of the teaching and practice of giving in the New Testament.

It's all about grace. But you don't need to take my word for it. Let's turn to the verses that we read there in 2 Corinthians chapter 8. And we read verses 1 to 9.

We want to just think about these verses just briefly. We're not going to deal with everything that's said here very exhaustively. But just draw out some lessons on this matter of giving. But having as our, let's call it our interpretive key, grace.

Grace is what will help us understand the passage and draw out practical truths for us from the passage.

[ 6 : 54 ] So, the first thing I want you to notice when we're talking about grace and how grace becomes the motor, if you wish, for generous giving.

First of all, I want us to notice what Paul identifies as the source of grace. If we think of grace as a river that can flow through us and through the church.

What is the source of that river? Well, I think we find the answer to that in verse 9. This is not right at the very beginning of the chapter, but as Paul is kind of drawing his argument or coming almost to a crescendo in his argument.

Notice what he says there in verse 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.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is where it begins. This is the source of the river of grace. The God of all grace. The grace of Jesus. And what is grace?

[ 8 : 00 ] At the heart of grace is the act of giving. Giving that is unprovoked and undeserved on the part of the recipient.

Or if we do want to speak about grace being provoked or giving being provoked. Provoked only by the love of God. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.

That is the only provocation, if you wish. The only spur to God's generous giving. His own love. His own character. That which is innate to himself.

Nothing outside of himself. Nothing in us that drew him to us. But rather his own love is what explains. And that is the source of his giving to us.

And in this verse Paul highlights the cost of the grace or the giving of Jesus. And the results of his giving in our lives. We notice there in that verse it says that though he was rich.

[ 9 : 09 ] Though he was rich as the eternal Son of God. Rich in glory. Rich in majesty. Rich in beauty and splendor. Rich in that deep communion with the Father that he had enjoyed through all eternity.

Rich in his enjoyment of the worship of angels. So no doubt we could go on as we would try and explore something of the wealth of Jesus.

And even if we were to try and explore that further. We would only scratch the surface. He was rich. And yet Paul tells us he became poor.

Here we have the conscious, willing, and deliberate act on the part of Jesus of becoming poor. Of divesting himself of riches and joy through all eternity.

And enduring the ever deepening suffering and poverty that constituted his life from the point of becoming man. And Paul expresses the matter very, very powerfully in his letter to the Philippians.

[ 10 : 22 ] Where he speaks of this emptying of Jesus in these terms. In Philippians chapter 2 and verse 6 we read, The source of grace.

Our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet he became poor. And why did he do this? Well he did it for you. He did it for you. That's what Paul says so clearly.

Though he was rich, yet for your sakes. For our sakes. He became poor. So that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

Rich in the enjoyment of God's forgiveness. Rich in peace and hope and joy. Rich in your new status as a child of God.

Rich in all the privileges of being a child of God. Indeed if we had to summarize it in one short phrase. Rich in Christ. And all that that implies.

[ 11 : 41 ] And all that comes within that simple statement. That we are, you are, rich in Christ. So this is the source of grace.

But I also want you to notice in this passage what I'm calling the direction of grace. And really what I have in mind is here simply to notice how grace is given. In this case to the Macedonians.

But also, and it's the other side of the coin really. Grace is received by the Macedonians. But each of them has its own kind of distinctive emphasis that we can draw out.

But this is the direction of grace. Grace given to the Macedonians. Verse 1. And now brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

The word there about the grace that God has given. It's the very same word that we've noticed is used to speak of Jesus. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 12 : 41 ] So this same grace is given by God to the Macedonian churches. This amazing grace or giving of Jesus requires recipients.

And it's kind of obvious in a way. But that's the thing about giving. You need somebody to give to. Without somebody to give to, there can be no giving. Giving requires a recipient.

And here we're told who the recipient of God's giving in Jesus are. In this case, the focus on these churches in Macedonia.

All the benefits of God's grace in Jesus are given to the Macedonians. Real people, real churches, in real places. Ordinary people.

Flawed people. People like you and me. Given grace by God. And of course, as that is true of the churches in Macedonia that Paul's speaking about.

[ 13 : 42 ] We can of course also recognize and acknowledge that it's true for us. That the grace of God has been given to the churches in Aberdeen.

Many churches in this city. That like the churches in Macedonia. Have been the recipients of this grace. And that of course includes ourselves. And this is a grace that God continues to give in so many different ways.

So grace given to the Macedonians. But also grace received by the Macedonians. And really picking up on what I just said. There is a sense in which grace is only fully grace. When it is received and enjoyed.

If grace is rejected. There's a sense in which there's just a crucial missing element. Grace requires both to be given. But also to be received.

And it's clear that the Macedonians received God's grace in Jesus. I think the key expression to note this reality is. Where Paul speaks of their overflowing joy.

[ 14 : 50 ] There in verse 2 it says. Out of the most severe trial. Their overflowing joy. And their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. But this expression that is used to describe the Macedonians.

Of their overflowing joy. The word translated joy. There in verse 2. Their overflowing joy.

The word translated joy is the Greek word charas. Now the Greek word for grace. As we find it in this chapter. Is the word charis. So you can see there's clearly a connection between the words.

And this word charas is used in the New Testament. To describe the joy that is produced by a gift received. You know there are many things that can produce joy in us.

But this word is used very specifically of that joy. That we experience when we receive a gift. It's that kind of joy that is being talked about.

[ 15 : 50 ] And so what's very clear is that Paul is saying. Yes God has given to the Macedonian churches. That's the direction of grace. But the Macedonian churches were delighted to receive from God.

And this produced in them this overflowing joy. It's the direction of grace. But as we continue to just notice a little bit more of what we find in this passage.

We can also speak of what we might call the effects of grace. Verses 3 through to 5. Some of the effects of grace are highlighted.

Now we've already identified joy as one effect of grace. One product. One result. One consequence of God's grace. Joy in those who receive God's grace.

But grace induced joy needs an outlet. And what is joy's outlet? Well I think what we find in this passage is that the outlet for our joy is the giving of ourselves.

[ 16 : 54 ] There in verse 5 we read of how the Macedonians gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us. And so this giving of the Macedonians.

They've received from God. This produces in them overflowing joy. And the outlet for this joy is the giving of themselves. To God they gave themselves first to the Lord and to others and then to us.

And then it goes on in verse 4. In the previous verse it speaks of how they gave themselves and gave to the saints. Their desire was to give towards others.

It's interesting there in verse 4 where it speaks of how the Macedonians urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

The word privilege there is actually the word, same word translated grace. Another in verse 1 and in verse 9. And the translators here choose to use the word privilege because they feel that it captures the idea.

[ 17 : 55 ] But it's interesting that literally what has been said by Paul is that they urgently pleaded with us for the grace of sharing. We've been given so much.

We want to give as well. We want that privilege. We want to be part of this giving. We've received so much. We want to give also. We've discovered God to be gracious.

We want to be gracious too. So the effects of grace. The giving of ourselves. And then we also have in the passage, and particularly in verse 3, some of the features of grace, but particularly in the context of gracious giving.

And what Paul is speaking about here is financial giving. Now giving takes many forms. But what he's speaking about here, as he describes the Macedonians, is their giving of their financial resources for those in need.

And he identifies certain features of that giving on the part of the Macedonians. Let's just read what Paul says there in verse 3.

[ 18 : 59 ] For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability, entirely on their own. They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

Well, we could say a lot, but let's just notice one or two things about some features of this giving. Gracious giving knows no obstacles. You know, out of their extreme poverty.

They didn't allow that to be an obstacle. They didn't allow that to be something, well, we'd love to do it, but, you know, we just can't. No, even in the face of what seemed to be an obstacle, they were able to overcome that.

And that is a feature of gracious giving. And gracious giving is generous. The language used by Paul is, in speaking of the Macedonians, he speaks of their rich generosity.

Gracious giving won't take no for an answer. It's very, what's the word, almost moving and touching to just picture these Macedonians.

[ 20 : 03 ] You know, and Paul is saying to them, look, I know you're really struggling. I know your resources are limited, and don't feel you've got to give all this. And how do they respond? Well, he tells us how they responded.

They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. They said, Paul, don't deny us this privilege. Don't say to us, well, no, you can't participate because you're so poor.

I'm going to go to other people who are more able. No, don't do that. Don't deny us this privilege. Gracious giving won't take no for an answer.

Then one final thing I want you to notice is what I'm calling the example of grace. In verse 7, which in a sense could be identified as the central verse in regards to Paul's purpose in sharing this with the Christians in Corinth, we find, well, his purpose identified in this verse.

In verse 7 it says, 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.

[ 21 : 18 ] And so what he's saying is, look, I've given you the example. I've shared with you what I discovered of the Macedonians. This is how they responded to the opportunity to give.

And I'm just describing it for you. This is what I saw in them. And I'm telling you about this because I'd like you to learn from their example. I want you to know the thrill that they knew in giving in the manner that they did.

And so this is his concern. He wants to encourage the Corinthians to give generously, but not by commanding them. As he says there in verse 8, I'm not commanding you. My idea here isn't to place any sense of obligation on you.

I don't want to lay a guilt trip on you. That's not what I'm doing. But I do want you to learn from and to consider the example of these Christians in Macedonia and encourage you to follow that example.

And so there's this example of grace. Giving is contagious in that sense. Giving that is grounded in overflowing joy is contagious.

[ 22 : 30 ] And the example of the Macedonians, of course, is not just for the Christians in Corinth, though that was Paul's initial and original concern. It has been kept for us in the Scriptures to serve as an example for us.

Well, let's just draw things to a conclusion. As we look to Jesus, the one who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, may we receive his grace.

May we rejoice in his grace. And may we delight in reflecting his grace as those who delight in giving ourselves to the Lord, to his church, and to the saints.

Which takes me back to where I began. Our mission budget is all about grace. It's for those who have received freely and so delight in giving freely.

It's for those who have received from God and so delight to give for God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you again for Jesus. We thank you for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 23 : 39 ] We thank you that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that we, through his poverty, might become rich. We thank you for all the wonderful theological truth that is contained in these words of the apostle.

For all that they speak of the sacrifice of Jesus. For all that they speak of the enormous privileges that we enjoy because of what he has done on our behalf.

We do thank you that you are a God who is generous in giving to us. But we thank you also that you are a God who would have us become ever more like you.

You are a God that would have us think your thoughts and walk in your way and become ever more like you, ever more like your son, Jesus. We thank you for the example of the Macedonians, fellow believers who lived 2,000 years ago and yet who continue to speak to us and to challenge us and to encourage us in this privilege of giving for the extension of your kingdom and for the support of your people engaged in sharing the good news of the gospel in this city and indeed around the world.

And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.