

2 Corinthians 9:15

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[0 : 00] Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.

With this explosion of praise, Paul seals the section of his letter to the believers in Corinth in which he has been encouraging them to be cheerful givers as they would support their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem who were in great need.

This morning we were thinking about that passage in 2 Corinthians and we ended the sermon this morning, recognizing that this dramatic climax that we find there in the chapter that we were looking at has to be our starting point in this matter of cheerful giving. It is when, and really only when we are able to echo the sentiments of the apostle, thanks be to God for His indescribable gift, it's only then that we're really equipped to then ourselves move on and be cheerful givers, as we would in a small way reflect our giving God. What I want to do this evening is spend a little time considering the very words that we were stressing this morning were so important but didn't then take any further. This, what I'm calling an explosion of praise. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. The way we're going to think about these words is guided by the following headings. First of all we're going to be unwrapping the gift. Paul speaks of a gift and like all good gifts we need to unwrap it to see what there is inside. So we'll spend just a brief moment unwrapping the gift. Then we'll think a little bit more about what Paul says under the heading speechless in admiration. In the language that Paul uses there is this sense that he is speechless, obviously not completely speechless because he does say something, but we'll explain a little bit more what we mean by that in due course. But then we'll move on to what may appear a very foolish endeavor, and that is describing the indescribable. The word that we have at the heart of this doxology, of this praise of Paul, is this word indescribable. He speaks of the gift as indescribable. And maybe if we were sensible we would just take that at face value and just recognize that, well, it is indescribable. But we're not going to do that. We're going to attempt, at least in a measure, to describe the indescribable. And finally, we'll think a little bit about the matter of giving thanks for the gift. This is what Paul is doing. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. So we want to spend just a few moments thinking about what that might look like. How do we give thanks for God's indescribable gift? Well, let's begin by unwrapping the gift. And really, the question that we're posing and looking to answer is, what is the gift that Paul gives thanks to God for? What do we discover as we unwrap this gift that

Paul speaks on? What or who is God's great gift to His people? Now, it seems to me that that isn't really a very difficult question, but the answer is certainly a very wonderful answer. The gift, surely, that Paul is referring to is the person of Jesus Himself. Jesus, God's Son, is His generous gift to us. Now, Paul has already punctuated his encouragement to give cheerfully by pointing to Jesus in chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians. We were noticing that this morning, and we'll just do so again this evening. In chapter 8 and verse 9, in the midst of this encouragement to give, he focuses the attention of his readers on Jesus. And we can just read 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. On that occasion, the stress is on the generosity of the Son, on the generosity of Jesus Himself in giving Himself for us, in becoming poor for us. And here, in verse 15 of chapter 9, part of the same section, really the close of this section of the letter, Paul praises the generosity of the Father in the giving of His Son. He praises

Jesus for giving Himself, and he praises the Father for giving His Son, His one and only Son. So I think, for myself, my settled opinion on this matter is that here Paul is speaking about Jesus as God's indescribable gift. It has been suggested, and it's a reasonable suggestion, if the gift that Paul is referring to might not be the gift of salvation provided in and through the work of Jesus, rather than Jesus Himself. It seems to me that it's really of little consequence in choosing between one or the other, though my own sense is that here Paul is speaking about Jesus. But as I say, it's not of great consequence because either way, our admiring gaze is directed to Jesus, whether He Himself is the gift that Paul is speaking of, as I think He is, or whether it is the salvation that He has secured for us, which also is spoken of in Scripture as a gift.

[6 : 36] In that regard, and maybe just confirming if that's the word, or certainly something that would be consistent with the contention that here Paul is indeed speaking of Jesus, the person of Jesus, as God's indescribable gift. It's interesting how Paul uses language that would certainly very much coincide with that thought as he writes to the Romans. In Romans, and in chapter 8, and in verse 32, he uses the language of God giving, and indeed he speaks of all that God gives us. And notice where he places Jesus in that panorama. In Romans 8, verse 32, we read, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Jesus being viewed by Paul as God's great gift, who in turn opens the floodgates for all God's gracious gifts to his people. So this gift that Paul praises God for, thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. I think we can confidently assert that here he is speaking of none other than Jesus. He is God's indescribable gift. But I want to move on and think a little bit about what Paul says here under this heading, speechless in admiration. Now why do I say that he's at a loss for words that could do justice to the marvel of God's gift? As he closes this section of the letter, he's at a loss for words. And why do I say that he's at a loss for words?

Because of what he does. And what he does is he makes one up. The word that we have translated here, indescribable. And in the older versions, the word that is used is unspeakable. For those of you more familiar with the older version, so unspeakable or indescribable. But the interesting thing, the curious thing about this word is that everything would suggest that Paul himself has coined this word. It's not a word, it would appear, that existed. It wasn't a word that existed in the Greek language. There's no occurrence of it in any Greek literature that is known and has been investigated. This is the very first time that this word appears on the stage, as it were, of Greek literature. And so it seems reasonable to presume that what Paul is doing, as he does on other occasions, is coin a word in order to, in some measure, try and do justice to the subject matter that he is dealing with. It would seem that Paul, certainly, as we know, inspired by the Spirit of God, coins this new word in a noble attempt to find an adjective worthy of the noun. And this is the word that he comes up with, indescribable. What Paul is endeavoring to do, really, is to do the impossible, to describe the indescribable. And so he comes up, fittingly, with this word, indescribable. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift, a gift that defies the constraints of human language. It's as if Paul is saying, whatever words I use, whatever adjectives I draw to the task at hand, they will be insufficient to do justice to the gift that God has given us in his Son, Jesus. This gift is indescribable.

It simply can't be done. We can't adequately describe God's gift. Certainly not fully, not exhaustively. Paul recognizes that Jesus is, in a real sense, indescribable. Now, this is true, but the fact that Paul would recognize it to be true in this way is, I think, also revealing. Why do I say revealing? Well, we are aware that in the Bible, God himself and his ways, his mind, his thinking, are, on different occasions, described as, presented as indescribable. His ways are inscrutable. Again, if we think of what Paul himself says in Romans chapter 11, reading from verse 33, speaking of God and of his judgments and of his wisdom, what does Paul say? Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out. Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out. And what Paul is recognizing in using this language and in coining this word, indescribable, what Paul is doing is recognizing that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the God-man, the one who is truly God and truly man, shares that divine characteristic. He is indescribable. We cannot and will never fully fathom Jesus.

But having recognized that, we're now going to move on to do something that would seem very foolish, and that is to describe the indescribable. Now, as I say, given what we've just said, that would seem an impossible task. Jesus is, after all, in the language of Paul, God's indescribable gift.

[12 : 53] But of course, the point that is being made by the language that Paul uses is not that we can know nothing of Jesus, or that no description or portrait is possible, but rather that we will never be able to know everything. We will never know Jesus exhaustively. But that does not mean that we cannot know him truly and accurately. We can, thank God, know Jesus truly and accurately as he is described for us in the Scriptures. As we turn to the Scriptures, we can find Jesus presented to us, described for us who he is and what he has done and what he's like. We find this. We have this before us in the Bible. And what I want to do is to suggest that in the passage in 2 Corinthians, Paul points us in an intriguing direction to a beautiful description of God's chosen and promised

Messiah, who we know is Jesus, the Messianic King. In 2 Corinthians chapter 9, and in verse 9, as we've already pointed out as we were reading from Psalm 112, Paul quotes from Psalm 112.

There in verse 9 of chapter 9 of 2 Corinthians, he has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever. Now the reason why Paul quotes this verse is that it is helpful in making his case to the Corinthians. He is seeking to encourage the Corinthians to be generous in giving. He's wanting them to be sure and to understand that this exhortation or this encouragement in his part isn't anything novel. He's not bringing anything new to the table. What he's doing is simply doing what God has already done in the Word, and he directs them to this particular psalm that speaks of a generous man and of how God commends and is pleased with and delights in generosity. So that's why he draws attention to this psalm. It helps him establish the case that he's wanting to establish.

But the question that I want us to think about just in the little time that remains is, who is described in Psalm 112? Now, if you were limited to the quote employed by Paul, now we've already read the psalm and sang the psalm, so you have a little bit more information, but if all you had was the verse in front of you there in verse 9 of 2 Corinthians 9, I wonder how you would answer the question, well, who has been spoken of here? He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever. But especially that second part, his righteousness endures forever. Who can this be speaking of? And I think we might reasonably pose the question, well, can this be speaking of an ordinary man, however good he might be?

His righteousness endures forever. I think at the very least it would pose or present to us that question mark as to who is being spoken of. And yet as we turn to that psalm, and as we turn to the psalm that precedes it, because as I was commenting, they very much go together as a pair that are intended to be side by side and to be read and considered together. As we do that, and we've already sung both of the psalms, so hopefully that gives us a little bit of a head start, we do discover that these two psalms, Psalm 111 and Psalm 112, are a matching or certainly complementing pair.

[16 : 42] The one describes the Lord, Psalm 111. We read there in verse 2, great are the works of the Lord. And then it goes on to speak of the works of the Lord and of the Lord and what he's like and what he's done and his nature and characteristics, the psalm, that is its subject matter. But then we turn to Psalm 112 that we've read and sung. And it follows exactly the same pattern poetically, in terms of the form of the psalm. The language parallels itself on many occasions. We don't have time to identify the many parallels. But in Psalm 112, it is not the Lord who has been spoken of, but the man who fears the Lord. There in verse 1, praise the Lord, blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. And the psalm continues to describe this man, this covenant keeper, this God-fearing man. Now, we've come to look at the psalms under the heading of describing the indescribable and describing Jesus. So, are we, as we've looked at the two psalms and how they deal with their subject matter, do we have to conclude that Psalm 112 does not, in fact, describe

Jesus. And we'll have to look elsewhere for a description of Jesus. Well, time doesn't allow us to compare and contrast the psalms. But if we were to do so, we would discover a fascinating correspondence or echo in the description of the man who fears the Lord, in Psalm 112, with the Lord himself, in Psalm 111. Now, most striking of the ways in which there are these parallels or these echoes, most striking is this use of a phrase, word for word, the same in both psalms, about his righteousness enduring forever, as it happens on both occasions in verse 3 of the two psalms. So, in Psalm 111 that speaks of the Lord, what does it say about him? It says, his righteousness endures forever. And then in Psalm 112, speaking of the man who fears the Lord, what does it say? His righteousness endures forever. What are we to make of this matching description of the Lord and of the man who fears the Lord? At one level, we could say that it is God's purpose for us, as we were commenting just in the passing this morning, that we be like him. We have been created in the image and likeness of God.

We are called to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. And so, if it is true of God that his righteousness endures forever, then perhaps it ought to be true of us also, that we would share in a measure that characteristic. But I think we can go further. I think that what we have in Psalm 112, not unlike in Psalm 1, what we have is God's portrait of the ideal covenant keeper of the archetypal righteous man. This is what God's righteous man looks like. Now, as we read the psalm and we look at it and we say, well, we're righteous. That's what we're meant to be like. The psalm takes on an aspirational character. It's something that we can aspire to. I would like to be like that man.

But of course, it's not a mirror. We don't look in and say, well, that's me. That looks just like me. Because we're not like this man. With God's help, we can become ever more like him, but we're not like him. We fall short. In fact, the psalm, a bit like the law, serves not so much as a mirror, but as an accusing finger. Because as we read it, we say, well, that's not me. I'm not generous like this man is generous. I'm not like the man described here. Indeed, the question could be asked, does such a man exist? And of course, the answer that I think we must give, and we do give, is that yes, praise God, such a man does exist. And his name is Jesus. Jesus, the God-man, wonderfully straddles the two psalms, the one describing God and the one describing the godly man. And in the light of the New Testament, we know that Jesus is both. He is both God, and he is the godly man. And so he, as it were, straddles these two psalms. Now, that's not to say for a moment that Psalm 112 is only describing Jesus. No, it's intended to describe the godly man, the godly woman, you and me. And it is, in that sense, aspirational for us. But it does surely also point forward to the ultimate righteous man, the ultimate covenant keeper, the one whose righteousness endures forever. And what I want us to do as we kind of draw things to a close is simply read the psalm. And to read the psalm, we've read the psalm already, but I want us to read it again. But to do so with this perspective in mind, that in this psalm, we see the one described by Paul as indescribable. We find him in a measure described for our delight and admiration. So let's read the psalm. And just read it. But read it with that perspective that in this psalm, we see Jesus described prophetically in a measure for us. So let's read it again. Praise the Lord. Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. I said I wasn't going to comment, but I can't help but comment. Don't we have here a cheerful giver? You know, in the morning, we were thinking about a cheerful giver, one who delights in giving. Well, it's the one who finds great delight in his commands. If we think of that as Jesus and this great command that he was under to give himself over on our behalf. And he did so. And did he not delight in doing so? Did he not delight in the Father's will? Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land. The generation of the upright will be blessed.

Wealth and riches are in his house. His righteousness endures forever. Even in darkness, light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. Surely he will never be shaken. A righteous man will be remembered forever. He will have no fear of bad news. His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is secure. He will have no fear. In the end, he will look in triumph on his foes. He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. His horn will be lifted high in honor. The wicked man will see and be vexed. He will gnash his teeth and waste away.

[23 : 52] The longings of the wicked will come to nothing. But let's finish by just noticing what we can do as we would give thanks for the gift. That's what Paul does in song, in this declaration. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. How can we give thanks for God's indescribable gift? Is it possible? Is it possible to give thanks? Certainly not in any symmetrical way, not in a way where our thanksgiving might somehow correspond to the gift. That's simply not possible. We can maybe poorly illustrate that by thinking perhaps of a time when we have been the objects of an act of kindness and generosity that has led us to respond something along these lines.

How can I ever thank you? I don't know if you've ever been in that situation. I hope you have. I know I have on many occasions and if either it's expressed or certainly it's the thought that goes through one's mind. How can I ever thank you? And of course sometimes the reality is that we never can.

Certainly not in some kind of repayment of what we have received. Well if you multiply that scenario to the nth degree then perhaps we can grasp something of the challenge facing us. How can we thank God for his indescribable gift? Well the fact that we can't thank him in any corresponding way does not mean that we're incapable of giving thanks at all. By no means. God has graciously provide us with the opportunity to express our gratitude. And we can do so by seeking with his help to be like the man God. That is the man who God presents for you in this psalm. Be like Jesus. Be a cheerful giver.

Just like Jesus. So now let's close. And what we're going to do, bear with me, is we're going to read the psalm again. But this time as we read the psalm I'd ask you to prayerfully ask God as you read and as you listen, prayerfully ask God that he would help you to be like this man. This generous and cheerful giver. Praise the Lord. Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands.

His children will be mighty in the land. The generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house and his righteousness endures forever. Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. Surely he will never be shaken. A righteous man will be remembered forever. He will have no fear of bad news. His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is secure. He will have no fear. In the end he will look in triumph on his foes. He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. His horn will be lifted high in honor. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. Let us pray.

[27 : 38] We do indeed, our God, thank you for your indescribable gift. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you that you have been pleased to describe him for us, to send him to us, that we would see him, that we would behold his glory, that we would know something of him and enough of him for us to put our trust in him as our Savior. But we do recognize that just as we will never be able to fathom you, so we will never be able to fully fathom your Son. We would not wish to do so, even if it were a possibility which it is not. Indeed, we recognize that eternity itself will not provide time enough for us to fathom you and your unsearchable mind and will and majesty and might and love. But Lord, we pray that we would delight in the adventure of discovering more and more of you. Help us to show our gratitude in the manner that is being presented to us, that we would seek to be like this man, this righteous man. Help us in our lives to become more and more like this man, more and more like Jesus. And we pray in his name. Amen.

Amen. Well, let's close our service this evening by singing verses in Psalm 103 on page 369. Page 369 of our psalm book, Psalm 103, we'll sing verses 1 to 5 to the tune London New.

O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless. Let's stand to sing these verses. Let's stand to sing these verses.