

Treasure in Heaven and Security on Earth
2 Corinthians 8:9-15; 9:6-16
April 13, 2008

Next Sunday, April 20th, we are encouraging you to make a pledge to this church in order to complete the funding of our building project. I do not know of any space on this church campus that has not been improved in some way by this project. New paint, new flooring, new parking, new rooms, new buildings, new driveways, new lighting, new covered walkways, new landscaping to come, no not everything is new, it did not need to be, but everything is better one way or another alongside of that which is new. It is inspiring to see what this congregation has begun to do here and now we are to complete the financing of it. But not only is the building expansion and renovation project inspiring, the congregation and its leadership has been so inspiring. The facilities have grown but so have we, so have we in being the people of God in our time, in this place. Our people, our lives, our ministry, our relationships, our being a church has also expanded in the time we have been doing this. Imagine this, we have almost finished this project and the church has not split. We have had problems of course since we remain human, but we have come through this well and intact. We have grown in more one way than one. And this wonderful church shall continue to grow in every way into a greater relationship with our Lord and this his plan for us in the days ahead.

I have been asked to give a sermon to encourage you to do your part in completing this tremendous ministry. I have chosen a text where some Christians long ago, were also encouraged to complete something they had started. In our NT reading from 2 Corinthians 8:9 and following, Paul is encouraging the Corinthian Christians to follow through with their financial pledge to needy Christians in the city of Jerusalem. Evidently the Corinthians had the best intentions but the offering they had promised was not getting to those in need and this had come to Paul's attention. How does Paul get them to follow through? While their situation in Corinth is not our situation, there are transferrable concepts and I will share some of those with you. Why should you give, in some cases continue to give, to this project so we can retire the debt? The reasons the Corinthians were to give apply to us as well. Let me go through those with you. Listen for them as I read from two chapters, 8, 9 of II Corinthians to you.

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.¹⁰ And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—¹¹now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.¹² For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have.

¹³*I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.¹⁵ As it is written,*

*“The one who had much did not have too much,
and the one who had little did not have too little.”*

In the ninth chapter, beginning in verse 6, Paul continues to encourage the Corinthians to follow through with their commitment with more reasons:

⁶The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹As it is written,

*“He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”*

¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹²for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

The first reason Paul furnishes the Corinthians to complete their gift is through example of a church where everyone gave.

Paul is appealing to the Corinthian Christians to learn from another congregation in Macedonia that was very poor. Yet although they were poor, they ALL gave generously to help others in need. That church was thrilled to be able to give what they could afford because it let them into the world of helping another.. They can use what little they have to benefit others. **But they could only do it together.** What each of them had was so meager that their own giving independently would be hardly worth the cost of postage, but coupling it with many others made enough to really help. The joy of the Macedonian Christians was coupled with their poverty used to bond them together and being bonded together at the heart, built up the congregation. Their poverty worked for them in their getting them to be a people who were bonded together for the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Macedonian Christians were described by Paul, he said that they gave even beyond their ability. How on earth does one give beyond ones ability? Is there something beyond their ability? The coach says to give 110%. They found more ways to accomplish the task that getting more money.

Maybe they encouraged another person to make a donation, maybe they found a cheaper way to do something, maybe they cut something out that no longer needed to be in the budget, maybe they grew their church library by having people give books they no longer need rather than buy new ones. **If everyone gets involved and everyone does something to help, it is amazing what can be done.** I remember a family that wanted to give to a church where I served and they could not give much, and one Saturday they were down at the church and noticed the gardening being done by a lawn service. They volunteered to do that one year and through that were able to give the church a generous gift given their income level. It was not important that they were poor, it was important that whatever they had was pooled together.

I experienced this in India when visiting a boarding school of untouchables girls in Utter Pradesh. In what may have been the most moving experience of my life, I was part of a delegation of American Christians that was received by those with next to nothing that made all of us weep with joy in their honoring us with their hospitality, gifts and love to total strangers. There are Christians in this world

today that we can learn from who do not have to keep for themselves what can benefit others who know not our Lord. **We give because of the example of others, all of whom gave what they had.**

The second reason they were to give and we are to give draws on another example, the example of Jesus Christ himself.

He refers them to Christ who became poor that they became rich. There are people who become poor. We all can do it. It is not especially popular to become poor. And, if we are talking to each other about being like Jesus, most of us would probably not get into the becoming poor part. But this becoming poor of Jesus is qualified, Jesus became poor that WE might become rich. He did not become poor because he stopped working or got laid off. He was already rich and gave it up so we could be rich. Someone today who is poor becomes rich and helps himself get richer by charging poor people to get rich too, maybe, maybe not. If one has done so well at getting rich, why not give it away? Rather than get more for yourself.. It was not important for Jesus Christ to be rich. It was important for Jesus to make others rich. He shared his wealth with us at his own expense so we could have what he had. To be like Jesus means to share what we have so that others can also know him. **The example of Jesus Christ himself.**

The third reason that Paul supplies to the Corinthians to complete their gift was balance.

The people of God are to love the Lord and one another. When you love one another, you want others to have enough. You do not want to have too much yourself if others do not have what they need. I know of a certain grandmother who just bought her grandson several gifts, not for a birthday, not for a holiday, but because she could not help herself. It is about economic koinonia, financial fellowship. Paul takes the Corinthians back to the OT, to the wilderness to the Jews who had to learn to share what they had. They could not take without thinking of how their taking would affect how much others got also. The Lord gets us to think about who we care about what they have and what we have. “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.” There is such a thing as having too much and there is such a thing as having too little. Provision and need were to be matched. They were to be balanced but only with those who are loved. Who shall we love is the question? Then how shall the question, who does God love affect our answer to the question, who do we love? The example of those who all gave, the example of Christ, the matter of balance, and **Another reason to give generously and complete the gift has to do with consequences.**

All activity has consequences. We reap what we sow, we harvest what we plant. We live in a society that would rather forget consequences and have it now no matter what it costs overall. . We see ads for things and cannot find the price of the thing, only monthly payments; consequences, no where in sight, or maybe in fine print that requires a magnifying glass to read. . We only have to pay \$289 a month and we can have can have now what we can pay for later, much later, as in eternity.

What do we want to have happen in the future? Can we take the present and press into service so that the future will bring us what we want?

Sigmund Freud’s favorite story was about the sailor who was shipwrecked on one of the South Sea islands. He was seized by the natives, hoisted to their shoulders, carried to their village and set on a rude throne. Little by little, he learned that it was their custom once a year to make some man their king, but only for one year. He liked that until he wondered where all the ex-kings were. He soon learned that after they served their year, they were banished to a certain deserted remote island where they starved to death. The sailor did not like that idea so he decided he would take the future into his

hands. Since the natives worked for him, he had them make boats, farmers transplanted fruit trees, gardens were planted, a home built. When his kingship was over, he was banished not to a barren island but an island of abundance. Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, Jesus told us.

You will be made rich in every way. You can be rich in one way, but this says, you will be rich in every way. Now when you take some of what you have and give it to the church, it will feel like a loss and it should, it is a loss. But that is not all it is. **To give**, said one ancient commentator **is not to lose, but to sow seed**. You are not just losing, you can do that enough, you are losing and you are sowing, you are planting, you are starting something that is so good, so great, so glorious that it will not end with your loss, it will begin with your loss and it will go and go and go and never stop as it is directed to and through Jesus Christ the Lord.

When we give to the Lord it is not lost, it is planted.

Three parties are blessed according to our text: You will be made rich in every way, it supplies the needs of God's people, and it results in thanksgiving to God for more and more people.

Jim Elliot said that "He is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Example, balance, consequences: another reason we are to complete the gift is simply about grace.

Chapter 8 begins with the words, *We want you to know about grace*. Grace is not about getting more, more than other people. It is not saying, *God is gracious because I have more than you do, just look at me*. **It is not about what we have. It is about what we share that we have.** Grace is being privileged to know that wealth consists not in what you keep for yourself but what you give away to bless others along with what you keep. I do not deserve the knowledge that God has blessed ME and that it is unnecessary for me to get more to be more. I do not have to do that. In fact, it possible for me to get less and be more. But I would like to offer what I have to others so I can help them with what God has given to me. **It is not grace to have it; it is grace to have it and be able to give it away.**

We say these words from scripture alot: *the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you*. IF the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with us, what is that like? The root word grace is related to two other derivative words in the Greek language. There is grace, there is gift, and there is joy, all intimately related to grace. There is the grace which means that we use our gift in such a way that we have joy. The idea is that we share what God has given us for the benefit of a person who does not have the gift we have. I know the grace of God not out of what I have been given, but what I have been enabled to give out of what I have.

The grace of God is experienced by those who are eager to bless others with whatever they happen to have. All of us have something to offer others as an expression of our love of God. It needs to be something you are proud to give. It should make you feel that this represents you and is something that you want to give very badly. For some of us that would be a relatively small amount and others a relatively large amount, depending on what we have to work with. **Examples, balance, consequences, grace.**

The last reason is that we complete our gift to create more thanksgiving to God. What is Paul after? Thanksgiving is the goal. How can we live in such a way that we are giving more and more thanksgiving to GOD ourselves AND more people are joining us in that thanksgiving? According to

Paul, we live in thanksgiving when we take a significant portion of what we have to help someone else, above and beyond.

God can use you and what you have to bring more praise to God. We come alive as we share the life God gave us with others. There was a Christian name Leo the great who gave a sermon that included these words:

We must show more liberal bounty toward the poor and those who suffer from all kinds of affliction in order that many voices may give thanks to GOD. Save the smallest amount for yourself. Get as many voices thanking God as possible.

The first reason Paul furnishes the Corinthians to complete their gift is through example of others.

The second reason they were to give and we are to give draws on another example, the example of Jesus Christ himself.

The third reason that Paul supplies to the Corinthians to complete their gift was balance. Another reason to give generously and complete the gift has to do with consequences. Another reason we are to complete the gift is simply about grace.

The last reason is that we complete our gift to create more thanksgiving to God

<p>THIS SERMON WAS WRITTEN FOR ORAL PRESENTATION AND THEREFORE CONTAINS GRAMMATICAL FORMS THAT ARE UNACCEPTABLE IN WRITTEN ENGLISH</p>
