**MADE RICH TO BE GENEROUS**

(The meaning of offering II)

March 8, 2015

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:15

Key Verse 9:11 “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

Someone said, “The more you stare at Jesus, the more of a giver you will be—and the more generous you are, the more you become like him.” Jesus is the most generous person in history. Verse 8:9 says, “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 foundation for generosity is always God’s abundant blessing toward us. Generous giving transforms people. We can grow on Christ-like generosity. Generosity is not about money. It is a character issue, it is a transformation of our mind and heart; it is grasping how wonderful God was and is to us; it is triggered by grace. “Generosity is being a conduit through which God increasingly pours his resources to meet needs.” Today’s passage does not revolve around money as much as getting a new heart and attitude.

**First**, Paul’s care in administering the offering. Look at verse 19b. “...which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.” The offering was given sacrificially as a worship offering by Gentile believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia. It was God’s money, dedicated for relief of the Jerusalem Church. It was essential that the money be used for its intended purpose. This would honor the Lord. Paul wanted to avoid any criticism in the way the offering was administered. Not one penny should be lost, stolen, or misdirected--even by accident. So Paul dealt with this offering wisely and prayerfully. Look at verse 21. “For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.” This is a key verse for many treasurers. Not only we do what is right in the sight of God, we take great care to meet high standards of accountability and financial integrity of Canada Revenue Agency. In order to avoid of any possibility of scandal, Paul insisted on a group of 2 or 3 people to handle the offering. The offering servants should be trustworthy. Verse 18 says, “And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel.”

**Second**, the principle of sowing. Look at verse 9:6. “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” You reap in proportion to what you sow. If you sow with generosity, there will be a greater return. Jesus said, “Give, and it shall be given to you.” Now, our harvest will not always be money, but it will always be far more than we gave. In God’s economy, just like in farming or gardening, we reap something very different than what we sow. For instance, you plant pumpkin seeds—and what do you reap? More pumpkin seeds in many delicious pumpkins. You should know that there are very few 1:1 correspondences in the Christian life. If you serve, you may not be served. If you are hospitable, you may never be invited into other homes. But the Bible promises that your harvest will come and it will come in proportion to your sowing. The point here is that if you sow with a good attitude, God will provide you a harvest in the same measure.

Many people say, “When I get out of debt, then I will start giving.” But God says, “You don’t understand. Start giving and I will help you get out of debt.” God’s way is give it. He says when you have a need, sow some seed. God is saying that his financial plan for your life starts with giving in faith. It is a test of faith. That may seem illogical. You say, “I don’t have enough. Why would I give away what I’ve got?” God wants to teach you to live by faith. We walk by faith and not by sight. The best time to plant seed is when you have a need. The best time to be generous is when you are under financial tension. Paul speaking about the churches in Macedonia, says this: “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.” They gave in spite of their difficult circumstances, and God blessed them because of that. This principle of sowing and reaping applies to every area of our life. Not just finances but every single area. Proverbs 11:24-25 say, “One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

**Third**, God loves a cheerful giver. Look at verse 7. “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” There is a right way and wrong way to give. Let’s clarify this right up front. God doesn’t need your money. God owns all the money anyway. What is he after? He wants our heart. He wants what our money represents. Most of us spend all our lives thinking about money, planning about money, saving money, spending money, worrying about money, investing money, using money. God says, “It is such a major part of your life that I want to be in your life.” God wants your heart, not your money. He doesn’t need your money. He wants your heart. That is what it represents. The Bible says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” God is far more interested in your attitude than he is in the amount. He is not interested in how much you give as much as he is interested in why and how you give that amount.

In this verse there are two kinds of givers that are being compared to each other. One represents bad giving. The other represents good giving. In fact if you look at verses 5-7, there are terms that are given to compare these two kinds of people:

Bad Giving: Grudgingly (5) Sparingly (6) Reluctantly (7) Under Compulsion (7)
Good Giving: Generous (5) “Willingly” in some translations, Generous (6) Cheerful (7)

There are three descriptions of how not to give and three descriptions of how to give. Let’s think for a moment about bad giving. In each of these descriptions the essence of what’s wrong is the desire to hold back. There is giving! But it is coming from a heart that wants to hold back. Take the word “grudgingly” in verse 5. KJV uses the word “covetousness.” A person who gives grudgingly has a coveting heart—it indicates grasping to hold more, grasping to get more at the expense of others. Or take the word “sparingly,” for example, in verse 6. If I say, “Spare no effort!” I mean, hold back no effort. Give all the effort you can! When Paul said, “God did not spare his only Son,” he meant, God did not hold him back. He didn’t keep just Jesus for himself. He shared him. So to give sparingly is to give from a heart that deep inside wants to hold back. “Reluctantly” – You are doing it but you’re sad about it, you’re sorrowful about it. It’s painful. You're doing it but you really don’t want to do it. “Under Compulsion”—outside pressure because somebody told you that you have to. “I am not happy about this—but I am compelled to it.” That is how not to give.

Take the positive side now. In verse 6, the word is “generous.” It means give on the basis of blessing. Our giving should rest upon the great truth that God is a generously blessing God, and then our gift in turn should be a generous blessing to others. Verse 7 says that it should be “cheerful.” So giving generously means giving from a heart that wants to share things. Something has happened in the heart so that the basic desire is now to give and share as much as possible instead of keep as much as possible. It is as though there was a magnet in the soul that was used to be turned so that it pulled possessions into itself; and now something has happened to turn it around to the other pole so that it pushes things out toward others.

What makes the difference between these two kinds of hearts?—the sparing heart and the generous heart? The “sparing” heart has a relationship to God that sees God as a Taker rather than a Giver. If our life is being drained away by God because he is so incessantly and solely demanding, then we feel like grasping after the things of the world to meet our need. If every time we look up, we see the pointing finger of God demanding, “Give me! Give me! Give me!” how can we look at the needs of the world and say, “Use me: I will gladly spend and be spent for your good.” We will give something—but because of the draining demands that we hear when we look to this ever demanding, ever taking God: “Give something to the church!” So out comes the gift—the draining, life depleting, exhausting, sparing gift.

But the generous heart has a relationship with God that sees him as a Giver rather than a Taker! We look up to God and see a Giver, a Supplier, a Helper. When we look to God, we feel replenished not drained. Just like the literal translation of verse 6 implies, our giving is based on blessing—God’s blessing. So what makes the difference between the sparing giver and the generous giver is their relation to God. For one he is an incessantly demanding, draining Taker. For the other he is a generous Giver. So the big issue for our lives is how we see God. What do we see when we look up into his face? This is the issue. We cannot give with a right attitude if we do not understand him properly.

**Fourth**, I can expect God to meet all my needs. Look at verse 8. “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” God wants to teach you to expect him to meet all your needs. Notice the repetition in verse 8: “all” grace, “all” things, at “all” times, “all” that you need.

“All grace”: God says I will give you all grace. Not some grace. All grace. “So that in all things”: Not in some things of life but in all things. “At all times”: Not some of the time but all of the time. “You will have all that you need”: Not some of what you need but all of what you need. “And abound in every good work.” What does that verse not cover in your life? It covers everything. Does that include mortgage payments? Yes. Does that include school tuitions? Yes. Doctor bills? Yes. God says all. Is God a liar? When we talk about giving, it is not really about giving. It is about faith. Giving shows whether I have faith or not. Will God do what he says he will do? Will God keep his promises? Can I depend on God. Giving is not about giving money; it is about faith. The real issue is whether we really believe God is able to do? Romans 16:25 says, “Now to him who is able to establish you.” He is able. He has no limitations. Ephesians 3:20 says, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” Jude 24 says, “To him who is able to keep you from falling.” He is able. We need to be like Abraham of whom Romans 4:21 says, “being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”

When it comes to giving, people think to themselves, “Can I really put God first? Can I really trust him? If I put him first in my finances, will he take care of all my needs?” If we can trust God with our eternal salvation, then surely we can trust God with our finances. Malachi 3:8-10 says, “‘Bring your whole tithe into the storehouse. Test me in this,’ says the Lord. ‘And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have enough room for it.’” Notice the phrase “test me.” God issues a challenge here. God says, “Test me and I will prove it to you.” It is amazing that the God who created the entire universe puts himself on trial. He puts his character on the line. Will God keep his promises? You will never know until you start tithing.

When the Jerusalem believers received a much needed relief offering through the Corinthians, they lifted their heads toward heaven and thanked God. Did you ever consider that when you are generous, when you liberally give your time, talent, or treasure, that becomes a direct pathway by which people will offer to praise God? Notice Paul does not say, the people will praise the Corinthians, he says they will praise God. Then in verse 13 he tells them the recipients will glorify God because of the Corinthians’ giving.

Let’s read the key verse 9:11. “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” I am blessed to be a blessing. Are you generous? The question is never, “Do you have a lot to give, or do you have nothing to give?” The question is, “Is your heart like God’s generous heart?” Is the magnet in your soul turned around so that instead of pulling things into yourself, it pushes things out toward others? When the need is clear to serve, to help, and to give, how do you react?

Time—are you ready to give it to people in need, or to the ministry?

Talent—are you offering freely what God has given you to reach out, to serve, to give to the body of Christ and to people?

Treasure—do you understand grace when it comes to money? Do you keep seeking ways to support, and supply, and serve with God’s resources?