**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 3-19-2023
The Joy of Giving**

Have you ever received a gift when you didn’t expect it? It can be such a surprise and a blessing. While we should always be grateful for any gift someone gives us, it is sometimes those unexpected gifts that are especially powerful.

Now, you may or may not know Chestnut Grove’s previous pastor, Donna Hildebrand, but one thing that she thrives in is in joyful giving. She loves to bless others and be extravagant in her generosity. I’ve experienced this from her firsthand on more than one occasion.

Besides insisting she pay the bill whenever we’ve shared a meal together, Pastor Donna has also been generous to me with gifts. Certainly unexpected gifts. It was hers. But she felt led to offer it to me.

And then, just a few months ago at Christmas, she surprised me with gifts of two beautiful paintings of Jesus. I have them both with me today. One of these we keep in our home. It is of Jesus hugging a woman. It is called Forgiven and it is just beautiful.

The other one I keep in my office and it is of Jesus and Simon Peter. This painting is titled “Friends.” And it speaks to me on several levels.

First, it is a reminder that Pastor Donna and I are friends. We met nearly 10 years ago and she has been an encouragement and a friend to me and I hope I have been to her as well.

Second, the picture reminds me of the friendship of Jesus and Simon Peter. We see the love that was shared between Jesus Christ and one of his closest followers in this painting. Jesus was not only Peter’s Lord, but also his friend.

Third, the picture reminds me that Jesus calls me His friend, for which I am so grateful. There is nothing more important than being a friend of Jesus.

And fourth and finally, I am reminded that Jesus calls everyone to be His follower and friend. That is God’s plan. That’s God’s will.

It was the joyful generosity of Pastor Donna that leads me to be thankful every time I look at either of these two paintings. This is because the joy of giving has ripple effects. Perhaps you have heard stories of people paying for the person behind them in the drive through. And sometimes this leads to several people choosing to pay it forward to the person behind them.

I believe the Apostle Paul knew very well about the ripple effect that joyful giving has in this world. And today, as we conclude this sermon series on Paul’s letters to the church in Corinth, I think this subject of joyful generosity is a fitting conclusion. Why? It is because finding joy in giving is a huge sign of spiritual growth and transformation.

We’ve titled this sermon series *Church Gone Wild* because this church in Corinth was very immature in their faith. These believers were still largely self-focused and had a lot of growing to do in their faith. Throughout Paul’s correspondence with this church community, Paul addresses one issue after another in trying to help this young church become more Christlike in its living and in their witness.

And one of the ways that this is expressed is through God’s calling His people to be joyful givers.

Now what was the situation that was causing Paul to write about the joy of giving? What was happening that caused Paul to focus on this?

What seems to have happened was that Christians in and around Jerusalem were struggling. Persecution had broken out against the church years earlier and this led to Christian communities scattering all over. But the church that remained was struggling financially. They were poor.

And Paul has this grand idea. He wanted to collect a generous gift from various churches that he had planted and to take that gift to bless the church in and around Jerusalem. This would not only help Christians needs of fellow believers, but also was meant to be one of showing unity and love between the Gentile and Jewish believers in Jesus. In Jesus they were united as one new people. This generous gift would be one way that their Gentile Christians would tangibly express their thanks for the Jewish believers that had taken the good news of Jesus to them a few years earlier.

Let us turn to the Scripture now itself. It is 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

**6Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9As it is written:**

**“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+9%3A6-15&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28966a)**]**

**10Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.**

**12This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. 14And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!**

I would like to begin with the very last verse here, verse 15. Paul writes, **“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”**

Paul is talking about God’s greatest gift to humanity, the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Yes, this gift must be opened and received by trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior. But it is a gift to be received, not something anyone could earn.

And this gift is so good that Paul cannot even put in into words. It’s indescribable. As gifted as Paul was with words, he seems to be at a loss here. He describes God’s amazing gift of salvation as indescribable. Isn’t that amazing?

I believe that it is this truth of how profoundly generous our great Triune God is truly the foundation for the call to joyful giving. God is a generous and extravagant God. The LORD loves to lavish people with His amazing grace.

Now, you may recall from back in January when we began this series, Paul never asked for a dime for himself. He wasn’t in ministry for financial gain or to make a name for himself. In fact, he refused to be compensated during his 18 months that he remained in Corinth. This was because he wanted to make it especially clear that he was not to be confused with the traveling stoic philosophers, who were really spouting lofty words just to gain followers and deepen their pockets.

This hasn’t changed. Paul is still not wanting to come across this way. He still doesn’t want a dime for himself from them. But as Paul writes to the Corinthians a few years later, he is now inviting them to give to help sisters and brothers in need in Jerusalem.

Paul invites them to give generously. He tells them in verse 6, “**Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”**

Now Paul is not trying to preach a prosperity gospel or to make this proposed gift into some formula, as sadly something people misuse this Scripture to do.

Rather, Paul is simply encouraging the Christians in Corinth to desire to bless others in a significant way. He is not trying to twist their arm.

In fact, in verse 7 Paul writes, “**Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

In other words, Paul is telling the Corinthians that God wants them to be cheerful and excited about this opportunity to give and bless others. The amount should be between them and God. The Lord didn’t want the Christians in Corinth to give under the sense of compulsion or as a result of a guilt-trip.

The truth is that God didn’t need the gifts of the Corinthians. God would meet the needs of the believers in Jerusalem. Paul himself writes elsewhere to the church in Philippi, **“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. – (Phil. 4:19 NIV)**

The psalmist wrote “the cattle on a thousand hills are the LORD’s.” Friends, God will tend to the needs of His people.

But with that being said, God also loves to work through people. It would bring the Lord great delight to see His children joyfully helping one another out. That would move God’s heart, I’m sure. And so the Corinthians are being given an opportunity to be used by the Lord in meeting the needs of other believers.

Moreover, this call to joyful giving would not only bless the struggling church in Jerusalem, but also bless the church in Corinth as well. There is a blessing that comes with giving to others and giving to the work of God in this world. If you’ve ever helped at a homeless shelter or some other minister, you leave more blessed than those that are coming to be supported in those ministries.

In verse 11, Paul writes, **11You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.**

Friends, this is the end result. It is that thanksgiving to God is given. This whole gift that Paul wanted the Corinthians to give was ultimately intended to another reminder of how good God is.

So as we process this passage and consider how it relates to our lives today, the biggest takeaway for me is that the Lord invites all of us to be joyful and generous givers. This is one of our many callings as God’s people.

It is not about the amount. It’s about the heart and calling a spirit of generosity. Friends, we are privileged to intentionally bless others in Jesus’ Name. That is truly amazing.

Certainly, giving can take many forms. We are called to be joyfully generous with our time and talents as well.

But today, since Paul was focusing on money, it is a reminder that we are to be joyfully generous with money and gifts.

I love how John Wesley once put it. He said**, “we are to earn all we can, save all we can, and give all we can.”**

Wesley reminds us that the money can make an excellent servant, but a terrible master. As Christians, earning and saving money is not trying to live in luxury. Rather, it is about how we can be joyfully generous.

We have an opportunity each week to be joyful givers through tithes and offerings. Our joyful generosity enables the Lord to open up more opportunities for ministry.

We also have 2nd mile missions here at Chestnut Grove. These missions are all about blessing others in the Name of Jesus Christ. This is very similar to what Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to do in blessing the Christians in Jerusalem.

Finally, as Paul wrote in verse 15, **Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!**

Our Triune God is so joyfully generous towards us. Paul wrote that for the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God.

Friends, as we practice joyful generosity, we become more like Christ, who out of His richness became poor so that we could be made spiritually rich in Him.

So whatever the Lord entrusts to us to steward, may joyful generosity be our goal and may this be one way that we express our deep gratitude for God’s indescribable gift of salvation to us. Amen.

Resources:

[www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com)