

Harvest Sunday : The Beauty of Giving.

Main Passage: 2 Corinthians 9:6-end

Also Luke 12:16-30.

How would you describe the gospel?

What words would you use?

At its core the gospel is about generosity and forgiveness, giving and forgiving. And it suggests that as there is a beauty about giving, for our gospel is a truly beautiful one. The apostle Paul shares about the beauty of giving with the Christians at Corinth. Here on Harvest Sunday, we are reminded of this beauty...

Briefly the setting. Paul writes to this church he helped establish in Greece. They have promised to help contribute to a gift of money to be brought to the church in Jerusalem. Gentiles sharing from their own material blessings, with the Jewish believers through whom they had received the spiritual blessings of the gospel. He is writing to make sure that their enthusiasm is matched by action as he not only reminds them of the offering but also encourages their generosity.

It is possible to see giving of money as a duty to God - a certain amount of our income which we give faithfully to the Lord, to his church and to organisations involved in his world. But Paul wants us also to embrace the beauty of giving.

1.Beauty and Grace

His first words about this start in chapter 8. If you have a bible on your phone or in the pew do look at it now or later. What is giving? He says the Macedonian churches – who are also involved in this gift to be brought to Jerusalem – they have faced

trials, yet in their joy, despite their extreme poverty, they committed the issue to the Lord and then gave. But I want to draw you to – “they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service for the saints, ” (8:v4). Another translation says ‘begging us’. This giving means to them.

‘The privilege of sharing in this service for the saints’. The word, we translate ‘privilege’ in Greek, is GRACE. ‘The gracious act of sharing in the service for the saints’ could be another way to translate. Paul returns to this idea in v6 and v7. He calls their giving as ‘an act of grace’. And then he also says, as ‘they excel in faith, in speech, in Christian knowledge, in being earnest, and in their love for Paul those with him, he says excel also in this ‘grace of giving’.

Giving is beautiful because it is about **grace**. Grace and giving? We have said before – ‘grace is that you get what you do not deserve’. That is why we declare we have a gospel of grace – we do not deserve to be saved through the sacrificial giving of Christ. Our gospel is about generosity and forgiveness and giving and forgiving. Paul uses that word ‘grace’, three times, inside a few verses. How does giving reflect grace? I’d suggest maybe three ways...

We give to people who do not have to earn it. Here that word suggests that the money will go to Jerusalem **not** because they have done something to earn it, but because they are **in need** and are fellow believers. With so many things going on in Washington, you may have missed this week’s news item that Melania Trump was criticised by a school librarian. It was National Read a Book Day last month in the States. And she sent out 10 children’s books to select schools. The White House said

that the first lady had worked “with the Education Department to select schools around the nation that had high standards of excellence, special programs, and that had been recognised for achievement.” A particular librarian had many issues with Mrs Trump’s gift. But there was one line that stood out of me. The librarian wrote: ‘Why not go out of your way to gift books to underfunded, under privileged communities.’

Melania’s gift, wasn’t an act of grace, was it? These schools earned those books from the White House, by their excellent and achievements. Paul says to Corinth ‘you know you don’t have to give to the saints in Jerusalem, there is nothing they are going to do, which makes you give. You give because it flows out of the grace.’ How do I determine who to give to? What is the balance between deserving causes and grace? We give to that organisation but perhaps don’t give to the homeless guy on the street because we do not know what they will do with it?

Grace. Secondly. Paul reminds us: **we** have been given grace and so **we** give. He says this first – ‘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.’ (8:9). Grace – our gospel is one of generosity and forgiveness, giving and forgiving. We have received the gospel. We obey the gospel. We reflect the gospel. Giving is beautiful because giving is a picture of the gospel. And the times when our giving is sacrificial. Then it even more reflects ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.’

Grace. Thirdly. Paul reminds us of grace in another way. ‘And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times having all that you need.’ (9:8). We have education,

we have worked hard, we have trained, we have built networks, but Paul says, behind, within all of this, God's grace at work, that we have what we need. Paul goes on to say – comparing giving to seed – 'God will supply and increase you store of seed...You will be made rich in every way, so that you can be generous on every occasion.' What we have is through grace, so we can give.

Giving is about grace. Grace – we give not because people deserve it; grace – our giving reflects the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; grace – we can only give, because God has given to us materially.

2.Beauty within.

Beauty **WITHIN** us as we give. We note how Paul while he exhorts them, encourages them, he says – 'each man or woman should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly, or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.' (9:7). A cheerful heart. Not forced to give. We can read that cheerful giving within the Macedonians. They begged Paul to be able to give.

I know the times when I have given – and it has come from only duty or even a reluctance. Maybe even from guilt. I don't like saying it but at times I have given because of such reasons. I see someone in need. And I put some coins down as I should.

Yet I also remember a time for example, there was a lady selling a homeless magazine outside a supermarket. I wanted to help her. I remember walking back and buying it from her. And yes there was her smile, but you know I walked away with that glow of joy – a cheerful giver. What is more beautiful?

And of course, it isn't that I feel better, but it says 'God loves a cheerful giver.' And of course, why does that warm his heart – he loves us totally madly deeply – but the gospel, generosity and forgiveness, giving, forgiving... it is so part of his character to give... and he cheerfully gave to us and loves it when we imitate that part of his character. Note Paul is not caring about amounts people give – some in that church were wealthy, some were poor, some were inbetween. The focus was on the heart...God loves to see the beauty within us, of a cheerful giver, for we reflect more of his beautiful character.

3.Beauty in others.

Beauty in those who are served. The last part. As we heard in our gospel, (Luke 12), Jesus told the story of the rich man and his barns. It's a great story, lots of ways to tell it to children. But it is a tragedy isn't it? Yet he ends by saying – 'you need to be rich towards God first.' The disciples – who have no employment benefit are used to saving. Yet Jesus says – as we well know – 'see how God provides for the birds, he **will** provide for you, as you are much more valuable; the flowers are clothed, he will cloth you, do not worry and be concerned about the things that non believers are worry about – your Father **knows** what you need, seek his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well.

The beauty here – **you** can be a way that the Lord keeps his promise. You can be his provider. There is a story about one of the world's biggest seminaries – Dallas Theological College in Texas. Shortly after it began, it faced closure in the 1924, due to its debt. The banks had lost patience and were going to call in all

the loans, and end the place. The founders of the seminary met in the office of the president and prayed for the Lord to provide. One of them said – a man called Harry Ironside prayed very simply and honestly: “Lord we know that the cattle on a thousand hills are Thine, please sell some of them and send us the money.”

Now as they were praying, a man came into the office of the seminary, he held a ranch, a tall Texan, he said he had sold two train carriage loads of cattle. He had been trying to get a business deal to work, but it wouldn't. He said he just felt God wanted to give this money to the seminary. He finished by saying: “I don't know if you need it or not, but here's the cheque.” And he gave it over. The secretary went to the meeting room, quietly knocked, the president of the seminary opened the door and took the cheque, he looked. It was the exact amount of the debt they had as a seminary. Then he recognised the name of the man on the cheque – the cattleman – and he turned to Harry Ironside: Harry, God sold the cattle.’

There is beauty of how in giving you can be used as part of his purposes to meet the needs of others, perhaps needs you are unaware of, or perhaps unaware how critical those needs are.

Beauty is brought out of those who are served. Paul says: ‘This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people, but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.’ (9:12). He says, Christian men and women will praise God because of our giving. The Lord is thanked and praised. It is a wonderful image. Can you imagine the praise in that room in Texas after that cheque arrived? And Paul continues to paint this beautiful picture. ‘He says they will pray for you’ – and ‘their

hearts will go out to you' – of fellowship formed. Love grows between believers, or between churches or between groups of Christians in one country and those in another. In many cases today, when we give to believers in other countries, or in difficult situations, we usually do it via an organisation and this is efficient and proper. But we can of course, lose that personal connection or church to church connection that Paul has in mind here. But it is beautiful how Paul sees it. God uses us to meet the needs of others, to be part of his provision. And the beauty of people raising voices in praise and thanks to God. And more, how they turn to pray for you – the one who has given, to the ones in need, yet they pray for you, and their hearts go out to you, they love you, the Christian community is deepened and strengthened.

To finish. Paul sees giving as part of our Christian life. You only need to read chapters 8 and 9 to get his passion. Jesus himself said: 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Act 20:35). But I believe there is a beauty to giving. Firstly the beauty of Grace – we give to people not because they deserve it or earn, its about grace because what we have, our resources, whether great or small, is a gift from God, he enables us to give to others, and its grace because our gospel is about God gave us his Son, and so as we give to others it is a picture of the gospel. Second, It is about the Beauty within us – a cheerful heart, a cheerful giver, a beautiful heart one that beats like our heavenly father, a heart he loves; and third, the beauty in others we serve – we are used by God to meet their needs, they turn to our wonderful Father in praise and thanksgiving and then turn in prayer for us and their hearts go out to us.

The beauty of giving... **Shall we pray...**

