

Money **MATTERS**

2 Cor 8,9

Earlier on the offering bags went around. I want to ask you. How much..... did you put in? Was it two dollars? Was it twenty? Fifty. A hundred? I remember last year at Windsor. Thea who counts the money came out of the room up the back where they count the money. And her jaw was just about on the floor. She said somebody put in a thousand dollars!

How much did you put in this morning? And how did you decide...how did you arrive at the amount? Was it just what you had in your pocket? Was it the loose change you found lying around the house? Or are you more deliberate than that in how you give?

A lot of us give by dd these days. Same question for you. How do you arrive at the amount you decided to give?

And second question. What's your motivation for giving? WHY do you give....if you give? Do you give out of guilt? Do you feel DUTY BOUND to give? Does the offering steward have to sort of prize your envelope out of your hand on the way through. What's driving you to give? And what are the benefits?

It's difficult talking about money. And you might think I'm a bit rude even asking you those questions. But Paul doesn't think it's rude at all. In fact. Paul's got

some great things to say here about giving. The very last words of chapter nine.

Talking about the gift of giving in the church. Paul says

Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift. According to Paul it's a GREAT THING.

If we can get it right. If we can think rightly about money.

But I've got to say up front. If you're looking for some hard and fast rules when it comes to giving. Then I'm sorry. You won't find that here. What you WILL GET is some good principles. And you're going to have to work out how those principles apply to you.

Paul doesn't hold up a figure. He doesn't even hold up a percentage. What he does hold up though....is an EXAMPLE.

And for the Corinthians. The example Paul uses. Is the church down the road. Chapter 8 the first couple of verses there. How about those Macedonians says Paul!

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

You won't believe these guys he says.

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in RICH GENEROSITY.

Now, you need to take a note of the G word there. And lock it in....because as he talks about giving. Paul's going to use it over and over. Along with words like eagerness, and sincerity. And the Macedonians, Paul says. Are GENEROUS.

Now let me just put that into context. Because as Paul goes around the churches. He's arranging for a collection of money to go to the churches over in Judea. There's a famine in that area around Jerusalem. And as he goes around Paul's getting everyone to contribute money to help those churches. And last time he was in Corinth he put it on them to be a part of it.

And now as he writes... Titus is on his way to collect what they said they'd give. Titus is almost at the door with the offering plate. And Paul says. I want you to know about the generosity of the Macedonians.

Get a load of these guys he says. They're going through some kind of severe difficulty. They're poor as church mice. And yet they're giving like kings.

Now... I'm not sure I'd be game to use that approach. Could you imagine me – as the offering plate goes around. Telling you about the great giving at Clayfield church last week. I can't imagine doing that. But Paul's got no problems.

And he goes on from verse 3

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. More than that he says they PLEADED WITH US for the PRIVILEGE of sharing in this service to the saints.

And as he holds them up as an example there's some good principles for giving. Which I'll get to in a moment.

Now, just before you get all bleary eyed about the benevolence of the Macedonians. Come with me to the start of chapter 9 and I want to show you something

From verse 2 there. Get a load of what Paul says here. Paul says (talking to the Corinthians) I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give,

Here he is writing to the Corinthians about the generosity of the Macedonians. But when he was there. When he was in Macedonia he was doing the same thing in reverse. Talking about the Corinthian generosity.

I told them how you were ready to give and he says and YOUR ENTHUSIASM has stirred most of THEM into action.

Do you see what he's doing? To the Macedonians - How about those Corinthians? To the Corinthians - how GENEROUS are those Macedonians? It's almost like he's playing them off against each other.

But there's a great little principle at work here. And that is. A bit like godly living. Godly giving. Generous giving. As a spin off spurs others on to do the same.

It's a reverse kind of keeping up with the Joneses.

And Paul holds up the Macedonians. And he says there in verse 7. He says you do the same.

I was at a funeral a couple of weeks ago of an old friend whose name was Geoff. And the guy leading the service. The guy taking the funeral the minister..said. Last year my daughter came up from Sydney...and she was in all sorts of trouble. She needed money for legal expenses. She needed 5000 dollars. And I didn't have it he said. And Geoff and his wife without blinking wrote out a cheque. Pay us back when you can. They needed somewhere to stay. Geoff and Dot said you come to our place. Stay as long as you like.

Now I hear that. And I say. Lord let me be like that. I'm inspired.

Let me give you another example. My office now has an air conditioning unit. As of a few months ago. GIFT. The mothers' room's ready to go now as well. With the second unit that was also a gift from a family here at church.

Here's another one. A certain student minister and his family that were here last year. Had to move out of their house. Had to incur MORE DEBT...to be able to do four years of student ministry. Had to watch the balance go up each month rather than down.

I don't know about you but I've got a home loan and if the balance goes up...so does my blood pressure.

That same family. Turned up here. Not with moaning about the cost of it all.

Not whinging about having to live on less than you'd get for the dole.

Matt turned up with STUFF for church. You guys need a church umbrella – here's a fifty dollar model. All yours. It's up the back. Here's a couple of cartons of coke to get you going.

How good's that? Here's a guy. We catch up for a coffee. I'm being paid a full time wage. He says. You've got so many kids.....I'll pick up the tab.

Here's a guy. Buys paint, brushes, rollers, accessories for the toilets. Stubborn man REFUSES to give me a receipt so we can pay for those things.

Now if you tell on me – I'll get in trouble for telling you that. So don't tell. But I'm inspired when I see that kind of generous giving.

And that's what Paul's doing. He says. Here's a great example. And he says. Go for it. See if you can do the same. Verse 7

..just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving. Just like them.

Here's something to aim for in your giving Paul says – be excellent. Be excellent givers.

But it's not a command.

Verse 8 It's not a command. It's a test of sincerity.

I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

Because here's the thing.... sincere followers of Jesus...that's what they do. They give generously. They give sincerely.

That's what they do.....because that's what Jesus did.

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.

Jesus is the ultimate example of giving isn't he. It's not that it's bad to be well off. Jesus was rich Paul says. But how generous are you going to be...with your riches? That's the question isn't it.

And as you run through all the justifications for why you can't be generous or maybe why you haven't been generous in the past....Paul says. Jesus became POOR...for you. So you'd be rich.

For your sakes he became poor...so that you through his poverty might become rich.

So how about you do the same.

Be excellent givers.

Two principles just quickly from those first 8 verses.

One. The Macedonians gave as much as they were able.

See the problem with setting a percentage is that the richer you are – the more comfortable it is to give the same percentage.

If you go on ten percent for instance. Then if you're on a million dollars a year that's a lot of money. \$100 000 dollars. But you've still got \$900 000 to live on. But if you're on the pension. And you're just scraping by. And every dollar's accounted for. Then your ten percent is a far greater sacrifice than the ten percent of the other guy...even though it's less money.

And Paul says the gifts acceptable according to what one has. That's what he says in verse 12

2 Corinthians 8:12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

As long as you actually give it. Not just say you will.

So Paul holds up the Macedonians and says. Even in their poverty... they gave what they could. And even beyond their ability. It was SACRIFICIAL GIVING.

Which is the second thing.

Which I'm sure is something you DON'T NECESSARILY want to hear.

Because I want to be comfortable. I don't want to giving to HURT.

Well here's your out. Paul says I'm not commanding you. You don't have to give till it hurts. You can be a COMFORTABLE GIVER if you like.

But here's the thing....he says your GIVING'S a test of your sincerity.

You've heard the saying. When you become a Christian..the last thing to be converted is your hip pocket. Well Paul's saying something like that.

There's a direct correlation between your giving...and your sincerity.

Titus is on his way. And Paul says to the church at Corinth. Be a shame if he arrived and you weren't ready with your gift. Instead of being encouraging...it'd be the opposite.

And we're at the start of chapter 9. There's no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints.

Which is code for saying. I'm reminding you about this service to the saints.

Titus is coming. And brothers from all the churches – including Macedonia. I've been talking you up. But if it's just talk. And no action. Instead of being inspired. Encouraged to be excellent at giving. They'll be DISCOURAGED. And my words will be hollow.

2 Corinthians 9:4-5 ⁴ For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we-- not to say anything about you-- would be ashamed of having been so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

So just a recap.

Principle number one – give generously according to your means

Principle number two – it's not a bad thing if it hurts a bit.

Number three. Don't forget Paul says. You reap what you sow.

Verse 6

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 ⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

If you ask any of the financial gurus they'll say you want to be wise with your money. Then make your money work for you. And in a way that's what Paul's saying too. It's not wrong to have it. But put it to work. Not to put you above the Joneses. Not to put you into the top 100 rich list. Paul says. Use money to make it work. So there's a great harvest.

In verse 10.

2 Corinthians 9:10-15 ¹⁰ Now 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.

As God generously supplies you with what you have. He gives you the seed. It's not just meant to make you comfortable. It's an opportunity to be GENEROUS. To show your EAGERNESS. It's an opportunity for growth in GODLINESS.

Now if you've ever been up at 4am and watching the tele-evangelists they'll take you to places like 2 Corinthians 9 to tell you that you give fifty, God'll give you back

a hundred. That God will multiply your giving. To make you rich. But Paul says the harvest's much better than mere money. If you use it right. The return's something that can't be bought. The harvest is one of Godliness.

So verse 7

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.

Sow generously and cheerfully. Because that's what God loves. Do that...and you'll reap the harvest. Make your money work. And you'll grow in godliness....

And the ripples will go out as well. As others are encouraged.

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.

That's the whole idea of Operation Christmas Child isn't it. Not just to supply a need. But that people would thank God for the generosity of his people.

¹² 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. ¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men 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.

¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Generosity gives a sort of a concrete substance to your faith doesn't it. It puts flesh on the bones of your words. And if we're doing it right. You're built up in godliness. The church is encouraged. And God gets the honour and thanks. And Paul says that's a great thing.

So there's some great principles to take away as you think about giving.

Some great things to aim for. Let's be sincere followers of Jesus. The one who became poor for our sakes. That we might become rich.

Out of his generosity to us. Let's be generous givers in all sorts of ways. Let's spur each other on in that. Let's be people who are not just full of platitudes, but who do what we say we'll do. And do it cheerfully.

Let's sow generously with what God's given us for that very purpose, and reap the harvest of righteousness. That because of us there'd be thanks given to God for the obedience that accompanies our confession of faith.