

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Living generously

Presented by Graeme Best

Good morning. I have no idea whether this story is true or not but a story was circulated some time ago about the golfer Arnold Palmer and his visit with a certain Middle Eastern Head of State. This ruler was so impressed with Arnold Palmer that he wanted to give him a gift. Arnold Palmer tried to refuse at first, but the ruler insisted and asked what gift Mr. Palmer might enjoy. Finally, Arnold Palmer suggested that he might give him a golf club. The ruler seemed happy with that answer. Two days later Arnold Palmer received the deed to a 200 acre golf club. Of course, he didn't mean that sort of golf club ... he meant a new driver or a new putter .. but I tell you, that's an elaborate gift. A very generous gift.

As Christians, we should be known as people who are generous. This morning I want to look at some words of Paul written to the Corinthians that give us some timeless principles that we can follow so that we can be known as people who live generously.

Song

The background to the comments by Paul in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 was this. The Corinthian Christians had made a promise about a gift to help the needy saints in Jerusalem who were suffering from a famine. Paul had shared this Corinthian promise with the Macedonians but seeing their poverty had told them that they did not need to participate in this relief effort, considering their own needy situation, however they still gave.

But, there was a problem. The Corinthians had not carried out their promise and therefore Paul desired to stir the Corinthians into action. And so Paul begins by bringing before the Corinthians two examples of generous giving. **The first example of generous giving concerned the Macedonians.**

Chapter 8:verses 1-5. "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."

Paul is saying to the Corinthians, just look at these Macedonians! They had such generous hearts they gave liberally in spite of deep poverty! They begged us to receive their gift so they could have fellowship in this ministry to the saints.

Why? What motivated their generosity? Well, this was a demonstration of what happens when people give themselves to God first and foremost. These Macedonians were a wonderful example to the Corinthians and Paul uses their example to spur his readers into action.

The **second example** of giving that Paul uses to try and motivate the Corinthians is **Jesus himself** who, unlike the very poor Macedonians, was exceedingly rich. 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 possessed the whole universe. God’s Son was rich in honour, glory, adoration and praise. The angels bowed down and worshiped Him. But the Lord of glory made Himself poor as he left his heavenly home and became a weak human being.

He became a servant. He was born in a humble home. He knew poverty. He could say, "I have nowhere to lay my head." He depended on others. He was always borrowing. A coin. A donkey. A tomb.

What better example than Christ when it came to giving of oneself to others. Again, Paul used this example to try and spur the Corinthians into honouring their pledge.

Song

If you read these chapters of Corinthians you will see that Paul did not command the Corinthians to give because he was confident they would respond to his call to action. However, in setting out these examples and further discussing this whole aspect of our Christian lives .. giving to others, to the Lord’s work and living generously .. Paul, in these chapters, gives us some wonderful teaching about **how and why we should be generous in our giving.**

Firstly, we should note that the Macedonians gave anonymously. This fact might not be immediately obvious but Paul does not name any particular churches or households within Macedonia that gave the most. No one got any extra credit so their ego could get pumped up.

Lots of people give so that their name can go up in lights. A man went on a trip to Israel. He was about to enter the famous and impressive Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv to take in a show. The man was admiring the unique architecture, the sweeping lines of the entrance, and the modern decor throughout the building. Finally, he turned to the Israeli tour guide and asked if the building was named after Thomas Mann, the world-famous author. “No” the tour guide responded, “It’s named for Fredric Mann, from Philadelphia.” “Really? I never heard of him. What did he write?” asked the tourist. “A cheque,” said the tour guide.

Now of course, if you give money to someone in need they may well know it came from you. If you give money to the church in a way other than through the offering bag, your treasurer may well know it came from you. And that’s fine. But we should not give in order to gain credit for ourselves. Philippians 2:3 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit ..”

Second point. The Macedonians gave sacrificially. They gave generously. These weren’t wealthy Christians with plenty to spare. These people barely had what they needed to survive. It was realistically one group in poverty giving to another group in poverty. The givers needed it as badly as the receivers, but even so, they still gave generously. They gave sacrificially.

Just like the poor widow Jesus spoke about who gave two small coins. Jesus commended her giving because she, like the Macedonians, did not give out of her abundance, but gave out her first fruits.

First fruits was an Old Testament principle. The first harvest belonged to God. The first booty from battle belonged to God. The people gave to God first, then trusted God to provide the rest.

The world's advice is: save, invest and indulge. Then give out of your leftovers. But the Bible says give first, then live out of your abundance. Not that God wants us to live in poverty so that others can live in luxury. That's not what Paul is saying. He says we are to give according to our means. Really it comes down to **faith**. When we give to others and the work of the Lord generously and sacrificially, we demonstrate that we are trusting God to provide. It doesn't take any faith to give out of our leftovers.

Song

Third point. God wants us to give cheerfully. Give willingly. 2 Corinthians 9:7 "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." The Macedonians gave cheerfully. Jesus gave of himself willingly.

A mother wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson. She gave the little girl two coins for church. A 20 cent piece and a dollar. "Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl.

When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection, the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I'd be a lot more cheerful if I gave the 20 cents, so I did."

Hey, at least she's honest. Many of us give, but often it's for the wrong reasons. As I said, sometimes people give when they know that others will applaud them for it. Others give because they know they are supposed to give. It's like a chore. A duty. But they aren't that happy about it. But God wants us to give cheerfully .. not reluctantly.

No, we can't give to every need. Every cause. We should give to the church. To God's work. That's a given. But whatever or whoever we give to, we should give cheerfully. Willingly. Even with enthusiasm. Not with regret that somehow we might be missing out.

Fourth point. We should give out of love. Giving generously is surely the fruit of love. Love for God. Love for others. Love drives us to give sacrificially because love doesn't always operate reasonably.

Consider this. If you are a parent, I imagine at some point one of your children has asked you for something and you told them you couldn't afford it. You see, when we look at things from one perspective we measure our money according to a certain kind of priority and this is based on wisdom. On reason.

But I've noticed that when someone we love gets really sick or is in an accident or whatever, we use a different standard. We will do whatever it takes to help. We will mortgage our home, cash in our retirement, or borrow our way into as much debt as we possibly can to save the life of the one we love .. if that's what it takes!

We never ask, how much is this person worth? But that's how love operates. It measures value in terms of grace that gives beyond reason. If we love, we will give. If we love God we will cheerfully give to sustain and grow his kingdom. If we love others we will generously and sacrificially give to meet their needs

That's what God did for us. "For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life..."

Love compels. We can give during trials because of love. We can give in spite of our financial incapacity because of love. We can give beyond our ability because of love. Like our God, we too should give out of love. In fact, it is because of our love for God, we should give.

Song

In conclusion, Paul calls giving an **act of grace**. Giving to others is an act of grace just as God graciously gave us Jesus. Graciously gives us everything we need. We share God's grace to us with others as we help them.

Giving is a deeply spiritual matter because the truth is we are like God when we give. In fact it has been said, "the most you will ever be like God is when you are giving." Jesus makes the recipients of his grace exceedingly rich. We can make others rich by our grace. We can bless others by our acts of love. Meet needs. Be an answer to prayer. Transform lives. And in doing so, be so blessed ourselves in return.

Are you a generous person? God wants you to be. God wants us to hold our earthly treasures lightly and build his kingdom by sharing what we have with others. Cheerfully, willingly, anonymously, out of love. Who can you bless this week by living generously?

And may God bless you as you bless others in this way. Thank you for listening.