

THANKSGIVING (EVENING) - Thanks Be to God for His Indescribable Gift

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- [0 : 00] Well friends, let's pray. Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have said that your word is living and active, that it's sharper than any sword penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow.
- You've also said that it's able to judge the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. So I pray today that you'd enable me to speak from your word faithfully and that you would cause your word to do what you have promised at will.
- We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ and for his glory. Amen. Friends, I want to begin today by telling you a story. The story is of a blind boy.
- He is sitting in the midst of this ordinary road with lots of people on it, but he's sitting to the side on the pavement. He's placed a hat just by his feet.
- There's a sign on it and it reads like this. I am blind. Please help. Many people are walking by and there's only a few who are contributing to the hat, only a few coins in it.
- [1 : 14] Then another man walks by and he takes a few coins out of his pocket and he drops them into the hat, but then he does something else. Then he picks up the sign and he takes out a pen and he turns over the sign and he writes a few words.
- Then he puts it back so that everyone can see not the old words, but the new words. And then he walks off. Now before long, the hat begins to fill up far more rapidly than it had in the past and many more people contribute.
- And before long, it's got lots of money in it. Anyway, later on in the day, the man who changed the sign comes back to see just how things are going. Now, remember the boy is blind, but he has very finely tuned hearing as a result.
- And he recognizes the footsteps of this man and so he begins to question him. He says, Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?
- The man explains. He says to the boy, Look, I only wrote the truth. I said what you said. I just said it in a different way. I simply wrote, Today is a beautiful day, but I cannot see it.
- [2 : 29] Friends, both signs told the people that this boy was blind. But the first sign simply said, That's it. But what the second sign did, told people that they were so fortunate not to be this boy.
- Because this boy could not see. And so it engaged them, didn't it? It was far more effective in just engaging them and getting them to be generous. It made them identify with the blind boy.
- It made them want to help. Friends, I want you to notice this and hear this. You see, I think that our attitude as Christians to our money and to giving money is often wrong. We don't reflect on our own situation.
- We don't think about who we are and where we have come from and what our status is with God and so on. And so I think we don't respond rightly. Well, today I want us to think rightly and I want us to respond rightly.

And to help us do this, I want to look at this passage that was read out for us. So please open your Bibles, have them open at 2 Corinthians 9, page 1145 or something like that.

[3 : 33] Is that right? 1152. 62. Thank you. All right. 1162. Now, in order to understand this passage for today, we really need to do some background.

First item of background is that Paul the Apostle's ministry, as we know from Galatians that we've been looking through these last few weeks, was predominantly among the Gentiles. At his conversion, Paul was appointed a missionary to the Gentiles, an apostle to the Gentiles.

He therefore spent most of his ministry outside of Israel and away from Jerusalem. He was a Jew, but his ministry was to Gentiles. However, as we saw in Galatians in the preceding weeks, Paul and the leaders of Jerusalem had met together sometime after Paul's conversion and they'd come to an agreement.

And that agreement, you remember from Galatians, was that James, Peter and John would head up evangelism or mission amongst the Jews, but Paul and Barnabas, they would head up mission of evangelism amongst the Gentiles.

However, that wasn't all they agreed to. Do you remember from Galatians? There was one more element in their agreement. And that element arose out of the fact that many Christians in Jerusalem were poor.

[4 : 48] And so both the Apostle to the Jews and the Apostles to the Gentiles agreed that they would have an additional focus that they would share together. They would remember the poor.

And Paul took both elements of their agreement quite seriously, very seriously. He avenged the Gentiles with vigor, but he also remembered the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

And so some years earlier than this, he had developed a way of doing this practically. He was keeping his word. He started an appeal among Gentile churches.

So imagine that. Here's Paul traveling around the Gentile regions, evangelizing people, setting up churches. And then he goes back to them and he says, look, I want you to contribute to this collection I'm taking for the Christians, the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

And in 1 Corinthians 16, verse 1, he calls it exactly that. A collection or the collection for God's people. By the way, that's why I prefer the term collection rather than offering here at Holy Trinity because I think that's what it is.

[5 : 55] It's a collection. It's not an offering. We offer ourselves to God. We collect money for use for God's service. Anyway, Romans 15, verse 26, he calls it a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

So Paul is there raising money, money from Gentile Christians for poor Jewish Christians. And from chapter 8 in 2 Corinthians, he's been working on this argument.

He's been working on persuading the Corinthians that they should be generous and contribute to this cause. He's still talking about this project in our passage for today, 2 Corinthians chapter 9.

He wants the Corinthians to help. He's urging them to help. That's our background. Let's see what Paul has to say. Now, if you look carefully, you'll see, I think, that Paul does three things in this passage.

Number one, he gives three principles about financial giving that he wants the Corinthian Christians to consider. Second, he wants them to grasp some promises based on God's word.

[6 : 52] And third, he wants to tell us about four groups of people that will benefit from their giving. And finally, he wants us to take a look at principles for financial...

Sorry, he wants us to look at each of these elements and examine what they mean for ourselves. So, actually, let me repeat that.

He wants to point out to them the thing that motivates him and should motivate them. So let's have a look at each of those elements. First, look at the three principles for financial giving.

Now, first principle comes from the world of nature. Can you see it in verse 6? What I think Paul is doing is quoting some sort of proverb. We're not sure it's a biblical proverb, but it's like some biblical proverbs.

He says this, remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows generously will also reap generously. I think Paul's point from nature is self-explanatory, isn't it?

[7 : 51] I mean, it's not rocket science. He's saying that for the farmer, sowing seed is a down payment on the future. The more seed that you sow, the better chance you have of having a good harvest.

And if you have a good harvest, the better hope you've got of having good seed to sow for an even better harvest the year after. If you're stingy with the seed that you sow, then you're likely to have a stingy harvest.

However, if you're generous with the seed that you sow, then your chances of a good harvest are much better. Can you see the principle from nature? Paul's applying it to financial giving and in so doing, he's following the Lord Jesus.

Listen to Jesus in Luke 6, 38. Jesus says, give and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over will be poured into your lap for with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Paul's point is the same. I think he's saying, look, the more you give financially, then the more you will have to give. Plentiful giving will result in a plentiful harvest.

[8 : 59] Stingy giving, stingy harvest. Now, Paul Bunyan, the author of the book Pilgrim's Progress said it in this way. A man there was and they called him mad.

The more he gave, the more he had. Now, I don't think he was mad actually. I think he was just following good observation from nature. Stingy sowing, stingy harvest.

Plentiful sowing, plentiful harvest. So there's our first principle. Let's turn to the second one. It's there and it comes from scripture. It's in verse 7. Paul says, 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.

Now, in explaining this verse, let me start at the end of it. Look at how Paul ends this verse. He speaks about God loving a cheerful giver. Now, I think that statement appears to be derived from scripture.

It appears to come from Psalm 22 verse 8 in the Greek version of the Old Testament. Now, the Greek version of the Old Testament is what most Gentiles would be reading because they couldn't read Hebrew, though Paul could.

[10 : 11] Okay, and that version says, God blesses a cheerful and giving man. And Paul derives from this a principle. The principle is God loves a cheerful giver.

He rewards a cheerful giver. And the very next verse in the same book of Proverbs supports this. Verse 9 of Proverbs 22 says, the generous will themselves be blessed for they share their food with the poor.

Can you see what's going on? Paul's addressing each individual in verse 7, each one of us, as it were, or each of the Corinthians, and he's telling them, you've got to make decisions about this, each of you.

Those decisions should flow from your heart. You should not be reluctant. They should not be reluctant decisions, nor should they be compulsory. No, Christians are to be like God. They are to be, God is a cheerful giver himself, and so should his people be.

They should carefully and freely give. Friends, please understand this. You see, I would argue that in no other human action do we reflect God more than in generous giving.

[11 : 24] In no other human action do we reflect God more than in generous giving. Whether it's generously giving of our time, or of ourselves, or of our lives, or of our money, God looks at the generosity of people who for him give things up, and he loves it.

Why? Because that's what he's like himself, and we are being like him. You see, he loves cheerful givers because he himself is a cheerful giver. He loves to give.

I would therefore argue that our financial giving is a sort of litmus test of the genuineness of our faith. It demonstrates that we've come to know God's essential nature and that we want to be like him.

So I had a friend who mentored me when I was a young leader in the AFES, and one of his favorite sayings was, Andrew, until this has been converted, the person's not truly converted.

In fact, he put it slightly differently. He said, this is the very last thing to be converted in the Christian's life. But when it has been converted, that is when it's been put into God's service, then you know the person's truly converted.

[12 : 36] They've become a cheerful giver, as God himself is. So let me urge you to do what Paul says here, that is think deeply, and let each of you give what you've decided in your heart to give.

Don't do it under duress or compulsion, no, because God loves a cheerful giver. Now let's turn to consider more of God's character and Christian giving. Paul's encouraged us with a principle from nature.

He's encouraged us with a principle about God, from scripture. Now he turns more to focusing on God's character. Look at verses 8 to 11. Let me quickly summarize.

First, Paul makes the point that God's character is that of a provider. So think of God that way, a provider. He is ready and able to provide everything that we need, that we can be like him and be generous.

Let me read to you a more literal translation of verse 8. It reads, 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 all good work, or every good work if you like, but it's the same word in the Greek as the one that's been used elsewhere.

[13 : 50] Can you hear the stress? Paul's point is that God is an abundant supplier of all things. His great grace leads to us demonstrating grace, and at all times God supplies us with all that we need, so there's never a time when we cannot be generous.

You see, even if you are a widow in the New Testament who's got nothing else but the very smallest coin, you can be generous with it, and in fact be extraordinarily generous.

So even the poor can be generous. God supplied us with everything we need to be generous. We have an abundantly giving God. He has supplied us what we need to be generous.

We should be abundant in giving as well. To reinforce this, Paul quotes scripture again. Can you see it? Verse 9. He recalls Psalm 112. Now, out of desire to be politically correct and perhaps to affect the original psalm better, our version of the Bible has not been that helpful to us here.

It's turned the third person masculine, sorry, third person masculine into third person singular, into third person plural. Let me read what we have in our text. They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever.

[15 : 04] However, the original is in the third person masculine singular. Let me read it to you as it would sound. It goes like this.

I'll use the English Standard Version translation. It goes like this. He has distributed freely. He has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. Now, I wonder, I think probably as the original psalm he has distributed freely and so on, is about the righteous giver.

However, if you look around about Psalm 112, such as Psalm 111, that term, his righteousness endures forever, is actually used of God as well.

And I wonder if that echo is here as well. Okay, and I think it is because you'll see in the succeeding verse, that God's righteousness is mentioned. But let me explain it this way.

As God's people give, God himself gives. As we give, God distributes freely. As we give, he gives to the poor. As we give, his righteousness is displayed as well as our own.

[16 : 12] So friends, let's remember where we are. Paul has now given three principles to consider about financial giving. Now he turns to two promises based on God's word. He wants us to remember.

So first principle, look at verse six. Sorry, remember verse six was all about sowing and reaping? Well, he returns to that thought here in verses 10 and 11.

Have a look at it. Paul promises that God will supply all they need. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

goodness. You 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 our generous God. He fills our hands with good things. One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 145 which talks of God's hand being filled with good things for his people.

[17 : 14] What is being said here I think is that God then fills from his good hand, fills our hands with good things so that we, our hands, might be open just as his hand is open.

So that we might be generous even as he is generous. Filled with grace even as he is. So that's the first promise to grasp. God will supply our need.

But there's a second. Did you notice it? Look at the end of verses 10 and 11. Paul speaks of our generosity resulting in a harvest. A harvest of righteousness verse 10 and an overflow of thanksgiving to God verse 11.

So friends Paul wants the Corinthians to give generously. This will supply the needs of the Jerusalem Christians but it will do more. It will give rise to thanksgiving.

The Jerusalem Christians you see imagine the context. Remember Jew-Gentile very big divide in the ancient world. You imagine Jews whose disposition is to think a little bit suspect about Gentiles.

[18 : 22] Paul's been journeying around the ancient world. He's been collecting a collection. He turns up in church one Sunday morning as it were.

And he turns up in church at Jerusalem. He says I've brought this gift for you. He's been collecting it for years. I imagine it's quite a sizable sum of money.

And he says this has come from the Gentile converts. This is for you. Their brothers in Christ. You know your brothers in Christ. What would you do if you were a Jew sitting there in church that day?

You would lift your voice in thanksgiving to God wouldn't you? You'd be overwhelmed at the generosity of his people. It would be an incredible time.

And you'd tell everyone you met, did you know what happened? Did you know what happened to us this day? We had a gift from Gentile Christians to us.

[19 : 22] We sent the gospel to them. They sent us money. And it's helped us poor, our poor Christians. Friends, before we finish, I just want you to notice something else.

I want you to notice that if the Corinthians listened to Paul, there will be four beneficiaries of their generosity. Did you notice it? Look at verses 8 to 11 again. The first beneficiary will be the Corinthian Christians themselves.

God will bless them abundantly so that they might abound in every good work. That is, they will be at the receiving end from God himself. He will supply seed and a harvest of righteousness.

The first beneficiary will be them, the givers. The second beneficiary is the recipients, the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They're referred to in verse 12. Their needs will be supplied.

But then there's a third beneficiary, he's named in verses 11 to 13, it's God himself. Thanksgiving will flow to God. Remember what the Jerusalem Christians will do?

[20 : 22] They will praise God for this. Praise will flow to him, thanksgiving will flow to him. But there's a fourth beneficiary. It's the whole church of God.

Look at verse 13. Paul speaks of others who will praise God. He says this 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.

Because of the service which you have proved yourselves, by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ.

By the way, do you notice what it is they're praising God for? your confession of the gospel of Christ as you gave money, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

You see, they praise God for the Gentiles becoming Christians, they praise God for their generosity. Do you see the long reach of Christian giving? Givers, receivers, God himself, and others who hear of God's great work.

[21 : 27] Friends, today is our opportunity to thank God generously and financially. As we do so, let's think of the benefactors of our generosity. Ourselves, those who receive the benefits of our generosity.

So let me just think of some. Think for a moment that we fund a trainee next year. Now, someone who's thinking seriously about Christian ministry and think that perhaps they actually go into Christian ministry and then think perhaps that they think that they should go in ministry to Upper Mongolia, okay, wherever it might be, somewhere in the world, they go into ministry.

And there, they teach the people of God, there, they evangelize people, who put them there.

Well, in one sense you did, by your gift, to that person being trained in ministry. Next year I'm going to Tanzania to train pastors and I'll spend a couple of weeks there teaching them how to preach, along with Mike Rater.

We did it last year, or this year and we'll do it again next year. And last year we got a letter back from those to whom we had ministered from the bishop of the area and he was effusive in his thankfulness.

[22 : 45] So imagine you see, you're paying for me to go there, you're supporting me, our missions budget is paying for me to go to Africa to train pastors and they will praise God that, you know, people in their churches may praise God that someone's taught their pastor to teach the Bible to them.

Can you see what's happening? So there's ourselves, there's those who receive the benefits of our generosity, there's God and the whole body of the church of Jesus Christ. That's a very long reach for a bit of money, isn't it?

Think of the people that that includes. Massive. So there's Paul's argument. By the way, it's happened to us here in Australia.

You know, when white people first turned up in Australia, some very entrepreneurial Christians in the UK decided they were evangelicals, Bible-believing people, decided they would send key clergy to be in the new colony.

They paid money for it, they supported the person, he turned up here and so the foundations of Christianity in Australia were laid by these folk.

[24 : 05] You see, and we still reap the benefits of it. It's an enormous thing, you see. People have funded gospel ministry. Its reach is very, very long.

So, look, now Paul turns to what motivates him for all of this. Look at verse 15. Here is the basis of Paul's plea. He says, Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

Now, in my view, that gift is referred to in chapter 8 verse 9. That is the place where Paul identifies what that gift is, chapter 8 verse 9. So, flip back in your Bibles and look at it with me.

Paul says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

Friends, this is a favourite verse of mine in the Bible. I've memorised it. I think you ought to memorise it as well. It's a great one. We Christians don't give because God's going to give back to us.

[25 : 06] That's not why we give. No, we Christians give financially because of what God has already given to us. We give out of thankfulness. God has been gracious and so we are gracious.

God has given to us, so we give to others. Jesus was rich, however for our sake he became poor and through his poverty we were made rich. What an incredible gift this is.

How indescribable. So as we think of our lives and as we think of our wallets and purses, let's remember God's indescribable gift. A gift of grace.

This indescribable gift of his son for us, who left his father's side to come and be a human being and to die for us. Let's remember this indescribable gift and let's be generous even as God has been generous.

And with that, I want you to remember the story we began with. Let's think back to the blind boy. Do you remember him? And do you remember him asking for money? He wrote down, I am blind, please help. But the man who helped him wrote down something else.

[26 : 12] He helped other people see things from a different perspective. He wrote down, today is a beautiful day, but I cannot see it. Well today we are going to give you here an opportunity to be thankful.

And the money you give will be used for good and great purposes. It will be used to help fund a ministry trainee or to help train a person, that is, or to help train people for ministry in three continents.

It will be used to help maintain our property here so that it can continue to be used to bring people to Jesus and to build them up in the faith. So as you think about giving thanks today, I want you to see things in proper perspective.

That is, I don't want you to see things from the perspective of here's someone asking for money. No, no, I want you to go through the transformation that happened with the blind boy.

So as you think about it today, I want you to see things from the perspective of God's indescribable gift of Jesus. I want you to remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.

[27 : 33] Remember this. Remember God's indescribable gift and be generous as God himself has been generous to you. Let's pray.

Our Father, we do thank you so much again today. for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that we, through his poverty, might become rich.

Father, please supply us with everything we need, so that we might be like you, rich in generosity. Father, help us to remember your indescribable gift and to act appropriately.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.