

God and Money (2) The Grace of Christian Giving
2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15
Sunday 22nd October

The World's thinking is Upside Down

Much of the world's thinking is upside down. When someone injures you, the world says, "take revenge" Jesus says, "love your enemies, pray for them." (Matt 5) "If you want to be great", says the world, "promote yourself and boast about your achievements." Jesus says "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant." (Matthew 20) "If you want to really live" says the world, "go and do exactly what you want to do" but Jesus says "whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matt 16) "If you're not happy at your place at work, cause trouble," Jesus says "Blessed are the peacemakers." (Matt 5) "Heaven is only for good people" says the world, but the Bible says "Christ died for *the ungodly*." (Romans 5)

And because we're thinking about a Christian attitude to money, my final example: "Happiness consists in filling our lives with stuff, of getting as much money and possessions as we can." As one of the world's spokeswomen sang it, "I'm living in a material world, and I'm a material girl." But Jesus said, listen to this one: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20) Greater joy is to be found, says Jesus, in giving stuff away than in receiving it!

In our first sermon on money we saw, Scriptures that although money is a wonderful gift from the Lord, it can so easily become an idol and ruin us. And secondly, we learnt that all "our" money really belongs to the Lord; it is the Lord, "who gives you the ability to produce wealth" Deuteronomy 8:18. We are mere stewards. And one day he will call us to account for how we used the wealth, little or great, that he entrusted to our care.

This morning, we learn that one the distinguishing marks of a Christian's use of money is giving. Here is house number 15 lives an unbelieving family, and next door at number 17 lives a believing family. Much of the way they spend their money will be similar. Both will pay fuel bills, both buy groceries, both will buy presents for loved ones, and so on and so forth. How does the expenditure of number 17 differ from 15?

Someone in house group said that they lived a simple life—I think that will be one beautiful way a Christian’s expenditure will differ from the world. We won’t buy gold taps for our bathrooms, or purchase row upon row of shirts or jumpers or trousers, like David Beckham does. A simple life will mark the Christian, because we can’t take it with us when we die.

But the biggest difference between number 17 and number 15 is that followers of Jesus will find in their hearts a desire to give generously!

Let me share **three truths** with you this morning about giving.

(1) Give some of God’s money away!

The Scriptures encourage us to give to three places—in addition to our own families. **To the poor.** “When you give to the needy...” says Jesus in Matthew 6, not “if you give to the needy.” Jesus assumes that his followers will give to those who are in genuine need. In the OT, farmers were encouraged to leave some of the crop behind in their fields so that the poor could reap behind them and feed their families. **To help spread the Gospel.** The Christians who lived in Philippi supported Paul in his ministry “It was good of you to share in my troubles” (Phil. 4:14)

Most local churches, including ourselves, give some of the money they receive to support missionaries around the world, so many Christians give to mission through their local churches. What a wonderful opportunity we all have to see the Gospel flourish in places around the world that we cannot go ourselves, through our giving!

I was brought up in a missionary home, our family of eight was supported for decades in India, Pakistan and Wolverhampton by many faithful individuals, but especially by two churches: Simpson Memorial Church in St Paul Minnesota and Above Bar Church in Southampton. **To support those who teach us.** And thirdly to support those who teach us the Scriptures: *“If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much of we reap a material harvest from you? ...The Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 8)*

If MPC is your spiritual church home, if this is where you receive your Bible teaching, then you should support the church financially—that's how pastors receive their living—by the giving and generosity of the Lord's people.

So that's the first word. The Lord wants us to give some of our wealth away; to those in need, to the expansion of the Gospel around the world, and to those who teach us the Word week by week.

(2) Give according to your means!

The second word from the Lord this morning is this: he wants us to give according to our means. That's the fair and just principle the Lord commands. If we do not have much money, he does not expect us to give much; but if on the other hand, we have lots of money, the Lord does not expect us to give a little!! According to our means!

In the OT , God's people gave a tithe, which is 10% of their income: Leviticus 27:30 '*A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.*' So if a man harvested 10,000 kilograms of wheat one year, then he brought 1000 kg to the temple. That's a lot of wheat, but he had 9000 left for himself! If a man only harvested 100 kilograms of wheat, then he was only expected to bring 10 kilograms.

The idea of proportionality is built into the OT tithe: the Lord wants us to give according to our means. And although we do not find the tithe in the NT, 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 teach us to give according to our means.

There was a severe famine in Judea, many Jewish Christians were suffering. The Lord laid on Paul's heart the idea of a gigantic fundraising effort from the non-Jewish Gentile Christians, who were better off at that time, to help their Jewish friends. Wherever Paul went preaching the Gospel and people became followers of Jesus he mentioned this fund to them! When the Christians in Corinth heard about it they said "we want to give, put our names down."

But, Oh dear, their good intentions hadn't been matched yet by their actions! They hadn't given anything yet!

Paul had encouraged them in a previous Letter to set aside some money every week so when he came it would be ready. But he heard on the grapevine that so far, those little boxes on the window sills were only gathering dust! And Paul was concerned for them and for himself! He had boasted about their willingness to give to other churches and he was worried that he might look a fool, and the Corinthian Christians would be embarrassed if he showed up and there was no generous gift on the table!

So he writes two whole chapters in this second letter to encourage them; and then he sent three trusted men ahead of him to spur them up some more, before he arrived to collect the gift, *“Now **finish the work**, so that your willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it.” (2 Corinthians 8:11)*

And how much should they give? *“Now finish the work, so that your willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, **according to your means.**” (2 Corinthians 8:11)*

So we have the idea of proportionality in the OT tithe and here in the NT too.

That still leaves the question: exactly what proportion, shall I give 5%, 1%, 20%?!

Let's start with how the world gives. How much money do you think the average UK citizen gives away to charitable causes in the UK? Over 60% of the adult population give to charity, how much do you think they give every month? Guess? £27/ month. To get an idea of how much that is, we need to set it alongside other figures (website statistica):

- £29 on sport leisure
- £30 on hobbies
- £33 on beauty products
- £53 on take-away meals

I hope you'll agree that £27 per month doesn't seem so great when we compare it these other expenditures. What is even more significant, £27/month which is only about 1% of national wage. The average UK wage is around £30,000 (some of you will

be saying, “I wish” but others of you will be saying, “that’s small”). So the average giving to charity in the UK is about 1% of income.

Should we follow the example of the world?

What about the example of Christians? Many churches both in history and today have suggested that the 10% tithe, OT saints gave is a good target to aim for. And many Christians, including Christians at MPC, give 10% of their income.

The danger with the 10% target is that it may be too much for some believers while others can afford more than 10%. Robert LeTourneau was a Christian business man, who started out poor, became a multi-millionaire who gave away 90% of his income and kept the 10% - because he could. “I shovel out the money” he once said “and God shovels it back – but God has a bigger shovel!!”

How do we decide? We know it should be in proportion to our income, but how much? 1%, 5%? 10%, 30%. Well, the third word about money, share with you this morning will help us to decide:

(3) Give from the heart!

Paul’s greatest concern in these two chapters is the heart of the giver. The Lord wants us to give cheerfully! *“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a **cheerful giver.**”* Don’t let anyone put pressure on you, you decide what to give, make sure you give it cheerfully. Listen brothers and sisters, never give reluctantly, grudgingly. It’s better to give nothing, if it is given unwillingly, for the Lord is always looking at our hearts!

Giving is all about the heart, so Paul gives us three motivations to inspire us to give:

1. Remember the more you sow, the more you reap! Giving is like farming! The more seed you sow, the greater the harvest will be! So what do you want? A little harvest or a big one? *“Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also read generously.” (9:6)* It is wonderful that a little church like MPC supports two trainee pastors and a number of missionaries! Lots of Gospel seed being sown! We could even do more, if we all gave more!

2. Remember that the more you give, the more you will receive! “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. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion...” (9:10-11)

Some Christians are poor because they don't give! Haven't you got that wrong, preacher? Shouldn't you have said, "Some Christians are poor because they give too much away?" No, I said that some Christians are poor because they don't give enough away, because Christian giving obeys a divine kind of mathematics!

When Yvonne and I were church planting up north, we had a small income. One day we had a visiting preacher come to speak. We wanted to thank him with a gift, but we couldn't ask the infant church, because it had no money, so Yvonne went off to town to buy a gift. "Lord we don't have enough money to buy this gift" but you have said, give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:28). She bought a generous gift. And a week or so later – out of the blue—we received a gift that was many times the cost of that present, we saw it as a direct response to the promise of Jesus.

3. Remember the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The third motivation Paul gives is the greatest: the true spring of all Christian giving is the grace of God to us, through Jesus Christ: *“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)*

We are unworthy, we are wretched, and we are so prone to wander sinners! Is that not true? We are spiritual paupers!

The perfect Son of God, on the other hand, possessed all the riches of righteousness, glory and power. What did he do? Well he saw us in our poverty, and filled with love, he decided to make us rich! How? By becoming poor! He gave up glory in heaven to live in a broken sinful world. He gave up the adoration of angels to be despised by those he had created. He gave up his life to suffer on a Roman cross. He became poor

so that we might become rich! And his example, his grace, is to be the spring of our giving! And indeed of our whole living!

Conclusion

This giving thing, is often a litmus test of our spiritual life. If we find in ourselves to give, well perhaps we are not true followers of Jesus. We should come to Jesus today. Or perhaps we are backsliders? Are you truly a follower of Jesus? We should return to Jesus today, we will find a welcome.

Or perhaps I am talking to a Corinthian Christian – you have every intention of giving, but it hasn't happened yet! You need to start giving. As we close let's turn away from money and wealth to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.