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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 16, 2016
22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 30:15-19, Luke 12:15-21

Hymns: 27; 439; 307; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-12

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 7 But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.

8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

10 And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; 11 but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. 12 For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Tithing

When some churches talk about Christian stewardship they focus on the word tithing. They have adopted this word from the Old Testament. In the days of the Old Testament the Jews were under the ceremonial law, including a law that prescribed that they give a tenth or a tithe of their income to the Lord. This was about the inheritance of the Land of Canaan. The tribe of Levi did not receive a portion of the inheritance. The tithe was to be their portion so that they could give themselves to the service of the temple and the Lord.

So we see the correlation that the offerings of the Old Testament were to support the work of the Lord, and so the work of the Lord is to be supported by offerings, (not fundraisers but offerings) today.

What happens with this use of the word tithe for the New Testament era offerings is that it falls short of the true idea of Christian stewardship. It misses the breadth of all that is Christian stewardship that is the use of other gifts, and the use of these gifts in the wider area of Christian life not only as it relates to the church offerings. It seems to prescribe a specific portion of one's income that should be dedicated to the Lord. It's legalistic. It makes the right percentage the issue in people's minds and hearts and can lead to a begrudging attitude toward giving. It fails to recognize that the Old Testament law about tithing is no longer in effect.

But doesn't our text instruct us concerning offerings, indeed offerings of money? Indeed it does, but the Apostle Paul does not use the law at all in this discussion. Rather he references **grace**, and a wonder of grace at that. So then let us consider the Holy Spirit's instruction for us concerning --

THEME: The Grace of Liberal Giving.

Throughout our text Paul emphasizes the power of God's grace. He demonstrates how it was grace that opened the Macedonian Christians' hearts so that they insisted upon –

I. Giving beyond Their Ability.

As we read these verses once again we need to note the attitude toward money that is evident in the hearts of these early gentile Christians.

2 Corinthians 8:1-4 “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,”

First let us recall what this offering was all about. The Jewish Christians in and around Jerusalem were experiencing great difficulty. They were a distinct minority, and when it became known that they confessed faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior they were ostracized, first by family and then also by society. They were often put out into the street. They found themselves without jobs; people refused to do business with them. They experienced persecution as they had earlier at the hands of Paul himself before his conversion. They faced the possibility of imprisonment and even death by stoning.

This offering from the gentile churches throughout Asia Minor, Greece, and Macedonia was to bring relief to the suffering of the Jewish Christians in Judea. But the Christians in Macedonia were suffering hardship themselves. Shouldn't they be excused from contributing to the offering for the Christians in Judea? That wasn't what they wanted. They insisted that they be included, that they be allowed to join in the relief efforts for their brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem. They did this with intent and purpose, with a singleness of heart. They were focused in on this as something they felt compelled to do, so earnestly they wanted to contribute.

This didn't come from the natural desires of the flesh. This was God's grace alive and active within them. It was a gift of grace that they, with singleness of purpose earnestly desired that the Apostles receive what they had contributed for the relief of the Christians in Judea. We don't know how much that was. It doesn't matter how much it was. We do know that, humanly speaking Paul saw that it was more than could afford. **But they were rich towards God!** Paul saw this as wondrous evidence of faith and trust in the Lord. Surely the Lord saw what the Apostle saw.

What comes naturally, what flows from the heart of man is a stingy looking out for one's self, one's own needs, one's own desires, one's own temporal and material goals. So often those who have been richly blessed in material goods fail to see how they can possibly part with even a penny. Many find that in their desire for material goods they have overextended themselves financially, and as a result they are convinced they cannot give to the Lord. This worldly singleness of mind goes against what the Lord would have us think about our material blessings. From days of old the Lord identified this as covetous and as sin. We read in --

Malachi 3:8, 10 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it."

When one looks at this opposing view of material goods, stinginess of heart is the world view. From the Lord's point of view that is not only holding out on repaying the Lord for the blessings He has bestowed upon us, but also a failure to trust the Lord for future providence. More than that, the Lord says, "Try me and see if I don't bless you even more than before." Once again there are some, especially among TV evangelists that would make this the motivation for giving: "You want to get rich, give to me and the Lord will make you rich." Investing with the Lord is always a good investment, but the dividends are not paid out in solely in material

blessings. We receive from the Lord dividends more in spiritual blessings of peace and security; things found only in the Lord.

The lesson learned from the Macedonian Christians is --

II. Giving with Love in One's Heart.

Paul found these sometimes impoverished Christians –

2 Corinthians 8:4-5 “Imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”

The Macedonian Christians did not want to be left out. They understood the connection that existed between them and the Christians in Judea. Yes, these were people they had never met and likely would never meet this side of heaven, but they were their brothers and sisters in Christ. They understood the fellowship in Christ Jesus that connected them. They felt a debt of love that was tied to Christ and His gospel. They had collected the offering and they had done this not only as Paul and his companions had hoped, but with the dedication of faith that is described as **“first giving themselves to the Lord.”**

We know the hymn, **“Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee.”** We know how it goes on to list hands and feet and voice, and then also **“Take my silver and my gold Not a mite would I withhold”** (The Lutheran Hymnal:400) We sing those words. That is what the Macedonian Christians did. They gave themselves to the Lord wholly, completely with all that they were and had.”

In our text Paul was holding up these Macedonian Christians before the Corinthian Christians as an example for them to follow, that they might comprehend the joy and the privilege of giving of one's material blessings to advance the love of Christ among the brethren and throughout the world. And so the Holy Spirit brings this message before us today. The Spirit continues to hold this example of the proper spirit of Christian giving, with one wholly dedicated to the Lord and with love in one's heart for the brethren, not begrudgingly, and not simply because there is a need. Although

the need was laid before them, their single-minded dedicated participation came from the fellowship connection with God and their brothers and sisters in Christ.

What the Macedonian Christians did they did with joy in their hearts to the Lord because they were --

III. Giving in Response to God's Grace in Christ.

Paul continued in his encouragement to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 8:6-9 “So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 7 But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also. 8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Titus was to complete this “**grace**” among the Corinthian Christians. What grace? First of all the grace of God in their hearts, not the grace of the Corinthians toward others. It is a gift of grace that we desire to give offerings to the Lord. It is just as much a gift of grace as other gifts received from the Lord. In faith our life changes, our outlook changes. We see things as they relate to Jesus and our Savior God. We speak differently. We react differently towards others. We think differently because of the faith we have in our hearts. This happens because of the content of our Christian faith.

We know what Christ has done for us, and He didn't have to do it. And we didn't deserve it. And still in grace and love toward us the Son of God humbled Himself. He was rich beyond our comprehension for He was and is and ever shall be the Son of God with majesty and great glory. He emptied Himself, and became poor for our sakes. He took upon Himself our flesh and blood and became our brother, and endured a lowly life in this sinful world, enduring the abuse, the rejection of men, even of His own people. He took upon Himself our sin and bore it to the cross. He bore the

accusations of our sins, He was scourged for us. He was brutalized by man and forsaken by God. He poured out His life as a sacrifice for our sin. Though He was rich for your benefit, for your salvation, NOT His own, He became poor, that we through His poverty, through His sacrifice might become rich, rich beyond imagining in the spiritual realms.

That is why the Macedonian Christians were determined to bring offerings not only as they could easily afford, but sacrificial offerings, and they not only intended to do this, but they got it done. They presented their gifts to the Lord as they presented them to Paul.

This was then also the exhortation of Paul for the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 8:10-12 And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; 11 but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. 12 For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.

It was to the Corinthian congregation's advantage to make sure that they continued to bring their offerings, diligent in gathering the gift for the relief of the Christians in Judea. They had made a good start a year earlier, but it had apparently fallen into neglect with all the other problems that had arisen within their congregation. Problems arose, offerings went down. Paul exhorted them to finish the good thing they had begun. He wanted it done with a willing mind, a loving heart. Again, it was to be done in proportion to the blessings God had given them in their own lives. They were to give according to what they had, and not according to what they did not have. Even if the Macedonians had given from their poverty, Paul didn't intend to impoverish the Corinthian Christians. The Lord gives a variety of responsibilities and means to each of us, and we give as the Lord has blessed us.

The lesson before us is a lesson about the grace of God working in our hearts and lives. It is not the law of the tithe, but the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that moves us. This grace of God in Christ

impacts our lives in every way. It impacts our attitudes towards things and possessions, for we realize the lesson Jesus taught in our gospel lesson. **“One’s life does not consist of the abundance of things one possesses,” but rather we are rich in things spiritual.** We are rich in our relationship with God, for we have been redeemed, purchased and won from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. Now we have life, and we have it more abundantly because of all Christ has done for us. Isn’t it our desire also to bring our offerings to the Lord for the advancement of His Kingdom, that we also might know that grace that abounded in the hearts of the Macedonians?

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)