

Grace-Oriented Giving

An Example of Grace-Oriented Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

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Scripture

For the next few weeks I plan to take a break from my sermons in *The Gospel of Luke*. I want to preach a four-week series on “Grace-Oriented Giving” from 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15.

The reason for doing so is because the Session and Diaconate has noticed a drop in giving to our various funds this past year. You know that we asked you at the end of last year to contribute financially to the General Fund rather than give to a special End-of-Year project. And I want to thank you for your support.

For the next four weeks I want to examine grace-oriented giving. What is it that motivates and encourages people to give? How should Christians give? How much should God’s people give? It is my intention to answer these and other questions in the next four weeks.

We are going to be studying one of the most significant passages in Scripture that deals with giving. Paul teaches us about “Grace-Oriented Giving” in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15.

Today, I want to look at “An Example of Grace-Oriented Giving.” Let’s read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5:

¹We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

Introduction

As we begin our series on “Grace-Oriented Giving” some of you may be thinking, “Oh no! Not again! Here is another sermon about money! I wish the pastor would not talk about money.”

Early in my ministry I was reluctant to talk about money. But, I came to see that this was a mistake.

It might surprise you to learn that Jesus said more about money than anyone else in the Bible. Furthermore, Jesus said more about money than any other single subject. Why is that?

Jesus talked more about money than any other single subject because money is a spotlight on a person’s spiritual condition. It is an index to a person’s character. It is a reflection of a person’s heart.

Jesus repeatedly linked money to one’s spiritual condition. I can point you to many stories, but let me share just one with you.

Every Sunday school child knows the story of Zacchaeus (in Luke 19:1-10). Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. Zacchaeus lived in Jericho. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was a “wee little man” (as the Sunday school song says). So Zacchaeus ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus, for he was about to pass that way.

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5).

So Zacchaeus hurried and came down. Jesus evidently confronted Zacchaeus about his sin, and he repented and believed.

Now, what was the evidence of his transformation? The immediate, first evidence that Zacchaeus was a new creation in Christ was financial.

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As soon as he felt the waves of God's grace wash over him and cleanse him, Zacchaeus stood and said to Jesus, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

Now, it is very important to notice what Jesus said to Zacchaeus. Jesus did not say, "Zacchaeus, that's great! What a wonderful gesture!" No. As soon as Zacchaeus said that he was willing to part with his money, Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

The evidence of Zacchaeus' transformation was his attitude toward money. Money is a spotlight on a person's spiritual condition. It is an index to a person's character. It is a reflection of a person's heart.

Contrast the story of Zacchaeus with the story of the rich young ruler (in Luke 18:18-30, and also in Matthew 19:16-30). The rich young ruler who came to Jesus was a typical urban professional: doing very well financially, young, hard-working, decent, earnest, sincere, and desperately wanting peace in his life. He wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life.

After a brief discussion about the ruler's morality, Jesus told the rich young ruler the bottom line, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22).

Do you remember the rich young ruler's response? Did he say, "I will gladly sell all that I have and distribute it to the poor"? That would have been an evidence of his transformation. No. He did not say that. Instead, when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich (Luke 18:23). And he walked away from Jesus and eternal life in order to hold on to his money.

In the case of Zacchaeus, his attitude toward money was the evidence of God's grace in his life and of his transformation. In the case of the rich young ruler, his attitude toward money was the evidence of the lack of God's grace in his life and of his hard heart.

So, because Jesus so clearly linked our attitude toward money as an evidence of God's grace in our lives, I am now much more eager to talk about money than I used to be.

When people don't want to hear sermons about money, then I am concerned about where their hearts are. But when people want to hear about money, then I know that God's grace is alive and active in the hearts and lives.

Lesson

In today's message I want to introduce you to "Grace-Oriented Giving" by showing you an example of grace-oriented giving. By examining this example of grace-oriented giving, we notice that grace-oriented giving is an expression of God's grace.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Grace-Oriented Giving Is Initiated by God's Grace (8:1)
2. Grace-Oriented Giving Transcends Difficult Circumstances (8:2a)
3. Grace-Oriented Giving Is Generous (8:2b-4)
4. Grace-Oriented Giving Is an Act of Worship (8:5)

I. **Grace-Oriented Giving Is Initiated by God's Grace (8:1)**

First, grace-oriented giving is initiated by God's grace. The apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth, **"We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia"** (8:1).

Now, it is important to understand the background to Paul's statement. Paul planted the church in Corinth in 51-52 AD, during his second missionary journey. After Paul established the Corinthian Church he returned to Antioch, thus concluding his second missionary journey.

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On his third missionary journey Paul traveled to Ephesus and stayed there for three years. During his stay at Ephesus, Paul wrote several letters to the Corinthian Church, addressing several concerns that had arisen at that church. Most likely Paul wrote this letter about 55 AD.

The churches of Macedonia consisted of three churches: in Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica. They were north of Corinth, in what is northern Greece today. Corinth is in southern Greece. So **the churches in Macedonia** were not far away but they were in very different circumstances.

Macedonia was severely impoverished. It had been a Roman territory for 200 years. They had been cruelly treated by the Romans. The Romans had taxed them so heavily on their rich mineral resources that they were extremely poor. Moreover, **the churches of Macedonia** were the objects of persecution.

Paul was raising money for the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was experiencing an extremely difficult time financially for several reasons. There had been an explosion of new Christians in Jerusalem from all over the world that needed to be housed and fed. There had also been a persecution of Christians, so that they could not easily find work. And finally, there had been a massive famine that impacted the availability of food.

And so Paul was raising money for the church in Jerusalem. Wherever he went he asked for financial support for the church in Jerusalem. He had previously asked **the churches of Macedonia**, and now he was asking the church of Corinth to support the work.

There was so much poverty and so much persecution that **the churches in Macedonia** were likely the poorest of all churches in the Gentile world. Consequently, they provide the best example of grace-oriented giving.

The first thing to notice is that grace-oriented giving is initiated by God's grace. Paul says in verse 1, **"We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among**

the churches of Macedonia.”

The primary motive for their giving was not human kindness. It was not human philanthropy. It was not to ease their consciences. It was not response to human need. No. What motivated **the churches of Macedonia** to give was **the grace of God that had been given** to them. They had been the recipients of God’s grace, and their lives were completely transformed.

Now, that is how grace works. God’s grace radically transforms. God’s grace completely recreates. God’s grace fully re-orient. Just as God’s grace transformed Zacchaeus, so God’s grace transformed **the churches of Macedonia**.

All grace-oriented giving is initiated by God’s grace.

II. Grace-Oriented Giving Transcends Difficult Circumstances (8:2a)

Second, grace-oriented giving transcends difficult circumstances. The apostle Paul says in verse 2a, “. . . **for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty** have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”

The churches of Macedonia were struggling economically and physically. They faced **a severe test of affliction** in terms of persecution from the Romans. Moreover, the Romans taxed them so heavily that their resources were depleted and they faced **extreme poverty**.

Even though the churches of Macedonia found themselves in very difficult circumstances, they did not use their difficulties as an excuse. They did not have a “poor me” mentality. They did not say, “We can’t help. Can’t you see that we have enough problems of our own?”

No. In spite of **a severe test** and **extreme poverty** the apostle Paul says that their giving overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

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That is a characteristic of grace-oriented giving. People who are the recipients of grace have been liberated from their slavery to money. Rev. Selwyn Hughes, a Welsh pastor and author, wrote, “Remember this – you can’t serve God *and* Money, but you can serve God *with* money.” God’s grace orients us to a right understanding and use of money. Money is no longer the Christian’s master but the Christian’s servant.

So, grace-oriented giving is initiated by God’s grace. And it transcends difficult circumstances.

III. Grace-Oriented Giving Is Generous (8:2b-4)

Third, grace-oriented giving is generous. The apostle Paul says in verse 2b that their giving **“overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”**

This is a remarkable statement. These Macedonians were poor and they were persecuted, and yet their giving **overflowed in a wealth of generosity.**

The Greek word for **“generosity”** is interesting. It is translated in the Bible as “generosity,” “liberality,” and even “sincerity.” The Greek word carries the idea of single-mindedness rather than its opposite, which is double-mindedness. And that’s a wonderful way to see what **generosity** is. **Generosity** is the attitude that triumphs over double-mindedness or duplicity.

Duplicity says, “Well, I understand that you’re in a difficult spot, but you need to understand that I’ve got to take care of me too. I would love to help you, but I need to help myself first.”

The Macedonians, however, were literally rich with single-mindedness. They had received the grace of God, and now their orientation was how to share with others the grace that they themselves had received. No longer were they concerned about themselves, but they were concerned about God and the things that concerned God himself. No longer were they self-centered,

they were now God-centered and other-centered.

It was not the amount of their giving that was important. It was the orientation of their hearts. That's what God evaluates.

Do you remember the story of the widow's offering (in Luke 21:1-4)? Jesus was in the temple and he looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.

And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

It is not the amount of her giving that was important. It was the orientation of her heart. She was single-minded. She was generous. And notice that Jesus did not commend her for what percentage she gave, but rather for what percentage she had left. She gave everything. She gave because she was the recipient of God's grace, and that oriented her own giving.

It has been said, "When it comes to giving, some people stop at nothing." But, frankly, that is where a great many people stop!

The story is told of a Scottish church many years ago that was attempting to raise money for a new building. One member of the church was a rich Scotsman who was known to be worth fifty thousand pounds. He was a typical Scot and was pretty tight with his money.

A deacon came to see him and asked, "Brother, how much are you going to give for the new church?"

The Scotsman replied, "Oh, I guess I'll be able to put in the widow's mite." The deacon thanked him and left.

At the next prayer meeting, the deacon reported to the entire church, "Brothers and sisters, we have all the money we need. This brother is going to give fifty thousand pounds."

The man was amazed. "I didn't say I would give fifty thousand pounds! I said I would give the widow's mite!"

The deacon replied, "Well, she gave everything, and I

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thought that is what you meant to give!”

It is important for us to see that Jesus notices not only what we give but also what we keep for ourselves.

But what is even more remarkable about the generosity of the Macedonian churches is that they not only gave with single-mindedness, they actually begged to give. Now, remember, these people were extremely poor and they were persecuted. But when they heard about the opportunity to give to God’s work, they begged to participate. Paul says in verses 3-4, **“For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.”**

Now, if you watch TV you will notice that some TV evangelists beg people for money. Oh, they are very slick about it; it doesn’t seem like they are begging. But they are. However, Paul tells us that the churches of Macedonia begged the leaders **earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.**

Why is that? Why did they beg to give? The believers in those churches were the recipients of God’s grace. They were like Zacchaeus. The evidence of their transformation was their attitude toward money. They wanted to share the grace of God with others.

So, grace-oriented giving is initiated by God’s grace. It transcends difficult circumstances. And it is generous.

IV. Grace-Oriented Giving Is an Act of Worship (8:5)

And fourth, grace-oriented giving is an act of worship. The apostle Paul says in verse 5, **“And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”**

Here we have an explicit statement showing us how the believers in Macedonia responded to the grace of God. They were so thankful for God’s grace in their lives. They were so grateful that

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God had reconciled them with himself. And so their response was to say, in effect, “Lord, all that I am is yours. I am yours. My life is yours. My talents are yours. My money is yours. Everything I am and have is yours. You may use it as you please.”

So giving away what little money they had was not difficult. They worshiped God with all that they had because they recognized that it all came from him.

They are illustrating for us what Zacchaeus did in response to Jesus’ grace in his life. They worshiped God with all that they had.

How about you? Do you worship God with all that you have? Do you say, “Lord, all that I am is yours. I am yours. My life is yours. My talents are yours. My money is yours. Everything I am and have is yours. You may use it as you please.”

So, grace-oriented giving is initiated by God’s grace. It transcends difficult circumstances. It is generous. And it is an act of worship.

Conclusion

There is so much more that I could say about this wonderful example of grace-oriented giving.

But let me just say that grace-oriented giving is one of the clearest barometers of our spiritual condition. I am not saying that you must give all your money away. No. That would be foolish. However, I am saying that if you are a Christian, you know that all the money that you have actually belongs to God. You are simply a steward of his money. And your job is to manage it for his glory. And it doesn’t matter whether you have much or little. You are still a steward of God’s money. So, how will you steward it?

May God help you to exemplify grace-oriented giving in your life. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for your Word. It is so rich and true and meaningful and helpful.

You have shown us the Macedonians today. They were extremely poor and they suffered tremendous persecution. And yet, they received your grace into their lives. And once they had received your grace into their lives they displayed remarkable generosity in spite of difficult circumstances.

O Lord, we have so much more. Even those among us who are really struggling with finances cannot even begin to compare ourselves to the situation of the Macedonians. And yet, we too have received your grace into our lives. Oh, make us generous like the Macedonians. Make us beg earnestly for the privilege and opportunity to participate in the extension of your kingdom.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!