

11/14/10

The Next Step in Giving – 2 Corinthians 8-9

- Something happened last Sunday that I would guess, if I did not point it out, would go unmentioned and practically unnoticed today...
- and the fact that that's true allows us to make an important observation about the Lord, and our church family...
- here's what happened -- last Sunday, as part of our worship service, we prayed to the Lord, and then passed these silver trays around...
 - we call that "worshipping the Lord with our tithes and offerings"...
 - and because an orderly accounting of those funds is necessary, a team of people took that money to a secure place and prepared a deposit...
 - when it was all said and done the total was \$79,987.42
 - what's noteworthy, I think...is not that that happened...but that it happened, and because it's so commonplace around here, it's not particularly noteworthy...
 - in other words, there's no fanfare...
 - you won't read about it in the paper...
 - we hardly ever say anything about it...
 - that's just part of what it means to be a faithful, growing follower of Christ...
 - this morning we want to try to answer this question...why?...why have so many people around here allowed God to develop that level of faithfulness in them?...
- with that in mind, please open your Bible this morning to 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9...(pages 143-144 in the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you)
- we're in the middle of a series right now entitled...**Taking the Next Step in Financial Wisdom...**
 - we started the series by studying the issue of **The Next Step in Earning**
 - last week we examined **The Next Step in Spending**
 - today we want to think about taking **The Next Step in Giving**
 - then we'll conclude with taking **The Next Step in Saving**
 - our thinking was – since our country is experiencing such economic pressure right now, let's take the entire month and examine what Scripture says about various aspects of the topic of money...
 - this is all part of our church's annual emphasis on stewardship...
 - let me remind you of the 4 principles of stewardship that we would encourage every person in our church to commit to memory...

Four Key Principles of Stewardship

1. **God owns everything, you own nothing.**
2. **God entrusts you with everything you have.**
3. **You can either increase or diminish what God has given you; God wants you to increase it.**
4. **You can be called into account at any time, and it may be today.**

- now, let's just take a minute and have an authentic chat before we launch into all of this...
- there are at least some reasons why pastors don't really like to talk about this topic, and why parishioners don't really like to hear about it...so let's just tackle them head on, shall we?...
- why don't pastors like to discuss this subject?...[many reasons I'm sure]...

1. There's the possibility of being lumped together with people or groups who seem to be talking about this constantly...people here know that I speak about this topic generally about once a year...but I realize for some folks, this will be their first Sunday...
 2. there's also the possibility of folks believing that the subject of stewardship is really all about money, when it's not...it just one aspect of the discussion...stewardship is a lot bigger than \$...
 3. there's the possibility of people thinking that our church is really only interested in people for their money...which is patently untrue and certainly contrary to the facts...
 - I'm saying there are some reasons why some pastors might be tempted to avoid this topic altogether...
- now, if you wonder, why don't parishioners like to hear about this...I'm sure there are a variety of reasons there too...
1. perhaps they have been exposed to teaching on this subject in other places that was less about the Bible and more about man's opinion...and they found that troublesome or distasteful...
 - and here's my commitment to you this morning---my goal is simply to help all of us evaluate ourselves in light of the Word of God...nothing more, nothing less
 2. if I could be rather direct with you a moment, another reason I think some folks might be uncomfortable around this topic is because there is such a thing as the precision of math...
 - here's what I mean...many topics in the Christian life are fairly subjective...pretty squishy...
 - i.e., do you love the Lord?...how do you quantify that?...and many of us would probably rate ourselves higher than perhaps is really the case because it is subjective...
 - giving to God is much more precise...open the checkbook...or in this day and age, look at the electronic deposit register...it is what it is...
 - I agree with John MacArthur when he said:
Someone who sees the pattern of your spending can fairly well discern the moral direction of your life. John MacArthur – Whose Money Is It, Anyway?, p. 4.
 - so this topic has a way of turning on the lights in the spiritual room rather brightly, some folks like that...some folks don't...
- now, here's what's going on in II Corinthians 8...this was written by the apostle Paul about 51 AD to the church in Corinth..
- a famine was occurring, especially back at the church in Jerusalem which of course was comprised primarily of people who were Jewish who had placed their faith and trust in Christ...
 - and so some of the other churches [and please keep in mind that the church is only about 20 years old at this point]...but some of the other churches comprised of predominantly Gentiles who had trusted Christ were in the process of taking a love offering to send back to their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ...
 - so Paul is going to talk to the Corinthians about what had been occurring in the churches of Macedonia...that would include Philippi, and Thessalonica, and Berea]...
 - and Paul was thanking God for what the Macedonian churches had done, and was encouraging the Corinthians to live in a similar way...
 - all of this gives us tremendous insight into what God thinks about giving.
- **read II Corinthians 8:1-15-9:14**

- isn't that a marvelous passage of Scripture?...
- in the time we have remaining, I'd like us to work through these verses and find **Five characteristics of giving that honors God.**

I. Biblical Giving is a Matter of Grace.

- this passage is one of the reasons you hear Christians speak about "grace giving"...
- these verses, from beginning to end, place a heavy amount of emphasis on grace...
- for example...

A. God's grace is the source.

- this is one of those places in the Bible where even the order of the words is important...
- what is the focal point of verse 1?...it is not on what the persons did, but on what the grace of God allowed persons to do...
- that is why Christians aren't interested in receiving credit or public applause...
- I often hear things like, "boy, your church is really _____" ...
 - for one thing, it isn't my church...but I always try to quickly turn those statements around to things like...The Lord has been very good to us...The Lord has been very gracious...we are very thankful for what God is doing...[The Lord is leading, guiding, supplying, helping, direction...]
 - because we all understand that to whatever degree we are doing anything right, it is only because of God's grace...

B. Grace is the defining characteristic.

- you may have noticed that several times giving financially to God was referred to as a gracious work or an act of grace...
 - **verse 6 – complete in you this gracious work**
 - **verse 7 – abound in this gracious work**
 - and one of the questions that each of us would have reason to ask this morning is, could we look at the way we handle the issue of giving financially to God and honestly use words like "gracious" to describe it?...
 - not because of arm twisting, not grudgingly, not by compulsion...
 - but by God's grace...and done in a way that is gracious...that's why Paul would say a few verses later of our giving that is to be done...
 - **2 Corinthians 9:7 - ...not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**
 - where grace is the defining characteristic...a gracious work...an act of grace...
- now, of course for men and women apart from Christ, none of this would make a whole lot of sense...that is why it is so important to think about how...

C. Grace is the model.

- don't you love verse 9?...
- **2 Corinthians 8:9 - 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.**
- there are all kinds of people around this church who have developed patterns of generosity where they give in a way that is faithful and sacrificial...how did they get to that place?...
- one of the fundamental answers is that they decided long ago that their model [the One they were trying to be like] was Jesus Christ...
 - He's the standard...He's the example...

- and if the grace of Christ would motivate Him to become poorer so that someone else could become spiritually rich...then they want to let that same characteristic of grace impact them in a similar way...
- for Christians one of my concerns as a pastor is how many persons who would call themselves followers of Jesus Christ...or even in some cases members of our church...have never really let grace impact the way they use their finances...and maybe therefore don't "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" the way Paul is explaining in this text...
- that's why I said a moment ago that some people don't like this topic because of the precision of mathematics...you can say you know about the grace of Jesus Christ all you want...but one of the questions today would be...does your checkbook suggest that you know the grace of Jesus Christ?

II. Biblical Giving is a Matter of Faith.

- the only way the men and women in these Macedonian churches would have behaved this way is if they really believed that God could be trusted...
- that He was who He said He was in His Word...
- that is why we are using the phrase "biblical giving" ...
 - faith isn't an ethereal feeling conjured up out of mid-air...
 - faith is choosing to take God at His Word...
- A. Faith that transcended their circumstances.**
 - the words in verse 2 are incredibly counter-intuitive...
 - **verse 2 – in a great ordeal of affliction...**
 - **verse 2 – in deep poverty...**
 - there's a great socio-economic condition for the church to launch its first capital campaign...
 - but that is what God allowed them to do...and that was used as the prescribed model for the Corinthian church, and by implication to people like you and me...
 - and I think we have to ask ourselves...what was going on in their hearts/minds that would allow them to do this?...what were they thinking?...

1. A belief that God would be true to His name – cf. Genesis 22:14

- one of the names for God in Scripture is Jehovah Jireh – God will provide...
- it is possible to become so insulated and so cautious that God could stop keeping His promises and we wouldn't even be in a position to know...
 - and we're not talking about recklessness---you know that...
 - but we are talking about handling our money in a way that requires taking God at His Word...

2. A belief that God would supply their need.

- **Psalm 37:25 - I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.**
- **Philippians 4:19 - And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.**
 - there's no way they would have given like this unless they really believed this...

3. A belief that Jesus' teaching was true.

- do you remember the story the Lord told about sitting down in the temple and observing the way people gave...and a woman came in and gave just a couple of small coins...
 - **Mark 12:43-44 - So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."**
 - and her story was passed down to the church...and some men and women took Christ's words to heart...
- the point is, Giving is a matter of faith...the faithfulness of your giving demonstrates the depth of your faith...

B. Faith that demonstrated they really were redeemed.

- now, we have to be very careful here, but the Scripture would teach us that the way a person's handles money is often a test of whether they genuinely know the Lord.
 - **verse 5 – they first gave themselves to the Lord.**
 - now, I hope we all understand that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone...
 - if anybody walked away from here thinking money had something to do with coming to Christ, I would be horrified...
 - but the other side of that is, if anybody walked away from here thinking that you can genuinely come to Christ and it won't affect the way you give, I would be equally horrified...
 - this comes up in many ways in Scripture --- [as time allows, develop...Christ's statement to the rich young ruler---Good master, what can I do to inherit eternal life...why do you call me good?...keep the commandments (I've kept them all from my youth)...go sell all you have...Matt 19 ---- contrast Zaccheus – Luke 19:8-9 - Then Zaccheus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;
- if you've been here the last couple of weeks, you know that we are asking everybody, member or non-member [anybody who's hanging around here]...to complete the commitment card between now and November 21st...[develop the kinds of commitments we are requesting...]
- my encouragement to you would be...make that commitment in light of Scripture...read II Cor. 8-9 and then complete it...
 - [also, deal with the issue of if you are married, the impact you are having on your spouse on this issue...]
- We have always viewed this time of year as an audit...I would encourage all of us to think back over this past year...or maybe even go back home and examine the way you have given over the last year...and ask...does this represent biblical giving?...has it been a matter of grace, and has it been a matter of faith?

III. Biblical Giving is a Matter of Mission.

- there's an important historical detail that explains why all of this was so significant in the development of the church...
- our Lord made it clear that He wanted His church to be multi-ethnic...
 - **Matt. 28:19 – Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...**
 - **Acts 1:8 - But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."**
- imagine the task of bringing Jews and Gentiles together in one body called the church...
- that is a significant emphasis in the NT...
- well, how do you do that?...provide an opportunity where one group is in need, and the other group gives [not because they are that much better shape themselves]...but because of their commitment to the mission...if that is the heartbeat of Jesus---that is exactly where I want my money to be...
- and did you notice...

A. They begged to be involved.

- **verse 4 – begging us with much urging**
 - please...pretty please...pretty please with sugar on top...

B. They saw it as God doing them a favor.

- **verse 4 – for the favor of participation.**
 - Mission driven people are characterized by financial generosity...
 - for example, last Sunday night, we voted to add another couple to our missionary family...Kirk and Celinda Lehner...
 - the Lehner's were with us several weeks ago and spoke in a number of our ABF's...
 - Kirk and Celinda are serving with Baptist Mid-Missions in a unique ministry in the Asian Pacific...they are living in an undisclosed location providing training for Chinese house church pastors.
 - we unanimously added them to our missionary budget because we consider it a privilege to partner with such individuals...
 - the past couple of weeks, two of our laymen, David Selvey and Mike King were on a survey trip to Africa (develop)
 - we also had the privilege of hearing from Seth and Darla Curtis...
 - we see all of these kinds of ministry opportunities as IPO's (Initial Public Offerings of stock) – like, how can I get into that?
- we saw last week that the antidote to greed is being "rich toward God..."
- **Luke 12:33-34 - Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**
 - Jesus said it this way in...
- **Matthew 6:19-21 - Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

- another decision we made last Sunday night was to purchase the old Smitty's property on Northwestern Ave...[develop what we plan to do there...]
- we made it clear last Sunday night that voting "yes" meant that you understood and planned to participate in a capital campaign that will be launched sometime in the next year and go through the following 3 years [just like our 5 year strategic plan calls for]...
 - why would people do that?...because we can't wait until we start hearing stories of the first students won to Christ through the expanded ministries of PBF, or of someone won through the new biblical counseling ministry...
- let me also encourage you to get your free tickets today to our Stewardship Celebration on November 19 – develop – celebrating the mission....]

IV. Biblical Giving is a Matter of Growing.

- I am sure you saw this emphasis as well...but several times Paul told the Corinthians...

A. This is an area in which we should seek to excel.

- verse 7 – see that you abound in this gracious work also.

- now, one of the questions that often comes up is...how much?...
- ultimately you will have to determine that between yourself and the Lord, but there are certainly guidelines through the sweep of Scripture...
- the Bible says a lot about tithing...many of us see tithing as a starting point for our giving...
- some say – but that's OT law...actually not – develop Gen 14 – Abraham and Melchizedek...
- [dev. Net/gross?...what about benefits package?...]
 - now, you might say, PV...I don't see how we could do that...some folks have developed such a consumptive lifestyle...it might take a while to get there...but if the other issues we are seeing in this passage are in place...the rest will follow

B. We can be overflowing.

- verse 2 – overflowed in the wealth of their liberality

- now we said at the beginning that we weren't going to be bringing in any of man's opinions...we just wanted to let the Word of God help us evaluate ourselves...but can I ask you – are you doing that?...
- [could develop – this is why the Bible even used the metaphor of thief to describe a person who would not let God's Word and God's grace impact the way he/she handled their money...cf. Malachi 3:9-12]

V. Biblical Giving is a Matter of Finishing.

- this offering the Corinthian church was taking had actually been a year long project...
- and is the case even today...it is often easier to start something than it is to finish it...
- the Christian life is a lot like a marathon...God isn't interested in sprinters, in quarter milers...
- **2 Corinthians 8:6 - So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.**
- **2 Corinthians 8:11 - 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.**