

2 Corinthians 8 (9) – The Gospel of Generosity

The Bible often presents its redemptive truths in three parts, which you can call redemption pictured, redemption performed, and redemption practiced. The Old Testament describes some of the details of redemption. The Gospels detail what Jesus Christ did to accomplish redemption. And the rest of the New Testament applies the redemption to your life.

Let's look at one example where you see redemption pictured in the OT, performed in the Gospels, and practiced in the NT. And then you will see why we are calling today's sermon, "The Gospel of Generosity."

So, we start with redemption pictured. In Psalm 22:18, David writes, "*They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*" This is a prophecy about Jesus. But how can you know this?

Well, Psalm 22 has always been known as what we call a "Messianic Psalm." There are verses in that Psalm that point to Jesus directly. For example, on the cross, in Matthew 27:46, Jesus cried out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" He was quoting Psalm 22:1, and referring to the whole Psalm as a picture of the cross and his resurrection and our redemption.

We have preached from Psalm 22 and its applications in the NT many times before. And I am not the first to connect Psalm 22:18 with Jesus on the cross, and to then take that to the NT epistles and apply it. Psalm 22:18 is about Jesus; there isn't any evidence that David's enemies cast lots for David's clothes. Yes, this could be describing a difficult situation David experienced. But in the NT, you see that this verse is also more than that.

So, redemption is pictured in Psalm 22:18. And then, redemption is performed in Matthew 27:35. That verse quotes Psalm 22:18 as historical narrative – *And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.* At his crucifixion, Jesus was stripped of his clothing, and the Roman soldiers cast lots to see who would get his garments.

On the way to the cross, on the cross, and after the cross, Jesus was giving himself, as the greatest act in human history. He was achieving your salvation as only your sinless Savior could. 1 Peter 2:24 says – *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.* And, by the way, the very next verse, 1 Peter 2:25, describes the kind of healing 1 Peter 2:24 is talking about – *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* The healing is about being reconciled to God.

Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's redemptive plan, down to the last detail. And part of God's redemptive plan was for Jesus to suffer the humiliation of nakedness that David predicted in Psalm 22:18. It was a thousand years before Jesus was on the cross. And this was the redemption pictured in Psalm 22:18 being fulfilled in Matthew 27:35. This was redemption performed.

So, redemption pictured, in Psalm 22:18. And then, redemption performed, in Matthew 27:35. And finally, the NT shows you how this detail of redemption is to be practiced. This is how Jesus' atonement is applied to the lives of his followers. And one way you see this is with believers becoming generous givers. This is the redemption pictured in Psalm 22:18, which was performed in Matthew 27:35, being practiced in 2 Corinthians 8:9.

2 Corinthians 8:9 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 by his poverty might become rich.* This is not about believers in Jesus being blessed with material wealth in this life as a result of redemption. This is about believers in Jesus being blessed with eternal life as a result of redemption. This is about an eternal inheritance, in the eternal state. 1 Peter 1:4 says that your *inheritance...is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.*

Jesus making you rich isn't about this life's wealth. The application of this blessing, this becoming rich, in 2 Corinthians 8:9, is that believers in Jesus are to become generous givers. Jesus gave his all for your eternal good, so Christians give some of their all for the good of others, especially other

believers. Galatians 6:10 says – *So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

The context of this portion of 2 Corinthians proves that Paul is saying that since Christians have received an eternal wealth, they are to give some of their earthly wealth to needy believers. 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 says – *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 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. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.* Wow! This wasn't poor churches who became wealthy because of the redemption. This was poverty-stricken churches who responded to redemption with joyfully generous, and sacrificially earnest giving.

Corinth was in southern Greece, known as Achaia. Macedonia was northern Greece, which included the churches of Phillipi, Berea, and Thessalonica. And the grace of God among these churches, a result of the redemption, led them to give earnestly, generously, even sacrificially, and yet cheerfully, to others. That is rightly applying the redemption seen in 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Jesus possesses all wealth as God Almighty. Jesus owns everything. But he came to give everything to his children. So, on earth, he loses everything. He leaves the glories of Heaven and becomes a man (Philippians 2:6-7). He suffers the insults and injuries of other men. He dies on a cross (Philippians 2:8). And he became so poor on Earth that he died without clothing. This poverty was necessary to redeem his people. And this fact changes you and how you handle your possessions. Jesus didn't cling to the privileges of his divinity, when he took on humanity. And you shouldn't cling to your earthly possessions because you have eternal possessions that are far greater.

The redemptive example of Jesus teaches you to participate in earnest, generous giving, even sacrificial giving, that is also cheerful giving, not mandatory giving, or greedy giving. To take 2 Corinthians 8:9 and say that

it's about gaining earthly, material blessings is to miss the entire point. Paul is emphasizing the grace of Jesus as a model for your giving. He isn't trying to manipulate you into giving. The Bible doesn't picture giving as a means of increasing your riches, like some transactional deal with God, using "kingdom principles" to "take ownership" of your "covenant rights", so you can "exercise your dominion", and thereby spread the kingdom of God (or get your own piece of it) by the use of your wealth. Financial blessing isn't the point Paul is making in 2 Corinthians 8. The reason for generosity is *because* God has been generous, not *so that* God will be generous.

Paul was not teaching about an increase in your material wealth. The context clearly reveals he was teaching the Corinthians (and you) that since Christ gave his everything for them, they should give of their means in service of him. The Macedonian churches had financially helped the Corinthian church when they were in need. Now, the Macedonian churches were in need, and Paul urges the Corinthians to give to them, writing that *your abundance at the present time should supply their need* (2 Corinthians 8:14).

Yes, God blesses those who bless others. Yes, you should help to spread the kingdom of God using your resources. But this isn't a "get rich" strategy. Rather, it is a call for generosity, like the churches of Macedonia, who gave generously even when living in poverty, and were blessed with joy. Did Paul say they would become wealthy (or healthy) because they gave? No. Did he teach people to give so they will get? No. Instead, he praised them for demonstrating a non-transactional love for others. They demonstrated care for the church, without demanding reciprocity from God. And they were blessed. Their generosity was motivated by what Jesus did.

Jesus bought the Church with his own blood (Acts 20:28). And he gives salvation as a gift (Romans 6:23), to all who ask him for forgiveness (Romans 10:13). So, as Jesus said, "*freely you have received, freely give.*" This is the true heart of Christian giving. You give your time, talent, treasure, and testimony in Jesus' name. This is the gospel of generosity – redemption pictured, redemption performed, and redemption practiced. Amen.