

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- 2 Corinthians 9:6-15
Sunday, Oct. 30, 2011

1. Cheerful giving

- a. The time is upon us again for Stewardship Sunday. Last year I was asked to have Stewardship Sunday having only been here a few months. At least this year I have over a year of service in with you guys.
- b. In talking about stewardship I thought it would be helpful to look at one particular passage that is often used for talking about the issue. It is a passage that is often used by prosperity preachers in urging us to give so that God will bless us by giving us even more and making us wealthy.
- c. In my mind, there are two problems with this view. First, it isn't what the passage teaches. Second, it makes giving compulsory by making it sound like you need to give generously in order to receive God's blessing. This undermines precisely what Paul is actually teaching in the passage.
- d. So let's look at our passage from 2 Corinthians 9. The setting here is that Paul was telling the Corinthian Church that he was sending some people ahead to collect an offering that they were giving. They had pledged an offering in order to aid the Jerusalem Church which was facing persecution.
- e. He said that he was sending people ahead of him so that they would give as they felt comfortable and not feel compelled to give more just because of his presence among them. They had already promised that they would send a gift. In verse 5 he said, "So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion."
 - i. He didn't want to be seen as extorting money from them. He wanted them to give joyfully what they felt they could give.
- f. Thus he says in verse 7, "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." This point really coincides with the messages that Jesus would teach against the Pharisees. He wanted them to understand that the issue wasn't whether or not they followed the letter of the law, but whether they had hearts that desired to keep the spirit of it. Giving their tithes to the church boastfully to show how pious they were; or giving grudgingly out of duty; neither of these represented a heart turned towards God.
- g. Likewise Paul's concern was that the giving be something that was done from the heart, not from obligation. As my mentor would say, "Giving is a spiritual issue, not a money issue." So Paul (and strangely enough, my mentor was also named Paul) wanted them to examine their spiritual state, see how much they trusted God, and then give accordingly from the joy of their hearts.

2. The reward of righteousness

- a. Now that we see how Paul had told them each to determine their giving amount, let's look at the parts where he talks about the rewards. One of the most famously misquoted verses is 2 Cor. 9:6.

- i. The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.
 - ii. This sure makes it sound like our receiving is directly linked to our giving. I have a friend from Kansas who could never figure out why his life was going down the drain because he paid all his tithes and he couldn't understand why God was not honoring this so-called principle of sowing and reaping. He believed that by giving, God was bound to give him a strong material life in return. But this isn't at all what Paul is teaching.
- b. Verse 8 says, "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." What does God give us an abundance for? So that we can get rich? So that we can have more stuff for ourselves and take nicer vacations? God is able (note God is able, not that God is going to for everyone) to provide you with abundance so that by having enough you may share abundantly in every good work.
- c. His increase in your life as a Christian is to enable you to share more fully in the work of the Kingdom. You have been made a steward of God's blessings, and when you show a faithfulness to bless God's Kingdom with your wealth, then he is faithful to provide you with enough extra to ensure that you will continue to bless his Kingdom.
 - i. Doesn't it seem clear here that the issue isn't about God wanting to bless us with more stuff, but instead about wanting to equip those who have been faithful with all they need to continue to be faithful to the work of the Kingdom? It isn't about blessing us, but about enabling us to bless others.
- d. Verse 10: He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.
 - i. God, the one who provides seed to the sower, will multiply your seed- that which you sow- in order to what? To make you rich beyond your wildest dreams? No, in order to increase the harvest. He gives you more to sow, so that he can have a bigger harvest.
 - ii. But he also says that you receive a bigger harvest- the harvest of your righteousness. The great blessing that we receive for giving faithfully is an increased righteousness. Now this might seem like a letdown to many people, but isn't righteousness the very thing we are short on as human beings? Isn't it the very thing we are called to? So being faithful and acting in a righteous fashion by support God's Kingdom will yield a greater righteousness which will in turn allow you to be even more faithful and increase your righteousness even more.
- e. Verses 13 and 14: Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others,¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you.
- f. This is a very interesting statement that Paul made. By being faithful in this ministry of giving, he said that they glorify God by obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and their generosity in sharing.

- i. This takes us back to the statement that giving is a spiritual issue. It is very interesting that there is more than just glorifying God through sharing with others. Paul said that this glorifies God by their obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ.
 - ii. Now Paul is very clear in his letters that the gospel of Christ is not about our obedience to doing good works; it is about Christ's loving sacrifice in dying on the cross for our sins.
 - iii. Yet the faithfulness to this "test" as he calls it, the faithfulness to support the ministry of the Kingdom, is their obedience to the confession of the gospel. Their willingness to support financially the ministry was seen as a direct reflection of how strong their confession of the gospel truly was. Their obedience in giving showed that they truly believed the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - g. The end of that quote in verse 14 says that they (those receiving the blessing of the gift) would long and pray for them because of the surpassing grace of God that he had given the Corinthians in their willingness to provide. Those who received the gift saw the giving as an example of God's grace being abundantly upon the givers.
3. We must decide what to give
 - a. So as it turns out, this doesn't end up being a passage about the prosperity gospel. It isn't promising that if we give we will get wealthy in money. Instead, it teaches that if we give joyfully from our hearts, trusting in the gospel and knowing that we have all we need in Christ alone, then God may well bless us with even more for the purpose of allowing us to give even more.
 - b. All of this will serve not to increase our lifestyle, but to increase the harvest of our own righteousness as we are faithful sowers aiding in the harvest of God's Kingdom.
 - c. Now these are the things we must consider as we prepare our own pledges for the coming church year.
 - i. First, how much do I believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ and trust the promises of God?
 - ii. Second, does my giving support sowing in the Kingdom of God to help increase the harvest?
 - iii. Third, how much can I give joyfully without a feeling of resentment and compulsion?
 - d. In the next few weeks, take the time to think about those questions. Then, as you fill out your pledge card, remember Paul's words, "Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ." Your giving is an act of worship and obedience. May he be glorified in you through your generosity.