

Grace Giving - Part 2

Becoming the Church Next Door

By Rick Baldwin

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1

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Wildwood Baptist Church

4801 Wade Green Road

Acworth, GA 30102

Website: www.wildwoodbaptist.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/wildwoodbaptist

Thank you, Jeff.

Well, I trust that you have enjoyed Jeff today. He has been a blessing to our hearts.

Turn with me in your Bible please to the second book of Corinthians and the eighth chapter. Last week we began a series of messages on grace giving. I will follow up with that this week, 2 Corinthians chapter eight and I want us to look a moment at verses one through five.

There are many churches who are involved at this point in all of the rescue missions that are going on over in the Gulf coast, throughout Mississippi and particularly in New Orleans. Let's suppose this morning that there are a number of churches—and there are—in the North Georgia area who want to give. And a call goes out, a plea goes out to those churches. Please give. And the churches begin to respond. They ask all the churches except for one. This church has problems of its own. Financially they have been wiped out and devastated. Their people, because of their faith have lost their jobs and at this area they are just really, really at rock bottom. They have nothing to give.

But they get tuned into the fact that other churches are giving and so they email and say, "We want to be a part of the giving process. Please let us give."

And the churches write back and say, "Thank you so much. We appreciate everything that you want to do and we know your hearts and your love for Christ, but we are just not going to ask you to give."

And they say, "Please. You don't understand. It is incumbent upon us to give. We know. We have seen the television. We have heard the reports. We have watched Fox. We have seen them drag the dead bodies up and we have watched as tears have flowed down the eyes of the people and please let us give."

And they say, "No, listen. As a matter of fact, we are thinking about taking up an offering from you."

“No, don’t do that,” they say. “Don’t do that. That is the worst thing you could do. Please, please, please. Let us give.”

Imagine a church like that. Well, the one we are going to read about this morning is exactly like that. The church at Macedonia is going to beg to give.

Honor the reading of the Word by standing with me, please.

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.¹

The music this morning, Father, has been marvelous. We have been blessed by it. Now give us a word from the Word. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

I want to call your attention this morning to the word grace. The word grace appears seven times in chapter eight and three times in chapter nine. Notice with me the encouragement of grace giving.

The reason the Macedonians want to give is to the mother church in Jerusalem. The mother church in Jerusalem has suffered at the hands of persecutors. They have become socially ostracized and nationally disinherited because of their faith in Christ as the Son of God. And they are in deep, deep need and Paul sets up for them the Jerusalem Fund and he is asking different churches to participate in the giving to that fund and the church at Macedonia writes and says, “Please, Paul, let us give.”

Notice how he encourages them in verse one.

“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God.”²

In this setting, in this context it has to do with giving. But in the classical Greek the word grace meant something beautiful as opposed to that which was ugly. Strength, as contrary to weakness, health as opposite of illness and love against hate. The New Testament writers took the word grace and they put life into it. Grace becomes full blown in the incarnation of the Son of God and in his death, burial and resurrection. For what the Greeks longed for came about in the Messiah, the Christ and his gospel. They saw the beauty of the gospel, the glory of the gospel, the hope of the gospel, the power, the help, the blessing of the gospel as he gave his life for you and I.

¹ 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

² 2 Corinthians 8:1.

And then Paul writes to the saints he says to them they have been touched and become recipients of the grace of God which simply means their giving was a giving out of the heart of love and appreciation and generosity for what Christ had done for them.

What is it? Giving is an activity of grace. So there is the encouragement.

But notice with me, secondly, the example of the Macedonian saints. What is grace giving? Well, as we walk down through these verses we will just document what the Bible says about grace giving and our participation in it. Notice, first of all, that grace giving always begins with a profound spiritual experience. What does that mean? It means that our hearts have been touched by God. And listen to me, beloved. When our hearts are touched by Christ, we can never ever be the same.

Here is what the Macedonians understood about stewardship. Stewardship has nothing to do with the circumstances of life. It has everything to do with our relationship with Christ.

Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that God has been taken by surprise over the events of this last week? Do you think God said, "Oh, I wish I had known that was coming down the pike"? Do you think God was surprised that gas prices have risen like they have risen? Do you think God is surprised that the gas prices in some places are so exorbitant that people can't even buy them?

You say, "Pastor, do you believe? Can you believe where this is going?"

Let me tell you something, folks. It doesn't matter if gravy becomes a dollar a pop. God is still our source and our resource and God is still in control. And when we understand that, we understand my giving is not contingent upon my circumstance or my happenstance or a run of bad luck. My giving is because my heart is a recipient of almighty God and that God is my source and God is my resource. Grace giving begins with my experience.

Secondly, grace giving is an attitude. Now look at verse two.

"... that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality."³

Now get these words with me. Walk through and take your pen or your pencil and just underline some things with me. Look at that verse again.

"... that in a great ordeal of affliction."⁴

Underline that. And then in the B part of that verse:

³ 2 Corinthians 8:2.

⁴ Ibid.

“... their deep poverty...”⁵

Great affliction or oppression or tribulation is what that means. Deep poverty means rock bottom. They have nothing. They are absolutely destitute. Things have been taken from them.

The Roman government had taken the silver and gold mines. They had taxed their copper and iron smelting industry. They could not longer use the trees for wood to build their ships in an act of commerce. They lived in difficult days.

But then notice the contrast. Look at that verse again.

“...that in a great ordeal of affliction...”⁶

Now watch the contrast.

“...their abundance of joy...”⁷

In the middle of their oppression and tribulation, in the middle of their material wealth being extracted from them, they had great joy. How do you explain that?

And look, again, at the contrast in the second part of that verse.

“...and their deep poverty...”⁸

Watch this. Out of rock bottom poverty:

‘...overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.’⁹

Where did their generous spirit come from? It came from the touch of the master’s hand. It came because grace had spoken to their heart. Underline the word liberality there in verse two. It means to be free from ulterior motives. They are not calculating, well, if I give this I will get that. No. It has nothing to do with what they receive in return. It has everything to do with the gracious generosity and the sprit of their heart.

Somebody would say, “Well, pastor, how reckless of them to give what they need.”

No, no, no. You don’t understand. We are not living according to the philosophy of this world. We are living according to the Word of the living God. And then notice

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

something else. It is an experience of the soul. It is an attitude. It is according to our ability.

Look at verse three.

“For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord.”¹⁰

Now what does that mean? It means that they had a certain amount of something and that is all they had. God does not expect you to give what you do not have. But now wait a minute. They didn’t stop there. They gave according to their ability and beyond their ability.

If you don’t have it, you are not responsible. Have you ever heard someone say something like this?

“Well, I tell you, pastor. If I had a million dollars I would give so and so.”

Can I help you out with that? That ain’t so. Because if you won’t give out of the 100 dollars that you have, you wouldn’t give out of the million dollars that you want.

God is not asking you to give a million dollars. God may not be asking you to give 10 dollars, but whatever he is asking you to give, you ought to give because your heart has been touched by the grace of God.

Notice something else. Grace giving is to be done willingly. Verse three again.

“For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord.”¹¹

Nobody pushed them to give. Nobody intimidated them into giving. Nobody just got up in a high pitched voice and began to shed tears and say, “If you don’t give, this is what is going to happen.” They gave out of their own ability and willingness.

Now watch this very carefully, because many of you may have been feeling like me over the last several days, kind of helpless. And we have shared with you several things that you can do, some you can, some you cannot. But you are going to have people coming at you from every different direction concerning giving. Some of you watch televangelists. They are asking you to give. You come to church and your pastor asks you to give. The Salvation Army is asking you to give. The Red Cross is asking you to give. Southern Baptists are asking you to give. And you feel bombarded by certain acts and works because you are giving to your church and you are giving beyond the tithe and you say “Well, pastor, I really don’t know how to respond to that.”

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 8:3.

¹¹ Ibid.

Let me tell you this. Listen to me very, very carefully. When you get letters from people who are asking you for help in certain areas, you take that letter, you lay it before God and you pray about it. You should feel no panic in your Spirit. You should feel no compulsion from the writer. You should feel no outside constraint or coercion. You should give whatever the Holy Spirit who is the friend within tells you to give.

Don't feel guilty that you can't give everything. Give what you can and give God the glory that you can give what you can. Somebody ought to say amen right here.

Look at something else. We give according to our experience in Christ, our attitude, our ability, our willingness and often it is sacrificial.

When I lived in Hazlehurst, Georgia we had a couple in our church named Eunice and Claude Stevens. Claude when he was a young man was a very business type entrepreneurial type man and he owned the men's clothing store and he did quite well in it. But Claude made a mistake, a fatal mistake. He did not believe that he ought to have health insurance. He believed that God would take care of him. But as Claude got older his health got bad and he had a stroke and he stayed in the hospital in Macon for many, many months and it literally took everything he had. And they lived in the project.

But I want to tell you is about Claude and Eunice. When they couldn't get to church they would call and say, "We are too sick. Claude is not going to be able to make it. Would you come by or send somebody by to pick up our tithe?"

When we were going to build a building they would call and say, "Pastor, we are not going to be able to be there Sunday. Claude is sick. But we need somebody to come by because we want to share in the giving of the Church."

You say, "Pastor, why did they do that? Were they trying to pay God off?"

No, you can't pay God off. That is why they call it grace. It is free. It is unmerited. It is the favor of God on you and not what God expects from you. The only thing that God expects from us is to be sinners and to live like sinners and to act like sinners until his amazing grace touches our hearts and when it touches our hearts it touches us at the very core of our being.

And they would give over and over and over. Do you want to know why usually—and I know this is a long weekend—but do you want to know why usually it is on the first of the month that the offerings of the church will go up? I will tell you why. It is the people who get the pensions and the people who get the little checks who are dedicated to the cause of Christ and the gospel sharing thought heir church that give.

Some of you are money misers and pinchers and you need to get right with God over it.

I heard about a man who came to his preacher and he said, "Preacher, I will tell you one thing. I don't believe I will have to give anything and I can be a happy Christian."

The pastor said, “All right. That is all right with me.”

He said, “By the way, pastor, the thief on the cross never did give anything and he went to heaven.”

To which the pastor replied, “There is only one difference between you and the thief on the cross. He is a dead thief and you are living thief.”

It is often sacrificial. Grace giving is often supplicating. Look at verse four.

“...begging us...”

Can you imagine that?

“...begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.”¹²

Now I want you to get the idea here. This is not Paul begging them to give. As a matter of fact, Paul has said to them, “It would be better probably for you not to give.” This is not Paul. This is not the preacher begging them to give. This is them begging to be a part of the experience that is going on.

I found out in a little over six months of being your pastor that there are a lot of Macedonians who are members of this church. There are people who are always giving. They may be giving food. They may be giving clothing. They may be giving shelter. They may be paying of things here and there. But there are Macedonians who belong to this church, people who are begging to say, “God has so blessed my life and touched my life that I want to be a giver.”

And notice something else. It begins with giving ourselves to the Lord. Look at verse five.

“...and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”¹³

May I tell you something? When you come to faith in Christ you are abandoned to God.

We have a man in our church in Jacksonville. His name is Everett. Before Everett got saved he won millions and millions of dollars playing the lottery. Something happened one day that changed his life. He was with his brother-in-law and while he and his brother-in-law were together there was an accident and his brother-in-law drowned. He didn't know if his brother-in-law was saved, but he knew that he wasn't. And he began to think, God, what if that had been me? What if I had drowned? I would have gone to a

¹² 2 Corinthians 8:4.

¹³ 2 Corinthians 8:5.

Christless eternity. I would have gone to hell. I would have been away, separated from God and my family forever.

Everett came to our church and the gospel was preached and Everett gave his heart to Jesus Christ. May I tell you something? From that day until this Everett Pringle has been a changed man and when the Bible says they gave themselves to the Lord, he was the first man that I thought about. As a matter of fact, there is a group of people down there at Hillcrest who work with the Samaritan's Purse and Everett got a hold of that and went to work in South Florida helping them rebuild the houses and he bought a trailer and filled it with utensils and tools that they will be taking over into the affected area. Why? God touched his heart and the first thing he did was not give his pocketbook. The first thing he did was give his life to the Lord and he said, "Here, Lord, my hands are empty. Whatever you need you fill them with it and I will give it back to you."

Hallelujah. Amen.

Ah, but notice something now. Notice not only that, but the Bible said it involves humble submission to the Church. What Paul said look at verse five again.

"...and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God."¹⁴

Do you know what the problem was at Macedonia. There was no problem. They were not trying to tell the pastors what to preach or how to do it. There was no conflict. They just wanted to be a blessing to somebody else. And then notice giving, grace giving is a matter of spiritual maturity.

Oh, look at what Paul says in verses six, seven and eight.

"Consequently we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well."¹⁵

Now here is what Paul is saying. You Corinthians, I am using the Macedonians to encourage you and what you started, you finish. You go ahead and fill out your commitment card. You said you would. Now do what you said you were going to do.

And then he reminds them in verse seven of how wealthy they are. Look at verse seven.

"But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also."¹⁶

Demonstrate your love for God by participating in giving.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 8:6.

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 8:7.

Verse eight.

“I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.”¹⁷

I want to motivate you by the sincerity of the love you have for the Lord. I want you to give.

Listen to me. When one begins to mature in his faith, he begins to look in his life not in possessions, but in what he can do for the kingdom and what he can do for others. So there is the encouragement. There is the example.

But then he gives us a strong exhortation of the master himself. Notice what the Bible says. Look at verse nine.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”¹⁸

I want you to see something. Jesus was rich. You know who Jesus is? Do you know what this Bible teaches about Jesus? Do you know what this church believes about Jesus?

You say, “Yes, sir, pastor. We believe he is the Son of God.”

You are exactly right. But also we believe that he is very God himself. We believe that not only is he the second in the godhead, but we believe that he is coequal with God the Father. Does he teach that? You better believe he teaches that.

Philip said, “Show us the Father and it will suffice.”

And Jesus said, “If you have seen the Father, you have seen me.”

He was rich. Jesus stood before those Pharisees who said their father was Abraham. Abraham was an extremely wealthy man, but Jesus said, “Before Abraham was. I am.”

The Queen of Sheba wanted to see all that Solomon had and when she came back someone asked her, “Is he as rich as they say he is?”

She said of Solomon, “The half has not yet been told.”

But I want to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, there is one greater than Solomon here and his name is Jesus. He is rich in his creation. God owns all of creation. He is rich in his adoration. When the Son of God, the announcement of his birth, the Bible said that all creation bowed down to worship him. He is rich in his possession. We are the inheritance

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 8:8.

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:9.

of almighty God. I want you to know something today, that we serve the King who is Lord and God and he is extremely wealthy. Oh, he is rich. But now watch. He became poor. What a play on words. The Macedonians were rock bottom poor. He became poor. He can identify with you in every issue of your life. There is not one issue of life that you have that he cannot identify with you. He was poor. He became poor. He chose poverty. His was a riches to rags story. How poor was he?

Jesus said, "The birds of the air have nests and the foxes who walk on the earth have holes, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

When Jesus slept, he slept on a borrowed pillow. When he rode into Jerusalem he had to borrow a donkey. When he preached he had to borrow a pulpit. When Jesus Christ died they had to borrow a tomb. When he died on the cross he only had one thing to his possession, one thing to his name. It was a robe. And they took that robe off of him and they gambled on it. He was rich, but he became poor. Why? That you and I might become rich.

And I want you to know something today, child of God. If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are above rich. You are filthy rich. You have got more than this world can ever understand. God is your Father. Jesus is your elder brother. Everything that heaven has is yours. You became rich because of his poverty.

The story is told of Rebecca Saint James who went to a song fest where some of the most popular Christian bands were going. They said when Rebecca showed up she obviously was not dressed to perform and she got out and not too far from where she arrived there was a karaoke tent and the story goes that there were two girls singing karaoke one of her songs and so she was so touched by it she went over and she stood at the back for a little while and she watched them sing. And then she walked down to where they were and she began to sing with them.

Now one of the little girls immediately recognized her and was dumbfounded and she couldn't sing anymore, but the other girl just kept singing. And when the song was through nobody in the room recognized Rebecca Saint James and the D. J. said, "Hey, would you like to sing another song?"

She said, "No, I have got to go." And she excused herself. She came in with a bandana and she had a tank top and she had blue jeans on and nobody even recognized who she was.

May I tell you something? When the Son of God came to this earth we were not even singing his songs. Men did not recognize him, because though he was God, though he thought it not robbery to be co-equal with God, he put down his richness, he put aside his wealth and he stepped into clothes like your clothes and my clothes and we did not recognize him. But he came to sing the songs of redemption and we are rich because of it.

Ah, ladies and gentlemen, listen to me. Are you listening? Say amen. You are rich. I am preaching to a bunch of rich folks today.

You say, “Not me, preacher. I ain’t got a pot or a window to throw it out of. I am just like what you said.”

Oh, yes, you are. Listen. Ephesians 1:3 says:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.”¹⁹

There is not one thing you need that your Father does not have.

Years ago the story came out of a mash unit in Vietnam days. There were so many casualties of war that when they brought in the soldiers who had been wounded they put colored tags on them. If you had a yellow tag, the yellow tag basically said you are going to make it. You are going to be ok. You are injured, but we can wait a few days before we have to fix you up. If they put a blue tag on you, that was worse. A blue tag said you are injured and you need help immediately. If they put a red tag on you, there was no hope for you. Your life was not salvageable and that you were going to die.

The story is told that a young nurse began to walk through the mash unit. As she did a young man with a red tag reached out and grabbed her by the arm and said, “Miss, would you do something for me? Would you tell my mom and dad, ‘Thank you’? Would you tell my brothers and sisters that I love you?”

She looked to his eyes and there seemed to be so much life into his eyes that she did the unthinkable. She took off his red tag and she put on a blue tag and the young man lived.

A few months later there was a general walking through the mash unit and he was looking seriously at the records. Finally he said to the doctor, “You in charge here?”

The doctor said, “Yes, sir, I am.”

He said, “There is a name here. I want to know about this name. There is a name of a young man who had a red tag who should have died, but he didn’t die. He got help. Somebody switched his tag and put a blue tag on him.”

And the nurse was within hearing distance and she said, “Sir, I did that. I am guilty of that.”

The general turned and he looked her right in the face and he took her by the arms and he said, “Thank you. That was my son. And because of what you did, my son is alive today.”

¹⁹ Ephesians 1:3.

I tell you, child of God, that he stepped out of the noon day of heaven into the midnight of earth, that he condescended, God almighty condescended to become like us so that we might become like him. He took the red tags of our sin and he paid for them with Calvary's cross. He put on us a white tag that said, "Righteous before God, propitiated by the blood of of Christ before God, saved by the grace of God."

God almighty, rich God, God who owned it all stepped out of glory into my heart and made me a child of the living God. I am a recipient of grace. I am a rich man and so are you.

Look at these wonderful, extraordinary truths. When our hearts are moved by grace, the grace of God we want to give generously. When our hearts are touched by the grace of God we count it a privilege to give. When we first give ourselves to the Lord we have the right priorities. How we walk in grace affects how we did.

Would you bow with me for a moment?

I want to ask you the most serious question that any many can ask you today. Listen carefully with eyes and hearts {?} if you are here today and you have been touched by the grace of God and saved by that grace, would you raise your hand and just say, "Pastor, yes, I have"?

Hands are raised all over the building. God bless you. Thank you.

If you are here today and you have not yet received the grace of God, you have not been saved, why don't you give your heart to Jesus today? Why not be saved today right now in a moment when the invitation is given? Say the eternal I do to Christ.

Here is what I want you to do. If you are a believer, I want you to bow your head and close your eyes. If you are not a believer as of yet, you have been thinking about it. You know that your life needs to be changed. Something has been going on in your heart and you don't understand it all. You came today. You have been coming. You have been looking for something that you don't have. I want you to look right at me if you are not a believer yet. I want you to look right at me. Now I can't see you, but you can see me. Look right at me if you have not given your heart to Christ. Young, old, it doesn't matter. Little girl, sonny boy, mom or dad, grand mom or grand dad and here is what I want you to do. If you are ready to give your heart to Christ, here is what I want you to do. I want you to pray silently as I pray aloud. Now if you want to pray aloud that is fine. And then I want you to make it in your heart. The Bible says we believe in our heart. We confess with our mouth. And today if the Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart and you need to become a believer today, look right at me. I can't see you. You can see me. Pray this prayer with me.

Lord Jesus,

Pray that in your heart.

Lord Jesus, I give you my soul. It doesn't belong to me any longer. It belongs to you. I confess.

Say that in your heart.

I confess the righteousness of Jesus in exchange for my own righteousness. Come into my heart and save me.

If you prayed that prayer in a moment we are going to stand and sing and I am going to offer you an opportunity to come and tell this church, "I prayed that prayer. I received Christ as my Savior. If I die I am going to heaven in the name of Jesus."

Congregation, would you stand please? For those of you who prayed with me, I am going to meet you right down here. My grandson prayed this morning to receive {?}. Why don't you come as bother Steve leads us.

[singing]

As some of you come today you say, "We believe this is where God wants us to be a part of a church and we want to offer our lives." We will take care of your letter. But you want to move your life. You believe this is where God wants you to come.

As Steve plays today, if you have never been saved, come. If you have been saved and never baptized come. If you are looking for a church home, you come. Won't you come right now? Anybody need here to make that decision for Christ.

Father, we believe that you have spoken to your people and, God, your Word to them is adequate for today in Jesus' name. Amen.

Congregation, would you be seated? Ushers, would you come forward please?