

Thanksgiving, Part 2

November 18, 2018

Pastor Jared Stoner, Lead Pastor

Last week we talked about the importance of giving thanks to God, specifically for his goodness and enduring love toward his people. Of course, that's most clearly seen in our redemption through Jesus, who claimed us back when, as Paul says, we had been sold as slaves to sin (Romans 7:14). This week I want to preach a second sermon on giving thanks and then you won't need to worry about giving thanks until next November. Kid-ding.

This week I want to preach a sermon on thanksgiving that's kind of the other side of the coin from what we talked about last week. So while we're still talking about thanksgiving, this week we won't talk about our thanksgiving to God for his provision to us, but how we can be used to help others give thanks to God for his provision to them. If it's fitting for us to remember God's goodness and enduring love and so give thanks to him, it's fitting for others to do so as well, and we can be a part of that process in their lives. So this morning I want to work through 2 Corinthians 9. I'll begin by reading 2 Corinthians 9:1-5.

Ushers, Please Come (vv 1-5)

Paul says, ¹*There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints.* ²*For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.* ³*But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be.* ⁴*For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say*

anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. ⁵*So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.*

In Acts 11:27-30, a prophet named Agabus predicted that a famine would ravage the whole world, here probably referring to the whole Roman world. Acts says that this would take place under Claudius. Secular Roman historians such as Dio Cassius and Tacitus record famines in Rome, Egypt, and Greece, while the Bible records the famine in Israel. As a result, Paul sets out to receive an offering from believers outside the land of Israel to be given to the believers inside the land of Israel. 2Corinthians 9, then, describes how Paul wants the offering to be given and more importantly for our purposes, why. So verses 1-5 describe Paul's attempt to make sure that the generous offering he had promised on their behalf would be given, and neither he nor they would be embarrassed when the ushers arrived to pick it up.

Sowing & Reaping (vv 6-11)

⁶*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* ⁷*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Paul reminds these believers that sowing and reaping are intimately connected to each other, both physically and spiritually. You reap what you sow, more than you sow, and after you sow and that's true across the board. Whoever sows generously tends to reap generously and whoever sows a small amount tends also to reap a small amount. That should be an encouragement to sow generously, but if it's not, Paul says, don't give past the point of cheerfulness because God loves a

cheerful giver. Another way to translate that Greek phrase is, "don't be crabby when you give because God doesn't like crabby givers." God doesn't like our crabby giving any more than parents like their children's crabby sharing. But Paul doesn't leave it there. He goes on in verse eight.

Abundant Grace (vv 8-11)

⁸*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.* ⁹*As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."* ¹⁰*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.* ¹¹*You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

So first notice Paul has shifted gears here and he's no longer just talking about money; he's talking about every good work. And he's saying that God wants to give his people enough resources so that they can abound or overflow in every offering, whether money or time or service. When it comes to giving, no matter what you're giving, God wants to give you enough of it so that you can be generous in giving it to others.

Paul then fills out what he's saying by pointing to what we should know already: whatever seed we have to sow has been given to us by God. This is the New Testament equivalent of Psalm 24:1, which says, "The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Our very lives are sustained by God. Each moment is a gift from him. Your intelligence and health are gifts from him. Your ability to work hard or the opportunities you received by being born into the family you were are all gifts from him. At the end of the day we're all called to be generous with God's stuff that has been entrusted to us.

Paul says that God wants to make us rich in every way. God wants to make us rich in every way SO THAT we can be generous on every occasion. Isn't that interesting. God wants to give us the gift of being able to be really generous, no matter what capital we're talking about. God loves cheerful giving so much that he wants to enable it in his children and use them to meet the needs of others.

So what's the end result of all of this? The end result of God enabling us to be generous on every occasion is that our generosity will result in others to giving thanks to God, which is what Scripture calls us to do. Instead of God giving what he has directly to each person, he uses his people to provide for the need of others but the thanksgiving still goes to him. Paul then concludes the chapter by fleshing that out a bit.

Thanksgiving & Intercession (vv 12-15)

¹²*This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.* ¹³*By their approval of this service, they will glorify God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.* ¹⁴*And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.* ¹⁵*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

Verses 12-15 outline the sometimes unexpected consequences of generosity. Obviously, when we give to others we meet their needs it's a great blessing to them. Our brothers and sisters in Christ then offer many expressions of thanks to God for our generosity because they understand what we do, that all provision is ultimately from God. And so we get to be a blessing and God gets the glory.

Paul also says in verse 13 that their service to the believers in Israel would lead those believers to glorify God because it would be proof to them that Gentile believers were not only claiming to follow Jesus, but were living that claim out. What provided the proof of the Gentile's genuine faith? Generosity.

What's Paul talking about with this discussion on Jewish and Gentile Christians? Acts records the difficult transition the church experienced as it spread from a primarily Jewish context to a Gentile one. It was hard for the church in Israel to wrap its mind around the fact that God was saving Gentiles.

Peter himself could hardly believe it. In fact, it wasn't until he was preaching and the Spirit came upon the room full of Gentiles and they began to speak in tongues that Peter got it. And even then he still struggled. For Paul, the generosity of these Gentile believers was proof positive that God had actually saved them and that they had the same spirit as their Jewish counterparts. It's one thing to claim to follow Jesus; it's another altogether to be generous with others, especially those you don't know and have had a long history of conflict with.

Even more unexpected is the result we find in verse 14. Because of the generosity of the Gentile believers, the Jewish believers would have their needs met, would give thanks to God for his provision as well as the authentic faith of the Gentile believers, but also would pray for their Gentile counterparts. Jewish Christians would pray for their Gentiles brothers and sisters. And as a result, all of their hearts would be knit together and the church would enjoy a new level of unity. All of that because of the generosity of God's people.

The way Paul ends this passage makes it clear that what's at stake is way beyond giving money in an offering. He says, "Thanks be to God for his inde-

scribable gift." What gift is it that God has given here? Is it the gift of seed to the Gentile believers so that they could be generous? Is it the provision for the Jewish believers? Is it the thanksgiving God receives for both of those things? Is it the unity this produces in the church? Is it the proof of genuine faith in the Gentiles? Yes. It's all of those things. God's gift is all of those things. God is so good at killing 27 birds with one stone. So what do we conclude from this?

Conclusions

One, generosity is a sign of authentic faith. God gives his children various forms of capital, whether spiritual, physical, intellectual, time, or financial. Having a generous heart is part of the work God does in our lives. The result is that God meets the needs of his people and his world while at the same time changing our hearts and receiving thanksgiving because of what he's done through us. Generosity is something that we should desire to see grow in our walk with the Lord because it makes us more like him.

Two, if we truly believe that thanksgiving is an important part of biblical faith, we'll not only want to give thanks to God, but to cause others to give thanks to him as well. And we do that by living generous lives. That's important to us here. WCAG is a worshipping family on mission. Practicing whole life generosity we exist to reproduce Jesus in people of every nation and generation. This passage is a large reason the phrase whole-life generosity appears in our mission statement. We want to be generous with all of the capital God has entrusted to us so that our lives would result in thanksgiving to God.

Three, the effects of generosity go far beyond meeting people's financial needs. Our generosity in service, in time, in the use of our talents, in finances, in learning, in forgiveness, in everything not only meets a wide variety of people's needs, but also draws them closer to God and draws us

closer to each other. As I've said before, this aspect of Christian faith cannot be lived outside of the church. It's why every believer needs to be connected to other believers.

Four, then, let me encourage you this week to not only make an effort to give thanks to God for his provision to you, but be deliberate in looking for ways to be generous with others so that they would give thanks to God. Think about ways to be generous with your family or friends or brothers or sisters in Christ. Maybe you will be around people this week who disagree with you spiritually or politically or with whom you have had a difficult history. Rather than avoiding them or trying to argue with them, try generosity. Be like God, who generously lets the sun shine on the evil and the good.

THANKSGIVING (Part 2)

November 18, 2018

Pastor Jared Stoner



www.wcag.org

