

The Ministry of Giving, Pt.2
Romans 15:25-29

We started going through this section last time we were together. We realize that Paul is concluding his letter and indicating one of the reasons that he is writing to them is that he plans to come to them, and hopes they as a church will be able to aide him in preaching the gospel in places like Spain and other places where Christ has not be heralded or known. But what Paul has to do first is to finish a very important ministry that he started amping the Gentile churches for the church at Jerusalem that was suffering in extreme poverty through taxes, a drought in that area, and ongoing ostracism and persecution for their faith in Christ. And he calls on many of the Gentile churches to alleviate the suffering.

And this is always a touchy subject. It seems that money and sex have taken over so many people's lives, and have come to dominate our society and even people in the church, that these subjects have become subjects that are rarely preached on. And when it comes to money and giving, which our passage addresses, so many people are fearful to address the subject. Some out of fear that they will be lumped in with the health and wealth and prosperity preachers that seek to line their pockets at the expense of the most vulnerable, making promises that they cannot keep. And any preacher who loves God would never want to be lumped into or confused with those false preachers of material wealth.

But I think there is another reason why we seldom hear sermons about money and giving. One is that it money is such a powerful entity in our lives and in our society. We realize when you preach and teach on money you are going to touch a nerve. And that is what biblical preaching many times does. It touches a nerve. It disturbs us and makes us uncomfortable. God's Word shows what controls our hearts and lives. And money is such a powerful entity because of how it interacts with our heart. It is so powerful, and it is incredible how much happens to be written in the Scriptures about money. The word of God teaches and preaches about money and it does so unabashedly and un apologetically. Of the thirty nine parables taught by our Lord, eleven of them deal with money and money related issues.

Now here is why money is so powerful - it is because of two realities: There is great danger in money, and secondly, there is great blessing in money. The Bible frequently warns us of the dangers of money and the love of money can bring into our lives. Listen for example to 1 Timothy 6:9-10, "**But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.**" Money and the desire for money has led to the destruction of so many. Paul calls that love the root of all kinds of evil. Money makes us selfish where our sinful wants and desires become central.

But money is also a powerful thing because it is also such a blessing in our lives. The emphasis of Scripture is the more God blesses us materially, the more good that we can do. Listen to Proverbs 10:15, "**A rich man's wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin.**" There is no blessing in poverty in and of itself. God

even promises to increase wealth to his Old Testament people who have a heart for him and give freely. Deuteronomy 15:10 talks about giving to a needy Israelite and how God will bless, **“You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.”**

And here is why money is such a powerful thing: it will expose the true love of yourself. The way that we think about, use and interact with money exposes our hearts. It will either be a means of blessing others or a doorway of selfish and indulgent living. It is like the two sides on a coin. Each side calls out to you. It has a vision and promise of life. The only question is what is money to us? Money calls out to us every day, and whether money is a blessing or a curse to us is answered every day. That is why Scriptures speaks so clearly and powerfully about money. It is really a powerful entity in our lives, and it can so easily dupe us in believing its false promises that money, more money, and the things that money can buy is where joy, contentment, life and security are found. We all have a theology of money whether we realize it or not.

And that is why we preach on money. My pay does not go up if you give when you have not been giving. I don't get a bonus at the end of the year because we have exceeded our budget. The deacons do not get an all expense paid vacation. We preach and teach on money unapologetically because we care about you and where your heart is.

And we saw last time we were together that Paul will be delayed from coming to Rome because he is in the process of bringing this offering from the churches of Achaia and Macedonia to the suffering believers at Jerusalem. And Paul say this as not just some sort physical or material aspect of life but as real ministry. That is what that word means, “aide.” It means serving or ministry for the glory of God and the advance of God's kingdom through serving others. The second point we made is that it is a privilege to give. And there are a couple more principles that I want to share this morning. I want to preach on giving because I want the highest and best for you.

1. Giving is fellowship in Christ. V. 26.

One of the things that we often talk about is the need and the importance of fellowship. And we have very loose ideas behind Christian fellowship. It might be just a synonym for coming together on Sunday morning, in other words, worship service. It might be having someone over for a meal at your home. We enjoy great friendship in Christ. And fellowship does include these elements but it is so much more than that. In J.R. Tolkiens, *Lord of the Rings*, there is a fellowship of nine individuals that will take the ring up to the mountain to be destroyed. And there are two element in that fellowship. One is a common purpose that they are all committed to, and that is the destruction of the Ring of Power. None will rest and stop until the quest is done. And the other aspect is they will support one another in that quest. There is a willingness to carry the burden of that ring and the temptations that it brings.

Well fellowship in the church also has both those elements. We realize that we have a common purpose that we have talked about in the passage above, and that is the making and maturing of disciples for the glory of God. This is why we just do not go to church but we are involved in this fellowship. We have a common purpose of how God has chosen to be glorified in this day and age. We cannot carry out that purpose

on our own. And that is the second element. We are willing and we do carry the burden and hazards and sacrifices of ministry one with another. No one carries the burden alone. We cannot do it in our own. We are all involved and all carry this burden.

And you certainly see both of these elements in our passage before us. Look at verse 26 again, **“For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.”** Last time we were together we pointed out that although giving is sacrifice, there was no complaining. Although it was difficult because they already lived in difficult circumstances, it pleased or it brought pleasure and joy for them to give. But the word that I want to hone in on for a couple moments is the word “contribution.” Do you see it in the text? They wanted to make **“some contribution for the poor saints at Jerusalem.”** The word for “contribution” here is a Greek word that many believers are familiar with, and that is the Greek word “koinonia.” It is the Greek word for “fellowship.” And think of this gospel endeavour here with the two elements that we mentioned. Certainly, there was a loud message to the church at Jerusalem that we are in this gospel ministry together. Certainly it created that oneness of purpose and intent.

But the second is that we help carry the burdens - the burdens of others and the burden of making and maturing disciples for the glory of God. And think of how this monetary gift of love must have been so encouraging to these saints as they sought to make much of Christ. It no doubt was a tool in the Saviour’s hand to encourage them and cause them to persevere. But notice in the passage what they gave is **“some contribution.”** This is the amazing thing, is that no one individual and no one church can do it on their own. This is a combined effort and combined fellowship and ministry. We are in this together. We support what is going on together. So, by Paul using this term, he is saying that their giving is not just bland, some sort of obligation or some sort of giving like we would pay our taxes. But there is soul and heart and purpose and meaning and care behind their giving. Carrying the burdens of others is not popular. Money and the love of money causes us to be so self-focussed. We want to finance the kingdom of self. The more we get the greater the barns. We have all felt that rush when buying something.

Now, none of us loves paying taxes. We never say hooray, my property taxes went up! But listen to 2 Corinthians 9:7, **“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”** What that giving looks like from person to person might be different. But here is the thing, because this is a shared ministry and it is not a heartless ministry but because we care about God and others, we give. Not out of compulsion but freely and joyfully. We give with other believers. We give not to be applauded by for God’s glory.

Listen to what Paul David Tripp writes about this to challenge our thinking, **“When you have extra money, what do you dream of buying? In the use of your money, does it make you happier to use it for your own purposes and pleasure or to offer it to God for his purposes and the work of his kingdom? Do you find it is way easier to get than it is to give? Do you envy the person next to you who has resources you don’t have? Do you tend to spend more than you should while telling yourself that you would give more if you could? Does the level of your contentment rise and fall with the amount of money that’s in your wallet? Are you**

able to celebrate what you've been given while at the same time looking without compassion at someone clearly needier than you? Are you ready, willing, and quick to give? Do you look for need that you can alleviate with resources that you don't really need? Are you glad to give, even in seasons when you don't have much?"

We live in a Christianity where the individual is central. Whole internet ministries have taken hold, so much so that you never have to enter a physical church or associate or be involved with other believers. It is all about me and God. There is no thought about giving or giving in fellowship with other believers where our hearts are united together for a common purpose. This is how the Greek churches gave. They gave because money is a powerful thing, but their love for God and even others was even more powerful and life changing. Money will expose what rules your heart. This side of eternity it exposes how our hearts are easily led astray from what God says is important. Money in these churches became not an idol but a tool for God's glory. How great is our love for God? Have we entered into the fellowship of Christ by not only belonging to the church but serving and sacrificing and giving with other believers for the glory of God?

2. We realize, secondly, that we have a moral obligation to give. V. 27.

It is amazing that when we hear the word obligation, or in this case debt, the first thing we think of is that it takes away from serving out of love, or the freedom of loving as God loved us. But we realize that Jesus Christ came out of the will and obedience of the Father, and certainly that did not stifle or limit the love that he has shown us from the sacrifice of the cross. So we read of Jesus in Philippians 2:8, **"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."** Jesus obeyed God the Father. He was obliged to obey him. But He loved God and he loved us. We read earlier in this epistle in Romans 5:8, **"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** No one is ever honoured by mere obligation or obedience. We see that in children. If asked to clean their rooms and they do but grudgingly, they do not honour mom or dad. But if they hear the command and love mom or dad and obey out of love they are still obliged but that loving obedience honours mom and dad. Their love is evident.

And here, there is no specific command given to the Gentile churches to give, but they do have a moral obligation. Look at what he says here, **"For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them."** We see those two words, "pleased," and "owe" in the same clause. They freely gave and joyfully gave, because they realized, **"For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings."** The Gentiles have come to share the spiritual blessings of the Jewish church. And what he is talking about here is salvation in Christ. The gospel as we have seen in chapter one came to the Jew first and then to the Greek. But the gospel didn't stay in Jerusalem, but through various different means through God's providence, Jewish believers started sharing their faith in Christ with non-Jewish believers who became followers of Christ. The early missionaries came from this church and were all Jewish. Now here is where

love comes in, and they were not just takers. The Gentile churches were given spiritual blessings, and now they are to give material blessings in return.

And the application is not difficult is it? We receive so much from the church of Jesus Christ. The greatest spiritual blessings that we have received, the greatest growth that has come through our lives, and our spiritual lives are all wrapped up in the church. God has used the church to give us untold blessings in Christ. This is the vehicle that he has chosen to use. Therefore we have a debt or obligation. And it is joyfully to support the church of Jesus Christ and its ministries through the material things of life. And again, it is not just that one person or a minority of individuals support the church but we all benefit so we all support the church. There is a mutual fellowship and indebtedness that is ours in Christ Jesus. And as we see growth in our own lives and the lives of those around us, then it should be our joy to give what we have received so abundantly from the church of Christ.

Listen to Paul David Tripp again, **“your world of money will be determined by your allegiance to the work of one of two kingdoms: the kingdom of God or the kingdom of self. God gives you money not so much to make sure that your kingdom works, but to connect you by grace to the work of a much bigger, much better kingdom. As you give yourself to the work of this kingdom, you get to watch your money do things that are literally of eternal consequence. In offering your resources to the bigger kingdom, your money is used to fuel the most important work in the universe—redemption.”**

He goes on and says, **“When I misuse money, I don’t misuse it because I am ignorant or without a budget. No, I misuse it because at that point I don’t care what God or anyone else says. I want what I want, and if I can use my resources to get it, I am going to get it. Money matters because it interacts with one of the most significant issues in my heart: the selfishness of sin. No amount of money, education, or budget construction has the power to free me from the ravenous greed of my sinful heart. For that, I can only look to one thing: the powerful grace of my Redeemer. He knows how selfish and greedy I can be. He knows how I make a resolution one day that I abandon the next. He knows how easily I am seduced into thinking that there is something in the creation that will satisfy my longing heart. He knows that I can say that I believe in God yet live as if he does not exist. So, he has blessed me with his right-here, right-now grace. Yes, that grace forgives me, but it does more: it provides everything I need to live in the money crazy world in the way that I was designed to live.”**

So let me ask you: do you realize your joy and your obligation here? Do we really show where our heart is and our appreciation to God for all that he does by giving? Are we living for his kingdom or our own. Money is a diagnostic tool to help us see our heart. Money is either a great blessing or a great curse to you spiritually. Which is it? Let close by quoting again 2 Corinthians 9:7, **“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”**