

The Grace of Giving
Stewardship 2022
John 3:1-16 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-15
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This morning our topic is the Grace of Giving. This is a phrase Paul uses in his Epistle to the Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 8:7 *"See that you excel in the grace of giving."*

This morning is a message about making a decision about your giving to God's mission, through his Church, in 2023. And doing it prayerfully.

There are many demands on our income, and our needs and desires usually rise beyond the level of our income. So for those who name Jesus Christ as Lord it is important that our first commitment is to Him and his Kingdom. And my experience is that my other needs and wants then fall into their rightful place. As Jesus said seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

We are going to look at our readings from Corinthians and John, however, I want to do that using the outline of our four Values in Vision 26. Those values are Bible based, Christ centred, Spirit led, Mission shaped. These Values guide all we do in a church and as we practice them we will fulfil our Vision of 'Living to Love and Proclaim Jesus.'

1. BIBLE BASED

The fact that we are going to address these values by looking at the scripture should give you the clue that we are Bible based. I could appeal to you to give to God's church because we are a worthy charity just as good as any other charity in the community and supporting charity is a good thing to do.

But I want to appeal to you on the basis of God's Word. Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."* When we sit under God's Word it feeds our souls, feeds our inner being and we hear words of life. The world says life is found by spending money on your own pleasure. God's Word says life is found through the grace of giving.

We give because God's Word calls us to give. This brings glory to God and it blesses people.

2. CHRIST CENTRED

What is the central motivation in Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians to give to his Jerusalem Appeal? It is The Grace which is found in Jesus Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 8:9 he 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 through his poverty might become rich."*

The Amazing Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!!!

'though he was rich' What does that mean? Philippians 2 mirrors this passage when it says Jesus was in very nature God. From the rest of scripture we know that Jesus is the Son, second person of the Trinity. From all eternity he has enjoyed intimate relationship with the Father and the Spirit and all the glories of heaven.

Philippians 2 goes on to say, *"He did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant being made in human*

likeness." Jesus leaves his special place with the Father and the Spirit and comes to this earth taking our human nature,

- walking the dusty streets of Palestine,
- mixing with the sick and the socially outcast,
- coping with fickle crowds and thick disciples,
- engaging with powerful forces of evil, and
- finally going to the cross.

Philippians 2 goes on to say, *"He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!"*

So Jesus becoming poor, wasn't just about him taking human flesh and living the life we live; it was also about him going to the cross. That's where the poverty degenerates to it's lowest point, in the degradation, suffering and shame of the crucifixion. Jim Packer puts it rather well when he says, *"The crucial significance of the cradle at Bethlehem lies in its place in the sequence of steps down, that led the Son of God to the Cross of Calvary."*

Paul goes on to say, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

- Rich in redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,
- Rich in grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
- Rich in newness of life,
- Rich in the gifts of the Spirit,
- Rich in adoption as God's sons and daughters
- Rich in wisdom and understanding
- Rich in being pre-destined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.
- Rich in the gospel of our salvation
- Rich with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit

Most of these wonderful riches of the gospel I found in Ephesians 1. I just added a few others that came to mind, thrown in for good measure.

Jesus dies so that we might live. And not just live, but enjoy all the blessings of the gospel. He did it so that, *'through his poverty you might become rich'.*

And Jesus pattern is to be our pattern.

It's a pattern...

- of dying and rising,
 - of riches to poverty, in order to provide riches for others,
- This is the pattern of all those who would follow him. When we give up ownership of our financial resources and put them at his disposal, we release the power of the gospel in the world afresh. To put this into practice is to excel in the grace of giving.

Grace is a wonderful word in the Christian vocabulary. It can actually be used in two ways.

It can refer to all that God has done for us in Christ. The grace of the gospel is Jesus' life death and resurrection for our salvation. The way Paul puts it to the Corinthians is *'Jesus Christ though he was rich yet for our sake becoming poor, so that we might become rich.'*

So grace is what God has done for us, but grace is also about what he wants to do through us. It is the grace the Macedonian churches [probably Philippi and Thessalonica] exercised in giving money to Paul's appeal with reckless generosity. Paul is looking for this same sort of grace to be shown by the Corinthians. This is what he is talking about when he exhorts them to excel in the grace of giving. This is grace which is extended to others by generous financial giving. "Excel in this grace." he says.

So grace is about what God wants to do for us but also what he wants to do through us. Either way it is a Christ centred grace.

3. SPIRIT LED

To illustrate being 'Spirit led' I want to look at John Chapter 3 – the well-known story of Nicodemus meeting Jesus at night.

The amazing thing about this story is that to all outward appearances Nicodemus is a very spiritual man. He was a respected Pharisee, a member of the Jewish ruling council we read in v1. He taught people the Jewish scriptures. Yet Jesus said he had to be born again.

Jesus is saying, 'start again'. It's not like he's saying there's just a few bits of your theology you have to fix up. No, he's saying you're totally on the wrong track, go back and start again and get on the right track.

Jesus is talking about a new life in the Holy Spirit. Now one of the best examples of this I know in the scriptures is the passage we looked at last week and the story of Zacchaeus. Here is a man who was totally on the wrong track, a man who had to repent, that is, turn around go back to the beginning and start again.

CS Lewis in his famous book *Mere Christianity* said this, "*Jesus Christ didn't come to make you nice. He came to make you new. Christianity is not about teaching a horse to jump better. It's about turning a horse into a winged creature.*"

It's about a new start being a new creature.

So the Spirit brings about a new birth, a new life which is totally centred on Jesus Christ. It's about knowing him as Saviour and the forgiveness he offers. It's about following him as Lord.

Zacchaeus found the Saviour and forgiveness, '*Today, salvation has come to this house.*'

Zacchaeus followed Jesus as Lord – he gave half his money to the poor and reimbursed anyone he had defrauded four times. This is what is meant by a horse becoming a winged creature. It is a totally new animal doing what it couldn't do before. For Zacchaeus he was a new creature, born again. Previously his money was there primarily for his own pleasure.

Now it was there for the Kingdom of God, so he gave it away in bucketloads.

This is one of the evidences of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life, of being born again, of being led by the Spirit. People who are filled with the Holy Spirit, know the grace of giving.

4. MISSION SHAPED

The apostle Paul had a great heart for mission. That's why he travelled all around the Mediterranean planting churches and then pastoring them, usually at a distance through his letters. Paul knew his calling was to reach the Gentiles, where as Peter, James and John were called to reach the Jews.

But Paul never lost sight of the Jewish church in Jerusalem. In Galatians 2:9 Paul says, "*Peter, James and John agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do.*" 2 Corinthians Chapters 8-9 are about Paul's collection for the Church in Jerusalem who were doing it tough. Paul is fulfilling his promise to remember the poor. Paul is showing his heart for the Jewish believers.

One of the great themes in Paul's theology is the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in one body, the Body of Christ. Paul argues in Romans 15:27 that, "*If the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.*" Paul wanted people to see how the Gospel

made a practical difference and broke down Jewish Gentile animosity. He also wanted to counter the false teaching of the Judaisers who were preaching circumcision, and demonstrate the unity of the Body of Christ.

There are some huge gospel issues at stake here. This was much bigger than just taking up a collection for some people in Jerusalem who were poor.

And likewise, when we give to God's church it is for a big theological and missional purpose.

-We are wanting to glorify God.

-We are wanting the name of Jesus Christ to be lifted high in both proclamation and living.

-We are wanting the power of the Holy Spirit to be at work in the world today bringing Christ's healing and salvation.

So our giving should be mission shaped just as it was for Paul.

It is very pleasing to see how strong the mission giving is here at Noosa Anglican. Parish Council has set a goal that our mission giving be at least 11% of our Offertory giving. Our Treasurer Ian Mortley tells me we are meeting this goal.

But I want you to know your Offertory giving also has a mission edge. We are running Alpha and reaching out into the community. Every invitation issued to come to Alpha is mission, is a witness to the gospel. If people accept the invitation and come that is a bonus. If they find Christ when they do Alpha that's a special bonus. But simply offering the course is fulfilling the call to mission.

We are a mission shaped church through the agencies we support and through ministries like Alpha.

CONCLUSION

My friends this is the time of year when we ask you to especially pray and consciously decide what your pledge will be for the coming year.

I direct you to the brochure we've given out. Please read, mark, learn and inwardly digest.

I always encourage people to think of their giving in percentage terms. If you are a pensioner then a small percentage will be a wholehearted and generous gift unto the Lord. If you have a significant income then I want to suggest you should be looking at a big percentage if it is to be a sacrificial offering to the Lord. John Calvin said this, *"God never requires that you should contribute more than your resources allow. In this way none is left with any excuse, since rich men owe God a large tribute and poor men have no reason to be ashamed if what they give is small."*

Paul says in verse 15, *"The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."*

But most importantly please take time to pray.

Please...

-Take time to reflect on 1 Corinthians 8 and Paul's exhortation to be generous.

-Take time to reflect on John 3 and what it means to be a new creature in Christ with a new perspective on your finances.

-Look afresh at the Vision of your church and the progress we are making achieving it.

-Live out the Values of being Christ centred, Bible based, Spirit led, and Mission shaped.

Please renew your commitment this week and excel in the grace of giving. May your decision be to the glory of God. Amen.