

October 11, 2009
Pentecost 19
Philippians Sermon Series

“The Beauty of Generous Giving”

PHILIPPIANS 4:14-23

Let it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. ²¹ Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. ²² All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus once said that it is better to give than it is to receive. Paul found that true in his life and he saw it in the lives of his dear Christian friends who generously gave him help while he was a prisoner in Rome. It is better to give than receive.

Take the example of a ten year old boy named Derek who lived to fish with his grandfather. Only this summer at the lake cabin was different. For the first time he would share his fishing time with his little sister who had just learned how to cast out the bait and retrieve. Grandpa rowed the boat, and Derek cast his lure into the weed bed, but no luck. Then he heard his sister scream, "I have a fish." Only seven years old, she pulled in a two pound bass which they proudly showed to the rest of the family. Derek and Grandpa went out again by themselves. Derek would not give up. He kept casting and casting, and then he saw the large bass rise out of the water to grab the lure. After a furious battle, he pulled it into the boat, a five pounder twice as big as his sister's fish. He looked at it and then said to Grandpa, "Let's let it go." He did not want to spoil his sister's joy. That day Derek had the joy of catching the largest bass of his life. He had the greater joy which comes from knowing it is better to give than receive.

Today we are coming to an end of our series of sermons on Philippians, affectionately called the epistle of joy. Let's listen as Paul writes to his dear Christian friends about the joy of generous giving which they had experienced in their lives. Some of the happiest moments in your life have come when you have been generous with the time, talents and treasures the Lord has give you in your life.

Generous giving helps others

Generous giving is such a beautiful thing because of what it does for others.

Paul tells us how much the generosity of the Christians in Philippi meant to him when he writes, "Yet, it was good for you to share with me in my troubles." It was not just once that these Christian friends shared in Paul's troubles. It happened time and time again. These dear Christians kept track of Paul while he was engaged in doing mission work. They gave him financial support, their prayers and people who encouraged him. He wrote in 2 Corinthians, "For the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need." Then they lost touch with him. Finally, they got the word he was a prisoner in Rome where Paul had been forgotten and neglected by the Christians in Rome. He writes to Timothy these sad words, "Only Luke is with me." In their generosity, these amazing Christians in Philippi sent a man by the name of Epaphroditus with gifts they had gathered for Paul. He made the long arduous journey by land and sea to Rome and nearly died.

This generosity was deeply appreciated by Paul. He writes, "I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus, the gifts you have sent." Even great heroes of faith who seem to be invincible need the support and generosity of their fellow Christians. Galatians 6 says, "Do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith." Think of the Christians who are part of your life and ask yourself the question, "How much do they need my generosity and support?" There is such a beauty in Christian homes when family members are generous in their love for one another. There is such beauty when husbands and wives learn how to be generous with each other in love and patience. There is such a beauty in a Christian church when Christians are not afraid to give of themselves to learn about the needs of their fellow Christians that they might pray for them, encourage them and show their love in Christ. We tend to underestimate how much others need this generosity, especially those who seem to be so strong in the Lord, people such as the Apostle Paul.

Generous giving glorifies God

Generous giving does more than just help other people. It also gives glory to God. He writes, "Not that I am looking for a gift, But I am looking for what may be a credit to your account." A more literal translation from the Greek might read, "I am looking for fruit which might increase to your account." Paul does not hesitate to encourage even greater investments of time and money and prayers from these people because it will be an investment which pays off tremendously by giving glory to God and turning the hearts of people to Jesus.

The words used here have the thought of bearing interest in account. Think of your life as having two accounts. One account is the righteousness you need to be accepted and loved by God in this life and for all eternity. You know that the debt of sin in this account is huge. Take one small slice of your life this past week, examine it under the microscope of God's law, and you will come to the conclusion of the hymn writer who wrote, "Foul and full of sin I am. I am all unrighteousness." Then look at the righteousness of Christ that was put into your account and his blood that paid the price of sin for you. Recall what Paul wrote about this righteousness in chapter three, "That I gain Christ and be found in him, not have a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that is through faith in Christ- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." When we look at Jesus

we realize how generous he was with us. "He became sin for us who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him." "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that through his poverty you might become rich." Some of you go online to check how much money is in your bank account. Every day we can open God's Word and realize how rich we are in Christ.

Then there is the other account. There are the opportunities to give glory to God and show how good he is by the generous lives that we live for him. That's the account Paul was referring to when he wrote, "I have been looking for what may be credited to your account." These generous gifts were like a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. As I was working on this part of the sermon, my mind went back to one of those very special Saturdays in fall, when my mom baked bread and cinnamon rolls. I realize why she did this on Saturdays when we were home from school. We would come in and smell the cinnamon rolls fresh from the oven. We would enjoy them when they were still warm with a glass of milk. The smell just made you want a fresh cinnamon roll. When Christians are generous because Christ has been so generous with them, it draws other people to want to have Jesus in their lives as their Lord and Savior.

How can we ever forget the stirring words of Paul from this letter to the Philippians? "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." With Paul we say, "We bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ." With Paul we say, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection." We want the power of Christ's resurrection to ooze forth from every pore of our being.

Generosity trusts God

Generosity is beautiful for another reason. It puts God to the test and trusts in the Lord to provide. Paul was not afraid to ask these poor people to give even more to Lord. He writes, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in Christ." Notice these words do not say, "God will meet some of your needs from his glorious riches in Christ." Christians who give generously discover that even when they seem to empty what they have, the Lord fills it up again, sometimes in even greater measure than before. You don't have to be afraid to totally give yourself and your love to those around you. You will not come out on the short end of the stick. Christians find joy in planning their finances in such a way that they can give generously to the Lord. I know a man who wrote how much he planned to give on his offering envelopes at the beginning of the year, trusting that the Lord would supply his needs. What if you were so bold as to take a percentage of your income and designate it for the Lord? Would he not supply your needs from his great riches in Christ? Even if you could not make the amount there would be the joy that comes with having done your best for the Lord.

Many years ago, some farmers thought they could eat all their big potatoes and use only the small ones for seed. After years of planting small potatoes, all they discovered that small potatoes only produced small potatoes. Galatians 6 tells us, "A man reaps what he sows." If we are selfish and sow only small potatoes, we will never experience the rich, full abundant life Jesus mentioned in John 15 where he said, "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full." Jesus said, "Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap."

Paul concludes his letter of joy with a joyful final greeting. We hear the chains rattling one more time. Is that a tear we see welling up in his eyes as he writes? "Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." Amazing grace! Truly amazing! There were saints in Caesar's household, converts to the Christian faith who told Paul specifically to greet the dear Christians in Philippi, fellow saints who brought even more joy into their lives.

Read this letter of joy over and over again. Make it your own. It will never disappoint you as you are encouraged to "Rejoice in the Lord! Rejoice in the Lord always! Amen.