



2 Corinthians 8:1-7, “The Generosity Gospel: In Corinth”

By: Brent Joseph, transcribed from a live conference in the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp

Did everyone have a good sleep last night? It is very different on the other side of the world and not sleeping in your own bed. We are all a little tired today, but we are going to give you everything we got. We are going to begin in Second Corinthians chapter eight. Do you remember from yesterday, we read from this chapter? Yes? We are going to read the first three verses again.

2 Corinthians 8:1-3:

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia;

For during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means.

Paul says that they “voluntarily gave,” that “they gave according to what they had.” Paul continues to say that they even gave beyond what they should have given. When we speak about generosity among the Christian community, we remember how we discussed yesterday, the very nature of God. That we are made in the image of God, and God is generous in His very nature. We as the church are to reflect God’s image towards our fellow man. We are to give “voluntarily.” No one can force you to give. No one can force you to love. These are all things that come from the heart. Forcing someone to give is just robbery. This verse says here, and this is Paul the apostle speaking. You have to remember this is Paul. Was Paul the apostle an expert? Did Paul know what he was speaking of concerning Christ? Paul was not only an expert, he was THE expert. Am I speaking my words or am I speaking Paul’s words? Are we departing into my own ideas or are we staying exactly with what is being spoken from the Scripture? These are not my ideas. We are not talking about my ideas or American ideas. We are talking about Christ’s ideas and that is what we will continue to discuss.

This church gave voluntarily concerning what they had because every man’s giving towards another is dependent upon what they have and not upon what they do not have. If

we are in the mindset that, “I will only give when I attain a new status” then we will not accomplish anything. I want to read to you from Matthew’s gospel. This chapter we are going to read a small portion of its foundational teaching in Christianity. If you’re ever wondering, “Where do I begin?” Matthew chapters 5-7 are foundational teachings on discipleship. In these teachings of Jesus here, we will see the tight alignment with what Paul says in the second letter to the Corinthians as we just read and that his teaching comes down from Christ himself.

Matthew 5:38-42:

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'
But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;

and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well;
and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

In the teaching of Christ, he is teaching us not to be resistant. Jesus teaches us to not be resistant. He teaches us not to be forceful. The teachings of Christ say that we are not to be demanding, but the teaching of Christ is to be generous. This last verse we read in Matthew 5:42 may bother you and cause you to wonder, “Did he really mean what he said? How does Christ expect me to fulfill this word?” As we discussed yesterday, the message of Christ is simple, but it is not easy. Is Matthew 5:42 in your Bibles too? You can see it in there right? If this was all you learned, you would be better for it. If this was all you read, you all would be better for it. Again, Christianity is not complicated. It is self-sacrifice for the benefit of others out of love, and you know it is easy to do these things when you have only one thing in mind. You have to have in mind that you are doing it for the Lord. You have to have in mind when you are giving to others you are actually giving to Christ.

Raise your hand if you would confess that you would give anything to Christ. If Christ was here, right here, would you give anything to him that he asked? If not, you would be a fool. You would be a fool not to. And so, Christ says how we treat each other is how we serve him. Let me just tell you something before we go to the next Scriptures. Miracles will not save you. Do you understand these things? Miracles happen to help you, but they will not save you. Most Christians I know chase miracles instead of chasing the teachings of Christ and changing. Pursuing the teaching of Christ and living according to how Christ has called us to live, that is salvation.

Luke 14:12-14:

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

These things are not easy, but they are simple. My question to you is, "Will you allow Christ's words to transform your life? Will you allow the Word of God to change the way that you think?" I did not come here to do miracles. If miracles happen, that is God's business. Miracles are beyond my control. We came to help people transform their lives and grow closer to Christ Jesus.

Luke 14:25:

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them.

Jesus has large crowds following him. He had much larger crowds than this one here. Now Jesus has these large crowds following him, and you would think that Jesus Christ would want these large crowds to continue to follow him. You would think, "Certainly, any pastor would want a large church." And yet, we will see what Jesus says.

Luke 14:26:

Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.

Jesus is using extreme language here to make a point. How can Jesus tell us to love our enemies and later tell us to hate our own families? He is using this extreme language to make a point. We know this because Jesus says that even life itself, there is nothing in life that should come before him. He says that unless we do these things we cannot be his disciple. Let me break this down for you. A disciple is a student. What does a student do? When the children go to school they are students, so what are they doing at school all day long? They are learning. They are learning from the teacher. Jesus said you cannot be my disciple unless you put nothing else before him. So what he is saying is that you cannot follow his teaching unless you put nothing else before me. You cannot, it is impossible to follow the teaching of Christ if we do not abandon the requirements and expectations of all other worldly relationships and bonds so that we are bonded to him alone. This is the cost of discipleship.

This is the problem right here. “So what are you saying Jesus? You are saying that I cannot even learn from you, I am not able to follow you unless nothing else is genuinely as important and elevated in my life as you are?” And the answer is: yes. To be his disciples, he calls us to forsake all. Now remember, he has these large crowds following him. And he starts to preach to them this intimidating message. He doesn’t care if they go. He is only interested in the true followers. He doesn’t care if they go.

Luke 14:27:

Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

In the times of Jesus, disciples not only listened to the teaching of their teachers. But in the culture and time of Jesus, a disciple would literally follow a teacher wherever he would go. Disciples would do this because a disciple never wanted to miss even the smallest detail in their master’s teaching. Jesus says, “If you do not carry the cross and follow me you cannot be my disciple.” Now what was the cross? We know it as a symbol of Christianity. We see it as a symbol of hope. It hangs from almost every church in this camp. But what did it mean in the time of Jesus? What did it mean in the minds of the people who were listening to his message? The cross was a tool used by the Roman empire for executing criminals with shame. It would be like saying, unless you take a rope and tie it around your neck, you cannot follow me.

How the crowds understood “the cross” is very different from the way we may process these words as we hear or read them today. We have to not only take up our cross, but we have to follow him. What does it mean to take up our cross? Does this mean that the Lord wants us to die? Some of us may die, but this does not mean that the Lord wants us to die. What he means is, do you hide from the hardship that is required while following him? Do not be like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the good samaritan, who walked around to the other side of the road from the man who was hurt. Following Christ will cost you something. Do you hear me? Following Christ will cost you something. There is cost to discipleship.

Most people want to follow Christ because they want something. He will give to you, but he will also require of you. Now you can say, “Brent, how do you know these things? What makes you think you are so smart?” Well, I am not smart. I am an average man. The only reason that I know this is because all you have to do is keep reading. What I said is exactly what Jesus is about to say when we just keep reading in Luke chapter 14.

Now I want to speak to the pastors here for a minute. We had a conversation last night. A group of pastors met together, and we talked about two differences. Again, this is for the pastors wherever you are and whoever you are. There is one kind of pastor who says, "Ah, I have an idea. I would like to say this to the people." This pastor then begins to go through the Scripture, and he begins to pick out all the verses that he likes. The pastor patches verses together and then looks at his work and thinks to himself that it is beautiful, because he gets to say what he wants. Now sometimes this method is appropriate. Sometimes, but not always, and there is another way. There is another kind of pastor who goes into the Word of God, and he knows in his mind that he is just a man. He knows in his heart that he is not sure what the people really need. This pastor prayerfully enters into the Scripture seeking what he does not already know. And in this way, the pastor comes across treasure. And instead of making points and teaching from what he already had in his mind, he is teaching from the Word of God.

We want to allow the Word of God to speak for itself and give us the answers. Many, many times, if you just keep reading, and pay attention to what is being said, and pay attention to what follows, then you will find the meaning. So what does Jesus mean here in Luke 14? He says if you do not bear your cross you cannot be his disciple. He said if you do not follow him you cannot be his student. Now he explains, and we are going to see and understand why Jesus is saying these things.

Luke 14:28-30:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?

Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him,

saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

Now remember, do not forget, this is Jesus explaining to a multitude of people what it is like to follow him. You would not go out to build a large structure like a tower without first estimating the cost. You see, this multitude is following Christ, and I can just see Jesus stopping and thinking to himself, "These people have no idea what they are getting themselves into. I should warn them." These crowds think they want to follow him, but they must first know that they have to be willing to hate even life itself, to not put anything above their Lord and Master. They have to know it will cost them something. They have to estimate the cost of the tower they are about to build, unless they begin to say that they are a follower of Christ, begin to follow Him, and they don't recognize what it will cost them. This chapter in Luke's gospel is not history. This is a message for today. If we say that we want to follow him, and yet we live otherwise, we will be subject to mockery. Jesus then

gives another example to make the same point. These are not just words. If you are his disciple, these are the words of your Master.

Luke 14:31:

Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand?

No king who uses his mind will send his armies into a war he knows they will lose. Maybe a foolish king would, but not a king that uses his mind. The example here is that we should think. We should not get involved in a situation we will not be able to see until the end result, specifically with respect to following Christ. So where is all of this going? What does all this teaching mean?

Luke 14:32 and 33:

If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.

So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

No one wants to hear these words. This does not mean that to follow Christ you have to give away everything right now and have nothing. But what it does mean is that we are not attached to the things that we own. It means that we live with an open hand. This was the understanding of the early church. Do you remember where we began in Second Corinthians chapter eight? That they gave willingly. They must have understood the teaching of Christ. Would you give willingly if you knew in your mind that by not doing so you were not following him and being his disciple? Knowing what is required of us produces the willingness. You see when you teach people about Jesus Christ you do not have to force them to do anything. If they care for their own souls, if they love the Lord, and if they decide to follow him, they will always do more than what you could ever imagine. Followers of Christ have been known throughout the centuries to go beyond and to do more than what was expected of them. I want you to keep in mind these teachings of Christ. I want you to keep them in mind for your own life, but I also want you to keep them in mind as we go back to Second Corinthians chapter eight. We will begin again in verse 1 again.

2 Corinthians 8:1-3:

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia;

For during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means.

In verse two, we see they had joy in affliction. We see that they had generosity in poverty. They did not even love even life itself, and the suffering that they had surrounding them could not compare to what they had in Christ Jesus. How could they have generosity in poverty? The verse says “poverty” it does not say “nothingness.” So, because none of their possessions were their own, the little that they had, they were willing to give to those who were in need. The verse says that their poverty overflowed into a wealth of generosity.

Let me ask you, how does poverty become wealth? Before you answer, I want you to sit and think about this for a second. How does poverty become wealth? These are questions that we will be discussing for the next three days. As with so many things in the kingdom of God, the answer to this question is probably the opposite of what we think. For those of you who own Bibles, I want you to read in Matthew chapters 5-7 on your own time. For those of you without Bibles, try to find one that you can borrow for the specific purpose of reading these chapters in Matthew’s gospel. If you do not own a Bible and you borrow one, make sure you do two things. You need to either have a very good memory or take good notes. That is number one. If you borrow a Bible, the second thing you must do is bring it back to the person you borrowed it from and say thank you. You will see from these chapters in Matthew that the teachings of Christ and the kingdom of God is the opposite of what you expect it to be.

How do you turn poverty into wealth? I am going to give you the answer. Are you ready? You give it away. If you are in poverty and you have a jacket, and I am cold and I have no jacket. If you put your jacket on me, you have just made me rich. That is how you turn poverty into wealth. You see most would think what I meant was, how do you turn your poverty into your wealth. No, that is not what we are here to talk about. You can turn your poverty into wealth by taking care of someone else who does not have what you have under your personal belief and expectation that God is going to take care of you. Where is your faith? Where is it? Is it in things? Is your faith in your possessions or is your faith in God? Turning your poverty into someone else’s wealth is an act of faith. Most people say that they indeed have faith, but all we ever see is what they say. Do you follow what I am saying here? We will keep reading.

2 Corinthians 8:4

Begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints.

There are three important things that I want to bring up from this verse. They begged them to receive their money. Have you ever had to beg someone to take your money? Usually it is the other way around, usually it is someone who is begging you for money. In the kingdom of God things are not what you would expect them to be. Why would these people beg the other churches to take their money? What do you think that this exchange was based upon? They must have thought it was important. In this church that Paul is writing to, they were collecting money for another church that was far away. Paul was collecting funds for the church in Jerusalem. He was specifically collecting funds for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The money was for the people. They begged Paul to take their money and it says here in 2 Corinthians 8:4, "For the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints." It was a privilege to give their money away. It was a privilege to give what they had to those in need. It was a privilege to them because they understood the gospel.

This church understood that in providing money to the poor saints in Jerusalem they were serving Christ. If it is not a privilege for you to take care of someone else, I do not care who you are, you do not understand the gospel. If it is not a privilege for you to take care of the needs of another person, if it is not an honor to you, you do not understand the gospel. At the end of 2 Corinthians 8:4 it says that this contribution was going "to the saints." The "saints" means "Christians." It does not mean perfect people who have died, it is referring to ordinary Christians, those who have been sanctified by Christ Jesus and have been invited to walk into the purity of life that Christ has made available. That is where the money was going.

2 Corinthians 8:5:

And this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us.

Here we see they went beyond what Paul expected. There is an aspect of living out the gospel that you exceed the expectations of those you serve. This is very beautifully sketched out in Paul's letter to Philemon. You remember from yesterday, the story of the good samaritan that cared for the man who was beaten half dead and was robbed? He not only took him to a place where he could rest and where his wounds could be healed. The good samaritan then did something unexpected. He also left money behind to take care of the injured man after samaritan left. That is the gospel. Do you remember in Matthew chapter 5 where we read earlier, Jesus said, "If a man ask you for your coat, give it to him and your cloak also." This causes us to wonder, "The man only asked for a coat. Why would I give him my cloak also?" Because that is the gospel. This is why in Second Corinthians chapter eight the gospel says, "That they gave not merely as we expected, they gave

themselves first to the Lord and by the will of God to us.” When Paul says, “by the will of God, to us,” Paul is referring to the actual money that was given for the distribution to the saints. First, they gave themselves to the Lord. We must always keep that priority straight.

We give ourselves first to the Lord and then with our entire life we empty ourselves for others. If you woke up each morning and thought to yourself, “I am going to give myself to the Lord and then I am going to give myself to others,” you will follow Christ. If each day you tell your God that you will give yourself to the Lord and then give yourself to others, you will follow Christ.

2 Corinthians 8:6 and 7:

So that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you.

Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you —so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

In this church that Paul is referring to, they excelled in faith. They were a church of strong faith. They were a church that was strong in speech. They were a church in knowledge and in this church there was great strength in eagerness. Now, if I am in a church, and let’s say in my church they are strong in all of these things. Anyone who came into that church would say, “This is a good church. They are strong in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and they have a great eagerness.” And yet, Paul looked at this church and he said, “You guys are doing pretty good, but, there is really one thing that I would like to add to your list. Be generous with one another.” You can have all the spiritual giftings that God provides. You can have all of the knowledge that God provides and faith that moves mountains, but if you lack generosity, how are you a church? If you do not care for one another, how are you a church? If you lack generosity, you are more like a club, or more like a group with a common interest that happens to be Jesus Christ. You come together to talk about Jesus Christ and you form a club around Jesus Christ. You know about him and you talk about him, but if you lack generosity, what are you doing for him?