

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

INTRODUCTION:

- Welcome to visitors...
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I wanted to begin our lesson this morning by sharing with you the story of Zina Garrison.

- For those of you who used to watch Professional Tennis about fifteen years ago, you may know who she is.
- She started playing tennis at the age of 10 or 11 years old and by the time she graduated high school, she had become the No. 1 ranked Junior tennis player in the world.
- Seven years later she beat Martina Navratilova in the U.S. Open and in the same year represented the United States in the Olympics earning our country a bronze and a gold medal.
- Five years later she won her 500th match, becoming the 12th woman in the history of tennis to hit that landmark.
- Although she is an amazing athlete, these are not the reasons I was so impressed with her and these are not the reasons that I mention her today.

I mention Zina Garrison because of her compassionate and giving attitude towards others.

- Six years ago, Zina was entered into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame.
- She was given this honor because of the way she has chosen to contribute her time, energy and money to the community.
- You see, she was raised in the inner city of Houston Texas and she had chosen to help inner city kids in the way she knows best.
- In 1988 she opened up a foundation that provides funds and support for the homeless, youth organizations, anti-drug groups among others.
- In 1992 she announced the launching of her inner-city youth program called the Zina Garrison All Court Tennis Academy, which gives inner-city children the opportunity to build self-esteem and learn about themselves through tennis.
- She is also a member of Kid Care, Inc. of Houston, an organization that delivers hot food to the homeless and indigent children.
- The bottom line is...Zina Garrison has dedicated her life to giving and spending her time helping others.

It is always refreshing to see and hear about people who strive to do good things in this corrupt world today.

- We love to hear about the wonderful things that civic organizations and individuals are able to do because of a desire to help others and to make a difference in the lives of others.
- This morning, I would like us to study a passage in the Bible about a group of people who also had a strong desire to help others and had chosen to make a difference. Please turn with me to **2 Corinthians 8**.
- As we take a look at the Macedonians this morning, we will see their generosity and I believe that we can learn a number of things from their example.

In **2 Corinthians 8**, Paul is speaking to the church in Corinth and he uses the Macedonians' as an example.

- He speaks to them about their strong desire to help in the spreading of the gospel.
- Let's take a look at this passage, and try to identify how it applies to this congregation as we begin a new year of outreach in the Salem area.
- We will be looking at **2 Corinthians 8:1-15**, however let us begin by reading just the first four verses...

*1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,
2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.
3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord,*

4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,

There are a number of things in this passage that we can learn about supporting the church.

- As we evaluate this first section of our text this morning, it becomes resoundingly clear that...

I. They were eager to give generously.

Many of us are probably familiar with the passage about the widow who gave her last two coins.

- When we do a comparison between the widow and the Macedonians, we realize that they had a lot in common. The widow was down to her last two coins.
- The Macedonians are described as ones who have undergone a “*great ordeal of affliction*” and ones who are in a “*deep poverty*.”
- Now, I could be wrong, but I don’t believe that anyone in this room knows what it is like to be in poverty.
- The United States National Poverty Level varies according to how many people are in the family.
- If an individual makes less than \$10,210 or if a couple makes less than \$13, 690/year, they would be considered to be living in poverty.
- The apostle Paul didn’t just say that they were just in poverty...He said they are in a “*deep*” or “*extreme poverty*.” Needless to say, they were not in much of a position to be financially generous.

When I think of poverty, I picture the children on TV that are wearing raggedly clothes and standing in front of rickety shacks that they call homes.

- I picture malnutrition and diseases being rampant with all kinds of health problems and people living in a state of despair and depression.
- Take a look however, at what **verse 2** says again about the Macedonians.
- Paul says that they had an “*abundance of joy*” and in their joy, they expressed a “*wealth of liberality*” or a “*wealth of generosity*.”(NRSV)
- I am sure that Paul was particularly impressed with their attitudes! They were overjoyed to be able to give, because they knew that the money was going to be used to spread the gospel.
- This must be why Paul also praised the Macedonians when writing to the Romans in **Romans 15:26**.
- And again, he mentioned them when he was speaking to the **Philippians** in **chapter 4:15-18**.

The Macedonians knew that the money would go to save souls, and they had such a focus on helping others to be saved that they did not even consider it a sacrifice to give up what little money they had.

- **Verse 3** continues on to say that they gave, “*according to their ability, and beyond their ability...*”
- In essence, Paul was saying that they really gave more than what they were able to give.
- They had no regard for their own personal comforts and they just kept on giving despite the fact they were already in a deep poverty themselves.
- Take notice of the end of **verse 3**, which says that they gave “*of their own accord*.”
- They were freely willing to give of the money. They gave entirely on their own without having to be asked by Paul, or Peter, or Timothy, or Philip, or by one of the other church leaders.
- They gave generously because they knew it was important!

As a matter of fact, not only did they not have to be asked, but take a look at **verse 4**!

- They begged and pleaded to be able to support the saints.
- I like how the New International Version of the Bible puts it, “*They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.*”
- For them it was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to assist the church in this way.
- In **1 Corinthians 16:1-2** Paul directed the Corinthians to set aside money as they have prospered and to collect this money on the first day of every week.
- From this we know that giving is a commandment and God expects it from churches today
- However, when we evaluate our text in **2 Corinthians 8**, we also realize that giving to the church is an amazing privilege and should always be done with the right state of mind.
- Paul instructs the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 9:7**, saying, “*Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*”

The first thing that we have learned from the Macedonians then, is that they were eager to give generously and they had the right attitude in their giving to the church.

- Let's read **verses 3-4** again and then continue on through **verse 9** to see what else we can learn.

2 Corinthians 8:

3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord,

4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,

5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

6 So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.

7 But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.

8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

9 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 second lesson that we can learn from our text is that...

II. It is God's will for Christians to give themselves in service to Him.

Paul says that the Macedonians didn't just give up their money in service to the Lord, but **verse 5** says, "*they first gave themselves to the Lord...*"

- Their attitude was on serving God, no matter what amount of effort it would take.
- They were willing to make their deep poverty even deeper because they had fully dedicated themselves to serving God in whatever capacity they were able!
- It all comes down to a question of where were their priorities?
- They put their faith in God that He was going to provide for them the next meal. Perhaps we could go so far as to say that they believed that their bodies were not as important as other people's souls!
- "*They first gave themselves to the Lord...*"

I remember reading a story about the hen and the hog that were having a discussion about who was the most important farm animal.

- The chicken was bragging about how she worked so hard at preparing her nest and she kept a continuous supply of eggs for the farmer's wife to cook breakfast while the hog just laid around and got fat all day.
- The hog, however, responded by asking her one simple question... Who makes the biggest sacrifice when it comes to putting bacon and eggs on the farmer's table?

When it comes to serving God, there are two types of Christians as well. Those who contribute like the hen, and those who sacrifice everything like the hog.

- In congregations around the world, there are those who will show up on Sunday morning to make their contribution, however, one thing that sets a true Christian apart is when they are truly willing to sacrifice.
- Brothers and sisters, I want to encourage you to be more than just a contributor to the church.
- The end of **verse 5** makes it very clear that the Lord wants more than just contributors.
- God's word says, "*they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*"
- The NIV says, "*in keeping with God's will.*" He wants us to give ourselves to Him!

In **verse 7**, Paul continues on to express the importance in dedicating yourselves to God's service.

- Paul basically says, "**You already excel in your faith, in your speech, in knowledge of Scripture, in your eagerness, and in your love towards one another, but you also need to be sure that you are excelling in your generosity!**"
- **Verse 8** tells us that when we generously give to the church, it is a demonstration of our love..
- A person who loves the church, will give generously knowing that generosity will save souls.
- I have heard it said: "**Our sole purpose in giving is to give purpose to souls.**"

- Our main goal is to love the Lord and to love others so much that we will do everything that we can to expand our outreach to save as many souls as possible.
- **Verse 5** says that it is God's will for us to give ourselves to the Lord.

Before the Apostle Paul was taken to Rome by ship, he had an opportunity to say a last good bye to a number of his brothers and sisters in the Ephesian church.

- His final words of comfort from **Acts 20:32ff** are as follows: *“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'”* When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word, which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.”
- In Paul's farewell to his Christian family, he suggested that they keep focused on God's word and he said that he worked hard so that others would see the importance of helping the weak. As far as we can tell, Paul's very last words to them was a quote from Jesus, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

We have learned first, therefore that we should be eager to give generously with a joyful attitude and second, we should be willing to give of ourselves for the furthering of the gospel of Christ.

- Let's continue on and take a look at **verses 10-15** and see what else we can learn about giving....

2 Corinthians 8:

10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.

11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.

12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality--

14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality;

15 as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."

Paul Begins in **verse 10** by complimenting the Corinthians on the fact that they desired to give even before the Macedonians did. In **verse 11**, he basically says, **“Now finish what you started.”**

- In **verse 12**, he tells them that when there is an eagerness to give in accordance with what they are able to give, it is an acceptable sacrifice.
- In **verses 13-14**, Paul told them that they have an abundance and that they should desire to give because when they have a need, others will be able to return the favor.

The third and final lesson that we can learn from our text this morning, is that...

III. **We should desire to give generously, knowing that God will provide for us.**

In **verse 15**, Paul quotes to them a Scripture from **Exodus 16:18**, which speaks of the Manna that God provided to the Israelites when they were in the wilderness.

- I found it very interesting that Paul would choose to quote from this scripture... *“HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK.”*
- Clearly Paul's objective was to let them know that God would provide for them, but I believe this statement goes deeper than that!

When we consider the manna that God provided, I think we need to remember a couple of things.

- Each person was supposed to collect only what they needed to survive each and every day.

- Some tried to collect extra so they could store it over night so they would have it for the future.
- Moses had told them that they couldn't do that, but they did it anyway. When they tried it the manna was worm infested the following morning. Therefore, each was to gather only what they needed!
- The end result of this is that God provided fresh manna every day. If God didn't provide the manna, they would go hungry!
- Paul wasn't just giving the Corinthians a lesson on the fact that God will provide if they freely give.
- He was also giving a lesson on fully trusting in God!
- Each day, they had to put their faith in God that he would provide the next day's food.
- When each day was over, they had nothing to eat.

To drive home the lesson that Paul was trying to express to the Corinthians, we are also instructed to fully trust in God knowing that He will provide for us today.

- The following two passages I am going to read from are words of our Savior Jesus Christ,
 - **Matthew 6:33-34**, "*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*"
 - We also find in **Luke 6:38**, that it says, "*Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.*"

SUMMARY:

This morning we have learned a number of lessons from the example that the Macedonians set and from Paul's words to the Corinthians.

- First we learned that although the Macedonians were in a deep poverty, they were eager to give generously and went so far as to beg for the opportunity and the privilege to support the church.
- Second, we learned that the Macedonians obeyed God's will by giving of themselves to His service first. They were not just contributors to the church, they were willing to sacrifice themselves for the Lord.
- Finally, we have seen that when we do give our selves and our finances to the church, the Lord will provide for us. When finances are tight, we still need to give generously knowing that souls will be saved!

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

Every week that I have opportunity to present a lesson from God's word, I get up here in the pulpit and I teach the same lesson week after week, month after month. Yes, I use a different passage. Yes, the characters that we discuss are different. But when it all comes down to it, we discuss the very same thing every Sunday.

- We discuss priorities and we ask ourselves if we are going to do our own will, or are we going to more fully commit our lives to God?
- Another thing included in every sermon is the fact that Jesus Christ is our Savior who died on a cross so that we might have eternal life.
- As **verse 9** 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.*"
- We talk about this every week to remind ourselves of His love for us, and our responsibility to Him.

In today's society, we don't like to think about having to sacrifice our time for the church.

- We're busy with life, and for some, church is only about an hour's time once a week.
- We don't like to think about having to sacrifice our money for the church.
- We have cell phones, and Satellite or cable TV, and High Speed Internet connections that we feel are too important to give up for the church.
- Remember though... The Macedonians were in a deep poverty! And yet begged for the privilege of giving beyond what they were able to.

It is not easy to be a Christian. It takes your time. It takes your money. It takes your service and sacrifice.

- Are Christians just gluttons for punishment? Of course not! The truth is...we are afraid of punishment and we are extremely excited about an amazing inheritance.

- Being a Christian brings peace of mind, knowing that we are striving to please the all-knowing, all-merciful, and all-powerful God of creation.
- Being a Christian is having that joyfulness even in the pit of poverty because we have something wonderful to look forward to.

If there is anyone here who feels that you have been failing to serve God in the way you should, we are happy to pray with you.

- At the same time, if there is anyone here who has never been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, now is your opportunity to become a member of Christ's body.
- If you would like to respond to the gospel today, please come forward as we stand and sing.