

Sermon on Give Generously to Get Blessings

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Text:

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵ And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

1 Introduction

In this month of November, we celebrate thanksgiving, which is a holiday established out of the Christian tradition of giving thanks to the almighty God for his abundance. In this month, therefore, we are going to spend each Sunday to study God's Word on Giving resulting out of thanks to God for his abundance.

2 The Macedonian Churches were least positioned to give

2.1 The gifts were meant for the impoverished Jerusalem church

As noted in Acts 11:28, the Prophet Agabus predicted that a famine will hit the entire Roman Empire and indeed it came to pass. The Jerusalem Christians were ill prepared to handle it because of their poverty. The Christians were made up of low class people and so needed the help of the other churches. Paul set out to collect gifts to ameliorate their suffering.

2.2 The Macedonian churches gave generously

It was in response to Paul's appeal to the gentile churches that the churches in Macedonia province of the Roman Empire in northern Greece, consisting of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, which I will call the Macedonia District, gave generously. The generous giving attitude

of the Macedonian churches was like Las Vegas gamblers today who aggressively invest their money in gambling in expectation of a big payoff.

While I was in business I attended a trade show in Las Vegas where we were showing our new computer products to the world. One thing struck me when I landed in Las Vegas. The airport itself had gambling machines and the hotels were all operating around the gambling business. People come from all over the world just to gamble in Las Vegas. Now, why is that, you may ask? It is because of the lure of making big money from small money; for example, investing \$100 in a night of gambling and making \$1,000 or \$10,000 or even more. Big gamblers are drawn to such casinos with zeal to invest their money to gain big returns. They go to Las Vegas on their own free will, with an excited joy at the prospect of making money. This they do even though the odds are really against them making money.

Unlike the Las Vegas gambler who may lose, the Macedonian Christian knew that he will always get great returns and never lose. So he gave his money to the kingdom business and he did so generously. If you want to get great blessings then give generously. Give generously to receive your financial breakthrough. Give generously to get your great reward.

2.3 The Macedonian churches were poor and persecuted

If the Macedonia District gave generously then it stands to reason that they were a wealthy people and could afford it. That is the reasonable thinking of most people when it comes to generosity. You can be generous because you have in abundance and so you can afford to give some away without hurting yourself. So, was the Macedonia District wealthy?

The answer is a big NO. In fact prior to this time some commentators suggest there had been a civil war or a natural disaster such as earthquake or flooding in Macedonia that had devastated the land and the economy. To make matters worse, the Christians there were persecuted by the gentiles having been incited by the Jews in the region. Paul describes the plight of the Macedonia District members in verse 2 of our passage as people in the most severe trial and extreme poverty. Note then that their trial was not ordinary life's problems but it was most severe arising out of the persecution. Their poverty was also not ordinary, but it was extreme and possibly exacerbated by the persecution.

So, in this extreme down-and-out situation how did the Macedonia District members have the overflowing joy stated in verse 2 of our passage?

3 Giving is investing money in the most profitable business – kingdom business

3.1 Certain of great returns the Macedonian churches were zealous to invest in the kingdom business

In verse 3b and 4 of our passage we read that “Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.” In other words, the Macedonian District members had a zeal to give towards the need of the Jerusalem church. They had the zeal because they had the desire to give, pleaded to give, and considered it a privilege to give. There is something admirable about their aggressive giving attitude. This attitude is abnormal today because people want to be begged and even tricked before they will give. But the Macedonians knew the benefits of giving, which fanned their zeal into flame. Perhaps, they were thinking of Proverbs 3:9-10, which says, “Honor the LORD with your wealth, ... then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.” They saw their giving as an investment in kingdom business that guaranteed great returns. They therefore, begged, pleaded for the privilege to share in this investment opportunity. And when they were allowed to give they were overflowing with joy for the opportunity!

They saw their ticket out of poverty through giving. They saw their chance for financial breakthrough through giving. They saw their way out of financial distress through giving. They saw their path to prosperity through giving.

3.2 Investing in a start-up company is reserved for special people

When a new company is formed their shares, which represents ownership in the company, are not for public sale. They are sold to special investors who invest millions and to friends of the founders. At this stage the price of the stock is extremely low. When the company does well and offers its shares to the general public many people bid to buy the shares and so the price goes up. At a higher price then the original founding investors can sell their shares with a big profit.

When my former boss started a new company a friend of mine who knew about my boss’s reputation in running successful companies sought to buy some of the founding shares. He was very interested in investing his money because of the potential huge returns. But he was

refused because the founding investment is reserved as a privilege for close friends and family of the key founder. In other words, investment in such a company is a privilege.

3.3 So also, investing in kingdom business is a privilege reserved for God's children

Just as the returns on investment in a start-up company is huge so also I submit to you that the return on investing money in kingdom business is even bigger. J.L. Kraft, head of the Kraft Cheese Corporation, who had given approximately 25% of his enormous income to Christian causes for many years, said, "The only investment I ever made which has paid consistently increasing dividends is the money I have given to the Lord."

Just as investing in a start-up company is exclusive, so also only God's children are allowed to invest money in the kingdom business. That is why Paul speaks of such investment in verse 5 of our passage as a privilege. Beloved, kingdom investment is a great investment opportunity. The Macedonians yearned to invest their money because of the guaranteed great returns.

They gave in poverty knowing it will make them rich. They gave in trial knowing it will remove their trouble. They gave abundantly knowing they will get over abundantly. They gave beyond their means knowing they will get beyond measure. They gave beyond expectation knowing they will get overwhelming returns. So you also must give generously to get overwhelming blessings.

4 Giving is a wealth acquisition tool!

4.1 Rich generosity – giving beyond your means and beyond expectations – induces great rewards

The more you invest in a company the bigger return you get. If the return rate is 10 times, then if you invest a \$100 you will get a \$1000 and if you invest 200 you will get \$2,000. It is the same way with investing in kingdom business. That is why Paul describes the Macedonia District members giving not as ordinary generosity but as rich generosity. He explains in verse 3 and 5 that they gave "beyond their ability" and "did not do as we expected," which means they exceeded Paul's expectation as to how much they might give. Rich

generosity, therefore, has two sides: the giver and the receiver. The giver gives beyond his ability and the receiver is astounded by the amount because it is way beyond his expectation.

Such rich generosity induces admiration of God to bless. One day, “Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything-- all she had to live on.’” (Mark 12:41-44) The widow’s giving was very generous because it was beyond her ability and it exceeded Jesus’ expectations so Jesus was impressed. If you impress God then you are in for a big reward.

I don’t know about you, but I want to impress God. I want to outgive everyone. I want my money to work for me through giving. So give generously to get blessings. Invest your money in the kingdom business to get great returns. Let your money work for you through giving.

4.2 When you are pressed on all sides financially, giving is your only way out

I don’t know your particular situation. Let’s assume that you are like many people who can’t make ends meet. You work two jobs yet the bills are piling up. How can you give generously under those circumstances? I will tell you how. You have to view your giving as an investment in kingdom business that is going to get you bigger returns to enable you to dig yourself out of your debt. That is, conserving your meager resources will not help you survive. Instead take some of it and invest it in the kingdom business and receive the multiplying effect. Give your way out of your financial distress.

4.3 Giving is a long-term investment and not a short-term experiment

A word of caution: investment advisers ask you to invest for the long term. Short term investors risk losing money, but investors with a long term perspective always reap great results. If you give with a view of receiving in the short term you will lose. Giving with a short term perspective is like experimenting with God’s faithfulness. It shows lack of faith because it means you are not sure of what you hope for. You have to give with a long term perspective – you put your trust in God that he will come through no matter how long it takes. With that

attitude then you will not be tampering with your giving but you will keep on giving higher and higher amounts. Then in due time you will begin to receive greater and greater returns that will overwhelm you and make you wonder if it is real! Yes, it is real. You have invested in the most profitable venture in the world – kingdom business – and you are reaping the results.

5 Conclusion

The Macedonian Churches were least positioned to give and yet they gave generously. Giving is investing money in the most profitable business – kingdom business. Certain of great returns the Macedonian churches were zealous to invest in the kingdom business. Investing in a start-up company is reserved for special people because of the great returns. So also, investing in kingdom business is a privilege reserved for God’s children because of the guaranteed great returns. Giving is a wealth acquisition tool! When you are pressed on all sides financially, giving is your only way out.

I call upon you today to give a bigger offering than you planed to give today in addition to your correct tithes.