

Generosity - Ours and God's

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- [0:00] But we are in Philippians. Now, I had planned that this would be our last message in Philippians,! But alas, after this week, we're going to save room for just one more.
- So we won't quite finish with the book of Philippians today, but we'll get pretty close. I have a question for you to get started, just to start us thinking.
- You know, I'm sure many, most of you have given money to some kind of cause, whether it be the church or a ministry, missionaries, those in need.
- We have the food pantry here that we give to, or maybe just an individual that you've seen need some help and you have had the opportunity to give to them. Now, I want to ask the question, why is it that you give those gifts?
- Why have you done so in the past? What's the reason? Why do you give to your church? Why do you give to missionaries? Why do you give to local ministries, like I said, the food pantry, or like recently we had an opportunity to give to the pregnancy resource clinic here in Springfield?
- [1:15] So, yeah, what is the reason? What is the motivation? That's one of the things we're going to be looking at this morning. Last week, we looked at the same passage that we are going to look at this week, but we focused on somewhat of a side conversation or an aside that Paul talked about, and he mentioned his contentment.
- But that was in the context of speaking about the Philippians' generosity in their giving to him. And so this week, we're going to focus in on that part.
- We're going to look at the Philippians, their opportunity to give to Paul, lessons that we can learn from their generosity. And then also, Paul speaks about the fruit that will come from that generosity, and we'll talk about that as well.
- So we're going to read through this passage. We're going to again start at Philippians 4, verse 10, and this time we'll go to verse 18. So if you've got your Bibles, we'll read this together. Philippians 4, 10.
- But I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now, at last, your care for me has flourished again, though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.
- [2:36] Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and all things I have learned, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Nevertheless, you have done well that you shared in my distress. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving, but you only.
- For even in Thessalonica, you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed, I have all and abound.
- I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

So here, Paul is taking an opportunity at the very end of his letter to the Philippians to, in a way, thank them. He's not directly saying thank you, but he is in an indirect way saying thank you for the gift.

- [3:47] But he says that in terms of rejoicing. He says, hey, I'm rejoicing in the Lord because of your gift. He mentions, and we'll just talk a little bit about what Paul is referencing here, because throughout this passage, he references how the Philippians gave to him and what his history with them was.

He mentions in verse 15 about this time that he calls in the beginning of the gospel. In the beginning of the gospel. What does that mean? If you read the first verse of the gospel of Mark, it says the beginning of the gospel.

Right? And that's the beginning of when Jesus was born. Right? That's when the gospel starts. But is that what he's talking about when he says in the beginning of the gospel? Well, the gospel in many ways, right, is the life of Jesus.

So we read the four gospels. It's about the life of Jesus. But in an even more specific way, the gospel is a message about what Jesus Christ did for us, for the whole world.

That he died for the sins of the world. And so I think when Paul says in the beginning of the gospel, he's talking about when I first came to you and shared the gospel.

- [5:06] when I first came and shared the gospel with you. And he mentions at that time that they helped him out financially.

A little bit of history. How did Paul end up in Philippi? Well, he was traveling around. God had sent him to preach the gospel to Jew and Gentile, but specifically to share the gospel with Gentiles.

Paul is called the apostle to the Gentiles. And as he was traveling, he received a vision, a dream. And there was a man who was from an area called Macedonia.

And that man said, come and share the word of God with us. And so he took that as a message from the Lord that he needed to travel to Macedonia. And there are three cities in Macedonia that we're familiar with.

One is Philippi. And that was the first place that he landed when he went to Macedonia. The other one is Thessalonica, which we have another book in the Bible.

- [6:12] So we have a book or a letter written to the Philippians and then we have another two books written to the Thessalonians. And then the third city in that Macedonia area is Berea.

And Berea is most famous because of the attitude of the Bereans, the people in Berea, who searched the scriptures when Paul came and shared the gospel with them.

These were Jewish believers in Berea and Paul shared the gospel of Jesus Christ. They didn't know who this Jesus was or maybe they had heard of him but they, you know, didn't know this was a legitimate thing.

And they searched the scriptures to see if the things that were supposed to happen that related to Jesus. And so they were described as being more noble than others because they searched the scriptures when they heard about Jesus.

So those are three towns or cities in Macedonia. And so Paul goes there and the first place he starts is Philippi and he's there for about three months, shares the gospel with the Jews, shares the gospel with the Gentiles and then as so often happens with Paul at the end of his time there he ends up in jail.

- [7:21] Gets into trouble and is ultimately miraculously released through a miracle of God. There's an earthquake and his chains are loosed and but he decides it's time to move on and he goes on to Thessalonica.

And so when it says here looking at, let's see, verse 15, now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, so when I first came to you with the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, he said, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.

He says, you as a church, you supported my needs when I left the area. Not only, maybe probably while he was there maybe they supported him but even when he left they supported him.

And then he goes on further and he says, for even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. So he went from Philippi to Thessalonica and even while he was there, they supported him.

But then some time passed because if we go back up, right, to verse 10 where this passage starts, he says this, he says, I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again.

[8 : 40] You have given to me in the past and now that giving, that aid has flourished again. He says, as though surely you did care but you lacked opportunity.

And so, as you read through the Bible, if you do some math and some people have looked at this more carefully, there was a time period probably of about 10 years between when Paul was first in Philippi and supported by them to now when he's writing to them from house arrest in Rome.

And so, during that time they must have supported him for some period of time. But you can imagine back then, you can't just PayPal somebody or Venmo somebody or even mail a check to them, right?

It requires quite a bit of effort. You've got to know where somebody's at. You've got to know where to send somebody with the gift in hand. But, what had happened, right, is as we kind of read the context here as we're reading this book of To the Philippians, this letter to the Philippians, we know that a man named Epaphroditus had been sent from Philippi to give a gift to Paul because they knew that he was under house arrest in Rome.

That he was, as Paul says here, in distress. He was needy. They decided, hey, this is an opportunity for us to give again. And so, and then Paul wants to make sure that as he speaks of his rejoicing in their giving, he wants them to know it's not because I'm getting my needs met even though that's nice, right, it's nice to have your needs met, it's better to have a full stomach than an empty one.

[10 : 25] But he said, hey, that's not the reason I'm rejoicing. He says, the reason I'm rejoicing is because of what this will do for your benefit and for the benefit of what?

The gospel itself. And so, he goes on to explain and we talked about this last week, this little side, about his contentment, him being able to be content in all things, whether he receives any kind of gift or not.

But today, we're going to focus on the rest of this and we're going to look at a couple of things. One is just some lessons that we can learn about giving when we see what the Philippians did and how they are praised for their giving.

And then the other thing is Paul mentions the fruit that will come to the Philippians because of their giving and what is that fruit? So, let's start with the lessons that we can learn.

You know, Paul here is basically bragging on the Philippians. He's saying, hey, you guys have done so much to support me. Years ago, when I was with you, there wasn't any other church that supported me except for you guys.

[11 : 38] He's saying, wow, that's pretty incredible. But did you know that Paul actually bragged to another church about the Philippians? There was the church in Corinth and in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, you can take the time to turn there if you'd like.

2 Corinthians chapter 8, we'll look at this passage. But Paul is actually taking up a collection from them. They had promised quite a while ago, the Corinthians, that they were going to send a gift to the saints that were in Jerusalem.

But they never really got around to it. And so Paul is taking this opportunity as he's writing this letter to them to say, hey, now is the time to give that gift that you promised to these saints in Jerusalem.

And so 2 Corinthians 8, 1, we'll just read part of this passage, says this, moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia. He's talking about the church in Philippi.

That in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering of the saints.

[13:09] There's a lot of words in there, but a few things to take note of, right? These Philippians, they gave in their affliction, he says. Not in their comfort, not while things were going well, but while things were not going well for them.

And we don't know exactly what kind of affliction that was. Maybe it was persecution for the gospel. That's probably the most likely scenario that was going on. But even while they were in some kind of distress and affliction, they were willing to gather up what they could and send it as a gift to Paul.

He mentions their deep poverty. You know, they weren't abounding in wealth and riches when they gave him a gift. It sounds like they were struggling.

And then he says this, he says that they, he says, I bear witness that according to their ability, and then he says, and yes, even beyond their ability, they were freely willing to give that gift.

And so even beyond what really they were able to, they were generous to give Paul a gift that he needed to keep his ministry, his ministry going.

[14:20] Now, I think it's important, you know, giving beyond what you can is hard to do, right? It puts you and maybe your family at risk.

So it's not something I think that is wise for everybody at all times, right, to give beyond really what they are able. The Bible actually teaches that your first responsibility when it comes to your finances is to who?

Is it to the ministry? No, it's actually to your family to make sure that your family is well cared for. And then after that, once our family is taken care of, then we can look at giving to, giving to any kind of service that others might be doing, but especially the ministry of the gospel.

The other thing I want to point out here is, he mentions, this is in verse, in verse 3, for I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, freely willing, and even, he says, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift.

It sounds like maybe Paul was seeing that they were in need themselves and saying, you know what, I don't really need, you know, you guys just keep it, I'll be fine, and they implored him and said, no, no, no, we want to give you this gift to help you out.

[15:48] They were freely willing. There was no compulsion. And this is one of the things that Paul actually talks about.

This is a little, this is actually in the chapter previous, or excuse me, the next chapter, Paul talks about giving and what it looks like for Christians to give.

And he says this, 2 Corinthians 9, verse 7, So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And that was the kind of givers these Philippians were. They were happy to give Paul a gift, even if it put them in a tough spot.

You know, this is actually different. The way that Christians are taught to give today is different, at least in some ways or in certain areas, than what it was under the law of Moses.

[16:56] Under the law of Moses, there were legal requirements, religious duties, religious requirements to give a certain amount of money for the ministry of Israel.

there was one of the tribes, a tribe called the Levites, who were not allowed to own land, but their purpose was to serve as priests and servants serving in temple service.

And so, the people, the rest of the 11 tribes, were required to give what was called a tithe. There were actually not just one tithe, a tithe just means 10%, but there were multiple tithes that they were required to give both to the, to the, to the Levites and also for a few other things, feasts and, and things like that.

And so, we, we shouldn't be, we shouldn't be confused and thinking, and there are many churches, unfortunately, I think that, teach that that tithe spoken of in the Old Covenant is something that applies to Christians today and that every Christian is required to give 10% of all of their income to the church.

And that's just not true at all. Paul specifically teaches when it comes to the church that every gift that you give is something that is without necessity, without requirement, it's something that you give freely of a willing heart.

[18:27] Now, he's sure to talk about the benefits of giving and the needs that are really there for any church or ministry. And so, it is always good to give, but giving should always be done from a willing heart, not grudgingly or of necessity.

God wants it done with a cheerful, with a cheerful heart. The next thing is as far as looking at, at the Philippians and how they gave and with what kind of attitude and heart they gave is going back to our passage, Philippians 4, verse 10.

Again, he says this, but I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me. Notice how he, he's talking about their gift as their care, their care for him.

Has flourished again. Though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. And so, he talks about two things, their care for him and then their opportunity. They cared about Paul.

He was the one that showed them the gospel, how to have eternal life. They cared not just about Paul, but about the ministry that he was doing, that he was laboring in, sharing that same gospel message, that message of eternal life to any who would hear.

[19:52] Now, they didn't always have opportunity, right, as he described. Paul's traveling around, maybe they wanted to send a gift, but they didn't even know where he was, right? Where's Paul this time?

I don't know. We didn't have the opportunity. Or maybe they just didn't have the funds, right? Maybe they knew where he was, but just didn't have any opportunity because they didn't have the funds. And many of us can, depending on the season of life that we're in, there are certain times in our lives where we have more to give and others where we just, we just don't have anything.

But there's always an opportunity, opportunity, right? Even if not for Paul, there's an opportunity to give to somebody else in need. And for the Philippians, or like the Philippians, we don't have the opportunity to give to every need that is out there, right?

There's lots of needs, lots of ministries, lots of missionaries, lots of non-profits, lots of churches, lots of individuals who are in dire straits, but we don't know them or they're far away from us.

They're not in our sphere of knowledge or influence. So we just don't have that opportunity. But we always have an opportunity to give to some need, right?

[21:17] opportunities always exist somewhere. But the willingness is not always there. I think we ought to pray and ask the Lord to help us in that, that we would grow in our care for others, our care for the ministry of the Lord, the ministry of the gospel, that we might be those who are constantly looking for opportunities to help financially or even in other ways in the work of the ministry.

So those are some lessons I think we can learn from the Philippians when it comes to their financial support of Paul and his ministry. The other thing I wanted to talk about was something that Paul says, and this is in verse 17, if you want to look there, again, Philippians chapter 4, verse 17, he says this, not that I seek the gift, the gift that you're giving to me, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. And he doesn't really necessarily say much more about what that fruit is.

But, let's talk about what he might be talking about. You know, one of the things when it comes to the fruit of their gift that I think about is the fruit that comes from the value of their gift.

When they're sending a financial gift, some kind of aid, or even, one of the things they sent was people, right? They sent Epaphroditus himself. And I think there were other people that they sent to help Paul in his ministry.

[23:07] ministry. And that's part of their aid package, if you will, that they gave him. But that, that aid enabled Paul in his ministry to do the work of the ministry.

To reach people who are lost to share with them the message of eternal life through the blood of Jesus. And so, when any person, no matter who you are, regardless of the size of your gift, when you give a gift of some kind, again, whether it's a financial gift of money, sometimes that's the easiest thing to do, or your time, or your skill and resources that you might have, whenever you give that to somebody else who labors, maybe whether it's full-time or part-time, in some kind of way for the work of the ministry, then you are playing a part in that ministry.

You are credited, as he says, he uses the word accounted, that this fruit would be accounted to you. When you are, when you support a missionary who's out planting churches and preaching the gospel, then it is credited to your account the fruit that they have.

Every church they plant is credited to your account. Every soul that is saved is credited to your account. If you support some Bible teacher, you are credited with every soul that is nourished by the word of God.

The fruits of those ministries will be credited to you because you helped enable their work. You know, not everyone has the same strengths, the same gifts, the same time, the same resources, or the same opportunity to do full-time gospel work.

[25:10] But, all of us can participate in some kind of way even if it's just financially. Even if it's just other things like calling up someone and giving them a word of encouragement.

Sometimes that's what somebody needs more than a financial gift. They just need to be encouraged because ministry work is hard. But, regardless of what it looks like and how you give that aid and support, when you do that, then that work, the fruit of that ministry, is applied to your account.

Jesus taught a principle like this. He was traveling around, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. He was saying, hey, the kingdom for Israel is coming and he was sending out missionaries, his disciples and his apostles.

And, as he was teaching the people, he said this, he said this, Matthew chapter 10 verse 41, that he who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.

When a prophet comes, somebody who's speaking on behalf of God, so a minister, a servant of the Lord, when he comes and you receive him in some kind of way. And what he was talking about, you give him some kind of aid.

[26 : 24] These guys were going around to all the towns around Israel and some people would not give them quarter, wouldn't house them. But for those who did, Jesus here is saying that you will receive a reward from the fruit of their work.

And so, does this mean going back to the fruit, the fruit, right, of the gift? Paul says, I'm looking for the fruit that will be accounted to you. Is he talking about some kind of eternal reward?

Maybe it's a big mansion in heaven, right? Or some kind of position of privilege or power in eternity.

you know, I don't know. This is something that I don't have a strong opinion on, on whether Christians will receive like material types of rewards like that in heaven.

Beyond, by the way, what the Bible already promises to every believer. Some say that there will be rewards of a material nature and others say this, that the reward that Paul talks about here and in other places is simply the reward of those who are brought to Christ, the people that we get to enjoy forever in heaven.

[27 : 54] And that is a reward, isn't it? A reward in and of itself. Paul says, here's just another, here's an example of where Paul talks about rewards, 1 Corinthians 3.8, Now he who plants and he who waters are one.

He's talking about Christian laborers, those who labor in the ministry, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. There is some kind of reward talked about there.

But I think, you know, we can, regardless of whether we receive any kind of special recognition or reward in the afterlife, the Bible already teaches that just by trusting in Christ, we have a reward that is really already beyond our imagination.

In 1 Corinthians 2.9, Paul says this about what Christians have to look forward to. But as it is written, eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him.

For all of those who love the Lord, they put their trust in him. They have a great reward to look forward to, regardless of anything else.

[29 : 17] The last thing I want to look at as far as the fruit of this gift that the Philippians gave is something that I think is even more priceless than anything we might receive in a tangible way.

And it's described in verse 18. So if you're still there in Philippians chapter 4, let's read verse 18 again. He says, Indeed, I have all and abound.

I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you. By the way, he's saying, hey, your gift is so generous. He says, I feel like I'm abounding.

Maybe I was struggling before, but right now I feel rich because of your gift. But this is what he calls their gift package. Their generous gift.

He says, A sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. What's he talking about? A sweet-smelling aroma and an acceptable sacrifice?

[30 : 20] I mean, their giving was sacrificial, likely, right? But is that what he's talking about? He's actually making a reference to the Old Covenant, that the Jews lived under, in which they would offer sacrifices, animal sacrifices to the Lord, as was required of them.

And there are many places in the Scripture that those sacrifices, and the sacrifice, by the way, would be an animal, a lamb, a goat, a bull, that would be cooked on an altar.

And you can think of it kind of like a barbecue, right? You burn, or you cook meat on this altar, like you would in some ways over a fire pit.

And as many of us have experienced, I don't know if anybody's ever done a hog roast, anybody ever done a hog roast? And you put that hog on the spit over the fire, and you smell that meat, and it smells amazing, right?

It's a sweet smell of smoked meat. And the Bible references the smoke from that sacrifice going up as if to heaven and being a sweet aroma in God's nostrils.

[31 : 35] The first mention of this is in Genesis chapter 8. Noah, the flood is over, the waters are receding, Noah comes out of the ark, and the first thing he does is he offers a sacrifice to the Lord.

And it says this, Romans chapter 8 verse 20, Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and he took of every clean animal, and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma.

Then the Lord said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. And he said that in response to this sweet aroma, this thing that Noah did.

And there are several other places in the law where it talks about these offerings, these sacrifices, and it mentions a sweet aroma going up to the Lord. You see, when men do the things that God asks, when they accomplish God's will, when they serve him, it pleases God.

It's like, we can think of it in such a vivid picture, right? Anybody ever been to, what's down here, Rudy's Smokehouse? Oh, just amazing smoked meat barbecue place.

[32 : 51] But you walk in there, right, and you're just smacked in your face with this amazing smell of smoked meat. To me, there's just nothing like it. I mean, that's one of my favorite smells in all of the world.

But I walk in, I smell that, and what does it do? It puts a smile on my face. If I was having a bad day, I'm having a good day after smelling that. You know, in a similar way, our support, whether in financial ways or other ways, for the ministry of the gospel, puts a smile on God's face.

It's like him smelling that delicious food. It makes him happy and pleases him. You know, the Bible says that what Jesus accomplished for us in his sacrifice for us, his love and care for us by dying on the cross for our sins so that all we have to do is put our faith and trust in him and we can live with God forever.

It says in Ephesians chapter 5, it says this, verse 1, he says this, therefore be imitators of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma.

Jesus loved us, loved us enough to die for the sins of the world, not just for our sins, the people in this church, not just for Christians but died for the sins of the whole world that anybody might come to him in humility and faith and have eternal life.

[34 : 33] You know, as awful as the death of Christ on the cross was, and it was awful, a terrible, terrible death.

It says here that his death pleased God. Jesus offered up his life, it made God smile. And isn't that amazing?

And it says here, when we walk in love and care and concern for others, whether it be other believers in Christ or whether it be those who need the Lord and sharing with them the gospel, we put that same smile on God's face.

That work that we do, that sacrifice that we give, whether it's money or time or whatever resources we invest in the ministry of the gospel, that same smile, that same, it's that same aroma that is going up to the Lord, putting a smile on his face.

And to me, that alone makes that labor, that sacrifice, all those gifts, all the worthwhile. What do you think?

[35 : 48] Amen? Let's finish up there and thank the Lord for his gift for us. Father, we're so grateful to you for your word. It teaches us here about what opportunities and what joy lies in giving and the importance of supporting the ministry of the gospel.

This is the most important thing that has eternal impact, something that is not just temporal in nature but is eternal in nature, things that matter more than anything else. We thank you for the sacrifice, that sweet smelling aroma that Jesus sacrificed, that pleased the Father.

We pray that our lives would in some kind of way, obviously not anywhere close to what our Savior did, but that we would in some way walk in that same love and care and concern for others and that our love and our care for others would also be a sweet smelling aroma to our Father in heaven.

Help us to do that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you everybody. Now don't forget tonight