

2 Corinthians 8:9 | “The Incarnation Impacts our Giving”
Preached on December 17, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles this morning to 2 Corinthians 8, verse 9. *[pause]*

For some of you, you may be thinking that this is kind of an odd passage to be in for a Christmas series.

And I understand your initial thinking.

But what I’m doing this Christmas season is I’m preaching on how the incarnation impacts our lives. *[pause]*

So 2 weeks ago, I talked about how the incarnation impacts the most important things, and today we will be talking about how the incarnation impacts our giving. *[pause]*

My prayer is that we will be able to see that the truth of Christmas isn’t merely about knowing that the Savior is born, and leaving it there.

But the truth of Christmas should also motivate and change how we live. *[pauseeee]*

So this morning, I want to start with 3 examples, and I want you to try to notice the connections between them. *[pause]*

First, imagine a man in his 30’s.

He has been working hard at his job, moving up the ladder at his place of employment.

He is very proud of all of his hard work, and has seen the results, as his pay has increased significantly since he first started years ago. *[pause]*

He thinks to himself, “I’ve worked so hard for this money, so I deserve to spend it how I want.” *[pause]*

He does so.

He has a running list of ‘wants’ that he wants to tackle so he can enjoy life more. *[pause]*

He starts checking off his list, buying and buying things that he wants: a new car, a new TV, the newest phone, a whole new wardrobe, the list could go on. *[pauseeeee]*

Then one day, he hears about a family in need, but he doesn't seem to care. *[pause]*

Instead of helping in some way with his money, he thinks, “I can’t give anything because I still have things on my ‘want’ list that need to be bought.” *[pause]*

In fact, he’s so closefisted that he hasn’t given to the church in years.

He has only been concerned with making money to purchase what he wants, for he's worked so hard, you know? *[pauseeee]*

Now onto example 2...

Imagine a woman in her 50's.

She's not someone like that young man, who is tightfisted in order to spend on herself, rather, she's a giver. *[pause]*

In reality, she gives *a lot*.

Every week that the plate is passed at church, she diligently drops her check in the plate. *[pause]*

But there's something going on below the surface.

For if you opened up her heart, and peeled back the layers, you would be astonished at what you saw. *[pause]*

For though this woman is a faithful giver, her heart hasn't been in it.

You see, her giving has been driven by guilt. *[pause]*

She gives because she knows that if she doesn't she will just be consumed with unrelenting guilt, for not giving.

So to never feel that burdensome guilt, her hand drops the check into the plate. *[pause]*

Everytime that she writes that check, it's because she feels like she just 'has to'.

She would rather spend the money somewhere else, but she knows the guilt would be too unbearable, so she takes the pen out, and once again fills out the check. *[pauseeee]*

Example 3...

Imagine a man in his 70's.

He likewise is a faithful giver.

If you could think of someone who faithfully gives, this man would be the first person to come to your mind. *[pause]*

Everyone knows that he gives, and many people look to him as an example of being a great benefactor. *[pause]*

A family in need? He's first to step in line.

The offering plate? Every week, he gives.

A special offering? He's going to give, you can count on that. *[pauseeee]*

Well what's wrong with this man's giving?

Hidden underneath all of this faithful giving, there is a hideous motivation that has been propelling this man to give.

Other people don't see it, but it's there nonetheless.

This man has been giving in order to look good to others. *[pauseeee]*

He loves when people notice him giving, and this is *why* he gives. *[pause]*

He makes sure that people see or find out about his gifts. *[pause]*

If there's a situation where he knows no one will see or find out about his giving, he doesn't give, for he would rather spend it on himself.

But given an opportunity to look like a generous giver, he can't pass that up.

He likes the image of this well-off philanthropist that he has cultivated, and which everyone believes.

And he has to continue to feed that image by making sure people see that he's dropping the money into the plate. *[pauseeee]*

Three examples of people and giving.

Did you notice the connections and commonalities? *[pause]*

All three had an issue with their motivation for why they gave or didn't give. *[pause]*

You see, when we think of someone who has a giving problem, we quickly think of that young man, who was tightfisted, and didn't give anything.

But really, all three weren't in good spots in regards to their hearts.

For the Bible makes it clear that it's not just about the act of giving, but it's also about our hearts when we give. *[pauseeee]*

So then what's the right motivation, and how do we get the right motivation?

Well what we come to understand this morning from our passage is that it's Christ and His generous giving of Himself. *[pauseeee]*

To get some context, I'll READ, starting in verse 1 of 2 Corinthians 8. *[READ 2 Cor. 8:1-15]*

At this time, there was a great need: the believers in Jerusalem were very needy. *[pause]*

It may have been because of a famine,¹ but no matter what it was, they were in great need and needed help from others. *[pause]*

A year before this letter, the Corinthians were enthusiastic and promised to give to the needy in Jerusalem.

But they hadn't given yet, and so Paul is encouraging them to give, as they said they would.

He wanted them to complete what they started. *[pause]*

Would they be ready to give this generous gift, and do it with the right heart? *[pause]*

Paul's goal is to motivate them in this way.

So he gives them the example of the Macedonian churches, who gave, even though they didn't have much.

But the supreme example and motivation that he gives them is Jesus Christ. *[pause]*

He says in verse 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 by his poverty might become rich." *[pause]*

We see that...

I. The incarnation is the supreme display of generosity.

Have you ever seen the supreme example of something? *[pause]*

I remember when I was little, I loved basketball, and played it all the time.

Then one time, I went to a professional basketball game, and I got to see the supreme display of how to play basketball.

I was astonished and mesmerized. *[pause]*

Or maybe you enjoy some type of hobby like woodworking, cooking, photography, or crafting.

What do you do when you go see someone's work who professionally does your hobby?

You are amazed at their example, and just look it all over, admiring the details. *[pauseeee]*

Well what is the supreme example or display of generosity?

It's Christ's generous giving of Himself for us. *[pauseeee]*

'You know this', Paul says.

¹ See Acts 11:27-29.

As Christians, we can't help but know this grace!

It is this grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that has saved us out of spiritual poverty and raised us up to spiritual wealth. *[pauseeee]*

It is truly *grace*.

It's the undeserved, unmerited love and kindness of Jesus that has done this. *[pauseeee]*

It wasn't duty that led Christ to give Himself, but delight to shower us with grace.

It wasn't guilt that led Him to do this, but goodness gift-wrapped with mercy and filled with love. *[pauseeee]*

What specifically is this grace?

“That though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.” *[pauseeee]*

Christ has eternally existed as rich.

He lived in perfection with God the Father and God the Spirit in eternity past.

There was no sin there, but only complete love, unity, and sinless perfection.

No suffering, no pain, none of that.

Now that's a rich state to dwell in! *[pause]*

Yet though He lived in and enjoyed that richness, yet what?

“Yet...he became poor.” *[pause]*

He left the perfection of Heaven, took on flesh, and was born into and lived in a sin-cursed world.

Instead of a rags-to-riches story, Jesus went from riches-to-rags. *[pause]*

Now He would experience pain, suffering, rejection, betrayal, ridicule, and even physical death.

At one point, He even shared that He didn't have a place to lay His head.² *[pauseeee]*

C.S. Lewis makes the point, by saying, “think how you would like to become a slug.”³ *[pause]*

How much more of a drastic descent did the perfect Son of God take to come here?

And He did this *for us*.

² A reference to Luke 9:58.

³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

His generosity was *for our sake!* [pauseeee]

It was a willing gift.

He did it voluntarily, He wasn't forced in any way or begrudging in the act of it, but did it for us out of love.

Now that's astonishing because we remember that we didn't deserve it, for we were enemies of Him.

And yet He did it. [pauseee]

His generosity was sacrificial in that He gave *Himself.* [pause]

Sometimes it's easier to purchase a gift and give it to someone because you can then walk away after giving the gift, but it takes more sacrifice to give yourself to someone. [pause]

He gave of His time and energy for us, certainly, as He came here to earth.

But He also gave of His life by dying in our place.

What a supreme display of willing, sacrificial, and loving generosity! [pause]

As commentator David Lowery states, "From the splendor of heaven Christ came to the squalor of earth."⁴ [pause]

Though He was infinitely, completely rich in Heaven, Christ became poor for us.

And what was the purpose?

"So that you by his poverty might become rich." [pauseeee]

Christ became poor.

In comparison with the richness of Heaven, He came to this fallen world, filled with pain and sin, and took on flesh.

Now that's poverty for the Son of God!

And then He even went so far as to die for us - talk about poverty! [pauseeee]

Yet through this becoming poor, Christ was able to secure us riches.

He accomplished salvation for us, and all of its attendant blessings. [pause]

⁴ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 574.

Because He became a human, and died in our place, we no longer have to fear condemnation, for He paid the penalty of our sin.

We are forgiven and free.

But also, in Him, we receive every spiritual blessing!⁵ *[pause]*

We receive the joy, peace, and comfort of being a child of God.

The righteousness of Christ, future glorified bodies, and the inheritance of God's kingdom.

Need I go on?

We are reconciled to God, made alive in Him, and adopted as children.

We are beloved, justified, delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

We are a royal priesthood, a chosen people, and citizens of heaven, whose mortal, weak bodies will someday be raised to immortality, and we will get to live in Heaven's perfection for all of eternity. *[pause]*

Riches upon riches upon riches!

No wonder Paul says that he was graciously given the privilege of preaching "the unsearchable riches of Christ."⁶ *[pauseeeee]*

We are truly rich in and because of Christ.

As James says, "has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?"⁷ *[pauseeee]*

The incarnation is truly the supreme display of generosity.

The baby in the manger is the greatest gift ever given, and the greatest example of generous, sacrificial, loving giving. *[pauseeeee]*

How can we think of Christmas, and not be taken back by the generosity of Christ in coming?

He went from riches-to-rags, so that we could go from rags-to-riches. *[pauseeeee]*

So what does this marvelous truth have to do with what Paul is getting at, again?

Paul is using Christ's gracious generosity to motivate the Corinthians to be graciously generous.

⁵ A reference to Ephesians 1:3.

⁶ Ephesians 3:8.

⁷ James 2:5.

And that shows us that...

II. The incarnation propels our hearts and hands to be generous.

There are some of you who may wonder how you can be a better giver.

Or maybe you think back to those examples that I gave at the beginning, and you're thinking, "How do I stop being so tightfisted with my money?"

Or, "How do I stop giving only to look good, or because of guilt?" *[pause]*

Well Paul is giving us the primary, correct motivation of giving: the incarnation.

It's the grace of Christ in leaving the heights of Heaven for the lowliness of earth that truly and lastingly motivates someone to give. *[pauseeee]*

Imagine there's someone who you have treated pretty badly recently in your family.

They didn't do anything wrong, but for some reason, you haven't been kind to them.

Then one day, out of the blue, this person gives you this super expensive, sacrificial gift and simply says, "I love you and I wanted to do this for you." *[pause]*

Consider what that does in your heart...

Your heart melts. *[pause]*

What they did actually leads you to think about who *you* could bless with a gift, too.

You can't help but think of giving because you dwell upon how much you have been given by someone else.

It is their grace that leads you to want to show grace to another person. *[pause]*

That's what happens in our hearts, but so much deeper and greater, when we truly know and experience the grace of Christ in giving His life for us! [pauseeee]

You see, the solution to our lack of generosity is not more guilt and shame, it's the grace of the gospel.

Generous givers are those who give in light of Christ's generous giving of Himself. *[pauseeee]*

We just learned all about how though Christ was rich, He became poor for us, so that we could become rich. *[pause]*

Really, take a moment right now and reflect upon what He has done for you. *[pauseeeee]*

He gave you so much, though you didn't deserve *any of it*.

He went so far as to leave the perfection of Heaven for the suffering and pain of an earthly life *for you*.

He went so far as to give up His life, dying an excruciating, humiliating death on the Cross *for you*.

Now that's a gracious, generous, sacrificial, costly gift! *[pause]*

And if you have trusted in Jesus Christ, you are a recipient of the greatest display of generosity there ever was.

How could you not be an openhanded person? *[pauseeee]*

You see, the truths that we celebrate at Christmas propel us to give.

And as I said earlier, the incarnation propels our hearts *and hands*. *[pauseeee]*

The great kindness of Christ transforms our hearts from stingy, selfish-centeredness to benevolent, open-handedness. *[pause]*

Like the Macedonian believers described here, we can be people who give out of the abundance of our joy, even giving beyond our means.

We can be people like the Macedonians, who beg earnestly for the privilege of participating in the relief of the needs of others. *[pauseee]*

Due to the grace of Christ for us shown in the manger and the Cross, we can become cheerful givers, who are ready, willing, and eager to give to others.

Because we can't help but think about the willing, sacrificial, costly gift of Christ for us.

And our giving will be a sign of our love and a sign of the work of God's grace in our hearts. *[pauseeee]*

This is the kind of heart that God wants us to have as we give...

Not driven by guilt or by a desire to look good.

Not propelled by mere routine, or to get something in return.

But rather, hearts impacted by grace, giving grace.

People knowing that they are blessed, striving to bless others.

We are blessed to bless, as I heard one church put it. *[pauseeee]*

What if you continually reminded yourself of that?

Post it on your mirror, on your fridge, somewhere in your home - "blessed to bless".

It's a constant reminder that you have been blessed by Christ, so that you can be a blessing to others. *[pauseeeee]*

Christ's grace in the incarnation propels our hearts, but also *our hands*.

This is what Paul was seeking to motivate the Corinthians to do: for their generosity to show itself through their hands. *[pause]*

They did great at eagerly wanting to give, but would they complete what they started?

Would their hands actually be active in giving? *[pause]*

He says in verse 11, "So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have." *[pauseeee]*

Desire to give should be completed *by actually giving*.

We can't be all talk and no action, but our hands should complete what was started in our hearts. *[pause]*

This can be a temptation.

Our hearts are eager to give, but then one thing leads to another, and for some reason, we never actually end up doing anything. *[pause]*

That's what was happening with the Corinthians and they needed encouragement to actually give. *[pause]*

So also, maybe you are in that spot.

At times, your heart is softened to the needs of others or softened to give to the church more, but for some reason or another, you just have never ended up doing it. *[pause]*

Complete what was started in your heart!

Let your readiness be matched by your actual giving. *[pauseeeee]*

What is God doing in your heart this morning?

How is Christ's grace going to impact your heart and hands? *[pause]*

Maybe it's giving to the church, or giving more to it according to your means, so that we can even more greatly impact Clearfield for Christ.

Or maybe it's giving to our church fellowship fund, which helps those in need.

Or maybe it's giving to organizations that have helped you grow this year, or who are in need.

Or maybe your heart is burdened for a person or family that you know, and who you could send money to this week. *[pauseeee]*

Do not let your eagerness die down into inactivity, but let your eagerness rise up into generous action. *[pause]*

Maybe quickly write a reminder for yourself to give to a certain person or family, or to give extra to the church by the end of the year.

Or do something today, so that it isn't forgotten about.

Whatever you need to do, and whatever God is leading you to do, don't let this readiness not be completed by action. *[pauseeeee]*

What about us as a church as a whole?

After the service today, we will have a business meeting, looking at our budget for next year.

Will we view our church's money with stinginess and selfishness, or will we look at it, remembering the generosity of Christ for us?

Will we have generous, active hearts and hands, or will we be miserly and tightfisted?

Will we walk by faith, trusting God to provide? *[pause]*

Any time that we have a surplus of money, will we be thinking solely of ourselves, or about ministry and about others? *[pause]*

May Christ's ultimate display of generosity radically change our hearts and move our hands.

For as we saw this morning...

Christ's generous giving of Himself should lead us to be generous with others.

You know, if you wanted to, you could easily come up with a million reasons not to give. *[pause]*

You could think, "I just need a little more then I'll give," and then a little more comes, and you think, "OK, just a little more," and a little more is never enough. *[pause]*

You could have a desire to spend it on yourself and what you want, for you see all the happiness that you think it will bring.

You want that better lifestyle that you see so many others have. *[pause]*

Or maybe you want to feel completely secure by having a certain amount of money, so you think, "If I can get to that amount, then I'll be secure financially, and then I'll give willingly." *[pauseeee]*

It's also easy to be wrongly motivated to give.

You have guilt, you have a desire to look good, you have an attempt to get something in return.

Those are all wrong motivations to give. [pauseee]

So what can free us from those excuses and those wrong motivations?

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. [pause]

The rich, pre-incarnate Christ became poor by coming to Bethlehem, and went all the way to the Cross of Calvary for us.

When you truly reflect upon that grace, you can't but show grace to others. [pause]

We are undeniably blessed, so let's be a blessing to others.