

**Message: Jesus, the Generous**

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2 Corinthians 8:8-15

The Power of Generosity Sermon Series

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Generosity is a chief character trait of God. It is seen in creation (all things are “good”). It is evident in the fall (God seeks and clothes the original sinners). The generosity of God is best revealed in Jesus’ life. 2 Corinthians 8:9 is stunning: *“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.”* The incarnation, God becoming a human being, is incomprehensible to me. Why would God want to become a human being? Why would God come in such a way at such a time in such a place for such a people? My scarcity mentality is in vivid contrast to the abundance mentality of Jesus, God in human flesh.

Our text is not only historical (back then) but applies to us here and now. Jesus became poor so we could become rich. We begin here. We are fabulously wealthy because of the spiritual gifts of Jesus Christ. Every Christian is rich because of the abundance of His grace. This is our identity.

**APPLICATION:** A frequent complaint from outsiders (and sometimes insiders) about the church is, *“All the church cares about is money.”* Yes, we must pay our bills, but we know that criticism is usually an excuse to avoid taking personal responsibility. It is also projection. It reflects the attitude of the person making the comment. If a sermon on money makes us angry, aggravated, or anxious, that is an alert that something is amiss in our spiritual lives. Hearing a teaching on giving should make us feel alive, engaged, grateful, and joyful. *“How can I grow in generosity?”* Honestly, how are you doing? If we are willing to learn, we can choose generosity.

**Context,** 8:1-7: There’s always a reason “why?” the author is writing. The “why?” in 2 Corinthians deals with the poverty-stricken Christians living in Jerusalem. Maybe they were poor because of persecution or bad harvests but Paul wants the Corinthians to be generous in their support of the Jerusalem church. In 8:1-7, the Macedonians served as an example. They gave joyfully. They were among the poorest people in the world and would be the last ones you’d think would be generous. They far exceeded any one’s expectation. Paul was astonished by their generosity. Paul is not trying to create competition among churches. He is not

telling them what they should do or how much they should give, but he does remind them of the grace of Jesus. Participating in the offering would be following in the example of Jesus.

*1 Cor 16:1-2a Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, (Give what you can – do what you can as appropriate to your status)*

Paul is trying to “stir them up.” It should be done with 2 caveats:

With LOVE: 1 Cor 13:3 *“If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”* The Macedonians were overjoyed to give. Studies show that religious people, those who work and are poor, are more generous than those who are secular and make the same amount of money.

There are always exceptions, but this is overwhelmingly the case.

Giving is to be an act of WORSHIP.

**2 Corinthians 8:8-15** *I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 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. And in this matter, I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. 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. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”*

**Jesus as Generous:** *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. (v 9)*

**HUMBLE (INCARNATION** – God becoming a human being.) *Colossians 1:15-20 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the*

*head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

God dumbled down and moved into the neighborhood by being bound by human limitations. Jesus being a human and being born in Bethlehem. A backwater town in a 3<sup>rd</sup> world country? Jesus becoming human and being born to Mary/Joseph of all people. A young mom. A carpenter's son. Can anything good come from Nazareth? It all smacks of one thing: **HUMILITY**. *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.* Jesus informed us: *"If you want to be first? Be last. You want to be the greatest? Be the least. You want to find yourself? Lose yourself. You want to be exalted? Humble yourself."* This is what He did.

*Philippians 2:5-11 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

**INVITATIONAL:** Jesus' humility was shown in that He asked good questions. He listened to people. He looked for people. He invited them out of the Kingdom of Self (darkness) into the KOG (light).

**Disciples.** Why them? He picked **Losers**. He didn't pick the disciples because they would make Him look good. They weren't the brightest and the best. They weren't the cream of the crop but curdled milk, skim milk, the dregs from the bottom of the cup. How much love did He have that He would even invite Judas, who He knew would betray Him? That's amazing grace. The invitation wasn't to follow His teachings – the invitation was to follow Him. The first words his disciples heard him say: "Follow me." It was the first words Peter heard: Follow

Me. It was the last words Peter heard Jesus say: Follow me." From watching these disciples in the gospels and from following the story of the early church, we would notice that they did NOT have it all together. They did not have all the answers. They were anxious, angry, competitive, doubting, fearful, & jealous. But one thing they continued to do: They followed Jesus. And while never perfected, they grew in their faith. They got brighter and stronger. They are an example for us – continue moving in Jesus' direction, even if you can't do it completely right.

**Crowds: Luke 14:12-24** *"When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

**Women/Children/Gentiles/Sinners/Unclean**

**PROACTIVE** In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that this cup would pass from Him. It sounded like He was passive. But when the soldiers arrived, He wasn't. **Matt 26:46** *Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.* To meet the kiss of the betrayer, the accusations and phony trial, the imprisonment, the scourge, the Via Dolorosa, Golgotha. Jesus wasn't passive, but actively engaged. He wasn't a victim but was a victor. From that moment on He assumed command of every situation. He healed the ear of Malchus, the High Priest's servant. He pronounced the doom of every kingdom, founded on blood and fear, in the words, "He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword." By the terror of silence, He made Pilate tremble on His throne – the Accused, judged the judge and with him, his whole empire. He would not accept the tears of the weeping multitude – He told them to weep for themselves and for their children. He dispensed Paradise to a dying thief on a nearby cross and commended His murderers to the mercy and forgiveness of God. At the end He cried, "It is Finished" – the will of God had been done – done in spite of the hate of men, yet, through it, and that will was redemptive love.

**JOYFUL.** *So, they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.* Matt 28:8 When the New Testament was translated into the Native Alaskan language there was no word for joy, so the translators had to come up with another way to express the meaning of the passage. In their research, they discover that one of the most joyful times for an Native Alaskan family is when the sled dogs are fed in the evening. The dogs come barking and yelping, running about, furiously wagging their tails. The children squeal with delight. It is a very happy time. As a result, when John 15:11 (*"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*) was

translated back into English, it read: *“When the disciples saw Jesus, they wagged their tails.”*

We become what we eat, what we think, what we say, what we worship. We also become what we follow. A Washington, DC resident headed to West Virginia University in Morgantown. Just before closing time he stopped at a shopping mall to pick up some needed supplies. The snow was coming down so hard the visibility was just about zero. Fortunately, through the blinding snow, he spotted a snowplow. Why fight the snow when a machine can do it for you? He fell in line right behind it. He followed the plow for about 45 minutes through each & every turn. He could see nothing but the red taillights right in front of him. It was a tough ride, but at least had a clear path to follow. Suddenly the snowplow stopped. Its driver got out and walked back to the car. “Where are you going? You’ve been following me for almost an hour.” “Morgantown.” The snowplow driver said, *“Well, you’ll never get there following me – I’m plowing out the mall parking lot.”*

We can make great time/progress but if following the wrong guy, the results will be a waste. **Who are we following?** If we really follow Jesus, we will become generous, too. Humble, invitational, proactive, and joyful. This is your invitation to follow Jesus Christ.