

The Blessings of Generous Giving
2 Corinthians 8-9
Northwest Community Church, Todd Havekost, 7/31/2022

Introduction

Psalm 119 describes God's Word as "a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths" (119:105). God has given us the treasure of His Word to direct us into His ways that lead to joy and fulfillment in our lives and enable us to be His instruments of blessing to others.

Many of us have Bible passages that are particularly near and dear to us, that God has used powerfully in our lives to bring about profound change, being "transformed by the renewing of our minds" as Romans 12:2 describes it. The text we come to this morning in our sermon series in 2 Corinthians, chapters 8 & 9, is one of those passages that God has used to change the course of my life. I will say a bit more about that near the end today.

So it is my great privilege to lead our study of these rich chapters this morning. We look forward to Dave's return to the pulpit next Sunday to pick up with chapter 10 of 2 Corinthians, as well as to an upcoming sermon series in September that will build on today's themes of generosity and stewardship.

Since it's been a few weeks since Dave preached 2 Cor 7, let's reorient ourselves to the context. There Paul reflected on the reasons he had spoken challenging words to the Corinthians, and the good outcomes in how they had responded.

Throughout both 1 & 2 Corinthians we see many failings of the Christians there that required Paul to write many challenging words. Yet God never gave up on them but kept exhorting them to live out their high calling in Jesus.

That the Corinthians were at another crossroads is the occasion for this morning's passage, 2 Corinthians 8 & 9, the most extended teaching on giving in all of Scripture. Collections were being taken among many churches to help meet the needs of Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were impoverished largely due to intense persecution (Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4).¹ The Corinthians had been talking a good game for many months but so far it was just that. Paul writes to exhort them to follow through on collecting their gift and in so doing enter in to the blessings of generous giving.

2 Corinthians 8:1

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia (8:1).

Paul begins by sharing the wonderful example of the churches of Macedonia, the neighboring region to their north. Several of these churches are well known to us from the New Testament, including the Thessalonians, Bereans, and Philippians.

Note how he refers to their giving.

- He does not say "we want you to know about the money that has been given."
- But instead he says "we want you to know about the grace of God which has been given."

¹ Persecution of the early church in Jerusalem is a dominant theme of Acts 3-8, culminating in Stephen's martyrdom (7:60) and the scattering of the church (8:4) that helped propel the fulfillment of Acts 1:8. The far-reaching economic impact of this persecution (e.g., expulsion from families, loss of employment) is also woven through the early chapters of Acts and prompted communal sharing (2:44-45; 4:32-37) and the daily serving of food to widows leading to the selection of deacons (6:1-6).

Grace is one of the very prominent characteristics of God, He showers unmerited favor on His creation and on His children through Jesus. Whenever we give freely to others with no strings attached, such as

- giving bags of food to people in need through the Food Pantry, or
- helping people learn through English as a Second Language classes,

we are following in the footsteps of our God who abounds in grace, and we are providing a tangible manifestation of God's grace to the recipients and before a watching world, "bringing God's grace to life." So, it is no surprise that in this passage about giving the word that appears most frequently is "grace."²

2 Corinthians 8:2-3

What made the Macedonians such compelling role models?

That in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality (8:2).

This is the first time in this passage (but not the last³) Paul gathers up many intense words, in this case to ensure we comprehend the severity of the situation for the Macedonians. They were not just facing affliction, but a "severe trial of affliction."⁴ They were not just poor, they were experiencing "rock bottom poverty."⁵

Yet in the midst of this "severe trial of affliction" their joy abounded,⁶ and the "riches" of their generosity "overflowed."

For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord (8:3).

They gave beyond what anyone would expect, even beyond what they could afford to give. And they gave "of their own accord", they were motivated from within, arising out of their personal experience of God's grace.

2 Corinthians 8:4-5

Begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints (8:4).

Being aware of their deep poverty, I imagine Paul was not going to even ask the Macedonians to participate in this offering for the church in Jerusalem. But somehow the Macedonians found out that the offering was being collected, and when they did, they "begged" Paul for the "favor" of participating.⁷ "Favor" here is the word usually translated "grace." They considered it a privilege to be involved in meeting this need.⁸

² The Greek word for "grace" (charis) appears ten times in this passage: 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19; 9:8, 14, 15, and is translated in our English Bibles in a variety of ways.

³ Also 2 Cor. 9:8.

⁴ "Ordeal" (dokime) and related dokimos are commonly used for trials that put one to the test, e.g., James 1:12.

⁵ Again, as in Jerusalem, it is highly likely that persecution was a major aspect of this affliction and cause of this poverty. Acts 16:19-17:13 chronicles a series of incidents of persecution in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea; see also 1 Thess. 1:6.

⁶ This uniquely Christian response of joy to affliction is a recurring New Testament theme (Rom. 5:3; James 1:2).

⁷ It grabs our attention when we see "begging" refer not to something done by the recipients but by the givers!

⁸ There are other familiar words in this verse that also may not be initially apparent from our English translations. "Participate" is the word normally translated "fellowship" (Gk. koinonia). The Macedonians viewed this giving as a means of deepening their connection with their brethren in Jerusalem. And "support" is the word "service" or "ministry", from which we get the word "deacon." Through these gifts they were serving the saints.

We may be inclined to think of giving as something we "ought to" do, as a duty or obligation. But something was going on in the hearts and minds of the Macedonians that they considered it a privilege, something they by all means did not want to miss out on.

And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God (8:5).

This intense desire to give was not some isolated behavior, but rather was one expression of their devotion to God that extended to every area of their lives.

There were several factors making the Macedonians wonderful examples of giving that delighted the heart of God.

- Their giving was an expression of "abundant joy"
- It was sacrificial ("rock bottom poverty", "beyond their ability")
- It reflected "overflowing generosity" ("wealth of liberality")
- It was entirely voluntary ("of their own accord", "begging" to give)
- It originated from a heart devoted ("given") to God

2 Corinthians 8:6-7

So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. 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 (8:6-7).

Paul continues to point to the wonderful example of the Macedonians which he describes as "this gracious work" in both of these verses. And note the context Paul provides in v. 7. He includes their giving in a far-reaching list of Christian virtues.

Giving isn't in a category all by itself, a one-off with unique considerations. It is just one of the many facets of following Jesus and experiencing the abundance of life He designed for us. All the principles we discuss today as we focus on generosity with our finances are also broadly applicable to generosity with our time, our energies, our hospitality, and our prayers.

Let's pause here and reflect on a couple of other "big picture" concepts. Since the Macedonians were very poor, the numeric amount of their giving was likely quite small. But Paul singled them out for his "over-the-top" commendation, not because the amount was large, but because their hearts were large, because their sacrifice was large.

Jesus had exactly the same perspective, remember who received His "over-the-top" commendation for giving? A poor widow who also sacrificially gave 2 coins (Luke 21:1-4).⁹

These commendations from Jesus and Paul show that every one of us here today,

- whether we possess small coins or millions of dollars,
- whether we receive an allowance or a six-figure income,

we are all capable of delighting God and experiencing blessing through our giving. If in this coming week you decide to forego a Starbucks and instead give that money to someone in need, or to support the ministry of this church, or wherever God puts on your heart to give, you also will delight the heart of Jesus.

Also, let's notice where Paul began as he sought to influence the Corinthians to give generously, He started with the example of other Christians. One of the reasons Christian community is such a big deal, that God has designed

⁹ "The most genuine liberality is frequently displayed by those who have the least to give" (Hughes, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 288).

it to play such an essential role in our lives, is that one of the most powerful influences for our lives is the good example of others. We hear truth, we understand truth, but often we are most impacted when we see others living out that truth. In our Care Group in recent months I have been spurred on by seeing brothers and sisters demonstrating a peace that passes understanding while facing financial lean times, showing great capacities for meeting needs of people in their lives, and walking calmly by faith through deep valleys of adversity.

So as we proceed in this passage let's keep in mind

- today's principles apply across all our Christian lives (not just to giving),
- giving isn't about the amount at all, it is about the generosity, and
- God has designed community to play an essential role in our lives.

2 Corinthians 8:8-11

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

Paul doesn't rely on strong-arming in this passage, but exhorts his readers not to miss out on the blessedness of generous giving.

Paul pointed to the example of the Macedonians, do any other examples of exceptional generosity come to mind?

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 (8:9).

As in every area of life, Jesus is our example par excellence. He left the infinite riches of heaven to take on every aspect of the "poverty" of human experience. Through this giving of Himself everyone who believes in Jesus has received "every spiritual blessing ... in Christ Jesus" (Eph 1:3). We have become rich indeed. Paul will come back to another connection between Jesus and generosity at the end of chapter 9.

2 Corinthians 8:12-15

For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have (8:12).

If you want to give, it is a good thing. And it is a personal thing, based on what you have, not based on what you don't have, or what someone else has. This personal nature of giving will continue to be emphasized throughout this passage.

For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality --- 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 (8:13-14).

In the current situation, the Corinthians had an "abundance" while the believers in Jerusalem had "need", so it was appropriate for the Corinthians to give to help "supply" that need. But it is conceivable that in the future circumstances could change and the roles of giver and receiver could be reversed. The principle is "equality", namely equal relief from burdensome poverty¹⁰, as those having abundance assist those in need.

¹⁰ "The end to be accomplished by giving is relieving the necessities of the poor. The equality ... intended is not an equality as to the amount of property, but equal relief from the burden of want" (Hodge, An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 205).

As it is written, "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack" (8:15).

To reinforce this principle of equality, Paul draws on an Old Testament precedent when God introduced manna (Exodus 16).¹¹

- Every day God provided manna like dew in the morning and the Jews gathered it.
- "Some gathered much and some little" (Ex. 16:17b).
- Yet at the end of the day, as Paul quotes here "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack" (Ex. 16:18b). Despite the fact they gathered differing amounts, miraculously everyone's needs were met.

The logistics of God's rollout of the provision of manna contain an object lesson of His desire that the needs of all His children be met. In Exodus this was achieved through God's miraculous "equalizing." In the church the means is to be those with "abundance" giving to those in "need."

"Abundance" and "need" are relative terms. We are likely unaware of the extent to which our perspectives on these have been affected by the affluence of the culture in which we live and the effectiveness of the advertising to which we have been exposed.¹²

In many areas of the world today poverty is widespread due to numerous factors. For Christians it is often intensified by persecution, as was the case for the church in Jerusalem in our passage. Over half of today's world population lives in countries where persecution is widespread, with the result that many Christians face great need due to being physically attacked or forced out of their homes, jobs, or families.

We commonly associate the freedom from persecution we currently enjoy with being free to gather for worship as we please, which is indeed a blessing. But another outcome is not being run out of our houses and jobs by persecution which gives us the ability to preserve and potentially accumulate assets.

The combination of these two factors together

- living in a society with an extraordinary standard of living relative to the world, and
- freedom from persecution that inhibits the preservation of wealth,

places us in an unusually fortunate situation from the perspectives of world and church history. Ideally this awareness will prompt us to ask God how He may want us to participate with Him in meeting "need" around us and around the world.¹³

For the rest of chapter 8 through the first part of chapter 9, Paul returns to the details of collecting the gift. He was sending Titus and two other brothers so the Corinthians would have full confidence that the gift would be handled with integrity (the rest of chapter 8, 8:16-24), and he was sending the brothers in advance to help the Corinthians finish collecting their gift (the first 5 verses of chapter 9, 9:1-5). We will pick up with verse 6 of chapter 9.

¹¹ This miraculous provision of manna began one month after God's ultimate deliverance from Pharaoh at the Red Sea in Ex. 14, and continued on a daily basis (except on the Sabbath) uninterrupted for 40 years until their wilderness wanderings were complete and they began eating the produce of the Promised Land (Josh. 5:12).

¹² Reports from people who have participated in Northwest Missions trips over the years to places like Mexico, Uruguay, Kenya, Chile and the Philippines have described how those experiences informed their perspectives of "abundance" and "need".

¹³ "Suppose God wanted to reach the world for Christ and help an unprecedented number of suffering people. What might you expect Him to put in the hands of His delivery people? Unprecedented wealth to meet all those needs and reach all those people? Well, He's done it, hasn't He? The question is, what are we doing with it?" Randy Alcorn continues to list six reasons to live more simply and give more generously.

- Because heaven is our home
- Because it frees up and shifts our center of gravity
- Because we are God's pipeline
- Because of the reward we will receive in heaven and the joy it will bring us
- Because of the dire spiritual need of the world
- Because of the world's dire physical needs (Alcorn, Money, Possessions & Eternity, pp. 294-6).

2 Corinthians 9:6

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (9:6).

Paul employs the time-tested educational principle of expressing the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. He uses an example from agriculture (what we can see) to help us understand God's perspective on generosity (a spiritual truth that we can't see).

Of course, Jesus was the master of this. You can hardly open a page of the gospels without Him saying something along the lines of "the kingdom of God is like ...". So let's see what we can learn from "sowing and reaping."

I spent my early years on a farm, and my first job involved walking through corn fields, so I witnessed first-hand some essential truths about sowing and reaping. Let me mention three.

1. We reap more than we sow. Each kernel of corn planted in the ground produces a corn stalk with one or more ears of corn. And each ear of corn contains several hundred kernels.
2. We reap in proportion to what we sow. The farmer wants to fully plant all the land he owns so he will maximize his harvest. He doesn't view seed corn as an expense to be minimized but as an investment that will multiply itself several hundred-fold. He wants to sow as much as he can so he will reap as much as possible.
3. We reap in a different season than we sow. The farmers had planted those cornfields months before I walked through them, and the harvest was yet future.

Verse 6 utilizes these universally known laws of the harvest to teach us that when we give generously toward God's work, we are sowing toward a greatly multiplied future harvest of eternal reward. And to be clear, this "bountiful reaping" does not mean earthly riches.¹⁴ Jesus' parallel image in Matt. 6 of laying up "treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal" makes this explicitly clear (Matt 6:20). Rather it refers to richness of spirit in this life and richness of reward in the life to come.

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (9:7).

The first phrase of verse 7 consists of only 5 words in the Greek, literally:

1. "each one"
2. "just as"
3. decide - includes idea of beforehand or in advance, perhaps "pre-determine"
4. the heart (words 4 & 5)

English translations have to supply some words to make that a readable sentence. Between "each one" and "just as" NASB inserts "must do." When I read "must", I think of being required or forced to do something, which is clearly the opposite of the idea here, since the very next phrase says "not under compulsion." So I suggest "let each one do just as he has decided in his heart" is a better translation. The emphasis on "each one" reflects that our giving is another facet of the personal intimate relationship we each have with our Father in heaven.

¹⁴ Contrary to teachings advanced under the heading of "prosperity theology."

Continuing to the rest of the verse, God is delighted when we choose our level of giving

- not "grudgingly", "it pains me to give this amount"
- not "under compulsion", "something I feel forced to do"
- but freely and cheerfully, with great joy.

I checked with my Dad to see if in all his years in and around farming communities he was ever aware of a situation when the night before it was time to plant, the farmer was so distraught about how many seeds he was "giving up" and placing into the soil, that his family and neighbors had to get together and have an intervention to pry the farmer's fingers from the seed corn he would be planting the next day.

That is never the case, farmers are eager for the day to come when the conditions are right to plant because they are focused on the several hundred-fold crop they anticipate harvesting in the coming months.

Recognizing that my giving represents sowing with a view to a bountiful harvest paves the way to being a "cheerful giver" who experiences great blessing in that giving.

2 Corinthians 9:8-9

We may think of giving simply in terms of arithmetic, an expense to be subtracted from an account balance, and miss the connection with dependence on the power of God. But verse 8 tells a very different story. The "vanilla" version of the verse is "God will help you so you will have adequate resources to do good works." But that doesn't come close to doing the verse justice. Paul stacks up superlatives (words like "all" and "every"), seven in all, to ensure we understand that God is "super-involved" in multiplying the ministry of generous givers.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed (9:8).

This point will be repeated in subsequent verses, that God's purpose in supplying resources to the giver is not to raise our standard of living but to increase our capacity for giving.

As it is written, "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever" (9:9).

This is a quote from Psalm 112, which speaks about the righteous man, with particular emphasis on the attribute of generosity. Typically, in the Psalms (as in the immediately preceding Psalm 111) "his righteousness endures forever" is a statement made about God. But in Psalm 112 it is applied twice to the generous giver. The outcome of his or her generosity will be ministry that has an enduring impact in the lives of its recipients.

2 Corinthians 9:10

Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness (9:10).

The same God who supplies the resources to meet our basic needs also supplies and multiplies our "seed for sowing", i.e., our resources for giving. Verse 6 encouraged us to sow generously, verses 8-11 encourage us to ask God to increase our capacity to sow generously. Just as we pray for countless other aspects of our lives, here we are encouraged to pray for God to work mightily to increase our personal capacity to give.

God's answers to that prayer can take a myriad of forms.

- He may provide us with skills and opportunity to be hired for jobs that pay more than our basic needs.
- He may bring to our attention opportunities to purchase needed items or services at reduced costs.

- He may extend the useful life of items we own so that we can postpone replacing them, or give us the ability to repair them ourselves.
- He may help us invest our long-term savings wisely, increasing our capacity for giving in the future.
- He may deliver us from the “blindness” of our culture and enable us to establish a standard of living informed by an awareness of world-wide need.

You may think of many other ways God has answered that prayer in your life.¹⁵

Again, verse 10 says that God supplies and multiplies our seed "for sowing". He increases our resources, not so that we will raise our standard of living, but to increase our capacity for giving.

Not only is God involved in the "giving" side of things ("supply and multiply"), He also unleashes His power through what He does with the gift after it is given as He "increases the harvest of your righteousness". A familiar example of this is in John 6, when Jesus multiplied a boy's gift of five loaves and two fish so that it fed thousands of people. We have seen many instances of this in our corporate life at Northwest, including exceptionally low purchase prices for this facility, remodeling projects completed at very low costs, and the world-wide impact of the Land Sale Proceeds.

2 Corinthians 9:11a

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion ... (9:11a, NIV).

Verse 11 repeats the theme, God's purpose in prospering us financially is not to raise our standard of living, but to increase our capacity for giving. One example of this concept is seen in the life of John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, who in the 1700s embraced this call to be a conduit of funds to God's work.

- Year 1: Income €30 [pounds] - living expenses €28 = giving \$2
- Year 2: Income €60 - living expenses €28 = giving €32
- Year 3: Income €90 - living expenses €28 = giving €62

Later in his life when he was receiving significant royalties from his books, Wesley was earning more than \$1 million per year in today's dollars. But he maintained the same very modest standard of living so he could continue to give the rest away.¹⁶

Some teaching suggests determining the amount to give based on a one-size-fits-all fixed percentage of income. 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 sets before us a far loftier vision offering a far greater blessing, one of sowing generously so that we reap generously. It invites to be responsive to what God puts on our hearts, seeking to minimize what we need to live on, and asking God to expand our capacity as we give what's left to further God's kingdom work and lay up treasure in heaven. (If this is a new concept to you, I encourage you to give it some thought in light of the verses we've seen today.)

¹⁵ My list of God's answers to this prayer throughout my life now extends to five single-spaced pages.

¹⁶ As you might imagine, Wesley's lifestyle was so counter-cultural that he drew the scrutiny of the "property tax" police in England. In 1776, the English tax commissioners (who were not having a particularly good year anyway) inspected his return and sent Wesley a letter. "[We] cannot doubt but you have [silver] plate for which you have hitherto neglected to make an entry." They were saying a man with his income certainly must have a sizable amount of silver in his house and were accusing him of failing to pay property [excise] tax on it. Wesley replied "I have two silver spoons at London and two at Bristol. This is all the plate I have at present, and I shall not buy any more while so many 'round me want bread." I am indebted to Randy Alcorn for Wesley's example (Money, Possessions & Eternity, pp. 298-9).

2 Corinthians 9:11b-14

... which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you (9:11b-14).

God's standard "mode of operation" is to carry out most of His purposes through His people. Knowing how we mess things up, most of us probably think God doing everything directly Himself would have been a far better plan. But verses 11-14 give us a "peek behind the curtain" of why God chooses to operate this way. They show a massive downstream "ripple effect for good" when we give.

When God meets a need directly, the recipient gives thanks to God, and that is a good thing.

Verses 11-14 tell us that when God meets a need through our giving

- the recipient thanks God for His provision to meet his need (11b),
- the recipient's needs are met (12a),
- others not directly involved ("many") thank God for meeting needs through His people (12b),
- the recipient glorifies God for faithful living of giver (13a),
- the recipient glorifies God for generosity of giver to him (13b) and to others ("to all", 13c),
- the recipient prays for the giver (14a), and
- the giver and recipient are connected in fellowship (14b).

And that isn't even mentioning the benefits to the giver we've seen earlier in this passage.

When we allow God to work through us, there is a cascading impact for good in God's infinitely wise design. And as we said earlier, today's principles extend far beyond giving. When we love, when we serve, when we pray, when we give, there is a cascading impact for good in God's infinitely wise design.

Conclusion

I work in the mainframe computer industry which has a very "mature" demographic. Few younger people choose this for their career because the demise of mainframe computers has been forecasted for decades. This traces back at least to the early 90s when a prominent writer in a major IT publication predicted "the last mainframe [computer] will be unplugged on March 15, 1996."¹⁷

That hasn't happened, but the net result is if you were to stumble into one of the mainframe conferences I attend, you might think you were in a geriatrics convention. So not surprisingly, a very common topic of conversation at these gatherings is "when do you plan to retire?"

Being a lousy evangelist is one of many, many areas in which I have fallen short in my life. But I am so thankful that God in His limitless grace keeps giving me second chances.

So being asked the retirement question gives me the opportunity to respond. "One of the great passions in my life is contributing financially to help persecuted Christians around the world have a Bible of their own. I plan to work as long as I can so I can continue to help provide Bibles for these Christians who face so much adversity." In some cases that opens the door for further discussion, otherwise I pray a seed is planted.

¹⁷ Stewart Alsop, Infoworld, March 1991.

The course of my life was forever changed when as a young adult I first read these words written by Randy Alcorn:

- You can't take it with you
- But you can send it on ahead.

In the years since, God has used 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 to transform my perspectives on finances and work, changing my focus from "how can I save up enough to retire early" to instead asking God to sustain my capacity to work so I can keep investing in His kingdom purposes and laying up treasure in heaven. The opportunity to sow bountifully so I can reap bountifully has infused my life with purpose and passion.

And I am spurred on when I see you showing the love of Jesus in the areas of need He has put on your hearts, investing your energies and your service as well as your finances.

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (9:15)

All morning we have been talking about our giving, things we can do to help advance God's purposes. Paul concludes this morning by reminding us of first things. Before our giving or our doing anything comes God's indescribable gift of Jesus.

In this most famous of all Bible verses, note the primary verb "gave".

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Prior to our giving anything, God gave the hands down, bar none, words can't do it justice, absolutely greatest gift of all time, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29).

If you aren't sure where you stand with God, if you don't know for certain that you have eternal life you can never lose, I encourage you to settle that today. Believe Jesus' promise to give eternal life to anyone who believes,

- not anyone who works,
- not anyone who gives,
- but anyone who believes in Jesus.