

# Overflow

*Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. (Philippians 4:16-17 ESV)*

*For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (Matthew 25:29 ESV)*

## **That There May Be Fairness**

**March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026**

**2 Corinthians 8:1-15**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 8.

When I was a kid, my parents gave me an ancient coin collection. When I first opened the box, I was discouraged to see that my ‘coins’ looked more like a box of rocks. The coins were caked in ancient dirt and sediment. On each of those coins I *should have* seen the image of Caesar. But that image was so obscured that you would never have known what you were looking at unless someone told you.

When God made humanity, he *impressed* upon us His image. We are *image bearers*. If you look long enough, you will catch glimpses of beauty and kindness and selflessness and purity. There is a glimpse of the divine in each and every one of us.

Unfortunately – like my coins – that image is obscured. Those ‘glimpses of the divine’ are all-too-often buried beneath layers upon layers of sin and selfishness. In some places, the sin is so thick that the light barely seems to break through.

But there’s hope! You see, the kit that my parents gave me came with instructions. If I submerged the ancient coins in a special solvent, the sediment would lose its grip. After that, I could carefully chip away at the stone and slowly and steadily return the coin to its former glory.

In the same way, the Bible tells us that there is a solvent that can *BREAK* the power of sin in your life! As we just sang, ‘There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel’s veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their filthy stains!’ Of course, we are not *literally* plunged into a fountain of blood, but when we place our trust in Jesus, his sacrifice on the cross covers over our sin completely! As the Apostle John wrote:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just **to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** (1 John 1:9 ESV)

If you confess your sin and place your trust in Jesus, you can be plunged into his forgiveness right now.

But Jesus did not simply come to forgive us. Jesus has come to *restore* us! Like the little chisel that I used in my coin kit, Jesus wisely and carefully chisels away the sin that continues to linger in our lives. The Christian life is a life of continual restoration.

In this three-week series that is going to a close this morning, we are inviting God to chisel away at anything that would hinder his generosity from shining through us. He is the overflowing God, and we were meant to be an overflowing people. To that end – we are going to be looking at 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

Before I read the text, allow me to give a brief word of context. A terrible famine has left the church in Jerusalem in desperate conditions. The Apostle Paul is making his way to Jerusalem to bring some money to relieve their poverty. He will soon pass through Corinth, and he has sent this letter ahead to ask the Corinthians to contribute to the gift. Look with me now to God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup> and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. <sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup> But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in

knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

<sup>8</sup> I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. <sup>13</sup> For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness <sup>14</sup> your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. <sup>15</sup> As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.” (2 Corinthians 8:1-15 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The Apostle Paul is walking a fine line in this passage. There are very clearly two things that he wants: First, he wants the Corinthians to be generous. But second, he wants the Corinthians to WANT to be generous! Because a forced gift is not generosity. A forced gift is *taxes!* Which is why Paul is careful to say:

I say this **not as a command** (2 Corinthians 8:8a ESV)

As an Apostle, he COULD have said this as a command. But he chose not to.

Let me address the parents in the room for a moment. Do you want to raise your kids to be generous people? How are you going to go about doing that? Are you going to play the role of the Mosaic law in their lives? Are you going to force them to put 10% of every dollar they make into the offering plate? (If you're going to go that route, FYI, the Mosaic tithe was closer to 33%.) Is that your plan?

That will certainly modify their behaviour. But will it have any effect on their heart?

Here's the thing: God doesn't need your child's begrudging 10 cents. Nor does he need the businessman's begrudging \$1,000. His focus is not on our money.

His focus is on our heart.

Paul understood that. In fact, he goes on to say in the very next chapter:

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, **for God loves a cheerful giver.** (2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV)

That's what God is looking for in His people. A truly generous person DELIGHTS to share! That's the kind of generosity that I want to see in my own heart. That's the kind of generosity that I want to see in my kids. But how do we go about stirring that up? In this passage, we find an Apostle-approved example of how we can stir up our hearts to be generous.

### **How Can We Stir Up Our Hearts To Be Generous?**

First, we learn from this passage that:

#### **1. We can stir up our hearts to be generous by celebrating the generosity of others**

That's what Paul does here in verses 1-5. He opens this section by celebrating the generosity of the church in Macedonia – a region that includes the Philippians who we talked about last Sunday. They were facing their own financial hardships, and they were certainly in no position to be contributing to the need in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Paul says:

in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have **overflowed in a wealth of generosity** on their part. (2 Corinthians 8:2 ESV)

The contribution of these churches was likely very small – like the widow we heard about two weeks ago who put a penny into the offering box. Nevertheless, the Macedonian Christians were *eager* – they were literally *begging* – to join in the famine support for Jerusalem. It was OVERFLOWING out of them! In case there is someone here who needs this encouragement, you don't need to be wealthy to overflow in generosity.

Now, to be clear: Paul's point here isn't to puff up the Macedonians. In fact, look at the opening verse of this section:

We want you to know, brothers, about **the grace of God that has been given** among the churches of Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8:1 ESV)

Paul's not saying, 'Look at how amazing THEY are!' No, he's saying, 'Look at the amazing grace that is shining THROUGH them!' Because his intention is not to incite jealousy or competition.

His intention is simply to celebrate a beautiful, God-glorifying display of generosity.

He's saying, 'Look at this *amazing* display of God's grace! These people with so little – these people who ought to be pinching every penny – are being so generous! Look with me and see how GOOD this is! Isn't THIS the way that we all should be?!

We would be wise to do this for one another more often. We are SURROUNDED by examples of greed and self-centeredness.

It is good for us – no, it is TRANSFORMATIVE for us – to celebrate real, sacrificial generosity when we see it. Because, whenever we catch a glimpse of it, something inside of us says, 'I want to be like that!'

We feel that way because we were MADE to be generous! It's like a glimpse of *reality* breaking through the lie of greed that we've embraced.

One compelling glimpse of the goodness of generosity goes farther than 100 compelled donations. So, let's celebrate it when we see it.

Second, Paul teaches us here that:

## **2. We can stir up our hearts to be generous by prioritizing our love for one another**

This is what Paul says in verses 7:

But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—**see that you excel in this act of grace also.** (2 Corinthians 8:7 ESV)

The ‘act of grace’ that he’s referring to is the gift to Jerusalem. He wants them to excel in this generosity. But look at what he has to say about that gift in the following verse:

I say this not as a command, but **to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.** (2 Corinthians 8:8 ESV)

This act of generosity – Paul says – will be a test of the Corinthians LOVE. He’s calling upon them to prove by their giving that they have grown in the gift of love.

As I read that, I can’t help but think back to the challenge that he issued the Corinthians in his first letter to them. Love had always been an issue for this church. They had historically been a very gifted people, but a very *dysfunctional* people. He devoted an entire chapter – 1 Corinthians 13 – to the supreme importance of love. He told them:

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; **but the greatest of these is love.** (1 Corinthians 13:13 ESV)

In that chapter, he explained that – without love – all the other gifts were *useless*. Now here, in this follow-up letter, Paul is essentially asking, ‘So, have you pursued this gift of love yet? It’s time to prove it with your generosity.’ As one old preacher puts it:

What you live is what you really believe; everything else is just so much religious talk.<sup>1</sup>

I don’t know if you’ve noticed this or not, but it is so *easy* to talk! And yet it can be so hard to ACT. ‘I’m going to exercise.’ ‘I’m going to eat better.’ ‘I’m going to start being more generous!’ These things are easy to *say*. In fact, we say them all the time! But until they are acted upon, it’s all just talk. Charles Spurgeon is right when he observes:

Where nothing is done, much is talked about.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vance Havner as quoted by Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews eds., *Text-Driven Preaching*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 269.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Sermons on Proverbs*. (Public Domain, printed in 2012), 207.

Why is generosity so hard? What is the root sin behind our greed? Forget all the excuses that we're prone to interject – those are superficial. I'm asking, what is the sin that lives *beneath* the excuses? Paul seems to be saying here that a lack of generosity is indicative of a lack of love.

When I am greedy – when I turn a blind eye to a person in need – what I am saying most fundamentally is that I love myself and my wealth more than I love the person in front of me.

And isn't that exactly what Jesus taught us in the parable of the good Samaritan? As he was teaching the crowd what it looked like to 'love your neighbour as yourself', Jesus told a story about a man who was beaten by bandits and left for dead on the side of the road. Three religious people walked by, ignoring the man in need, but a Samaritan brought him to a lodge and paid to have his needs taken care of.

According to Jesus, THAT is what it looks like to love your neighbour! THAT is the love that was being tested in the Corinthians. THAT is the love that is tested in us each time we see an opportunity to be generous. If we want to grow in generosity, then what we need most fundamentally is to grow in love.

Now, as to how we go about doing that, that is a bigger question that deserves its own sermon. How can we grow in our love for one another? Very practically, I would put forward two suggestions. First, pray. Ask God to grow your love for others. Use your prayer time to consider the needs of the people around you. Second, spend time with others. It's easy to neglect love for others when you silo yourself away from the world all week long. Invite people into your home. Go to their home. Go on a missions trip. Experience firsthand the lives of others. See their context and their challenges. Position yourself in places where your love can grow.

And that leads naturally to the third lesson we find in this text:

### **3. We can stir up our hearts to be generous by considering what is fair**

Look with me again at verses 13-15. I imagine some of the believers in Corinth were objecting, 'Why is Paul asking us to send our money to Jerusalem? Does he want my family to starve so that

the family in Jerusalem can eat?’ Paul is clearly getting ahead of that line of thinking when he writes:

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness <sup>14</sup> your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, **that there may be fairness.** <sup>15</sup> As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.” (2 Corinthians 8:13-15 ESV)

He essentially says, ‘I’m not asking you to starve your family. You can’t give what you don’t have. But maybe – if you DO have a little extra in this season – *maybe* you should send some to those who are starving in Jerusalem? If you have much, and they have little, maybe it would be fair if you shared?’

The best illustration I’ve heard on this passage was in a sermon by Pastor Paul Carter 10 years ago. It’s stuck with me, so I want to share it with you. Imagine a dad packing a lunch box for his three kids before school. For his own unspecified reasons – perhaps as a test, or a character-building opportunity – he puts all the sandwiches, cheese strings, fruit roll ups and apple slices into the oldest child’s lunch box. There is more than enough food for all three kids, but Dad chose to send it all with the one child.

At the end of the day, if his oldest comes home with a sore tummy, and a bloated waistline, and says, ‘Thanks for giving me all of those treats, Dad! Next time you should pack some for my siblings – they were starving!’ how do you think he’ll respond?

Is there not a level of common sense that we suppress when we allow ourselves to indulge our greed and selfishness? One of God’s children was born into affluent North America with tremendous gifts and opportunities. Another of God’s children was born into a slum in northern India. She is equally gifted, and she works just as hard. But she will never have the same opportunities. Is the person born in North America meant to assume that God simply loves him more?

What does God expect from us when we are made aware of the desperate needs of our brothers and sisters around the world? What is fair?

Paul tells us that we should reflect on these things. Many of us in this room have won the lottery – so to speak. Which is not to say that we did not work hard or that we should be ashamed of our wealth. Let me be clear: I’m not saying that!

But I AM saying that we ought to recognize that our Father put some extra sandwiches in our lunch box. I AM saying that a day is soon coming when we will stand before our heavenly Father – alongside our brothers and sisters who were born into poverty – and we will answer for our choices. On that day, I don’t want to be the son with a tummy ache and a lunchbox full of empty wrappers. Let’s strive to live in a way that is fair.

Fourth, and finally:

#### **4. We can stir up our hearts to be generous by reminding ourselves of the gospel**

Paul places this at the center of his argument because it is the most important piece of the puzzle. Martin Luther once said:

The Gospel cannot be preached and heard enough, for it cannot be grasped well enough.<sup>3</sup>

Every element of the Christian life flows out of our understanding of the gospel. And so – as Paul calls upon the church to be generous – he reminds them 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. (2 Corinthians 8:9 ESV)

Notice those opening words: ‘For you *know*’. The people that Paul is writing to are Christians. This isn’t new information for them. Nor is it new information for us. We *know* this.

And yet, Paul wants us to slow down and reflect on this amazing truth once again. He says, ‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus’. Grace is such an important word. Grace is the giving of an undeserved gift. We didn’t *earn* salvation, nor could we ever deserve it. And yet:

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther as quoted by C.J. Mahoney, *Living the Cross Centered Life*, (United States: Multnomah, 2006), 23.

God shows his love for us in that **while we were still sinners**, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 ESV)

‘You *know* grace’ Paul says, ‘that though he was rich, *for your sake* he became poor.’ We know this. And yet, Paul knows that we are so prone to forget.

Before Jesus came to us, he had never experienced hunger or thirst. He had never felt the sting of betrayal or suffered through the grief of a funeral. He had never experienced pain – let alone the excruciating pain of the cross. He had never experienced the displeasure of His Father until he bore the wrath of God against our sin in our place.

He was RICH in a way that you and I with our finite, creature minds will never be able to understand. AND YET, Paul reminds us, for OUR sake he became poor. As Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but **emptied himself**, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8 ESV)

Christian, Jesus gave EVERYTHING for you. And for me.

He emptied himself. He stepped down into our poverty so that we might become rich.

If you have confessed your sin and placed your trust in Jesus, then he has cleansed you of your sin and transformed you into a child of God. Because of Jesus’ generosity, there is glory in store for you! The new heavens and the new earth are now yours to inherit! A new day is coming when every tear will be wiped away – where there will be no more sin, and no more death – and YOU GET TO BE THERE!

Because of Jesus.

He stepped into our poverty so that we could be rich.

We *know* this.

But if we would become truly generous people – if we would become a church that OVERFLOWS in generosity – then we need to LIVE this.

Jesus told a parable of a fool who was entrusted with great riches. But as the riches increased, rather than blessing others he simply built bigger barns. Surrounded by a world in need, he decided to continue amassing his treasure.

If we're honest, there is a wrestle in each of our hearts to build bigger barns.

But we were made in the image of God, and He is the God who overflows in generosity. Big barns – big bank accounts – are celebrated by the world. But they will never bring you satisfaction. Because God didn't make you to be a hoarder. He made you to overflow. He blessed you so that you would be a blessing.

This morning, if you recognize that there is some lingering sin that is obscuring His image in your life – like the sediment on those ancient coins – I want to encourage you that Jesus is here – chisel in hand – and he is eager to restore you to who it is that God made you to be. To that end, let's pray together.