

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on October 25, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb on 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

**Series: Live Like No One Else**

**Today's Focus: "A Full Life"**

**"Generosity Prompts Praise!"**

In the name of Jesus who once said, "Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15).

Have you ever heard the name John D. Rockefeller? He was a co-founder of the Standard Oil Company which came to dominate the US oil industry in the late 1800s. Basically he was the richest man of his time. He was the Bill Gates of his day. Rockefeller was so wealthy that when he died, his wealth, adjusted for inflation today, was \$336 billion. Can you even imagine? Once he was asked how much money is enough. And his reply? "Just a little bit more."

Now I don't think anyone would call Rockefeller a fool but you all heard Jesus tell a story today about a man whom God actually did call a fool. It's recorded in Luke chapter 12:15-21. We heard the story of the rich fool who kept upgrading the size of his storage units. He did this rarely thinking about others and never about God. Then suddenly he died—a materially rich, but spiritual poor fool. For what a tragedy! He couldn't take a single penny with him into the place where he would spend eternity. He died with his barns filled to overflowing, but with his soul on empty.

Well the words we're going to hear today as we finish this series is sort of a how-to. How not to die a fool—empty and without God, but rather how to live a full life that leads others to actually thank and praise God. That's the kind of life that the Corinthians were striving to live. Remember the situation. Pastor Paul, their first pastor, is writing to the Corinthians to encourage them to finish the gift they promised to give to the Jews in Jerusalem who were suffering from poverty. Paul has explained how Jesus Christ's sacrificial love for us as seen at the cross is what motivates us to want to give generously.

Because this is how God is too. God is generous. The one true, Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is generous. And when he made us in his image, I think part of what that means is that he made us to be generous. So when we are generous, we actually fulfill one of the purposes for which God made us. For when we give cheerfully we simply reflect the character of God himself who is the greatest giver! And so here's a truth that we want to talk about today...**generosity prompts praise!** When God's people are generous, others are led to thank and praise God for being generous! Listen to what Paul says in the closing verses of this awesome section of 2 Corinthians 9:

<sup>6</sup> Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. <sup>7</sup> Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or

*under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.<sup>8</sup> And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.<sup>9</sup> As it is written:*

*“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;  
their righteousness endures forever.”*

*<sup>10</sup> Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.<sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

*<sup>12</sup> This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.<sup>13</sup> Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.<sup>14</sup> And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.<sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

So what have you been thinking the last couple weeks as we’ve gone through these two chapters of the Bible? Well in preaching through these two chapters a pastor friend of mine shared how he’s been forced to confront how money is something that’s always competing with God for first place in his life. And you know what I said? I said, “Dude, you’re not alone. That’s true for all of us I think, isn’t it?” What about for you? Friends, how much do you trust God to provide what you need? Do you take every day time to thank and praise God for all the ways he gives you just what you have and more, or do you spend your days and hours fretting about what you don’t have or would like to have if only you had more money? I mean Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread, the necessities of life one day at a time, but don’t we act sometimes like we would’ve preferred that Jesus had taught us to pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this year our yearly bread...or give us this lifetime some leisure and luxury.” I’ll be honest, that sounds kind of nice.

For me it’s usually not that I think more money will make me happier. It’s more that I sometimes think more money will make me feel more secure. That’s how I’m like John D Rockefeller. How much money is enough? “Just a little bit more.” So the temptation is to find my security in money instead of God, to be stingy instead of generous, to be tight fisted instead of open handed, to sow sparingly instead of generously because I’m motivated by fear instead of being motivated by faith in God’s ability to abundantly provide.

My friend shared this comment with me. He said, “I don’t think I really realized before how much money controls the thoughts and the emotions in my heart.” Friends, I wonder, do you? This whole series is our opportunity to repent, friends, and to ask God once more to forgive us. To admit that money has too often taken control of our lives and can often function as our substitute God. By nature we are spiritually poor.

Yet the good news is that God makes those who are spiritually poor, abundantly rich. Rich in Jesus Christ our Savior who perfectly trusted his father for his daily bread. Jesus never was greedy or envious. He was perfectly content. The good news is that on the cross Jesus gave you and me the riches of his perfect life. And on the cross Jesus accepted in exchange the full penalty of our greed and idolatry. And so this principle still applies today just as it did to the Corinthians for whom Christ also died and rose again:

*Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* I like to say that God is so good to us in spite of us. His generosity prompts praise! So I want to praise God by telling you about my businessman friend because his faith illustrates this verse. Last year this friend of mine donated \$50,000 to our church's building fund to help us build our ministry center. That's a large amount of money, isn't it? Well as many of you know this past year has been a roller coaster ride with our church's building plans. Our site plan that was originally approved by the City got changed multiple times. We had to change the plans when Kayla's Playground got moved to a different site. We then had to change the site plan due to some poor soils. We had to change the site plan because of the trees that were declared to be mature woodlands by the City. We had to change the grading of retention ponds, the shape of the parking lot, bring in extra fill, and multiple times change some of the materials we've used in the building, etc. So there have been multiple times when we had to make decisions not exactly knowing the impact or the outcome but trusting God to work it out.

Well a couple weeks ago I reached out to my friend again this year. You see because of all the site plan changes we had to take some things out of the budget just to get the building itself built. We made those decisions but weren't sure how would furnish the building. That's one of the reasons we have a soft cost campaign and we're prayerfully waiting to see how that turns out. And that's ok. Our God is a God who provides.

So I invited my friend to come on site for a tour. I showed him around. We talked about what God is doing. And then he asked, "Ben, what do you need?" And I said, "Well \$30K would help get us this and that. \$50K really gets us really close to what I think we need for audio/visual so we can get the message out well." And just like that, without even blinking, he gave me a check on the spot for \$50K and said, "I'm so happy I get to do this. I believe God always comes first. If the Church needs something, that's our first priority. He'll take care of the rest." Well you can bet I held onto the check carefully until I handed it off to be deposited in the bank!

But the story's not over. You see later that week, the phone rang. It was my friend. I was a little nervous when I saw the caller ID (because this is how our sinful nature always is right?) that he was going to say, "I hope you didn't cash that check yet, I need you to give it back" but instead I could tell from his tone of voice that he was excited. He said, "Ben, I didn't tell you this the other day when I gave you that check, but all year long we've been in cost savings mode with the business. So when I told our CFO that I wrote you guys that check, he said, 'What are you doing?' And I said, 'We can trust God to take care of us. He always has.' And he said, 'Ok, well that's nice that you trust God, but we have to trust you.'"

And then my friend said, "Then when I got home and told my wife, she said, 'What are you doing?' And I said, 'We can trust God to take care of us. He always has.'" And then my friend explains, "Ben, the reason I'm calling you today is because we just found out that we unexpectedly landed a new contract worth just over \$400,000 for the business. Isn't God awesome!? He is so amazingly generous!" And I said, "God be praised! That is incredible! And all the more so because here's something you didn't know either, my friend. After you handed me that check the other day, I walked around our ministry center site and said prayers of thanks and praise to God for people like you who not only have business savvy and the means to be generous but so cheerfully want to help. And I specifically asked that God would continue to bless you so that you also can be generous on every occasion with the blessings God pours out in ways that you haven't even yet seen or imagined." Needless to say we both were prompted to thank and praise God together over the phone! Amen?

Friends, listen to this again: <sup>11</sup> *You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

<sup>12</sup> *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.* <sup>13</sup> *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ.*

According to these passages, what does generosity do? Generosity prompts many expressions of thanksgiving and praise to God! Does this still happen today? Absolutely yes. When you give cheerfully, you are showing that money is not your master. Money is not your god. You are showing that you have a greater God, a richer God, a more generous God. And then through the ministry of our church when the message of God's love through Jesus is preached, the Holy Spirit goes to work in people's hearts to create saving faith in Jesus so that God is glorified. So generosity prompts praise which prompts praise which prompts more praise. It's a beautiful things

This is why the Corinthians are eager here to give and why Paul in the Bible is encouraging them to bring this special offering to completion. I look at something like watching my 3 year old nephew at the water park. He stands there looking up at the water slide. He wants to go down the slide. So he walks up the steps. Now he's standing there looking down at the slide. But he's not yet going down. He's continuing to stand there. His intention hasn't yet translated into action. Meanwhile his dad is saying, "Come on, Malachi, you can do it." And the thing is Malachi wants to do it. But he's a little scared to at the same time. He's never done this before. Going down the big kid slide is a big deal. And just having dad say, "Come on, Malachi, you can do it" doesn't quite motivate him to do it. Until...until...he sees his older cousin Sophia step in front of him and confidently go down the slide, hears her shout "Whee!", and then thinks, "I want to experience that too." And with that, he goes down the slide. "Whee!" It seemed risky but it was worth it. Soon he wants to go again. His confidence builds. He starts looking at the bigger slides and thinks, "Those might even be more fun."

Friends, that's what generous giving is like. If you don't do it, you miss out. If you do it cheerfully, you will find it fulfilling. And your faith is then given the opportunity to grow as you wait to see how God fills you up in ways you couldn't imagine—especially when you hear other people thanking and praising God along with you!

You and I were made to be givers. Why? Because that's how God is. Open handed, not tight fisted. In fact God is the greatest giver whose undeserved gifts of grace can only prompt in us our highest thanks and praise. And I think that's why Paul wraps up this whole section, as if when it comes to God, he runs out of words: <sup>15</sup> *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

What is this *indescribable gift*? I think it's summed up pretty well in the verse that serves as kind of the theme verse for our church. *"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Cor. 15:57) That's what this is really all about, isn't it? The gift of Jesus our Savior who took our place and paid our sin debt. The spoils of his victory that are given to us by faith through the gospel in God's Word and the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Because through the gospel we receive forgiveness for all our sins and an inheritance stored up in heaven and that comes to us free of charge. God's riches at Christ's expense! These are our true lasting treasures and what we want to also share with others. Can you hear all the people for generations to come thanking and praising God because of your generosity? Amen.

### **My Next Steps**

**Point to Ponder:** When we are generous, we actually fulfill one of the purposes for which God made us. When we give cheerfully, we reflect the heart and character of God himself who is the greatest giver!

**Treasure to Share:** *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up"* (Galatians 6:9).

**Action to Take:** Where are you at in terms of joyful generosity with your time? Your talents? Your financial resources and treasures? What would happen if you prayed, "Lord, let my life today be your generous answer to someone else's prayer"?

Reflect on the greatest gifts God has given you and pray about how God might be prompting you to give in response. Consider signing up to serve today in the lobby at our ministry fair, helping buy a chair for our ministry center, or perhaps for you it's taking the next step of giving an offering for the first time.