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2 Corinthians 8:9-15 – The Fullest Life

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Have you ever heard someone say about you or maybe just about Christians in general that Christians don't get as much out of life as non-Christians? I mean, there's no way you could have as much fun as everyone else because you're "trying to live a Christian life." There's no way you can live life to the hilt. I've heard it. In fact, I recently talked to a woman who told me she felt trapped because she likes being a Christian, but she feels like she can't really be the "fun" person she felt like she was when she wasn't a Christian. Maybe you can relate to that sentiment. Maybe it's the only thing you're really not sure about with this whole being a Christian thing. I mean, grace is a wonderful thing, and we need to hear it all the time. I'm so glad my sins are forgiven, but now I have to live Leave It To Beaver style, and let's just be honest, that can be really hard.

Well, I am convinced that actually the very opposite is true. I believe that Christians are the ONLY ones who can live life to the fullest. I believe they are the only ones who can live life to the hilt. That's what Paul is getting at in 2 Corinthians, and that's really what we are getting at in a series like Live Like No One Else. We are seeing how being a Christian allows us to live like no one else even can!

Now, I want you to think if I want to the mall today and offered everyone I saw \$20, would they take it from me? Of course. Whether they were Christians or not, almost every person would accept money from me. Why? What is so universal about money? I mean, it's one of the few things in life that everyone wants. Seriously, you can offer other really great things to people and they might say no, or might just take it so they can sell it to get money. Well, money offers me the chance to improve my life. For the poorest person, it might be the only way they get a meal, for a teenager, it might mean a new video game, clothes or an extra trip to Taco Bell, for the blue collar worker, it might be a chance to buy a luxury item they wouldn't have had otherwise. For the rich, he might not have anything specifically in mind, but it's nice to have in case he walks by a vending machine or something, ya know? We all want the chance to make our life better. Money offers that, whether you're Christian or not.

But now, you might be thinking, "But people give their money away! What about gifts?" Ok, sure. But how many times do we give money away hoping to get something in return? I think I would probably only need one hand to count the amount of times I gave a gift to someone without expecting anything in return, although even those times, I'm not so sure I wasn't just doing it so I could give myself a super private and humble pat on the back for my generosity. We give gifts because we hope gifts will come back to us, or because we want people to think highly of us, or because we feel like we are fulfilling an obligation. And that means we are right back where we started, trying to make our lives better both in getting and giving money.

See, it all comes down to the same desire that we all have which goes deeper than just the desire to make our lives better. It's the desire to win. I'm actually convinced that this is

the reason sports are so huge in our country. We love to win so much that we are even willing to spend money so we can win vicariously through other people.

But on a personal level, none of us wants to lose. That can be in totally superfluous things. If my neighbor has a nice car or a nice house, I want to be the same or at least close so I don't seem like I'm losing to him. I compare myself to the people that I maybe graduated college with to see if they have a better paying job than I do, even if I'm completely happy with the job I have objectively. But this can also happen in very base ways. I can look at TV shows or bloggers or celebrities or friends or co-workers or whoever and worry that they are just generally happier than I am. If they are, I have to figure out what I'm doing wrong. Am I eating the right thing? Am I exercising enough? Am I taking the right pills? Am I hanging out with the wrong people? WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO SO THAT I DON'T LOSE?

You know, it makes me think of our gospel lesson about Jesus. There was man who came to Jesus one day and asked him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He was man who didn't want to lose. He had certainly heard that this Jesus could do amazing things and was even offering eternal life! If everyone else was getting eternal life, he wanted to know how to get it too. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. "Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother." This man was convinced that he had kept these commandments. He told Jesus, "I have kept them since I was a boy." Even though he was very wrong about this, Jesus lets him believe it for a little while that he maybe has kept them, but then gives him one more command. He said, "One thing you lack. Go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow me." The man couldn't bring himself to do it though because the Bible says he had great wealth. See, this man could not stand to lose what he had. He was afraid of what he would lose. Like Pastor Ben talked about last Sunday, being a Christian very often means that you have to lose something like in the case of the Macedonians or Corinthians who were being fired and ostracized because they became Christians.

After the man left, Jesus said one of his famous pithy quotes that you've maybe heard before. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Of course, the disciples realize that this is impossible, they ask Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" because they don't want to lose what they have in Jesus just over some money.

And once we realize the futility of putting our hope of "winning" in this life in our money, we can left wondering the same thing. Would I be happy if I lost it all? It's nice to thing that I would, but in reality, would I? If I won the lottery, would it make me happy? Sure, it would for a time, but what about when the money runs out, or when people only want to be with you for your money?

See, in an effort to keep up with everyone around us, make ourselves, or just not feel like a failure, we look to money to make us happy. And if money has become what we depend on like that rich young man, then it really is impossible to get into heaven.

But look at what Jesus says to the disciples. "With man, this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God." See, God can do something for us that we can never do for ourselves. He can give us everything we need. Check out 2 Corinthians 8. **"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.”**

Jesus had everything. He was winning. He was everything that our heart desires. He not only had every bit of power and significance that we ever craved, but he never had to die. He never had to store up stuff to make himself feel better. He didn't have to compare himself to anyone because no one could compare. But in spite of all that, he gave it all to you. He switched places with you. He gave you the promise that you will live forever in heaven. He gave you a way to rid yourself of every bit of jealousy, greed, materialism, or coveting you've ever done. In fact, he became so poor that when he was on the cross, with all my sins and your sins on his shoulders, he was not only the world's poorest, most miserable sinner, he was the world's only sinner. He did it so you wouldn't have to rely on your stuff or your money to feel like you matter because whether you.

How would you live if you knew you couldn't lose? Think about it. If you were playing football, and you knew you couldn't lose, what kind of plays would you run? You'd run the craziest trick plays and deep throws and you'd feel great doing it! If you were an artist, and knew you couldn't lose, you would draw or paint or design whatever you wanted and you would go all out on it! If you worked at a great job with great pay that you knew you could never lose, you would work hard just for the love of the job! That's the way Paul talks about the Christian life.

Look, you're not going to lose Jesus. No matter how many times you've failed at life, no matter how many times you've sinned, no matter how much you will sin in the future, you have Jesus' love and forgiveness forever. So, now live like you can't lose! Look at how Paul describes that life.

**“Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.”**

See what he says! Keep doing what you're doing! You're living like you can't lose! You went out of your way to support other churches with your money. You could have used that money to make yourself happy, but you wanted to live like no one else. Now, finish your work with eager willingness!

So, what does that mean for Victory of the Lamb members? Living like no one else means being generous with what you have because you know Jesus became poor to give you something even better and no one can take that away from you. It means you can give to support the outreach we do here in Franklin. You can support the building of our ministry center, or even to support the missions that our national church body runs or specifically our missions in Nepal that you'll hear about later in our service.

Paul even helps us understand how much we should give! He says to **“...according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.”**

We talked about this last week with the widow who only gave a couple pennies, but God cares less about how much you give than why you give. On the other side of the coin, God doesn't want you to just throw away everything. God wants you to live like no one else. So, I

want to ask you, are you holding on to just a little bit of reliance on your money or are you ready to see what God can do for you? I don't ask you because it affects me or pastor. Our salaries are set. Every bit of money you add to what you're currently giving goes directly to increasing ministry either here in Franklin or in the missions we support as a congregation.

See, Victory of the Lamb can be like the Corinthians in how we serve other congregations. God has blessed us with a lot, so now he calls us to give like no one else. Because here's the thing, God could give congregations what they needed and then nothing more. He could lead lottery winners into congregations if he wanted to, but he didn't. He brought you into this congregation so you could be a blessing to other people. Be that blessing!

But what if it's just not there? I mean, I would be completely nuts if I believed that every person in here was just rolling in money and looking for a place to give it to the church. The fact is, we aren't all the same, and sometimes hard times take away wealth that we were counting on. What do you do then?

Well, what Paul reminds us is that you don't have to feel guilty because you can barely keep your head above water right now. You don't have to blame yourself when your money doesn't allow you to give like you wish. God gave you your wealth and for a time, his will might be that you lose it, but he knows. He hasn't forgotten you. When those times come, that's a chance for your brothers and sisters in Christ to love you!

Like Paul says, **"At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need."** God calls the church to look out for and love each other and to do that proportionally out of what he has given them.

So if this sermon is coming to you in a time of plenty where God has really blessed you, look for ways to share your wealth with God's people. If this sermon comes to you in hard times, look to your family of believers here at Victory of the Lamb to love you and support you. And if you are either of those groups and you feel personally challenged to step out of your comfort zone and take those challenges, I encourage you to talk to me or Pastor Ben about how we can help you.

Maybe you've heard people say that that Christians can't live life to the fullest, but I'm convinced that with grace, life, and love from Jesus that I can't lose, I can live like no one else. I challenge you to love like you can't lose. I challenge you to give like you can't lose. I challenge you to live like you can't lose. I challenge you to live like no else.