

"It is More Blessed to Give than to Receive"

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[0 : 00] I wonder if I were to describe someone as really blessed, really blessed, what might you think I was saying about them?

There are a lot of different places we could go with that, aren't there? Maybe blessed with good health, blessed with a stable family, blessed with wealth. Blessed with a secure job, a stable income, a home to go to, friends to hang out with.

I'm sure that there's many others that come to your own mind as well. But when it comes to what we associate with what it means to be blessed, most, if not all the time, we think, don't we, we think of things that people have.

Health, wealth, family, careers, whatever it might be. Well, Jesus knows the world better than we do, and as with many things, Jesus therefore sees the world differently to we often do.

And Jesus does not say that those things are not blessings. But according to Jesus, more blessed than having is giving.

[1 : 27] It is more blessed to give than to receive. We live in a world, don't we, that often assumes the opposite of that to be true, that assumes getting is the way to happiness and contentment.

But Jesus says it is giving. And interestingly, although unsurprisingly, given Jesus said it, as I was kind of reading up on this through the week, the science checks out, came across two separate, secular, peer-reviewed journal articles this week, which both found that people who give live longer, healthier, happier lives.

Now, those journal articles themselves might be a good enough reason for us to give. Jesus' words, though, far more so. Because Jesus' words, aren't they, are far more authoritative.

And he also adds much-needed depth to what it means to give and why we should do it. We're carrying on our series, looking this morning at the elements of worship, and we're approaching a topic today that might not initially seem to obviously fit in.

But hopefully, very soon, it will. Just come back with me to that passage we read in 2 Corinthians 9, as we think about not only why it is more blessed to give than to receive, but also how it fits in to our worship.

[3 : 11] So two very simple questions to look at this morning, as we've been doing so throughout our series. Why do we give, and how do we give? Why do we give, and how do we give?

First of all, why do we give? And the simplest answers are often the best, aren't they? And it's no different here. Why do we give? We give as a good and right response to the greatest gift of all.

Just look down there with me to verse 12 of 2 Corinthians 9, where Paul writes, this service that you perform, that is their generous giving, the generous giving of the Corinthian church.

He says, this service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people, it is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Why is God to be thanked? We get a little glimpse of it there in verse 15, don't we? Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

[4 : 23] We give as an act of thanksgiving to God, who has already given us the most indescribable gift of all. If you go back through the years of your life, I imagine there have been some pretty wonderful gifts you've received in that time.

I still remember a Hornby train set I got one Christmas. Admittedly, it was only actually a few years ago. But however great a gift we might have received, right, none of them, not one of them, will even remotely compare to what God has given us in Christ.

Trust that those of us who are regular here do not need me to explain the wonder of Christ's gift in great detail.

Please come and ask me about it afterwards if you do not know what that is. But it is, isn't it? The greatest gift of all. The gift of complete forgiveness.

Eternal life. Life. It is a gift we could never have earned through any and all of our efforts. It is a gift we are in desperate need of.

[5 : 35] It is a gift that cost God more than we can ever fully comprehend. And it is a gift he gladly and freely gives to us.

That's what we've been seeing in this series on worship. We've spent a few weeks now looking at our response to God's revealed grace. We respond in singing, we saw a few weeks ago.

A couple of weeks back, we saw how we respond in prayer. And we see that we respond in thanksgiving by giving. Giving is worship.

Because it is what we can and should do in response to God's revealed grace in Jesus Christ. We do not have an item, do we, in the order of service that says giving or offering.

Some churches might well do, and that's certainly no bad thing. But just because you can't see it in the piece of paper in front of you does not make it any lesser a part of how we participate in worship.

[6 : 44] Responding through giving because of the indescribable gift he has first given us. Let me be clear. We do not live in debt to God.

But we do live in constant gratitude to him. That is a key distinction I think we need to make sure we understand. We do not give to God a sort of repayment for what he has given us.

The gospel is freely offered to us. And if we do not freely accept it, acknowledging we could never pay for it, then we don't accept it at all. We do not live in debt to God, but we do live in thankfulness.

And we express that gratitude through giving back to him something of what has been given to us. Today is Father's Day, isn't it?

It's a helpful reminder for some of you. Imagine a dad, right? Maybe you are this dad. Imagine a dad who gives their young son or daughter a little bit of pocket money every week.

[7 : 50] And then Father's Day arrived and the little child brings along a lovingly, but probably terribly, wrapped present. It's not an act of payment or repayment, is it?

Nor is it the child giving their parents something they need or would have otherwise been without. It is, first and foremost, just an act of thankfulness.

Really, the dad's paid for it, hasn't he? But the child is freely using what they have been given to give back to the one who provides for them.

And it is an act of thanksgiving that brings great joy, isn't it? Blessedness to everyone. The father has joy in the gift given.

Even if it's not really up to much. The child has joy in seeing the joy of their father, even though he's only receiving what was his in the first place. That is how we are to think of giving first and foremost.

[9 : 00] Not financially, but joyfully. Like no one on Father's Day, are they? Are sort of looking at the budget and wondering if it was really a financially sound decision.

Looking at the bottom line and saying, well, actually that was a bit pointless. There might not be any more money in the household at the end of the day, but there is more joy. That is what is at the heart of giving.

Not balancing the books, but offering thanksgiving to the one who provides all things. Knowing that we are only really giving him what is already his.

But doing so, knowing that our acts of worship, our giving, brings joy to both him and us. As an expression of our glad dependence on him for all things.

Most of all, the eternal salvation of our very souls. And so we give. Why do we give? We give to worship. We give as an act of worship, as we respond to the greatest gift of all.

[10 : 11] I said earlier we would see how giving fits into our worship. I hope you see now that giving is not just that it fits into our worship, but it is part of our worship. Giving is worshipping.

And it is perhaps helpful to note here at this point, right, that if this is the primary purpose of giving, that means that those who give a small amount from the little they have, right, is of no less value.

It is no smaller an act of worship compared to those who give much from their plenty. God knows what you give. And he delights in people.

And will bring delight to people who give from what they have, whether that is much or little. When Jesus watches people putting large sums into the temple offering, he doesn't, unsurprisingly, he doesn't condemn any of them.

But it is the woman, isn't it? The poverty-stricken woman who puts a tiny amount from her poverty that he holds up to the disciples as the paradigm of godly giving.

[11 : 22] It's not first and foremost about balancing the church's books. That is good and important. But the primary purpose of giving is to express our thanks to God for his indescribable gifts by giving back to him from whatever he has given us.

So let me just say here, if you are in any way hesitant about giving because you wonder what difference the little you'd be able to give would really make, then, well, first of all, it would make a difference.

But far more importantly, even if it is only a tiny fraction of what others might be able to give, it is no lesser and potentially even greater an act of worship.

And that is what matters most. That through it we worship God for the indescribable gift he has given us. So we give as an act of worship.

But in God's good providence, when we respond to his grace in this way, he achieves much else through it. We get a glimpse of the ways that God uses giving to serve his kingdom purposes in verses 12 to 14 there.

[12 : 41] We see, don't we, that giving is an act of worship, but it is also an act of love to Christian brothers and sisters who need care and support. It is an act of obedience and proclamation.

Through our giving, others praise God. Not because we make a big deal of our individual gifts, but because people will see and rejoice in corporate generosity that is able to support God's people and God's work.

And it does support God's work. God loves to work through very ordinary means. God loves to work through very ordinary means.

He destroys his kingdom on earth and saves people's eternal souls. It's been a joy and a privilege, hasn't it, over the last year to see a number of people come to faith, give their life to Jesus, through the preaching of his word, through Judy and Anne and others meeting up and speaking God's word into their lives.

all of it happens because God delights to use the gifts of his people given to the church. Let us be clear, God does not need our giving to save people but in his goodness he uses our acts of worship as part of his plan for salvation.

[14 : 43] He takes what we give and he uses it to give people everlasting life. That's a glorious thing, is it not?

God could so very easily do it entirely independently of us but instead he chooses to share that joy with us. Again, think of the picture of a father with work to do, washing the car, mowing the lawn, painting the fence.

You can probably guess what's happening with my day off tomorrow. If I take our young son along to help me with those tasks, it is not necessary, is it?

It is not going to improve the efficiency. It will almost certainly take a little longer than it would if I decided to go about it on my own. But there will be far more joy and delight in sharing that work, sharing the joy, the labor with children.

That is what God does. And so God hands us the paintbrush and says, come along. And we get to be part of his work.

[16 : 01] Working with our Father in heaven through many means, one of which is what we give. If we gave as an act of worship and it vanished into a black hole and we never saw it again, that would still be a good and right thing to do.

Because giving is most of all about worshiping, responding rightly to God's grace. But God in his goodness also chooses to bring us along, using us and our gifts to care for his people and to grow his kingdom by giving his indescribable gift to more and more people.

That, brothers and sisters, is an immense privilege. So why do we give? We've seen two things in the last 10 minutes or so.

We give in order to worship. And we give because we get to. As an act of love, as an act of gospel proclamation and kingdom work by supporting God's means as he works through the local church.

That is why we give. Let us now just spend the rest of our time thinking a little more briefly about how we give. If we just look back up there to the start of that passage we read from verse 6 of 2 Corinthians 9.

[17 : 34] I'm just going to quickly provide three points from these verses from verse 6 to 11 that give us some guidance on how we should give. First of all, verse 6, we give generously.

Remember this, Paul writes, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

Again, down to verse 11, you'll be enriched in every way. Why? So that you can be generous on every occasion. Godly giving is generous giving.

That means it's more than handing over what happens to be left over at the end of the month after we've bought everything we want to. Generous giving means giving in a way that will cost us something.

Now there is no fixed number on that. And it's really important you hear the New Testament session that it is a wisdom issue. It doesn't give us a percentage or a figure to match.

[18 : 40] But it does say again and again, give generously out of your abundance. We mentioned earlier, didn't we, that the poor widow at the temple who put in two small copper coins.

Jesus was clear, wasn't he? That was the most generous gift of all. Not because of the amount, but because of the relative sacrifice. Of the one giving it.

So there is no fixed number of percentage, but throughout the New Testament, precedent is that generous giving is costly giving. Giving where it will tangibly affect the way we live our lives.

You can go and read 2 Corinthians 8 if you want to just see a little glimpse of that and how the Macedonian churches were doing that in Paul's time. Now it might be at this point you're thinking, aren't we just supposed to give 10%?

A tithe, as we call it. And not worry about any more than that. Well, not only does the New Testament not really make any mention of that, it's not really what the Old Testament says either.

[19 : 51] And in ancient Israel, the people were to give back to God a tenth of whatever crop they harvested. Recognizing that every year of wheat and kernel of barley, they had only because God had sent the sunshine and rain.

And that went, that tenth went to support in the Levites who performed temple work. So the tithe was a response to a good harvest and given to support the work of the Levites.

But there was a lot else in ancient Israel. The poor and the widows, sojourners and strangers, other sacrifices and festivals and celebrations. When the Israelites were expected to give over and above what they had already contributed through their tithe.

They responded to the gift of a healthy harvest by gladly giving a tenth of what they took in. If they gave a tenth for the gift of a good harvest, I think the question is really how much more should we give in response not to the gift of a harvest but to an indescribable gift?

A tenth was a fitting response to God sending sun and rain in season. How much more should we seek to give who have been sent the one and only Son of God to bear the wrath of God we deserve?

[21 : 24] There is no comparison really, is there? Just a couple of things to say. Do not hear me say that means we should give beyond our means, nor that we have to make ourselves miserable.

The Bible is very clear on the extreme importance of looking after ourselves and those dependent on us. And it also affirms the good enjoyment of the good gifts God has given us.

But whatever we do have, we are expected to give generously from. It might even be that less than a tenth is genuinely all that you can afford to give after you've provided the necessities for you and your family.

God will delight in that gift. But we come to using the Old Testament tithe as a basis of our own giving. I think we should see it not as the model, but the baseline.

Look after your family. Enjoy what God has given you, but live and give generously from it.

[22 : 38] So don't hear me saying you should feel guilty about going on holiday, but perhaps do think about going to a slightly less fancy hotel, or going away for a couple of less days, or taking someone along with you so that we can give to God from the abundance He has provided us with.

So too with everything that we are blessed with. Enjoy it. Please do enjoy it. But think about how to give generously from it too. Living generously means holding all that we have lightly, sharing it with others around us, and giving more than we need to, delighting to be as generous as we can with all that we have.

So our giving should be generous, and it should also be joyful. If we don't want to give generously, there are deeper problems underneath the surface that are beyond the scope of this sermon.

But if we do want to give generously, then delight in whatever you give. Delight to give as much as the Lord puts on your heart to give.

Just look there at verse 7. Each of you should give, Paul writes, what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

[24 : 07] Please don't, off the back of this service, give abundantly simply because you feel like you have to, begrudgingly. That is not an act of worship.

And that is what we want all of our giving to be. But do, Paul says, give abundantly because you want to give generously, knowing that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Believe those words of Jesus, and your giving will not be a duty, but a joy. I mentioned the chapter before this, chapter 8, just a minute ago.

In that chapter, Paul recounts how the poverty-stricken churches in Macedonia, despite their poverty, pleaded with Paul. They pleaded with Paul to be able to give to the collection.

not because they had an abundance to give out of, far from it, but because they recognized the joy of giving, even out of their poverty, and so begged to be allowed to take part in the giving.

[25 : 18] Giving is a duty, but even more so, it is a joy. It is not a burden, but a privilege. Take delight in giving to God in response to his gospel.

That means not giving begrudgingly, nor out of mere compulsion, but I have a genuine desire to give. Giving is worship, and just like singing or any of the other elements we've looked at, it is to be done joyfully, participating gladly in it.

Different people here give in different ways, and there are many people here who are so, so generous, and the church is extremely thankful for that, and God delights in it.

But I would say, however you give, make sure you do it joyfully. We live in a kind of unprecedented era of technology, don't we? And for many of us, I speak of myself included very much in this, giving can become something that you think just happens right in the bank account.

you give no thought to, it just disappears. Sort of like your income tax and your national insurance, and you just live off whatever's left. But God wants you to delight in your giving.

[26 : 41] There is joy in giving. That might well mean, for many here, not changing what you give, but simply remembering that you give, and delighting in that fact, even if it's just something as simple as setting a reminder on your phone Sunday by Sunday, to joyfully remind yourself what you give to God because of what He has given you.

So we give generously and joyfully, and then thirdly and finally, we give expectantly. We give joyfully and generously and expectantly.

Giving should be costly and sacrificial now, but the Bible is actually very clear that the long-term returns on our generous, joyful giving will far outweigh the short-term cost.

Just look there at verse 10 of 2 Corinthians 9 where Paul writes, Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and enlarge your harvest of righteousness.

Generous, joyful giving comes with a guarantee. This investment will return far more than you've put in. not in that you're going to find more money in the bank account later on in the month, but in the sacrifice you give now will be seen by God and he will one day reward you abundantly for it.

[28 : 24] Generous, joyful giving takes the temporal and uncertain wealth of the now and gives it eternal value. Again, hold this in the big picture here.

Generous, joyful giving is other-centered giving. So if you start giving with the sole motivation that you are going to benefit from it at the end of the day, you're not giving in the way that will result in treasures in heaven being stored up.

But if you do give generously and joyfully in worship of God and for the good of others, rest and rejoice in knowing that your heavenly Father is producing a bountiful harvest of righteousness.

So give, expecting the Lord to enrich you in ways you cannot comprehend. But also, I think, give, expecting the Lord to work now because God works through these very ordinary means, doesn't he?

Every church needs resources to run and churches that are focusing the gospel will use those resources for gospel ends. And you can and should expect to see fruit from that.

[29 : 43] Not because God needs a certain payment before he'll get going in a place, but because he delights to work where his people delight in him. And where his people delight in him, there his people will generously and joyfully give to him as an act of worship.

So give, expecting the Lord to work now and give, expecting the Lord to bless you in eternity. That is how and why we give as an act of worship generously, joyfully and expectantly.

But before we close up in just a couple minutes, let me just highlight maybe a couple of really practical matters that might be of help as we think about this aspect of our worship.

We've seen, haven't we, that giving is a matter of wisdom and of conscience. Paul says very clearly, doesn't he, each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give.

Sometimes that can be a really hard question to answer within ourselves, especially if it's something we're unfamiliar with or we've not done before. So I would say if that is you, please go and speak to someone you trust about it.

[31 : 05] Ask for help and advice and guidance. Speak to a mature older Christian and speak to them about giving.

Ask for help. Listen to what they do. We should not by any means be publicly showing off how much we give. But we often don't we go to the other unhelpful extreme of just never speaking about it at all or addressing it in any circumstance.

That is not helpful. The Bible speaks a lot about money and giving and what we should do with it. And it speaks well of it.

It speaks very badly of the love of it. but it is a good gift that God has given us to steward and to steward well and we need help from one another in thinking how we can do that well.

So don't be afraid to ask for advice and guidance on what it might look like in your life to give joyfully and generously. And if you do want to give, I'm just going to say this from up the front because if you come to me after the service I'd have no idea.

[32 : 17] Speak to Ali and Christine or you can find the email in the weekly update as well where you can ask for more information to them about it. I'd be of no help whatsoever to you on that front.

So I'm just going to let you know that from here. But whatever you do, whatever you do, do it as a worshipful response to God's grace first and foremost.

There are so many people here who give so generously and the expectation for many is not that you will go and change how much you give. But we do want to think about how we give.

Make sure we are doing it joyfully and generously. Delighting in worshipping God through what we are doing.

Because above all else, giving is an act of worship. And when we give, we bring glory to Him who is alone worthy of our praise. And all that we have might not be our favourite topic to talk about.

[33 : 29] But when we do it joyfully and generously, know that we do bring glory to the Father, Son, and Spirit, and He will bless us through it.

Before we sing to Him once more in praise, let us just come before Him in prayer with one another. water.