

# Jesus Christ Is Lord - Lord of Our Money (3)

by J. Glyn Owen

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*Jesus Christ is Lord of our money, and Christian giving is mandatory and should be proportionate to one's ability to give.*

**Duration:** 56:37

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 16:1

**Topics:** "Money"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares an illustration about an American family welcoming refugees from another country. The family goes to the airport to meet the refugees, and the mother suggests that their daughter, Katie, bring some of her toys to give to the refugee children. The speaker then discusses four key words: poverty, generosity, giving, and stewardship. He emphasizes that even in extreme poverty, it is important to give generously to the Lord and his people. The sermon concludes with a story about a little girl who loses one of her quarters meant for the church collection, highlighting the importance of giving to the Lord.

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## Transcript

Now we are continuing with our subject that has occupied us for some time, Jesus Christ is Lord. And on two previous Sunday mornings we have been thinking of how he is Lord of our money. Two things we have stressed to date.

First of all, our Lord Jesus Christ seemed to set a limit to the accumulation of wealth. For his own followers and disciples. When he said, Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.

You were called into life, and you were redeemed for something beyond the accumulation of wealth. Get on with the business for which you were made and remade. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves don't break through and steal.

There your treasure is eternal. On the second occasion, we dealt with a subject which some people found a little challenging, and I must say that I for my part did. Our Lord Jesus Christ seems to indicate directly or indirectly that one of the most dangerous things in life is to hold money in our possession.

Money is a very dangerous commodity. It can hinder some people from entering the kingdom of God. We have instances in the New Testament of how it did that.

But then when some have apparently received the word of the gospel, it can crush, it can quench the influence of the word in the soul, so that the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, as Jesus says, seems to come down like a damper upon everything that has happened in our apparent proper response to the hearing of the gospel, and what seemed to be emerging as a new life just wilts and withers and dies. So it's a very dangerous thing to have accumulated wealth in our possession. We need tremendous grace to handle a full cup.

We need daily grace, we need great grace, we need sovereign grace. Now today we come to the matter of the distribution of such wealth as God in his providence, and we through our industry or in one way or another have in our possession. Today how are we going to use it? How do we distribute it? What use do we make of it? Now I must confess to you that I was quite bewildered as to where to begin and where to end.

I find that biblical religion from beginning to end has had something to say about the matter of our possessions, our wealth. In the Old Testament that is very, very obvious. The Jews, as we indicated on the first occasion when we were with this theme, probably gave more than one third of their annual income for the support of their religion.

Not a tenth, a tenth was a minimum. It's very sad that there are so many people in the evangelical church of today who have never realized that the tithe was but a minimum for the Jew in the Old Testament. It was a requirement but it was a minimum.

Over and above that there were free will offerings and there were special occasions, special occasions when they had to bring sometimes substantially more than the tithe of their then present income. All that I want to say this morning comes in brackets as it were between two pictures that I want to leave with you. I want you to see the wise men coming to the babe of Bethlehem.

I want you to see them coming bringing gifts with them, gold and frankincense and myrrh. Right at the outset of our Christian era, right at the coming of our Lord Jesus, right at the incarnation, somehow or other these men that are designated wise recognized that they had to bring something and give him as indicative of their heart's worship. Now move into the new Jerusalem, move into eternity.

Come with me in the light of the apostolic words in the book of the revelation and hear the song of the redeemed. Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive riches. Now between those two I want to call your attention this morning to two statements or two passages in Paul's epistle, or epistles rather, the two epistles to the Corinthians.

The one in 1 Corinthians 16 verses 1 and 2 is where Paul is found expounding some basic principles relative to Christian giving. Now that is the key passage this morning. It's 1 Corinthians 16 verses 1 and 2, certain basic principles.

But then in 2 Corinthians 8 verses 1 following we have the apostle Paul highly commending those who are practicing those principles not as a legal requirement but as a matter of grace. There's a world of difference between obeying a law and doing something out of grace in your heart as unto the Lord. Now those are the two areas of our concern then this morning.

So you'll find it useful if you have the Corinthian epistles open in your bibles. First of all the apostles exposition of some basic principles. Let me read verses 1 and 2 again.

Now about the collection for God's people. Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, and the words mean saving it up week by week, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

Now Paul of course is here addressing a particular need for the giving of the saints. It's a particular need but it seems that he is enunciating a fairly general principle. A principle that he has already enunciated to the Galatian churches and the same principle that he is now enunciating to the Corinthians.

So we may take it that even though he's addressing a particular situation, it has a the principles have a far more general application than that. Now the particular occasion is this and I don't don't want to enlarge upon it but I think it needs to be said in case someone doesn't quite remember the background. From the very word go the Jerusalem church, the mother church let us remember.

The mother church is the Jerusalem church. Every other church is an offshoot of the Jerusalem church. Not the church of Rome, not the church in Constantinople, not the church anywhere else but the church in Jerusalem.

That's the mother church. Now from the word go the Jerusalem church was very poor. You remember how the multitudes were gathered in on the day of Pentecost and then you read on to Acts chapter 4 and you find that thousands again were added to the church almost in a day, almost in a day.

Now true to principle the book of the Acts doesn't say very much about what it cost them but secular history does. Oh there are indications in the book of the Acts but they don't they don't blaze forth, they don't they don't shout about what it cost those early Christians but cost it did. You have only to read between the lines in order to see how much it cost.

When Paul came to Jerusalem for the first time one of the things that flabbergasted him was the fact that the Jerusalem church was so poor. The second time he went to Jerusalem and don't forget don't forget when Paul went to Jerusalem the first time the Christian church didn't receive him. Had it not been for Barnabas he would never have been given the right hand of fellowship they were afraid of him.

But when Paul goes to Jerusalem the second time he goes from Antioch in Syria and you remember he goes with a gift for the poor in Jerusalem. That's grace. This man who wasn't received by the community in Jerusalem sees their need and has so forgiven them their lack of hospitality and welcome he cares for them and he carries from a wealthier church further south he carries from them a gift which he himself had collected in order somewhat to alleviate their sufferings.

The third time he's there for a council where he and Barnabas were acknowledged to be the Lord's servants to preach the gospel to the Gentiles just as Peter and James were to the Jews. But Peter and James gave him a little word as he left he says don't forget Paul don't forget the poor. Now unquestionably they were referring to the fact that Paul was the only one who had thought of the poor of Jerusalem and had already brought a gift for them and he had the poor on his heart.

I say that for more reasons than one. In theological circles today Paul as always is maligned and he's often thought of as a sheer doctrinaire sort of person concerned about the minutiae of doctrine but not about the real issues of bread and butter and caring for people. It's a lie.

It's a lie. You only need to read the New Testament to recognize it. Paul never forgot those words from James and from Peter.

Already the poor was on his heart and so he set about he went to Greece where things were a little better not in the north not in the north in Macedonia but in Achaia in Corinth for example the southern part of Greece things were far better materially speaking. And as he told them he told them about the Christians in Jerusalem and in Judea and about their continuing need how poor they were. One because of the multitude of Christians that belonged to the church now they'd lost their jobs now they were socially ostracized now they had no means of livelihood they had to share everything with one another there was no one to care for them.

Paul never forgot it. He decided that he must tell these more opulent believers about the need of the mother church in Jerusalem and he organized this second relief fund in the New Testament. Now that's the context here.

But now let me come directly to the general principles which we deduce from these instructions in the first two verses of 1 Corinthians 16. I want you to notice three. First of all Christian giving for the support of the Lord's work and of his people is mandatory.

Do says the Apostle Paul what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of the week each one of you should set aside a sum of money. Now Paul is here speaking with full apostolic authority.

You remember the apostles had authority not given to anyone else. They were the delegated emissaries of their Lord after he had ascended to the Father and they were endowed with power and endowed with authority to speak and to teach in their Savior's name. They represented the Lord in a way in which no one else has ever represented him.

Now the Apostle Paul is here speaking with full apostolic authority and he puts it in the imperative. He isn't telling these churches, he isn't telling them now it would be a very good thing if you could possibly come to it that you should lay aside a sum of money on the first day of the week. He's not saying that.

He's saying do it. He's commanding them and that doesn't sound very well. It doesn't go down very well in an age when we are anti-authority of every kind.

But brothers and sisters in Christ we have to take this seriously. God by the very nature of his being is a God of authority and he has a right to command. I would say to you unequivocally, dogmatic as it is, if you have not come to terms with the fact that God has the right to command you, you have not come to terms with God and you need to be reconciled to him.

If I am not prepared to acknowledge the right of God to be God, I have not been reconciled to him. I am at dispeace with him. I am at loggerheads with him.

I'm at war with him in my heart. And a Christian is a man who's been reconciled to God, who has come into fellowship with God. The Apostle is commanding.

Now he says exactly the same thing of course but in a different language later on. In 2 Corinthians 8 7. Just as you excel, he says, in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and in your love for us, see that you also excel in this grace of giving. This grace of giving.

You have the same teaching in Hebrews 13 16. Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Liberality is commended everywhere in scripture.

Now the same point that is giving is mandatory is equally stressed here in another way. I want the Galatian churches, you do. On the first day of the week, each one of you, each one of you.

Now notice that. You can easily pass it by. Paul is addressing the entire church in Corinth individually and singly.

And he's telling them, look now, he says, I am commanding you not only as a church, but I'm commanding you as individuals. I've got a word to the individual in the community. Every one of you, each one of you by himself or herself, each one of you lay aside on the first day of the week as God has prospered you.

Now the amount of course may vary. Of course it will. We shall see in a moment.

The poor cannot give what the rich may give. But the principle of giving to the Lord and in giving to the Lord, giving to his people and for the fulfillment of his purposes is a principle that must be accepted alike by rich and poor. Rich and poor.

Christian giving is mandatory. Even if I have only a cup of cold water to give in the name of my Lord, to someone in the name of as a disciple. Heaven takes notice of it.

It may only be a cup of cold water that I have and I've got nothing more, but I'm a steward of the cup of cold water when a disciple has need of it. That's the principle. It's mandatory for all.

The second principle is this. Christian giving should be proportionate to one's ability to give. Look at verse two.

Each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income says the NIV. The King James says as the word God is not in the original, but evidently that is what is meant, as God has prospered him. As God has prospered him.

Now, whereas it is obligatory upon every Christian to use his wealth to express his loyalty and devotion and worship of God. The apostle does not expect anyone to do the impossible. Neither does the apostles God and Savior expect that kind of thing.

There is a wholesome reasonableness about all this. In this connection, I think we do well to remember that this is true of the whole of the biblical religion, the old testament as well as the new. Giving was essential.

You could not be so poor that you were not expected to give for the treasury and for the work of the Lord. And when you have sinned, you had to bring your sacrifice, whether you were rich or poor. But listen to this.

Oh, the people who malign the old testament, they never see this kind of thing. Have you noticed how the old testament, how God made provision in the old testament? If you couldn't bring what was generally required of you, then he provides something small and maybe very insignificant, which you can give. Let me give you two illustrations from Leviticus.

A person has sinned, but he's very poor and he can't bring the lamb and he can't bring the pigeon, the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, for a thanks offering. He can't bring the lamb. He hasn't got a lamb.

Well, listen to what it says. If he cannot afford a lamb, he's to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the Lord as a penalty for his sin. One for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.

You have the same thing concerning the mother who has brought forth her firstborn, probably. And following upon her purification, you remember she was expected to bring a lamb. But not every mother could afford a lamb.

Listen to what the book of Genesis says. If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons again. One for the burnt offering and the other for the sin offering.

In this way, the priest will make atonement for her and she will be clean. Now, the point I want to get across is this. God does not expect the impossible from any man or any woman.

But the shattering thing to me and my complacency as I read the Old Testament and the New is this. I discover that where there is a man or a woman that has come to know God and to worship him aright, which is expressing what we think he's worth. That's what worship is, you know.

Worth-ship. When you and I worship, we only manifest what we think God is worth. And when you find a worshipping man or a worshipping woman in the Old Testament or in the New, you will find that they have always something to give.

And the thing that shatters me is this. That the Bible holds up as two classical examples of this kind of thing. Two widows, who as far as human eyes could see, had really nothing to give.

But found something because they were worshipping God. And they knew God. And their knowledge of God and their love for God meant that they must find something indeed.

You remember the widow of Zarephath, way back in 1 Kings 17. God sent Elijah to her. He didn't go on a whim.

God sent him and said, she'll look after you. When Elijah got there, he must have been a bit shocked because the woman where he was going to, that he was going to stay with, had really nothing. He says, I'm a bit hungry.

He said, make me, make me, make me a little, or rather bring me a little bread and just a little drink. And the woman turned to him and says, my dear man. She says, I've only got, I've only got a handful of flour and a little oil in a jug.

And she says, I'm planning to make a last little snack for me and my son. And this will be the last snack. And we're going to settle down to die.

Elijah looked her straight in the face because God had sent him to this woman. And he said, woman, he says, first of all, before you do anything, make me a little cake and give me my needs and then cook for yourself. What a challenging thing to say.

And he assured her, you do what God requires of you through his servant and he'll provide for you. And she found that he did. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.

She was impoverished because of the circumstances. God is the ruler of nature. He'll turn the tide when it pleases him, says Elijah.

And he did, of course, the other widow woman is found in the New Testament. Let me read it to you. Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury.

Many rich people threw in large amounts, but a poor woman came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, I tell you the truth. This poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.

They all gave out of their wealth. Their wealth remained when they'd given. They gave out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty.

She put in everything all she had to live on. You see, when I look at that, staring me in the eyes, I find that really I'm condemned by it. Aren't you? Now, the poor line injunction here in 1 Corinthians 16.2 breeds a wholesome spirit.

It stresses that it is necessary for everybody to give to the Lord and to give to supply the needs of his people. It is necessary, but it is as reasonable as it is necessary. God doesn't expect you to give more than you can.

It is in proportion to your income. Grace in you may find more to bring. A widow, not one of them had an income and they had no resources.

Grace in you may go beyond what the principle is as Paul lays it down, but this is what God requires. And this, of course, is a very important issue and I cannot just pass it by. How do I decide what is in proportion to my income? How do I decide what to give the Lord? Now, my friends, this is really the way of growing up to spiritual maturity.

This is one of the main disciplines in sanctification. I have two things to weigh over the one against the other. Here I have so much wealth, never mind what it is.

What proportion do I need for myself and my family? What proportion can I afford to give God? I may put it like that. I may put it in a different way. How much can I keep of what I have? And how, or if you like, how much must I give of what I have? But there comes a time when a man or a woman will ask not that.

As grace, the grace of God transforms us and weans our heart from earthly things, the question we will ask is this. How much can I give? How little do I need for myself? There are two polarities here. There are two claims here that face us.

The claim of the self, the standard of living I deem to be right for myself, and the standard of giving that is worthy of the God who gave his Son and sent his Spirit and gave us his word and gave us his life and keeps us and sustains us. And it is in arranging this, you see, it's in deciding the proportion I give. This is really where I show God what I think of him and where I show men and women if they see, ideally our left

hand should not know what our right hand is doing, but sometimes they see.

If they see, we show men and women, we manifest to men and women what we really think of God. The communist shows what he thinks of his ideology. There are no communists known to me who give less than 35 percent of their income.

Some of them give 75 percent of their total income. I was flabbergasted the other day when I read a book written by a man who had been a communist for so many years and had been converted to Christ, and one of the main things that challenged him and harassed him when he came into the church and he couldn't get over it was that Christians gave such so little, when as a communist he gave, if I remember correctly, 55 percent of his earnings. You see, in this discipline of working out the appropriate proportion, you and I are showing what we think of God.

Who really possesses my life? Who really possesses my riches? Who gave them to me in the first place? What am I here for? Am I here to serve and please myself, or am I here to please and serve my God with my money, as with everything else? Christian giving is mandatory. Christian giving should be proportionate to one's income. Christian giving should be regular and consistent.

On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside saving it up. Now, the verb setting it aside means that this is an ongoing thing, and the words saving it up means that, you see, there's a process here. It's going on until the thing is finished.

I want you to notice that. The Christian should not be giving occasionally. He goes to a meeting and he feels, well, that was a wonderful message.

That man came, or that person spoke, or that testimony was given, and I was moved and I emptied my pockets. That's not how you and I should give. We should give it by principle, according to principle.

Have you noticed how the Apostle Paul makes this very straight here? He says, I want you to finish this matter of collecting before I come. Now, this is a very, very significant thing. Why does Paul say that? One reason, he says, it is this.

He just wants to lay down the principles. He doesn't want to pressure them. You see, he doesn't want to exercise undue pressure upon any one individual.

He might, if he were there, if the offering was taken and he was able to see what people were giving, they might feel, well, I ought to give more because the Apostle Paul is here today, and he can see, or he may be counting afterward. I don't know. But the point is, he says, get it all done before I come.

Why? Well, you see, having laid down the principles, Paul wants them to do it as a matter of discipline before the Lord, not before his Apostle even, not before any of his servants. We've no business to know what you good people are giving. It's none of my business.

It was not even the Apostle's business. Our business is to stress the principles and then leave it to the individual conscience. God is the only Lord of the conscience.

You work it out. You work it out as God has prospered you. You work it out as your view of God and your love for God grows, change your proportion, move upwards as you become more and more mature, more and more Christ-like who gave his all.

Now, there are many things to be considered, of course, before we come to the point of giving to the Lord. And don't forget the New Testament acknowledges this. It was the Lord Jesus who said, render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

It was He who paid the temple tax, worked a miracle in order to be able to pay it for Peter and himself. We learn in the New Testament that those who do not make provision for their own family are worse than infidels, as the King James puts it, and have denied the faith. But when all these legitimate needs have been considered, now before God, a man must work it out by himself, alone before God.

Paul does not want to exercise personal pressure, and yet the point is this. I have felt the weight of this over these weeks as I've been meditating on this. Paul speaks about this in a context which is almost over-mastering.

You notice where we have this passage in the epistle to the Corinthians. In verse 15, we have one of those gigantic passages in the Pauline writings, where Paul has begun with a cross, but leading on, of course, to the main theme of the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we have in chapter 15.

The cross. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. Men and women, do you know that? Do you believe that this morning? Your sins.

He died for them. In the light of that, says Paul, now come and think about this. Bring your collection.

But not only the cross. The gigantic peak, as it were, in the background is the glorious resurrection. The Christ who died is alive again.

He's torn the bars of death away. He's won for us a glorious victory over death and over the grave. Oh, death, where is your sting? Oh, grave, where is your victory? You see, he's come to know eternal life and fellowship with the living Lord.

Now, he says, in that context, in that context, think about this. I'm not going to bring pressure to bear, but I want the resurrection to pressurize you, and I want the cross to pressurize you, and any pressure that you may feel, I want it to be the pressure of God through the death of his Son and his glorious resurrection. Let that pressurize money out of your pocket and riches from your hand.

You know, he does it in still another way. Not only the context in which he places this, but he tells them to do it on the first day of the week. Why the first day of the more than the seventh? Well, you've only to ask the question, and you've got the answer.

The first day is the week, is the day when we remember the glorious resurrection of our Lord. See, he comes back to the same thing. Unfortunately, in history, we've come to commemorate the resurrection of our Lord largely once a year at Easter time, but the early Christians commemorated the resurrection of our Lord every weekday.

It was the Lord's day this day. Now, says Paul, every Lord's day, every day belongs to him, of course, but one very specially. It was the day of his triumph.

It was the day when he finished the work of redemption. On the Lord's day, when you are fellowshiping with a risen Lord himself who died for you. Now, lay aside something in proportion to your income.

Work it out on the first day of the week when you're worshipping God through his crucified, risen, reigning Son, and in that context, work it out. You will notice, therefore, that there is no reference here to tithing. Now, I don't want to stop anybody tithing.

It's a great place to start. I'll tell you a little secret. I try to do it myself and have for many years, but I'll have to reconsider my whole attitude in the light of what I've learned these last few weeks.

Tithing is a great place to start, but Paul doesn't say tithe. A word doesn't come in here. You know what he says? In proportion to your income.

And work that out, not apply a legally inflexible principle to your income, one-tenth. Work it out as to what is right in the sight of God against the background of the cross and the resurrection. It's very interesting, and yet it's not interesting.

It's just what you'd expect from Isaac Watts, isn't it? Bernard Jackson sang for us those lovely words this morning, when I survey the wondrous cross. This is exactly what Paul's getting at in this context. When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss.

See from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and blood. That's the original from Isaac Watts, not sorrow and love. Our modern hymnists don't like the word blood.

Isaac Watts had known its power. Sorrow and blood flow mingling down. Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown, were the whole realm of nature mine.

After surveying the cross and the crown of thorns and the blood and the spittle and the ignominy and the humiliation of it, were the whole realms of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine demands. Isaac Watts had got the key.

This is how you decide what God is worthy of. This is what expresses my worship here in the light of the cross and the resurrection. Not an inflexible legal principle, but a flexible response of the soul to a growing appreciation of the death and resurrection of our Lord and our subsequent fellowshiping with Him and with the Father in Him on the Lord's day and every other day.

Can I add one other practical point here? I thank you for your gracious listening. I don't know what it's like out there. I've got a fan here.

That's a secret. You shouldn't know that. I hope you're all comfortable.

Can I add one thing here? Every first day of the week, says Paul. Now, they didn't all get a weekly wage in these days, and they didn't in Corinth. Some did, apparently.

Why then does he ask them to do it every first day of the week? Well, there are many reasons. Even though he has laid down as a principle in proportion to your wages, whatever you've got on the Lord's day, see what portion of it is worthy of your name as a Christian and of your giving and worthy of your Lord. But the other is this.

I have not time to dwell upon it, but it's very important, I think. See, the apostle knew that the sooner the better you and I give when we've got something, because we are all tempted to spend more and more upon ourselves than perhaps we ought. And so Paul says, don't let it go on too far.

If you've got it on the first day of the week, consider what you've got and then give the proper proportion to the Lord. I'll illustrate it. I remember hearing, though I'm sure this illustration must go back a little in time, but I remember hearing an American pastor give the story of a little girl that had been given two quarters to go to Sunday school in the morning, two 25 cent pieces.

Her mother gave these two. It was a hot summer's morning, very much like this, I guess. And she said, the first is for the collection and the second is, honey, she said, for you to have an ice on the way home.

Now, an ice of 25 cents must take us back a few years, don't you think? Anyway, well, little girl trotted off for Sunday school and she had the two quarters in her hand. And as she was running, she lost one and it went down the grid, gone. There goes the Lord's quarter, she says.

I don't need to comment, do I? Do I? I don't think so. Satan has his way of extracting from us for uses that are not as important what should be given to the Lord every first day of the week, says Paul. Now, I can only refer to this second passage, and I can't dwell on it.

In the second passage in 2 Corinthians 8, the Macedonians' expression of those principles in actual practice. Now, the stress here is this, and it's a very beautiful one. When you have time to read it and study it, please do so.

Paul stresses now that the Macedonians, the churches of Greece in the north, had been giving, giving for the saints in Jerusalem. But they just hadn't given according to the principle, because they had no income. They are in dire need.

The Macedonian churches of which we read in the New Testament are Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Now, Paul says that their giving in Macedonia had been characterized by grace, not by considering the proportion in relation to their wages. Well, were they not disobedient then to the mandate he had given? Not at all.

They went beyond it. Five times over in the first nine verses, the Greek word charis, grace, comes in. Now, it's not always translated grace in your King James, nor even in your NIV.

But five times I ask you to believe me, it is there. The thing about their giving is grace, grace, grace, grace, grace. And grace goes beyond any requirement of law.

Where grace is really operative, that's the point. And then I must conclude with this. I want to refer to four words here, which you can follow up in your own time, which give us the key to the kind of giving that characterized grace and that went beyond the requirements of the Apostle and the Apostle's Lord.

First of all, poverty, extreme poverty. Look at the second verse. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy on their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Actually, the people in northern Greece were as poor, if not poorer than the saints in Jerusalem and in Judea. And they had every possibility of saying, what have we, what do we need to bother about the saints in Jerusalem? We can't make ends meet ourselves. Their poverty was extreme, but they didn't argue like that.

The next word is generosity. Their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. Now, this really seems quite illogical and irrational, doesn't it? You don't often find these two, this kind of

thing working.

Their overflowing joy, where did the joy come from? Because they're poor. We talk about our taxation system. The people in Greece were taxed well over and above anything that we are taxed today by Rome at this very time.

Where does their extreme joy come from? Well, first of all, they possessed God's unspeakable gift, as Paul speaks of it later on in this same letter. God had given his unspeakable gift. They possessed this treasure in earthen vessels.

As Paul tells us earlier on in chapter four, they possess God's unspeakable gift in Christ. They had eternal life. They had fellowship with God.

That's where their joy came from. You see, even though they didn't possess material things, they were conscious of what they did possess, and they rejoiced in their possessions even though they lacked many material things. They counted their blessings, and they named them one by one, and they rejoiced in what they had rather than grumble about what they didn't have.

And they thought of others. Out of their extreme poverty, I've no time to enlarge it, one commentator says this, these two opposites, overflowing joy and extreme poverty, working in combination like an alkali and an acid, brought about an overflowing result which is called the riches of their liberality. These people became liberal in giving though they had nothing to give.

How? I'll tell you, grace always finds something to give. And the last thing is this, their spontaneity and their totality. Says Paul, I didn't have the face to ask them to do anything for the churches in Judea, not in the north, in Macedonia.

Listen, entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in the service of the saints. It wasn't Paul that begged them to give, it was they who begged Paul for the opportunity. Why did they beg him? Because of grace.

Not because of a law telling them you ought, there was no such law, save the law of grace in their hearts. And they gave, says Paul, first of all, not as we had expected them to perhaps find something between them and them to help me along to gather a little more for the saints in Jerusalem. That's not how they gave.

But first of all, this is what they did. They made a spiritual crisis of the opportunity. And they gave themselves first of all to the Lord.

And having given themselves to the Lord, then they gave themselves to us to help us to do what the Lord had given us to do. And they found something to give. So there was a double giving.

First of all, they gave themselves and having given themselves, as grace always does, of course, there was something of themselves in the giving. Brothers and sisters in Christ, this, I believe, is the essential ingredient in the giving that is worthy of our crucified, risen, ascended, reigning, coming Lord. There ought to be something of self in the gift that we give.

I will close with a little illustration. It was about 18 months, no, maybe two years ago now. An American family, I read this from the pen of the father of the household, an American family were welcoming a family

from across halfway across the world who were refugees from their homeland.

They were receiving a mother, father, and two little girls. And they were flying into this particular airport near where they lived in the United States. The welcoming family went to meet them at the airport, and they had one little girl.

Her name was Katie. And the mother thought, well, now these little girls will have traveled so many hours maybe a good thing if Katie takes a few of the things that she likes playing with to give to the kids. So they had some stuffed animals.

Now that's how he puts it, and you judges, you know as well as I do what he probably meant by that. She had some stuffed animals, and she took some of these to give to the two kids when they arrived. They were in the airport.

They couldn't speak, didn't know each other's language, but they recognized each other because they had corresponded and they had photographs. And then this family in the United States took the incoming family, the refugee family, took them to the place where they were going to stay, had a meal, still couldn't communicate. And then after a meal, it was time for them to separate.

And evidently this family that had come halfway around the world were very tired but very, very grateful. Quite spontaneously the two children talked to their mothers and began to argue with their mother. And it became evident that they wanted to give something to little Katie, the child of a family that was welcoming them in the United States.

And in no time, these two little kids had one doll each. Now we're in the child's world. One doll each, rather scruffy at that.

And the two of them quite spontaneously brought their doll and they handed them over to Kate. And the father was putting his hand on Kate's shoulder to tell her, look, not on your life. You've got more dolls than you can keep tidy now.

They're all over the place in the house. But he just suddenly looked at their faces and they were grateful. And they wanted to show their gratitude and he just recognized it.

And little Katie received them. And he said, after that, I don't think I can ever get over the sense of joy that came to the very eyes and to the faces of those three kids, especially the two that had given. They had given something of themselves.

Their gifts were expressive, not of a law that required them to give, but of gratitude. My dear fellow Christians, I don't know how we dare apply this to our giving. You know yourself, I know myself, but I believe that this is the kind of thing that our Lord deserves from us.

Blessed be that individual that has learned to see the deserts of the Savior, crucified and risen for us, and can say and can sing, we were saints in the apocalypse. We shall be among them one day. Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive riches.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, our heavenly Father, we must first acknowledge our unworthiness as we bow before you now. You have given to your people here great generosity, and we thank you for all those who are more than stewards of whatever treasures you have entrusted to them.

We thank you for the testimonies that come from one and another of the generosity of your people here. And yet, our Father, we have to acknowledge that with all that we may have done, we are still unprofitable servants, and we have yet to come up to the standard of grace, even if we can claim to have struck the target set by illegal tithes. Oh, Spirit of God, teach us how to worship you in our giving of our gifts, as well as of our lives, our time, our talents, and everything else, that we may confess with life as well as lip that Jesus Christ is Lord, even our Lord.

We ask it in his holy name. Amen.

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