

Expressing God's Inexpressible Gift

by James Jennings

This sermon focuses on the theme of giving and generosity, using 2 Corinthians 8-9 as a backdrop. Paul highlights the sacrificial giving of believers from Macedonia as an example for the Corinthians, emphasizing the cheerful readiness to give beyond their means. The sermon delves into the concept of an inexpressible gift, possibly referring to the indescribable grace of God in sending Jesus Christ as a supreme example of giving and sacrifice. It challenges listeners to reflect on their own readiness to give, the motivation behind their actions, and the gratitude they should have for the immeasurable gift of Christ.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1, Romans 6:23, John 3:16, Ephesians 2:7, 1 Corinthians 2:2, Exodus 15:11, Revelation 22:17

Topics: "Generosity", "Sacrificial Giving"

Description

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Transcript

Alright, well, I'm very grateful to be here. To still be healthy. We've been trying to escape the sickness.

We had sickness prior to going to Missouri. And then we were healthy in Missouri. And then we came back.

The kids and the wife have been sick, but the Lord has preserved me until this moment. And I prayed for that so I could not miss preaching another sermon like happened two weeks ago. Let's turn in your copy of God's Word to 2 Corinthians 8-9.

And we're not going to read those chapters in their entirety, but often these two chapters are considered a letter within the letter. Some would even want to say it's separate to 2 Corinthians. But the idea is He's dealing with an idea here throughout these two chapters that's just different than what's happening in a lot of the rest of the letter.

And if you know 2 Corinthians 8-9, these chapters, Paul shares with those at Corinth about the giving of believers from Macedonia. That is Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. And he shares how these churches

gave beyond their means in order to help the others, primarily being believers who are primarily Jewish in the church at Jerusalem.

You see that in Romans and 1 Corinthians 16. Now why tell those at Corinth about the giving of those at Macedonia? Why does Paul do that? Without reading these two whole chapters and taking the five minutes to do that, for those who are aware of it, why tell those at Corinth about the giving of those at Macedonia? Why does he do that? Paul lets the Corinthians know that a report he gave to Macedonians about their cheerful readiness to give is part of what encouraged them to be so giving. So the idea is us as a church, we committed a year ago to give a certain amount of money.

Someone else heard about our commitment. And they ended up getting that ready before we did. And so Paul's coming and he's saying, hey, these other people that I told about how much you guys were ready to give, they've already finished completing the gift.

Where those at Corinth and Ikea had not yet completed this part of the giving. Look at 2 Corinthians 9.2. He says to them, I know of your readiness, of which I boasted about you to the people of Macedonia. I was telling them, Ikea has been ready since last year.

And your zeal has stirred up most of them. So these other churches were stirred up by these people's zeal. But they haven't actually got the gift ready.

He says in v. 3, but I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove to be empty in this matter so that you may be ready as I said you would be. V. 4, otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you're not ready, we'd be humiliated. You know, because of the boast that we said.

We're so confident, he says right there. So he says in v. 5, I thought it was necessary to urge the brothers to go ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised so that it may be ready as a willing gift and not as an exaction. So you see, Paul's encouraging one church with what's happening in another church.

And the other church was encouraged by what was happening in the one church. They just were a little slower to complete it. You see, Paul's encouraging them based on these churches' examples.

And so Paul's bringing all this up in this section in 2 Corinthians 9. Now, I'm not wanting to focus on giving this morning, but I want to focus on something else that enters in to Paul discussing, you could even say having a business meeting. You could say in these chapters, it's kind of like a financial business meeting among a church. Now that might appear to be something kind of dull and mundane, but it's not for Paul.

Because when Paul thinks about the gift of finances and giving to others, you're going to find something else enters in to Paul's mind. And what's that something going to be? What do you think it's going to be in these chapters? When you go into the business meeting and you think about giving, you think about gifts, you think about people generously giving financially, what happens to Paul? What enters in to his mind? Joy? Yeah, joy. I'm thinking what specific example of another gift enters in to his mind? Yeah, what God has done in Christ.

And so look at even 2 Corinthians 8. Look how just a few verses in, he's already talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 8, he says, I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. So he's thinking about genuine love in the midst of giving, and where does he go? Verse 9, For you know of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your

sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.

Just a little into this. Paul's already thinking about Jesus Christ. Paul can't escape from thinking about Jesus Christ even in the midst of talking about finances with a church.

So we're going to consider some things here, and specifically, we're going to look at this last verse that Paul says in v. 15, Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift. But let me pray. Father, Lord, I need Your help.

I pray You would just empower me with Your Spirit to articulate clearly Your Word. Lord, I want to be faithful to the Word of God. It is Your Word.

It is powerful. It is a double-edged sword. And Lord, I can stand up here.

I can speak. I can look at my notes. Lord, I can have something that is just dead.

It has no life. Lord, I pray You'd deliver me. You'd deliver my hearers from that.

Lord, I pray You would meet with us in this hour, that You would speak to our souls, that You would quicken us, Lord, to see Christ and to see Your beauty, Your glory, to see what happens in Paul even in these chapters. And Lord, we need You today. We need You every day.

We're thankful that You're our God. We're thankful for all that You've done. And we just pray again, open our eyes to see wondrous, glorious things from Thy Word.

In Christ's name, Amen. You know, imagine being in that church. You've made a commitment.

You're ready to give. And Paul has to send some brothers to make sure you get the job done. It might be a little humbling, but in these chapters, we see cheerful giving being talked about, right? The Lord loves a cheerful giver.

Verse 7. In these chapters, we see the importance of keeping our Word and finishing what we've started. In these chapters, we see the importance of being prepared for every good work. And in these chapters, we see the means that God uses even to fulfill these good works.

But that's not what I want to think about. I want to think about one who did give cheerfully. One who did keep His Word and was ready to fulfill His Word.

I want to think about one who is the great means for the forgiveness of our sins. I want to think about the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know what's going to happen as you think about Jesus Christ? The same thing that happens to Paul.

As you think about Christ, as you think about Him, that becomes the motivating factor behind everything that you do. It's very easy to give cheerfully when you've just thought about who giving their life. Christ.

All the restraint starts to go away when you see Christ was not begrudging in the giving of His life for the payment for my sins. So, specifically though, I want to look at v. 15 and then we're going to look a little back at v. 9. So get your eyes to the end of 2 Corinthians 9. And let's read starting in v. 12. Paul says, "...For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of Your submission that comes from the confession of the Gospel of Christ and the generosity of Your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for You and pray for You because of the surpassing grace of God that is upon You." And then he says in v. 15, "...Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift." So at the end of these two chapters, Paul kind of has a benediction. He's kind of got a conclusion here that is in v. 15. And we've got to ask the question, what is God's unspeakable gift that He is talking about here? And you know why we have to ask the question? Does Paul describe what the gift is specifically? In v. 15.

No, he does not describe what the gift is specifically. So we've got to consider it in its context to make sure this really is speaking about what we would automatically assume, which is Christ. The automatic assumption when you approach this and you read this is it's got to be talking about Jesus Christ.

But because Paul does not specifically describe it, we better test that we're right on this. If I just told you that v. 15 is talking about Jesus and I moved on with my message, I know many of you here would not be convinced. You wouldn't.

You know why I know that? Because last Sunday, I was sitting in a church and someone shared on this very verse and they just said it was Jesus Christ. And I spent the next ten minutes trying to examine in the context, is it really talking about Christ? So I was left in that situation. So I don't want to put any of you in that spot.

I need to prove if this is really talking about Jesus Christ in v. 15. And again, this matters, because this is at the end of these two chapters that he's dealing with giving and we're seeing Paul overflow with thanks. He's grateful to God.

Is he thinking about the Son and the salvation in Christ? Even as you think of it, you almost start to feel wrong and you think, well, what else would Paul say that is inexpressible? I mean, it's got to be talking about Christ, right? I get that. Okay, but we still have to be faithful to think of this. And you know what happened? Days later after I heard this, I thought I'm going to study this verse.

And I discovered that John Calvin and many other older commentaries do not believe the inexpressible gift in v. 15 is talking about Christ. And I thought, oh, why am I studying this verse when I find out all these older commentaries don't think this is talking about Jesus Christ? It's getting a little more complicated than I anticipated when I dove into looking at this verse. That's fine.

And you know, I mean, today being Christmas, it'd really be very anticlimactic if I took John Calvin and some of those older commentators' views, would it not? That would really be anticlimactic. But the good news is here at the church, we're just trying to be biblical, right? So whether it's talking about Christ or something else, we got to be convinced of that in our own minds. No matter what day it is.

So I want to walk through a moment just wrestling with this. And I've not really told you yet where I stand. I trust you know probably where I'm wanting to stand.

But again, you got to make sure, if it's Christ, can I prove that to you? So, and some might say, and I've heard this before, James, you're over-complicating this. Just say it's Christ, move on, or say it's all of the above. If I could do that, I would, right? But if I studied this, I can't just pass it over.

I was the guy last Sunday sitting in a church and I heard this text referenced and it wasn't proven. And that caused me to struggle to hear the rest of the points. So we got to prove this.

We got to think this through. So let me just, so you all realize, this is one of the common views, right? This is the other view that people hold. And I've tried to get this worded in a right way to represent their view.

But let me just read this. According to some, Paul is giving thanks for God's powerful grace that made them, these believers, want to give so generously. And Paul is giving thanks in view of the fact he's anticipating what the gift will do.

He's seeing this positive effect. He's anticipating from their giving. And this is coming about and it's just so glorious to him specifically.

It's so glorious because he sees churches full of mostly Gentiles giving an earnest and cheerful love gift to churches of mostly Jews and them overflowing with generosity. Gentiles to the Jews. For those who used to hate one another.

Paul's just seeing all this happen. And he looks at Corinth where in the first letter they were falling apart. They weren't even disciplining people out who needed to be put out.

Now he sees what's happening with them and those in Macedonia. And he's just overflowing with thanks to God for what God has brought about when it all seemed like it might crumble. Now he looks and he sees these churches creating this gift to give to these Jews.

Gentiles to Jews primarily. And he's just in awe of what God is doing. When it seemed like the Jews and the Gentiles, they just have ongoing tensions.

Here they overflow in love for their Jewish brothers. So God is bringing about this about through a powerful grace that He's given among these churches. It's the Lord's work.

It's His doing. So is that the inexpressible gift? Many would say that's exactly what Paul is talking about in v. 15. And to their point, Paul does describe it as a gift that their conduct is the way it is.

He does describe that as a gift. So he starts this whole section out. Chapter 8, verse 1. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches.

So he describes grace being given, and he's not talking about salvation grace. But he's talking about God's powerful grace at work in His people to do these great acts of kindness. That's what he's seeing happen in them.

And then he bookends all of this in the end with v. 14. So if you look at v. 14, he says, while they long for You and pray for You because of what? What was upon them that all these other believers are thinking about those at Corinth. He says because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.

Surpassing. Extraordinary grace of God upon you. So clearly this topic at the start of the section and at the end of the section, it's on Paul's mind.

When he just described extraordinary grace that is causing all this to happen among them. So, it makes you ask, okay, is the surpassing grace in v. 14, is that synonymous in one with the inexpressible gift that Paul is thanking God for in v. 15? Again, remembering grace right here is not described as some unmerited favor in this context, but God's power at work with them. So their point is, is Paul then in v. 15, does he continue on after saying that these believers are going to give thanks, does Paul himself then just overflow with thanksgiving to God for what the Lord is bringing about? So that's one view.

That's one view of what he means here. And many, many people hold to that view. Now, I'm not convinced of that.

There's definitely some things to consider with what they're saying, and I hope I'm not blind here today and trying to read something into the passage, but let's consider the opposite. Look at v. 15. Thanks be to God.

God referring to who here? Which person of the Trinity is on Paul's mind? Yeah, God the Father. For His inexpressible gift, a gift, not plural, it's singular. Okay, I mean, naturally you read that.

What gift did God, the Author of all perfect gifts, give that would be inexpressible? Is it the surpassing grace at work in them? He thanks God for the surpassing grace at work within them. Where does He do that? V. 14, right? He's thanking God for the surpassing grace of God at work within them. Is He then doing that again in v. 15? Or does the grace of God at work in them then draw His mind to not the grace of God at work in them now, but He's thinking about the inexpressible gift of the Lord Jesus Christ? I think in v. 15, Paul is thinking specifically about the source of salvation in Christ.

He's not thinking about the outcome. He's already talked about that. And so let me try to convince you of what I think he's saying here.

So I agree in part with the one prominent view. That Paul is glorying in what is happening. It is amazing.

To see 1 Corinthians, to 2 Corinthians, to see what they're doing, to see Paul desire to remember the poor and to see all that being brought about and all these Gentile churches are giving to the Jewish Christians, that is incredible. I don't want to minimize that at all. That is a miracle that God has worked that about in those churches.

It is phenomenal to see these people in their poverty overflowing in joy and giving cheerfully. That is absolutely incredible and that is absolutely the power of God at work in their lives. And I think Paul says that as much in v. 14 because there's passing grace of God upon you.

But I think v. 15, he's talking about Christ. So here my first reason is, Paul's reference seems to tie back to what he already mentioned in 8 v. 9. 8 v. 9, we already read that verse. I think here at the end, Paul is turning their eyes back to Christ for the same reason he brought up Christ.

What was the reason Paul brought up Christ in v. 9? He's reminding them so that by his poverty, you might become rich. He's getting you and I to think about the riches that we have in Christ. So when you think about the riches you have in Christ, it makes any type of gift that you're giving to anyone else or any type of benefit to them, it all of a sudden makes it really, really small compared to this greater gift that God has given you in His Son.

And he's basically giving Christ as a supreme example of motivation to give and for your conduct. So now Paul, who desires to see them complete what they started, brings Christ in to close out this section. Christ is already on his mind.

You see, the Gospel and what Christ has done, he's already giving that as a motivation in v. 9. He's already bringing that up at different points in the chapter. And then v. 15, it just seemed with the flow, he's already thanked God for the grace among them in their giving, but now he's thanking God for the great gift of the Lord Jesus Christ. It just seems like it's already on his mind from v. 9. And if you look at v. 9, it has

the language of giving.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus that though He was rich, yet for your sake... You hear that? For you. So that you by His poverty might become rich. There's something given to you and I that changes what our possession is.

It makes us rich. I'm going to prove spiritually rich is what he's talking about there. So that's my first reason.

V. 9, Christ is already on his mind. It just seems like in the flow, that's what's happening in v. 15. My second reason why I think this inexpressible gift is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation.

In these chapters, Paul deals with the fact that those at Corinth were not on top of everything as they should have been. Okay, I'll put that right there. If you're writing a letter to people who've yet to complete what they should have been ready to do and had been ready for for a year, and you're writing to them to get it ready and it's not yet ready, why would you close out a section giving thanks to the Lord ahead of time for that which is not complete? I struggle to see that.

Even if they are now on top of things, if you notice in v. 13, Paul says when you do this service, it will glorify God because of what you give. Sorry, let me read that again. Okay, look at v. 13.

Look what he says here. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God. They will.

When's that going to happen, Paul? He's talking about in the future. Right? This is a future glorifying God that's going to happen. So the contribution has not yet been made.

If Paul is thanking God for the grace at work at them in a contribution that has yet not been made, and he says that is the inexpressible gift is grace, well, Paul's already seeking to get this to fruition. It's not yet done. You see, my point is, all these people want to hold a view.

It's talking about the grace at work in them. I just don't see that Paul is thanking God for that which is not yet complete. The inexpressible gift from God the Father.

It would just make more sense just talking about the Son who is complete. He has finished the work. It has already been completed.

A third reason I think in 2 Corinthians 9-15 is talking about Christ when He says, thank thee God for this inexpressible gift that He doesn't even describe specifically to them. Some, as I said, they connect v. 14 and say He's talking about the grace of God at work among the believers. But the third reason, if you know Paul, and even if you remember Tim's series years ago called An Outburst of Glory, and I thought about this as I was looking at this, Paul in multiple places, it's common in his writing to overflow with adoration towards the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of some teaching that's rather practical.

What is he doing in 1 Timothy? He's talking about discipline and false teachers and then he goes into ten verses of just glorying in Jesus Christ. And then he goes back to the topic. And so you could cut that out.

It doesn't make sense why he put all of that in there. Well, that's how Paul often writes. There's an overflowing in his heart where he just can't stop thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I think that would be consistent with Paul. You find this in other places like in 1 Timothy 1.10-11. And here, a fourth reason is, I think this inexpressible gift is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to these verses.

Romans 6.23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
John 3.16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. Gave His only Son.

It was a gift that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. John and Paul, they think about Christ as a gift of God to sinful humanity that we might be saved. I mean, that just seems the way that they talk.

Here, a fifth reason is I think it's talking about Christ. The word inexpressible, indescribable, how many times is it in the Bible? This exact word. One time.

This is the only time it's in all of the Bible. And if you look, it's not in classical Greek anywhere. It's almost as if Paul coins a word to try to express what he's saying is what? Inexpressible.

It's like he makes up a word to try to express that which is inexpressible. I mean, Christ's humble incarnation in salvation? You can describe it. You can talk about it.

But another way, you can't talk about it. You can't describe it. It's impossible because you feel like you've always fallen short in accurately describing who Jesus Christ is.

So I could see Paul saying that about Christ. What Christ has done, it's unimaginable. There's the guy who said I was the chief of all sinners.

And he knows what Christ has saved him out of and he looks at his own life and it's like you're talking about gifts and giving money and someone gave me a present today and your mind just goes to Christ and the great gift. It's like you can't escape thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ. And when you think about Christ, you're at a loss for words.

How do you even describe this Christ? Look at how Paul talks in Ephesians. Ephesians 2.7 He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace. And how are the immeasurable riches of His grace going to be shown? In what? In His kindness towards us in who? Who? Come on, be an active audience.

Christ Jesus. What word did Paul just use there? Immeasurable. Is it immeasurable and inexpressible? Do you see any similarity there? It's inexpressible, immeasurable.

You can't express a word. You can't measure it. And then listen to Paul in Ephesians 3.8. The unsearchable riches of Christ.

You can't search it out. You can't find it. It's too deep.

You can't measure it. You can't speak about it. It's just too great.

That just seems how Paul talks. He's thinking about Christ. He's thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ is inexpressible, unsearchable, immeasurable. That just all seems so similar. And it's from the same author speaking in this way.

And then another verse I thought about. 1 Corinthians 2.9 Paul spoke and he said there in verse 8, he said, none of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, listen to what he says, as it is written, what no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him.

And don't think about heaven. What the heart of God has prepared for those who love Him, the very next thing he says is these things God has revealed to us. You and I have something that the heart of man could never imagine.

And if you're a Christian, it's been revealed to you. The eyes of your heart have been opened to see the glorious reality of Jesus Christ. And Paul doesn't use the term inexpressible here, but he's saying the same thing.

There's something out there that no heart can imagine. What God has prepared, and it's not talking about heaven. In verse 10, he says it's already happened.

He's talking about the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He's talking about something that's been prepared for us now through Christ. Matthew Poole, he says of that text, it could never have entered into the heart of men to conceive that God should give His only begotten Son out of His own bosom to take upon Him our nature, to die upon the cross, or that Christ should so far humble Himself and become obedient unto death.

You know how inexpressible this is? 1 Peter 1.12, it says of the sufferings of Christ, these are the things which angels long to look. You can't express it. It's unmeasurable.

You can't search it out. The angels long to look there, and even they, in their perfection, with whatever state of mind they have, they can't comprehend what God has prepared for us that we've taken part in through the end of John. The books can't even contain all that Christ has done.

You can't imagine it. You can't express it. The books can't contain it all.

The angels long to look. I think this is what he's talking about. This is God's gift to us in Jesus Christ.

And it says He's made us rich. He's not talking about money. He's talking about His righteousness.

Lost humanity, longed for riches in this world, and yet here we are. We've got it. I'm a rich person in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, 2 Corinthians 9 and 10, thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift. I just think Paul's overflowing there with his thanks. And it moves him on from this topic in the letter.

What did this just leave the Corinthians with at the end of these two chapters on giving? The last thing on their mind is what? They're looking at all these things they can express. We're going to give \$2,000 to the people at Jerusalem and they have a financial need. Oh, I can express that.

I can see that. Okay, now let's talk about God the Father sending His Son, His Son humbling Himself and shedding His blood. Wow! Even that, it doesn't sound like it fully expresses what Christ has done.

And so the very motivation he brought up in v. 9 of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and Christ becoming poor that we mean by might be rich, Paul brings them back to that at the end. He wants that on their mind.

Because that will no doubt bring about what Paul desires of them.

They're going to complete it. If Christ is on their mind, they're going to complete this giving. So, look for a moment at v. 9 in chapter 8. Again, let's think of this for a moment.

Paul says we know of the grace of the Lord. Again, he's not talking about the gracious disposition of Christ. He's talking about God's love clearly being shown in a saving act that was actually accomplished.

And the grace that Christ was specifically shown in it says in Him becoming poor for us so that we might be rich. So is Paul's point that Christ had to become economically poor? No, even if you look at Christ, I know it says He had nowhere to lay His head, but you just don't find that that is consistent. That He was below the poverty level and just completely poor economically.

Or is this referring to Christ incarnate life? Him setting aside glory above in the presence of His Father to come and join us as enemies? He came down. Did the world recognize Him? No, the world didn't recognize Him. I mean, His own people must have received Him, right? No, they didn't.

They didn't receive Him. And Paul says He came to make us rich. That does not mean material prosperity.

Paul speaks of riches for spiritually poor people. Let me prove that to you. Turn back even.

2 Corinthians 6-9. He's speaking here about today being the favorable day of salvation. And then he goes on to talk about how they treated them.

And look at v. 10. He says here, "...yet making many rich." Wow, if Paul was a real prosperity gospel preacher, I didn't realize he came around and made many people rich financially. That's incredible.

That's not what he's saying. Because look what he says next. "...Yet making many rich is having nothing." Wait, how do you make many rich when you have nothing, Paul? Wait, and then he says something else.

He possesses everything. What is it? That's the thing. He's thinking about the spiritual realm.

They're making many rich with what he just talked about, the favorable time in v. 2, the time of salvation. And he's not put any obstacle in anyone's way that they might come to the Lord Jesus Christ and have Him. Even in Romans 10, Paul says, the Scripture says, "...Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all." And what's this Lord of all doing? Bestowing riches on all who call on Him. "...For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Clearly right there, the riches He bestows on all who call upon Him, it is salvation. Being saved.

That's the great riches. Ephesians 2, He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace towards us who believe. So you want to be rich? Paul came to make you rich in the most important sense.

And Christ has that. His perfect righteousness. He'll freely give it to you that you can sing, yea, justified, what a glorious thought! That you can stand before that throne.

And believe, if you're here, no matter what you're going through, no matter what trials, no matter what physical calamity, remember with gratitude the fact that you are rich in Jesus Christ. That is the most

important thing. There's no room for self-pity when we look back to what Christ has done.

It says here, Christ became poor. That word poor means extremely destitute. It even shows up in Psalm 79.8. He said, "...Do not remember against us our former sins.

Let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low." That's the word poor. "...For we are brought very low." But a guy who has sin says he was brought very low. How could Christ, who never sinned, be brought very low? How could that apply to Him that He would be poor and extremely destitute? 2 Corinthians 5.21 tells us, "...For our sake, God the Father, made Him who knew no sin to become an offering of sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." This gift is greater than all the riches in the world.

It's the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul says right there in v. 15, he can't even express it. He can't even describe it.

That's one of the sorrows of being a Christian, right? Christ could become common. And so what's one of Paul's remedies? If you want to call it that? When he's talking about finances, guess who he thinks about? Jesus Christ. I mean, is that how your mind is geared? Does something happen and Christ comes to the forefront? So let me give a few applications or observations from this to think about.

First, consider, as I just said, what these chapters did in Paul. Consider what they did in Paul. As he thought about the churches giving financial support, it seems something stirred in him.

Taking part in a business meeting and discussing financial commitments can lead one's thoughts to something far more glorious. You just talked about in the beginning people overflowing with a wealth of generosity in v. 2 of chapter 8. And these people having extreme poverty. He goes on then to talk about who's poverty? Christ becoming poor.

And then Christ overflowing in what? Making us rich. You see, Paul just looks at the Corinthians giving. And they as the body of Christ, it reminds him of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think about it. A funeral. I mean, if you just had a loved one die, even years ago, when you go to a funeral, what tends to cross your mind at the funeral? You think about your own loved one who you lost and the funeral you had to attend for that loved one.

You see, that's what's happening with Paul. He's talking about giving a gift. Guess what he's thinking about? He's thinking about the greatest gift.

His mind is just flowing towards Jesus Christ. I mean, someone is suffering, the Macedonians, despite being in the midst of their suffering, they're overflowing with a generous spirit. It's like that's what Christ did.

He suffered and then He overflowed with a generous spirit. Wow, these believers are reminding me of Jesus Christ. I mean, brethren, you can be a reminder to one another of Christ.

How you suffer, how you give, how you and I live. People should look at us and remember Christ. Did not Paul say, imitate me as I imitate who? Christ.

I mean, there's a sense where you look and it's like, you remind me of Jesus Christ. Because aren't we being changed from one degree of glory to become more and more like Jesus Christ? Isn't that what Paul

says in 2 Corinthians 3.18? So there should be some sense where people look and they're reminded of the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, they might ask, Paul, I thought we were having a business meeting and talking about our commitments this year.

Paul's like, yeah, we were. That's brought my mind to Christ. I thought about the poverty that Christ had.

I was thinking about the poverty the Macedonians had. And then I'm thinking about the grace at work in you all as believers and it's incredible. And then I thought about God's inexpressible gift.

Like my mind just keeps going to the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done. What did Paul say in 1 Corinthians 2.2? He said, I have made a determination to know nothing among you except what? Jesus Christ and Him crucified. You see that here in this chapter.

He's constantly thinking about Christ. So brethren, remember this. Your genuine acts of love and giving, even financially towards believers in need, can be used to remind you yourself and others of the greater gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's kind of like the parent who the kid is getting so overly excited about a gift they get on Christmas. And the parent, it's like Paul, they're seeing that and they're thinking about their own joy and what Christ has given them and they remind their children of the greater gift. And children, don't despise your parents for that.

They're just being like the Apostle Paul. Their mind's just overflowing with thoughts about Christ. Your second thing is, think about here, is your obedience motivated by Jesus Christ? Look at v. 9-13.

He says, your submission comes from what? Your confession of the Gospel of Christ. What's leading them to do what they're doing is this confession of Jesus Christ. Even in v. 9, where he talks about Christ and enters Christ in as an example.

You know what would happen? If you take v. 8-5, v. 8-9, v. 9-13, and v. 9-15 out. If you take everything out that talks about Christ in this chapter, would that change the appeal that Paul is making to the Corinthians? It would dramatically change the appeal. Because you're leaving out the supreme motive behind getting them to be motivated to go forward and that is Jesus Christ.

And brethren, you know what we should ask ourselves? What do I do in my own counseling? Is there times where I'm strongly exhorting people in a specific situation and conduct? And it's like I'm telling them to drive five hours, but I don't give them any gas? Is Christ entering in there as a motivation like Paul does here when he's just talking about financial commitments and doing what you said you would do? Did Paul's motivation work from 2 Corinthians 8, 9? Did it work? Yeah, it did. Listen to this, Romans 15-25. It seems a few months later.

He says, "...At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints." And who gave the aid? From Macedonia and Ikea, right? Where the Corinthians are at. They've been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. You see, the thing he wanted them to complete, they did complete it.

But if you strip out all the Gospel motivations and you strip out the Lord Jesus Christ, are you really going to get the same result? A third thing to consider here. Look at v. 2 and chapter 9 again. He says, I know your readiness.

He talks about being ready since last year. He talks about their zeal stirring up other people. And he talks about v. 3. Look at this.

He says, I don't want my boasting to prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready as I said you would. You kind of see the tension here. These people have said they're going to be ready.

Paul's wanting to make sure it's going to happen. And there might be a fear that his boasting would end up not coming true. You know what that made me think about? Contrast that, their readiness, with the readiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Does Christ need someone urging Him along to do what He said He's going to commit to do? No, He doesn't. He doesn't need an encouragement. Where did the disciples encourage Christ in His life? Where was He about to give up and one of the disciples gave Him a great word of encouragement? I mean, if anything, Peter said, oh Lord, don't do this, and Jesus rebukes him and says, you're setting your mind on things of the earth.

Get behind Me, Satan. If anything, they tried to discourage Him from doing that which the Father had put before Him. But Christ? You contrast this with the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is there. He is sure. He is ready.

He is someone you can boast in. He is ready to freely forgive you of all of your sins. And the promises that we tell you about Jesus Christ, about you coming to Him and Him bestowing riches upon you, you're not going to find out it's a statement made that isn't accomplished.

It's already been accomplished. And the redemption that Christ has accomplished can be applied even today. But isn't that what some people fear? They're afraid these are empty promises.

Brethren, these are not empty promises. Paul's afraid of being humiliated. You will never be humiliated if you hope in Jesus Christ.

Did not Paul say, all who hope in Him will not be put to what? Shame. They're never going to be humiliated. But you hope in something in this life, it will humiliate you.

It will be taken from you. If not in this life, at the judgment, it will be stripped from you, and the only thing that will matter then is being rich in Jesus Christ. You can have the whole world.

It's not going to profit you anything if in the end you lose your only soul. So Jesus doesn't need urging. He fails not.

Well, a fourth thing here. Has there been a way of serving by which you were ready? Kind of like these Corinthians said they were ready, and then a year's gone by and it's not come to fruition. Nothing came of it.

You had good desires, but it failed to produce results in the last year, 2022. And here we're approaching a new year. What good desires do you have that you maybe have failed to produce into actions and you've needed to be urged along? Maybe someone here needs to exhort you in that specifically.

Ask yourself that. Paul said right in v. 9-5, I thought it necessary to urge the brothers. You've got to urge people.

You've got to exhort them. You've got to stir them up. You've got to poke them a little to get them to keep going forward.

A fifth thing, since we've shared in such great benefits in Christ, how can we be grudgingly give to others and not do it in a cheerful way? Isn't it what John says? If anyone sees his brother in need and he has this world's goods and he closes his heart, what's John's conclusion? How does the love of God abide in that person? And I'm not saying there aren't times you need to use discernment with the stewardship of the money God has given you and use it appropriately as you seek to help people. But he connects this thing of being willing to give to whether you're a Christian or not. Isn't that incredible? Well, that shouldn't surprise you because what's Christ's whole life marked by? It's a life of giving of His blood.

And it's God not sparing His own Son, but giving Him up for us all. So likewise, just like Paul is doing, as we're giving and helping others, it's a reminder to them and to us of Jesus Christ. A sixth thing, the gift of God should lead you and me to have great gratitude specifically to God the Father.

That's what we see right there in v. 15. Paul is overflown with thanks to God for his inexpressible gift. When was the last time you've had that happen? When was the last time I've had that happen? Where I'm in a situation, it might be dealing with money, it might be dealing with giving someone something or loaning someone something, and all of a sudden, your mind, it goes to the inexpressible gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You can't express it. It's indescribable. It's unmeasurable.

May God stir that in our hearts more and more. And these believers overflowing in generosity was a reminder to Paul. Their conduct, God used it to stir Paul up to say this statement that he only uses this word one time.

And it's right here. He can't even express it. And I really appreciated about 14 years ago when Bob came just thinking about what he said about the Lord Jesus.

Let me just read what he said here. It just really glorifies Christ. He said, how different God's ways are than man's.

If man were to send the Son of God into the world, we would choose a palace. Not a stable. Wealth.

Not poverty. The finest schools. Not a carpenter's shop.

A throne. Not a cross. If man were to devise a way to continue to advance the Kingdom of God after Pentecost, we would bring in golden-tongued rabbis.

Not fishermen. If man were to set up rules for entering the Kingdom, we would choose merit, performance, ability, or at least faithfulness. We're talking about the price.

The Lord Jesus Christ. And think of what the Lord Jesus Christ... we can only imagine really what it was for Him. The immortal dies.

The infinite becomes finite. He who upholds all things by the Word of His power. And now He's held by a mother's arms.

He was so great, the heavens couldn't contain Him. And yet, squeezed down into a mother's womb. The God of light and the darkness in a mother's womb.

He who built the heavens, now fiddling around in a carpenter's shop and growing up. The patience that the Lord Jesus exercised for 30 years, knowing He was the Savior of the world, yet He said almost nothing. He was waiting and waiting and waiting until the time appointed by the Father when He could open His mouth and go forth and say, repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

That's just one man's attempt to express who Christ is and what He has done. Steve Lawson said, if the greatest Giver has given the greatest gift, then the only proper response would be for the greatest gratitude to be given to Him. And that's what you see in Paul.

Paul is grateful right here in v. 15. Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift. Well, one more thing here in closing.

Are you giving thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you rich in Him? If you're not, come. What does the Spirit and the Bride say at the end of the Bible? Come, all who thirst, come, and drink the water of life. What have I got to bring for the water? What's He say? It's without what? Without price.

Just like Jesus said, it's finished. Just like Jesus said, for the wedding feast, everything's ready, come. It's ready.

It's finished. It's without price. It's free.

But it costs God His only Son. And He crushed His only Son on that cross that you might have forgiveness of sins. And again, we can't even express in words this gift that God has given us in His Son.

We can't express the love that God has. Many of you know that book Philip Schaff wrote. He commented on Exodus 15-11 where it says, Who is like, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? I mean, there's no one like Christ.

Here, another man's attempt is to describe the indescribable. Listen to Philip Schaff. Jesus' zeal never degenerated into passion or rashness.

His perseverance never turned into stubbornness. His generosity never turned into weakness. His tenderness never turned into sentimentality.

He is justly compared with the lion in strength and with the lamb in meekness. He was the most effective and yet the least noisy, the most radical and yet the most conservative, calm and patient of all reformers. He came to fulfill every letter of the old law, yet He made all things new.

And yet this Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Muhammad, and Napoleon. Without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all the philosophers and scholars combined. Without eloquence of schools, He spoke the words of life such as never were spoken before or since.

And produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet. Without writing a single line, He has set more pens in motion and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes and works of art, and sweet songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times." That's who Paul's speaking about. That's this inexpressible gift.

I think he's talking about Christ and His salvation and His incarnation and what He has done. Let's pray. Father, Lord, we do thank You for Your inexpressible, immeasurable, unsearchable, uncontainable in books gift.

A gracious, free gift given to us once Your enemies, now seated at Your table. Lord, You became a man. We've heard about it since we were kids.

As many of us have. Lord, it can become something common, but it's not. It's an absolute miracle, Lord, that You would do the plan that You've done.

Lord, no one could have thought what You've prepared. The heart of man could not have imagined what God has prepared for us in Jesus Christ. And Lord, here You've allowed us to partake in it, to see it.

And Lord, our hearts long to see more of Your glory, more of Your power, more of Your wonder. Lord, we want to know more of that which is unsearchable, that which is indescribable, that which is immeasurable. Lord, we want to know more about it.

Lord, that's our heart's desire. And Lord, sometimes we want to force something to happen, but Lord, we know in Your timing, in Your own time, Lord, You can come upon our hearts and show us these realities. Lord, we don't need emotional, manipulative music to stir it up.

Lord, we need the truth of Your Word. It can pierce the heart. And Lord, just bring a shower of glory upon our own soul.

Lord, would that not in some way rejuvenate us, even going into this new year? Lord, help us in this new year to be ready for every good work. Lord, help us to not just desire to do things, but to get it done. Lord, to do that which You want us to do.

And so Lord, we thank You today, Father, for sending Your Son, for so loving us that You sent Your Son and slaughtered Him, that we might go free, that we might have heaven that's coming one day. Lord, all the riches. Lord, it feels so far away, and yet it's not.

And so Lord, help us to be good stewards of this one vapor of a life You've given us. Lord, we need You. Lord, help us in Jesus' name, Amen.

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