SOW GENERAOUSLY; REAP GENEROUSLY

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:15

Key Verse: 9:6

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

In the last lesson we learned about the example of giving from the Macedonian churches and, more importantly, from our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor so that we through his poverty might become rich. Those who realize their richness in Jesus Christ can be rich in heart and be generous and magnanimous in the life of giving. In today’s passage Paul goes further in the principle of giving and receiving with the agricultural image of sowing and reaping.” Paul describes how much God is pleased with and blesses those who give generously and bountifully. In this passage, Paul also mentions trustworthy servants in dealing with the liberal gift of offering and the purpose of sending them to the Corinthian church.

**First, stewards with integrity (8:16-9:5).** Paul says in 8:16-17, “I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.” What a precious fellow worker Titus was to Paul! Titus accepted Paul’s appeal regarding the service to the saints in Jerusalem and so he could have the same spirit as Paul had in this matter. Furthermore, he was enthusiastic and took his own initiative in going to the Corinthians church to arrange and finish this offering matter. While Paul was a Jew, Titus was a Greek, a Gentile, a godly Gentile. Titus had visited the Corinthian church several times and so was very familiar with the church members. Considering these factors, it would be much more effective for Titus to deal with this matter offering upfront, rather than Paul. Paul must have been very much encouraged by Titus, such a gospel co-worker for the church of God.

Then in verses 18-19 Paul says, “And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honour the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.” Paul was not sending Titus alone. It was not because he was mistrusting of Titus but was because he was considerate and prudent in completing this project of the large offering. The brother who would be sent with Titus was first the one who was praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. Here “for his service to the gospel” is in other translations “as a preacher of the good news” or “for his preaching the gospel.” So, he was a gospel preacher. Among all services, the service to the gospel should come first. And then this brother was chosen by the churches to accompany Paul in carrying the offering, surely reliable in the matter of money. Paul was clear in this administration to honour the Lord himself and to show his eagerness to help.

And then he says in verses 20 and 21, “We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.” Since the project of collecting the liberal gift which started a year ago was stopped because of the false teachers’ hindrance, Paul was making every effort to avoid any criticism, taking pains to do what is right both in the eyes of the Lord and in the eyes of men. For this, Paul was choosing reliable and trustworthy servants, one after another.

Paul continues in verse 22, “In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you.” Paul was sending another servant tested and approved as a zealous, eager, and diligent servant with great confidence in the Corinthian believers. Again, we see that Paul was prayerful and very careful in choosing servants for this work of God.

Now, Paul sums it up in verse 23: “As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honour to Christ.” Here, “representatives” are “messengers” or “apostles” as those sent on a mission. Paul made these three as one team of delegates for the great project, being sure of their reliability for the honour and glory of Christ. What a complement, an honour to Christ or a glory to Christ! They bring honour and glory to Christ.

Verse 24 says, “Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.” To finish the giving would be the proof of their love as Paul said in 8:8, “…I want to test the sincerity of your love…” Again, loving is to go together with giving.

After talking about the reliable servants, Paul talks about the Corinthian church and his purpose of sending the delegates of the churches. In 9:1-2, “There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.” Paul goes back to the Corinthians’ original motivation, their original eagerness and readiness before they had been influenced by false teachers. Paul had been boasting about them to the Macedonians. The Corinthian church in Achaia was a good influence on the churches in Macedonia. They sparked the fire of the great spirit of among the Macedonians.

Paul says in verses 3 and 4, “But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident.” Paul was making every effort to help the Corinthians to be prepared for the honour of God.

And in verse 5, “So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.” Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to keep the promise they had made regarding the offering, not changing their minds because of circumstances or their covetous desire. He was helping the Corinthians in any way he could that their gift would be acceptable and pleasing to God as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

**Second, the principle of sowing and reaping (9:6-15).** Paul says in verse 6, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” In other translations, “generously” is “bountifully”, which seems to convey a better understanding. Paul uses the familiar agricultural imagery, and this is the simply agrarian principle or axiom. The reaping or the harvest is directly proportionate to the sowing. The principle is that when you sow, you will reap a harvest according to the measure of your sowing. The size of the harvest is in direct proportion to the amount of the seed sown.

In verse 6, “generously” or “bountifully” is in Greek *eulogia* from which we get eulogy, which means blessing. We clearly understand the idea of sowing and reaping bountifully as opposed to sparingly. But it also carries the inherent idea of blessing, and it can have the sense that the man who sows with the view toward blessing is the one who is going to receive blessing. In other words, he who sows on the principle that he wants the most blessing possible is going to get the most blessing possible.

Let’s think about sowing generously or bountifully. The Macedonian churches sowed generously when they gave their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity in their most severe trial. There’s an old story of a king who went into his village to greet his subjects. Wandering through the streets and as he was doing that, he came across a beggar sitting by the roadside. The beggar eagerly held up his little alms bowl, being sure that the king would put in something of value for him. Instead, the king looked down at him and made a most unique statement. He asked the beggar if he would please give him something. Taken aback, the beggar fished around and found three little grains of rice and dropped them into the king’s hand. At the end of the day, when the beggar poured out what he had received, he found to his astonishment at the bottom of his bowl three grains of solid gold, and he wished he had given the king everything.

The world will tell us that if we want prosperity, hold on to everything, hoard it, accumulate it, save it, invest it. That’s how to increase our riches and guarantee our future prosperity. But God has a very different plan. When you talk about prosperity in God’s terms, it is the opposite of what the world would suggest. And God does have a plan for financial prosperity. It does not disregard hard work, it does not disregard saving, it does not disregard wise investment. But it does reject accumulation and hoarding. In fact, God’s plan for prosperity calls for us to give your money away. Very much like that beggar, if he had given more rice, he’d have gotten more gold. It is to sow bountifully in order to reap bountifully.

In 1 Kings 17 there was a poor widow, who only had a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug, just one meal of portion for herself and her son, and would die the next day without any food left. But according to God’s direction the prophet Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid…first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. 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 went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

Sowing generously is investing with God, in which He pays dividends on it. What you give is invested with God and He pays dividends on it. That is the path to prosperity. The generous Christian never needs to fear not having enough. The more you give, the more God gives in return. God will outgive you all along the way, returning generous gifts beyond all proportion or expectation of what you have given.

Here Paul says in verse 7, “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion.” In giving to God, one’s decision to give is important. Then the person can give willingly, not reluctantly or under compulsion.

And at the end of verse 7 Paul says, “for God loves a cheerful giver.” Paul specifically wrote this. It is written in 2 Chronicles 2:11, “…the LORD loves his people…” Psalm 37:28 says, “The LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones.” And Psalm 146:8 says, “The LORD loves the righteous.” We remember John 3:16, “For God so loved the world…” We also remember 1 John 4:10, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” and 1 John 4:16, “…God is love…” But the description, “God loves a cheerful giver” is very specific and unique in the Bible. Here “cheerful” is in Greek *hilaros*, from which you have the English word, hilarious. God loves a cheerful give, a hilarious giver. Here is a clear emphasis that God is so pleased with a cheerful giver. When we give generously with a cheerful spirit, God is very happy and shows us his special affection.

Then Paul says in verse 8, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” In this verse “all” is written 4 times and “every” 1 time. In Greek, *pasan, panti, pantote, pasan, pan*, all of them are a form of the word “all.” This shows how much God blesses a cheerful giver. It could be read, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you that all ways having all sufficiency in all things you may have an abundance for all good deeds.” God is able to give such plentiful blessings for generous and cheerful givers and they will always have all sufficiency for all things. And here we should not miss that God’s blessing was to keep doing every good work, not consuming God’s blessing for one’s own desire.

Paul also supports this rich blessing with the words of the Old Testament in verse 9, “As it is written: ‘He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” It is a quotation from Psalm 112:9. This Psalm is about God’s blessing on the righteous and their children. A righteous man scatters abroad his gifts to the poor and God never forgets his righteous act of giving. His generosity will never be forgotten. And God will replenish him and reward him both in time and in eternity.

Then Paul says in verse 10, “Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” In this verse, we see the words, “seed”, “sower”, “bread” “food”, again “seed”, “harvest” and “righteousness.” Again, Paul stresses the importance of giving in light of the principle of sowing bountifully and reaping bountifully. Let’s try to trace Paul’s mind. Who is he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food. Definitely it is God. The word “seed” appears first in Genesis 1:11, “Then God said, ‘Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according their various kinds.’ And it was so.” God created various kinds of seed and the seed is given to the sower. And the seed is planted and grows to be plants and trees and more seeds are produced. This cycle keeps going. And from the plants and trees oats or wheat comes and bread for food is made. When we sow bountifully, God blesses us with bountiful reaping and more seeds, increasing our store of seed. And we sow more bountifully, and God blesses with more bountiful reaping, enlarging the harvest of our righteousness including our generosity. This is a spiritual principle of God’s blessing.

Then in verse 11, “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” Paul states in very clearly that they will not make themselves rich, but they will be made rich surely by God, and in every way. And it is so that they can be generous surely in the service for God and his people on every occasion. As a result, God will be glorified with thanksgiving through those who have received their generous service.

Paul continues to say about such service in verses 12-13, “This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved themselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.” Their service not only supplies the needs of God’s people but also brings praise to God with overflowing thanks for their obedience to the gospel of Christ and their generosity.

Then Paul says in verse 14, “And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.” When their hearts go out to them through their prayers, they will be prayer supporters and friends to them because of their generous service. Proverbs 14:20 says, “The poor are shunned even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends.” We are also reminded of what Jesus said in Luke 16:9, “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.” What a precious use of money when we invest our earthly money to make eternal friends saved in Jesus Christ and so to expand his kingdom! This grace of giving can be included to the surpassing grace God has given them.

Finally, Paul says in verse 15, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” This indescribable gift is none other than the Son of God. Paul wrote in Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will be not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” Truly, when God gave us the gift of his Son, he gave us everything. We know that we cannot exchange our child, son or daughter even for the whole world. Giving his Son Jesus, he gave us everything. God’s gift of His Son is so big, so great, so glorious. It just fails to be able to be described in human language.

We know that God’s giving His Son is the foundation for all Christian giving. God planted a seed and Jesus said in John 12:24, “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” And God planted the seed, Christ, in the grave, as it were. God buried His Son and reaped a redeemed humanity. And that makes it possible for us to sow and reap. We resemble and imitate God when we give voluntarily, sacrificially, joyfully, as Paul said in Ephesians 5:1, “Be imitators of God…”

May we truly believe the truth of God’s word in 2 Corinthians 9:6, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” and put it into practice and testify to it.