

Now. There I go. There I'm at. Hey, good morning, guys. Love that.

I had a great I was singing with Dana Lovato over here, the Tisto sweet of Trust in Jesus. Our harmonies were amazing. Cheryl, you can attest to that. Didn't it sound good over there? Y'all need to sit in that corner right over there next Sunday.

That was amazing. Shauna. Thank you for worship this morning. We're finishing up a series on generosity. We do it every year.

So if you're here today for the first time, we didn't plan it just for you. We've been doing it. You've just arrived at the perfect Sunday. I hope you brought your checkbook, because we're going to talk a lot about money. We've been talking a lot about money.

The first week, we talked about the heart of generosity, and we were reminded of that widow with her two coins and how her gift was significant, not because it was a large amount, but because it really revealed the heart that she had towards God and how it played itself out in her generosity to offer everything she had. And Jesus says she's given more than anyone else. And then we talked about the impact of generosity. We talked about this idea that since God owns everything, we're merely stewards of God's resources, and we want to be wise stewards. We don't want to be foolish stewards.

We want to be wise stewards of what God has entrusted to us. We want to be faithful with what he's given us. And then Alan spoke last week about this rhythm of generosity and developing a discipline and a pattern of just trusting God with our stuff. It's not big, like, big one stuff here and one big thing here. It's just like a pattern of life where we develop a habit and a rhythm of generosity.

And this week, we're going to be talking about the paradox of generosity. Anyone know what a paradox is? It's not a pair of dogs. I thought that was it. And it's not an oxymoron.

I used to get those two confused. So an oxymoron. Anyone here remember from English what an oxymoron is? No. Mason raised his hand, but then he took it down real quick.

So an oxymoron, it's like two words that are opposite but formed to combine something new, like giant shrimp. That's an oxymoron. Deafening silence, that's an oxymoron. Pretty ugly. Someone's pretty ugly.

That's an oxymoron. Civil war is an oxymoron. Civility and war, oxymorons. So we're not talking about the oxymoron of generosity. We're talking about the paradox of generosity.

And a paradox is sort of similar, but different in this way. It's a statement that sounds sort of ridiculous on the face of it, but when you get down a little bit deeper, when you examine it a little bit closer, you realize that there's something true there. And so one of my favorite paradoxes is this phrase, less is more. You heard that phrase before, maybe you've used that

phrase. And for those of us with very, very busy, busy schedules, we learn eventually that having a little less commitment of time in our lives actually can make our lives more full and better.

Anyone in that stage of life where you're recognizing that less is more? Jesus used paradoxical statements a lot. One of the things he said is, whoever wishes to save his life must be willing to lose it. He says, the meek, the humble, the meek, they are the ones who will inherit the earth. They're the ones who are going to rule, who are going to govern the place.

He says this, Whoever would become great in the kingdom of God must become a servant. These are paradoxical statements here.

Paul in Acts or John in Acts reminds us of this, that Jesus said this right here. It is more blessed to give than to receive. Now, we are entering into the season where we are thinking about, if you have children, all the things you want to receive, correct. Maybe you've been given a list of things that it would be nice to receive this year. And on the face of it, Jesus' statement seems a little bit like I get why people find that a challenging statement, because getting stuff is a lot of fun.

I like to get stuff. But for those who are enjoying learning about this discipline and this rhythm of generosity, what we're finding is that the blessing of giving is greater than the blessing of there is a blessing in receiving, isn't there? But the blessing in giving is even greater. So today we're going to look at the paradoxical situation involved in the blessing of giving. And we're going to be looking at three distinct churches.

We're going to learn a little bit about a collection that was taken up for people who were going through some really rough times. None of them had ever really met each other. They had heard about each other, they knew of each other, but they didn't really have a deep relationship. And yet in this story, this paradoxical story, we're going to discover how the poor became rich in living out this rhythm and this pattern of generosity and living out the grace of the Gospel. So let's pray, and we'll dig in.

Heavenly Father, we thank you today for Your grace to us. We have received so much, and it is a blessing to receive from you. You have given us life and hope and health and a future. But you remind us that it is even more blessed to give. So we want to live in a way that lives in that reality, as paradoxical as it may sound.

So teach us, instruct us through Your Word. This morning, by the Holy Spirit, we pray in Jesus name. Amen. You guys can turn to two Corinthians, chapter eight, if you want. As we're doing that, I want to tell you about a new game I downloaded because it's a lot of fun.

I think you all enjoy it. It's called GeoGuessr. G-E-O-G-U-E-S-S-R geoguesser. Anyone ever played this game before? This is crazy.

Do you love this game? Sure. You don't love it as much as I do. Here's what it does. It uses Google Maps to randomly place you somewhere on the globe you're just dropped.

And sometimes you're dropped in a city, sometimes you're dropped in the middle of a cornfield and you've got to figure out where on the globe you are. And I've had a blast with it for the last three days. So sometimes they drop you in these amazing places and you're like, OOH, I want to go there. I want to see that. I want to be there.

There's places in Eastern Europe that I am now fascinated. I want to go see because of this game, Geoguesser. There's also places they drop you and you're like, oh, yikes, this is rough. People live in some pretty rough situations around the globe, don't they? Some places are sweet, some places are sketchy.

But it put me in mind of this week's sermon because we're talking about three different locations. The first location is Corinth. Now, we've talked about Corinth. If you've been part of our congregation for a while, you know about the city of Corinth. You know where it sits.

You know, it sits between it's an isthmus between two different lakes. It's a prosperous city, a rich city, very diverse. It's the center of education. There's a lot of commerce there. It is an important, big and important city.

The second city you're also familiar with, and that's in Jerusalem. Now Jerusalem is clear across the Mediterranean over into the Middle Eastern area. The Middle East coast. Jerusalem is another important, very, very important city. The center of religiousness.

The temple is there. The temple economy is there. Christianity was birthed there. The church began there in Jerusalem. So we've got Corinth and we've got Jerusalem.

But there's a third region that we want to drop into right now, and this is called the Region of Macedonia. Anyone familiar with that word, at least Macedonia. So Macedonia sits, if I'm facing you. So I'm the map and facing you. Greece is down here.

Jerusalem is over here. This is the Mediterranean aegean Sea right here. And Macedonia is up here on this north section. Now, the Macedonian region has three main churches in it. There's the Church of Philippi.

There's the Church of thessalonica and there's the Church of Berea. And here's what you need to know about these churches. They're very, very poor, but out of their poverty they do something paradoxical. They become generous. They excel at generosity.

Paul will say so here's the scripture we're going to read in two Corinthians, chapter eight, verses one through four. Paul writes this to the people, the Christians in Corinth, and he says this. Now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace underline that word, if you got a pen. The grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Now remember, they're very poor.

In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability, entirely on their own. They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. Now, what is he talking about here? Well, here's what's happened.

The whole region is undergoing some famine, and Jerusalem has been hit the hardest. The church in Jerusalem is really, really struggling. People are dying. Famine then didn't mean that the government would bring in some cheese and eggs for you. Famine then meant you died and people were dying in Jerusalem.

And so here's the first paradox that we see in this scripture that the church plants up in Macedonia. Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea are actually helping the mother church over here in Jerusalem. That's a first paradox. That would be like us here at our Bedford campus, helping out the campus in Bloomington. They sort of helped get us started, and they still fund a lot of our ministry here.

We are not yet self supporting. We're trending that way, but we're not there yet. But if something devastating happened in Bloomington, I would come to you and say, guys, we really need to take care of our brothers and sisters in Bloomington. We need to dig deep and help however way we can. And you guys would say, Help us do this.

Tell us how we can do it. We want to give more. You would excel in generosity, I'm confident. So that's the first paradox. The second paradox is this Paul is pleading on behalf of people that he once hated.

If you remember, it's in Jerusalem that Paul got his start in his reputation as a killer of Christians. He would have people arrested. He would have people thrown in prison and even have people killed, if you know the story of Stephen. So the second paradox here is that Paul is pleading on behalf of people that he once hunted down. The third paradox is this, that the ones who gave the most were the ones who had the least.

We see this all the time. If you do the research on charitable giving, the people who give the most percentage wise, are people who have the least. These Macedonian churches, Philippi, Thessalonica Berea, they are poor. Poor. The government up there, the country is rich in natural resources, but it seems like the rulers and the government squandered that and left people devastated where they should have been rolling in cash.

The people in Macedonia are destitute. Have you ever been poor?

I see a few know your I know your income. You still are.

I have been poor. Now I'm not talking poor about, oh, you know what? We're going to have to skip a month paying this bill. That's just like making ends meet barely. I'm talking poor.

I'm not talking about canceling a few streaming subscriptions because you don't need to do all that. It's \$9 a month. And why are we paying this? We only watch one show that we don't even watch anymore. I'm not talking about that.

That's just wisely assessing your financial needs and requirements. I'm not talking about that. I'm not talking about well, we're not going to eat out this week because going to golden crowd will be \$60 for all of us. And so we are not going to do that. That's not poor again.

That's just good stewardship. I'm talking poor where you're in the aisle at Walmart and you need to buy toothpaste and deodorant and you got to make a hard decision. I've talked about this before. Anyone ever been there where you're that poor, that's destitute poor, that's Macedonian poor. That's what these folks are going through.

Paul calls it extreme poverty. But in spite of that, they gave above and beyond their ability. Remember what he said in the midst of their severe trial, their overflowing joy, and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. And they see, Paul says, even in their own need to say, how can we do more? When I was growing up, one of my dad's favorite verses about taking care of others was from one John, chapter three, verse 17 and 18.

And here's how John writes this. He says, if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? John seems to equate the reception of God's love in our own hearts with it flowing back out and taking care of others. The Macedonians didn't have a lot of the world's goods, but when they saw the needs of their brothers in Jerusalem, they couldn't help themselves. They said, We've got to help.

We don't have a lot, but we're going to give what we have. They didn't let their circumstances detract from their willingness to give. Instead, they opened their hearts and gave what they could. And Paul says, they exceeded our expectations, like the widow with the two coins she has given the most of all. And for that reason, part of the reason that they were able to do that was because they gave themselves first to the Lord.

Verse five says it this way they gave themselves first of all to the Lord and then by the will of God, also to us. They surrendered their entire lives to the Lord, their heart, soul, mind, and strength. And that included their finances. One of our values here at Sherwood Oaks is that we live like God owns everything. We understand here that we are stewards of the resources God has given to us.

And we understand that like faithful stewards, we don't hide, even if we just have one bag, we don't hide it. We don't hoard it. We release it to be used by God. We hold everything with open hands, as Alan says lightly, we live like God owns everything. I want to live that way.

That is an aspirational quote for me, by the way. I am not there yet, but I want to live that way. And how do we get there? How do we get to the point where we really live this way? I think it begins by just remembering God's grace in our lives.

That was the first verse where Paul brings this up. He says, now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Grace is the key to really living generously. My cousin Todd lives up in Greenwood, and over Thanksgiving, he was telling me about one of the guys that goes to the church, an elderly man who lives in an assisted living across from the church, just across the road. But it's a major road, and he needs some assistance getting from his residence to the church.

And so my cousin has taken upon himself, really, to take this guy and become his chauffeur and almost a caretaker as well. He says he's on a fixed income. The assisted living place is not cheap, and by the time he pays all of his bills, he's got about \$100 left over at the end of the month to do what he wants to do with it. And he always wants to give something. When the offering plate is passed one day, they're there, and Todd knows how much he's got.

And Todd's running sort of a running calculation how much this guy still has left in his count. And the guy says, I want to put something in the offering plate tonight, Wednesday night at church, because I want to put something in the offering plate. And Todd's like, you need to mind what you've got because it's still early in the month. And he goes, I want to give something. And Todd says, Well, I mean, you don't have to give something every time you go to church.

The guy says, I want to give something every time I go to church. Anytime there's an opportunity to give, I want to give. I love that. Anytime there's an opportunity to give, I want to give. Out of his extreme poverty, he understands that something happens when we give.

He becomes more when he gives. If you want to save your life, you got to be willing to lose it. And this gentleman is Jeff Houston, who's preaching one of our elders here at Sherwood Oaks is preaching in Bloomington this morning. He says it this way when we recognize that we are the recipients of God's undeserved favor, we develop an attitude of gratitude. He did not coin that phrase, by the way, but it's a good one.

We develop an attitude of gratitude. And this gratefulness acknowledging God's unmerited favor allows us to give joyfully regardless of our circumstances, and sometimes even more than we thought was possible. Grace always points us back to Jesus, who did, who gave more than anyone would think possible. Paul continues in Corinthians he goes, I'm not commanding you about this offering, Corinthians I'm not telling you you have to do it, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

There's another paradox, isn't it? Through his poverty, we become rich. Not rich like Jeff Bezos. That'd be nice, but that's not how God works. Spiritually rich.

Rich in things that really eternally matter. Friendships and connections we make with others when we serve them. Sacrificially this abundant life full of just rich opportunities, this rich hope that we have of an eternity waiting for us in heaven. And all of those riches come to us by way of a sacrifice. Jesus' sacrifice love, by the way, always entails some degree of sacrifice.

Have you thought about that? Jesus demonstrated his love for us through sacrifice. That's how we know that we are loved when others make sacrifices for us. That's how we know we love others when we make sacrifices for them, when we give up something of value to ourselves in order that someone else might have what they need. That is love.

That's divine love. The Macedonian Christians chose to make sacrifices to help the Christians in Jerusalem. They showed love for their brothers and sisters there. And Jesus showed us love when he chose to make the ultimate sacrifice. He had all the riches of heaven, everything he needed there, completely self sufficient, and yet he humbled himself.

He was born into poverty. He lived a life of very little material prosperity. But through his life and his death on the cross, he offered to us eternal riches, priceless and invaluable salvation. Have you thought about what you've received in Christ? You've received that forgiveness.

You've been reconciled with God. You have an abundant life now and an eternal life in heaven with our Father. And that all involved sacrifice. God so loved the world that he gave his only son and Jesus gave himself.

We give because God first gave to us.

We're going to share in a time of communion here. And as we do, I just want to remind us, god is so gracious, god is so good this morning. We live in this place of immense blessing. Now, you may not be at the toothpaste and deodorant stage of poverty, but perhaps you understand that you had a deep, deep need that you could not supply on your own. And God stepped in and said, I'm going to provide a way for you.

You cannot buy your way out of the brokenness that you find yourselves in. But I'm going to step in. I'm going to offer myself for you. Jesus laid down his life for us, that we can enjoy this moment right here together with each other, surrounded by people that love us and we love heavenly Father Jesus, the psalmist wrote that it is good to be generous. And good will come to those of us who are generous, and we are certainly blessed.

But more than material blessings, we desire here at Sherwood Oaks, this congregation of men and women who desire to become more and more like you. We want our character. We want our actions. We want our words. We want our thoughts.

We want the things that we love to mirror your heart and your mind. We want to be made more and more in your image. And you are a giver. Not just in word, but indeed, you gave your life, that we might gain life. You you stepped into poverty.

That we might know the riches of Your grace. We might know abundant life. So this morning, Lord, where grace, your grace, meets our gratitude for that, may it result in generosity. Today, as we come to Your table, we receive Your life and the bread and the cup, and we offer our lives as a demonstration of generosity. In Jesus name.

Amen.