

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

8 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵ And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. ⁶ So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But just as you excel 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.

⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When you heard the words of our sermon text, you might have thought to yourself that this sermon is going to be all about money. The Apostle Paul does refer to a special offering and generosity and giving but this sermon text is also about Grace. So this morning, as we consider the words before us, we want to focus on **“God's Grace.” “The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as it was Shown in His Poverty,”** and **“The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as it is Reflected in Our Generosity.”**

I. Probably the key verse in this section of scripture is verse 9. **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”**

If you had \$1000 in the bank and your friend came to you and said they needed it to buy medicine or to pay for some other urgent need, would you hand it over without question? What if it was \$10,000 or \$20,000 that you had and they had an urgent need for that amount, would you be just as quick to give it to them?

That comparison might help us to start to understand what Jesus gave up. It wasn't \$1000, or \$10,000 or \$20,000 but he gave up everything he had. He was rich beyond our imagination because he had the richness of heaven and he owns everything in this world and yet Paul tells us **“[Jesus] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”** (Philippians 2:6–8)

As Jesus conducted his ministry, he had nothing except the clothes on his back. He had no home, no money and no food. He relied on others for his day to day support. His poverty was seen in his humility – humility that took him to the cross where he gave his all for us.

Think about that for a minute. Through his humility and poverty we have become rich. Not rich by worldly standards with money, wealth, cars, prestige, power – but rich by spiritual standards with faith, forgiveness, peace, comfort, and the sure hope of heaven. Not because we deserve it or have earned. Just the opposite. We have been disobedient and at times defiant – and even though we might think we were doing okay we were living in spiritual poverty.

But our Savior, in his poverty, did everything to lift us up and give us life and hope. Because of God's grace we have been forgiven and adopted into his family. We have been given this treasure that can never fade or spoil or erode away – the treasure of salvation found only in Jesus. And the best part, Paul tells us is, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”** (Ephesians 2:8–9)

The world says we have to work for everything we have but Scripture tells us that Jesus has done all the work and now gives us the benefit of his work through the gift of faith. We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. But God gives it to us because he loves us, even in spite of our sins. That is what God's grace is all about.

Sometimes we sacrifice for our children and grandchildren because we want them to have the best. God sacrificed his best, his Son, so that we, his spiritual children, can experience the richness of his grace.

I know you have heard this all before, but we need to hear about God's grace on a regular basis because we need his grace and his love on a regular basis.

As a child we need our parents to love us. Often, we know that they do, but sometimes we need a reassuring hug and we need them to tell us they love us too. God wraps his arms around us through his Word and holds us tight when we need it. He tells us and shows us his love by forgiving our sins every day. That is God's great love for us that comes to us by God's Grace. And because of God's Grace we are able to then reflect the generosity of our Savior.

II. Paul began this section of scripture by telling us, **“And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵ And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.”** Paul is writing to the Corinthian church but uses the Macedonia church as an example of how God's love can prompt us to want to reflect that love in what we do.

Paul points out that the Macedonian church members were extremely poor but when they heard of this special offering for the churches in Jerusalem, they made it their singleminded purpose to gather an offering – to contribute. Most of the people that knew them said they were too poor and shouldn't contribute but Paul tells us that they begged for the privilege to give.

So they gave themselves 1st to the Lord – maybe asked God for the proper motivation and for the grace to do this and then they gave from their hearts and with joy.

Now Paul is encouraging the Corinthian congregation and us, **“Just as you excel 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.”**

Our Christian faith has an impact on our speech, our knowledge of God's Word, our excitement for the Gospel and our love for one another and now Paul reminds us that it also includes the giving of our offerings. Paul doesn't tell us how much we have to give but rather, as a Christian, he wants us to share in the joy of giving.

Giving is about God's grace and it is about trusting in God. Think about all that God has given us and continues to give us. Our God is a “giving” God. As his children – because we have experienced his grace and continue to experience his grace – we too, want to be “giving.” Matter of fact, it is only because of God's grace that we have any desire to share with others.

Our sinful nature and the world around us would encourage us to be stingy with what we have – to hold onto it for ourselves but then we miss out on the joy of giving. God doesn't command us to give up everything we have but may we have a heart that moves us to share when we have the opportunity and God will help us to experience the joy of giving – of helping others. Some of you have already experienced that joy and like the Macedonians may we ask the Lord to give us the proper attitude and help us in this part of our Christian living.

After all, we have experienced God's grace and we continue to experience God's grace daily and it makes all the difference in our lives.

We are spiritually rich because of God's gift of faith.

We are forgiven because of Jesus' poverty and his suffering and death on the cross.

May we rejoice every day as we experience God's grace and may we let the joy of salvation encourage us to take every opportunity to let God's grace shine in our lives. Amen.