

# Rich Towards God

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, well, great to see you folks. We're actually looking at chapter 9 today, so great to be reminded of chapter 8, but we're just going to read this together, chapter 9. So come with me to verse 1 of chapter 9. We just continue on exactly where chapter 8 finished. Paul writes this, continuing on, he says, there's no need for me to write to you about this service to the Lord's people, for I know your eagerness to help, but I've been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year, you and Achaia were ready to give, and your enthusiasm stirred most of them to action, but I'm 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. 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. Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver, and God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

As it is written, they have freely scattered their gifts to the poor. Their righteousness endures forever. 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. You can be generous on every occasion, and through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people, but it is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others 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. And in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

Amen. So here is the most awkward question that I think you can be asked today. See if you agree with me. Okay, picture the scene, you're enjoying a nice evening with friends before someone turns to you and says, you know, I've always wondered, I've always wondered how much you earn. How would you respond?

I think we've got the perfect response for this in Scotland. If you've ever heard this one, you go, jog on mate. So we respond, isn't it? While you're thinking about a polite way of saying that, let me tell you one of my favorite things about Jesus. It's the things that he speaks most about.

[ 3 : 1 5 ]     Top three things that Jesus speaks about, money, sex, and what happens after you die, in other words, heaven and hell. Now why that's interesting is because they are the three topics that are most taboo today.

in our world. Yeah? We shy away from them. Jesus, however, goes towards them. And out of the top three, top one is money. And it's worth asking ourselves, why is that the case? What does Jesus know about money that we don't? Now here's a thought for you. We often think that money or lack of it is the problem.

But according to Jesus, it's not the primary problem. Maybe think about it like this. I grew up playing a lot of golf. And see when I or someone that I was playing with or someone that was in the hole in front of us, hit what is known in Scotland as a duffer. So often what we do in our anger and frustration is you would turn, you would hit the ball, and then you would look at the club in anger and frustration. As if it was the club's fault for that duck hook off the tee.

Complete the phrase, a bad workman blames his tools. Right? Because here's what Jesus realizes that I think we so often don't when it comes to money. Money really is neutral when you think about it. Money isn't the primary issue. What Jesus perceives is that our hearts are the primary issue.

Or here's how Tim Keller puts it, and I'm going to recommend a couple of books as we go through this today. This wonderful book called Counterfeit Gods, worth it for the chapter on money alone. And here's what he says, the money God's modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart.

[ 5 : 18 ] In other words, Jesus perceives that we don't perceive that this is a problem. Now Jesus tells this parable in Luke chapter 12. He tells this parable about a farmer.

A farmer who's doing really well for himself. A farmer who wants to expand his business. And so what he decides to do is invest in building bigger barns for himself so that he can store all his grain.

What does he want? He wants to retire early and he wants to take it easy. So he is both a, what we would call today, a saver and a spender. And we hear about this man and we hear about this man and we think to ourselves living the dream. But Jesus tells this story and he says, behold the fool.

And you think to yourself, what is wrong with what this man is doing? Jesus perceives that this man in his plans and in his spending hasn't accounted for his death.

And the moral of the story says Jesus is that this is how it will be for all those who store up things for themselves but aren't rich towards God.

[ 6 : 41 ] And that phrase, rich towards God, it woos us to come and see that Jesus offers his people a better way. Now this is primarily really what we're going to be thinking about today, is spoken to God's people. So if that's not you here today, if you wouldn't call yourself a disciple of Jesus, just love that you're here. Just think about maybe your attitude to money and some of the things going on. So we're not here looking for your money. We're going to think about that later on.

That's not the name of the game. But this is all about our discipleship as we follow Jesus and learn the things that he's telling us. Jesus offers his people a better way, a way of handling and viewing money, which means faith instead of fear, which means contentment instead of comparison and envy and means worshiping God instead of hoarding for ourselves. And here's the wonderfully freeing thing about what Jesus says here. To be rich towards God can be done no matter how much or how little we have in the bank. He's inviting his disciples, our generous king, inviting our disciples to embrace the way of generosity. And that's what Paul wants to see take hold of this church in Corinth, a generosity revolution. Remember this place in Corinth? We thought about it last week. Corinth, because of where it is primarily on the map, this is a place of affluence and opportunity, simply because of where it is on the map. And I just think that's a really good thing to stop and think about how geography plays a massive part in all of this. Because we exist in the West, we exist and live our lives in one of the most affluent cities in the West. So often what we're tricked into doing is we look at how other people in our world are living and we think to ourselves, well, because I'm not living in mansion house roads, I consider myself really poor. But actually the rest of the world would look at us and think you are in the top, top, top percentage of affluent people in the world. So geography really matters, doesn't it? Where we're living, where we see ourselves. We've got to understand that's true. Verse one of chapter nine, do you see it? Paul talks about this service.

Just come with me there. Do you see it? He talks about this service. Now remember he's collecting money from the churches in Macedonia, Achaia, which is where Corinth is, to meet the needs of the Jewish Christian believers over in Judea who are really up against it in their lives. And notice what his motivation is here. His motivation is not guilt. So often how we're persuaded to give, isn't it, in our world towards all sorts of causes. Comic relief showing videos of tragic situations in other parts of the world. It's how they get us motivated to give. Now, of course, we care deeply about those things that are happening all over our world, but it's striking that that's not the approach that Paul takes. Presumably he could have done that, but it's not the approach that he takes. He goes for something that's going to motivate and transform people for the long haul. It's not guilt. It's the gospel. This is the thing that's going to motivate. It's coming to find life, and we thought about this last week, and Alice read it again, it's so good to be reminded of it, coming to find life in the fact that the richest one in the universe, Jesus Christ, became the poorest. It's in grasping the magnitude of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God, who became sin for us on the cross to redeem us from the penalty and eternal punishment that was awaiting us because of our sin against a holy God. It changes everything to know that Paul doesn't call it. Paul doesn't call it the practice of giving or even the discipline of giving. He calls it the grace of giving. For have a look at that last phrase of chapter 9.

That grace of being able to give is only in light of God's indescribable gift to us, which is the gift of his Son. So that's the indescribable gift that he's talking about. Praise God for his indescribable gift. Now the Corinthians, if you read the first five verses of chapter 9, if you scan your eyes over it, they've clearly talked about giving to this collection, but they just hadn't followed through with it yet. I expect many of us know that experience of saying that we want to give to the Lord's work, having that desire to give to the Lord's work, but for whatever reason, we just never get round to it. I think that's the kind of thing that's going on here. Paul, do you see the language? He knows that they are eager and he's been relaying the fact that they're eager to the Macedonians. Verse 2, and knowing that the Corinthians are hands-in on this collection, knowing that they're game for it, has spurred them on to buy into it and give. And Paul is saying, don't let me down now, guys. Don't let me down now. Verse 5, he says, don't do it begrudgingly. It's interesting, isn't it? Life's full of those kind of bills. No one rejoices when the posty delivers the yearly council tax bill, right? You can see that one coming a mile off when it hits the floor when it comes to your door. Let me tell you, our car was due its MOT this week.

Let me tell you, there wasn't a smile on my face when I paid the garage. Life is full of begrudging bills. And truth be told, how often we can see our giving to the church as just another bill to pay.

[ 12 : 32 ] I think this is how this passage has really searched me this week, because in all honesty, I can think of giving to the church as just another bill. Mortgage comes out, Eon Gas and Electric comes out, Edinburgh Leisure comes out for the kids' swimming lessons, and there is Brunsfield.

So often it doesn't even register what we're doing. You know, I once knew a girl called Claire, who would deliberately go to the cash machine, physically take out the money that she was going to give before giving it to the church office. And it was her way of reminding herself every month what she was doing. And if you're like me in this area, how desperately we need to see Paul's invitation and his logic when it comes to giving. Because in aiming to inspire them towards generosity, he lays out just two great principles for giving. And these are the two things we're going to think about in our time remaining. Here's the first thing he says. He says, remember who's providing for your sowing? And he taps into this everyday metaphor from the farm. Do you see him do it?

Verse 6, sowing and reaping. Sowing and reaping. And this applies across the board, doesn't it? In every single area of our lives, we know it's true. Not just when it comes to our money, but our time, our energy, our studies, our depth of friendships, that what we get out is really proportionate to what we put in. And it's the same when it comes to what you give to the Lord. And verse 7, which is really the New Testament verse when it comes to giving, we're going to riff on this for just a little bit. Verse 7 is how we should understand our giving today. For here's the question that Paul's anticipating in the minds of his readers, how much should we give? Maybe that's a question you're thinking about today. Maybe you're a real pragmatist. I don't know. How much should we give?

Well, the number that's batting around the Old Testament is 10%. It's what that word tithe means. It's literally the 10th. And the giving of the 10th to God and to his work was prescribed in the Old Testament law. It's how God's people gave to support the work of the Levites at the temple. It was connected with the festivals within Israel. But here's the way, the way more important question, I think, to get our heads around. Why did God bother with that figure? Because in my head, it's either 100% because everything is the Lord's. We give everything back to him or really it's nothing.

Why 10%? If it's all God's anyway, why tell his people to give 10%? Two things for you. Number one, what is he doing? He's drawing out the hearts of his people. He's inviting them to worship him. Just giving back to God what he's already given to them. It's an invitation to worship. And secondly, he's teaching them to trust. Come back to that in a second. But if that is how it worked in the Old Testament, I guess the question we've got to ask is how does it apply today as New Testament believers? Do we still need to tithe? I think the theological answer is no, because we are not Old Testament Israel and the law that they were bound by. It doesn't apply to us in the exact same way because of Jesus, what he's done for us on the cross. But because of Jesus, legal duty has given way to joyful sacrifice.

[ 16 : 28 ] God presumably gave that 10% figure because it was a reasonable, it was a working amount for your everyday family who was there. And because of that, whilst it's not binding, 10% of what we earn, friends, can I suggest that that is a really good ballpark figure?

The reality of it, I imagine for many of us, is if our income was reduced by 10%, we really wouldn't notice it. But conversely, if each of us gave 10%, then the budgets of every single church in this city and across the world would rise significantly. And I once heard of a guy because of this who pegged the standard of living. He was earning a lot of money and actually he did what was called a reverse tithe. So he gave 90% away to his local church and various things and he lived on the 10%. I think this is what this does. You're not bound by the law, but your hearts are transformed that you want to worship the Lord with everything that you have. What is he giving you? How much should we give? Good question, says Paul, but you want to know the better question? This is where he gets into it in the text. Not how much should we give. The better question, the first question, is how should we give? Answer, do you see it there? Verse 7, cheerfully.

Verse 9, he goes on there to quote from Psalm 112. If you want to read something this afternoon, Psalm 112 is a cracking psalm to read because it describes the heart of the person who fears God and gives generously. So their trust is in the Lord and they don't fear bad news because their hope is in the Lord. Paul's laying that psalm out and saying, do you know what, want to be that kind of person? But what Paul's doing here in these verses, particularly from verse 10 downwards, is he's counteracting the fear that we so often experience when it comes to giving. Are you like me in this one?

We're terrified that if we give, we won't have enough to meet our own needs. I think it's a genuine fear, isn't it, amongst us? But what he's saying here is that when we align our lives with God and his kingdom, our loving Father will provide us with everything that we need. To be a Christian is to go to bed every night and wake up every morning that the God of the universe was keeping it spinning while you and I were asleep. And to go to bed and wake up every day knowing that we have a completely good promise of provision for every single one of our needs from the creator of the universe. We can trust them. And this is where we need to see the subtle yet important difference between what Paul is saying here. And I guess what's known around the world is the prosperity gospel. Just wreaking havoc all over the world. This way of thinking that says that if we give to God, then God is obliged to give back to us in order to make us rich. If you hear that or if you see that, friends, can I encourage you to have nothing to do with it and out it for what it is? What Paul is saying here is that we can give freely and generously knowing that not only will God supply our own needs, but he does so so that we can keep on cheerfully investing in his kingdom. And on that note, let me tell you about my friend John Tellis.

He told me recently how God has done just this for our good friends in the FIEC at Wallyford Community Church. I just want you to hear the story and see exactly that this is what Paul is saying.

[ 20 : 18 ] For years and years, they wanted to buy a building in their community. The building they want to buy was valued by the council. Get this, at half a million pounds, he was telling me this. Half a million pounds. There's a lot of money for a church a lot smaller in membership size to us.

But they kept saying to people over the years, let's just keep on trusting God and giving sacrificially, let's just keep paying into the pot and trust God that he's got this one. A few months ago, John's phone goes and it's the council and they say to him that they are now in a position where they can offer it to them for 175,000 pounds. It's still a lot of money, okay?

So John comes off the phone, prays about it, tells the other elders, and then he looks at the church bank account to see what that pot of money is up to. And just that month, do you know what figure it's gone over into? £178,000. Isn't that amazing? God's provision. God's provision. Moral of the story, we can be generous for the gospel because the bedrock of all of this is our Father's perfect provision and timing. In other words, we can trust him. We can trust him. I cannot think of a more exciting investment to make in this world than to invest in the thing that God is doing in the world.

But certainly in light of what Paul says next, which this is the second thing, which is know what you're giving is achieving, right? Know what's happening here. You've got to see this, friends. He's saying, take stock of the fact that because God is behind this, he's blessing it and he's using it to do so much more than you naturally stop to think. And there's three ways, I think, accounted that he talks about here. Number one, do you see them at verse 12? He says, your gift is supplying for the practical needs of God's people over the other side of the world. I imagine that's one that they already get.

They understand what they're given is doing. It's just meeting a practical need. But the next two, they probably haven't even considered. Now, here's what I want you to see. Come with me and see them. He's saying that what you give is also overflowing in many expressions of thanksgiving to God. Do you see that? Verse 13, others are praising God because they're hearing about your obedience and how you have this desire to meet the need. So, other Christians are hearing about this generosity and it's causing them to give thanks to God for the fact that there's a church in Corinth who are willing to meet this need, right? So, this is reverberating praise that's going on here.

[ 23 : 05 ] And number three, and this is brilliant. Come and see it. Verse 14, the recipients of this collection, remember this is Gentiles giving to Jewish Christians. When these guys get the money, do you see how their hearts are going out to you? And what's happening is that a spiritual bond is being created because a gospel partnership between people the other side of the world is being developed between churches. These guys, their hearts are going out to you and they want to continue to partner together. Now, can I just, just before we close, let me just, we're going to close in a minute, but let me tell you why I think this is playing out for us just now. And it's playing out for us just now in our church partnership with Peebles. The best text I received this week was from Archie and it just said, how can we pray for you as a church? How can Peebles pray for us? Now, that hasn't just come in out of nowhere. That has been years and years and years of investing in him and investing in the partnership between our churches, right? So, so many of you bought into what we were trying to do with

Archie and continue to be a church that trains and sends. Some of you gave money to support Archie, some of you gave it to the church too, so that we could employ Archie. And your investment there, it probably seemed like nothing to you, but that investment in him has really overflowed in praise and thanks and their hearts have gone out to us. Do you see how this works? And let me say that we're continuing to do it with Craig. Is gospel partnership not a wonderful thing? The money that we give is just all God's anyway, we just give it back to him. But do you see how this is not just simply tip for tap when it comes to meeting a need? God is able to do way more than we ask or even imagine with what we do with our giving. Let that encourage you today that this is happening. It's not just happening in the first century, but because God is the same God and we have the same spirit, it is happening today.

And just as we close, I realize I've made that rookie error of saying we're going to close twice, but we are going to close this time. Let me tell you a joke that I heard about a man who, like the proverbial genie in a bottle, he got to meet God and make of God three wishes.

Wish number one, he said, gosh, God, I wish to know, because you're so far above my understanding, what is a billion pounds like in your world?

And God replies to him and he says, do you know what, a billion pounds, and it's like a penny to me. And I think it's wow. God, wish number two, God, I want to know what a billion years is like to you.

[ 26 : 08 ] And God says, you know what, a billion years is like a second to me. And the man puts the two and two together and he says, God, cheekily, here's my third wish. I wish for a billion pounds.

And God replies to the man and he says, sure, just give me a second. But here's the serious point of the bad joke. The God who inhabits eternity and who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, he doesn't operate according to our logic and our limits.

Got to remember that, haven't we? But through the gospel, he invites us to rejoice in Christ and to invest in his kingdom. Know, friends, that there is no sacrifice that we could possibly make for him that in view of eternity, we will look back and end up regretting.

He is the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He is the God who's able to do way more than we ask or even imagine. Thank you.