



PRODIGAL

CHURCH

SERMON SERIES: PRODIGAL CHURCH

DATE: SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH, 2020

SPEAKER: CRAIG VERNALL

SERMON TITLE: GENEROSITY WINS

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 16

As we reach the end of our time in 1 Corinthians, we find that Jerusalem is suffering from a famine. (cf Acts 11:27-30) The Corinthians have been in discussion with Paul about how they can make finances available to help the church and leaders who are based in Jerusalem. Paul's response in 1 Corinthians is very practical. Essentially, it's a description of how to keep faith with a commitment made before God.

LET'S READ THIS BELOW IN 1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-4.

"Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. ³ Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me."

As you can see this is very administrative. But there are two factors happening.

- The Corinthians are taking responsibility for their brothers and sisters in Christ.
- They're being introduced to the discipline of generosity.

Q1. Generosity is often linked with spontaneity. How do you think or feel about Paul's suggestion that generosity is something that's planned and considered in such an organised way as Paul's suggesting?

The real inspiration for us about what's happening with this financial gift for Jerusalem is found in 2 Corinthians. It's certainly worth a sneak peek into how other regions responded to this destructive famine. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

“And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² In the midst of a very 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 Lord’s people. ⁵ And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.”

These verses above positively explode with richness. Paul’s description of how the Macedonians gave generously out of their poverty captures beyond anything that I’ve read before of how generosity wins over a poverty mentality.

Q2. Discuss in what way do these verses from 2 Corinthians inspire you or challenge you.

Q3. The Macedonians “urgently pleaded with” the leaders for the “privilege of sharing”. Many will consider that “giving” is an obligation. What do you think was happening within the Macedonians for them to consider their opportunity to give as a privilege?

Q4. Do you think it’s possible to have a poverty mentality even when one has plenty of wealth? If so, then how does this happen?

THE FLIP!

God.	Economics
Culture.	Science.
Education	Education.
Science.	Culture.
Economics.	God.

Looking at these categories above we can see how as Christians we’re consistently exposed to the battleground which is money and resources.

Q5. Discuss what you observe in these simple lists above how worldly priorities compete with Kingdom priorities. Are these lists helpful? If so, in what ways?

Below is a quote from Aristides who was a 2nd century philosopher and social commentator. History does not record him as a Christian. But he makes some powerful observations about the ways of Christian community living within the Roman Empire.

“They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that has distributes liberally to him that has not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him, as if he were their own brother: for they call themselves brethren, not after the flesh, but after the spirit and in God; but when one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.” (extract from “The Apology of Aristides” 125AD)

Again, this is an awe-inspiring description of Christian community. Aristides describes this level of love and community amongst the Christians because it’s exceptional.

Q6. In what ways does this description of community move you or challenge you?

Generosity is measured by God in a different way to what the world will measure. Jesus made this very clear to us when he visited the Temple in Jerusalem.

READ LUKE 21:1-4.

"As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³ "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

The easiest way to explain the Temple story is that Jesus will measure generosity to what we keep rather than what we give. The cost of giving is not a numerical value but a heart value.

Q7. Can we understand why Jesus would commend the widow for her small gift? How do we apply this to our own standards of generosity?

As we conclude our study, we find ourselves back in 2 Corinthians where Paul speaks to the heart of the giver. Paul is reminding us again that giving is a matter of the heart. Which also provides for each of us a heart check-up.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8.

"⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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."

Q8. The cheerfulness gauge in each of our own lives is a consistent measure of how we're doing in this spiritual battle. The simple anecdote is "less cheerfulness means more understanding of Jesus is required." Discuss how can apply to your own life.

CONCLUSION:

I trust that, like me, you've enjoyed our time in Corinth. Overall what do you think you taken away from your time reading and studying through this letter?