



Preach 2 Corinthians sermon

Week Five

Suggested readings

1 Kings 17:8-16
2 Corinthians 9:6-15
Mark 4 v1-20

2 Corinthians 9 : 6-15 Sowing & Reaping

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 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.

As it is written:

“He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;
His 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 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.

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 yourselves, 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. 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!

Sowing seeds and watching them germinate and then grow, slowly at first uncurling, and pale green then confidently standing upright to seek the sun is to witness a miracle. How a sunflower, or an ear of corn or a host of tomatoes comes from inside a tiny brown dry seed - to me that is a miracle! God gives the seed but the very spirit of his mature is to invite us to share in the miracle of creation by sowing the seed, and to enjoy the fruits of the harvest in sharing the fruit of the seed on our dinner plates. God gives to share, God sows to reap, and God invites our participation

Our giving is the sowing of the seed There is no false distinction between the spiritual and the financial - if God is to be centre of our spiritual lives, then he has to be centre of our financial lives as well - the call of the harvest is all embracing.

In this final section of his chapters on giving Paul now consciously urges generosity on part of the Corinthians, a generosity that will match the Macedonian church, though actual comparison is no longer the issue. There is no limiting of the gift but an appeal to generosity founded on a promise that God will supply their needs and more and so provide the ability to be generous. He has already hinted at this, describing the gift as generous and he now explores it further. There are three essential points he makes: the sower, the seed and the harvest.

Sower. The sower who sows sparingly will of necessity reap a sparse harvest. By contrast, sowing bountifully will produce a rich harvest. The conclusion Paul draws is straightforward - we need to decide how much we shall give. He then sums up his thinking in the well-known phrase, “God loves a cheerful giver”.



The Greek word is *hilaron* from which we get our word “hilarious”. Now anyone who counts the collection at the average parish church will know that some people’s giving is hilarious – but that is not quite what Paul had in mind! He has in mind the joy that comes from enjoying participating in God’s work and the joy that comes from considered generous giving - just like the joy you experience at Christmas when you give a really appreciated and carefully thought about gift.

Paul’s emphasis is upon the heart of the sower not the promise of the harvest that is reaped. We need to distinguish between the gift and the giver. A gift may well be reluctantly given or compelled by grudging recognition of a need - we can all distinguish between gifts like these at Christmas can’t we? The have too’s and the want too’s! The gifts that are carefully chosen and thoughtfully given and those bought for convenience and expedience. Generosity is born from the heart of the giver not an over concentration on the need for the gift. The sower must decide how to sow

It is impossible to talk about sowing without some reference to the field in which we are invited to sow. Your church is your home address, it is your place of regular communion with God with other members of his family. It is the first call on your giving, just as it is the first call on your time each week for worship. There will be other ministries and good causes you are also called to sow in but this is your home case and first priority! As Nehemiah says “We will not neglect the House of our God.”

Seed. It is God the abundant provider who provides the seed we scatter. Any sparse sowing is not for want of seed, but for want of trust in the heart of the sower or the desire to hold on to what has been given. Each of us has a ministry of sowing in relation to what we are given - in money as well as gifts and talents. God’s provision means we will have enough to live, and enough to give and share in every good work with a sense of contentment if we sow seed generously as an expression of God’s grace. Christian stewardship is a liberating experience, as we learn to receive gladly and share gladly, finding a contentment whether in relative wealth or not. The sense of contentment we can share is a challenge to a lifestyle of affluence that knows not when to be content. The promise of God’s provision is not a green light to the accumulation of riches but an invitation into the economy of receiving and giving, which is at the heart of the Kingdom of God.

How we give, and our lifestyle is inextricably linked with spirituality. The obligation to extend and share grace through our giving, and putting the sowing, the participation in God’s work first rests upon all Christian people, whatever our personal circumstances. We either put ourselves first or we put God first. He is gives us the seed, we choose how to sow - in his generosity and abundance or putting our own desires first and reaping what we sow in our hardness of heart and self-centredness. Do we use all the seed God blesses us with - or is it still in the packet - untouched, and therefore infertile?

Harvest. We are not talking of financial blessing from the harvest to do so is to miss the entire point of Paul’s teaching. Giving is a response to grace received; it is God centred stewardship not an extension of the consumer culture. It was Copernicus who first taught that the sun is at the centre of our galaxy and not our world. In like





manner we need a Copernican revolution in our understanding of giving. That which is truly life giving, the glory and grace of God must be at the centre and we must find our proper orbit in relation to that life giving grace.

Core

The tough question for us leaders is: how are you sowing – richly or reluctantly? The promise in this passage is that God will multiply what you sow back to in everything – not just in money, or even spiritual blessing but also in the gift of contentment, of peace of heart and mind. The challenge for us is that we need to sow before we can reap. There is a domino effect in giving; when we learn to give it releases lots of other areas of our lives. Are we ready to put God to the test, to trust his promises?

Congregation

For us regular worshippers the second tough question might be: Which field are you sowing in? Yours or Gods? We cannot separate money from lifestyle. We may have seed but if it is all sown in the field of our own personal choices then we miss out on the blessing twice. Once because no matter how much we sow in our own field it will never be enough. Secondly because there will be little left to be sown in God's field.

Fringe

For those who join us each month or so there is a story of mercenary soldiers fighting in the crusade and needing to be baptised but keeping their sword arms out of the water! This was because they wanted their arms to kill, not to be converted to the way of peace. For us I suppose the question is how much of ourselves will we allow to be converted? Will conversion reach to our pockets? Paul said that deciding to give, to be involved in the collection was a test of the faith of the Corinthians. I can give my time and my expertise but the acid test is whether I will give my money to God's work as well.

For all of us, the final session in this teaching programme is a reminder of God's amazing generosity, blessing and daily miracles. Do we wish to be associated with it? Will we trust God sufficiently to put him first in our financial lives as well as our weekly worship? Do we wish to contribute joyfully and generously to Gods action in the world by being generous sowers of the seed and enjoying the harvest - not only in our churches and charities receiving our ministry of giving but in our own hearts as well!

Amen

