



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 9: 6-15

“Peace -- Giving Inexpressible”

TRANSCRIPT

This is the last of our series of messages on Christian Grace Giving. We have been expounding the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians; the second of them, and chapters 8 and 9 are the chapters that have to do with the doctrine of Christian giving. And it is, of course, the most extensive part of the whole scripture that deals with Christian stewardship and so that's why we have spent a considerable amount of time, this being as I say the fifth of the messages on these two chapters.

So today for our scripture reading, we're reading 2 Corinthians chapter 9, verse 6 through verse 15. The apostle, you may remember, is seeking to stir up the Macedonians and the Corinthians, those in Achaia as well as those in Macedonia to give for the poor saints in Jerusalem. As we have stressed, the apostle never asks for money for himself. We have no indication in the New Testament that, that is a method that we should ever follow. And when the apostle does ask for money and urged the Macedonians to give, it's not for himself; it's for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

And that distinction is very important. In fact, the apostle goes out of his way to be sure that there is no possibility of anyone charging him with having a personal interest in money. In fact, as we see from later scripture when this -- and earlier too -- when this offering is taken to Jerusalem, Paul is careful to see that others go with him so that there

is no possibility of a first century headline on the *Jerusalem Gazette*: "God and Greed" or some of the kinds of things that we've been having recently in our papers. In chapter 9, verse 6 through verse 15 is our scripture reading and Paul concludes this part of the questions of Christian stewardship. We read now:

"This I say, He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do that as -- do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly, or under compulsion: for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you; that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." (Now notice particularly he does not say word but deed, for every good deed.) "As it is written," -- now he cites Psalm 112, verse 9 -- "He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness abides forever. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service" (now incidentally, the word ministry here is a word that often refers to priestly service).

Now I doubt that that's on the apostle's mind at this point, but it's possible he does regard this as a special kind of ministry. "For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. Because of the proof given by the ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

Now if I may take just a moment, it has been the opinion of ancient commentators, as well as, modern commentators in the main that when Paul writes: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift,” that he is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. And the gift of salvation through him and the atoning work that he accomplished on the cross at Calvary. There are some ancient commentators and modern commentators who have suggested in the light of the context that when Paul writes “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift,” he’s not speaking about the gift of Christ, but rather the gift that he is so concerned about that the Macedonians and the Achaians, the Gentile churches, are giving to the church is Jerusalem.

Now personally I don’t accept that interpretation but I mention that because the chief appeal of it is that at least it would be something in the context that might explain, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.” But since the apostle and in fact other apostles too, in other places, often jump from what they are speaking about specifically in context to the great principles that lie behind that and thus refer to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ as that which is the principle lying back of exaltations as well as instructions and admonitions, it wouldn’t really be anti-Pauline for him suddenly on the; in the light of what he’s saying to jump from what he’s talking about to the Corinthians and Macedonians to the greatest gift of all; the Lord Jesus Christ seeking to show them that if they really believe that the Lord Jesus is an inexpressible gift, then surely they can express their faith by giving to support the poor in the city of Jerusalem and in Judea. So I personally think it’s better to take this “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift,” as a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now of course you know that one of the greatest of commentators was John Calvin. And it’s striking that even men like James Arminius recommended John Calvin as the greatest of the interpreters. The man who is responsible for Arminian Theology, which is thought by many to be contrary to the principles of Calvinistic Theology, he thought Calvin was the greatest of interpreters and wrote very laudatory

words concerning Calvin. Calvin held the other view. "Thanks be to God for His indescribable or inexpressible gift," was not the Lord Jesus Christ but the gift that would be given that would provoke thanksgiving to God as a result of the ministry to the poor in Jerusalem. But he's in the minority in this case and Calvin's not right on everything, we know.

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for the privilege that is ours today to open the Scriptures, to study them, to reflect upon them, to enter into the spirit of the things that the apostles were so concerned about in their day. And we recognize that they thought that it was very important that the believers all over the world should recognize their relationship to one another and should in the experiences of life, help one another. We thank Thee Lord for this practical expression of the oneness of the body of believers in Jesus Christ. And so we thank Thee for the passage that we have read and pray that we may profit from it. We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ today, wherever they may be, we know scattered all over the face of this world, meeting often in little rooms in homes, some in large churches but often meeting in very inconspicuous places sometimes being persecuted.

We pray Thy blessing upon each one of the believers today. May the things that concern the Lord Jesus Christ be particularly precious to them and may the ministry of God be fruitful. We pray for Believer's Chapel and its ministers, thanking Thee for our elders and deacons and the members and the friends and the visitors who are here today, we pray Thy blessing upon them. May their spiritual needs be met and other needs as well.

We especially pray for those who have requested our prayers and some this week are on that list for the first time and some of our very good friends no longer living in

Dallas have now been afflicted by great physical difficulties. We remember the [name redacted], particularly, who have been so close to us; now living in the Chicago area. We pray for [names redacted] and the trials that they have just frequently come to realize. May Thy hand be upon [name redacted] for physical good and spiritual good; as well. Supply their needs. And for others, Lord, too, like them who need our prayers. Lord, minister to them, build them up in the faith and strengthen them physically and spiritually.

We thank Thee for this country of which we are apart and we pray for the United States of America and our president and others associated with him in government. Be with us Lord as we sing, as we listen to the ministry of the word of God and may we leave with a greater appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

[Message] One thing that I hope the messages on Christian stewardship have not done is to depreciate Christian giving. That would displease the apostle; surely and would also displease the Lord because Christian stewardship is something that we as Christians must constantly keep before us. My aim has been, first of all, to expound what the scriptures say about Christian giving and then to depreciate the human substitutes for the Biblical teaching -- high pressure appeals, gimmicks and schemes, and also to soften some of the grumbling complaints that have been made with reference to Christian giving.

This past week on Thursday night I, with Martha, was out for supper with two couples, one younger and one a bit older. The father of the young man and their wives and in the course of the discussion, the young man who is a lawyer in the city made reference to the fact that there had been a particular interesting case that had been in the newspapers. I had not seen it, but explained it as an individual who had a physical problem; but desired to find a way in which he might sue someone to collect some money because of his problem. What made it interesting to me is because this fellow is a preacher. And so, he determined that he would make it possible for himself to sue the company that ran a particular enterprise -- I don't want to be too definite because it's

well-known in this area. He would sue this particular enterprise and claim that after he had been involved with them, they had allowed him to ride a particular ride and he had hurt his back doing it.

So it was very interesting. He said that he was going to sue them and he is suing them for allowing him to ride on the ride. Well he's a very large man, so I understand, weighed over 300 pounds and what was interesting about it was not only that he was a preacher but when the time came for the case, his own sister testified against him and said that he had a sore back before he ever went out to this place and rode the ride and furthermore, intended to do this in order that he might be able to sue them.

Well, then the young lawyer went on to say during the course of their discussions that he was privy to, comments were made about the particular church -- I don't know the church so I cannot tell you the church and I wouldn't anyway. But as I understand it, they have a rather unique way of taking up the offering. And I thought since you are so interested in how offerings are taken up, you might be interested in this. But his method was to call for the plates to be passed and then when the plates were passed and they were taken to the back, his wife was the one who looked at the amount in it and counted it. And then, at the end of the offering, she would signal from the rear and if it was not enough, she would make a particular signal and so he would pass the plate again until they got sufficient funds, what was sufficient for them.

So, I know that, that at least would make you grateful that you come to Believers Chapel when we don't even take any offering on Sunday morning. But that's a new method of taking it up as far as I'm concerned.

What we have said is that the essence of the church is teaching generally is legal and Mosaic, based on the Old Testament tithe. For example, in many of our Christian churches and whenever any scripture is referred to with reference to giving, it usually is Malachi chapter 3, verse 8 through verse 10 in which we have reference made

to the tithe. And I’ve just tried to set forth the fact that what we have here in Christian stewardship today in our churches generally is, first of all, a misunderstanding of the tithe.

In the first place, the tithe was not simply one tithe, but there are a number of different tithes. Second, the tithe was an income tax. It was not giving at all. In fact, in the Old Testament you have the expression -- tithes and offerings, which would seem to indicate that offerings were considered not to be -- that tithes were not considered to be offerings but considered to be something beyond the tithe.

Furthermore, the tithe was given to the priests; given to the priests because they were restricted from having gainful employment. And so the children of Israel in order to support the ministry of worship, preparation for the coming of our Lord, gave 10% of their income to support the priest. Furthermore, the tithe according to the Old Testament had to be taken in the city of Jerusalem. And I’ve said all along that if we’re going to follow the tithe, then we are two thousand years too late and five thousand miles too far away. We cannot really take up a tithe, scripturally in Believer’s Chapel.

So the tithe then was income tax given to the priests. It was to be given in Jerusalem. And furthermore, if an individual put himself under the tithe, according to Pauline teaching elsewhere, that meant that logically and consistently he must be under the whole law. As Paul stated with reference to the question of being justified through circumcision, he said, “Look, if you’re putting yourself under circumcision for salvation, you have a responsibility to keep the whole of the law.” And then I, just to put further emphasis upon this, ask you to take a look at the occurrence of the term tithe in the New Testament and you’ll find our Lord refers to it two or three times in the gospels and in each case it’s not looked at as something that we are to follow. It is referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews two or three times in the seventh chapter but there refers to something that took place historically before even the Mosaic tithe was given to the children of Israel.

So we have misunderstood the tithe. The tithe was never intended to be the standard by which Christians in the present age should give. And also have tried to express the fact that we have misunderstood what grace giving is. Grace giving is voluntary. It is according to our gratitude for what Christ has done for us as Paul expresses it in chapter 8 and also in chapter 9, verse 7, the text we just read this morning might serve as an example. He says in the seventh verse of chapter 9, “let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Sometimes you will hear individuals say, “If the Jews gave one-tenth under the law, for a Christian to give less than one-tenth in the age of grace, is a disgrace.” But that doesn’t follow at all. As a matter of fact, as I’ve said, giving is not to be associated with a tithe; that was income tax. And so to make any comparison between Jewish taxes and Christian giving is to compare things that are entirely different. As we often say, it is to compare apples and oranges. They are not the same thing at all. Actually not everybody in the Old Testament tithed to start with. Widows, strangers, orphans, and as I mentioned Levites, did not even tithe. So there can be no comparison between the tithe and Christian giving. It’s just not according to the teaching of the Bible.

Our Lord’s words are the keynote. And in Matthew chapter 10, verse 8, we have an indication of the kind of teaching that the apostles will set forth. In Matthew chapter 10, verse 8, we read the Lord Jesus speaking to the twelve disciples, “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” And that is the beginning of what we have in the New Testament as grace giving. In Luke chapter 6, verse 38, we read these words, “Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. They will pour onto your lap for whatever measure you deal out to others, it will be dealt to you in return.”

So when we think about Christian giving, and think about the ways in which we should give, the Lord’s teaching is the beginning. What finally issues is Paul’s great

teaching in these two chapters; which we've been looking at. There's a story, incidentally, of a Jewish man and a Christian man who discuss spiritual things and finally, they made a little agreement. The Jewish fellow would go to the Christian's church and the Christian would go to the Jew's synagogue and they would have a first hand way of comparing things. And so the Christian fellow went to the synagogue and the Jewish fellow went to the Christian church. The subject of giving, of course, came up in the church and as they talked about it, the Jewish fellow said, "We believe in tithing in the synagogue and we tithe 10% of our gross income." And the Christian said, "We believe in tithing, too. But we believe in tithing 10% of our net income." And the Jewish fellow said, "Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian."

So now we are going to take a look at our passage this morning so turn in your Bibles to chapter 9. We'll look at verse 6 through verse 11. Now here the apostle will talk about some of the principles of giving, some of the principles of generosity and first of all, verse 6 through verse 11, he will speak about the motive of personal blessings in giving.

You see, one of the blessings that we have from giving is personal and that is what Paul will speak about here. And first he will speak about our part in verses 6 and 7. And then he will speak about God's part in verse 8 through verse 11. But we look first at our part, verse 6 and verse 7. The apostle says, "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Now what, in effect, he says my Christian friends is this; that giving is an investment. It's an investment. It's an investment for others, it's an investment for us, and it's an investment for God. It's an investment for others because the giving benefits others. Just as the giving of the Macedonians and Achaians benefited the Christians in Judea and Jerusalem, so giving benefits others. But it also benefits us. It benefits us in

the fact that we ourselves are blessed when we give. Listen to what he says; let each one -- or rather, verse six, “Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.” In other words, when you give bountifully, you will be blessed bountifully.

Now, I’m sure that the apostle included some instances of financial blessing that do occur to believers that when they give. But it’s not probably limited to that when he says, “if we give bountifully, then we reap bountifully,” because the things that we reap are often things that are not simply financial but spiritual. So give bountifully. If a farmer is going to grow wheat, he doesn’t try to figure out ways by which he can sow fewer seeds. But he sows bountifully, sows properly. But he sows bountifully in order to reap bountifully. So the first thing that we need to remember is that we should give bountifully.

And then secondly, Paul says we should give purposefully. “Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart not grudgingly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.” That construction of that verb -- as he has purposed in his heart -- is a verb that suggests that it is the result of careful thought. It is something that he has purposed within himself, not something that someone else purposes for us, but it’s something that arises from within us. And as we think about our responsibility before the Lord, it’s evident when he says let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart that the apostle is not talking about haphazard giving, not the kind of giving that comes from impulse, not the kind of giving that comes from pressure, not the kind of giving that is designed to get praise for us, but as an individual purposes in his heart before the Lord, giving is to be given according to that principle.

Furthermore and thirdly, we are to give cheerfully. Verse 7 says, “for God loves a cheerful giver.” Bible expositors have often pointed out the adjective cheerful is the one from which we get the English word hilarious. Now I’m not suggesting that you should be a hilarious giver. There are some people who have from time to time have been

hilarious givers, but that’s a rather high standard for us to seek to attain. And furthermore, it’s doubtful if that’s really the sense that Paul is giving when he says, “God loves a cheerful giver.” But we should give cheerfully.

There’s an old story of a meeting in one of the churches of the West Indies years ago. And in those days, the churches were largely black churches and so at a missionary meeting held then among the Negroes in the West Indies, three resolutions were given; were decided upon in one of their meetings for missionaries. First of all, that they would all give something. And then secondly, that they would give as God enabled them. And thirdly, they would all give willingly. So as soon as the meeting was over, a leading Negro took his seat at the table with pen and ink to put down what each came to give. And so they came forward and each put money on a table and he made a notation in the books of the amount that they gave. And finally, a rather wealthy, elderly Negro came forward and he was almost as rich as all of the others put together. And so, when he came he threw down upon the table a small silver coin. “Take that back,” said the man who received the money. “That may be according to the first resolution, but it’s not according to the second.”

Well, he was very upset over it. He hobbled back to his seat again in a great rage. And one after another came forward and almost; as almost all gave more than he did, he was put to shame and so finally he came up to the table and he put a very valuable piece of gold on the table and he said, “There. Take that.” And it was given so ill temperedly that the fellow sitting at the table said, “That won’t do, yet. It may be according to the first and second resolution, but it’s not according to the last.” And so he reached over and took up the coin again, still angry at himself and all the rest. He went back and sat down in the chair and finally, after a long time, until nearly everybody was gone, he came up to the table and with a smile on his face and very willingly, gave a large sum to the treasure. “Very well,” said the fellow at the table. “That will do. That’s according to all three resolutions.” So we are to give, give something. We are to give as God has enabled

us, and cheerfully. That's very difficult to do, isn't it, to give cheerfully? So Paul says cheerfully.

So freely we are to give bountifully, we are to give purposely, we are to give. Now, one might ask the question, "well, I would like to give but I just don't have the money to give." Have you ever felt like that? I can remember as a young Christian, when I had very little money and when offerings were taken up for particular works; which I was interested, I used to think, "Well, now I would love to be able to give a significant amount of money, but I can not give a significant amount of money." Well, you know the apostle has something to say on that very point. Did you notice in verse 10 what he says? "Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." But in the eighth verse, he's even more to the point. He says, "and God is able to make all grace abound to you -- and remember grace is his term for financial giving -- God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." Notice that; not work, deed.

So in other words, if you wish to be generous -- this is what Paul is saying -- if you wish to be generous, God will not withhold the power from being so from us. Look at it again. "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." So you want to give? So you want to give to Christian works or you want to give to Christian individuals who are doing the work of the Lord, but you say, "I don't have the money to give? Well, I don't think it would be financially sound for me to give." Look, the apostle says, "God is able" -- incidentally that is able as emphatic in the original text. In other words there is a special stress on it. "God is able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." What's so interesting about this is all of those words for all. Did you notice that? Look at the roots in verse 8. "God is able to make *all* grace abound to you that *always* --

this is the same root -- always having *all* sufficiency in *everything*, you may have an abundance for *every* good deed." Five times that root, meaning all, occurs in this text. So that's what God can do.

So what Paul is doing is encouraging us to give, encouraging us that if we really want to give, he will make it possible for us to give. So that's what He can do. And if there's any doubt about it, one might say, "I know He can, but I'm not sure He will," then read verse 10 and 11. "Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food *will* supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you *will* be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God." In other words, he will do it. Not only can he do it, he will do it. If we really want to give, He will make it possible for us to give. That's a marvelous statement. That's really a marvelous statement.

There is an interesting change of words in verses 10 and 11. He says, "Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." The apostle uses two words that have to do with seed. One of them is a word that means the seed itself and the other seems to have the additional idea of seeds sown. Yesterday afternoon, I walked out in the back yard and I have a flower bed; and it has some weeds in it and so on one of those impulses, I started weeding that little part of the bed and pulled out a lot of weeds. And when I go through, I took them back and put them in a garbage can out in the alley and came back and then looked at the bricks where they had been and they were literally filled with small seeds.

So I realized that I was going to have this same problem next year because that's where they were. They had been falling all over the flowerbed. That's a seed. But then the word the apostle uses -- another word he uses here in this context has the idea of seed that is sown. In other words, what he seems to be suggesting, perhaps, is he doesn't multiply that, that's not sown, but he multiplies the seed that is sown. So, one must take

the step in faith of giving. Give bountifully and God will bless you bountifully. You will reap bountifully if you reap sowing -- if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly. If you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully. Back in the days when hymn writers wrote lengthy stanzas to hymns, some of them had as many as 35 verses to them, there is one that had 8 or 9 verses to it. It was Christopher Wordsworth’s “Oh Lord of Heaven and Earth and Sea.” And in it there was a stanza that went like this, “Whatever Lord we lend to Thee, repaid a thousand fold will be. Then gladly will we give to Thee, who givest all.” That’s the spirit of Christian giving.

I like the story of the little lad who was sitting at the breakfast table. His father read the scriptures every morning, was a Christian man, and he was a wealthy man. He read the scriptures and then they would pray. And almost every morning they prayed for the missionaries that were supported by their church. And so he would pray faithfully for the missionaries that God would supply their needs. And finally, one morning the little boys said, “You know, dad. If I had your pocketbook, I could answer your prayers.” Many of our prayers of that type could very well be answered if, as Paul encourages the Corinthians, if they sow bountifully, they will reap bountifully.

Now finally in verse 12 through verse 14, the apostle speaks of the motive for collective blessing. He says in verse 12, “For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.” Do you know what Paul is saying, my Christian friend, is that when a person gives bountifully; then it improves his theology. What a strange thing. It really improves his theology. Do you know why?

Well, listen to what he says. He says, “the ministry -- well, in verse 11 -- you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God because the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to

your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.” In other words, as a result of both sowing bountifully and reaping bountifully, God is glorified. And when God is glorified, men come to realize that he’s the source of all spiritual blessing and their theology is improved, thereby. As we say, salvation is of the Lord. And this is one of the ways in which one sees that.

In fact, Paul calls this a test or a proof of your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ. In other words, how we give is a reflection of what we believe about the gospel of Christ. That’s what he says. So if we give sparingly, that’s a revelation of just how we really feel about the gospel of Christ. If we give bountifully, that’s a revelation about how we feel about the gospel of Christ. I think that’s very challenging for Christian giving because of the proof given by this ministry. They will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all. Incidentally, Paul is only thinking of giving within the body of the faithful at this point.

Now finally, in verse 15, the apostle bursts into thanksgiving. This is the motive of all of giving, both God’s and ours in a sense. He remembers all the grace that flows from Calvary and he bursts out into thanks be unto God for His inexpressible gift. The apostle is a marvelous master of the Greek language expressing things in most challenging ways. He’s the one who talks about the untrackable riches of the Lord Jesus Christ. He talks about things like unsearchable judgments. Peter talks about unspeakable joy. But here we have God’s inexpressible gift. In fact, if there is any text that is a challenge to an expositor, it is this. How could we ever possibly expound what Paul means when he says, “Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift. Even the power to speak of the inexpressible gift must be a gift given only by God.”

Many of you know that this is football season and, therefore, I’m more interested in things now happening in the world, I guess because I love football, love to watch football. I was out last night for the debacle; and I particularly read the sport pages.

Well, I read the sport pages all the time but I like to read the sport pages particularly in the fall. And there was a very interesting comment regarding a ball player for the Washington Redskins that we thought of as one of the villains of the Redskins, Joe Theismann.

Joe Theismann is a fellow whose mouth is constantly moving and uttering things. In fact, I don’t know how the expression motor mouth originated, but he has a motor mouth. It’s well known, and there was an interesting article this past week about Theismann; he’s written a book called “Theismann” and the sportswriters were talking about how his mouth constantly goes. But one sportswriter got off a beautiful little line. He said concerning Joe Theismann, “Joe Theismann never had an unexpressed thought.” [Laughter] Never had an unexpressed thought. I know some challenges among my own personal friends but Theismann surpasses them all; never had an unexpressed thought. And I couldn’t help but think of this text that was coming up Sunday. “Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift.”

We could never set forth the whole meaning of what it means for Jesus Christ to come as God’s gift that we might be saved. Read what Mr. Spurgeon says, for example, in our bulletin. Ms. Ray selected that from Spurgeon’s writings on the right side of the page of the bulletin. Read how, in that particular comment by Mr. Spurgeon, he goes all of the way back to the councils of eternity when the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity with surety for us and for our salvation and the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit entered into an agreement by which you and I might be saved, done long before there was ever any creation when in the ages of eternity passed the eternal covenant of redemption came into being.

Who could ever express fully what is meant in, “Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift”? We could never set forth the whole meaning of it. We could never even set forth the manner of his giving. He was by the right hand of the Father throughout the ages of eternity in the fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy

Spirit, enjoying as he said the glory that he had with the Father before the world was, as he prays in John chapter 17. “And this one in the ages of eternity of the right hand of the Father comes into our existence and is on a mother’s breast.” Who could ever expound and explain the fullness of the gift and the significance of the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or if you want to think about the benefits that have come to us beginning with the benefits of forgiveness of sins, justification of life, adoption into the family of God, eternal life; not life for 6 months, not life until we sin, eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ. And all of the other blessings including the hope of ultimately being conformed to the image of the Son of God, you could only burst out into, “Thanks be unto God for His inexpressible gift.” He’s the gift of God that is inexpressible but yet he’s the kind of gift that he ought to be very much spoken of by Christians because we are those who have been in a sense called by Him to represent this magnificent gift of God in our present society. So while it’s an inexpressible gift, we are to express as best we can the significance of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was reading a sermon by one of my favorite men and there are two paragraphs that I’d like to read to you as I close. This is Mr. Spurgeon again. It’s a sermon on thanks be unto God for His inexpressible gift. He calls it the gift unspeakable. And he’s talking about how so often in his day, around the turn of the century, men began to depart from the word of God, depart from the great doctrines of the Christian faith, and how he was very much upset over it.

Mr. Spurgeon was involved in the downgrade controversy because of the growing liberalism in British churches. This is what he writes, “Now dear friends, there is one way in which I want you to thank God and show your gratitude for Christ and that is by always holding a thankful creed. Believe nothing that would rob God of thanks or Christ of glory. I said great store by sound creed in these evil days when the gospel is but little valued by many. Hold a creed of which the top and bottom is this; grace, grace, grace, salvation, all of grace. Whenever you hear a preacher, no matter who he may be, making

out that salvation is not completely of the grace of God, just say in your hearts; ‘thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.’ Do not go an inch away from that standpoint.

Salvation is altogether a gift; it’s not of works, it’s not of merit. It’s of grace and grace alone. Turn away from the man who stutters when he says grace. He will never feed your sow.” How true that is. If a man preaching the gospel of Christ does not understand what grace is, you will not be fed from the word of God.

He continues, “Hold the theology that magnifies Christ, a divinity which teaches that Christ is God’s unspeakable gift. When a man gets cutting down sin, paring down depravity and making little of future punishment, let him no longer preach to you. Some modern divines swindle away the gospel to the small end of nothing. They make our divine Lord to be a sort of blessed nobody. They bring down salvation to mere savability, make certainties into probabilities and treat verities as mere opinions. When you see a preacher making the gospel small by degrees and miserably less (I’ve never heard this expression, but I like it) he says when you see a preacher making the gospel by degrees and miserably less till there is not enough of it left to make soup for a sick grasshopper, get you gone. (What an expression, not enough left for a sick grasshopper!) Such diminution and adulteration will not do for me. My heart cries, thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.

“ These gentlemen, you know, are highly cultivated and can tell us all about it. They have theology which is suited to their educated reason, to them grace is suited; grace can be weighed and scales and atonement in balances unless indeed both be as the drop of a bucket not worthy of being mentioned at all. Every grand truth with them is dwarfed and dwindled down to utter insignificance. The thought of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century makes men the heirs of apes while it declares their souls to be mortal and their sins to be trifles. Our Bibles are made to be mere human records and our hopes are treated as childish dreams. These pigmy thinkers shorten all things to their pigmy scale. As for me, I believe in the colossal. I need deep as Hell and grace as high as Heaven. I believe in a

pit that is bottomless and in mercy above the heavens. I believe in an infinite God and an infinite atonement, infinite love, an infinite mercy, an everlasting covenant, order and all things ensure of which the substance and the seal is an infinite Christ. Christ is unspeakable."

Let me summarize. Giving should be dedicated. It should be voluntary. It should be sacrificial. It should be proportionate; we are to give as God has prospered us. It should be cheerful. It should be private (1 Corinthians chapter 16, verse 2). It may be for a family, for needy saints, for teachers and some other things. But this is what the New Testament teaches about grace giving.

You might wonder as we have spent these five times on Christian giving, just what was the response of the Corinthians. We assume it was a good response, but was it? Well, there is an interesting historical comment. Clement, a bishop of Rome, in the year 95, shortly after the New Testament -- most of the New Testament, about the time, perhaps, that the Johanne literature was written, writes a letter from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth. And in this particular letter, he refers to the Corinthians as "more gladly giving than receiving". In other words, evidently they obtained a reputation for more gladly giving than receiving. What a marvelous thing it would be if we, we individually, we as a body of believers might be known as those who more gladly give than receive. May it be so for Jesus' sake.

If you're here today and you've never believed in Christ, we remind you that salvation only is found in Him. God's unspeakable gift who came and offered an atoning sacrifice for sinners -- and we're all sinners -- and through Him, we may have eternal life. We may have eternal life not by doing good works, for by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it's the gift of God, not of any works lest any man should boast. If that seems strange, take a good look at yourself and I'm sure you'll recognize that you fall short. You need a savior. Everyone needs a savior because we fall short.

We cannot keep the law of God. We therefore stand under the judgment of God but Christ has died for judged sinners.

And if you’re here today and you recognize your lost condition, we invite you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ to receive Him as your own personal savior. May God in His grace through the Holy Spirit working touch your heart, enable you to see really what you are before God and may you flee to the cross and receive the forgiveness of sins as a gift from the Lord God who gave us God’s inexpressible gift; Jesus Christ.

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these words that the apostle has written concerning giving. And help us Lord to be those who give bountifully that we may reap bountifully. And that the saints who may be helped and encouraged, those who do not have the opportunities and the blessings that we have, enable us Lord by Thy grace to live in the light of the principles of the word of God. We thank Thee for that marvelous promise that we having all sufficiency in all things, by Thy grace shall be enabled to please Thee in Christian stewardship.

May we do it for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

