**TITLE:** GENEROSITY

TEXT: John 3:16; 1st Peter 1:15-16; 2nd Co. 8:1-15;

2nd Co. 9:6-15

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about generosity. I think that this is a good time for a message such as this. We are just about to enter the month of December and with the advent of Christmas quickly approaching us, the time that we celebrate the birth of Christ Jesus, I can think of no better time to talk about generosity.

 After all, isn’t that what the Christmas season is really all about? Generosity!

 Particularly the generosity of God.

John 3:16 (NIV) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This verse of Scripture speaks of the generosity of God.

**For God so loved the world that he gave!**

God gave His only begotten son to and for us so that all who would come to believe in and on Him for the forgiveness of their sin and the salvation of their soul would not perish in hell but come to have eternal life in Him.

 And it was all made possible by the generosity of God.

 The one sinned against coming down to where we are and willingly giving His life for our sins so that we could have eternal fellowship with Him.

**For God so loved the world that he gave.**

 This fact is, it is not just that the Christmas season is really all about generosity, but the whole of our life in Christ, our life as a Christian, is to be all about generosity!

 How so?

 The generosity of God is one of the manifestations of His holiness, His very character.

**1Pet 1:15 (NIV) But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;**

**16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."**

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do!

Generosity is a manifestation of Gods Holiness. Just as love and mercy and grace and forgiveness are manifestations of Gods holiness.

 So for us to be holy just as God is holy is for us to be loving just as God is loving, forgiving just as God is forgiving, merciful just as God is merciful, gracious just as God is gracious and generous just as God is generous.

 There was a time when the church, most specifically, the Christians in Jerusalem, were really suffering severe persecution. Many Christians in the city found themselves ostracized by the larger Jewish community where they lived because of their faith in Christ and they became destitute because of their faith. Most couldn’t find work or anyone to buy their goods because of this persecution and many were literally starving…

 Paul in speaking to the Christians at Corinth trying to motivate them in the area of their generosity to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem who were undergoing such hard times uses another Church body as an example to them of what generosity really means..

 **2Cor 8:1 (NIV) 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.**

 What a testimony of a Church body! What a testimony of Christians who knew what generosity is all about!

**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.

The Christians in the Macedonian churches such as those at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were going through some pretty hard times themselves because of persecution for their identification with Christ…

 These, unlike the more wealthy and sophisticated Corinthians, were for the most part poor communities in the first place…

 Yet notice how they responded when hearing of others who were in need…

**Out of the most severe trial** (they were going through)**, 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, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

It is one thing to give out of our abundance but completely another to give out of our substance.

 The Macedonian Christians who were poor themselves, gave not out of their abundance, their surplus, but they gave out of their substance! They actually sacrificed in order to help meet the needs of others who they perceived to be in greater need then themselves..

 And what is even more amazing is they didn’t even have to be asked!

 Paul says… For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

When Paul saw the trial and tribulations and the persecution that the Macedonian Christians were going through he probably felt pretty sheepish about even mentioning the needs of the Christians under persecution in Jerusalem. Paul most probably was asking them for their prayer support not financial, support.

 Yet when these Macedonian Christians heard about those needs they urgently pleaded with Paul for him to allow them to help out financially!

 When is the last time we pleaded with someone for the opportunity to help?

 When was the last time that we considered giving to the needs of others as a privilege and a service to God?

 So Paul uses this testimony of the Macedonian Christians to the Christians in Corinth…

**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.**

10 And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.

**11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.**

**12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.**

**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. Then there will be equality,**

**15 as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."**

Notice what Paul says that giving really is…

**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.**

 Giving is grace! Giving is grace in action. Grace made alive.

**5485 charis {khar'-ece}**

**1) grace**

**1a) that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: good will, loving-kindness, favor**

**2a) It speaks of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.**

**3a) grace is the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace.**

TheChristians in the Macedonian Church’s where rich in the grace of God. Their grace of giving revealed the spiritual condition of one who was governed by the power of Divine Grace.

 They where simply just doing to others as they perceived God had done for them.

Paul goes on in Chapter nine talking about this grace of giving for the disciple, the follower of Christ….

**2Cor 9:6 (NIV) Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.**

7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

**8 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.**

 God here uses a universal principle. What we reap will be in proportion to what we sow.

All of you who have farmed or gardened know the reality of that principle of sowing and reaping.

 We sow a few seeds and we will reap a small harvest.

 We sow a lot of seeds and we will reap a larger harvest.

 We will reap in direct proportion to what we sow.

 This is true whether we are sowing seeds to plant in the field or garden or we are sowing the spiritual seed of witnessing for Christ or sowing the seed of our generosity in giving.

 Paul goes on….

**9 As it is written:**

**"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;**

**his righteousness endures forever."**

**10 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.**

**11 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.**

**12 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.**

**13 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.**

**14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.**

**15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!**

This tells us several things….

 #1. All that we have is from God. All that we have God has allowed us to obtain.

 **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.**

God is the one who supplies all the seed.

 Some will say that I have made it on my own! The wealth that I possess is because of what I have done. I have worked hard and sacrificed much for what I have.

 That may be true but who is the one who gives us the ability to do what we do?

 Who is the one who gives the health to keep us doing what we do?

 Who is the one who really holds our prosperity in His hand?

 The one who has created us! We may be good at what we do but it is God that has given us the ability to do it.

 It is God who blesses us with the health that keeps us doing what we are doing.

 God supplies all the seed in one way or the other.

 We have been called to sow the seed that he has supplied us with.

 #2 God blesses us so that we can become a blessing to others. Or so we can become conduits of Gods blessings to others.

**11 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.**

**You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion!**

 You see, God doesn’t intend for us to be a storehouse of His blessings but He intends for us to be a clearinghouse for His blessings.

 A storehouse simply stores merchandise. A clearinghouse moves that merchandise on. It just acts as a middleman for the merchandise.

Example: The coupons you use at a grocery store go through a clearinghouse. The store redeems them and then bundles them up and sends them to a clearinghouse where they are sorted by the companies that issued them and then they are sent to the issuing companies for redemption + a handling fee.

 The Checks you write also go through a clearinghouse where they are sorted and then sent back to the corresponding bank.

 Church, God has made us rich in every way so that we can be generous on every occasion!

 And this is not just speaking about money or material wealth.

 It is speaking about anything and everything that God has blessed us with.

 First and foremost the blessing of our salvation.

 We are not to be a storehouse but a clearinghouse with the salvation that we have received.

 Our testimony is not to be stored in our heart for no one to hear, but it is to be passed on to others!

 If God has blessed us with health then we need to use that health to serve Him. Ministering His love to those who maybe don’t have the health that we have.

 If God has gifted us with the ability to do what we do then we need to pass on that blessing by being the best for Him that we can be in doing what we do.

 Sharing with others about Him who gives that ability.

 If God blesses us financially, materially, we are not to be storehouses of that blessing, saving it all up for ourselves, but we are to be channels by which He can use us to reach out to and bless others.

 And God considers all this to be an act of our service to Him.

**12 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.**

**13 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.**

**14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.**

**15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!**

This tells us five things..

 #1 Our generosity becomes an act of our service to God.

 #2 Our generosity is a matter of obedience to God.

#3 Our generosity is the proof of our faithfulness to God.

#4 Our Generosity will result in thanksgiving and praise to God.

#5 Even our generosity is the result of Gods surpassing grace in and on our life and that grace of generosity Paul describes is an indescribable gift from God.

 In his book, Run with the Horses, Eugene Peterson tells how he saw a family of birds teaching their young to fly. Three young swallows were perched on a dead branch that stretched out over a lake. "One adult swallow got alongside the chicks and started shoving them out toward the end of the branch--pushing, pushing, pushing. The end one fell off. Somewhere between the branch and the water four feet below, the wings started working, and the fledgling was off on his own. Then the second one.

 "The third was not to be bullied. At the last possible moment his grip on the branch loosened just enough so that he swung downward, then tightened again, bulldog determined. The parent was without sentiment. He pecked at the desperately clinging talons until it was more painful for the poor chick to hang on than risk the insecurities of flying.

 The grip was released, and the inexperienced wings began pumping. The mature swallow knew what the chick did not--that it would fly--that there was no danger in making it do what it was perfectly designed to do.

 "Birds have feet and can walk. Birds have talons and can grasp a branch securely. They can walk; they can cling. But flying is their characteristic action, and not until they fly are they living at their best, gracefully and beautifully.

 Church, "Giving is what we do best. It is the air into which we were born. It is the action that was designed into us before our birth. ... Some of us try desperately to hold on to ourselves, to live for ourselves.

 We look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it, hanging on to the dead branch of a bank account or our material possessions, for dear life, afraid to risk ourselves on the untried wings of giving.

 We don't think we can live generously because we have never tried. But the sooner we start, the better, for one day we are all going to have to give up everything that we possess including our very lives, and the longer we wait to give, the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace that God has for us."

 Church, as Christians we have been made for giving. For passing on the blessings of God. That is what we do best.

 Because our giving, our generosity is but a reflection of the one to whom we belong….

For God so loved the world –He gave!

**We have be made rich in every way so that we can be generous on every occasion, and …our generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.**

 Next Sunday is Missions Sunday and we will have an opportunity to give to missions…

 Give so that others can hear about Jesus and receive the blessings of God’s grace.

 Do you view giving to missions as an opportunity? And not just an opportunity but do you see it as a privilege of service? A service to God?

 **13 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.**

**14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.**

**15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!**

 Folks, giving of our time, giving of our talents, giving of our substance is to what we have been called as a Christian!

 Generosity in all areas of our life is the obedience that accompanies our confession of the Gospel of Christ!

 Will be obedient to that calling?