

¹⁰ I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

In the name of our generous God and Savior, dear friends,

This morning we are looking at the “Thank You Note” part of the Apostle Paul’s letter to his friends in the Greek city of Philippi. You may know the letter to the Philippians as an inspiring, happy little letter, made even more so when you know that Paul wrote it while he was a prisoner. He was under house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial because of the jealous Jerusalem Jews. You can read about that wild scene and how and why Paul was eventually sent on to Rome for trial in Acts 21-28. Though chained to a soldier in Rome, he was able to receive people, share the gospel, and send co-workers on errands so that the ministry could be carried out, while he prepared a defense for the highest court in the Roman Empire. If it failed, he could be put to death. Despite these circumstances, he writes this letter of rejoicing in which he speaks of being content and putting full trust in God! There are some pretty well known verses among Christians in this letter and in the first words of this portion! And there are certainly many things that each of us could learn from all that he writes here, but for our brief mediation today, we must choose.

I’d like to focus only a little on what Paul did and his attitude as a pastor and missionary, but mostly on what God’s people did and how important it was. The example of the church members in the city of Philippi encourages every one of us to

BE GENEROUS TO GOD

- 1. Because God has been Generous to You (10-13, 15)**
- 2. With An Acceptable Sacrifice (14-18)**
- 3. To Support the Gospel’s Work (14-15, 20)**
- 4. And Receive God’s Blessing (19)**

Paul knew of God’s generosity in Christ. God had called him to faith in Jesus, instructed him in the forgiveness won by Jesus on the cross, not only for him, but for the whole world. He came to know and trust that with the forgiveness of sins, there is the promise, the sure hope, of eternal life with God in heaven. Paul knew that, was personally comforted by that, and could not help following the Lord’s call to share that with others as a great missionary of the gospel.

You also know (at least most of you here this morning do) that Jesus is your Savior. The Holy Spirit has called you through baptism and the power of the Word to trust that Jesus paid for your sins too, that you too have a certain home in heaven. You have come to understand that your sins had separated you from the holy God but a generous and gracious God brought you close to him and made you his child. You didn't deserve it—and your sin even now is a reminder that you still don't deserve it—but God continually forgives. He is amazingly generous to you. You have come to know what Paul knew: the generous love of God that gave you what you could otherwise have never had: the confidence of his love and a home in heaven when you die.

Paul's ministry—as perhaps the greatest missionary ever and author of 13 of the New Testament books—was an acceptable sacrifice to God. It was Paul's way of living for Jesus who lived and died for him. Paul's sacrifices for God—even willing to go to jail and trial for speaking up about Jesus—did not earn him heaven. They were things he did to thank God for the undeserved forgiveness and salvation given to him. Paul was willing to give up anything he had—any worldly item, the money he earned as a tentmaker, his freedom, even his life—in order to share Jesus with the world so that people could come to know their Savior and have eternal life.

His friends in the city of Philippi—people he knew from establishing the Christian congregation there on his second missionary journey and visiting twice more on his 3rd missionary journey—they also sacrificed for the gospel. The businesswoman, Lydia, the guard at the jail, their families and others made up the congregation in that city. Those were people who did not know Jesus before Paul arrived there about 11 years prior to writing this letter. But they were baptized and taught and they came to believe in Jesus. Their faith continued to grow during those years and their desire to support the pastor who shared Christ with them and to support his ability to spread the gospel resulted in generous giving. Paul speaks of what they did for him while he was chained to a Roman soldier under house arrest as **“an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”** God was happy with their generosity.

Apparently, this is what their faith in Christ and appreciation for their salvation prompted them to do. Did you catch this? **Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.**

They were generous as they supported the gospel's work from the very beginning of their relationship with Christ. And now they had done it again. And how necessary their gifts were! Paul was sharing the good news of Jesus even while chained in Rome; God was still able to use him. But imagine how taxing the arrest, the journey to Rome under guard, the years spent under house arrest in a huge city that was new to Paul, and the

pressure to mount a legal defense there. For an emotional man like Paul, I imagine that the gift of a representative from the Philippian congregation (a man named Epaphroditus) was a huge emotional boost, to say nothing of the support they sent him, which was probably money. It absolutely helped Paul—and there was no separating Paul from his work as God’s preacher. The gospel was his life. If he were to be freed, it would mean an unfettered preaching of the gospel. So their gifts were not simply personal, a way to help their friend in Christ. They were supporting the gospel ministry. And for that, Paul was especially grateful. Their gifts meant the salvation of souls.

Remember, as Paul was concluding this letter to his Christian friends, he started this “Thank You Note” section by saying...**I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**

Paul knew that God was consistently providing everything he needed in good times and bad. He was convinced of that and that was the secret to contentment. He knew that the Lord would provide him the strength to endure all things. He’s the one who, a few years earlier, wrote to the Christians who lived in Rome, **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28)**. Paul knew this, he believed it, he encouraged others with this truth. And so to the Philippians who were generous to God and to him, he gave this assurance: **And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Philippians had been generous to God before so that salvation in Jesus could be spread to others. Now they had done it again. As they gave, God would give also. He would give them everything they needed. It was certain that because they were in Christ Jesus, God the Father made them the special objects of his affection. God would not accept their sacrifices for the sake of the gospel and then leave his people uncared for. Instead he would bless them.

The beauty of this is not simply that it is a lovely story about one of God’s preachers and the help of people who cared about him and supported his work. The beauty is that we have the same loving God and that the same promises apply to us today. Christians today find the encouragement to BE GENEROUS TO GOD here.

Just like Paul, just like the Philippian Christians, we too have been the recipients of God’s generous love in Jesus. You and I know that our Savior paid for our sins on Calvary’s cross. We know that we live under the umbrella of God’s forgiveness and love. We are certain that because of Jesus we will be taken to heaven one day. And we also know that we didn’t deserve this loving treatment from the holy God. God’s generous grace has made it so.

The Christian's response to that today is just like the response of Paul and the Philippians. We can't help but give back to God—purely out of thanks to him and for the salvation of others.

Well...we might actually struggle in this area. We might feel like we “have to” give back to God by giving our time and our effort for the spread of the gospel. We might think, *“Well, Paul was willing to live for God no matter the circumstances, I really “have to” do the same.”* We might think, *“I “have to” give a generous offering to church so that our Pastors can work like Paul did to share Jesus.”* You realize those thoughts, those feelings, are a struggle with our sinful nature, don't you? Our sinfulness shows through when we have to talk ourselves into doing what God wants and when we feel that we “have to” do these things. God wants us to do those things with pure hearts, hearts that are so filled with thanks to our generous God and love for a giving Savior who offered his very life for us. We ask God to forgive our sin-tainted hearts...and improper motives...and the struggle that just shouldn't be. And we do find forgiveness in the blood of Christ. And as we do, our hearts are set right again and we are able to BE GENEROUS TO GOD.

Then we can offer AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE to God. Then we give from a heart overflowing with love. Then we offer our lives in service and devotion to the gospel like Paul did. Then we offer our time and our very selves like Epaphroditus did. Then we offer generous monetary support so that the gospel can be shared with others like the Philippians did.

A Christian who experiences the generosity of God and has some maturity to their faith can consider an encouragement like this to serve for the spreading of the gospel and is not offended to hear an encouragement to give generous offerings back to God. God talks about such things and he uses our service and our gifts to bring the word of salvation to lost souls...and support weak ones...and further strengthen the strong. It's what God does through his people and it's how he does it. Our generosity back to God supports the gospel's work!

When we are unafraid to BE GENEROUS TO GOD, we too receive assurance from God's apostle: **And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.** To the Roman Christians, Paul wrote something similar: **If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** God has gloriously provided for us, giving us his Son. If he would do that, he will most certainly care for us. Like in Paul's life, there may be times of very little and times of abundance for us, but this is true: God never abandons his children. He meets all our needs according to his good will and for purposes we may never know. If we trust that—if we really trust that—we can BE GENEROUS TO GOD with gifts and sacrifices given from hearts of love. May we continue to grow in our faith so that we can respond like the Philippian Christians. And just as Paul said, may this be to the glory of **our God and Father...for ever and ever. Amen.**

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.