The Macedonian Equation

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[0:00] Amen.

And about what we do, well particularly the church is actually about what we do with our money. And some of you, I imagine, are instantly having that kind of, oh, please don't.
Don't tell me I need to do something different with my money. And some of you are even feeling that sort of, oh gosh, I knew it. The church, they're just after your money.
Well, that's not quite true. We're not just after your money. The church would quite like your time, your energy, your talent, your home, your whole life as well.
And why? Because Jesus wants all of you. He wants all of you. And church is not just a thing you attend. The church is Jesus' body.
[1:23] It's where we act out all that he wants of us. So we're going to spend the next five, no, six weeks in these two chapters. And it's just in the middle of this longer letter that Paul is writing to a church in a place called Corinth in Greece.

And he's writing to them, particularly at the start of this passage I'm going to read in a moment. He's writing to them about another church in Jerusalem, which they won't have visited necessarily, but they've heard of where it all started.
And that church in Jerusalem is poor, and there's a famine, and they're struggling for food. And what he's writing to the church in Corinth to say is, could you please send them some money?
Now, most of the chapters are more about why would they choose to do that than they are about that situation. But that's the situation. And what he does in this first section I'm going to read to you right at the start of chapter 8 is he tells them first about two other churches a little bit further north in Greece.
And he tells them about their giving to try and encourage these people in Corinth that maybe they could act similarly. So I'm going to read to you from 2 Corinthians chapter 8, starting right at the start.
[2:39] And the person talking here is Paul, who wrote this letter. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.

For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.
For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints.
And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God, to us. Accordingly, we urge Titus that as he started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.
But as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of grace also. This is the word of the Lord.
[3:54] So what Paul's doing, is he's trying to use the example of the Macedonians, this is particularly the church in Philippi, in Philippi, and the church in Thessalonica, to encourage this Corinthian church.

You might remember some of you, back in our Acts series just before Christmas, we got to a point at the end where Paul, he went back to Jerusalem, he ended up in prison and lots of trials and that kind of thing. The reason he went back to Jerusalem was to take the money that the churches in Macedonia and to the church in Corinth had given.
So in some ways, we've already seen the end of that story. That there was a point where they did give money to Jerusalem and that he took it to help feed the hungry there, the hungry particularly in that church.

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But he starts off by telling them about the situation in this church in Macedonia. And in some ways, the question that he's trying to answer, if you like, is what are the things that would make someone be generous?
What plus what plus what equals generosity? According to Paul, what is, if you like, the Macedonian equation? And, okay, you've read the passage, so you can have a look in front of you and see what the answer is, but if you just looked at that and I said to you, what were the things that would make you generous?
[5:13] I suspect you'd say, I don't know, there'd be lots of different answers, but you might say, well, I've got more than enough so I can afford to give some bit away. And you might say, oh, I really know these people and I love them.

Or you might say, I've been there before myself and I know what that feels like. Or you might, I don't know, you might say lots of different things. But I suspect, if we're just thinking, what is it that would make us generous, we'd probably start with, I've got some extra.
Did you notice what he said? What's the Macedonian equation? Severe affliction, plus abundance of joy, plus extreme poverty, equals generosity.
That's what he says. Verse two, in the severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity. I don't know how much sense.
Well, it doesn't, does it? Like, okay, that's what it says, but that's not necessarily what we would initially think makes us generous. We'd think, I've got extra, I've got spare, or I've got a situation, or I can see these people and I know them, you know, it's my family member and I really want to give to them.
[6:34] They've never met these people. They do think they're their family members, to be fair, but they've never met them, they don't know them. And these churches in Macedonia, now at Corinth, it's comfortable, there's not much persecution and they're wealthy.

And so Paul is saying to them, those churches just a couple of hundred miles north of you, they're under severe affliction and they're very poor and they're full of joy and so they're going to give to Jerusalem.
Could you do the same? That's what he's saying in his letter. Could you do the same? Severe affliction and extreme poverty, you would not think, led to generosity, which I think if we just look at the equation, it means that the middle one might be the key.
An abundance of joy. That's why they gave. Not necessarily because of their circumstances, but despite them. These people in Macedonia have every reason you could imagine not to give.
Life's really hard. People are against them because they're Christians. Paul caused a lot of riots when it led to the cities and they sort of shuffled him off really fast. You know, stuff's hot. It's difficult there.
[7:49] And they're very poor. There's a lot of reasons not to give. I suspect lots of us would feel like we have lots of reasons to not be generous with our money or our time or our talent or whatever else it might be of ourselves.

Lots of reasons not to be generous. I've never met anyone who has enough money. And genuinely, actually, in the last couple of weeks was having a conversation with someone who I'm pretty sure earns more a year than I do in 10.
I know. In fact, that's not an exaggeration. He earns more than that. Gosh. And we're just having that like... It's quite recent for him. He earns this much money. We were kind of talking about, what's that like? And he was like, it's awful.
I still don't have enough money, but how does that make any sense? He's saying he knows this is a stupid thing to say, but he's like, I still don't feel like I've got enough money. And I'm suddenly like, what on earth do I do with it? No one has enough money.
No one has enough time. It's not just you. No one has enough time. And yet, the key thing isn't having enough time, it's not having enough money, it's this thing about an abundance of joy.
[9:06] Why were they full of joy? Why were they full of joy? Life's hard. They're poor. People are trying to beat them up because they're Christians. Why are they full of joy?

Well, you can go read the letters that Paul wrote to them to get some sense of it. He's pretty pleased, certainly with the church in Philippi, but he's reasonably pleased with the church in Thessalonica as well. But their joy is because they know Jesus.

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Their joy flows from the gospel, which tells us that God is generous to us. that he chooses to gift us, that in fact you didn't earn your salvation.
It's not because you were clever, it's not because you realised you had to get in on the deal at the right time. It's not because you did good things, it's because you went, ah, help me! And then he gifted you salvation.
He gifted you rescue, if you know him. If you don't, this is a thing that can happen to you this morning if you want it to, but it's all gift. And when we start to get that under our skin, we can start to think, oh gosh, if everything God gives me is a gift, maybe I can gift things to others.
[10:20] But certainly, if everything God gives me is a gift, maybe joy can be the result. That doesn't mean they were happy all the time. They are having a severe affliction and they are extremely poor.

They're not idiots who are running around going, life's great! When it's not. That's not it. They'll be weeping, they'll be in pain, they are struggling with life. These are not foolish people who don't know what's happening to them.
But nonetheless, in the midst of all those very understandable emotions, they're full of joy because they know Jesus. Joy is not happiness, it's this sort of sustaining thing at the bottom of your soul where you're like, but the Lord's got me, but the Lord's got me, but the Lord's got me.
Doesn't mean it's going to get better, but the Lord has got me. And what comes after this is never-ending joy. We read at the right hand of the Father our pleasures forevermore. Joy is what he wants to welcome us into.
And they believe in the gospel, they're full of joy, they believe in the church, they know that the church is the hope of the world, that this Jesus' great idea of what he calls his body or his bride, the gathered church, not just us here, though yes, us here, but local churches all across the world in every nation, that it's the hope of the world that we introduce people to Jesus but then we introduce them into this communal life that he wants us to encounter and experience.
[11:54] So it can be generous because of joy. Okay? Verse 3, Paul says, for they gave according to their means, as I can testify, which means he knew how much money they had.

And so many of them gave according to their means. So that's good, actually. That's sensible stewardship behavior. So look at the amount that you have and think, what can I give?
That's good. We should be thinking like that. Then it gets a bit odd. They gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly!
for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. I find this actually quite hard to get my head around, if I'm honest. What's happening in this place, Paul's been before he writes to Corinth, what's happening in these Macedonian churches is that many of them, they gave according to their means.
I find that one I can understand. That sort of, I look at what I've got, I choose what to give first, and then I look at what tax the tax man takes, and then I look at my, you know, Helen and I were doing a budget on Friday, and that's how we think.
[13:01] You know, you start with what you give, but nonetheless, you do your budget, and you're like, what works? Can I, you don't end up giving something that means you can't afford to pay the mortgage or to buy food. You try to be generous, but you try and do it within your means.

Very sensible. But then he says to them, and that's like, that's what he'd asked them to do. And then they gave beyond their means of their own accord.
His point is, I didn't make them, I didn't even ask them to. Begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. These Macedonians are coming to Paul and saying, we really want to give you more.
And he's probably saying, is that wise? And they're saying, we want to give it to you. Eventually, he takes it, it's like, okay, we'll take it for the hungry in Jerusalem. What would make you do that?
And the only answer we're given, and in some ways, Paul unfolds it as the two chapters go on, but the only answer we're given here is this abundance of joy. that they experience.
[14:05] You want to be generous, get joy. They gave beyond their means. If you sat me down and said, how much should I give? I would not say, give more than you can afford.

We'd talk about generosity, we'd talk about budgeting, we'd talk about, you know, figuring stuff out, we'd talk about, can you stretch a little bit more than you have before? But we're not going to say, why don't you give it all? It's not wise.

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But am I wrong to say that? Paul says, they gave beyond their means of their own accord because they're so full of joy.
The application here is not necessarily go home and empty all your bank accounts. The application is, can you imagine doing that?
If not, seek joy in God until you can imagine doing that. I think that's the application. Let's press into Jesus such that our emotions, I mean, joy isn't really an emotion, it's more than that, but our emotions and our general disposition about life shifts to the point that we're like, I can imagine there could come a day where someone would say, could you give?
[15:20] And I'm just like, actually, you can have it all. I mean, I've not done that, but I know plenty of people who tell stories about, you know, there's an appeal for this thing and it just caught my heart and we were about to move to a new flat and there's, I have to give specific people now, but we're about to move to a new flat so we had the deposit in our bank account and we were like, should we just give it?

And so they did. Or people who were like, my car had broken down but I had a sum of money to get a new one but then there was this appeal and it just kind of caught my heart and so I gave it. Wild. Wild. Beyond their means.
I mean, the stories I'm thinking of, the Lord's blessed them. Not always financially, in some cases, yes, but they gave because their hearts were caught with joy at something happening somewhere else.
They're like, I would like to put my arm to this thing with my money. They gave beyond their means.
We might even think of that story Jesus told, well, it wasn't a story.
We sat in the temple talking to his disciples watching other people give because it was kind of public and watching a very wealthy person put lots and lots of money in the pot and making a big old show of it.
[16:31] Jesus wasn't that impressed. And watching a little widow come by with two coins and put them in and he points to the disciples and said, she doesn't make any show of it. No one really notices apart from Jesus is watching.

Says to his disciples, did you see that? And they're thinking, I don't know what you mean. She goes, these two little coins, it's not very much money. It's not really going to buy anything. I said, did you see that?
She gave everything she had. She gave a lot more than that guy did. He's interested in, not amount, but in your heart, which can sometimes look like proportion, yes.
But interested in your heart. She gave everything. And he does, he wants generous people. He is calling us to sacrifice.
And the question that all of us, we'd like all of us to ask across this series is, what's next for you? What's the next thing that Jesus is asking you to do sacrificially for him?
[17:33] You haven't arrived. It can be tempting sometimes, particularly if you're a little long way on your Christian walk to be like, I'm a jealous person. I'm doing all right. I'm giving this much of what I have and things are generally going okay and I give, I serve and I pray and I give my time and give my energy and we do a bit of hospitality and very quickly you start to sound like the guy in your heart.

You're not saying it out loud because we're mostly English people who don't say these things out loud but you're like the guy with loads of money who's like, look at me. It's very easy to get that way in your heart.
And Jesus is just saying, what's next? You haven't arrived. I haven't arrived. And we are talking about money. We're very deliberately on this subtitle not just talking about money.
Your application here might not be financial. It might be about your time or your hospitality or your home or about the way you serve in the church.
It could be about lots of different things. But we're asking everyone to just ask the Lord what's next.
And many of you are thinking, I don't know. I don't know if I can manage that.
[18:42] I totally get it. What's next might be joy in God where you are that will overflow in all sorts of generosity that doesn't cost you more.

If we are talking about money then tithing 10% of your income is a great starting place. It's a kind of Old Testament principle. Old Testament says you can do more than that if you want. It's a lot of permission.

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You're allowed to go further if you'd like to. Helen and I are just doing our budget on Friday and again just reviewing our giving like we try to every year. Some years we put it down. Some years we keep it the same.
That's okay. This year we're going to put it up. But I would encourage you every year to just if you're part of the church you give financially just review your giving. What are you going to do this year? Maybe you'll put it down. That's allowed. Sometimes that's the right thing to do. You do it prayerfully. You look at it. You consider your circumstances. Sometimes you put it down. That's okay. Sometimes the Lord will say should we have a little bit of fun?
[19:44] And you're thinking oh no. Never starts well when Jesus says should we have a bit of fun? And he's like maybe we could push a bit further. If that's what he says to you have a go.

See what happens. But what we're asking over the series as they've said is ask God what he's calling you to give next in your giving and your serving and what you give attention to in your hospitality.
And then I was just talking over the last couple of days about just reminding ourselves of times that the Lord has sort of encouraged us to do something and thinking it was a bit interesting wasn't it? But there was a time that we it was a young married couple getting married in their early 20s in our church in Birmingham doing really well getting married early great, wonderful they didn't have anywhere to live so they came and lived with us for three months that was a challenging experience but it blessed them there was a kind of generosity in it which at the time just felt like wading through treacle but it was good for them then I think of our dear friend Joe who you won't know he doesn't live in autumn but for years came and had dinner with us every Monday because Joe was going through a really rough time and he just needed to talk to someone and mostly we didn't talk about the rough time but we did sometimes but for years Mondays Joe comes around and it didn't cost us that much more it cost us a bit more time Joe did a lot of washing up which was helpful never really learned where anything lived so that was always interesting but but we loved Joe and so we opened our home to him as an act of generosity that only it didn't even occur to us at the time that's what we're doing because that's not how you act but afterwards you're like
I can't do it I guess that kind of was generous wouldn't it we've deliberately time after time sought homes that allow us to do that kind of thing it's like how big a dining room can we stretch to afford because we want to have particularly in our last church we want to have 15 people around for dinner on a Wednesday every week and it does cost you a bit of money but that's okay but stretching to do that these will not necessarily be the things that the Lord is asking of you but what I'm saying is bend your life towards generosity for the church and there might be very different things that he asks you to do or again it's often only on reflection that you realise because I wouldn't I don't think we're particularly good givers as it goes it goes out the bank in the standing order every month as you start to look at other people and other kind of friends and colleagues and that sort of thing over many years and you're like how does everybody afford these holidays that go on how does everyone afford these nice cars it's like we're doing okay we must save a little bit but I don't quite get where they get the money for that from and you're like oh yeah actually add up how much you give a year and you're like oh that's what they get it from okay that's actually a helpful activity because it makes you realise you're being generous it's very easy if your money goes out in a standing order every month for you to just think well you never see it right comes in it goes out you forget about it sometimes it's worth just saying what could I have had not to make you grumpy but to make you go okay well then I give that up for the Lord but there are other kinds of generosity too the church is not just something you attend don't just come on a Sunday there's a generosity when we're gathered together of seeing someone that you don't know and going and saying hello we're all on the welcome team did you realise that
I know there's some people who have the polo shirt and the fleece and that kind of thing and they're there to do some specific stuff and get the connect part of people's hands and all that and that's wonderful it's very important but they're not I know they're called the welcome team they're not really the welcome team you're the welcome team to see someone you don't know go and say hello it does not matter if it turns out they've been here 40 years you don't know them say hello if someone comes up to you and you're like oh you knew and you're thinking I've been here 40 years don't say I've been here 40 years say no I'm not but I don't know you hello be generous towards them it's the same in worship you can be tempted to think that Nadia and the band oh they're the worship team they'll do the worshipping and we'll sort of sing along no no no you're the worship

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team that's what happens when Karen earlier brought this contribution she reads from the Bible what she's doing is a generous she won't think of it like this there's a generosity of spirit in saying this is good stuff
[24:14] I kind of need to share it with everyone that's a generosity let's all be on the worship team on a Sunday let's come ready to bring our prayer of praise or our reading from the Bible or whatever it might be and just be like Jesus is good let's come ready to welcome others let's be generous with ourselves for the benefit of the church one more thought for you Paul gives even in this section multiple reasons to give he gives more as the kind of two chapters unfold but he does draw attention to one he says in verse 5 in other words they gave themselves first to the Lord what he means is that they're thinking because God gifts we gift ourselves to God it's not primarily for them about giving money to these brothers and sisters of theirs in Jerusalem it's primarily about giving their money to God it's primarily about giving themselves to God and we know this is a response to God's gift because that word appears over and over again in this passage the word grace which means gift we see it in verse 1 he talks about the grace of God given among the church in Macedonia what he means though is their generosity in verse 4 he said the word is translated in my translation as favour but it's the same word begging us earnestly for the favour or grace taking part in the relief of the saints in verse 6 the urge Titus so he's down in Corinth as he'd started he should complete among you this act of grace or gift and then in verse 7 again as you see that you excel in this act of grace or gift as well because God has gifted them this becomes clear in the next section that Sean's going to bring to us next week but because God has gifted them they want to gift to others well how's that work because to give yourself to Christ is to give yourself to other believers you can't just give yourself to Jesus on your own and be like

I'm just kind of sold out for the Lord but not in a church not doing anything all on your own union with Christ which without getting into the theology of it now look at the clock is what happens when we're saved we get united to Jesus union with Christ implies union with the church because the church is Jesus' body Jesus' bride when you're joined to Jesus you're joined to the church we're joined with Jesus and therefore with his body church is not a thing you attend we're a body so let's be generous to each other what's the Lord calling you to there will be as many different things as there are people in the room for some of you this will be financial for others it might be something else I've mentioned many things but there are many more besides but let's over the next six weeks explore what is God calling us to give okay what's going to happen now is a band are going to come and we are going to lift our voices again in worship because the reason that we give is due to joy in God because he first gives to us so let's stir up joy in our hearts as we think of all that Jesus has done for us why don't we stand together if you're able and briefly pray and then we'll sing
I'm wrong I won't I'll briefly pray and then Andrew's going to say something you pray okay fine Lord Jesus thank you so much that you have gifted to us yourself that you've gifted to us yes love and yes salvation and yes all the riches of heaven and yes your spirit but primarily you've given us yourself that we can know you and be known by you thank you so much teach us Lord to respond to that well teach us generosity speak with us over the next couple of months what are you asking us to do where are you asking us to give we want to be attentive Lord we want to do as you ask us and help us do so when you speak but mostly Jesus we love you we want to respond to all you've done for us Amen Thank you

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