Equality

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[0:00] If you don't know me, my name's Sean. I'm part of the leadership team here and it's great to see you. Fantastic that we're able to worship together this morning.

As a church, we have a number of core values which are up on the wall, I think over there somewhere, but one of them is generous and that's what we're looking at over these coming weeks, which Tim started last week.
And we're looking at the letter to the Corinthian church, the second one that Paul wrote. He wrote two letters to the Corinthian church and Corinth was a city that was an important Roman port city in southern Greece.
And Paul had established the church there during his second missionary journey. And having established the church, I think he spent maybe 18 months there establishing the church.
He's gone away. And then a number of issues have arisen, including divisions, moral and ethical issues, disorderly worship, doctrinal confusion and false teachers.
[1:11] So they seem to be in a bit of a mess, hence why two fairly substantial letters sent to them by Paul. But in the midst of dealing with all these issues, he raises the fact that the church in Jerusalem, the church that was first established, if you like, after Jesus died and rose again and went up into heaven, that first early church in poverty, it's struggling, there's a famine in that area and so they are poor and in need.

And Paul raises the whole thing with all the churches, not just with the church in Corinth, this need to give generously to the needs of the church in Jerusalem.
So last week, Tim prompted us with the first verses 1 to 7.
He was talking about the Macedonian churches, which were Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi. And how they, even though they were in themselves going through extreme poverty and severe trials, and yet they had given not only to their means, but beyond what they actually had.
So they had been so generous. And Paul is raising the Macedonian example to the Corinthian church that actually, even though they were struggling, they had been generous.
[2:42] It was a kind of a prompt and encouragement for the church in Corinth to also give as well. I have to apologise, I've got a cold, and so I'll be maybe swigging the water a bit.

And Stephen, you'll have to watch me, I might need to blow my nose. I'm sure people don't want to hear that. Okay, so let's start then.
We start in verse 8 of chapter 8. I'm going to read it, it's on the screen there. So Paul said this, Clearly he is comparing it with the Macedonians, who he's just been talking about.
And how is the church in Corinth, which was actually a fairly well-off church, how was it going to compare with those who had given beyond their means?
Verse 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.
[4:12] So Paul has started off in these first eight verses of the chapter, talking about the Macedonian church and comparing the Corinthians with another church.

And then suddenly Paul takes a step back and goes, Right, okay, we've looked at churches, let's now look at Jesus. The ultimate example, if you like, of generosity.
And Paul is saying, Jesus, who was seated on high in the heavens, who was rich and beyond what we could possibly imagine, in that he owned all things, he chose to lay it aside, come down to earth to a stable.
We've obviously been looking at this over Christmas, but he chose to take on a frail human body.
And so Paul is saying, actually, Jesus is the ultimate example of generosity.

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And that because he chose to give it all up, therefore you and therefore us, we receive these riches, not money per se, but actually the riches of a new relationship with God, spiritual riches of eternity with him.
[5:33] Paul is saying, this is the ultimate example. Jesus, who died for you, gave it all up. He is the one that we look to for the example as to how to be generous.

Okay. Excuse me a minute. So, it says that Corinthians have received this gift of grace.
That is this, firstly, the relationship restored, but then it's also a gift of generosity that comes from God. That's where generosity comes from. It comes from God.
Paul said it about the Macedonian church. He said that you could have it as well, this gift of generosity that comes from God. And just worth pausing here, we've talked about Jesus.
Many of us here will have already received and accepted him as their Lord and Savior, but maybe if you haven't yet, maybe it's something you want to explore, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, chose to give his life that we might be restored to relationship with the one who created us.
[7:01] For our sins to be forgiven, to be washed as white as snow, restored for eternity in him. That's what this gospel is about. And if that's something you want to know more of, please come and see me, chat to someone you came with.

But actually, this is the most important decision you'll ever make in your life, to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. Okay.
So let's move on then. Verse 10. So Paul again, and here is my judgment. Now some versions of the Bible use advice.
I mean, this isn't, he's not commanding them, but you could say, 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.
Now finish the work so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it according to your means. So the Corinthian church, they had made promises.
[8:07] So this need of the Jerusalem church, churches everywhere, I know, but this need had been raised the previous year and the church in Corinth said, yep, we're going to get behind this.

We're going to give. Maybe they'd already started to take up a collection and now Paul has said, actually, it is time to wrap it up, to finish what you have promised to do, to, as it were, put their money where their mouth is.
The Macedonians had already given beyond their means. But Paul is saying, actually, that was over and above. Actually, all we're looking for is that you at least give according to your means.
That's acceptable. And then, verse 12, for if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.
So, it wasn't a case of, don't give nothing, but give according, at least give according to what you have. Now, others may not know your means, but God does.
[9:25] we shouldn't be judging others as to how generous they might be. We leave that to God. Okay.

Okay. In a moment, we're going to turn to the last three verses of this passage.
For me, this was the key part of what we look at this morning. It was, in a sense, I had one of those epiphanies while I was reading this.
I don't know, but sometimes you can read verses over and over again through, over years and years, and then suddenly you read it and God goes, look at that one.
And you go, that wasn't there before, was it? And the Holy Spirit just quickens something to you. And you go, I'm going to share this and you go, yeah, we knew that, Sean. But for me, this was a real, oh, wow, this is great stuff.
[10:35] And so, I bigged it up now, so let's hope you, you know, but let's get on. Verse 13, our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but there might be equality.

At the present time, your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn, their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality. I want to read that again.
And you see, I've underlined the word equality. Our desire is not that others might be relieved, so that is, you give everything away so you're in the position they were in and they're doing well.
While you are hard pressed, but there may be equality. At the present time, your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn, their plenty will supply what you need.

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The goal is equality. And that's the thing that really got me. Because actually, it's not about giving it all away and living in poverty, it's about God bringing equality across the church, across the churches.
[11:43] It carries on, verse 15, as it is written, the one who gathered much did not have too much and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Now, that is Paul looking back to the Old Testament to Exodus chapter 16.

We will look at it in a minute, but basically, the Israelites have been freed by God from slavery in Egypt. Now, they're in the wilderness and they're starving.
But first, one more, there we go, Easter egg hunt. A bit early, maybe. I was reminded as I was reading this of something that used to happen in my childhood.
and we used to often go to my nan's house for Easter Sunday lunch.
well, I was there probably in my very early teens. I had five other cousins and my nan always used to do an Easter egg hunt for the children in the garden.
[12:54] And, so, before we got there, she would, I mean, you know what I mean. She'd go out, she'd put the Easter eggs around the garden, hiding some really well and some would be really obvious.

And, and then, probably after lunch, we, children would disappear out with the intention to get as many Easter eggs as we possibly could.
And, because I was the oldest, I had the advantage, obviously, of age and size. and, not always, but in most of the time, I would find the most.
And, I seem to have this vision of that they were all, you know, calories, cream, eggs or something, but they may have been cheapy things, I don't know. But, the point being is that we would all dash out and we'd find these eggs and then we would return to the house and some of us would be, you know, big pile of eggs and then maybe the younger ones just carrying one or two.
But, having got back into the house, there was something that happened that I wasn't that keen on. It was a redistribution. Yeah. You see, my gran had provided all the eggs and she wanted everyone to have the same amount.
[14:13] So, she would take away from my diminishing pile and give them to the younger ones. They had a smile, I didn't. But, you can see there was an equality of eggs so we all had the same.

Okay. So, going back to Exodus then. So, the Israelites have been released from slavery through God's power at work.
You can read it. In the book of Exodus, you know, the plagues and how the Egyptians were refusing to let their slaves go and in the end there were frogs and blood in the river and locusts and eventually the firstborn being killed.
And finally, they are released only for the Egyptians to follow them and then the Red Sea is parted and the Egyptians are drowned.
and therefore, the Israelites march on being saved by God which is fantastic. But then they get into this wilderness and their food runs out.
[15:25] So, they are complaining to Moses about God that, oh, he saved us from slavery but he's going to let us die in the wilderness.

So, therefore, God is going to have to provide. This is what it says, Exodus 16 verses 16 to 18. This is what the Lord has commanded. Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer which is approximately 2.2 litres for each person you have in your tent.
The Israelites did as they were told. Some gathered much, some little and when they measured it by the omer the one who gathered much did not have too much and the one who gathered little did not have too little.
Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed. What are they gathering? You may be asking. Well, it was manna which is interpreted as what is it? They were gathering provision by God which appeared in the morning.
[16:33] So, they would wake up in the morning and scattered across the ground was this manna. Now, you can imagine thinking back to the Easter egg hunt that they were the keenies. Wake up, first light or even before dashed out, gather as much as they could in.

Then there's those that are a bit slow to get up or maybe they're less able and they stagger out and only pick up a bit. But the upshot of it is at the end of the day it says that none had too much and none had too little.

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Now, you could say well, maybe they distributed amongst themselves. That's possible but actually this was miraculous provision by God and I wonder whether there was some miraculous transformation in the midst as they brought it back that they had what they needed just by God getting involved.
Imagine the feeding of the 5,000 where this bread and the fishes is torn apart and spread out and they all had enough. This is miraculous provision whichever way you look at it by God and all had enough.
God provided and distributed so it was equal just like the Easter eggs. Okay, so let's pull this together then.
[17:57] Excuse me again. Right.

The Bible reveals God has a number of names which indicate his character. Let's start with one. Jehovah Mithalti the Lord so Jehovah the Lord and Mithalti my deliverer. Now, as I said the Israelites knew God's salvation.
So they had if you like come across this name for God this characteristic of God and it's interesting that if you read through the Old Testament it indicates that idols or gods as so called appeared to have if you like control or strength in different areas.
so some might be gods of the mountains or gods of the river and so there was a certain amount of within the cultures at the time of this belief that gods could only do certain things and so obviously not the case with our God and this becomes apparent throughout the Old Testament but at this point the Israelites saw God as a saviour a deliverer and looking back to our passage in verse 9 Paul has reminded the Corinthians of their salvation in Jesus Christ so that we see God is still delivering to this day and so much more than just escape from a physical slavery but escape from spiritual death to sin but now the
[20:17] Israelites are starving they're wandering around in the wilderness and there's no food they're not in slavery but they need something to keep them alive and so the Israelites find out that their God is not just a deliverer but he's Jehovah Jireh the Lord my provider so they realize that it's not just that their God isn't limited if you like like some of the other gods so called gods that the other nations worship but actually he is so so much more and he provides but he provides equally we read that in the passage in

Exodus there he provides enough for all and Paul wants the Corinthians to see that they have too many Easter eggs if you like or too much manna that they've got more than enough that actually God is looking to them to redistribute his provision he is provided Paul is saying that God provides it all but he provides equally he provides enough and therefore he's encouraging Paul is encouraging the Corinthians actually you need to give of something some of what you've got not so that you then become poor but it's there's an equality in God's provision so as we draw to a close what do we take from this clearly firstly God is our deliverer
Jesus died that we might be set free we were dead in our sin we were spiritually poor we had no relationship with him but all that is restored through Christ and we are now spiritually rich he gave everything for us so that we might receive that eternal life and second God is our provider he supplies it all the air we breathe the time that we have the talents that we have even the money in our accounts Tim put it even the money in our wallets is his he provides it all and he provides enough for everyone but actually the onus is on us to do the redistributing according to our means you see within the church there are enough talent there's enough money there's enough time between all of us to redistribute and to do all that God wants so the question is what is
God calling you to do with the provision he has given you maybe you don't have very much but you can still give a little maybe you have lots and you can give so much more how generous will you be with your Easter eggs will you come with open arms before God and let him take whatever he wants or will you try to hold back what he's already given you will you be part of his redistribution this is what it means to be generous in the church okay could the band come back up and I'm just going to pray father I don't want to just concentrate on the fact that we need to give it all away but actually that we would grasp that you are our great provider you provide all that we need and so seeing your generosity through
Christ first and then through provision to us I pray Lord that that would that we would be generous in all that we have serving you giving our time and our energy to see you glorified and the church grow help us to trust you that if we give of what we've got you are faithful that you will multiply it and you will continue to provide all that we need Amen Amen Thank you Thank you.

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