Acts 21:1-14

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[0:00] My name's Tim. We're going to be continuing now our preaching series called Generous in the book of 2 Corinthians, particularly chapters 8 and 9.! Trying to think together, as we have been for a few weeks now, about what does generosity look like?

What does it look like? Yes, with our money, but also what does it look like with our time, with the gifts that God's given us, with our whole lives. And particularly the passage we're going to look at today, at the end of 2 Corinthians 8, will help us see that generosity in one sense starts with handling our money, our time and our talents well.
We have to handle them well. Let me read it to you. So I'm in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, we'll be starting at verse 16. But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.
This is Paul talking. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he is going to you of his own accord.
With him, we are sending the brother, who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us.
[1:29] For the glory of the Lord himself and to show our goodwill. We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us.

For we aim at what is honourable, not only in the Lord's sight, but also in the sight of man. And with them, we are sending our brother, whom we've often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.
As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.
So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men. This is the word of the Lord. Let me just refresh you on the story.
Paul is writing to the church in Corinth, asking them to join in with a collection that's going on around lots of the churches that he would work with to give money to the church in Jerusalem, where there is a famine and they're very poor.
[2:42] So he's essentially asking this church he's writing to to give money. But what he's doing in this passage is telling them how it's going to be handled. So most of what he's doing is talking about the people who are going to take the money and physically take it to Jerusalem.

And indeed, the people who've already taken the money from these other churches he was talking about that we've looked at a couple of weeks ago, and they've already collected it and have taken it with them. He's trying to reassure them that things are going to be done properly, as he said, not just in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men, as in it's visibly done properly.
He talks about three different people. He talks about his friend Titus, who he spends some time, they don't necessarily know super well, but he spends some time commending to them. He talks about a man who is unnamed, who is essentially called the famous preacher.
Presumably they'd know who that was. I think it's amusingly ironic that we don't, but there we go.
And he talks about someone who he calls the tested brother, so a friend of his.
So Titus, who he knows, this preacher that was actually chosen by the churches in Macedonia, someone they trusted, and this other tested brother, so someone else that Paul knows well personally, who act together as an apostolic team.
[4:02] They are messengers or apostles of the churches, in verse 23. And you might recall, some of you, when we did our Acts preaching series back before Christmas, we reached a point near the end when Paul went to Jerusalem himself, and were told of a group of seven people who he took

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with him, who were the people that ended up being finally appointed to carry this money.

In fact, when he was on trial, one of the people who he was on trial with noticed that he bought lots of money with him, and said, oh, probably he can pay a bribe, which obviously he didn't end up doing.
So that's kind of the story, and on the face of it, it's probably one of those passages of the Bible that you nod at, and go, okay, let's move on. What exactly do I do with that? I mean, the most obvious application is, we should have good financial processes.
That is where I'm going to go first, and 90% of you are like, okay, nice, time for a little Sunday nap. And then some of the singing will start again, eventually, when Tim stopped talking about financial process, and three of you were like, oh, very exciting, which is great.
You should probably be trustees. But, please don't fall asleep, not just for the sake of, you know, my ego, but also, this is actually for the gospel, what we're talking about, and has lots of application to us as individuals as well.
[5:31] So, firstly, we're going to talk about process, about the fact Paul is bothered by how they handle money, and I have three things I want to point out about that, and then we're going to move on to one other point.

So, process. First thing is, he wants it to be transparent. We know that because he's so keen to tell them about it. He wants to tell them all the different things that is going to happen in order to make sure that this money goes from them and arrives at the place that it's being sent to, as they expect it to.
And, of course, it's a different world. You can't stick it in a bank account and send it. This is physically. These guys are going to have to attach money to themselves or hold it in their hands and travel months in order to get to the place it's going to go.
It's potentially dangerous. It has to be done well. There's lots of temptation for them to take a little bit for themselves. It's very important that everyone knows how it's being handled. It has to be done right.
It also has to be seen to be done in the right. That's his point about it's important. Well, verse 21, we aim for what is honourable, not only in the Lord's sight, but also in the sight of man.
[6:38] Don't just do it right, but it needs to be seen to be done right. It needs to be visibly right so that everyone can have confidence in it. I don't know if you've realised this, but you are generally more generous when you trust the people who you're giving money to.

And that's not a, oh, you should trust people. That's a, well, people need to show themselves to be trustworthy so that you will be as generous as the Lord calls you to. So that you have confidence that the money I'm giving is going to go where I'm expecting it to.
And I have some sense of what's going to happen with it. This is why, I mean, I don't know how much you necessarily understand about how churches are organised, but we have a charity that we use to handle money through that is run by some people called trustees.
That's why they're public. That's why you can go on the website and see their faces. That's why we primarily appoint them not for their skills and gifting, though that is important, but for their character. Because you should be able to go and see, oh, these are the people who look after the handling of the money. And I can go and ask them questions. That's important.
[7:53] That's a vital thing for us as Harvest Church. We're good at some of it. Our trustees have identified other things we need to work on and they're working on it. And you also, if you have concerns, you must speak up about them.

It's important, actually, that in things particularly to do with money, it's not, oh, well, I'm sure it's okay. Don't do that. If you're not sure, ask. Ask questions.
You can ask me. You might not get the clearest answer. But if you ask the trustees, you will get clear, helpful answers. That's why I'm not a trustee than they are.
As part of that importance of transparency, again, you might not realise this, but I wouldn't know what you give. In fact, none of the elders know what you give.
That's a deliberate choice. Obviously, some of the trustees would be aware. There might be some staff who have access to that information, but none of the elders know what you give. That's a deliberate choice so that it cannot possibly affect how we lead or pastor.
[8:58] And it's, in one sense, also a helpful part of transparency, that the right people see things, but not that everybody does. There's an application here for ourselves.

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And you might think, well, what would it even mean for me to be transparent in my own finances? Because who even needs to see? But think about it like this. If I had a button to press and on this screen appeared your bank account, how would you feel about that?
If the idea that someone else was going to look at your bank account and kind of see your transactions, would that make you go, well, I don't really, not wild about them seeing it, but okay. Fine.
Or would it make your stomach sink and you think, oh gosh. Oh gosh. Perhaps they'd find out. What about if we managed to put on the screen like a timesheet of your day?
You know, some jobs would do a timesheet and you'd be required to kind of put in what you've done hour by hour as part of the way it works. What if you have one of those for your day and put it on the screen?
[10:09] And again, I'm sure plenty of you would be like, well, again, I'm not wild about people seeing that detail about my life, but also, okay, fine. And I'm sure some of us were kind of just a little thinking, oh, yeah.

Even if you saw it yourself, how many hours did I spend yesterday doom scrolling? We think, not that you need to be transparent in the sense that it's important that somebody else sees the details about your life, but we should live in such a way that if they did, you would not be embarrassed. We should live in such a way that if someone did see those things, that would not expose sin. Instead, that we're acting with integrity. So our processes need to be, as a church, certainly need to be transparent.
Second thing, we need to get serious about sin. why is it that they felt it was important that it was all transparent? Well, because there's a risk that things go wrong, right?
Because people are people. And money is very powerful. In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus said, you cannot serve two masters.
[11:23] You cannot serve God and money. You can't have two masters. It's like God is your master. Oh. But it's very easy for money to become your master too.

Like a kind of tug of war, if you like, in your life, with the Lord on the one hand saying, come this way into the light and goodness and life and health.
And on the other, your money, oddly, pulling you and saying, no, no, no, no. Grasp more. Have more. Buy more. As though security comes from having.
Sin is something we should be serious about. And money is a wonderful way for sin to get into our hearts. Have such a grip on us.
And all of us find that much easier to see in someone else than we do in ourselves. The church needs financial integrity. should never be the case, and again, we work on some of these things, but should never be the case that only one person has access to a thing so that things are always carefully checked.
[12:39] We also each need personal integrity in our finances. It might be easy, perhaps, at your workplace to fiddle your expenses and just claim a little bit more.

These things tend to catch up with you, but it might seem easy in the moment. It might be easy on your taxes to put down something different from what is the case.
Seems like a victimless crime, doesn't it? It might be easy to lie to your wife or your husband by not telling them about a particular pot of money or how you've spent it.
It's kind of easy, and we probably think about it less, to do the same thing with the way you use your time or the way you use your talents.
Are we doing it with integrity? If we looked really seriously at ourselves and our lives, would we be confident that we were acting with integrity?
[13:36] We should. And we need, like the church as a corporate body has to look quite seriously at these things and make sure that we are doing things with integrity and that we're seen to do things with integrity.

It's actually very easy to do things with integrity and not be seen to do it. But then we as individuals, not that we have to put on a big old show, but our lives should also look like lives of integrity.
That tug of war should be won by the Lord. But often what happens is that God is pulling us this way. He's much stronger than money, but we sort of help a little bit.
So we grab hold of the rope and pull ourselves towards the power of our what. So our process needs to be transparent.

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They're important so that we're serious about sin. And thirdly, they're important because we need them to be practical. What Paul's doing, and it would be tempting, I think, for a preacher like Paul to do what he's done in the rest of the chapter and what he's going to move back to doing in the rest of chapter 9 that we'll see in our final two messages in this series, is essentially tell them why to give, ground it in the gospel, help them see how God has been wonderfully faithful and generous to them and say, hey, you can do the same and stop there and sort of imagine if he does that, somehow it'll happen.
[15:02] He doesn't. He says, it's important that there are some kind of practical arrangements. Grand visions fail without administrators.

If you're the sort of person I am with not an administrative moan in my body, excuse me, bone in my body, I might want to moan about it, but bone in my body, it's quite easy to say, let's go over here and sort of just anticipate, oh, everyone will follow, it's straightforward.
Imagine if I were to say, there's a mountain, we need to get to the other side of it as a church. Let's go through. It's probably my temptation some of the time.
Someone might come along the side and say, you know what, Tim, it's quite expensive to go through, we're going to have to buy some sort of boring equipment. Maybe we could go over. The administrator is the one who comes along next and says, you're both idiots.
What we need to do is go round. It might seem slightly less obvious. It might even feel like to begin with, we're walking in the wrong direction because we can't just go forwards, we have to turn, but we'll all be alive when we get there.
[16:18] And we won't have wasted all the church's money on some giant boring machine. Now, the analogy, you'd have to actually apply it to a real thing that I might actually say, but the point is that the church needs people who engage in the practical, who the Bible uses the term administrators for, who say, actually, the way we get from A to B is like this, who do what Paul is starting to do here and say, well, we're going to need to make sure we've got the right people lined up in order to make this happen.

in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, in the middle of Paul's wonderful description of the worship life of the church, where he describes what it's supposed to look like when a church gathers together to worship, he lists a number of different spiritual gifts that people have.
He talks about apostles and prophets and teachers. He talks about people with the gift of tongues and healing. And in the middle of it, he says, administrators. Because it's a spiritual gift.
It's not just, some people are good at the practicals. It's a spiritual gift. In fact, the term used there is the same way that in the original language they talk about the person who holds the tiller on a boat. So that the pilot, if you like, not the captain. The captain might be saying, we're going to go over here. But someone has to actually turn the tiller in order for the boat to go where it's going to go. And this is the kind of gift of organizing.
[17:56] It's the kind of gift that cares about the finances. But it's the kind of gift of organizing people. It's the gift that sees what people are good at. It has a kind of, a little bit of a prophetic edge where it's like, actually, you know what?

They'd be brilliant in here and they're going to really help us move forwards. It's a spiritual gift. I'm laboring this point slightly because it's often wildly under-emphasized.
And what we like are the gifts that do what I'm doing and do something visible. And the Bible is over and over and over again at pains to say there are different gifts and they all matter, not just the visible ones.
The people who make the church work are doing wonderful spiritual work. And we need more of it. But it's a spiritual gift. You can receive it.
Again, it might seem natural to be like, yeah, okay, if I adopt the prayer position because it seems to be what people do and someone comes and prays for me, maybe I'll get the gift of tongues. Yeah, that can happen. Absolutely. You ask for the Lord or gift.
[18:56] But you can do exactly the same thing for the gift of administration because it's a spiritual gift. And in much the same way that if you're working, say, with the gift of prophecy, the Bible tells us to fan it into flame, you have to practice and get feedback and work with others and work in order to learn the gift and get better at it.

It's the same as the spiritual gift of administration. You can fan it into flame. It's important. We want to honour those in the church. You have it. And we want more people to have and use that gift for

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the good of all of us.
Okay. So Paul's bothered by process. He's bothered by transparency. He's bothered by it due to seriousness with sin. And he's bothered by it because someone has to think about the practical. But ultimately, if we go kind of a layer below, why does he care?
Because you could just go, well, it's good, isn't it? It's good to do it properly. But why does he actually care? And so you could ask the question differently, why does he stop in the middle of his flow that he picks up again a few sentences later about the wonder of the gift of God, the wonder of the gift of the gospel, the importance of generosity.
Why does he stop in the middle and tell them this? It ties the commentators in knots, genuinely. Some of them are like, maybe it was put in later. It wasn't.
[20:28] But they get quite riled up by it. It doesn't quite make sense. It seems to be like a pause of his argument and then he talks about this and then he picks back his argument up where he left off.

So why this here? Why does he actually care? I'd like to suggest it's probably because of the biggest theme in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, which is, funnily enough, not generosity.
He wants them to be generous for a reason. That reason is friendship. What these two chapters are full of is the names of people and the relationships between churches because the key thing Paul's interested in is friendship.
He wants this church in Corinth to be friends with the church in Jerusalem and to demonstrate their spiritual solidarity by opening their wallets. He wants them to love Titus as a friend.
He wants them to love these various different people from different places that they don't necessarily know as friends. What he's described in this section I've read today is a gang of friends.
[21:41] They may not have known each other before they got put together for this mission but they become friends in the gospel. And friendship, I don't know, it might sound like quite a weak thing maybe these days.

But it's a big theme in the Bible and it's a gospel theme. Paul cares about friendship because friendship comes from the gospel.
Let me show you what I mean. I'm just going to turn to John chapter 15 to read you some words of Jesus. He's talking to his disciples and he says, this is John chapter 15 verse 12 and following.
This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.
You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves for the slave does not know what the master is doing but I have called you friends.
[22:43] For all that I've heard from my father I have made known to you. No longer do I call you slaves but I have called you friends. His point, he'd be entirely within his rights to call them servant or slave.

I talked earlier about you can't have two masters. The point is, well, the Lord is your master. You do what he tells you to. Jesus' choice is not to speak to his disciples as though they were slaves.
He could. He doesn't choose to. It would be right and good in one sense for God to say, I'm the master, you're my servant, you do what I tell you to.
What Jesus does is he says, no, I'm going to call you friends. And in order to be called friends you have to radically level things. It's like a seesaw. If we have a master and a slave, the master is high, the slave is light.
In order to be friends you cannot maintain a friendship when you're not on a level. Friendship is a radical level. What Jesus does, pretty shocking actually, he says, I am the Lord Almighty who made all things.
[23:55] I made you for purpose. I could tell you what to do if I want. I want to be your friend. So I'm going to put us on the same level. I mean, that's the gospel.

Jesus wants to be your friend. It's the gospel. He wants to radically change things by dealing with your sin and then lifting you up into the heavens and choose to put himself down onto your level. It's the incarnation. so that we can be friends. It's wild. It might sound kind of sappy or childish. Jesus wants to be my friend. You might think that's what they do in kids' work, isn't it? They kind of get the kids to understand it by saying Jesus wants to be my friend. We're grown up now. Yeah, we are, which means we understand that Jesus wants to be my friend is really good news.
It's life-giving. This group of guys who are going to handle this money are like brothers in arms, but they act like that because Jesus taught them to by the way he acted with his disciples.

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[24:59] He modeled friendship. He taught them how to live together and be together and be friends. It is, as C.S. Lewis famously said, friendship is the way the angels feel about each other.

It's the kind of love that the angels have for each other. It's therefore, what we assume, the kind of love that would describe the age to come, the kingdom that is coming as a kingdom of friendship. How do we know that? Well, Jesus teaches that marriage is momentary, that great love of life, he's like, but it doesn't continue. The angels don't marry and we'll be like them in the age to come, he says.
But they love each other, so they'll be friends. The way that we'll love each other in the kingdom to come is friendship. We'll be friends.
So why don't you invest in what lasts right now? The Bible doesn't say this, I'm slightly speculating, but my suspicion is that friendships persist into the age to come.
[26:16] That deep Christian friendship persists into the age to come. You invest in it now, you get it forever. Put your life into that. It'll be worth it.

And the reason that we put good, because you might think friendship points the opposite direction to good process. You might be like, if we're all mates, we won't do it properly.
Whereas what I think Paul is saying is, no, no, because we're all mates, we're going to do it properly. Because we have deep love ties for each other, we're going to make sure that there's no opportunity for my friend to be tempted to do something silly with the money.
So I'm going to make sure there's a, I care about him too much, so I'm going to make sure there's a good process here that makes sure he is not able to do that. And we care about doing stuff together, so we're not going to get waylaid by anything that might waylaid us if we didn't have the right things in place.
In one sense, Paul doesn't care about process, but he knows that without it, all the things he does care about are not achievable. And so he makes sure that they're in place. What are we talking about in the series?
[27:25] We're talking about being generous. Yes, and in one sense, this might feel like a slight diversion, but Paul thought it was really important to stick right in the middle. But if you want to be generous, you need good process. We need good process in the church, you need good process in your life.

It's quite difficult to give your money if you don't know how much you have, for example. It's quite difficult to give your time if you're sort of running around all over the place.
the more we're able to apply some kind of structure, actually, the easier we find it to be generous. Whatever we're talking about, whatever way we're giving, whatever way friendship in the gospel is important to us, what we need to remember and what I'm going to keep saying through this series is that to be in Christ is to be in the church.
To have union with Jesus, friendship with Jesus, implies union with your local church and friendship with your local church. Where we all use our gifts, where church is a team sport, where administrators come alongside people with crazy plans and say, no, you can't do that, but help us do something that we can do.
where we all work together in order to achieve the end that God has given us on the earth to reach the day when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord covers the earth like the waters cover the sea.
[29:01] To make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that he commanded us. That's our mission. It's the mission of all churches. We get there through friendship. We get there through good process.

We get there through a generosity of spirit. But we will get there. Okay. The band are going to come now and we are going to lift our voices up again in worship.
Because all this detail only matters because Jesus has come to rescue us from our sin and is rightly king of the world. all this detail only matters because the church is the hope of the world.
All this detail only matters because Jesus loves the church and wants her to flourish until the day that he marries her in the age to come. as if you can

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