

## 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Although our text for today are the words of the Apostle Paul in Second Corinthians, we begin with the story of Jairus. His little daughter had died. There was great sorrow in the home...much weeping and mourning. But Jesus brought joy to that home by raising the little girl back to life. The next time Jairus went to church, how much money do you suppose he put into the offering plate? Less than he had before? Nothing at all? Do you suppose he and his wife reasoned together: "Well, we had a lot of expenses this week. We had to pay all of those professional mourners to come out to the house when our daughter died. We served a lot of food that day. We really don't have much left for the Lord..." You know that's not how it happened. Jairus did not look at his expense account. He did not look at how bad or how good the economy was. He looked at his little daughter, and rejoicing to have her back alive, he gladly, and likely from that day onward, gave his money generously to the Lord.

Now Jairus did not live in Macedonia, but St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, says that this is how they gave--generously, cheerfully, beyond what they were able to give. Not the Corinthians...the Macedonians. Christians like the jailer at Philippi who nearly committed suicide, but Paul and Silas stopped him and gave Jesus to him, and he and his family were brought to faith in Christ. Like Lydia who welcomed Paul into her home. Like Jason who was dragged out of his home because he confessed Jesus. The Macedonian Christians, who suffered much both physically and financially, were much better givers than anyone else around. Not because they were wealthy. Generous giving has nothing to do with how much you have. They gave generously because they loved the Lord Jesus.

How much do we love the Lord Jesus here in Augusta? More than the St. Louis Cardinals? More than our big screen TV's? More than our fancy cars, and nice clothes, and comfortable homes? Do we love Him more than all the rich food we feed our bodies with? Or does Jesus take second place behind all of these? Do we give to the Lord first, as the Macedonians did, or do we put ourselves first and give Jesus the leftovers, if there are any?

That's how the Corinthians gave. They were Christians. They had love for the Lord. They were baptized into Christ. They worshiped Him and received His Sacrament. But they were not the best givers. They had money. They had a reason to give--Christ had died for them. But their faith did not run very deep. Their faith took a back seat when the offering plates were passed around.

Which church do we here in Augusta resemble more--the Christians in Macedonia, or the Christians in Corinth? Do we, like the Corinthians, hold back on our giving because we do not trust the Lord to provide for us, or do we, like the Macedonians, give generously believing God will take care of our needs? Do we, like the Corinthians, hold back on our giving because we're angry at the church or at somebody here, or do we, like the Macedonians, give generously because we forgive as God has forgiven us? Do we, like the Corinthians, hold back on our giving because we're paying for our lifestyle first, or do we, like the Macedonians, give generously because Jesus comes first in our life, and heart, and home?

A wealthy man was down by the water front waiting for the departure of an ocean liner. He was joined by a friend who said to him, "You seem to be pleased about something." "Yes, I am," the wealthy man replied, "I do feel very good today. You see that vessel at anchor out there? Well, I have a million dollars worth of medical equipment on it. It's heading for a hospital in India, and I just came down to see the ship off safely." "Well that's very interesting and I am glad you made that gift," said the friend, "But you know I, too, have a gift on that ship. My only daughter is on that vessel. She is going to India to give her life as a medical missionary for the Lord."

There was nothing wrong with the wealthy man's gift if he gave it cheerfully from his heart. But the other man truly gave of himself. And that is, says St. Paul, how God gives to us. God gave Himself first to us. He gave up His only Son. Jesus, though He was rich, became poor for our sake. He became as nothing, taking the role of a servant, and He died our death on the cross. He did not first count the cost. He did not first make certain that we would fully appreciate His gift. He made no demands. There were no strings attached to His gift. Jesus simply gave Himself for you. He held nothing back. They took from Him even the last article of clothing. They whipped Him and stuck thorns into Him and pounded nails into His flesh, and He gave up His life's blood for you. Though the wrath and punishment of God fell upon Him because of the sins you and I have done, Jesus did not hesitate; He gave Himself up to endure that misery. Though He suffered the agony of hell for every sinner, He allowed Satan to torment Him. Why did God do this? Because of His love for you...nothing else. That is why the Christians in Macedonia gave so generously to the Lord. His love for them caused them to love Him in return.

We do love Jesus here in Augusta, don't we? We surely are not upset with Him for dying for us? We do believe His promise, do we not, that in Christ forgiveness, life, and salvation are ours free of charge? Are we not grateful, as Jairus was, because we also believe in the resurrection; we believe that in heaven we will be together with our loved ones who died in Christ? Does anyone of us have a good reason to give like the Corinthians and not like the Macedonians? Does anyone of us have a good reason to have little love for the Lord and to show it by giving Him only leftovers?

Now this may surprise you, but it is the truth, for St. Paul declares it. If you are feeling guilty today because of what you are hearing, do not give more out of a sense of guilt. Keep your money. God does not want a guilty giver...He wants a cheerful giver. Jesus did not suffer and die for you out of a sense of guilt. He did so cheerfully, joyfully, because His grace is rich toward you. And for us now, it's a privilege to give back to Him. Giving is not our duty or obligation. As Paul says, it is our privilege.

Friend, your giving, or lack of it, does not change this one truth: God loves you; Christ died for you; you are forgiven; heaven is yours in Christ Jesus. You cannot buy these gifts with what you give. What you give is simply your joy, your response, your love back to the Lord. In heaven we will see, one day, Christians there from Macedonia, and Christians there from Corinth. It's not how much they gave that got them there--it's all because of Jesus.

And He always, for us, is the reason why we give, is it not, from our heart, cheerfully, generously, and counting it a privilege? And so, go in peace. God does not look at what you give to Him. He looks at what He gave for you. He looks at Jesus. And that's why you are forgiven Christians. And that's why we love to give back to Him. Amen.