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WINFIELD BIBLE CAMP - 2003

OUR FAITH: CHALLENGES AND CONSOLATIONS

THE CHALLENGE OF CORINTHIANS

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Study #6: God loves a cheerful giver

Reading: 2 Corinthians 8

..... It seems nonetheless that we've come a long way, but we've not by any means covered everything in Corinthians, and I felt it would be wrong for us to leave this week, without at least sneaking into 2 Corinthians, so we're going to do that this morning, just with this particular subject we're going to look at, which is 'God loves a cheerful giver'.

What we really need to do is to go back a little bit and think about how it was that the apostle first went to Corinth and think about the difficulties of the missionary travel which he undertook, and all of those things where, although he was an apostle to the Gentiles, in fact, perhaps because he was an apostle to the Gentiles, then the Jews were not always happy with the things that he had to say. That little phrase 'the Jews in those quarters', crops up occasionally in the Acts of the apostles and the Jews in those quarters are never very happy with the things that the apostle is doing. They're either plotting to stone him, or actually stoning him; he's circumcising Timothy because of the Jews in those quarters; he's always conscious of how the Jews will respond to the message that he's bringing; it's really quite a difficulty for him at each stage.

Though the missionary preaching starts in Antioch (this is Acts 13), it received an enormous boost by the decision taken by the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, where some brethren in Jerusalem challenged the work that the apostle had been doing in baptizing Gentiles and not demanding that they should follow all the precepts and commands of the Law of Moses. Freed from those things, and only now having to expect of Gentile converts, these necessary things that showed that they had forsaken their paganism, then the preaching went on apace and the gospel now begins to spread like throwing a petal into a pond, the ripples are spreading forth. Or perhaps, a better analogy particularly this week, as a spreading flame going all the way across the Roman empire as the gospel now spreads from country to country and city to city.

But it didn't mean that the criticism that had been raised by the Jews, suddenly evaporated like snow before the sun, that did not happen! The Jews still criticized him and they dogged his steps wherever he went and you never quite knew when some criticism would pop up and make it difficult for the apostle. He was constantly having to

alter his travel plans as a result of this criticism that arose, and he reaches Corinth on the first occasion, purely because of the persistence of the Jews, who hounded him all the way down the peninsula of Greece until finally he reaches Corinth. So it's actually the persecution by the Jews which first brings the gospel to Corinth. Because of that, some of the problems that the apostle has to face in Corinth arise because of this dogged persistence of the Jews and certainly by the time we turn to 2 Corinthians, it seems that the real hard core of problem makers and trouble makers in Corinth are quite probably a small group of brethren, who have come even perhaps from Jerusalem, but who are certainly Jewish, and were very unhappy with the apostles' teaching, and they wished to denigrate him at every possible turn. They say, 'he's really not an apostle; to be an apostle you had to be someone who witnessed the Lord Jesus Christ'. Remember those qualifications for replacing Judas in Acts 1? 'One who companied with us from the beginning and were able to be a witness to these things', so the apostle Paul cannot possibly fulfilled those qualifications, they said. How much more important they were, because they had probably come from Jerusalem, and as far as the ecclesial world was concerned that must be the centre of the ecclesial world. So Jews from Jerusalem, listen to us! that's what they were saying!

Yet as a result of that Jerusalem conference, there was a command that was given to Paul and the other travellers, the other missionary travellers. Just turn to Galatians 2, the apostle speaks of going up to Jerusalem and talking with the apostles there privately, verse 2, 'I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain'. I wanted to be sure that what I was doing was the right thing, the apostle Paul says, so I went and spoke to the leading brethren in Jerusalem and explained exactly what I'd been doing; I wanted their commendation for the work. But what happened when I got there? Well, it was necessary to talk about the gospel going to Gentiles, and speaking about Peter, verse 9, 'When James, Peter and John who were reputed to be pillars, when they perceived the grace of God that was given me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcision (the Jews). Only they would that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was forward to do'. The NIV in verse 10 says, 'if only they would that we should **continue to remember the poor**'; it does seem to capture the sense of the Greek. This is something that has to continue, it wasn't that they should just remember them, do it once and then they'd done their job, they should continue to remember the poor! This was something that was laid on the apostle's shoulders by the apostles in Jerusalem; something he should continue to do wherever he went. It was as important as preaching the gospel! We mentioned in an earlier class, the two twin pillars on which an ecclesia is built and the tasks it has to undertake: care for those who are members of the ecclesia and being an lampstand of truth to those that are without, looking after those who are within, preaching to those who are outside. Both those parts devolve upon each of us as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be that we feel that we're particularly good in looking after our brethren and sisters, and that maybe true, but we're not a complete person until we've also preached. It doesn't necessarily mean

we've got to go overseas, but we have got to be able to tell other people about the hope which drives us! If we feel we're good at preaching, that doesn't mean that we can neglect the care of our brethren and sisters. Those two things have got to go very much, hand in hand, and we can't just rely on someone else doing the task that we don't like to do, quite so much. It is true that we are all these different parts in the ecclesial body, but nonetheless, a command has come to each of us, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; **to love each other as He hath loved us, and to spread forth the truth of the gospel whenever we are able to!** and the specific command is now given to the apostles.

Just like to go into Acts 11 and remembering that the missionary work started in Antioch where Paul and Barnabas were, together with others, and perhaps just as you are turning to Acts 11 perhaps you could stop in at chapter 13 verse 1, 'there were in the ecclesia at Antioch certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen, which had been brought up by Herod the tetrarch, and Saul'. It was this group of people and it was a powerhouse, the ecclesia at Antioch, as this group of people now start to pray together and wonder what they should be undertaking as an ecclesia now. They had been so blessed by God, how could they share that blessing with others? and as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them'.

So let's just look at that verse in Acts 11 shall we? What was the response in Antioch to this message that Paul has received from the leading brethren in Jerusalem that 'they should remember the poor'? Verse 27, 'In those days came prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch, And there stood up one of them named Agabus and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great dearth, a great famine throughout all the world, throughout the whole empire, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt at Judea, and they sent it by the elders, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul'. So the brethren in Antioch were already prepared to help where ever that help was needed and Paul didn't really need to be told by the brethren of repute in Jerusalem, to remember the poor when they went travelling undertaking their missionary work. It was something that already had been started in Antioch.

Then by the time we come to Acts 24, when the apostle is standing before Felix, then he tells Felix as part of his defence, for his apostolic activity, verse 17, 'After many years, I came to bring alms to my nation and offerings; whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me'. So it's actually **the bringing of help into Jerusalem** to help the poor brethren and sisters there, which brings about Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, and finally his appeal to Caesar, the means by which he is going to reach Rome, the centre of this vast empire, which is to learn the gospel message.

As he travelled round for those many years, he also enjoined each new ecclesia that

they

should undertake this same help for the poor and needy which the apostles had asked him to do. He believed that it would help to break down any barriers between Jewish and Gentile because each would be seeking to help the other, and how important that would be! As we saw from that passage in Acts 11, there was deep poverty and the deep poverty was particularly in Judea and it came from various sources. We just need to take a note of them all:

#1. The first was that mentioned in Acts 11 (the verses you've just seen) in the days of Claudius Caesar about AD. 45 there was **a famine throughout the empire**. That came and made life very difficult, that's point #1 which brought poverty, but that was across the empire and not just in Judea.

#2. Acts 2 verse 47, and others like it, tell us of **the vastly increasing numbers in the Judean ecclesia**, the ecclesia was growing rapidly. It starts with a small handful, what was it? 120 brethren who are mentioned in Acts 1, then as a result of preaching on the day of Pentecost 3,000 are baptized, and quite soon even Luke runs out of figures and just says 'great multitudes'. There were so many, they could hardly keep up with the count and so there is rapidly increasing numbers which brings a pressure of care, a burden of care upon the ecclesia and how they're going to look after them.

#3. We learn from 1 Corinthians 1 that there was **a lack of wealthy converts** (not many mighty, not many noble are called). So generally speaking, the gospel appeals to those who are not rich in this world's goods; you can't make that a rule, of course, but it is just generally speaking, the case.

#4. Then as **persecution arises**, particularly after the preaching of Stephen in which Saul of Tarsus becomes involved, then we find **the goods of believers are confiscated**, they're thrown into prison, and this answer further fractures the ecclesia particularly in Judea and brethren and sisters begin to be spread abroad. It was one of the means providentially by which the gospel was being pushed out beyond Judea, because the apostle's task to preach in the name of the Lord Jesus, beginning in Jerusalem, and to Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth, and persecution was going to be one of the driving forces which would take the message starting in Jerusalem, so that finally it would reach Rome.

#5. But any Jew who accepted that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, would soon be **expelled from the synagogue**. We know that excommunication happened; there was the case, you may recall, of the man who was born blind in the gospels, and they thrust him out of the synagogue because he believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah who was sent, 'herein is a marvellous thing, he said, 'He's opened my eyes and you ask where He's come from? since the world began it's not been heard that one who was born blind has been able to see!'. From that point onwards, believers in the gospel would no longer have the care that the synagogue would provide; no social welfare systems in those days other than that which was provided through the

synagogue, and if you were not a member of the synagogue, then that social care would not be available to you.

#6. But there was also this factor as we learn from the early chapters of Acts and that is, the people that accepted the truth of the gospel decided that they would have **all things common, they sold their goods and pooled them**. Now that may have sounded to be a very good idea, but the problem with a pool from which people keep drawing water is, that unless there is something feeding that pool, after a period of time it will become empty, and that's what happened. Gradually, the common resources were diminished and the combination of all those factors brought particular and deep and corrosive poverty to the brethren and sisters in Judea; a poverty which was scarcely relieved. 'They would that we should remember the poor, which thing we were forward to do', the apostle said. The apostle understood this, he'd been in Jerusalem, he had been a contributory factor because he had persecuted and confiscated goods; it was he who was involved in the start of the persecution that arose about Stephen. So having all things common and giving up their employment was just the last straw that broke the camel's back!

What was required was a response to this call, and the response had to be a response of **grace**. Now 'grace' is a widely misunderstood term, we tend to use it perhaps rather too glibly (I hope you don't think I'm being too critical in saying that!) but we use the word perhaps because we are affected by its use around us, particularly by other people who came to be religious, who claim to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and use this word 'grace'. We need to be absolutely certain about what it means and to understand the terminology because it is important. The word '**grace**' in the New Testament is this Greek word 'charis'

(5485) from which 'charismatic' comes interestingly enough, and there are three basic meanings; we shouldn't jump to one of them without understanding where it all starts. **Grace** specifically is this, 1. **God's gift** - the word means 'gift'; grace is God's gift to mankind of something which man does not deserve at all. It describes God's favour to undeserving man, the forgiveness of sins which is provided through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the primary meaning of grace. Now the effects of that might be that we receive some sort of warm glow, we are grateful for what we have received, but the warm glow is not grace, that is not its primary meaning. The primary meaning is that it is describing the work of God! However, there is a second meaning and that second meaning involves us; 2. although we are to feel that warmth of receiving the forgiveness of sins which results from God's gift in the Lord Jesus Christ, what grace is for us is **our response, not just our feeling, our response**. It's our **thankfulness** which is directed primarily to God and to the Lord Jesus, because it is they who have given us this undeserved gift. So when we talk about the grace of God, then it's that favour which He bestows upon us in offering to forgive us our sins when we confess them before Him; and **our grace is to thank Him for that!** 3. But then there is a third step, we've already used the analogy of the spreading fire or the pebble in the pond, well, grace is like that! God sends forth His gift, and the effect is the response of men and women to Him in thankfulness and praise, and also **to show it to their fellow man**. So we have to show the same godly generosity towards others. 'While we were

yet sinners, Christ died for us; God gave His gift of grace to us before ever we realized our own need for it and so our generosity towards others must be (not because people ask us to do it) but because we see that need before even the people who have the need, realize that it exists. Also, we do it without thought of reward!

That was what the apostles were trying to impress, as they went around preaching; it's what the apostle Paul was trying to impress upon the brethren and sisters in Corinth, that they were to show this same godly generosity to others, because of what they received from God. So if you'd just like to turn to 1 Corinthians 15, right at the end of the chapter, these lovely words in verse 58, 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, **always abounding in the work of the Lord**, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'; and how often do we read that and close the book? We've read the resurrection chapter, we finish with that verse and we build up to a crescendo and we stop. Now when the apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he did not write in chapters, he didn't even write in verses. As you know, chapters and verses were added centuries later. So when the Corinthians received this letter they were able to read verse 58, 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. **Now concerning the collection**' do you see the point? What sort of labour were they going to do? Concerning the collection you asked about, it is not an add-on extra, it's not just something that's slipped in if you think about it and it doesn't matter if you miss it out; it's actually part of your **abounding labour in the Lord**, and not for the first time in this subject, and certainly not for the last, the apostle is going to use a word which is a superlative. Whenever he speaks about the collection for the poor saints, he's always talking **magnanimously**, he uses the biggest words he possible can! He's always using superlative words, **abound in this work**, he's saying.

He needed to say that because of the deep poverty of their brethren and sisters. Again, it's a superlative word but it's going in the other direction, isn't it? It's not just that they were finding things a little bit difficult, it was **deep poverty**, grinding poverty that they were experiencing; in order to match that, the Corinthians needed to abound and to excel, and that's what the apostle is trying to teach them. They ask Paul about the collection for the saints, so he was going to tell them, and here is his advice and it's advice which stands good even today:

1. Collect on the first day of the week. 'As I have given order to the ecclesia of Galatians even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him'. Each person can contribute according to his or her personal means, and the reason for it? Well, he didn't want there to be any gatherings when he came. I don't want you suddenly scrabbling round at the last minute, seeing if you can find out the loose change and putting that in. Actually he is teaching us about how we should contribute to collections. It isn't a case of, 'oh, the bag's coming round, I better just check what I've got; what can I put in?' It's not what is left over, we ought to think beforehand, we know there's going to be a collection and we ought to be prepared. It's not just that we should be prepared before we go to the

meeting where the collection is going to be held, it's that in our lives we should work out what we feel we can contribute to the work of the truth, and ask ourselves where does it come in my list of priorities? I have my household expenses, and I need to run my car, and I need to feed myself, and what about my clothing? and what about things in connection with my employment? and then ecclesial contributions. Well, where do we put it in the list? Is it what's left at the bottom? or do we think we ought to be pushing it farther up the list? or ought it to be higher? Which is the most important thing in our life? and we'll perhaps show it by the extent to which we are to help and that's what the apostle is trying to teach brethren and sisters in Corinth.

There are certain guiding principles about this which become particularly important. Turn to 2 Corinthians 8 because although the subject is introduced there as you'll see, in 1 Corinthians 16, there are then two chapters here, chapters 8 and 9 in 2 Corinthians which particularly deal with this matter. Here is the first principle about contributing to the work of the truth, and remember this is not just, in fact, it's hardly talking about money. Oh, it sounds as if it's talking about money but what it's talking about, it's talking about you and it's talking about me, it's talking about our life, it's talking about all the resources that we have available. So it's talking about our talents, it's talking about our abilities, it's talking about our time, and all of those things, before ever it is talking about our money. So don't think I'm trying to squeeze the last dollar out of you! that's not the purpose of this talk. Nor was it with the apostle. What he was seeking however, was to ensure the full and complete commitment of the brethren and sisters.

So here's the first principle that applies, 2 Corinthians 8 verse 12, 'If there be first a **willing mind** (and of course, that has to be there, doesn't it?) 'it's accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he hath not'; every man has to give as he is able! You might just want to look at that cross reference that's marked there, Deuteronomy 16 verses 16 and 17, because the phrase in 2 Corinthians 8 verse 12, is a quotation out of Deuteronomy 16 and verse 16 says, 'Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which He shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: (they shall not come with just the loose change in their pockets) 'Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which He hath given thee'. Every man shall give as he is able, according as a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. JB Philips translates that, 'no one is asked to give what he's not got', it comes across quite forcibly doesn't it? We can't give what we haven't got , but what we have got we should be giving! that's the message, those things that we have we should be giving.

The second principle that comes out from 2 Corinthians 8, is here in verse 14, '**But by an equality**, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality'. That was the most important thing, so that you wouldn't have grinding poverty in Judea and lavish possessions and great wealth somewhere else in the empire, but that the Judea situation would be eased as a result of the greater resources that might appear

somewhere else. That there may be equality, then this may not seem to be a very important principle, this last one that I've put there, but it is an important principle and we need to understand it. You see, when we commit ourselves to the work, we are committing ourselves for the benefit of all, and it isn't necessarily what we choose to do that becomes important, but it's what the **need is** that is important. So I might decide that some little town on the prairies really needs attention, and I go there, and I spend all my time and all my resources and all my effort to try and help that little town in the prairies, where you, in fact, who are here in Canada have discovered, that there's a greater need somewhere else; there is a response somewhere, there are brethren and sisters somewhere that need help, who need support and those resources that I'm ploughing needlessly and fruitlessly apparently into this little town in the prairies, will be much better directed somewhere else. We are part of a brotherhood, we are not individuals each deciding to do our own thing. So when this great collection was made, the apostle didn't say, 'now each of you go and take this collection one at a time, all go up to Jerusalem and all take it, all do your bit!' He said, No, bring it to a central point and brethren will be authorized now to undertake on your behalf because we can do more together than we can do apart, so let's now gather together; and there were brethren chosen by the ecclesia to travel with this gift as verse 19 tells us. We are part of a great team, not individual mavericks each deciding to do our own thing.

That matter of there being an equality, well here in verse 15 it says that there is an Old Testament example of this, 'As it is written, He that gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack', it's a quotation out of Exodus 16 this time, not Deuteronomy 16, and it's speaking of the occasion of the manna; the wonderful example of the manna, and if ever there was an example of God's grace and undeserved gift, well, here it was in the manna. They grumbled and so He gave them! and what do you do when your children grumble? The LORD God did not feed the children with manna to stop them grumbling, he fed them with manna to teach them about **His majesty, His power**, that He's the Provider of every good gift; He was trying to lift them to understand that, not just to stop them murmuring! The wonderful thing about the manna if you would just like to go to Exodus 16, just look at these phrases. It's very interesting whenever you look at any chapter in scripture, by the way, just to notice when there is a repetition of words, ideas, phrases or language, because quite often the LORD God works in that way, just to impress upon us a particular truth; and the little phrase here in Exodus 16 which starts to leap off the page are these two words '**every man**'. Just notice how often they're used, here in verse 16, 'This is the thing that the LORD has commanded, gather of it **every man** according to his eating'. It's there again in verse 18, right at the end of the verse, 'they gathered **every man** according to his eating; it's there again in verse 21, 'they gathered it every morning, **every man** according to his eating'. That's the first thing, each person whoever he or she may have been in ancient Israel, had enough to satisfy their needs. Every man! according to his eating!

But then there's another little phrase as well, it's also there in verse 16, it's not only every man according to his eating, an omer for every man according to the number of



your persons, 'take ye every man according to the number of your persons'. Then it adds another one, 'every man for them which are in his tents'. Every man according to his eating, every man according to the number of your persons, every man for them which are in your tents; what the apostle is doing with this example is saying, 'just realize that what happened in the wilderness in Israel and because it occurred there, so you are to do the same. Now, every man according to his eating, every man according to his number, every man according to his tent, and he now speaks to the ecclesia in Corinth.

Just go to 2 Corinthians 9 because here is the Corinthian tent and he wants to tell them about a neighbouring tent which is the Macedonian tent; and the Macedonian tent had provided a challenge to the Corinthian tent (a bit like a chariot race, this), let's see who it is that's going to come up with the goods, between Macedonia and Corinth? So 2 Corinthians 9 verse 1, 'As touching ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you. I know the forwardness of your mind, I know all about this'. He said, 'I've boasted about you to those in Macedonia, and told them that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal that I've reported to them, has provoked very many'. So he's told the Macedonians, he's told Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, what the Corinthians are doing; the Corinthians have been out gathering, they told me, the apostle says, you told me that. You told me a year ago that you've been gathering these things; you're waiting for me to come because brethren are going to be appointed now to undertake this work that you're going to finance.

But he does say there's a problem with the ecclesia in Macedonia! Look at verse 2 of chapter 8, 'In a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality'. Well, that's strange, isn't it? surely it was the Macedonian ecclesia that needed help, if they were in deep poverty, and they were, because the persecutions took place in Macedonia and the Romans discovered vast mineral resources in that area. In effect, they raped the country, so that the Macedonians had got no help of their own, they were in **deep poverty**. But despite those circumstances, they were embarrassingly generous (again, notice the words that the apostle uses) 'it was a **great trial of affliction**, their **joy was abundant**, their **poverty was deep** but they **abounded**, their **liberality was rich**; can you see the way he uses words? What he's trying to do is to express extremes, their poverty was deep but their generosity was great! So as we saw in chapter 9 verse 2, Paul had told the Macedonians and the reason they were responding like this, despite their poverty, was because they knew what the Corinthians were doing. The Corinthians has been ready a year ago and they wanted to match the Corinthian contribution!

In chapter 9 verses 3 to 5, when Paul got to Corinth, would the Corinthians have actually done what they promised to do? Had they put their money where their mouth was? He couldn't be sure whether they had, he didn't know when he reached Corinth whether they would have actually done that or not! So what he does is, he sends an advance party! (always wise isn't it? just to check up beforehand), so in Acts 19 he explains that he sends Timothy and Erastus to go ahead of him; the apostle is going to

leave Ephesus, go through Macedonia, come down into Achaia, into Corinth, and he sends ahead of him, Timothy and Erastus. Timothy and Erastus are collecting the Macedonia contribution and then going to go on to Corinth; and just in case that's going to take some time, and their arrival in Corinth may possibly be delayed, the apostle decides he's going to send some others as well, and this is 2 Corinthians 8. He sends 3 other brethren directly to Corinth; verse 16 of 2 Corinthians 8, 'Thanks be to God who put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. Of his own accord, we're told, he went to you, verse 17, and 'we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the ecclesia'. Now I haven't got time to go into it now, but I believe that brother is Luke whose praise is in the gospel, and I also believe that he was Titus' natural brother, not just his brother in the faith. But that's a longer discussion and you need to look into it. (If I can put in a little advertising plug, if you haven't yet bought a CD which has got all the back copies of the magazine on it, then try and get hold of one; and if you do get hold of one, type in the two words 'Luke' and 'Titus' and you'll find an article that brother John Carter wrote, 'Luke and Titus were they brothers?' which appeared in the Christadelphian about 1962, but don't quote me on the date), but that will provide all the evidence about the relationship between Luke and Titus, it's an excellent article.

Then there was a 3<sup>rd</sup> brother; 2 Corinthians 8 verse 22, 'We've sent with them our brother whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent upon the great confidence which I have in you', and these three brethren we're told, at the end of verse 23, 'If anyone inquire of them, they are messengers (angels) of the ecclesia and of the glory of Christ'. I think (and that's a longer proof) that possibly that 3<sup>rd</sup> brother was Tychicus (we'll come to that briefly in a moment). But that verse 23 says they were messengers to help convey the collection, this great collection to Jerusalem.

Just go to the Acts of the apostles, if you will, and chapter 20, because here is Paul setting out. If you just look back to chapter 19 verse 22, here is Timothy and Erastus going ahead of the apostle to Macedonia, while he stays in Asia for a season. Then in Acts 20, after the uproar in Ephesus, Paul departs at the end of verse 1, to go into Macedonia, and when he'd departed and had given them much exhortation, he comes into Greece where he stays for 3 months. Notice when the Jews laid wait for him as he was about to sail into Syria, so just as the persecution of Jews started all this preaching activity, so persecution of Jews is going to take this great contribution back to Jerusalem. He determines to return through Macedonia and verse 4 tells us who were in the company who went with him. Now the information in yellow on this slide is the information which comes straight out Acts 20; the information in white is going to be information that's just conjecture, but I think conjecture with good support. So we're told first of all, that there was someone who accompanied him into Asia from

Berea	Sopater
Thessalonica	Aristarchus & Secundus
Derbe	Gaius

Lystra ? (w) Timothy (his home town was Lystra)

and what we're discovering is that these brethren were not just from those places, they were **representatives of those ecclesias**. These are the ones that have been entrusted with the collections of those various ecclesias, and they are now going to transport them back as part of the great collection to Jerusalem. You're not going to know how much was contributed by Berea, the Bereans would know that, and Sopater would have the account. You won't know how much Thessalonica had contributed but Aristarchus and Secundus would know, and they were there to witness to the fact, that this had come from Thessalonica and so on. So Timothy was probably, possibility as the representative of Lystra.

There were then some from Asia who were there:

Ephesus	Tychicus & Trophimus
Philippi (w)	Luke (w)
Corinth (w)	Titus (w)

Who were they from Asia? Well, there was Tychicus and Trophimus, well, there were a number of ecclesias in Asia, there was Ephesus, there was Colosse, there was Laodicea at least those ecclesias in Asia; so 2 brethren go to take the contribution from there. The apostle has travelled through Macedonia and there is no mention in this list of Philippi just as there is no mention in this list of brethren, of Luke and yet we know that he is there. Because in verse 5 we read, 'these going before tarried for **us** at Troas', and whenever you read 'us' or 'we' in the Acts of the apostles, you know that Luke must be present. So Luke is there and it's quite probable that Luke was there as a representative of the ecclesia in Philippi. Corinth isn't mentioned in the list but we know there was a collection at Corinth and who would be the representative from the Corinthian ecclesia? Well, if you just go back to 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 16 (a verse we've already looked at) 'But thanks be to God who put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you?' He accepted the exhortation, 'but being more forward of his own accord, he went unto you!' So I put Titus there, Titus who is never mentioned in the Acts of the apostles, which is another thread in the evidence as to why he may have been Luke's brother, because Luke would not give prominence to a member of his own family, just as he doesn't give prominence to himself. So you can see that we now have a group of brethren all representing their different ecclesias and they're all going to set off with this great collection.

This great collection which is described by the apostle wherever you turn in his writings, by the use of one of 3 words: these three words are always there whenever he's talking about this. He sometimes calls the collection '**charis**' (5485), he sometimes speaks of the collection as '**grace**', this is the response of the ecclesia and individuals to what they have received from the LORD God. So it's sometimes translated as '**gift**' (1431)

and sometimes as '**liberality**' (5485), we've seen that word appearing in different passages. There's another word as well that he uses; he talks about '**koinonia**' (2842) which is translated in our English versions as '**fellowship**', it's the Greek word for 'fellowship, sharing, contribution', this fellowship for the saints, this contribution for the saints. Then there's a third word and we met it at the end of 1 Corinthians 15 (do you remember that great verse right at the end of 1 Corinthians 15? 'Wherefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always '**abounding**' (4052), 'perisseuo' - abound, excel, exceed, 'always abounding in the work of the Lord'. Those three words then, duck in and out of every passage where the apostle is talking about the contribution. You can see how beautifully they all come together; a three-fold chord isn't easily broken is it? and you've got this description here of the work which the ecclesias were to undertake for their poor brethren and sisters in other parts.

Because God loves a cheerful (2431) giver! It's been said that the Greek word 'hilaros', which sounds very much like hilarious, doesn't it? it's where we get the English word 'hilarious' from. 'Give **cheerfully**', don't hold anything back, just like with hilarity you don't hold anything back, so don't hold back in your giving, God loves a cheerful giver; He held back not even His only begotten Son, so we should not hold back in our giving, to give glory to Him.

In 2 Corinthians 9, the apostle now teaches, 'what a man sows, he will also reap'. (We'll just have to dash through this, if you can read that quickly).

Let's move on to the paradox of giving, shall we? Just think about it for a moment, because what the apostle is trying to teach is this: 2 Corinthians 9 verse 11, 'Now therefore, perform the doing of it, for as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance out of that which he has'. What the proverb (Proverbs 11 verses 24,25) says is that, 'the more you give, the more you receive'. Strange, isn't it? that's why it's a paradox! Give and give and give, and the more you receive; it's a little bit like pouring out that oil, do you remember? in the time of the Old Testament prophet, and they kept on bringing and filling and filling and as it was being poured out, so it was replenished. As Jesus said, 'if you give and hold not back, then your reward will be great in heaven'. It was also going to be a **service**, 2 Corinthians 9 verse 12, 'For the administration of this **service** (3009), not only supplies the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God', he actually uses a word which means '**a liturgy**', it's part of worship; and the collection is part of 'worship'. The things that we do with our time is part of worship, our contribution whatever it will be is part of our worship.

But in particular, what the apostle wanted to happen as a result of this, would be **that it would unite Jew and Gentile**. We saw that verse in Acts 23, there he is in Corinth about to gather together the great collection and the Jews start once again, to oppose themselves. The apostle has to leave quickly in order to go to Jerusalem. Let's just look at this passage in Romans 15 verse 25, here's what he has to say about the brethren and sisters in Corinth; 'But now I go to Jerusalem, to minister unto the saints, and the ministry will be to take this great collection with him. For it has pleased them of

Macedonia (that's Philippi) and those of Achaia (that's Corinth) to make a certain contribution (that's the word 'fellowship' - koinonia) for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily and their debtors they are; for if the Gentiles had been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty (they owe it to them) is also to minister to them in carnal things'. Again, he uses that word 'minister' you'll see, 'When then I have performed this, and have sealed to them this **fruit** (it's the fruit of their labours which they are now sharing with their brethren and sisters) 'when I have done this, I will come by you into Spain, and I'm sure that when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ'. The Gentiles have received the spiritual things which started with Jews, so now the Jews should give their spiritual things back to the Gentiles.

Just in conclusion, go back to 2 Corinthians 9, because what drove all of this, of course, was the fact that God had given in the first place! That's why the apostle was encouraging the Corinthian brethren and sisters to give. So right at the end of 2 Corinthians 9, this is what he says, 'Thanks (and that's 'charis' as well, we give thanks!) Thanks be to God for **His unspeakable gift**'. You see, it's the same expansive and exuberant language that the apostle has used throughout, isn't it? God's gift is unspeakable (411), you just cannot fathom it, it's so great! 'Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift', and that's why God loves cheerful givers. God expects us to abound towards Him and towards our brethren and sisters as He has abounded toward us.

Now the message for us this week, is that we have all received, haven't we? that's what the bible school is about. We have all received abundantly! Once again it's impossible to use sufficiently expansive words to describe what we've received; and the message the apostle is seeking to leave with us, just as he was with the brethren and sisters in Corinth, is that we must now give as freely as we have received, as abundantly as we have received and as generously as we have received and it will be part of our fellowship. That wonderful fellowship in which we rejoice, because we share it with brethren and sisters throughout this wonderful world, a world which will finally redound to the greatest gift of all; when finally sin and death are removed and the glory of God will fill this earth, as the waters fill the seas. May God be with us all!