

**Sunday 17 August 2025, Trinity 9 Matins**

**2 Corinthians 8.1-9**

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The Bible doesn't usually provide a single coherent narrative on any given subject. Instead, there are a multiplicity of varying narratives that have to be woven together or synthesised. To find answers to our questions we often have to seek partial truths in several places and build them into a single greater truth. This is the great exercise we call doing Christian theology: discovering the greater truth revealed to us in the form of interlocking lesser truths. Often this exercise is difficult, especially when it comes to the more finely nuanced aspects of doctrine: How *exactly* does Jesus' death save us from sin? What does 'righteousness' mean in the writing of St Paul?

Yet sometimes the diverse truths presented in scripture are so deeply in agreement that the greater truth stands out like a searchlight in the midnight darkness. The truth about money is one of these. The Bible, both in places and as a whole, has very little good to say about money, and especially about having or wanting too much of it.

*He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? (Ecclesiastes 5.10-11)*

*Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty. (Proverbs 22.16)*

*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6.24)*

*Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. (Matthew 19.23-24)*

*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6.10)*

Throughout scripture, money is seen as something that corrupts, destroys, eats away at, and leaves its possessors dissatisfied. Having a lot of it is burdensome and wanting more of it is foolish. This is not to say that money is without its uses or that the rich are inevitably taken and snared by their own 'good' fortune. But we are warned that acquisition and accumulation are at least as great a danger to our souls as the sins of pride, lust, or murderous anger. It's not for nothing that one of the so-called Seven Deadly Sins is Avaritia: Greed.

In our second lesson, St Paul introduces what we might describe as an antidote to the poison of wealth. And this antidote is very simple: give it away. It's not unlike Jesus' own words to the rich young man, *Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.* The problem of too much wealth is easily got 'round by ensuring that you never have too much of it to begin with. When the bank account starts to feel rather full, empty it a little and you'll feel better. The problems and fears that having too much money brings aren't a problem if you don't have too much.

Forgive me for hammering away at this point, but I think it's worth saying that often the simplest solutions are the best. And the giving away of money is a solution that brings with it great blessing. At least that's what St Paul claims. *We do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.* What's going on in the background of this passage is that the Christians in Jerusalem were having a hard time. Many of them were poor when they came to Christ. Others had lost what they had due to war, famine, and persecution. The Church in Jerusalem was suffering.

The Church in other places was suffering too: in Macedonia and Achaia, in fact. Yet these are the two Christian communities singled out for praise by St Paul in our lesson and in Romans 15 which is the second place in his writings in which he references this gift: *But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.* The Christians who had little and were struggling in their own ways got together and sent money to the Church in Jerusalem. It's very laudable.

But let me magnify to the laudability of this gift by noting that the *Gentile* churches in Macedonia and Achaia sent a gift to the *Jewish* believers in Jerusalem. The same Jewish believers whose default position had been to question whether God had in fact sent the Holy Spirit and salvation to those who were of Gentile birth. This wasn't just a collection sent by the poor to the poor. This was a gift from the once-despised to their former enemies. And St Paul calls it *the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.* It is the grace of God that they should send a gift to those who had wondered if they even deserved saving.

So, to circle back around to the question of money: what are we to do with it when we have too much of it? I suggest we could do a lot worse than the poor Christians of Macedonia and Achaia and maybe share more of it with each other. At the very least, those among us who have much- for some of us are poor- but those who have much should embrace the grace of God that is charity and simply give the money away. Give it away in service to your fellow Christians here and in other places where it is needed.

I don't know, and I don't need to know, how much you give to this church or to other churches. But I do know this: having much more money than we need is a constant temptation and a certain source of distress and worry. The danger of serving wealth rather than God is ever-present and the easiest way to be free of that danger is to be free of the source. It was the gift of God that even the poor Churches gave out of love for others. Why would we turn away the gift that is giving in the service of the Church of God? After all, St Paul grounds this giving in the very act that saves each one of us from death and hell: *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.* If that isn't reason to give generously, I don't know what is. Amen.