Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – August 26, 2018

The Apostle Paul’s ***Second*** letter to the *Corinthians*

how the Cross changes everything

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 Proof of Love: Imitating Jesus in giving.

The Background: New topic? Not so fast!

A famine had prompted the apostles and churches to begin collecting money to relieve the poor among the Jewish churches (Acts 11:27-30). Paul and Barnabas had been appointed to collect and return the money to Jerusalem, so Paul sets about doing this in his journeys and in his letters. The Corinthians had known about the collection from Paul’s having been there, and have been reminded (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). But now things were complicated, and Paul finds himself on the defensive, his ministry undermined and his motives questioned. How will this always-delicate issue of money be approached, given a suspicious, or even antagonistic, audience?

Generosity: The Cross calls us to share with others.

Students of Scripture know 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 as “the giving chapters,” where Paul lays out a theology of money and giving. He does that, but if that’s all we see, we miss other key points Paul makes, and also how this section fits into his argument. Paul is defending his apostleship, his mission, and the gospel in this book, so let’s look deeper. While there is teaching about giving, most of the discussion is about accountability, the Corinthians’ and Paul’s, a test case and primer on promise-keeping, integrity, cooperation, and trust. Because the Cross changes everything.

The Narrative: (Reading 2 Corinthians is like hearing one side of a phone conversation. But we don’t really have to guess much, since Paul is both explicit and passionate. That said, we’ll be paraphrasing each section to sort out the argument and the not-so-hidden assumptions the Corinthians were making about Paul and his actions.)

(1) Let me give you an example of a congregation of believers who have NOT received the grace of God in vain, namely, the Macedonians. I say that because out of their afflictions and joy in (spite of) extreme poverty, has flowed an amazing generosity! They gave, according to their means, and then, far beyond, begging us to take even more of their resources to the poor. They give to others because first they had given themselves to God.

(6) Their grace-driven enthusiasm for giving encouraged us to send Titus back to you to complete what he began, namely, to collect your own pledge for the poor. Just as you have excelled in faith, knowledge, and love, now, excel in the grace of giving.

(8) Of course, this is not me commanding you (otherwise it would not be about grace), but rather it is me reminding you that it is what we give to and for others which proves the reality of our profession of faith, just as Jesus’ sacrifice proved his love for us. He impoverished Himself to make us eternally rich!

(10) This looks like a wonderful opportunity for you to complete what you began a year ago, since you’ve been saving up for this! It’s not that you, a more wealthy church, should be disadvantaged, but that the poorest of God’s people can have the basics.

The Challenge: Am I giving sacrificially as Jesus did?

***Memory Verses: Luke 16:10, 11***

Jesus said that heart follows treasure. So where is my heart? Matt. 6:21

Is my giving truly grace giving? Or am I giving out of guilt or Law?

Do I look for ways to bless others, or is my life self-absorbed?

Is my financial house in order, or am I disappearing into debt?

Am I giving begrudgingly or joyfully, as Jesus did?