**2 Corinthians 9:8-11** July 29, 2018

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 *2 Corinthians 9:8God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” 10Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 You know, I kind of like it when there isn’t any school. I never get stuck behind school buses on 31W. No parental permission forms to sign every other morning. No need to wake up drowsy kids at 6:30, reminding them to make their bed before they leave the house with one eye open and the other mostly shut.

 All of that will return in less than two weeks. I hear that I am not the only one sad about the end of summer. Sure, some kids are natural students. It’s like they were born with a mechanical pencil stuck behind their ear. But many students feel otherwise. “Why in the world do we have to know that?” is one of their well-worn refrains. “Why do we have to learn *that*?”

 Take, for instance, punctuation. “Why in the world do we need to learn about commas?” Why? Because it just might save somebody’s life. Think about this sentence. “Let’s eat [comma], Grandpa!” Compare that to the same sentence with no commas: “Let’s eat Grandpa!” Commas save lives!

 With the importance of punctuation now burned in your mind, I would like you to look at today’s sermon theme in your bulletin.

**Blessed, to Be a Blessing**

 That little comma means something. Take out that comma, and what do you have? You have, “Blessed to be a blessing.” It sounds like another version of “He thinks he’s God’s gift to mankind!” I am “Blessed to be a blessing.” It reminds me of that old western, “It’s hard to be humble, when you’re perfect in every way.” Yes, “blessed to be a blessing” I am.

 But put that comma in, and it reads quite differently. “Blessed [comma], to be a blessing.” Suddenly, instead of being the most important person in the room, I am the servant of all! With that little comma in there, it is the point the apostle Paul was making in his Holy Spirit-inspired letter to the Corinthians.

 Here’s what had happened: The Christians in Israel/Palestine had a big problem. Way over in Israel, they were experiencing a famine. I can safely say that except for a couple of you who lived through WWII in Germany, you really don’t know what a famine is. A famine a stalks a nation like a cat sneaking up on unsuspecting birds in the birdbath. Or maybe it is more like a chicken house with a fox let loose. In a famine, everyone knows that some won’t survive the year. The only question is “Who?” There simply is not enough food for all to survive. A good American from the land of plenty says, “Then go buy some food. Grow more food. Do whatever it takes to get food. Don’t just sit around!” But you didn’t listen: *There is not enough food*. Not enough food within the boundaries of the nation—a nation losing weight by the day for nine months from the end of one harvest to the beginning of the next. Oh, maybe some of the rich can liquidate assets and buy what little is on the market at nose-bleed prices. But not most people. For the first week after harvest you eat like normal, then you cut out lunch, then you cut back to one meal a day. Then you go out to the forest gathering edible leaves. The leather-smiths get busy punching extra holes in belts. The coffin makers buy more lumber.

 The Apostle Paul thought, “That’s how it is with our brothers over in Israel. But here in Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, a thousand miles away in Greece, we had a good harvest. Maybe the Christians over here can help the Christians over there.” And so the Christians in Greece took up a special collection. That is what Paul is talking about in our sermon text. He is encouraging the Corinthians to contribute toward the needs of their fellow Christians through a special offering.

 When you are asked to give to a special cause, the first thing we all think silently is—we would never dare to say it out loud because it sounds calloused—the first thing we think is “I can’t afford that!” Paul says, “Yes, you can.” Only he says it way better than that. When they looked at him with question marks saying, “But we have expenses too, you know. We have to eat. Taxes. Junior’s doctor bill. What do you expect us to do?”

**I. Blessed**

 Paul tells them, ***“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”*** God will give you all that you need. It is the promise of Scripture. You don’t need to go to a church where the preacher in the expensive suit promises you the car/home/career of your dreams. Paul says ***“God is able to make all grace about to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need…”*** As Paul appeals to the Corinthians to give, he reminds them of this: God gives what you need. In fact, he gives more than you need! Us too.

 How many of us are trying to lose weight? If you are, God has obviously blessed you with more than enough. How many of us have eaten out since the last pay check? That is a very expensive way to acquire food! How many of us have a cell phone? How many have paid for a movie in the last month? Nearly all, if not all of us have *more* than we need for life. We may not have all that we want, but is that the point? To quote a family-favorite kids’ movie, “So Larry, how much stuff do you need to make you happy?” “I don’t know, Bob. How much stuff is there?”[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Our first roadblock to realizing God’s blessings is our own desire. I say this in all humility, and if someone wants to shoot me down, I won’t stop them, but here is something I have generally found: except for really lazy people, the less people have, the more likely they are to thank God for what they do have and the more likely they are to state that God has indeed given them what they need. In general, over the years, I have heard more words of thanks for God’s blessings from people who have less and fewer “blessings”. The most discontented people typically are people who have enough, often more than enough, but who usually, rather than looking at what they have, are busy looking at what other people have, or what other people tell them they should have.

 Shut off the TV. Close the pop-up adds. Throw the printed advertisements in the recycle basket. Stop listening to people who want to get rich off you, and listen to somebody who actually cares about you, ***“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need…”*** Sit in your living room and count not the things you don’t have, but the things you do. You will realize the truth of what Paul says, that ***“in all things at all times, having all that you need.”*** We do have what we need.

 We have been blessed with the necessities of life: food, clothing, shelter. (But somehow we have been convinced that the necessities of life include a cell phone less than two years old, monthly if not weekly trips to the movie theater, and a car that still has a hint of the new car smell in it.) These aren’t necessities! If you have them, and aren’t financially underwater for them, thank God for the *extra* blessings. Realize that you have been blessed by God with *more* than enough.

 That is not where our blessings end. Think of the talents, abilities, personality that you have. One person leads, the other works. One makes people laugh, another listens carefully. One builds, another plans. One has an eye for detail, another has a knack for friendship. How silly we are when we look at other people and wish that we had their abilities, their talents, their personality. Sure we can improve, but God has richly blessed you with who you are. And remember that when you feel like you fall short of the virtues of others, those same people (if they are honest) look at you and admire something about you. May that be our joy – not wishing we were someone else, but honestly realizing the blessings God gives to each of us.

 Nor is that the end of our blessings. The greatest blessing that you have is a faith in your Savior. If you are here this morning and confessed your sins, and listened to news of forgiveness in Christ Jesus with a believing heart, thank God! Thank God! For the gift of saving faith, which is counted a weak and insubstantial thing by the world, blesses you with eternity. You have certainty that death is a doorway to a better life. Confidence that even the bad things in life serve a greater good. Knowledge that you can stand before God clothed in Christ’s righteousness. How God has blessed us!

**II. Blessed** [comma]**, to Be a Blessing**

 God word tells us this twice in our reading the reason for blessings: ***“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that… you will abound in every good work…”*** In verse 11, ***“You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.”*** If we think our blessings are about us, God has a word for us; it is “fool.” Do remember that rich man Jesus once spoke of? Financially he had such a great year that he was set for life. And God came to him in a dream and said—these are Jesus’ own words—God said, “You fool!” (Luke 12:20)

 If God’s blessings are about saving up money for retirement, making sure I and mine can get everything that we want out of life, God has a word for me: “Fool!” I have miscalculated. God has bigger plans for his blessing.

 Having said that, we need to remember that it is God-pleasing to enjoy God’s blessings. Listen to 1 Timothy 6, *“Put [your] hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”* Or listen to the poetry of Psalm of 104: *“[The Lord] makes plants grow for… man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.”*

 Enjoy God’s blessings. But remember,

**We Are Blessed, to Be a Blessing**

 Enjoy what God gives, but use it to bless others. Remember the talents, the skills, the abilities, the personal strengths you have, and use them to be a blessing to others.

 This is what is asked when our church asks men to serve as church council members. This is what we ask when we ask for volunteers for Christmas decorating, manning an outreach booth, volunteering at Feeding America. These are the sorts of things our new stewardship chairman, Sean Skinner, is going to be putting in front of you. He is going to be putting out opportunities to turn our own blessings (and not just financial blessings) into blessings for God’s people and even those who are not.

 Now we can wait to be asked, or even voluntold. But do you think that is what God had in mind when he said, ***“You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion”*?** Did God want our M.O. to be “Stand real still and hope he taps someone else’s shoulder?”

 But when you are ***“generous”***, when ***“you abound in every good work,”*** what happens? Does it mean you have less time for yourself? Less money for your stuff? If that is your question, if it really is all about you, then never mind. You obviously don’t get it. You don’t get what God’s point is.

 If your feeling is that God is selfish when he asks you to give your time, your talents, your money in his service, then consider this: Would you, as a parent, not feel proud over a helpful, generous child; and would you not be embarrassed over a selfish, lazy child? Why, if we are created is God’s image, would God feel any different about us, his children?

 When we use our blessings to be a blessing, the result is something greater than you or me or our momentary happiness. *“Because of [your] service… men will praise God”* (2 Corinthians 9:13). Remember:

**We Are Blessed** [comma]**, to Be a Blessing.** Amen.

1. *Veggie Tales:* *Madame Blueberry.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)