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Living the Jesus Life: Glory Giving

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TEXT: Philippians 4:14-20 (ESV)

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Dear friends:

A minor irritation for some people in my last church, including my wife and me, was the giving statement we would receive midway through the year, as well as at the end of the year. It always felt so businesslike and impersonal. "Amount pledged. Amount given." Period. No flattering words of thanks, though I knew there was gratitude for my gifts. But as I think about it, I need to ask myself, "Why would I expect any more than that? Do I really need someone to fall all over themselves in adoration for my giving, telling me how wonderful I am?" And if I think I need that, maybe there's something that's off in my heart, and I need to re-examine my motivation for giving.

A study of today's text has caused me to come to that conclusion. We're looking at Paul's "thank you note" to the Philippians for the gifts they sent to him to help him out, to continue advancing the gospel even in the confines of that Roman prison. Notice,

though, there is no outright "thank you" expressed here. In the first part of this thank you, Paul tells them he rejoiced in the Lord when their financial gift arrived and their concern for him had been revived. But then he goes on to say, "Not that I am referring to being desperately in need. I'm content. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Hmm. As he finishes up on this so-called note of thanks, which we read earlier, he goes on now to acknowledge that, in any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. There seems to be a bit of restraint even here, as he acknowledges their kindness. And then he goes on to describe their history together. You have been faithful partners to me in giving and receiving. In fact, in the early days, you were the only church that did. Even while I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once.

Now, we know that Paul actually boasts of these Philippians as a shining example of generous giving when he was appealing to the Corinthian congregation to give financial assistance to the ministry in Jerusalem. He uses them as an example of faithful, sacrificial giving for the advancement of the gospel. He tells them they were not financially well off, but as poor as they were, they gave liberally beyond their needs. But in this little passage, Paul isn't really fawning over them, is he, or going out of his way to brag them up? He simply acknowledges their gift. Now, why this tone? In fact, the phrases and wording that Paul uses here and in the statements that follow, (giving and receiving, profit, accumulate, your account, paid in full) is actually bookkeeping lingo, like a statement, business and accounting. He's using a bookkeeping metaphor as he talks to them about their giving. It's a strange way of saying thank you, isn't it? I mean, why do you suppose he uses this kind of language with them?

A little background on this will help us. In Paul's day, there were teachers and philosophers who would go into communities and sell their ideas and themselves for a profit. They're in it for the money. Many of them were crooks and thieves. So Paul's concern is not to appear like that; he didn't want to be that way and he certainly did not want to be seen that way – doing ministry for money. He also did not want to let them get the idea that their giving was to him, giving to him was something that made them like his benefactors. Actually, their giving, he says, was for the advancement of the gospel through his efforts. He goes out of his way in this subtle thank you to remind them of the big picture, then, regarding giving. In talking of their history of giving and receiving, he teaches them that they are really partners; partners in the advancement of the Gospel. That applies to us as well in our own giving. And then Paul says, "Not that I

seek the gift, but I seek the profit that that accumulates to your account." There's that business language again. It sounds like giving is a healthy credit balance in God's eyes.

Now, we know that Paul is not talking about buying one's way into Heaven. He's already made that quite clear earlier on: that we're saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. So what's he getting at here? Well, in this statement, Paul is talking about giving as a sign of our spiritual growth. It's evidence of our growth in our love for Jesus and our trust in God's faithfulness to see to our needs, which is exactly what Paul wants to see happening in their lives as they follow Jesus Christ. He celebrates that. When I was in the ministry in a congregation, there was a statement I used in teaching giving at my church for many years that captures what Paul is communicating to us here. It goes like this: "We give out of love to Christ in the area of our faith." Now, there are three parts to this statement. First, we give out of love. There is a relationship. My giving is a tangible expression of love in that relationship. It's a matter of the heart. Second, we give to Christ, not to the building needs or the salaries or my favorite mission or ministry, but to Jesus Christ Himself. My gift is a personal, loving response to Him for what He's done for me at the cross and at the grave. He rescued me. Finally, we give in the area of our faith. My giving is an expression of my faith and trust in God's promises. As my faith grows, my giving grows. Paul sees giving, according to this passage, as an expression of growth in our relationship with Jesus. Well, then he finishes off this business metaphor: "I receive full payment and more." Again, sounds like a transaction, doesn't it? Almost like he's giving them a receipt. It's almost as if he's saying, "Epaphroditus did get the gift to me." Not too different from my giving statement in the church.

At this point, though, Paul then moves from the world of bookkeeping and business to the temple. He says, "I'm well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you've sent: a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." It's worship language we find in the Old Testament: gifts, offering, sacrifices, "acceptable and pleasing to God." We're taught that giving is a fragrant offering to God, a sweet-smelling gift that delights Him. Giving is a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. The Philippians obviously gave sacrificially, as we see in 2 Corinthians 8. They had to have really felt that afterwards. We're told that kind of sacrificial giving pleases our Heavenly Father because it shows our love and our faith. It's a sign of our love for Him. And what really gladdens God's heart is not the gift itself, it's the generous spirit which comes from a heart that is filled with love and gratitude and trust. We learn, in these

words of Paul, that our motivation for giving then is love and devotion to God. We give not to things or to people, we give not in order to attain our salvation from God, because we're already saved in Christ. We give out of love to Him who first loved us. It's our loving response to grace. And we also give as partners with others in order to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ in our world, which is our number one priority.

Notice there's a promise attached to our giving, as Paul teaches us. "And my God," he says, "will fully satisfy every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." What Paul has found to be true in his own life he passes on to us now: that those who trust God in this way can be certain that He will fully satisfy our needs according to His riches and glory in Christ. A friend of mine, Jerry, was not a very well-to-do man. In fact, he kind of "got by." But he always tithed at stewardship time in our church, and he would say to me frequently, "I've learned along the way that God's shovel is bigger than mine. I don't have much to tithe, but God takes care of me." As we give to Him, God provides for our needs, according to Paul and to Jerry. So, we can continue to give all the more. I personally can testify that Julia and I have found that to be true in our own giving to Christ. God has been very faithful and seen to our every need.

So living the Jesus life means being a giver; a giver to the advancement of the gospel in the world. Your giving is to Jesus. We give out of love and gratitude to Him who first loved us at the cross. And it's part of our partnership with the church's mission of reaching the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. So as I keep these words of Paul in mind, I guess those giving statements from my church really should not bother me. After all, my giving is not for the applause of women or men, but the applause of Heaven. My giving is to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who's captured my heart through His suffering and death and resurrection, to rescue me and and make me His own. It's a response; my giving is to Him. I give out of love and gratitude for what He's done for me. What matters most is knowing that my giving is pleasing to Him; that what I put in an offering plate or send into the church or give to a ministry is actually saying, "I love you, Jesus. I'm committed to You, and to Your gospel. Thank you for saving me."

It is interesting how Paul concludes this teaching on giving. He says, "To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen." It kind of sounds like a doxology, doesn't it? Because it is. And when you think about it, that's the bottom line of everything we say and do as we live the Jesus life, isn't it? God's glory, desiring to glorify God our Father with our living and our giving, longing for Him to receive glory. That our Father may

receive glory; amen to that! Whenever Johann Sebastian Bach, that great musician and composer, began a new composition, he bowed his head and prayed, "Jesus, help me. Show your glory through the music I write. May it bring you joy even as it brings joy to your people." Before writing even one note, Johann carefully inscribed on the top of the page: "J. J." With that, the music began to pour from his soul onto the page. When he was finally satisfied with the composition, he would write the letters, "SDG" at the end of the piece: "Soli Deo Gloria", meaning, "For the glory of God alone." You see, he hoped that when his music was played, it would point people to the God who had rescued him. As you and I are living the Jesus life, may our personal goal and model always be for the glory of God alone!

Amen.