

## Todd To Start In Prayer:

### Background related to today's scripture lesson:

- **Macedonia** is a region in northern Greece,
- It was home to several early Christian churches that Paul either founded.
- The main **Macedonian churches** mentioned in the New Testament are
  - **Philippi**
    - In Acts 16, we see that it was the first church established in Europe by Paul.
    - Lydia was **the first recorded convert to Christianity in Europe**,
  - **Thessalonica**
    - We read in Acts 17 how it was founded.
    - Paul faced persecution there, but many Jews and Gentiles came to faith.
    - In **1 Thessalonians 1** we see that the Thessalonian church endured suffering but remained faithful
    - We know that it was a very poor church
  - **Berea**
    - Also mentioned in Acts 17.
    - The Bereans were known for their eagerness and for examining the Scriptures daily to verify Paul's message
- Now the reason for chapter 8 of Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians...
- He is raising support for **the church in Jerusalem**, which was suffering from famine and persecution.
- He's writing to the **Corinthians** (a well-off church)
- He is using the **Macedonians** (a **poor** but **generous** group of churches) as an example to challenge them.

## Nazia to read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15:

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the **grace** that God has given the Macedonian churches. <sup>2</sup> In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. <sup>3</sup> For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, <sup>4</sup> they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. <sup>5</sup> And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. <sup>6</sup> So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. <sup>7</sup> But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you<sup>[a]</sup>—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

<sup>8</sup> I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. <sup>9</sup> For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

<sup>10</sup> And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. <sup>11</sup> Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. <sup>12</sup> For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

<sup>13</sup> Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. <sup>14</sup> At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, <sup>15</sup> as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."

How does the passage start out...

- Paul's opening statement is that he wants for the Corinthians to understand about the **GRACE** God had given the Macedonian churches...
- It is an example for all followers of Christ to learn from...
- Giving is described as a **GRACE from God**
- Yesterday, my wife Michelle and I had an interesting conversation
- About the difference between what GRACE and MERCY is
- What would YOU say the difference is between the meaning of those two words?
- Take a minute here and think about that...

### **Mercy: Not getting what we do deserve**

**Mercy** is when God *withholds* punishment that we *rightly deserve* because of our sin.

- Mercy is **compassion in action** toward someone in misery or distress caused by their own wrongdoing
- Mercy emphasizes **God's restraint**.
- **Example:** "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us..." — *Ephesians 2:4* (Here, God doesn't treat us as our sins deserve.)

### **Grace: Getting what we don't deserve**

**Grace** is God *freely giving* us **favor, blessing, or salvation** even though we've done nothing to earn it—in fact, we've done the opposite.

- Grace is about **unearned generosity** and **favor**, flowing from God's love.
- It emphasizes **God's generosity**.

- Going back verse 2:
  - <sup>2</sup> In the **midst of a very severe trial**, their [the Macedonian churches] overflowing joy and their extreme poverty **welled up in rich generosity**.
  - What was that **severe trial**?

### 1. Persecution for their faith

- In **Acts 16**, we learn that both Paul and Silas are imprisoned in **Philippi**
- In **Acts 17**, we learn that Paul gets chased out of the city of **Thessalonica** by an angry mob, and the new Christians are persecuted.
- Jason (who was a new believer in that city) is dragged away and brought before the city officials in **Thessalonica**
- The **Macedonia brothers and sisters were under much pressure because of their faith**

### 2. Poverty and financial hardship

- In this same verse Paul highlights their “**extreme poverty**” (not just that they were poor...but Paul says “extremely poor”)
- Their poverty could have come from:
  - The economic conditions of the region (Macedonia wasn't particularly wealthy).
  - Being ostracized or boycotted for following Jesus.
  - Social status—many early believers were lower-class or enslaved.\

What's important here though:

- Despite the trials and obstacles, it instead “welled up in rich generosity”...
- Verse 2 says they had “overflowing joy” that led to **generous hearts**
- **Q) Where would you say that came from?**
- ...it comes from a clear understanding of everything we have and who we are in Christ Jesus.
- Clearly their HOPE was not in wealth...otherwise, given their extreme poverty, they would have felt overflowing desperation and not “overflowing joy”...

Nazia please read once again **2 Corinthians 8:9**: **<sup>9</sup>For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**

- The foundation of all Christian giving isn't guilt or obligation—it's **the example of Jesus**.

- Jesus had **all the riches of heaven**, but **gave them up**—becoming human, suffering, and dying—so we could receive spiritual wealth: salvation, adoption, eternal life.
- Paul is saying: *Generosity is gospel-shaped*. We give because **Jesus gave first**.
- All of this comes from **1 John 4:19** where in verse 19 it says: **"We love because He first loved us."**
- Brothers and sisters: everything we do—whether **loving, giving, or serving** — is a **response** to what Christ has already done for us.

Verse 3 Paul testifies that because of this understanding...

- the Macedonian churches gave "Entirely on their own..."
  - They did not give because someone said they had to
  - They did not give out of guilt
  - They gave because they **WANTED** to...all on their own.
- Verse 4 gives us a description of their heart and attitude:
  - It says: "They urgently pleaded with us..."
    - To be urgent means to be "earnest and persistent in response to a pressing situation."
    - Paul says they literally "pleaded" to participate...
  - The Macedonians viewed it as a **privilege** to be able to give .
  - They viewed giving as a "service to Lord's people"

[Communion]

- This leads us back to Christ.
- He is the perfect giver.
- He is the source of ALL good and perfect gifts.
- He is why we will take communion today.
- He is who you need to think deeply on as you get ready to take communion...

**Prayer for Communion**