

Many holidays have values associated with them. For Valentine's Day, it's love; for July 4th, it's patriotism; for Labor Day it's rest. What is that value attached to Christmas? I think Paul would say giving, which is what today's passage is about. It's a fitting passage for Christmas because it tells us that the proper response to the gift of salvation and the gift of God's Son is to be generous ourselves, and to reflect that giving spirit from our Father.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul shifts gears and starts talking about giving. At this time, the church in Jerusalem was experiencing hardship and persecution. Many churches in the surrounding areas were sending money, which Paul and his associates would collect and bring to Jerusalem. Paul describes how the church in Macedonia gave so freely as an example for the Corinthians and for us. The first thing we should notice about how Paul describes the Macedonians is that God has given them grace (v.1). The ability to give is a gift from God. Giving is a privilege. Sometimes we view giving in terms of a ledger or in terms of accounting. My parents would give money for Christmas to our relatives based on how much they gave us, so it would all balance out. But this is not the right attitude towards giving. We are all blessed with God's grace, and we all have the privilege of giving. We don't give based on what we can get in return or what people gave us first.

Now let's look at how the Macedonians gave (vv. 2-5). First, notice that they didn't give because they had abundance. Usually we like to give according to what we have. If we are financially blessed, we feel it's our responsibility to give more. That's not a bad thing. But for the Macedonians, they gave even in the midst of a great ordeal of affliction. Verse 2 says that even during their ordeal and in the midst of extreme poverty, their overflowing joy overflowed in rich generosity. This is a very unnatural attitude towards giving. Usually people are less generous when money is tight. Even my son will only share popcorn if he has plenty of it left over for himself, but not if there is only one piece left. But exemplary generosity often comes from the poor. During our short term missions trip to Mexico an extremely poor boy named Antonio was so eager to pass out the items we brought for others. And when it came time to leave, he gave me his last piece of high quality gum with a soft center. This gum wasn't so easy to come by for

him, but he was so generous with it. In the same way, the Macedonians gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. They gave to the church, and even to Paul and his associates. They begged for the opportunity to give. This is because they viewed giving as a privilege, a gift from God.

Then in v. 7 Paul tells the Corinthians that if they excel in faith they should also excel in giving, because faith should result in generosity. As v. 9 explains, Jesus demonstrated His generosity towards us. He was rich and became poor. He was exalted in heaven, and gave up everything to be born in the most humble of positions. This transition from rich to poor took place two thousand years ago in Bethlehem, and it is why we celebrate Christmas. And through His poverty, we became rich. We are rich beyond belief. We have eternal life, security, salvation, and a relationship with God. This is worth more than anything in this world. And we have it all because God gave His one and only Son. God didn't view giving like a ledger. We did nothing to deserve the gift. God gave out of love for us. And when we received this abundant love, it should overflow to others. We give because of what He gave to us.

So let us emulate the Macedonians. Let us give without expecting anything in return. Don't expect fairness, and don't keep count. When we give to our family, our neighbor, or our colleagues at work, we may fear that such generosity can be taken advantage of. But let us be generous all the same, because we are called to give. Jesus gave His life for us, so we should be willing to freely give to others. If we have the right attitude towards giving, then it shouldn't matter if someone keeps taking from us without giving anything in return. We shouldn't give to receive, but rather we give because what we have already received from God. Let us be generous because He was first generous to us.