

“IMPOSSIBLE GIVING, IMPOSSIBLE TREASURE AND THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT”
2 CORINTHIANS 9:1-15, PSALM 112:1-9, ROMANS 8:32 (NIV)
OCTOBER 13, 2024
COVENANT CHURCH – WEST LAFAYETTE, INDIANA

- I. Years ago, when I was just a boy in this congregation...*I heard a story*
- A. It's the story that's been faithfully told at Covenant Church for almost 70 yrs
1. It is the story of Jesus and his gospel...*and it is the most amazing story!*
 2. This amazing story results in countless changed lives...
 - ***But some doubt when they hear it***
 3. Of course, the story of the gospel stands on its own...
 - **The eyewitness accounts of the 4 gospels...*just from an historical reporting standpoint...can stand up under the greatest scrutiny...***
 - ***But*** our words & our story-telling matter as we seek to persuade people
 4. Sometimes we might hear a story that seems hard to believe
 5. See what you think about this story

In 1993 FBI agents raided the Southwood psychiatric hospital in San Diego which was under investigation for medical insurance fraud. After hours reviewing medical records, the agents were hungry...*so the agent-in-charge called a nearby pizza parlor to order dinner for his colleagues.*

According to snopes.com, a site dedicated to sleuthing out urban legends...the following telephone conversation actually took place....*Let's listen:*

The FBI agent places the call and hears someone answer on the other end...

Agent: Hello. I would like to order 20 large pizzas and 60 cans of soda.

Pizza Man: And where would you like them delivered?

Agent: We're over at the psychiatric hospital.

Pizza Man: The psychiatric hospital?

Agent: That's right. I'm an FBI agent.

Pizza Man: You're an FBI agent?

Agent: That's correct. Just about everybody here is.

Pizza Man: And you're at the psychiatric hospital?

Agent: That's correct. And make sure you don't come to the front doors. They're locked. You'll have to go around back to the service entrance with the pizzas.

Pizza Man: And you say you're all FBI agents?

Agent: That's right. How soon can you have them here?...We've been here all day and we're starving.

Pizza Man: How are you going to pay for all of this?

Agent: Oh, I have my checkbook right here.

Pizza Man: And you're all FBI agents?

Agent: That's right. Everyone here is an FBI agent. Can you please remember to bring the pizzas and sodas to the service entrance in the back?...because the front doors are locked

Pizza Man: I don't think so. **** CLICK ****

B. The *story of Js/gospel* has been persuading/changing countless lives for 2K yrs

1. I am 1, many of you are among the countless...& so is this man named Paul
2. In August you began considering Paul's 2nd letter to the church in Corinth

AN ASIDE: I had opportunity to visit this amazing archaeological site in 2019 with my brother Jim & my sister Elizabeth (wearing now-famous strtchy-pants)

1. PIC #1: TEMPLE of APOLLO RUINS + ACRO CORINTH behind
 - Spectacular views of 3 seas atop AC: *Ionic, Aegean & Mediterranean*
 - **Tech team: pls. keep PIC #1 on screen until yellow highlight line below**
2. PIC #2: *While we were in Corinth...(wait to show pic #2 at yellow below)*
 - The 3 of us were able to take part in some archaeological recovery work – *very special!*
 - What we unearthed in the ruins that day was *astounding!...*
 - And I thought all of you here today would be equally *astonished*
 - **LOOK AT WHAT WE UNCOVERED AMIDST THOSE RUINS!!!**

- C. In 2 Cor 8&9 we see the longest discussion in the Bible on the subject of giving
1. Teaching on money & giving can *evoke a range of responses* in the hearers
 - Paul is addressing 2 different responses to giving
 - *Last week Brently said it well: People can be funny about money*
 2. *And it's clear Paul is sensitive to the potential responses in his instructions*
 - *We can take a clue of this fact that P never mentions money specifically*
 - *He speaks euphemistically instead: this gracious work, generosity, a supply for the need...*
 - Paul knows that money & religion can be a sticky subject – *abuse happens*
 3. Part of our giving is knowing that when we give...we are letting go of our \$
 - We are giving up *our control* of our \$ & trusting God to use what we give for his kingdom purposes...purposes which can go beyond our understanding
 - Sometimes it's easy to give...sometimes not...*depending on our perspective*
- D. P is writing to the Corinthian church to help them in their perspective of giving
1. *To help w/ our perspective* we can pick out 3 main themes in ch. 9 on giving
 - **IMPOSSIBLE GIVING**
 - **IMPOSSIBLE TREASURE...and**
 - **THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT**

II. IMPOSSIBLE GIVING

- A. Giving our money away presents a # of challenges – *They all begin w/ the heart*
1. God understands we live in a world where material resources are limited
 2. Right there...*in our hearts* is where we encounter spiritual challenge...*a test*
 - *Can we – will we – trust God to provide if we share what we have?*
 - *Will our hearts be formed in the generous example of X & his giving 2us?*
 - *Will we have a care beyond just our own needs to see where God gives us rich supply to share with others for **his redemption project in our world?***
 - *Will hoarding & greed be the perspective through which we consider our stewardship...**OR will something greater help us to find the JOY God really wants us to know in our giving?***
 3. Jesus understands our stresses & struggles in this important area of disc-ship
 - May we *hear Jesus' call to follow him* and discover both the challenge & JOY of IMPOSSIBLE GIVING which he so generously displays for us
- B. It's helpful to think of IMPOSSIBLE GIVING...like 2 sides o/t same coin**
1. Paul illustrates this w/ the 2 different communities he writes about in this txt

2. **Quick revw:** *poor Macedonians in northern Greece, rich Corinthians south*
 - Paul & others are raising a financial collection for desperately poor ***Jewish Xians*** in Jerusalem who are suffering under conditions of famine
 - **Note:** *he's also trying to build the unity of Jesus' new growing multi-ethnic, multi-economic, multi-cultural church bringing together these 2 previously separate cultures to be one in Christ, as they now are*
3. So...on one side of this ***coin of IMPOSSIBLE GIVING***...the *Macedonians*
 - Their giving effort to help their ***new Jewish Xian brothers/sisters*** in Jerusalem truly ***rises to the IMPOSSIBLE***
 - Paul was sure their own deep poverty would make giving IMPOSSIBLE
 - ***BUT the Macedonians refused to be left out of this act of giving despite what Paul might think they lacked in their ability to share***
 - **EX: *Mother Teresa told this story from her mission in Calcutta***
 - **This was the same display of IMP GVG by the Macedonians**
4. Paul identifies the reasons for this display of IMPOSSIBLE GIVING
 - He says in 2 Cor 8:5...*they gave themselves **first to God & then to the ch.***
 - THIS is where our Xian act of giving begins as we follow Jesus
 - It's where we find that ***IMPOSSIBLE GIVING becomes POSSIBLE***
5. **NOW...on the other side of this coin of IMP. GIVING we find the Corinthians.**
6. The Corinthians are the wealthiest of all the Xian churches Paul planted
 - They've known about this collection for the Jewish Xians for a year and they've made some efforts...but it seems those are ***falling short***
 - *It sounds like they've become reluctant to give as they first indicated*
 - Paul is concerned not just with ***aid for others but for the spiritual condition*** of the Corinthians and the hold of material things on their ***hearts*** supplanting the Lordship of Jesus in their lives & witness
7. It recalls Jesus' interaction w/ the rich man in Mark 10 who loves his possessions more than God and finds it IMPOSSIBLE to give them up
 - ***It's not wrong to have wealth...but it can be risky to our spiritual health***
 - ***Js' caution in Mt 6: which will be Lord in your life? – God or money?***
8. **EX: As a PU student in CCF...I heard a great lesson on giving by Stan Ott**
 - I felt convicted to give a tithe of my earnings for the 1st time
 - As a staff resident at Wiley Hall I received a \$110 stipend 4X/year and enjoyed giving a tithe – the 1st 10% - of \$11 to Covenant ea. time!
 - When I graduated and was hired by Arthur Andersen & Co. in Chicago...*I was suddenly earning a lot more money*

- New expenses came w/ my new life & career: *rent, groceries, gas, etc.*
- But I also learned how more money can be...well...*fun to spend!*
- *While I had been faithful in my giving when I was poorer...I suddenly found giving to be **IMPOSSIBLE...***
- *I racked up debt on my new credit card for new skis, a bike, guitar, eating out w/ friends & the new freedom of a new career in a great city*
- I had found a great church and was growing in my faith...but I knew that my giving to God was anemic – *in fact, not at all!*
- **I didn't like it...but like I said...I found GIVING to be IMPOSSIBLE**
- Long story/short: it wasn't until I met & married Debbie 2 yrs later that this lack in my stewardship & my discipleship did a 180

9. Thank God for Debbie!

- Together we've determined to live in this discipline of giving
- We discover over/over...that while challenging, giving is a JOY
- It's a true opp. to enter the generous heart of God & watch what comes

C. So...What happens when we flip the coin on IMPOSSIBLE GIVING?

1. We get to participate literally in *God's Incarnational work*
2. *The Incarnation: the profound mystery of when God became flesh*
 - X was born in Beth...and God came to us as a *gift of IMPBL. GIVING*
 - How appropriate it is that on Christmas we participate in the *biggest gift-giving season of all*
3. And yet...Jesus knows how hard it can be to give oneself in such fashion

D. Paul is challenging the Corinthians now to flip the coin of IMP. GIVING

1. He gives them 2 powerful visions to help move their hearts forward
 - He shows them **IMPOSSIBLE TREASURE**
 - And he points their hearts finally to *THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT*

2. Let's look

III. IMPOSSIBLE TREASURE

- A. If you struggle to have a generous heart...P. says consider the IMP TREAS
 1. In v.6 he uses a harvest metaphor
 - *If you sow sparingly, you'll reap sparingly...sow generously, reap gen.*
 2. It's easy w/ just a superficial look at this text to think it's the prosperity gospel
 3. Looking deeper at the agricultural illustration: *what is seed-sowing about?*
 - Think: *you don't sow seed in order to get more seed as the 1st product...*

- *You sow seed to get fruit...corn! Beans! – the harvest, sm-thing that feeds*
4. ***In the same way P: We don't give \$\$ in order to get more \$\$...to get richer***
- ***EX: Randy Alcorn – For the steward of God's possessions, we must realize that God prospers us not to raise our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving...So when God provides us with more money, we may often think – What a blessing! – Well, yes...but it would be just as scriptural to think – **This is a test*****
- B. So then...if we accept both the *blessing* **and the test** and give our money...
1. *What is the harvest that will result?*
 2. **In 2 Cor 9:9** – Paul draws in a verse from Psalm 112:
 - *They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever*
 3. Understand OT word for ***Righteousness*** – **not moral goodness, as we think**
 - *More accurate translation is Justice...but even that doesn't capture the meaning as we think of justice today (an application of jurisprudence)*
4. ***Righteousness in the OT meant...RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS***
- *Right relationships in the way people relate to one another in the world*
5. ***B/c he's scattering his gifts to the poor...relationships are being healed***
- *Poverty is being healed & all the related human suffering is being healed*
 - *Racial oppression...healed, conflict & hatred...healed, families...healed*
 - *Political divisions...healed*
6. **2 Peter 3:13** reminds us this is *our great hope* – God will heal all wrongs
- ***But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness (right relationships) dwells***
7. Our hope is the day when *right relationships will replace all injustices*
- *An IMPOSSIBLE TREASURE that seems impossible to imagine!*
 - *But we know the promise that one day heaven and earth will at last be one in Christ – Jesus is making all things new & all that's wrong will be undone*
8. **EX: In *The Last Tower*...last book of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy**
- **The small hobbit Frodo had the impossible task to carry the most evil ring of power *made to enslave all of Middle Earth* and return it to the molten fire in which it was forged so that it would finally be destroyed forever**

- Frodo barely survived his suicide mission and would not have...had it not been for his ever-faithful companion...**Samwise Gamgee**
 - Both hobbits unbelievably succeeded and the evil of Mordor was cast down...though at great cost to these 2 brave figures
 - In a final scene...*Samwise is awakening* from a long recovering sleep
 - He's laying in a bed with the great white wizard *Gandalf* standing at the end of his bed looking down upon Sam with deep affection
 - Samwise is suddenly wide awake & startled to see his great traveling companion before him and he exclaims: *Gandalf! I thought you were dead!...But...I thought I was dead!*
 - **Gandalf...does this mean that everything bad is going to come untrue?**
9. When we give our money...we are *healing the world to the day when all that is evil will come untrue*...& we will see God's IMPOSSIBLE TREASURE
- *This great harvest of the seed we sow!*

IV. THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

A. Thanks be to God...It's Jesus! (v.15)

1. Js' riches as the Son of God were incalculable...& he gave them all up 4 us
2. **In 2 Cor 8:9** Paul writes:
 - *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.*
3. You see what Paul is doing for us here?
 - *He's putting what Jesus gave from his wealth for us...in economic terms*
4. Jesus...the wealthiest & richest of any ever...gave it all away to save us
 - God gave himself to us as a fragile, needy baby
 - He gave up all his riches and he gave himself TO us so that our hearts could receive his **INDESCRIBABLE GIFT at Bethlehem**...*that we might be like him to give ourselves away...all the way to the cross*

B. In Mark 10, just after Jesus told his disciples his mission was a cross in Jerusalem...he had a revealing encounter with a very rich man

1. He came to Jesus earnestly wanting to know how he could find God's favor
2. Mark records a tender exchange:

- *Jesus looked at him and loved him...and then he told him the one thing he yet needed to do in his otherwise perfect life was to give everything he had to the poor and come follow him*
 - *To this man...what Jesus was asking of him was **IMPOSSIBLE**, so he turned and walked away very sad*
3. Then Jesus tells his disciples how hard it is for the rich to enter God's kgdm
- *The disciples are astonished and ask Jesus: **Then who can be saved?***
 - *Jesus: **With people this is IMPOSSIBLE...but w/ God nothing is IMP.***
4. *If we're paying attention to the story behind the story...* Mark's gospel reveals the astonishing truth about Jesus
- *Jesus IS the rich man...who gave away everything he had to save we who were desperately poor*
 - *From the cross...Jesus looked at you and he loved you...and then he gave away everything he had so that you could be rich in him*

C. Jesus IS the Father's greatest TREASURE...HIS INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

1. And God *gave him up for us!*
2. This is the gospel story...the most amazing story to change *hearts & lives*
3. The question for each of us when we hear it again is: *How will we respond?*
4. That's the question Paul was putting to the Corinthians...*and now to us*