

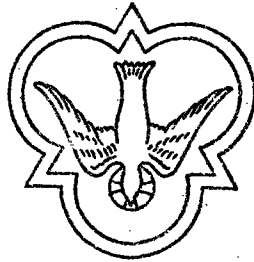
THE MACEDONIAN MIRACLE

THERE ARE
VARIETIES OF
GIFTS BUT
THE SAME
SPIRIT



Written by Pastor Robert Reim and delivered at the 1965
convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.





THE MACEDONIAN MIRACLE

We have heard from various sources that the grapevine has been at work spreading the word that stewardship is to be the subject of the convention essay this year. We have carefully stayed away from the word stewardship in the title because we believe that it is a term that has been much abused because it has so generally been used only to define the Christian's financial responsibility over against his Lord. We cite the Lutheran Hymnal as an example. All of the hymns under the "Stewardship" heading have to do with sharing our material blessings with the poor and using these goods in spreading the Gospel. While the term stewardship certainly does describe the proper and responsible disposition of our material possessions, it should just as certainly not be confined to this area. These are not the only talents the Lord has placed into our hands for our use in His service. The term stewardship with all its implications does quite properly excite congregations and pastors diligently to encourage the Christians in their care to accept and put to proper use the talent the Lord puts into their hands. There is danger that we emphasize proper stewardship of the material talent at the expense of the other gifts that we have and are to use. But if we have carefully trained and encouraged our

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membership to a proper stewardship of their material possessions, we have not nearly completed our responsibility. This is only one facet of the talent and dare not be emphasized to the neglect of others. We gladly accept the responsibility of leading in a study of ways and means that we are to use in encouraging our people to a proper stewardship of their material gifts. But we would like to see this as one of a series of studies that would give us the same help in the other areas of stewardship, the responsibility of proper use of our time, the proper posture for the child of God as he walks through the world, the exercise of the gift of charity or love we possess by the grace of God, the individual mission responsibility, to mention just a few. We have spent much energy and time in helping our people to a proper stewardship of the Word. Today we quite properly propose a study of the area of stewardship of material gifts. But let it not be at the expense of the other facets of the talent given us by our Lord.

Our assignment is to lead a study that we pray will help our people properly to assess and use the talent of material gifts with which our generation has been so signally blessed. There is a need for such study. If we look at the records of contributions from the hands of men for the work of Lutheranism generally in the year 1963, we find the highest average per communicant to have been \$119.18. If we compare this to the potential of the affluent society in which we live, it becomes obvious that the people walking under the banner of Lutheranism need to be helped properly to evaluate and use their material talent. The membership of our Church of the Lutheran Confession contributed an average of \$90.66 per communicant in 1963. Will we not grant that there is a need to study together this matter of proper stewardship of our material talent and then accept the responsibility that is surely ours of encouraging our people to use properly the treasures that God has put into their hands? It is not a new problem by any means. In his second letter we find that Paul accepted the responsi-

bility of speaking on this very subject at length to ³ the Corinthian Christians. There was a need for their contributions and they were not accepting their responsibility. Paul's approach to the problem stands as a classic example for us and we will do well to join the Corinthians in examining with care the Macedonian Miracle. Let us do so, so that we can understand the incident for the miracle that it truly is and let us do so, so that we find the pattern that will help us properly to guide our members.

The apostle Paul is excited. He demands our attention when he writes "We must tell you of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia." Something happened that demands our attention as well as that of the Corinthians and we are to examine the incident carefully. Paul doesn't give us much of the background material. There was trouble in Jerusalem. Very likely because of the persecutions directed against them the brethren there were desperately in need of help. The situation must have been critical because persecution was common and personal need not a stranger to the Christian of that time. But the picture had become so dark and the hunger so great that Paul doesn't hesitate to lay the problem before the Christians in far off Macedonia and Corinth. But in Macedonia Paul admits to having done it in a rather half hearted fashion, for he tells us that the Macedonians came "praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift." They too had suffered a great trial of affliction that resulted in what the apostle calls "their deep poverty." While Paul was ready to report on the needs at Jerusalem to these people, he was more than ready to excuse them from participating in this offering because he saw with his own eyes that the problems here were so severe that the Macedonians should be considered as recipients and should not be asked to share what little they had. He paints a vivid picture for us. In telling of the incident in Macedonia he wants it clearly understood that this was not an affluent society to which he had made known the needs of Jerusalem, but that he had told people, who

were desperately poor, of the plan of an offering for ⁴
the mother congregation.

When Paul reports the reaction of the Macedonians he says not a word about the amount that was raised. Nothing at all that could be used for a financial report to the churches. The most detailed financial report could never tell what had really happened no matter how tremendous the amount might be. Carefully he reports that they were "willing of themselves." This was an entirely voluntary effort on their part. As we mentioned before they literally begged Paul to let them have a part in this. Having heard that, we're not surprised that he should mention that "in abundance of their joy" they came with their gifts. They didn't have to be coaxed or pressured into giving. These miserably poor people came with laughter in their hearts and on their lips, overjoyed at the opportunity to share what little they had.

In a sense the apostle does report on the amount that was gathered. He tells us "For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing." The gifts that they brought were extravagant and when Paul adds that they went beyond their power we are to understand that they brought these gifts in a reckless fashion, without any thought of the consequences for them. It was the same spirit of the widow in the temple who brought all that she had. But they could do it and their action was not reckless at all. The apostle carefully tells us that they first gave their own selves to the Lord. They had learned to operate on the proposition that it was the Lord's business to see to it that their needs were supplied by His grace in whatever way He should choose. They could not conceive of it that the Lord would neglect His responsibility over against His children because they were moved to bring gifts that were beyond their power.

Finally Paul describes their gifts as being brought unto the riches of liberality. Here we have

an unfortunate translation in the KJ version. "Riches of their liberality" doesn't say much of anything. The *ἐπλοότητος* in the Greek text means single-mindedness or simplicity. In this singlemindedness they were rich. They had no hidden motives in bringing their gifts. They did not produce as they did because they expected something in return. They did not bring large gifts in the hidden hope that the Lord would prosper them with more than they had to start. These gifts were not brought because they hoped to be cited for their action and blessed with special honors. They did not bring these gifts with the thought that they had somehow done their duty and thereby deserved at least a word of commendation from their Lord. These were singleminded gifts, brought only because of their deep concern for the poor of Jerusalem.

And we believe it to be no exaggeration to term what happened in Macedonia a miracle. There is certainly nothing here that would indicate that they were drawing on some normally hidden supply of natural goodness that may be found in all men. There surely is nothing in the natural man that would prompt people to part joyfully with their material possessions, to do so when they were in deep poverty and then to do it to such a degree that they would jeopardize their own future creature comforts. And there is no possibility whatsoever of natural man bringing gifts in the singleminded spirit of the Macedonians. On the contrary, natural man is always looking for what might be in it for him, even if it is only the personal satisfaction of having done what is right.

We may certainly term this a miracle because the apostle does not hesitate to do so. Remember that he wanted to tell the Corinthians about the grace of God bestowed on the churches in Macedonia. Paul thereby declares that the action of those Christians was the result of God's work in them. It was He who made so clear the need of those in Jerusalem. It was He who wrought in them the unselfish concern for the needy that compelled them to bring this gift. It was

He who taught them that it must be a pure gift, without any thought of return or personal gain. This was the grace of God bestowed upon them, but it does not tell the whole story. Before God could bestow that grace, He had to have viable material with which He could work.

These were Christians, children of God upon whom He showered this grace. And consider what had already been done for them. In the letter to the Ephesians (4:24) Paul says of the children of God that they have the new man, created after God in righteousness and true holiness. Let us take a few moments to explore and reexamine the efforts and accomplishments of God in making of wretched sinners saints. The apostle Paul never wearied of doing so. Led by the Spirit of God he found new ways of bringing home to us the wonder of it all. In writing to the Ephesian Christians Paul was led to use the word "create" to describe the work of God. It is a word that is much abused, but not when Paul uses it. He would have us understand that God did call into existence, that He created the new man. When Paul uses the word create he certainly suggests that we remind ourselves of the material with which the Lord must work. The description that we find in Scripture is not very pretty. He says of all men that they are dead in trespasses and sin, that they walk according to the course of the world and have their conversation in the lusts of the flesh. Dead in trespasses and sin. What a horrible thing to say of anyone or anything. But the apostle says it and means every word of it. The charge is made that we have sinned and are guilty of trespasses, that we have done this before the holy God who made us, who rules over us, who sees and hears us and whose judgment in all these matters is final. It is offered not as a theory, that we might be guilty, but as a final judgment that we are guilty. The Lord would have us know that He has searched us and known us, that He knows our downsitting and uprising, that He understands our thought afar off, that He is acquainted with all our ways. On the basis of this clear

understanding He tells us we have sinned, we have trespassed. We have known His will and have disobeyed it. We were fashioned by Him and we have chosen to serve Satan, to become the obedient slaves of hell, to stand in opposition to our God. The apostle is led to encourage us to an honest appraisal with these words. He will have nothing to do with the modern thought that we should tread lightly in these matters and not speak too bluntly about sin and disobedience. The Lord insists that it be clearly stated and that the full import of the words "trespasses and sin" be brought home to us. For the consequence of it all is that we are dead. That is a simple word chosen by God to describe the helplessness of those who are guilty before Him. They can do nothing to change that condition. The rot is complete. There is no power there that can change the course of events. They have sinned, become slaves of Satan and will so continue if left to themselves.

Nor is there any desire in man to change this condition. Paul writes to the Ephesians (2:2), "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Ye walked, Paul tells us. There is no suggestion there of unwillingness. Even though it has been clearly established that the world in which they follow this course is the realm of Satan, that while they walk in it they are under the dominion of the prince of the power of the air who will certainly require of them that they be counted among the children of disobedience. Their rebellion against God is complete. They writhe and scream under the Lord's heavy hand when He punishes them for their wicked ways, but it only increases their hatred of the Lord and they look for better ways in which to serve Satan and disobey the God who has made them. To point up their unwillingness to change matters the apostle adds the thought that the sinner has his conversation in the lusts of the flesh. He has abused himself through sin

to such a degree that he hears and follows only the desires of his flesh as it is used by Satan in ruling the sinful wretch. The Lord leaves no loophole. Through His apostle He gives us a clear, accurate description of the material that lay before Him as He begins His work of redemption. It is rotten, treacherous stuff and must be rejected by Him. He cannot use it, He must create.

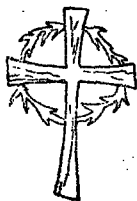


When the word create is used we are also reminded of what was required of God to bring forth this new man in us. The use of the word certainly draws attention to the fact that God considers the salvation of sinful man a matter that requires His attention and His alone. There is no help for it, He can turn nowhere for assistance. When He chooses that word He quietly rejects the suggestions

and beliefs that are so dear to many in the world, that they can be of help in this matter. The degree of help that they offer varies. Some ask that it be left in their hands entirely suggesting that they can, through the force of habit, develop character to the point where the behavior of man will be acceptable to God, that they can at least offer the Lord a helping hand in the matter of their salvation so that the responsibility will not entirely rest with Him. The Lord states quite simply that these suggestions are all impossible when He uses the word create. If a new man is to be called into existence that can be done by God alone.

This is something that He must do and the fact that He did it is recorded carefully for our peace and comfort. It would require a deep concern and love for us, love that goes beyond anything that we can ever hope to find among men, a love so great that we cannot fully understand or appreciate it while

we walk in this life. This He must accomplish at tremendous personal cost to Himself. Paul carefully tells us, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Eph. 2:4-7. It was His love, His deep concern for us that prompted Him in eternity to ask of His Son that He offer Himself for the sins of the world. It was the



anxious heart of the Son that moved Him to accept the assignment, to humble Himself unto death, even the death of the cross. It was this love that required of the Spirit of God that He approach us through Word and Sacrament to lead us into all truth, to humble our proud, sinfilled hearts, to purge them of all unrighteousness and fill them with that con-

fidence in the truth of every word of God, that we call faith. This is what needed to be done if we were to have the new man. Little wonder that He should choose the word create to describe this work, that He should insist that it could be done by Him alone and that all the glory should be His.

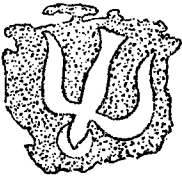
The Lord tells us through Paul that when He created the new man through Christ He created Him "after God." The cycle is complete. At the time of man's creation we hear the words "let us make man in our image." We have seen what man did to this image with sin, Now the change is complete and the Lord finds a variety of ways to impress that upon us. He does not speak of improvement but only a complete change. Notice how the Lord uses expressions that are completely opposite to describe that change. Where once we were sinners, now we are saints before God. He tells us that He has quickened us who were once dead in trespasses and sins. As we stand with

failing hearts before Him and hear His judgement that our sins are as scarlet, He is quick to assure us that they are as white as snow. You will remember the Savior's use of opposites when He comforted His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed. In John 17, as He reports to His Father, we hear Him speak of His disciples and of us as He reports of those who were once of the world, "They are thine, and all mine are thine and thine are mine and I am glorified in them." This He could now say of those who were once the children of hell. Little wonder that He should use the word create to describe what was necessary that we might have the new man.

We should also remind ourselves that the Lord had a definite purpose in creating such a new man. He did not do it simply to demonstrate His majesty nor to give us an object lesson of the lengths to which His love could compel Him to go. He tells us very simply that He did this that we might serve Him and that we might live with Him in eternity. In that same prayer spoken by our High Priest on the night in which He was betrayed, you will remember that He made it clear that those whom He had redeemed were in the world but were not of the world. In the closing sentences of His prayer He comes with the petition, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." It is for an eternity with Him in heaven that He has so created us. And until the day comes when we shall realize that glory, we are to serve Him in righteousness and true holiness. The apostle tells us, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10. That was part of the plan that was formulated in eternity. Christ would die in order that we who had sinned should be saved from eternal death and should live with Him eternally, but He would also die in order that we should no longer walk according to the course of this world, that we should no longer have our conversation in the lusts

of the flesh. In eternity the Lord already saw that when He created the new man in us we would walk in righteousness and true holiness. We would have an entirely new way of thinking, we would find our interests far different from what they were, for through Christ we have been created after God.

But the work of God was not finished with the creation of the new man. He must continue to come with the power of His Spirit and strengthen this new man so that He should in fact walk in holiness and true righteousness. For the Macedonian and we today still carry about with us that sinful flesh that is subject to the rule of Satan. This strange conflict is common to all children of God. Paul describes it for us in the seventh chapter of Romans where we hear the anguished words "For



I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." That explains our need of grace for grace. We need the continuing activity of our God so that we overcome the flesh and have the new man lead us into righteousness and true holiness in all that we do. That is what happened in Macedonia. God did come to them and it was He who put into their hearts the love for the poor in Jerusalem so that they suppressed the desire to bargain that is so much a part of the flesh, so that they were rid of the fear that the flesh uses to hinder such gifts. It was the Lord filling a vacant spot in the character of the Macedonians. That is surely what Paul refers to when he tells the Corinthians "now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want." The Corinthians, like the Macedonians before them had a want. We would say that they were in need of something just as were the Jerusalem Christians, but in their case this want or need was their natural inability to produce God pleasing gifts for

this purpose. But now God bestowed His grace upon them, supplied this need so that the new man could stand victorious over the flesh. The need in Jerusalem supplied the opportunity for exercising the gift of righteousness and true holiness bestowed on them by the grace of God.

The term miracle is not too strong at all to describe what happened in Macedonia. What they did was done only because their Lord did the impossible and moved them to bring their gifts not grudgingly nor of necessity but as cheerful givers.

But what does Macedonia have to do with us today? It is another mark of the grace of God that He permits His children to have a hand in bringing this grace that He bestowed on the Macedonian Christians. Paul had had a hand in this with His work among the Macedonians and the grace to do that work was not the special privilege of the apostle for he addresses himself to pastors and laymen alike today when he writes to Timothy "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering." It is a responsibility that we should be ready to accept without hesitation. Paul did not hesitate, for that was the burden of chapters 8 and 9 in his second letter to the Corinthians. There was a problem there and he could not be silent. The offering for the Christians in Jerusalem had been started but had faltered because of the spiritual problems that troubled the Corinthians. They did take precedence, but once they had been dealt with he must quickly remind them of this responsibility again. We recognize it as a continuing problem for our people. Again and again we find ourselves hampered in our work because the gifts are not sufficient. Let us accept the responsibility that is ours and be diligent in encouraging our fellow Christians to a proper stewardship of their material blessings.

But we must be careful in this work or the results could be tragic. We must confine ourselves

to those methods that will bring our people to offer gifts that are acceptable and pleasing to our Lord. There are certainly methods that the world has developed for the raising of funds that are most effective but would be most objectionable to our Lord. We will be wise to examine them so that we will not be trapped into accepting them because of the glamour and effectiveness that is so obvious. There is real danger in the field of giving that our people may become guilty of what has nicely been called "legalistic activism."

The world has become expert in producing results. We are faced with the question of whether or not we have the right to make full use of the means that the world has developed so skillfully, just because they produce results. Since the Lord Himself tells us through Paul that the righteousness and true holiness He looks for from His saints is only that variety that is produced by the new man created after God, we must be certain that the only means that we employ are those that are going to strengthen the new man and give him the power to conquer the flesh and produce these fruits. The point is that the Lord is not only interested in the product but also in the production. And with good reason. He can accept as good fruit only that that is produced by the new man, everything that is the result of legalistic activism is rejected by Him as worthless. Just because the methods of the world are so effective in getting results we may be tempted to bring them into the work of the Church. They don't even make good crutches. If they are not able to edify, to strengthen the new man, they will surely result in disaster.

It will do no harm to spend a few moments in examining the methods of the world so that we may see the truth of this. The business world has developed the huckster method to the point where it is able to persuade customers to buy almost anything or to do almost anything. By coming with repeated slogans, with attractive packaging, with persuasive arguments

and with snob appeal, the hucksters are successful ¹⁴ in selling their wares. It would be interesting at this point to have some statistics. How many pills do you think have been sold to perfectly healthy people just because the manufacturer has put on a successful advertising campaign? We have all doubtless heard of the subliminal approach that has been used with success. In an experiment in a theatre a suggestion was flashed on the screen during the course of a movie. It was put there again and again, but for such a short instant each time that the eye was never conscious of the fact that it had seen anything other than the movie. But after it had been repeated a number of times a large percentage of the people went into the lobby for a glass of rootbeer. It is true indeed that the human being is so constructed that he is susceptible to almost any suggestion that is attractively presented and that is put before him often enough.

We could dignify these methods somewhat, adapt them to the program of the Church and reap a rich harvest in gifts. We have seen elaborate promotional material and heard clever slogans that have stirred up enthusiasms among the people of God. These efforts must surely be used with restraint. Certainly Paul did not depend upon a vivid description of the hungry, homeless children of Jerusalem to promote an interest in the collection. He told them that the want was there, but there must be other reasons than an emotional buildup to prompt the gifts that were needed so that they would be brought in the proper spirit. There is nothing in the huckster method that will build the new man.

The world has learned long ago to make use of the personality boys to persuade others to do things that they had no real intention of doing. Some of them have the gift of leading men so cleverly that those who are being led suddenly find themselves incorporated in a movement and supporting it vigorously, without remembering why it was that they joined.

In the past years we have heard of a number of persons, many of them prominent, intelligent people who have found themselves members of communist front organizations. They are embarrassed. They don't remember why they joined, they are not communists, but they have been persuaded by a vigorous personality to become members of a group they really want no part of. What a tragic thing it would be if we brought our gifts only because we liked the man who asked them of us. Paul does remark that the Macedonians gave themselves "unto us" but quickly adds "by the will of God." He rejoices because they followed his suggestion and brought gifts. He was careful not to come to them "by commandment", ordering them to produce and he surely did not rely on his powers of persuasion. He rejoices that they followed his direction, by the will of God, recognizing him as their called pastor and giving him the high honor of recognizing that what he said and did was offered in the spirit of humble service that God asks of his clergy.

While it is not a method that has been formulated by the world, we should take a careful look at the method of giving that is referred to as tithing. We are especially disturbed because tithing has received more and more attention and encouragement in Lutheran circles in the recent past. We don't believe that we have the right so much as to suggest the tithe to our people, for then we would be going beyond our responsibility of encouraging them to give as they purpose in their hearts and we just might encourage a feeling of satisfaction because a duty has been done that would be in conflict with that singlemindedness that Paul commended in Macedonia. A person might set the tithe as his personal goal, of his own volition, but he will surely have to be on guard against a feeling of righteousness and will have to be careful that he doesn't stagnate. Certainly we would expect a growth in faith and love that would soon not be satisfied with a tenth but would set his sights on 12 or 15 per cent.

In summary then let us say that we must always keep in mind the basic proposition that we cannot measure the effective stewardship of our people by the sum total of what they have given. Before these gifts can be acceptable to our Lord they must come as they purpose in their hearts, that is they must be ^{brought} joyfully without fear of the consequences and with single-minded purpose. That was why the Macedonian gifts brought such joy to the heart of Paul. Any procedure that the world follows, no matter how successful it may be in the end result will have to be suspect and will have to be rejected unless it can be clearly shown that this method is not going to detract from the ultimate purpose of God, gifts that are the product of the new man, that have been prompted by the gift of grace.

Certainly there will be little profit in being only negative in the matter of stewardship. Paul was following a very positive program with which he was encouraging the Corinthian congregation to complete the offering. He did so by reciting what had happened in Macedonia so that the Corinthians would be reminded of the principles involved. Most assuredly he was not encouraging a feeling of rivalry or competition to raise the money. That would have been as wrong as anything that the world has developed to produce results. As he writes to the Corinthians then, let him teach us what we are to do to encourage our people in this phase of their sanctification.

While he does not repeat it on this occasion, Paul has already impressed upon the Corinthians the basic proposition that what they had was theirs by the grace of God. In the first letter he had reminded them that they were to give as the Lord had prospered them. They were never to forget that all their material possessions were in fact a talent, in the true sense of the word, a treasure that was God's but that had been put into their hands to use in His service and one part of that service was surely that they help the needy, no matter what the need might be. It

may seem that this is so elementary that it need not consume our time. But how often do we give more than a passing thought to this basic truth? Are we not at least occasionally guilty of paying mere lip service when we use the phrase, "We give Thee but Thine own"? Our whole economic system is geared away from this truth and leads instead to the thought that our possessions are the product of our personal industry or are ours because we live in the days of the Great Society. We work so many hours and in return receive so many dollars. When a union has been particularly aggressive the amount per hour is increased and the credit goes to the union. When a certain age has been reached it is not generally concerned children who provide for the needs of parents, but a blue government check is received in the mail each month and after July 1, 1966 the cost of illness will also be provided. Even those who live directly off the land find that a destructive hailstorm will result in a cash settlement and that a benevolent government is ready to ease the dependance on rainfall and sunshine by sending regular checks for not tilling certain tracts of land. We are a long way from the days in which a grateful man would shoulder a sack of wheat and remember the fine distribution of rain and sun by which the Lord had made this treasure possible. If Paul was ready to remind his people then that the Lord had prospered them, certainly we owe it to one another that we seriously and frequently remind one another that what we have is truly not our own. And this does not mean one sermon per year on the subject. Let it be the subject of frequent conversation in the home and among Christians when they are gathered together.

And why should the Corinthians be ready to use this talent as the Lord indicated? Paul puts it very briefly, but effectively reminds them of what had happened to them by the grace of God. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that

ye through his poverty might be rich." With these 18 words Paul is simply reminding them that their gracious Lord had, at the price of His only begotten Son, redeemed them from the curse of sin, had created in them the new man, had made of those who were sinners saints, had brought them into a fellowship with Him so that they might serve Him here and be with Him in eternity. Wasn't Paul missing a golden opportunity when he was satisfied with just this reminder when the need for an offering was so great? Where was the pep talk? We hear nothing of a kick off dinner. Just this brief but rich Gospel message. Paul was ready to rely upon the power of that Gospel. He knew that this Gospel would build the new man, would give them a love for Him who first loved them that would prompt them to do His bidding, that it would infect them with this love of God so that they would find themselves with an unselfish concern for others that would prompt them to use their talent properly. Paul was not experimenting with something new. When the Lord wanted Isaiah to serve Him as a prophet, He was asking as much of him as He asks of anyone. But you will remember that the Lord did not spend a lot of effort and time in telling him of the work that he was to do. He did not try to impress him with the necessity of that work. What the Lord did do was to come to Isaiah in a vision and then bring this trembling man to his knees with the words "Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." The Lord had permitted him to see the glory of heaven, taught him to understand that the guilt of sin had cursed him. Then, after He had shown him his guilt, then it was that the Lord came to him with the burning coal that had purged him of his iniquity. When it had been impressed upon his heart that the God of all grace and mercy had forgiven him and spared him certain destruction the words came pouring out of his mouth, "Here am I send me, send me!" When Jesus wanted to change timid carpenters and fishermen and businessmen into giants who would go through the land as His apostles, build-

ing His Kingdom, He did it by spending years with them in which He had but one thought. He would tell them of the mercy and grace of God repeatedly. He would make use of every hour to show them every phase of that mercy and grace until it had been firmly impressed upon their hearts that they were indeed redeemed from sin and had been made saints of God. Then they were ready to go into all the world without counting the cost to themselves. No Paul did not pass up a golden opportunity. Let us not underrate the effective means our Lord has put into our hands. But again, let us not restrict this to formal sermonizing. Let it be the subject of conversation among us on the informal level. Why should we be so shy about bringing this up in our conversation with our fellow believers? We will be effectively building the new man in one another when we informally and in our own words express the truth of the Gospel to one another. And this will be necessary. Our flesh will find a hundred other uses that we could make of that with which God hath prospered us.

The children of God face another specific problem when the time comes to bring an offering unto the Lord. Surely we have all experienced the disappointment of having fellow Christians heartily agree to an offering and enthusiastically endorse it only to have the offering fall short because these very people came with the word that they just couldn't afford to do what needed doing. May we suggest that there is a lack of courage there? We may as well be blunt - they are afraid, afraid that what they give will cause them to share a meager meal with their families, will make it impossible to make the next car payment. There is nothing new about this fear. Paul must have met with it, because we find him anticipating this fear by carefully reminding the Corinthians that the Macedonians gave beyond their power and then quickly explaining the reason for such extravagance by telling us that they had first given themselves unto the Lord. That is where we find the answer to our problem, the answer that can give us

and others the courage to give what is needed. They had learned to accept the simple proposition that there was no need for those who had been redeemed at so great a price to suspect that their gifts to the Lord who had redeemed them would cause them irreparable damage. This was not a new thought that these people had developed. The Lord had long invited such confidence and trust from His redeemed. You will remember that when the chosen people of God betrayed their fear by holding back their tithes and offerings Malachi was sent to charge them with theft and to invite their confidence in the continuing concern of their God for them with the words "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." The Savior early invited his disciples to such confidence when He told them "Give and it shall be given unto you, pressed down and overflowing." Paul makes free use of this invitation to confidence when he writes the Corinthians "He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." A word of caution is in place when these passages are used. We have heard them abused when the implication is made that this is some thing of an anti-poverty program. The Lord doesn't say that the basket will be filled to overflowing with cash. It may be, yes. But we dare not make it sound like a cause and effect proposition in which we determine what the effect will be. We are recipients of the grace of God and that can take many forms. It is significant that we are not told what happened to the widow who came, prompted by an astonishing faith in the promises of God, and placed her last mite in the offering. It might well have been that the Lord bestowed upon her the special grace of seeing this wretched world for what it was, and of letting her go to her bed and without complaint slowly dying of starvation, so to be translated to the glories of heaven. Paul surely wasn't speaking in terms of dollars and cents when he wrote about sowing bountifully. He knew that there might be some who would sow sparingly and still amass

a fortune. But what they would be doing by sowing²¹ sparingly was to close their hearts to the Lord's efforts to enrich them with His grace.

The fear is there. Let us accept the challenge that the flesh lays before us and strengthen the new man who knows no fear. We can do it by the power of the Word that the Lord has put into our hands. But again, let it not rest with one stewardship Sunday per year. Why should not the matter of this fear be brought out into the open in our casual contacts with one another. What a wholesome thing it will be if we remind each other that such fear is not in character for the child of God but that we are the treasured possession of the God of grace and we need, in truth, take no thought for the morrow.

The figures in Lutheran giving that we quoted in the introduction are discouraging. But we have no right to be discouraged in helping our people properly to assess and use their material possessions. Nor should we cumber them with our own assessment of whether they are able to give or not. Paul learned that lesson in Macedonia. If we follow Paul's procedure and content ourselves with the power of the Word even as he did, then there will be fruit. Happily he reports to the Romans that the offerings were brought, not only in Macedonia but in Achaia as well. If we have been disappointed in the fruits, it may well be that there has been a lack of enthusiasm and zeal on our part and we have consequently not been diligent in helping one another in this difficult part of our Christian life. Let us be at it! The Lord stands ready to bestow His grace and He will repeat the miracle again and again and again.

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