

The Butterfly Effect

A Sermon Based on 2 Corinthians 9:8-11

Have you ever heard of the butterfly effect? I'm not talking the weird movie that some of you may have seen; I'm talking about the actual theory. In case you haven't heard of it, here it is in a nutshell. The idea is that a butterfly flapping its wings in South America can produce a tornado in Texas. Now, I know that sounds absolutely ridiculous, but it is a real scientific theory. And while I don't know much about weather patterns and butterflies—I do know that the theory demonstrates a principle that is easy to forget, the principle being that actions often have effects that are far more profound than we think at first.

In the section of scripture before us today, Paul is urging believers to flap their tiny wings in the hopes of producing a tornado, but in a good way. He's asking some of his believing friends to give generously of all they have, yes, their money, but also their lives, because he knows that the results of their actions, by the grace of God, can be incredible. And so today I would like to you to think about the question, "What, by the grace of God, will my butterfly effect be?" And as you think about that question, remember two things, 1) The Lord can increase your ability to give generously, and 2) your generosity *will* result in thanksgiving to God.

When Paul wrote the words before us today, he was writing to a group of Christians who lived in the Greek city of Corinth. Paul was coming through their town soon to collect an offering from them that was intended to go to needy Christians in Jerusalem, and he was writing here to encourage generosity for this offering. But Paul didn't approach the issue as you might expect. He doesn't paint some dramatic picture of how horrible the situation in Jerusalem was. Instead he talks about how generous and giving God is, and how he makes sure that all his people's needs are met so that they are able to give generously. Hear his words again. He says,

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion...¹

Paul knew that one of the chief obstacles to giving was the innate nervousness that sinful people have about giving away their stuff—as if the stuff of this world makes people truly content and happy. And so Paul tells the Corinthians that God, in his grace, could make sure that all their needs were met, even if they did give away some of their stuff. And of course he was right. In fact, the Corinthians were already some of the richest people on earth. They were rich because they were Christians, and as such, they had everything they would ever need. They had been a people who had no hope. Since God demands perfection, and since they had not been perfect, they had been headed for hell. It is a simple, just equation. **"The wages of sin is death."**² But God had rescued them from that fate. He sent his Son, Jesus, to live a perfect life in their place and to be punished in their place. And since Jesus had been punished in the place of all other people, God forgave people. The Corinthians, like all Christians held in their hand an amazing, yet free gift. And it was the best gift they ever could have hoped to receive. They had the only thing that mattered and the only things that last. Through trust in Jesus' sacrifice for them, they had forgiveness from God. They had the peace of knowing that God would welcome them into heaven with open arms because Christ took away their sins. They had the joy of knowing that the God who created the universe was looking out for them and was working out all things for their good. They were the richest people on earth.

Paul did not promise that God would make the Corinthians monetarily rich if they gave away some of their money. But he promised that God was able to make them rich in the ways that really mattered. And, in addition, God promised to increase their store of seed enough so that they could share with those in need. Paul was telling them that God would not only provide for their spiritual needs, but that he would also provide for their physical needs—even if they gave away some of their resources. God would give them enough so that they could **"...be generous on every occasion."**

But as we think about how God makes us rich in all the ways that really count, so that we can cheerfully contribute to the needs of others, there are a couple of words that we need to consider carefully. Paul writes, **"God is able to make all grace abound to you... so that you will abound in every good work..."**³ But he does not

¹All scripture references are taken from: *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. (2 Co 9:8-11)

²Romans 2:23

³2 Co 9:8

write that **“God will make all grace abound to you.”** It’s not a given that people will be **“made rich in every way.”** People need to be connected to the channels of God’s grace if they want to be made rich in every way. If people are disconnected from God’s word so that they do not continue to learn more and more about his grace, they won’t be able to grow in their faith or in the love that they show to others. Only God, as he works through his word and his sacraments, creates giving love in our hearts. Only God is able to increase both the desire to give and the amount that one is able to give.

Jesus tells us that he is the vine and that we are the branches. Apart from him, he says, we can do nothing. When people are disconnected from their life-source, when they don’t read their Bibles, when they don’t come to church or Bible class, they will not be able to be made rich by God, they are branches that are sawing themselves off of their vine. Well, once the branches fall off of the vine, they are useless and are eventually picked up by the gardener and thrown into a fire. But if people are connected to their God, if they are connected to their loving Savior, if they let themselves hear his word and grow in wisdom from it, then God provides for the production of fruit. The more people realize the marvels of what God has done for them, the more they are filled with joy, contentment, and love toward God and their fellow men.

My friends, you have tremendous potential, because Jesus has given you life, and he’s given you the ability to produce, as Paul says, “a harvest of righteousness.” This means that you can give of your faith, your life, and your possessions to others. And there will be a butterfly effect. When you know God’s grace and are gracious with others, many will offer up praise to God. Remember the last line of this section of scripture, **“You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”**⁴

Think of how this probably played out in the specific situation that Paul was talking about. The Jerusalem Christians would have been overwhelmed at the Corinthians’ generosity. As the Jerusalem Christians finally filled their hungry stomachs, imagine the multitude of hushed, “Thank you, God,” prayers. But this offering that the Corinthians gave would not have just caused the Jewish Christians to give thanks to God. If the Corinthians would show this love toward the Jews in Jerusalem, they would reflect Jesus’ love to everyone who saw that expression of love. Who knows how many new people were drawn to the Christian faith when they saw how these two groups of completely opposite people loved one another. The Corinthians probably never fully understood the butterfly effect that their giving would have.

You know, you can be part of the butterfly effect too. The last hymn that we will sing today is about what it’s going to be like when we step into heaven one day, when we’ll see that great multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, language and people singing the praises of our almighty and all-merciful God. When you experience it one day, it will take your breath away. But have you ever thought about how many of those countless thousands will run over to you and hug you, and say things like, “I have praised God for you every day that I’ve been here because of the love that you showed me when _____” And you fill in the blank. They’ll say things like, “...when you gave money so that people could come and teach me English and then tell me about my savior, so that I could come here!” Or maybe it will be an old neighbor who runs up to you, throws their arms around you and says, “Thank you! My parents didn’t know about our Savior. I didn’t know about my Savior. But that one year when you volunteered to drive me to Vacation Bible School along with your kids, I learned about him. And, it didn’t happen right away, but later in life I decided that I wanted peace and the purpose that it seemed like those people at your church had, and I joined a Christian church and learned all about my savior, and I told my parents as well. There they are, right over there.” Wouldn’t that be incredible?!

My friends, the Christian author C.S. Lewis once said, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.” If you think that it’s true, treat it like it is of infinite importance. Stay connected Christ, so that you will continue to be the richest people in the world. Stay in the Word so that you will be able to share your riches with others. Let the grace of God dwell in you richly. Let your little wings flap away. Sow generously. And know with certainty that, **“your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”**⁵ I can’t wait to experience the great thanksgiving one day with all of you. Amen.

⁴2 Co 9:11

⁵2 Co 9:11