

That is Mine!
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November 23, 2008
2 Corinthians 8:1-9

It is great to be with you this morning. I hope and I believe that you'll be an easier crowd than the group of pre-school children I talked to a couple of weeks ago.

They asked me to come on a Wednesday night and talk to them about missions, and so I did. But I might have made a fatal mistake. At the end of my little talk I actually had the nerve to ask if they had any questions. So, of course the hands go up, and the first little boy I called on—just bright as a button—asked, “When are you leaving?” It’s kind of humbling. So there is no Q & A time today. If you’re asking that question you can just take that to the Lord, because sometimes the world asks that of God and His people. “When are you leaving? You disrupt our idolatry. You disrupt our self-centeredness. When you’re around you disrupt our ability to revel in our sin.” Do you know what God says to people when they ask Him, “When are you leaving?” He says, “I’m not. I’m here and I’m not going anywhere.”

About 100 years ago there was a Dutch theologian and politician, and yes, those terms are not mutually exclusive. When I shared this earlier one of the deacons came up to me and said, “You had to reach back 100 years to find a politician who

was also a theologian.” Well, yeah. Abraham Kuyper was the prime minister of the Netherlands. Here is what he said, and when I read it, it just grabbed me. We see it all through Scripture. He wrote this: “In the total expanse of human existence there is not one square inch of which Christ—who alone is sovereign—does not declare, ‘that is Mine!’ There is not one square inch on the totality of human existence, including your life and every bit of it, over which Christ does not say, ‘mine!’.” How do you respond to that statement? If you’re a believer you should welcome it. If you’re a believer, that should not be news to you. But are you appropriately throttled occasionally with the realization that the God of wonders—the God of the universe—looks at you and your relatively insignificant small life and says, “Mine!” He does not just say this for those who have received and responded to His invitation. Our Savior roams the entire world, in all of its beauty and pain and says, “Mine!” And we, His church—His body—are His hands and His feet. It is our job to take the Spirit of Christ throughout the world and close to home. As His hands and feet we reclaim and we collect—bit by bit—all that is broken. We give it back to the Lord as an offering and He says, “Thank you, church. You are my hands and feet. Now go and get what is mine.”

So how does God do this? How does God look at a world and declare, “Mine!” And what’s the process from that declaration to it actually happening? Some

would say that's what missions are all about. But I want to be careful that we never divorce missions from worship and discipleship. Here at Brentwood Baptist we talk about these (worship, discipleship and missions) as three-legged stool. Missions exist because worship and discipleship exist. And we know that what we have is too special, and we also know that God is not a selfish God or a "contained God." He does not only have room to say, "Mine!" to just a few people. John 3:16—"For God so loved the world. . ." You know that verse. It is all about Jesus Christ saying, "Mine!" So God asks us to partner with Him in this cosmic redemption plan, because He did not only save *you*, and He did not only save *this church*. He does not leave you and He does not leave this church here on earth just so we can bide time until it is "our time" to get to heaven. We have an assignment; we have a task. We go in His name, and we take back from the darkness that which belongs to Him.

There is a story in 2 Corinthians 8, and it gives us some insight into how God wants to do this. Now, I want to give you some context here. The Corinthian church, in our minds, does not have the best reputation. You read 1 Corinthians and Paul is very clear about his issues with the Corinthian church. They were morally suspect. They were theologically heretical. When you read 1 Corinthians, Paul had a "Come to Jesus" moment with the Corinthian church. Often times we

don't know how things turn out, but here's a circumstance where we know how things turned out, because not only do we have 1 Corinthians, we have 2 Corinthians. The tone in 2 Corinthians is very different from 1 Corinthians. Some time had elapsed and during that time between 1 and 2 Corinthians the Corinthian church repented. They finally got the message. Paul, in step with the Holy Spirit, brought conviction upon them. In fact, 2 Corinthians 7 is a beautiful picture of what true repentance looks like. So the tone in 2 Corinthians is quite a bit different. The Corinthians had mended their relationship with both the Lord and with Paul. In 2 Corinthians Paul is saying to them, "Way to go! I'm so glad you made these changes, but I'm afraid if you're not careful you might forget a prior commitment you have made." Paul had started churches throughout the Mediterranean basin and the church in Jerusalem and in Judea was suffering from a great famine. So throughout Paul's writings you see this theme crop up. For over ten years Paul was about not only starting churches and strengthening churches, but reminding churches not to forget about each other. He was engaged in a famine relief offering. So throughout 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul reminded the Corinthian church that for all their repentance and for all their growth they had made a commitment to take a missions offering. He did not want them to forget it.

In these verses that we are going to read Paul does something relatively interesting. Paul is writing to the Corinthian church. He wants to remind them not to forget about the Jerusalem church over here who is suffering from famine. He said that one of the reasons the Christians in Jerusalem were suffering from famine was that they were giving all of their food away to non-Christians in their midst. So it was not only taking care of other Christians, but also taking care of the hungry non-Christians in Jerusalem as well. But here is what Paul says to the Corinthians: “Corinthians, I want to tell you about another group of churches—the Macedonians—churches that Paul started in Berea and Thessalonica and Philippi.” We have Paul’s letters to the Philippians and the Thessalonians, right? So in these verses, Paul says to the Corinthians—trying to inspire them to meet the needs of the church in Jerusalem—“Let me remind you what the Macedonian churches are doing.” Economically, the Macedonian churches were not nearly as well off as the Corinthian church. But the Macedonian churches were mentioned in Paul’s letters to inspire the Corinthian church to finish what they had started and to live beyond themselves. Why? Because Christ had called them, had looked at them, and said, “You are mine, and I need you to be My hands and my feet to go help these other people.” And isn’t that why God leaves us here on this earth?

So stand with me, and let's read 2 Corinthians 8: 1-9. After we finish reading keep your Bible open because we will be referring to these verses again. ¹ *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God granted to the churches of Macedonia:* ² *during a severe testing by affliction, their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed into the wealth of their generosity.* ³ *I testify that, on their own, according to their ability and beyond their ability,* ⁴ *they begged us insistently for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints,* ⁵ *and not just as we had hoped. Instead, they gave themselves especially to the Lord, then to us by God's will.* ⁶ *So we urged Titus that, just as he had begun, so he should also complete this grace to you.* ⁷ *Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us —excel also in this grace.* ⁸ *I am not saying this as a command. Rather, by means of the diligence of others, I am testing the genuineness of your love.* ⁹ *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: although He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich.* May God bless the reading of His Word.

Will you pray with me? Our gracious Father, You roam this earth declaring, "Mine!" Thank you that Your gaze did not escape us. Thank You that we are included in that statement. But Father, You have claimed us so that we can partner with You in claiming this world for You. Show us how to do it. Keep us faithful. May these penetrate. May they connect. We ask all of this in Your name, Amen.

For those of you who know me, you already know that I'm a nerd. For those of you who don't know me I will now prove it to you--all right? Behind me you see all these flags. Now these flags represent everywhere that Brentwood Baptist Church has gone this year, and every place where members from our church are serving as missionaries. Now, I made one mistake in the earlier service today. I knew it was Mississippi and not Montana, but I messed it up. I won't do that this time. So, starting in that back left hand corner are the flags of the Sudan and Cambodia. We have a team who have been in Cambodia, working with the national baseball team there who are coming home today. Over here are Germany, Brazil and South Africa. In the back are Guatemala, Portugal, and the flag of our own state—Tennessee. Here in the front are Illinois, New Mexico and the American flag. In the back are Mississippi, Hong Kong and Mexico, where Doug and Christy Jones—the daughter of Joe and Margie Hudson—serve as missionaries. Right up here are great ones—California, Montana, the Virgin Islands. In the far back are Italy and Malaysia. Over here is India (Sarah Samuel) and Poland, Moldova (Jen Gash). That's where we are. That's where we have been called as a church to take Jesus and say, "Mine!" Not mine for you and me, but mine—referring to Him and His plan. The way that it is done, whether locally or around the world, is through the generosity of people just like you. It was

through the generosity of the Macedonians 2000 years ago, as of the generosity of the Corinthians. I believe that the Corinthians made good on their pledge to live outside of themselves and generously support the work of Paul in his famine relief offering. So that's the setting.

In verses 1-8 we see the models are the Macedonians. Very briefly, let's just pull and extract some of the key truths from these eight verses. The first is in verse 1. Paul starts out by saying, "I want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches." Then he proceeds to tell them how generous they are. Do you understand that generosity is a gift? Generosity just doesn't result in your giving gifts. Your ability to be generous is a gift. Anything that moves in your heart and mind and says, "I need to take care of that," or "God wants me to do that," is God honoring you by inviting you to partner with Him in His cosmic redemption plan. So for you to give is in itself a gift. The next time you give and you think God says, "Thank you," do not say, "You're welcome." Do not say, "Don't mention it." Do not say, "I hope you don't forget this, God, because I might need to call in a favor later"—no! The next time that God says, "Thank you," you say, "No! God, thank You!" You have done so much for me, nothing that I could do will ever begin to repay all that you could give me. In fact, create in me a heart that wants to give even more. Do you ever pray that? You might

pray that God would give others a heart to give you more. But do you pray that God would give you a heart to give even more—not just finances, but time and energy, focus and prayer? The ability to give is in itself a gift.

Even so, look at verse 2. All was not well in the Macedonian world the way we would define well. It says here in verse 2 that they had two problems: They were poor, if we call that a problem; and they were persecuted. This word persecuted also means harassed and distressed. The Macedonians had two strikes against them: They were persecuted and they were poor. But there are these two problems, and verse 2 tells us the result of these two problems. “Their persecution resulted in overflowing joy.” How counterintuitive and countercultural is that? “And their extreme poverty resulted in rich generosity.” Now that makes no sense. Most of us—if we give much of anything at all—only give what we can afford to give, and it does not curtail our lifestyle in any meaningful way. Not so with the Macedonians. When is the last time God gifted you with the ability to do something that actually curtailed your plans? That’s the kind of stewardship that will change the world. That’s the kind of giving that will make the world stand up and take notice when we go to a place—here or far away—and say, “God says this is mine!” They will say, “I want Him too.”

Verse 3 says that they gave sacrificially. Paul says they gave even beyond their ability. Most of us would think that to be very unwise, yet it seemed to be standard operating procedure for the Macedonians. They knew they could never out-give God, and they knew the greater their trial, the more they needed to test God, because God says, “Test me in this. You work with Me in reaching the world and I will meet all of your needs.” They knew it. They lived it. How much do we miss out on?

In verse 4 the Macedonians were also models because they took the initiative. It seems here that Paul was saying, “Look, we were not even going to ask the Macedonian churches to participate. After all, they are persecuted and they are poor. Maybe we need to take up an offering for them.” No, it says here that the Macedonians urgently pleaded with the Lord for the opportunity to participate in this service to the saints. How about you? Do you urgently plead with the Lord to show you what He wants you to do to help change your world? They took the initiative. In verse 5 they exceeded expectations. Paul himself was encouraged and blown away by what the Macedonians in their poverty and persecution were willing to do for their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, plus the unreached in Jerusalem that they had never seen. He was amazed, because they gave themselves first to the Lord, primarily.

In verses 6-8 you see that Paul says to the Corinthians the Macedonians were a blessing to others. “They blessed me as I saw how generous they were. They blessed the Jerusalem church because their generosity fed starving people.” Then Paul said, “Corinthians, I want the Macedonians to be a blessing to you. I want them and their example to inspire you to live outside of yourselves.” It made no sense whatsoever for the Macedonians to be generous. If we are not careful we will fall in the trap in these uncertain economic times when it really makes no sense to be generous. Why don’t you see what God can do? The Macedonians did, and they had overflowing joy. It’s worth it.

Look at verse 7. You see here how Paul’s tone with the Corinthians is so warm—such a contrast to 1 Corinthians. He said in verse 7, “Just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—don’t forget to excel in this grace of giving. Brothers and sisters, Christianity is not a buffet where you pick and choose that which you want to do. The fruits of the Spirit are not multiple choice, where you get to pick your “top one and your top two.” Paul says here, “Excel in your worship, excel in your discipleship, but don’t forget to excel in giving.” This is God’s strategy for solving

problems, for healing people and changing the world. It's how God says, "Mine!" Now church, go and get it. Bring it to me for my glory.

I love being part of a church that takes that seriously. I love the many ways we are involved in reclaiming this lost world. Because it is fresh on my mind, I want to show you a few images of some of your fellow church members and what they have done in the Sudan. There will be some slides and I'll tell you a story, but before we get to the slides of the Sudan, I want you to take a look at this map. This is called the 10/40 Window. All of the countries in navy blue run from 10 degrees latitude north to 40 latitude north. What is significant about this? It is first and foremost the cradle of the world's religions—Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. It's less than one third of the world's land area and it contains two thirds of the world's people. Ninety five percent of the people who live in this window are unreached and not evangelized, which means there is not even an indigenous church healthy enough among most of those people groups to carry out church planting and witnessing.

Don't ever believe it when you hear the missionary age is over. Eighty five percent of the people who live in this window are the world's poorest of the poor. And yet the majority of mission resources from the evangelical church do not go to

these areas. Why? It is so hard to do work there. But we are trying to correct that. You will see on the map in red the countries of the world where we as a church are involved. Now first and foremost, through our support of the Lottie Moon Christmas offering and the 5,000 missionaries around the world incredible things are happening in these areas. We have a hand in that. But in particular, we are in Portugal where our deaf are working; in India where Sarah Samuel has been; in Myanmar where many of our people have gone; in Cambodia where our team is traveling back as we speak; in China where we just sent our first team to Hong Kong this year. God looks at that and says, "Mine! Mine!" And we get to be a part of taking Him to them.

Now back to the Sudan. The guy on the far left is Gai. He is a member of our church. In 1983 civil war broke out in the Sudan, and literally tens of thousands of children fled. As a young boy he fled to Uganda and he was raised in a refugee camp. A few years ago he was repatriated to the states, and Nashville became a key place where the lost boys of the Sudan found a home. A Sunday school class in our church, through God's providence, got connected with Gai and a few other "lost boys." They got these boys computers, helped them get in school, and we gave them food. It was amazing to watch the Phillips Sunday School class, unprompted by anyone else in the church, take this ministry on. And as thankful as

Gai was, he came to me and said, “Scott, I appreciate Brentwood Baptist Church and all that it has done to help us here, but what are you going to do to help me reach my country?” Now that is a bit of a harder order to fill. But I knew God was saying “Mine!” through Gai. Most of Gai’s family had been killed. Some twenty years after he fled as a child he went back and was reunited with his father and his brother. The next slide is the picture of our team.

Kevin McKechnie is in the next slide and he’s here today. I said to him, “I’m glad you’re going but please come back—you’re my doctor.” The nearest medical clinic for Gai’s home village is a day and a half walk away. The line for the medical clinic started at 3:00 a.m. and over 1,300 people were seen while our team was there.

In the next slide you see Meredith MaGuirk and Christina Martin in the clinic caring for a child. Next, Mason Young is a lawyer and he went as a pharmacist. That is Walgreens in the Sudan. In the next slide, see what this little boy is holding: Vitamins, collected by the children’s ministry of Brentwood Baptist Church. May we never underestimate what our children can do. Who knows what those vitamins are going to do for that boy and his family. There is Rachel Knox and others doing Bible stories for the people in the village. Most don’t read, so our

team memorized Bible stories in a certain method so they could share with people the story of creation all the way through Christ as Healer.

Next slide is a water pump and you can see all the containers that people would bring. Now that is almost two miles away from the village, and it's the nearest water source the villagers have. So through your generous giving water just like that is coming to Gai's village. Don't ever think that your generosity doesn't make a difference. And, in your quiet times this week, if you continue to read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, in these entire two chapters Paul is talking about how missions offerings should be administered, to make sure people have trust in the process, and to make sure it is done and facilitated in the right way. I challenge you to read the entire two chapters about how missions and mission offerings should be done. We try our best to follow these same principles. . .so water is coming to this village.

Finally, this is Gai—a member of Brentwood Baptist Church—who found a place where there were people here who understand the Macedonian call, and were willing to do something. He has a partnership now between his home church in Tennessee and his village. Folks, what we do matters, and what we do makes a difference.

If the Macedonians are the example in verses 1-8, verse 9 reminds us of our ultimate motivation. If the Macedonians are the human standard and measure, then Jesus Christ—and Christ alone—is the divine standard and measure for what we do. Look at verse 9: ***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*** Jesus Christ alone is the basis for our motivation and is the standard for our ministry. Now Paul does spend time trying to motivate the Corinthians, to compare themselves against the Macedonians. Think about it. Usually comparison is not a good thing, because when you and I do it, it will result in one of two things. 1) We become prideful, because we are always doing better than somebody else. 2) We become discouraged because somebody is always doing better than us. But that is not Paul's intention here. Paul is not trying to guilt the Corinthians into being generous. He is using the Macedonians as an inspiring motive for the Corinthians to do what God knows they can do. But the ultimate standard is Jesus Christ Himself.

No one understands downward mobility more than Jesus Christ. Regardless of what your 401k has been doing or not doing, no one understands sacrifice more than Christ Himself. So Jesus Christ is the ultimate “riches to rags” story. He left

the wealth and splendor of His heavenly home to live like you and me, so that we would understand His call of “Mine!” But it’s not just a “riches to rags” story, is it? It’s also “rags to riches.” As He claims us, He takes the raggedness of our life, He infuses us with His Spirit, and we become rich. Maybe it’s not as the world defines rich—but spiritually and generously.

Do you know that most of the world would love to have your problems right now? So how do we convince each other, when we have so much, that we would actually be better off if we had a little less, and shared a little more? That’s part of a challenge. But as we close today, how do you respond to Christ looking at you and saying, “Mine!” Do you welcome that? Do you revel in it? Do you only want to give Him certain parts and keep some back for yourself? How do you respond today if you have not yet accepted Him as your Lord and Savior, as He is looking at you and saying, “You’re Mine! Your life will be frustrated and ultimately pointless and meaningless and doomed if you do not enter into a relationship with Me.” And if you do not know Christ today, oh what you’re missing. We here who know Him will testify to that. As He says, “Mine!” to you, we want you to say, “You’re mine” to Him.”