WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

“Learning To Expect The Impossible”

**2 Corinthians 8: 1 - 5**

**Take Note**

During the 2008 presidential debates in New Hampshire the then Senator Barak Obama made this statement:

“Words do inspire. Words do help people get involved. When the American people are determined that something is going to happen, then; it happens. But if they are made to feel disenfranchised, cynical or fearful and told that it can’t be done, then, it won’t get done; I’m running for president because I want to tell the American people ‘**YES WE CAN**!’”

This of course was the prevailing mantra of President Obama’s initial presidential campaign. Those three simple words managed to galvanize an entire nation and propelled the very first African-American in to the office of President of the United States of America. As Christians we would do well to apply this same mindset in our daily walk with the Lord. In a world teeming with pessimism, gloom and hopelessness there is dire need for the positive message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As disciples of Christ we are required to do far more than simply talk-the-talk and give lip service to our faith; but true discipleship calls for a real demonstration of our faith in God.

**A Basic Overview**

The churches in the province of Macedonia just north of Greece; mentioned in our main scripture were planted by the Apostle Paul during his second missionary journey. The scripture lesson in **2 Cor. 8: 1 – 5** in essence involves the Apostle Paul comparing and contrasting the church in Corinth with the churches in Macedonia. It would appear that despite the fact that the church in Corinth had an abundance of spiritual gifts, they had failed to maintain their commitment as agreed to financially support the ministry. **1 Cor. 16: 1 – 4** However, the churches in Macedonia, though smaller and far less affluent than those in Corinth; and despite their dire conditions, had through their amazing sacrifices managed to raise a considerable amount of funds to send to support the ministry.

**QUESTION**: Is the exercise of our gifts, talents and abilities a substitute for our generous giving? This short passage of scripture found here in **2 Cor. 8: 1 – 5** affords us all a wealth of spiritual knowledge and insights concerning the practical application of our faith and our works in the kingdom of God.

**Expository Discoveries**

Let’s examine our scripture lesson verse-by-verse and attempt to disclose both the meaning and the true application of the text.

**2 Cor 8:1-5**

**8:1 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit** *(we want you to know)* **of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; -**

The Apostle Paul thought it was vitally important that those who had failed to fully commit themselves to Christ and to supporting the mission of the gospel would come to “know” what others had accomplished with far less resources. Knowing that many people would judge what they can do for God by taking inventory of their carnal resources, Paul was sure to inform them that this great thing was accomplished not through mere human means, but by “the grace of God.” God’s grace provided the church in Macedonia with divine enablement!

**QUESTIONS:** How do you feel most people determine what they can personally accomplish for the Lord? What factors should be considered when determining what you can or cannot do for God?

The challenge isn’t the numbers of people involved, or our bank account balances or even the size of our goal – the challenge is really all about our FAITH! We must see God not as a resource but rather see God as “the source.” There is no requirement in the bible that the smallest church cannot accomplish! When we truly expect great things from God, then we will be willing to attempt great things for God. In **Jeremiah 1:11** God asks Jeremiah – “what do you see?” God then tells the prophet that whatever he sees; God would then “hasten his word to perform it.” The lack of God inspired expectations creates slothful Christians who will strive to resist accountability and responsibility. With this practice neither the individual nor the church will ever reach their true potential.

**2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.**

As we examine the Apostle’s description of the Macedonian’s church condition, it becomes apparent that great trials and afflictions cannot take away the believer’s joy nor can utter poverty render the believer unable to show immense generosity. But how could this be so?

The answer can be seen as the joy within these saints overpowered and broke the constraints that their afflictions and trials attempted use to bind them. For the believer, great trials have the capacity to produce great faith and great faith in God will produce great accomplishments.

**QUESTIONS**: What is this “joy” that managed to motivate the members of the church in Macedonia to achieve such great things for God in spite of their dire circumstances? How does **Nehemiah 8:10** speak to this matter? According to **Hebrews 12:2**, what factor enabled Christ to press through the agony of the cross? The joy of the Lord and of his Christ supersedes all earthly afflictions and will propel the child of God beyond the flames of any fiery trial into the winner’s circle of blessed victory.

**3 For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;**

The Apostle informs us here that he was an eyewitness to the fact that the saints in Macedonia gave far beyond what their visible resources could have ever accomplished. These saints were enthusiastically willing to trust God beyond the apparent limitations set by their current circumstances.

**QUESTIONS**: In the passage of scripture found in **I Kings 17: 11 – 16**, the widow has to make a choice. She can take what little food she has left and ingest it and die; or she can chose to trust God and invest it and live. What decision did she make and what were the results? Did God provide this widow with an instant truck load of supplies? How did God chose to provide for her and her family’s needs? Would you be willing to trust God to provide for you in this same manner?

These Macedonian church members were successful in the pursuits because they chose not to depend upon “their power” but rather chose to tap into the power of God. Another key to their success is innate in the fact that “they were willing.” Paul didn’t coerce them or manipulate them into making such sacrifices – they were not pressured but they gave willingly.

**QUESTION:** If after honest consideration you conclude that you; for whatever reason are not “willing” to do what God is requiring – all is not lost: let me ask you this question; “are you “willing” to be made “willing?” that’s the real question.

**4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.**

The term “with much intreaty” means that the saints in Macedonia literally begged Paul to let them contribute to the work of the ministry. How often have you ever heard of anyone begging or pleading to contribute in the tithes and offerings? God’s grace will not only open your heart, God’s grace will also open your hand.

Despite the realities of their circumstances, these saints here in Macedonia saw themselves as a contributor to the benevolent ministry of Paul and not a benefactor.

**QUESTIONS:** What causes some people to feel like they are the victim most of the time? How does a person determine if they are “poor?” Are there more symbiotic relationships in your church or more parasitic relationships in your church? – and which category to you tend to hang out in most of the time?

Here the saints in Macedonia were willing to sacrifice to help people that they didn’t even know! The fact is that the people you will enviably help through your ministry sacrifices you too will probably never meet until you greet them in heaven. These saints recognized the urgency of the moment and were willing to be God’s first responders to the scene of the need within the body of Christ.

**QUESTIONS:** When you consider the goals of the ministry – do you honestly believe that it can be accomplished? Do you really understand what these goals are and why they are so important? When it comes to the goals being attainable, exactly what are you basing your opinion on? Have you used the same strategies in your personal life?

**5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. KJV**

Now, we come to the heart of the matter. It is here we can clearly understand how these saints, while enduring overwhelming trials and tribulations along with extreme conditions of poverty were able to accomplish such astonishing feats for God. They did so because they began by giving “themselves” first to the Lord. These saints did not attempt to hide their hearts behind their acts of piety and benevolence but openly revealed their true selves before God – first giving of themselves then of their possessions. This was their formula for success.

**QUESTIONS**: Is it possible to give without loving? Could God have access to a person’s things, without having access to them?

An interesting portion of this verse points out the fact that Paul himself had underestimated the ability of the saints in Macedonia. At times even God’s leaders can be guilty of having low expectations of God’s people.

**QUESTION**: Some believe that the key to true happiness is to lower your expectations. Why do you think they feel this way? What should be the believer’s response to such a proposition?

Expectations come with three components; what we expect from ourselves, what we expect from others and what we expect from God. Our expectations of God will serve to either raise or lower or expectations for ourselves and our expectations of others.

**Hear the Conclusion of the Matter**

You may have hear the old hymn *“I Surrender All”* by Judson W. Van Deventer. The chorus says: *“I surrender all, all to thee my blessed Savior, I surrender all.”* Beautiful concept and lovely melody; but I wonder how many have sung that chorus while their life was not fully surrender to the Savior? A fear that at best we can probably honestly sing “I surrender some to thee…” Most of us are behaving as spiritual squatters; refusing to release portions of our lives; seeing it as “our property” reluctant to release it over to its rightful owner – Jesus Christ.

True Christianity requires consistent growth on the part of every believer. As progressive disciples of Jesus Christ, we do not have the liberty or the luxury of lounging around in our feelings and esoteric idiosyncrasies. In the words of the young Savior – “we must be about our Father’s business.” As never before our world needs to see a real manifestation of the power of God and the best representation of that power should be visible in the lives of God’s people.

President Obama had the right mindset when he engaged the American people’s hope and expectations with the words “YES WE CAN!” Even more so, the Apostle Paul had the right mindset when he elevated God’s people’s hope and expectations with the words “I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHICH STRENGHENS ME!” I know you believe you can do all things through Christ – but now it’s time for us to do “SOME THING” through the power of Christ. And like the saints of the Macedonian church, it all begins when we first give ourselves to the Lord.