

*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, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:8-11)*

Does God Promise to Make You Rich?

Does God promise to make you rich? There are people who believe that he does. You can find quite a few of them on cable TV religious programs. Sometimes, their teachings are called “name and claim it” because that’s what they say. You tell God what you want and he will give it to you – name it and claim it. If he doesn’t, then there must be something wrong with your faith. And, of course, there’s a part of me that would love to believe that all I have to do is ask and God will give me whatever I want. My kids could drive Porsches. We could move into a million dollar house with a swimming pool and a home theater and maybe some riding stables. We could build Kieta Tower in downtown Livonia. But does God really promise all that? Does he really promise to make us rich? Well, yes and no. Now, there’s never going to be a Kieta Tower in downtown Livonia. But notice what St. Paul says to us this morning: **“You will be made rich in every way.”** We can’t rip that statement out of its context and make it into a “name and claim it” theology. So what does it mean?

I.

Does God promise to make you rich? Yes. Rich in his grace. That’s what he says: **“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.”** This reading is about God’s grace. Now it is in a context that’s talking about Christian giving and Paul is urging us to be generous in our offerings to the Lord. But he stops and makes this very important observation about why and how that’s possible: God makes all grace abound to us.

What is grace? There are lots of ways people might answer that question and you can tell a lot about a church’s teaching by how they define grace. In the Bible, grace means a gift. It’s something that someone gives you just because they love you. You don’t earn it. They don’t owe it to you. They love you and they want to show it. So we Lutherans often say that grace means God’s undeserved love. And of course, the greatest example of God’s grace is Jesus. God looked down from heaven and he saw sinners who rebel against him and hurt each other and destroy their own lives. Is anything attractive about that? Think about the most self-centered person you know. Do you like that person? Or does their selfishness and ego rub you the wrong way? God feels the same way.

And as the judge of all the earth, the only right thing for him to do was condemn those sinners to death and hell. That definitely includes us. One of the reasons that “name it and claim it” thinking is so attractive even to us is that our greedy little hearts want to be richer than everybody else. That’s sin. But instead of punishment, God showed us grace. He loved us sinners and he sent Jesus to live a perfect life in our place so that he could give us credit for that life. He sent Jesus to die and pay for every moment of pride and arrogance we’ve ever showed. Jesus died and paid for every time we hurt other people and every time we damaged our own lives through greed or selfishness. He died and paid for every act of rebellion against God. He suffered everything we deserve and then he rose to tell us that it is all gone. God has given us his life and death and resurrection as a gift of pure grace. Not one of us could ever earn or deserve that gift. But he gave it to us anyway.

But that’s not all the grace God shows us. The Bible uses the word grace for lots of things. St. Paul calls the ministry a grace. It was a gift of God that he got to spend his life proclaiming the good news about Jesus. And it’s a gift of God that you have pastors and teachers to point you to Jesus. The Bible speaks of our

spiritual gifts as grace. The ability to serve the church, to teach your own children to know the Lord, to sing his praises, to manage our congregation's property, to be the kind of person that other people come to for help and encouragement – God makes us those kinds of people. Those things are all gifts he gives us just because he loves us. Finally, everything that God ever gives you is grace. Every day, God hears your prayers. Every day, God walks beside you and protects you from harm and danger. Every day, you go home to a family and to more blessings than you could possibly list. As much as we want to think that we've made a life for ourselves, God gives us all that stuff. God blesses our efforts to work and save. In the end, every cell phone, every car and house and apartment, every article of clothing we wear and every meal we eat is a gift that God gave us. We deserve none of it. It's all grace.

And Paul says that God makes his grace abound to us. It's overflowing. It's like water shooting up out of an open fire hydrant. The truth is, we are rich, even physically. Now, I don't often feel rich. But we Americans are the richest society on earth. We have doctors who take care of us. We have better food and more varieties of food for less money than anyone else on earth. That's true for all but the poorest people in America. And if you add in all the people who've ever lived, we're the Donald Trumps of world history. Roman emperors and Medieval kings couldn't imagine air conditioning in their houses. They couldn't imagine cars that drive seventy or eighty miles in an hour! For most of history, making 20 miles in a day was considered really, really good. And perhaps one of the greatest physical blessings is one that we don't think about: almost all of our children make it to adulthood. Until the dawn of the 20th century, that just wasn't true. Depending on when you're talking about, almost half of all children died before they reached adulthood in the past. Why are we so much better off? God's grace abounds to us. So yes, God does promise to make us rich, but rich in his grace.

II.

But why does God do that? If there's one kind of people we don't like, it's rich, entitled people. It's people who think the world owes them all that grace that God gives us. The only way for us to avoid becoming those people is by remembering why God's gives us his grace. He gives it simply because he loves us. And he gives us those rich, undeserved gifts so that we can then live Christian lives. If you think about it, that's a blessing, too. So **does God promise to make you rich? Yes. Rich in good works.**

We heard Paul say, **"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."** God's grace abounds to us so that we abound in every good work. All that physical and spiritual blessing is supposed to change us. Paul says, **"You will be made rich in every way"** – I quoted that right at the beginning of the sermon – **"so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."** That's why God gives us gifts.

So he gives us all that material wealth so that we can share it. Do you ever wrestle with that? Last week, I was putting gas in my car and a man walked up and asked me for money. So I pulled out my wallet and give a dollar. I thought I was being generous. He didn't think so. And as he walked away, I realized that he was right. I had just bought ice cream floats for my family and paid almost a hundred dollars to go kayaking. And all I gave that man was a dollar. He couldn't even eat at McDonald's for that. God is good to us so that we can be generous. Are we?

That applies to our spiritual blessings, too. God saved us from death and hell so that we can live with him forever. But he also did that so that we can serve him here on this earth. God gives us faith and then he matures that faith, God gives us spiritual gifts to serve on this earth, so that we can give glory to him by loving each other. Paul said, **"Your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."** That's why he makes us rich.

And it isn't just poor people that God is talking about, although that might be an issue we need to spend more time on. God makes us rich so that we can support the preaching of the gospel, here in our community and throughout the world. God makes us rich so that we can be generous in supporting his work. Are we? Will we be able to make our budget this year? Will we be able to welcome all those new children who are enrolled in our school for the fall? Will we find new ways to reach out with the gospel? Will we be generous with our lives and our spiritual gifts and join in sharing that message? Or will we say that we pay pastors and teachers to do that?

God makes us rich, physically and spiritually. He calls us to be generous with him – which includes both our offerings and our support for people in need. And I don't know about you, but that call always makes

me feel guilty. Especially when I consider how little of my time and my wealth I actually give. You know what? It's a sin to not be generous. Now, we have to be careful here. Paul points out in the context of these verses that *generous* depends on how much God has blessed us. So if God does make me fabulously wealthy so that I could build that Kieta Tower in downtown Livonia, what he expects of me is different than what he expects of the family that's working three jobs just to scrape by. If God gives me a deep and mature faith, he expects more than he expects of a new Christian whose faith has just started to grow. Only you and the Lord are able to evaluate your gifts from him and your generosity to him. I can't. But do evaluate it. If you find that you are not generous within the gifts God has given you, that is a sin. It's the same selfishness and greed that God saw from heaven that deserved his judgment.

But God did not condemn us. He does not send us to hell. That's why Jesus came – to wipe away all our sin and all our greed and all our selfishness with his blood. God calls us holy and perfect because Jesus is. And you know what? Hearing that does change us! Being generous is not just something that we do. It starts with God. God makes all grace abound to you so that – and those are really important words – *so that* you abound in every good work. God makes you rich *so that* you can be generous on every occasion. How does that work? Every time we hear about Jesus, God applies his grace to our hearts and he increases our faith so that we are indeed generous to God by being generous to each other.

God makes us grow in generosity and love. Now, we do need to then commit ourselves to the path God has laid out for us. But that path begins in his grace. We walk down that path by his grace, too. God's love is what makes us want to abound in every good work and want to be generous in every situation. God's grace makes us want to praise him and it makes us want to cause others to praise him, too.

And from God's perspective, the person who is generous and never thinks of himself, is a truly rich Christian. The other day, I was listening to the radio in the car. A sports commentator was talking about an interview that Jim Harbaugh, the football coach at Michigan, gave. All the sports writers were mad because they would ask these ridiculously long, involved questions and Harbaugh would give five word answers. But the guy I was listening to pointed out that when you ask him about himself, Coach Harbaugh has very little to say. But when you ask him about his team, he goes on and on. He gets excited and he'll fill an hour. And the commentator pointed out that's the way it should be. Now, this was not a Christian program. But even the world understands that being self-absorbed is bad, while being focused on others is good. God makes us Christians rich in grace. He makes us abound in every good work. God works through the gospel and he changes our focus from ourselves to him and to the people around us. Commit yourselves to that focus and be generous. Be generous to those in need. Be generous to your church. Be generous in giving back to your Lord. Be confident that you can do those things because God does indeed promise to make you rich. Amen.