



Series: Standalone Sermon

Date: March 20, 2022

Speaker: Spence Shelton, *Lead Pastor*

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Title: Releasing Children from Poverty in Jesus' Name

Good morning, Mercy Church! If you are new with us my name is Spence and I serve as the lead pastor here for Mercy Church. Things are going to be a little different today than they are on a typical weekend. I told you last week that this weekend is COMPASSION Sunday. And we are pretty excited about it. Part of our mission as a church is to make disciples who love our world and one of our values is to help people take their next step in discipleship. SO today we are putting an awesome NEXT STEP in how we can love our world.

Compassion International is a 60-year-old ministry committed to releasing children from poverty in Jesus' name. Here's how.

- They create partnerships with local churches in poverty-stricken communities around the world. They

establish after-school programs that children can attend where they will receive food, basic healthcare, education, and training in the gospel. The kids in these communities have very little and so they flock to these programs.

- And here's the cool part...the way every child gets in is by being sponsored by an individual or family somewhere else around the world.
- And the sponsorship is the genius of the ministry. It's not primarily about someone like me or you sending money. Yes, that has to happen and yes, my hope is that you will take a step with me and my family today to sponsor a child, but ya'll there is a real relationship Compassion helps facilitate between the sponsor and the child. We'll get into that more later, but I just want to say up front how legit this ministry is. The Sheltons have sponsored a child for several years now.
- And LISTEN ANOTHER reason we are so excited about TODAY is because we are sponsoring children who are all living in Kenya. Where we are planting a church this summer. This is a wonderful connection we are making and a beautiful reputation we are helping Mercy Nairobi build as they launch by saying hey, we are here to bring the Love of Christ to the city. And when you go to visit to serve with Mercy Nairobi, you'll have the chance to visit the child you sponsor there. Pretty cool.





- In fact, in a few minutes, I'm going to introduce you to a Kenyan woman who grew up in Compassion's program. Knows Nairobi well. Went to the University of Nairobi which is very close to where Allan & the team are hoping to plant. And she's going to share more about her experience.

But here's what I want to do first. I want to show you WHY caring for the poor, especially fellow churches in poverty, is not a burden to us but instead a gift God has given us. Why giving ourselves away, our money and time etc., to the financially impoverished ...is programmed in us by our designer to unlock the power of the gospel to change our lives.

So often we hear things like "here's a sad face of a poor kid & you drink \$14 coffee. Stop being a greedy American and help sad Sam here." Now listen, it is in part true. Most of us in America are considered wealthy by the world's standards even if you wake up to Folgers in your cup and spam on your plate. But, to say caring for the poor is the duty of the rich is guilt motivated behavior. And it MIGHT get you motivated for a minute, but it won't change YOU. And God is not after your money, he's after your heart. So, here's our big idea I want to show you from scripture today.

When you know the joy of the gospel, releasing others from poverty is a privilege, not a duty.

Turn in your bible to 2 Corinthians 8.1-9

Here's the situation. The church in Jerusalem is in poverty. I mean they had nothing. So, Paul is taking up a collection from other churches for that church in need. And by the time he writes to the Corinthians he's with the churches in Macedonia. This is Northern Greece. Philippi & Thessalonica.... Sounds familiar to you maybe if you've flipped through the New Testament.

And he's so inspired by what they are doing that he tells their story to the Corinthian believers to inspire them. And I want to walk you through it in hopes that you will

- See the gospel afresh as you who were in poverty...and yet God has made you rich. Not rich in dollars, but in grace! And Then through this text see why it is a great privilege to be a part of releasing others from physical poverty. Then we'll finish with how all this plays out today.

[1] We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, [2] for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.



- Severe test of affliction – Listen these young churches were being severely persecuted for believing the gospel. This was not an easy time for them. This was a time where no one would have faulted them for going underground. And YET...Paul doesn't call it affliction. He calls it a **test of affliction**. It's a test because he knows in this moment is an opportunity for this church to flourish. **Crisis is always an opportunity to trust the Lord**. Some of you need to hear that today and it's got nothing to do with compassion Sunday, but you have a crisis right now and your instinct is to run away from the Lord. No, this crisis is an opportunity to trust him. And God brought you here today to hear that. Ok back into verse 2...
- Two things converged in this moment of affliction...Their abundance of Joy and their extreme poverty. And the two together overflowed. Like a mixing bowl or something. Mix em together and a chemical reaction happens and the thing that starts bubbling up and pouring out - is GENEROSITY!
- There is a real beauty to this verse because Paul is reminding the Corinthians that your financial wealth is not the source of your abundance. In fact, these folks who were poor - Actually had an abundance. And they gave from it. **Their poverty was not their identity, it was their situation. Jesus was their identity**. And

because of that, they had JOY. And that JOY mixed with the poverty experience that says hey we've learned to be content with little...bubbles up in generosity!

- I recognize that most in here aren't in extreme poverty. But let's talk about the heart for a second. The gospel says all our best deeds & all our wealth...none of it will save us from our sin. Nothing can pay that debt. We are all POOR. We can't do enough to EARN God's forgiveness and grace. Then the gospel says Christ comes and pays our debt for us. So, God forgives us. And he doesn't just forgive us, he adopts us as his children. So now we who had NOTHING...have been given the inheritance of the one who owns the world. We have perfect love poured out on us, we have eternity secured with that father...we who had nothing, have everything! That love creates JOY! Deep joy of the soul that no circumstance can shake! **Poverty is our situation AND JOY is our experience in Christ**. And when those two things collide: the result should be an overflowing wealth of generosity on our part.
- It has been my joy to visit churches in several poverty-stricken areas of the world. China, Afghanistan, Cuba, India. Every time I sit with these churches, they have LESS than we do. And almost every time I am embarrassed because despite having LESS



wealth...they have MORE joy. Cuban missionaries came to work with us for a 4-day revival not expecting to eat. They had no food. But had JOY! And were prepared to fast & pray and reach people with the gospel. The girls in Uhuru academy just outside of Nairobi...a small schoolhouse and yet their staff is filled with the Joy of the Lord. The underground church in Afghanistan and china - The pastors in rural india - FILLED WITH JOY.

- Why? They know the hope of the gospel...joy is not based on circumstances. The world says it is. More money more comfort more joy. That's garbage. Biggie taught us that. On the contrary My identity in Christ gives me deep joy that is not dependent on comfortable circumstances. IN FACT, comfort is one of the most dangerous enemies of that joy.
- Side note: Don't be surprised if you sponsor a child and as you build that relationship, and he/she comes to know Jesus...don't be surprised if they encourage you more than you encourage them. You may feed their bellies, but their joy will feed your soul. Paul keeps bragging on them...

[3] For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,

- Obviously, this was not a huge amount of money. They didn't have that. But it was an overflowing amount for them. And I want you to see this in case you think

today is me trying to get you to pry your wallet open. No. God is always after your heart. That's why so many examples in scripture are not about the AMOUNT but about the heart of the one giving. NOT under compulsion though. In fact, look at what he says happened...

[4] begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—

- They BEGGED! They had to get in on it. They begged us for the FAVOR...the favor. These poor Christians regarded the request Paul gave them as a privilege! Why? Because they saw what this moment really was. It was a chance for them to do for someone else what Christ had done for them. By giving away some of themselves...by becoming a little poorer...others could be relieved from the poverty they were in. Ya'll...That's a visible demonstration of the gospel.
- Releasing others from poverty is a privilege, not a duty!
- Here comes the second most important verse in this passage. The most important is the last verse.

[5] and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

- Look at the order. See the first thing this church did...they once again opened their hands and said



God...everything I have is a gift from you. It's all yours! And listen to me, this is big for some of you I bet. As long as you think what you have is YOURS (remember last week), giving it away will be hard. You may give of your excess, but you'll rarely if ever give as a sacrifice and you'll struggle to find joy in it. But when you give yourself to the Lord that's you acknowledging everything, I have is from God anyways. My talent, my wealth, my time, my friends, my health...that's all God's. And when you believe the gospel, you submit yourself to the authority of God. He's the new head of your life. This is really, really hard because we feel a fierce independence where we don't want to be told what to do. Especially with our stuff. One of the first words a child learns to speak is "MINE!" That's not trained. It's just a word to express our natural feelings of selfishness. But when you come to realize everything, you have is God's...and that the best thing for you here on earth will be how you deploy those resources for God's glory & not yours...everything changes. The Macedonians re-committed themselves to the Lord again that day and then with open hands said OK Lord where do you want us to put your resources? Opportunity came open, they moved. This doesn't mean every opportunity...but it does mean they were excited, joyful, about opportunities to demonstrate the gospel to others in this way.

[6] Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. [7] But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also....[9] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8.9

Verse 9 is the most important verse. It's the gospel in a verse. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. What is his grace:

- He was rich. How? He was with God the father in heaven. He had everything. Yet he became poor. How? Several layers to this one. First, he came and took on human form. And the human body here on earth aint the glorified redeemed body we will have one day. But then he was born into relative poverty. He was the son of a carpenter. Then he became poor as a wandering teacher with nowhere to lay his head. But then...he became poor as a falsely convicted criminal...THEN he became poor in blood. He EMPTIED HIMSELF. HE PAID OUR DEBT WITH HIS BLOOD DYING A HUMILIATING CRIMINALS DEATH ON A CROSS... FOR YOUR SAKE!
- Why? So that you through his poverty you who had NO CHANCE to be with the father...by believing what Christ has done for you could have everything. See Christ



looked at your poverty and it wasn't his obligation to relieve your poverty, it was his privilege. It was his joy to become poor for your sake.

- Have you ever given yourself to the Lord? Have you received his gift of generosity towards you?

See this opportunity today, it's just an opportunity. It's a moment where I feel like we are where the Corinthians were. Some believers in need of help in reaching their community are asking for help. And maybe you will respond to this one maybe not. I love it because it's such a beautiful demonstration of the gospel.

today we get an opportunity to do that. Just one opportunity we believe in. Plenty of other ways you can obey this of course. But this is a clearly marked next step I think many of us should take together today. And in fact, I think doing this one step that kind of easy and laid out for you will be a catalyst to inspire you to lead our church in caring for the poor right here at home. Because your heart is going to be set on fire by experiencing ***the privilege of releasing others from poverty just as God has released you.*** We are helping the gospel go forward in Kenya today through sponsoring children to be in compassion programs. And then next week we are hosting a Bridges out of Poverty Training to talk about how this local church, Mercy Church, has the privilege to bring the love of Jesus to those in poverty RIGHT here in Charlotte. These are not at odds with one another. That's because

generosity is contagious. Once God lights a fire in your heart through the gospel, opportunities to serve others are like logs on that flame. More chances to bring the love of Christ to more people.

I told you I was going to let you hear from someone who has firsthand experience in the program in the area we are focusing our efforts. Her name is Cecilia Nyamwandha. As I said earlier, she is from Kenya, and I want to read you a little of her bio. Cause its crazy impressive.

Cecilia Nyamwandha is a geophysicist research assistant at the Center for Earthquake Research and Information (CERI) at the University of Memphis, where she recently completed her PhD in geophysics. Before completing her doctoral degree in Memphis, she earned diplomas in Basic Physics and Earth System Physics from the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy.

Previously, Cecilia helped pioneer Nairobi University's Physics Student Association, a platform for engaging students in education, research, and careers. She also co-founded the Kenya Women in Physics Association, which addresses the challenges facing female physicists in Kenya and encourages the younger generation of women to pursue science interests. She is a highly sought-after researcher and speaker,



passionate about scientific discovery and inciting the spark of knowledge in young people.

will you welcome the smartest person to ever be on our stage... Cecilia Nyamwandha here to Mercy Church?

Questions

1. Tell us what life was like growing up for you in Kenya
2. How did your life change once you were enrolled in Compassion?
3. What was your relationship like with your sponsor?
4. What are you doing now?
5. What would you tell someone thinking about sponsoring a child today?

PRAY over her

