

BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW: Out of the Chrysalis

April 24, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord’s Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world begins awakening from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “the year of the Lord’s favor” is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new *possibilities* with God this Easter season and always.

Reflect on this Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 NIV *And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. ⁵And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. ⁶So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

This Week: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

While all believers are dependent upon God’s grace, in this section Paul wants the Corinthians to know about the way God’s grace has been at work in the Macedonian churches. Paul’s description of these churches is striking. They, like Paul, have experienced both the abundance of their joy and the depths of their poverty. Paul combines three things that would not have surprised most of those who knew him well: The Macedonian churches have experienced at the same time an “abundance of joy,” “the depths of poverty,” and “a great test of affliction” (8:2).

In 8:1-5 the Macedonian believers are cast as exemplars. Despite their affliction (8:2), the Macedonians had responded to God's grace in kind – namely, in abundance and beyond their power. Their eagerness to be participants in the collection (8:4) sets up a distinct contrast with the yet to be noted reticence of the Corinthians.

The Macedonian response was beyond what Paul had hoped for. Paul describes this amazing reaction first with respect to the Lord and then to himself: "They gave themselves first to the Lord and, in accord with God's will, to us" (8.5). The Macedonians who "gave themselves... to the Lord and ... to us" are already believers when the opportunity to participate in the collection is first presented to them. So the "giving of themselves to the Lord" is a prayerful, zealous rededication of themselves in the light of the opportunity presented by the collection to live a generous life. This little opening portrait of the Macedonians is but the first of a series that Paul employs in 2 Corinthians 8-9 as he seeks to inspire the Corinthians not only to embrace his leadership more fully but also to return to their earlier enthusiasm over the collection for the poverty stricken in Jerusalem.

– Adapted from the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, Vol XI p. 120-121

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. According to scholars, the city of Corinth was largely affluent and obsessed with status, self-promotion and personal rights. The citizenry as a whole was also known for their neglect of the poor. How might this environment have made following Christ more difficult for the Corinthian Christians?
2. Paul seeks to motivate the Corinthians to support the poverty-stricken in Jerusalem (the "sharing in this service to the Lord's people" verse 4). How might the Corinthian practice of looking the other way when confronted with poverty have made this task more challenging?
3. In seeking to encourage the Corinthians, Paul cites the generosity of the churches of Macedonia who gave in spite of their own adverse conditions. As you think about this passage of Scripture, why do you think the Macedonians were so generous?
4. What can we learn from the Macedonian's prayerfulness/faithfulness through their own trials? How does the metaphor of a butterfly struggling out of their chrysalis in order to soar apply to us in during this Bright Hope for Tomorrow campaign?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC

2. Pray for how God's will can be done through us in the Bright Hope for Tomorrow campaign.
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: 2 Corinthians 8:1-2 *And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity..."*