If I was to do a survey this morning, as to your favorite part of the worship service. What would you say? Some of you would say, Oh, I love singing, and praising God! Give me some good music! Some would say, I enjoy the part where I confess my sins, and hear the priceless message that my sins are forgiven! Or some of you would say, The sermon, I need a message to take home with me. Finally, others might say, The Benediction and prayers! But how many of you here today, would say, The offering! I can’t wait until that collection plate comes by! What a joyful time! I’d venture to say not many of you. And if I was to try and get inside your head at that point of the service, this is what I might find. A visitor to our church may look at our nice comfortable chairs, a parking lot with freshly painted lines, and hear about our $700,000 expansion, and say, well, they seem to be doing quite well, I’ll just forgo the offering time of the service. In fact, its nice that they even have it in the bulletin that I don’t have to give. Another of you might say, well, I am on fixed income in retirement. I can’t give that much, since I may live 20 more years, so I’ll just give something because I want to keep the church in operation. Or still another. I give out of guilt. I don’t want people to see me pass the plate by; I have to give something, so I don’t look bad. Maybe if I give something too, it will help out with all the bad things I’ve done in my life. And finally you have the person, who has experienced the wonderful grace of God, and considers it a privilege to give an offering back to God. Today, we want to take a closer look at a group of people in Corinth, who were struggling with an offering. It is my hope today that we all leave here wanting to Mimic The Macedonians!

Our story begins in Greece, where Corinth was located. The land north of Corinth was called Macedonia. The apostle Paul had visited 3 cities in Macedonia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. While he was working in Thessalonica, the Philippians had sent him gifts to aid him in his work. Later, when Paul was in Rome under house arrest, the Philippians had sent a man named Epaphroditus to aid Paul. Epaphroditus brought monetary support for Paul as well. When Paul was in Berea, the Bereans listened carefully to his words, and checked to see if what he said matched with Scripture. But now these three congregations in Macedonia had been hit by a double whammy, persecution and poverty. It was like the Stock market crashed and they lost their entire retirement fund. They lost their homes, and their entire families were living in small one bedroom rental units. Plus, they were verbally assaulted by their neighbors for being Christians. Now it has been brought to their attention that a free will offering is being taken for the Christians in Jerusalem. Those Christians in Jerusalem were having a rough go of it and needed financial support. If anybody could say pass to this collection plate it was the Macedonians. They could have said like some of us, “I’m on a fixed income. I don’t have anything additional I can give. It has to stay on the homefront.” In fact, the average person would say to the Macedonians, It is not wise or prudent for you to give to charity at this point! Don’t give a special gift!

But the Macedonians amazed everyone. Listen to our text, “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints”.

No one put a gun to these people, and pressured them to give. They actually pleaded to be able to help in this offering. They considered it a privilege to express their
unity with Christ, and with the Christians in Jerusalem.

Wouldn’t it be great if all of us were like these Macedonians. Pastor, I heard there is going to be a special offering for our building program. I don’t have that much in my bank account, but I just want to give a generous gift to the capital funds drive. I realize that those 3 new classrooms will provide us space for new small group studies, a place for choir and handbell practice, even a potential ministry to children. That extra office will give us space for another worker, who can better reach the assistant living homes in our area, and assist with our many small groups. Pastor, tell me how I can make my commitment, either a onetime gift or one over three years.” I want to write out a check today!

Tell me, what on earth would motivate you to talk like that? What on earth motivated these Macedonians not to just give as much as they could, but even more?

But before we do that, let’s take a look first at what our culture teaches us about giving. Our culture teaches us to give if it BENEFITS you. In other words, give out of self-interest. So I go to Open Bible. I do get to hear a message each week from God’s Word. The minister will come see me in the hospital if I am sick or bring me communion. I have met some new friends, and I like those special concerts they have. The church is benefiting me, so I should give something. Give out of self-interest. Or, when you go to church you tend to feel better inside, or your spouse does. I guess I will give something to keep this program going. Give if it benefits you. The second reason our culture gives for giving is, Give if there is anything left over! Our culture says, set up the lifestyle you can afford first, then figure out about giving later. Buy a nice house and car, using the incomes you have coming in and figure out about giving with what is left. For a vast majority of people today, giving comes last in priorities. During the 1980’s and 1990’s, one of the most prosperous periods in history, percentage of income toward charity actually decreased. So even though we had prosperous times, the church still suffered. Finally, the third reason our culture says we should give is, Give out of a sense of duty! You should give something to charity. For the most part giving out of a sense of duty is only a token gesture, rather than truly generous giving from the heart.

But the Macedonians gave for none of these reasons. They did not give out of self-interest. Self-interest would have said, you need money to survive, hold onto it. They did not give the leftovers. They had no leftovers. They did not give out of a sense of duty. This was no token gesture on their part. It was entirely on their own that they made this decision. Here is the reason, they gave. Our text says, they gave because they knew about the grace God had given them. Our text says, 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. The Son of God left the mansions of heaven, where the angels sang their hallelujahs to him, where he had all possible comforts, and came to this earth and lived the poorest of poor life. Born in a stable. Wrapped not in fancy diapers, but strips of cloth. Growing up in a lowly carpenter’s house. And He, the Lord of the Universe. Then He lowers himself and dies upon a cross to make payment for all our sins of selfishness and greed, for every harsh word or deed we have ever done. All so that we could be part of the family of God once again. All so we could be assured of his abiding help and provision. Now we are truly rich. A Christian has joy no matter what the circumstance. The joy of being a child of God. So the Macedonians gave with
great joy in their hearts to help the Christians in Jerusalem. Truly “God loves a cheerful giver”.

This grace of God motivated the Macedonians to give thankfully. Psalm 116:12 "How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me," You can't. You'll never be able to repay God for all He's done for you. If God never did anything else for me, I still ought to give. If He never did one more thing for me, He's done so much for me today that I ought to give just out of gratitude. Did you choose to be born in America? You could have been born in Ethiopia during the famine. It's a privilege that God gave you. With privilege comes responsibility. "Give and it shall be given unto you. Freely you have received, freely give." Every time you give an offering, you're saying thanks to God. "Whether you ever do anything else for me in the future, I'm just giving this to You because You helped me to earn this."

You say, "But I earned this with my own hands!" Who gave you your hands? "But I started this business with my own mind!" Who gave you your mind? Everything you have is a gift from God. It's not like when I tithe and give the first ten percent back to God that I'm giving God ten percent. It's, He's letting me keep ninety percent. It's all His. You wouldn't have anything if it weren't for the Lord.

Learn from the Macedonians. They gave thankfully. They gave joyfully. The word "cheerful" in Greek is the word hilaros from which we get the word "hilarious". In the New Testament, when they gave an offering, they had fun! In today's society, when we take the offering, that's the low point in the service. Everything comes to a standstill. Rather we should be hilarious. Joyfilled!

Giving allows us to focus on God as our source of security. We give it away, and we display that we trust in Him for the ultimate provision. The Bible says in Matthew 6:19-20, Don't store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths, and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Don't base your security on riches that one economic downturn could quickly destroy, but on things of God that will last forever.

Second, giving allows us to achieve economic justice in the world. If God has blessed up beyond our needs, chances are its not for the purpose of raising our standard of living, but for the purpose of raising our standard of giving.

Third, giving allows me to be a blessing to others and to be blessed. Remember how Abraham was being blessed so he could be a blessing to others. We have all heard the slogan it is more blessed to give than to receive. Proverbs 11:25 "A generous man will prosper. But he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." Whatever you give out you're going to get back. If you're generous with your money, as an undeserved blessing, God will bless you.

Fourth, Giving frees the hold that money has on us. Money wants our allegiance, to capture our hearts, to control us. But the unnatural act of giving it away, breaks the hold money might have over us.

We are all looking for good investments these days. Well, let me tell you the best investment for eternity, is giving generously to your church. Here you can reach souls with Christ so they can spend eternity in heaven with you. Here you can be equipped to face the challenges of life better. Here you can find a group of caring people, who supply what you need in times of trial. It doesn't get much better than that. I can't wait for the offering today, can you? Let’s Mimic the Macedonians!