

# OpenTheo

## February 10th: Jeremiah 40 & 2 Corinthians 8

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Gedaliah's governorship. The theological underpinnings of Paul's charitable work.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Jeremiah chapter 40. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in chains along with all the captains of Jerusalem and Judah, who were being exiled to Babylon. The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, The Lord your God pronounced this disaster against this place.

The Lord has brought it about, and has done as he said. Because you sinned against the Lord, and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you. Now behold, I release you today from the chains on your hands.

If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you well. But if it seems wrong to you to come with me to Babylon, do not come. See, the whole land is before you.

Go wherever you think it good and right to go. If you remain, then return to Gedaliah the son of Ahicham, son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever you think it right to go.

So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go. Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahicham at Mizpah, and lived with him among the people who were left in the land. When all the captains of the forces in the open country and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahicham governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land, who had not been taken into exile in Babylon, they went to Gedaliah at Mizpah, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan the son of Koriah, Sariah the son of Tanhumath, the sons of Ephi the Natathothite, Jezaniah the son of the Maakathite, they and their men, Gedaliah the son of Ahicham son of Shafan swore to them and their men, saying, Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans.

Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. As for me, I will dwell at Mizpah, to represent you before the Chaldeans who will come to us. But as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken.

Likewise, when all the Judeans who were in Moab, and among the Ammonites, and in Edom, and in other lands, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant in Judah, and had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahicham son of Shafan as governor over them, then all the Judeans returned from all the places to which they had been driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance. Now Johanan the son of Korea, and all the leaders of the forces in the open country, came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and said to him, Do you know that Baalist the king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life? But Gedaliah the son of Ahicham would not believe them. Then Johanan the son of Korea spoke secretly to Gedaliah at Mizpah, Please let me go and strike down Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know it.

Why should he take your life, so that all the Judeans who are gathered about you would be scattered, and the remnant of Judah would perish? But Gedaliah the son of Ahicham said to Johanan the son of Korea, You shall not do this thing, for you are speaking falsely of Ishmael. In chapter 40 of Jeremiah, the disaster that has long been anticipated has fallen upon Jerusalem. It has been captured by the Babylonians, its walls have been destroyed, its rulers, its aristocracy, its craftsmen, its mighty men have all been deported to Babylon, and the small remnant of leaders that are left have to form a new government, a new order submitted to the king of Babylon with those that remain.

The few remaining rulers and members of the aristocracy have to establish a new life in

the land, and much of the land is now given into the hands of those who were formerly dispossessed of the Judahites. In such figures we see something of the obverse of the bringing down of the mighty that the captivity in Babylon represents. As the mighty are brought down, the poor are raised up.

The defeat and the exile of Judah is not bad news for everyone in the land. There are not a few for whom it will represent an improvement in their material conditions, Jeremiah being one of them. Jack Lumbom has suggested the possibility that chapter 39 verse 1 to 40 verse 6 closed off an earlier edition of the book of Jeremiah.

He notes the parallels between these passages in chapter 52, which also recounts the fall of Babylon, followed by a more positive reversal of fates for another character at the end. In chapter 40 verses 1 to 6, Jeremiah is released and he is given an allowance of food. A similar thing happens to King Jehoiakim in chapter 52 verses 31 to 34.

And in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiakim king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, evil Merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, graciously freed Jehoiakim king of Judah and brought him out of prison. And he spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiakim put off his prison garments, and every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table.

And for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, according to his daily needs, until the day of his death, as long as he lived. Nebizaradan, the captain of the guard, had been instructed to show special favour to Jeremiah and to release him. Surprisingly here, in verses 2 and 3, he repeats Jeremiah's own theology to him.

The Lord your God pronounced this disaster against this place. The Lord has brought it about, and has done as he said, because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice. This thing has come upon you.

We need not assume that Nebizaradan was a believer in the Lord, or that he held an accurate theology. This statement may have been a shrewd statement within Jeremiah's own theological framework to keep him and the Judahites in their place. Whatever his intention, it serves to confirm the word of the Lord that he had delivered through Jeremiah.

In the events of the preceding chapter, it has all come to pass. The word of the Lord and also his prophet have been vindicated. Being released, Jeremiah is given the freedom to go wherever he would like.

He can go with Nebizaradan and the rest of the captives to Babylon, where he will be treated well, or he can stay in the land under the governorship of Gedaliah. As the rest of the nation is experiencing extreme captivity, Jeremiah is now set at liberty, given the

choice of his preferred course. At this point, there are three paths open to many of the Judahites and to Jeremiah.

Either they can be radically subservient to the king of Babylon, to throw in their lot with Babylon completely and take on their ways, or they can take the path of rebellion, or in obedient submission to the king of Babylon, they can seek to establish their own faithful life within the land. Jeremiah, while advocating for submission to the king of Babylon, had always been concerned that Judah would pursue faithfulness, retaining its distinct identity. Rejecting the way of rebellion, while remaining in the land under the governorship of Gedaliah, seems to be the most promising course at this point.

The task facing Gedaliah is a challenging one. He represents some continuity. He is from a prominent Jerusalem family of scribes, the grandson of Shafan, one of Josiah's chief men.

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, his family has been very supportive of Jeremiah. As a moderate figure of the Jerusalem establishment, he would be among those best placed to retain some continuity with the past regime, but would also be well situated to deal with the Babylonians. His problems, of course, are many.

To many in the land, he would be seen as a traitor, someone leading a sort of Vichy government. To a number of those nearest to him, he would be seen as a threat. They had been stripped of much of their power, privilege, and possessions, while he had been advanced ahead of them.

And then, on his borders, he is facing people like the Ammonites, who are deeply concerned that a functioning satellite government to Babylon is not established near to their own borders. In chapter 27, Ammonite princes had been among the delegations in Jerusalem plotting rebellion against the king of Babylon. King Zedekiah had likely also been intending to flee to Ammon in the preceding chapter.

These threats, coupled together, would ultimately prove to be Gedaliah's downfall. Baalish, the king of the Ammonites, sent Ishmael, a deposed member of the Judahite royal family, to kill Gedaliah. At this point, however, Gedaliah is trying to get a functioning governorship off the ground.

He gathers the people to him at Mizpah. Mizpah, the place where Samuel had ruled from, and the place where Saul was anointed king, is now the capital instead of Jerusalem. Gathering leading men to him, Gedaliah instructs them to focus upon the economy of the land, to ensure that the people, in submission to the king of Babylon, are re-establishing the agriculture of the land and also resettling its cities.

If they peacefully submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon in this manner, they can prosper and they can also enjoy peace. The important thing that he instructs them to do

is to leave the politics to him. He will act as their political advocate to the Babylonians, speaking on their behalf.

Gedaliah seems to be concerned to present his rule as speaking on behalf of the Judahite people to the Babylonians, rather than being an expression of the Babylonians' power over them. If they submit to the king of Babylon's rule, there really need be no trouble for them. They can return to regular life, they can gather in their harvests, they can dwell securely in their settlements, and there will be no need for them to fear another great disruption.

Accustomed as we are to seeing the exile purely in terms of being uprooted from the land, being sent into captivity and the land being laid waste, it can be surprising for us to recognize that for many, the exile was a chance at a homecoming. The poor and the dispossessed of the land could finally own property and be settled, and many former refugees, seeing that peace and security had been established under the Babylonians, returned to the land and settled there once more. Furthermore, after a long period of divine judgment upon the fruitfulness of the land and the experience of famine and pestilence during the siege, now the people are gathering the fruit of the land in great abundance.

However, Gedaliah's governorship was not to last. The first warning comes in the form of an intelligence from Johanan and other leaders of the forces in the country. Johanan informs Gedaliah that Baalish, the king of the Ammonites, has conspired against him and sent Ishmael, the son of Nethanar, to kill him.

Ishmael, as a member of the deposed royal family, presumably has a personal grudge, and Ishmael's personal ambitions and interests obviously align with the concerns of Baalish, who is worried about the encroachment of Babylonian power upon his region. Johanan pleads with Gedaliah to allow him to kill Ishmael. He is greatly concerned that if Ishmael's plot should succeed, that the fall of the governorship of Gedaliah would bring devastating consequences for all of the people in the land.

If a preemptive strike against Ishmael would prevent this great disaster, why not attempt it? No one need know. Gedaliah, however, does not believe the word of Johanan or accept his counsel. A question to consider.

In our own day and age, Christians who once enjoyed considerable cultural power find themselves increasingly marginalised. In such a situation, we may find ourselves facing comparable choices to the people of Jeremiah's day. Do we submit to non-Christian governments and seek to be faithful under them? Or do we seek to take back control for ourselves? Or do we seek to accommodate ourselves to the new powers as much as possible, adopting their ways and their values? How might the book of Jeremiah assist us in our thinking about these questions? And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Accordingly we urge Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 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. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.

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. And in this matter I give my judgment. This benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work, but also to desire to do it.

So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

As it is written, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he is going to you of his own accord.

With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us, as we carry out this act of grace that has been ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself, and to show our good will. We take this course so that no one should blame us about the generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honourable, not only in the Lord's sight, but also in the sight of man.

And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men. 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and the chapter that follows concern the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem. Paul has already spoken of this collection back in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 verses 1 to 4. Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.

On the first day of every week each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems

advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Paul is organising a symbolic and a much needed gift from various Gentile churches to the churches in Judea. Titus has experienced considerable success among the Macedonian churches, but the response from the Corinthians has been somewhat less enthusiastic. Paul presents the Macedonians as examples to the Corinthians in this endeavour.

Now Paul is sending Titus back to the Corinthians, hoping to encourage them in the matter of the collection. When we read a passage like this we may wonder what it has to do with what has gone before in the letter. Paul simply has some helpful observations about thematic connections.

Paul has been emphasising his ministry, but now speaks of a ministry that the Corinthians can exercise as a sort of a return. The Corinthians can participate in the ministry of reconciliation that Paul has spoken of by giving to the Jewish Christians in such a manner. The theme of abundance and the overflowing of abundance has been mentioned by Paul in a few contexts already, in chapter 1 verse 5, in chapter 3 verse 9, in chapter 4 verse 15.

It seems to be a characteristic feature of the Gospel, and now he calls for the Corinthians to express this in their giving. He has spoken of the Corinthians' zeal and earnestness, as reported by Titus, and now he calls for those traits to be expressed in the collection. The theme of glory has been prominent to this point in the letter, and now he speaks of the collection as something that will bring glory to Christ.

Finally, the multifaceted theme of grace and gift pervades this chapter, as it has the rest of the letter. The collection is a very concrete expression of grace in action. Our Lord preached a message of good news to the poor, yet for many of his followers today, the Gospel message and Christian concern for the poor stand in uncertain and uneasy relation.

Although few would deny that Christians have a special duty to the poor, maintaining this duty in the context of a full-bodied Christian faith has proven surprisingly challenging. For some, the Christian message that summons people to the works of mercy can be reduced to a vanishing mediator for a generic message of social justice and welfare. Christ's teaching and example may be invoked to underwrite and inspire the moral fervency of a secularised social activism, yet in the final analysis, Christ may prove dispensable for it.

This is typically coupled with a shift from Christ to the government as the agent that must affect the awaited kingdom's advent, and from the church to secular society as its focal community. Christ ceases to be set forth as the King of the coming kingdom, the one to whom every knee must bow. He is diminished in stature to the level of a mere

moral teacher, exemplar, and vocal advocate for social justice.

A smile of universal benevolence lingers as, like the Cheshire cat, Christ himself gradually disappears. In other quarters, concerns about the wayward trajectory of a social gospel, coupled with wariness about the overemphasis upon works among Protestants, have led many conservative Christians theologically to minimise the importance of Christian charity. Lest it come to displace Christ in his centrality, Christian charity must be handled as a matter of secondary, peripheral, or even extraneous concern.

Yet when we read passages such as 2 Corinthians 8-9, a vision of Christian practice emerges for which the works of mercy operate in a close and inseparable relation with the specific claims of the Christian gospel. The modern reader of the Pauline epistles, who hasn't paid sufficient attention to the Book of Acts, can easily fall into the trap of regarding the Apostle Paul principally as a thinker, whose travels, church planting, and charitable work were largely incidental to his theological labours and thought. That the Pauline corpus consists of occasional letters to particular parties is also often a fact passed over without reflection.

Yet both a careful reading of the epistles and of the Book of Acts reveals that the various dimensions of the Apostle Paul's labours were firmly bound up together. As the Apostle to the Gentiles, one of Paul's chief goals was to establish the union of Jewish and Gentile Christians in a single household, functioning according to a single economy of grace. His theological work consistently undergirds and propels his practical labours.

Collecting for the poor, in particular the poor in Jerusalem, was one of the things that Paul was charged to do by the lead apostles, the pillars of the church, in Jerusalem in Galatians 2, verses 7-10. The apostles, who were to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me. They gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.

Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. Whether in letter writing, travelling and missionary work, dispatching fellow workers to various parts of the church, or in the raising of charitable funds for Christians in Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul tirelessly laboured to forge a unified economy and communication network between churches across the Roman Empire. In the circulation of Pauline epistles, for instance, specific churches passed on both the revelation given to them and their examples to other churches, born by messengers who would serve the receiving church in the name of the sending church and enjoy hospitality in return.

You should also notice the way that Paul will consistently refer to other churches as examples to the churches to whom he is writing. Here it is the example of the Macedonian Christians that Paul brings forward for the Corinthians to follow. As Paul encourages the Corinthian Christians in their raising of a financial gift for the Christians



in Jerusalem, he does what he does in places such as Romans chapter 15, verses 25-27.

He presents a rich theological and rhetorically shrewd rationale for his charitable work. He mobilises key themes of his epistles to encourage those receiving them to these endeavours. Verse 7 exhibits some of this as Paul frames the gift for the Jerusalem Christians in terms of the grace that the Corinthians have themselves received.

Especially striking is the way that Paul presents the giving that he is calling the Corinthians to, a simultaneously divine gift that he is desiring to see them abound in, a gift of which the Macedonian churches are exemplary recipients, which he emphasises at the start of the chapter in verses 1 and 2. In their practice of liberality the Corinthians will receive the divine gift of giving. Here we see a logic that is more fully developed in the chapter that follows, where Paul speaks of God's abounding gift of his grace as that which makes possible our own liberality. By giving us to participate in his own giving.

We should bear in mind here the way that the gifts of the Spirit in Pauline theology function as divine gifts by which the members of Christ's body are given to represent and participate in God's gift of the Holy Spirit to the whole. In such a manner the liberal giver is the one who most fully receives. This paradox is characteristically Pauline and perhaps especially fitting in the book of 2 Corinthians, within which a power in weakness paradox is foregrounded in later chapters.

Paul proceeds to speak of Christ who was rich becoming poor so that through his poverty we might become rich. Verse 9. As is often the case, Paul frames Christian practice both in terms of the example of Christ and then also in terms of the example presented by other Christians that we should follow. The relationship between poverty and riches in this statement also has elements of paradox, akin to those of James 1.9-10. Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

The heavenly riches that we have been given are discovered through a spiritual orientation that most readily grows in the soil of material poverty, what Oliver O'Donovan terms a dependence upon God and openness to his kingdom. God's riches are received in spiritual poverty, something which the puffed-up Corinthians often fail to exhibit. Paul's purposeful avoidance of command in favour of exaltation, as we see in verse 8, is also both typical and noteworthy.

For the Corinthians' act of giving to have its appropriate character, it must be done by their own volition, not under any compulsion or burdensome obligation. Paul is pointedly not imposing a tax, but is rather encouraging the Corinthians to come into the fuller possession of a gift and to follow the example of Christ, so that the fruitfulness of their gratitude and the abundance of their giving will redound to God's own glory. Paul then seeks to summon the Corinthians into the freedom of the abundant gift of Christ, in the full receipt of which they would overflow in joyful giving.

As elsewhere, Paul's conviction that the Spirit fulfils the law in the hearts of Christians leads him to adopt a rhetoric of persuasion and exaltation, appealing to the will liberated by the Spirit, for which the paths of the law's fulfilment will be the paths of freedom. The notion of equality in verse 14 should probably be read against a Greek background, where it was connected both with accounts of friendship and with politics. In the first place, in ministering to the needs of the Judean Christians, the Corinthians would be expressing the reality of the fellowship of the saints, as we see in verse 4. In the second place, the ministering of the Gentile Christians to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would be a striking political gesture, of which L.L. Wellborn observes The politically superior inhabitants of a Roman colony must demonstrate their submission to conquered provincials in Jerusalem, in order to achieve equality.

The equality advocated for here, as in the case of the oneness spoken of in Galatians 3.28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus, shouldn't be confused for some generalised egalitarian commitment on Paul's part. It is an equality grounded firmly in the event of Christ's action and in the new reality of the Church, not in some liberal convictions that Paul holds about human persons and societies as such. The fact that the Jerusalem Christians are to be the recipients of the gift is not insignificant either.

The equality that Paul calls for relates to the reciprocity described in Romans 15.25-27. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints, for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem, for they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. In the giving of such gifts, the bond between Jews and Gentiles in the Church and in the Gospel would be strengthened and a fellowship galvanised through the reciprocal ministry of the gifts of Christ.

This giving is a decidedly theological act then. Paul's reference to Exodus 16 is arresting in this context for many reasons. Exodus 16.18 reads, But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack, each of them gathered as much as he could eat.

This verse comes from the account of God's providential gift of manna to the children of Israel during the Exodus, and Paul's use of it in this context is quite remarkable. Our initial impression might be that Paul's use of the verse is somewhat at odds with its original context. In Exodus, the verse relates to the perfect sufficiency of God's provision for the needs of each of the Israelite families.

However, in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul uses the same verse to bolster his appeal to the Corinthians, the ones who have much, to give to the Jerusalem Christians, the ones who have little. The equality is not immediately established in the divine act of provision

itself, but will only be realised through the participation of the Corinthians in ministering to the Jewish Christians. This, however, fits with the greater themes of these chapters.

The gift and provision of God is to be ministered and enjoyed through and in the gifts of his people to each other. The allusion to the gift of manna might also excite other connections in the minds of the heroes of this passage. It relates the early Christian church to the Exodus generation, and implicitly situates them within the Messianic age, as Wellborn suggests.

As they are being led out of the Egypt of sin and death by Christ, they are being fed by him. A further possible connection would be to the celebration of the supper. The Christians sharing in the bread of the supper corresponded with the Israelites feeding on the manna.

However, while the bread of the manna was gathered in an equal manner, the bread of the supper is to be distributed in an equal manner. By means of the manna allusion, Paul may subtly conceptually relate the supper to the distribution of resources between Christians in the ministry of gifts. Note also the references to communion, *koinonia*, in verse 4. Perhaps there is some indication here that for Paul, the supper must be validated in the practice of the works of mercy and ministry in the body of Christ.

If you are sharing the bread and the wine with your brother or sister in Christ, you ought also to share with them from your abundance when they find themselves in need. Although contemporary Christian approaches to charity are often only loosely expressive of deeper Christian theological convictions, and thus at risk of either displacing or eclipsing them, or being marginalized for the sake of them, Paul's theology manifests no such weakness. Rather, Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians is grounded in, and their practice will be an affirmation of, both the union of Jews and Gentiles in one body in Christ, and the shape of the Christ event.

It is expressive of their situation in the new exodus of the Messianic age, a blessed participation in the liberality of God's own gift in Christ, and an enjoyment of the freedom of the will liberated by the Spirit. Rediscovering these foundations of Christian charity in the gospel enables us to rediscover the significance of the works of mercy as witnesses to the truth of what God has done in Christ, and also revelatory of the beauty of the form of God's work in Christ. Whether Christians sideline the work of mercy in order to maintain the primacy of the gospel, or pursue them in ways that uproot them from the uniqueness of the gospel message, the New Testament teaching on the subject is being abandoned in these cases.

However, in the faithful exercise of Christian charity, we bear testimony to the abundant and overflowing gift that God has given us in Christ, and we also testify to the freedom that we are granted to participate in His liberality. In societies defined by the opposition between rich and poor, we bear testimony to divine riches received in spiritual poverty,

calling the poor to the spiritual orientation appropriately corresponding to their material condition, and the rich, who almost all of us are, both their responsibility to, and their need to follow the example of the poor. In atomised societies we bear testimony also to a social body that crosses class and socio-economic boundaries, it holds people together in a loving communion of mutual service and regard, and also unites them in a desire to serve those without.

In these respects, Christian charity far exceeds secular charity in its political consequences. In it is disclosed an event that precedes and exceeds any human initiative or instigation, a divine beneficence that has burst forth in history, and which is beyond all containment. It reveals a new economy that escapes the logic of scarcity, a paradox called gift which is received in the giving.

It arises from a new liberating impulse that is the Spirit's work within us. It subverts the hierarchical opposition between rich and poor that secular charity all too often reinforces, and it binds giver and receiver together in a communion of reciprocal service. Practised faithfully, a pale reflection of a kingdom beyond all earthly kingdoms can be seen within it.

A question to consider. What are some respects in which the vision of charity that Paul presents here shows up the failures and weaknesses of dominant visions of charity within modern society?