

“He came to...transform our use of wealth”

2 Corinthians 8:1-11

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on December 6, 2015

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to II Corinthians 8.
- This morning I want to stir up your hearts to act. I want to stir your hearts to act in giving generously toward the refugee family we voted to bring to Canada.
 - This message applies to giving generously in all kinds of areas – to give your wealth and your time to help the hungry, the handicapped, the elderly, the orphan, or the sick.
 - But today I am calling us to fulfill what we said we would do when we voted unanimously to sponsor our Eritrean family.
- Now how should I do this? How should I stir your hearts to give? Let me tell you the Bible does *not* do it and how preachers should *not* do it. The Bible does not just give us laws that say, **“God commands you to be generous, so obey.”** Why not?
 - Laws don’t change hearts. Oh yes, I could hammer on you for 30 minutes about how you need to be generous, make you feel really guilty, and it would squeeze out some dollars.
 - But this would not give you a generous heart that delights to give.
- The Bible’s approach to giving is to start with our hearts and then move to our wallets. You see, the commands of God are *always, and without exception*, set within the generous grace of God.
 - The message is always, **“look at the astounding generosity of God toward us as sinners. Look at how Jesus gave up everything, including his very life, so that you could inherit the riches of heaven. Now let God’s radical generosity toward you change how you use your wealth.”**
- Let me put it this way: according to the Bible, one of the chief signs that you have truly become a Christian is that your use of money has completely changed. No longer do you keep a tight grip on your money and give only small amounts.
 - A Christian is someone whose heart is so filled with joy over God’s generosity to them that they, in turn, delight to give away their money in sacrificial amounts. They are eager to give not because they have to but because they delight to.
- This morning, I want to remind you of the great generosity of God, which is seen in the message of Christmas. I aim, not to hammer on your hearts but to melt your hearts. I am praying that, by the end of this message, we would be so awestruck by God’s generosity toward us that we would be calling out for the ushers to come forward because we are so eager to give.
 - To that end, I am going to develop this message in three parts. First we will talk about the rich God made poor. Second, the poor people made rich. And then finally, the rich people making the poor rich.

BACKGROUND

- There is perhaps not greater place in the Bible that shows the connection between the generosity of God in the message of Christmas and giving away our wealth to help the needy than 2 Corinthians 8-9. Here's the quick background.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE)** The Corinthian church, which is here on the map, had heard about a famine in far off Judea, which is here. They heard how the Christians in Jerusalem were starving. Under their pastor, Titus, the Corinthians had asked Paul for the opportunity to give money to help the Christians in Jerusalem.
 - But the Corinthians good intentions had failed to produce results. Paul is on his way to them but the money is not ready to take to Jerusalem. And so Paul writes 2 Corinthians to stir their intentions to action. He does this in a few ways but the primary way he does this is to remind them of the gospel – of the good news of Christmas that shows how generous God has been to them. He does this all in verse 9. So let's unpack it.

THE RICH GOD

- Our first heading then is **(SHOW SLIDE)** the rich God made poor.
 - Our passage first of all emphasizes how rich Jesus was. **READ 9.** *“Our Lord Jesus Christ...was rich.”* What was Jesus rich with?
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Jesus was rich in what he possessed.
 - You see the Christmas story does not begin with Jesus being born in a stable to poor parents. It begins with Jesus as the eternal creator of all things. As Creator, Jesus possesses everything. *“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”*¹
 - Behold Jesus on his throne declaring, *“I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.”*²
- But Jesus was not just rich in what he possessed. Many people possess things but we call them poor because they have no honour. Remember when Tiger Woods got caught cheating on his wife. He possessed all the wealth a person could want but he was poor because he was disgraced. Jesus was rich in possessions and **(SHOW SLIDE)** in honour.
 - All around him the song rang out, *“Glory be to God!”* The angels praise him at his birth but in reality they were just doing what they had spent their whole existence doing. Before he was born the host of heaven honoured him with shouts of praise.
- But again there are some people who have both money and accolades whom we still think of as impoverished because they have no one who loves them. What good is it to be famous, to have everyone speak well of you, but to live in all

¹ Colossians 1:16.

² Psalm 50:9-12.

alone in a gigantic mansion? Yet Jesus was rich in possessions, in honour, and **(SHOW SLIDE)** in love.

- The Christmas story begins in eternity past. Before the universe existed the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit living in perfect love with each other through all eternity. In John 17:24 Jesus says, ***“Father...you loved me before the foundation of the world.”*** John 1:18 says Jesus lived for all eternity in the ***“bosom of the Father.”*** ‘Bosom’ is an ancient metaphor for love and intimacy. At Jesus’ baptism God declared, ***“This is my Son, whom I love.”***
- Friends, my mind is too small and my skill of language too feeble to describe to you the great wealth of Jesus – he was rich in what he possessed, rich in honour, and rich in love.

THE RICH GOD MADE POOR

- But notice in our text that the rich God became poor. Look again at verse 9. **READ 9** - ***“The Lord Jesus Christ...though he was rich...became poor.”*** He became poor in what He possessed, in His honour, and in love.
 - Notice carefully though that He was not made poor as if he was forced into it. It says he ‘became’ poor. He voluntarily laid aside his riches and impoverished Himself when, at that first Christmas, he became a man.
 - It is not that he ceased to be God but that he gave up the rights He had as God.
- We see first that **(SHOW SLIDE)** Jesus was made poor in what He possessed. He laid aside His rights as God to become a man. That is poverty for men are so pathetically small, fragile, and limited compared to God.
 - Christ Jesus ***“who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”***
- It was poverty for Jesus, who had need of nothing, to become a fragile newborn baby – totally dependent on his mother and Joseph. It was poverty to be born in a barn when He had inhabited the palace of heaven. It was poverty to grow up with a working class father when he was the prince of heaven.
 - He who lifted his arms to fling stars into existence swung a hammer for the first 30 years of his life to earn a living. He who with but a word created all the lakes and streams became thirsty and had to ask a woman from Samaria to get him a drink.
 - We see how poor he was when He began his public ministry. He had to depend on the financial aid of certain women to provide His food and shelter. He said, ***“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”***³ Jesus became poor in what he possessed.
- We also see that **(SHOW SLIDE)** Jesus was made poor in His honour.
 - When God visited our planet was he received with the esteem and honour that is due to Him? No, people attacked his honour and reputation calling

³ Matthew 8:20.

him *“a glutton and a drunkard.”*⁴ The whole world should have bowed at his feet in honour but even His own disciples did not wash Jesus’ feet.

- We see how impoverished he became in His honour at the end of his life. He was betrayed by a close friend. He was falsely accused and slandered in court.
- Jesus had worn the royal robes of heaven. Yet we read, *“they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him.”* Jesus had worn the crown of heaven. Yet we read that they, *“twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head.”* We read of Him who held the golden scepter of the universe that, *“they put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said.”*
 - We read of Him who was richly honoured by billions of angels that, *“they spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him...they led him away to crucify him.”*
- In His crucifixion we see him utterly dishonoured. Crucifixion was so disgraceful that even the worst Roman citizens were beheaded rather than crucified. Only non-Romans were crucified and even then it was only for vile criminals.
 - To add to the shame, the entire thing was done publicly. There was no suffering in dignified privacy. Jesus was stripped and displayed for all to see and mock. *“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”* Jesus was made poor in His honour.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Finally, Jesus was made poor in love.
 - For all eternity, and even throughout his earthly life, He had enjoyed unbroken fellowship with His Father. But there on the cross Jesus became utterly impoverished for we read, *“about the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”*
- You may be forsaken by your spouse, family, or friends. You may feel forsaken but God’s truth upholds you when he says, *“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.”*⁵ Jesus was not just abandoned by his disciples. When he looked for the face of God he found it was turned away from Him. He had never known such poverty of soul and so he cried out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*
 - Jesus laid aside everything: His possessions, His honour, His love. *“The Lord Jesus Christ...though he was rich...became poor.”*

THE POOR PEOPLE MADE RICH

- Having unfolded the rich God made poor we come to our second heading which is **(SHOW SLIDE)** the poor people made rich. Here we must ask, ‘Why did Jesus do this? Why voluntarily choose poverty when He was so rich?’ What does it say? *“The Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich.”* What is next? *“Yet for your sakes he became poor.”*

⁴ Luke 7:34.

⁵ Hebrews 13:5.

- For your sakes! Oh let those words ring in your ears. If you are a Christian here today make it personal. ***“The Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for Barton’s sake became poor.”***
 - Why do this for me? The last phrase tells us: ***“so that you through his poverty might become rich.”***
- Jesus made himself poor so you could be rich. We are the poor ones. We deserve nothing from God but judgement. We have not served Him, obeyed Him, or loved Him. We confess: ***“we all like sheep have gone astray. Each one has turned to his own way.”*** We were poor indeed – under judgement for sin, alienated from God, and without hope.
 - And yet, let your hearts melt before this truth – for your sake Jesus made himself poor so that through his poverty *you* might become rich.
- Let me paraphrase Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th century preacher who has inspired me greatly in this message. For your sake Jesus laid aside what He possessed as the Creator. For your sake Jesus chose to be disgraced. For your sake Jesus endured the mocking and spitting. For your sake His beard was ripped out.
 - For your sake He voluntarily exposed His back to the 39 lashes with the cat of nine tails. For your sake Jesus became obedient to death, even death on a cross. For your sake He was forsaken of God.
- But it was also for your sake that Jesus rose triumphantly from the grave. For your sake he ascended to the Father’s right hand for He said, ***“I am going... to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”***
 - For your sake that he will come again. For we read that ***“he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”***
- For your sake Jesus, the rich God made himself poor, so that through His poverty you might become rich. Have you seen that commercial for Scotiabank that ends by saying, ***“You’re richer than you think”***? That is ridiculous. Whatever your account says, that is how rich you are. No more no less.
 - But dear Christian, most of you do not know the riches that Jesus has won for you. You are indeed richer than you think for he has ***“blessed you in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”***
 - Let us recount the riches that Jesus won for us through his poverty.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First you are richer than you think in what you possess.
 - Because Jesus was made poor you possess the riches of forgiveness for ***“in him you have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”*** Because Jesus was made poor you possess justification. Justification is the legal declaration before God that you are not guilty. Jesus was falsely accused so that you might confidently say, ***“Who shall lay any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is He that condemns?”***
 - Because Jesus was made poor you possess the Holy Spirit who transforms your life to be more like Jesus. Because Jesus was made poor you possess hope. Though this life may crush you, you know that your ***“light and momentary troubles are achieving for you an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”*** Though your

body may be ravaged by disease you have hope because Jesus has earned you a resurrection body. When Christian friends and family die you possess hope for ***“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”***

- My friends, you are richer than you think. Because Jesus gave up His riches and made himself poor you richly possess all things.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Secondly, you are richer than you think in honour.
 - Jesus was disgraced so that you might never be disgraced before God’s throne. ***“The accuser of our brothers who accuses them before our God day and night has been thrown down.”*** Because Jesus was made poor you are rich and can confidently say, ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”***
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Finally, you are richer than you think in love.
 - You would be rich if God forgave your sins, justified you, and gave you His Holy Spirit. But he goes even further. He adopts you into His family so that we can shout, ***“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”***
 - How can you be anymore rich than for God Himself to love you? And this love cannot be broken by anything ***“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***
- Oh Christian, you are richer than you think! But here is the key: you are only rich because the rich God voluntarily laid aside his riches. He chose poverty so that you through his poverty might become rich. For your sake He did this. A recent song on Christian radio captures the grace of Christmas so well.
 - ***How many kings stepped down from their thrones?
How many lords have abandoned their homes?
How many greats have become the least for me?
How many God’s have poured out their hearts
to romance a world that is torn all apart?
How many father’s gave up their sons for me?
Only one did that for me***
 - For your sake! So that you through His poverty you might become rich.

THE RICH PEOPLE MAKING THE POOR RICH

- With our hearts exploding with joy let us turn very quickly to our final heading: **(SHOW SLIDE)** the rich people making the poor rich.
 - Let me ask you, ***“why did Paul write verse 9? Why did he speak about Jesus’ grace in enriching us?”*** Remember the context. Paul outlined the grace of Jesus to motivate the Corinthians, and us today, to act on our good intentions to help the poor.
- Do you see it? Here is the big point: **(SHOW SLIDE)** The gospel motivates us to act in giving up our wealth to enrich the poor because when we were poor Jesus acted in giving up his wealth to make us rich. Let me say that again: the gospel

motivates us to act in giving up our wealth to enrich the poor because when we were poor Jesus acted in giving up his wealth to make us rich.

- Grace is not just good intentions. If God just had good intentions toward us we would still be impoverished. Grace acts. Jesus acted. Since Jesus voluntarily and intentionally laid aside his comfort to make us rich, we must voluntarily and intentionally lay aside our comfort to enrich those in need. Since Jesus voluntarily got his hands dirty in serving us, we must voluntarily get our hands dirty in helping others. Since Jesus voluntarily gave up his vast wealth, we must give up large sections of our wealth to enrich others.
 - Grace without action is mere sentiment. Jesus did not just send sick humanity a ‘get well’ card saying, ‘hope you get better soon.’ No, he acted. He took our sickness into himself so we could be healed.
- That is why an older commentator named Charles Hodge can write, ***“No man can enter into the meaning of this verse or feel its power, without being thereby made willing to sacrifice himself for others”***⁶
- You know you have understood the Christian faith, and that you are truly a Christian, if at least two things are true of you:
 - First, that your heart is absolutely thrilled by what God has done to rescue you from the poverty of your sin and make you rich in all the spiritual blessing that are yours in Christ.
 - Second, you know you are truly a Christian when your use of wealth has been transformed - when you delight to give for God has given so much to you.
- Oh what an opportunity lies before us – an opportunity to show in action the message of Christmas. For were we not all refugees?
 - We were held captive by an oppressive evil power that we could not escape. In our sin we were impoverished. We could not help ourselves. We could not rescue ourselves.
 - But God in his great mercy and love, sent Jesus to rescue us. Jesus left the riches of glory. He impoverished himself. He came down into the refugee camp of this world. While a baby, Jesus himself was a refugee, for his family had to flee from King Herod who was killing all the boys under two years old.
 - Furthermore, Jesus impoverished himself by paying the full cost to deliver us from sin and death. Because of his poverty, we spiritual refugees, were made rich. For he did not just free us. He made us citizens of heaven. He brought us into his family. Through Jesus was rich. We are given all the privileges and wealth of our Father’s house.
- So let us now end this worship service by worshipping God through giving. Let us give generously to sponsor this family.
 - Grace acts. Act on your gracious intentions, ***“for 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.”***

⁶ Charles Hodge, *I, II Corinthians*, pg 577.