

The grace of Jesus Christ

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‘For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.’ 2 Corinthians 8:9

The text tells us of a Person and of persons. The Person is our Lord Jesus Christ, and of him it is said that he was rich. Of the persons in the text, the church at Corinth, it is said that they were poor. The riches of Christ consist, first, in that he is God, the second Person in the adorable Trinity; he possesses eternity, immensity, incapability of increase, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, justice, goodness, love, wisdom. This wealth, being his own and infinite, is incommunicable, except in the benefits thereof that he condescends to communicate in nature, providence, and also saving grace to his people. Everything that is proper to God the Father is proper to his eternal Son and the eternal Spirit. Be careful with respect to the Trinity. Trinitarians, made such by Holy Scripture, and by the teaching of the Spirit, alone among men worship God acceptably. Unitarianism is the darkest and most forbidding theory respecting God that is imaginable. A solitary Being with no companion, no peer, with none with whom to take counsel. What a horrible theory it is! And Arianism is no better, because the second Person, the Son, is created, according to Arianism, and everyone who worships a created god is an idolater. Trinitarianism is glorious; the mysterious, wondrous, eternal Trinity, one God subsisting in three Persons, bearing the essential and beautiful names of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Incommunicable are the riches of Jesus Christ, as he is God.

But he has other wealth. He is Emmanuel, God with us, he has taken up into an indissoluble union with his Divine Person human nature without sin, he thus has communicable wealth—riches which he will give, and does give to sinners. *This wealth*, we may say, in the first place, *is in the incarnation of the Son of God*. It was great grace, great love, great condescension in the Son of God, who was eternally in the bosom of his Father, to take our nature into union with himself. Great is the mystery of godliness, and it is without controversy in the Church of God. Let the

Modernist say what he will, let him seek to deprive Christ, as he attempts to do, of his Deity—let him speak of Christ in that debasing manner in which he speaks of him as the “son of a carpenter,” with limitations, and Jewish prejudices and ignorance. One day the Modernist, if he have not repentance and forgiveness, will know who Christ is, and that he denied and degraded God’s only begotten Son. How terrible will be the unavoidable “wrath of the Lamb” to all who would not have this Man to reign over them.

Be it given to us to worship God in hHis Son, and to love the Son of God for the manifestation of his grace in becoming man. “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.” Is it without controversy here? Yes; in every saint it is; and ever will be without controversy in the whole Church of God, that God was manifested in the flesh. Hart has a beautiful word on this:

His royal state aside he laid,
Came down to earth, a man was made,
To make poor men the sons of God,
And pay the debt his brethren owed.

And in this Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the wealth of grace, which his eternal Father gave to him. The Holy Ghost inspired Paul thus to teach of the Father: “Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling; not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” And this grace given to Christ is expressed beautifully and clearly in the Ephesians: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” He blessed us thus, “and predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself. In whom we have obtained an inheritance; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” What a catalogue of blessings! And these are all within the wondrous folds of the Covenant of grace. God speaking of the Covenant, and of his Son, said: “I have laid help upon One that is mighty, I have exalted One chosen out of the people,” and I have made a Covenant with him; and in that Covenant, as the great category of all blessings, you will find the inheritance: redemption, adoption, conformity to God’s image, liberty, the liberty of the sons of God, liberty to enter into the presence of God. Every good, every needed blessing, every sort of favour, you will find within the blessed and

large category of the Covenant of grace. *Here is the wealth of Christ.* As a Man he made himself of no reputation. There are some things of which he could not divest himself. Men talk about the “emptying of himself”—*kenosis*—but this we must say and maintain that the Son of God never ceased to be the Son of God. His Deity did not become confused, or merged with his humanity, neither could he divest himself of it. He could never become poor in respect of his equality with his Father. He could never become poor with respect to his omnipotence; he could never become poor in respect to his foreknowledge; he could never become poor in respect to his eternal love; he could not empty himself of all that. But he became or was poor in his sacred humanity. He was actually, literally poor. How pathetic are his own words: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8: 20). Though he upholds the worlds which he made, (Hebrews 1: 2), yet he was physically weary, and to rest himself “sat thus on the well.” He was so exhausted by his wilderness temptation that angels ministered unto him. His sacred frame was so weakened by the agony and bloody sweat of Gethsemane that an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him. Though he possessed the whole earth, and the fulness thereof, women who loved him ministered unto him of their substance, he was thus poor. Moreover, he was poor in regard to the ordinary respect of men. His own people despised and rejected him. His pure love, his tender compassion, flowing forth to the sick, the hungry, the possessed of devils, were imputed to the base power of the prince of devils. He defended not himself, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. Jesus was silent when men took away his judgment in his humiliation.

He was poor in respect to the law. He was made under it, and this made him capable of obeying it, and liable to all its most righteous, inflexible claims, capable of being a Surety, and of having sin committed under it imputed to him. And here it may be said that the most mysterious of all the dealings of his eternal Father with him, as he was his Father’s willing, obedient Servant, appears in the imputation of the sins of all who were given to him to save. Here also is the formal, legal cause and reason of the Father’s commandment to him to lay down his life, (Isaiah 53; John 10: 19). Thus view the poverty of the Lord Jesus, who was rich, yet for your sakes became poor.

But the greatest part of his poverty has yet to be mentioned, it consisted in his dying. If life is the greatest wealth, then death must be the deepest poverty, and

Christ submitted to this. Yea, his death was an act of obedience; therefore his own act. He became obedient unto death. He was never more active in obedience than when on the cross. There it was that he was a High Priest, that he offered himself an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savour, and he did that obediently. “No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” Therefore it is said that he was obedient unto death.” We shall die of a physical necessity; Christ died of a gracious voluntaryness, of a holy, loving willingness, a divinely acceptable obedience.

What was all this for? Why would he thus become poor? There was in him no natural necessity for it, as there is no natural necessity in God to forgive a sinner, to justify an ungodly person. Why, then, did the Son of God thus become poor? Because of his love. He looked, so to express it, from heaven, in eternity, to a world he would make, and to men he would create, men who would break and did break the law given, and he saw them plunged into the deepest poverty, the deepest guilt, the most abhorrent corruption that the creature is capable of; yet these people, among all other sinners, were his people—given to him, his bride, chosen for him. What shall he do? He must have them with him in heaven, but not in their fallen condition, and justification on God’s part is no arbitrary act; there is no pardon possible without blood, for without the shedding of blood is no remission. What then shall be done? Says the Son, “I will redeem them; I will take their nature, I will bear their sin, I will pay their debt, and by the wealth of my grace, the greatness of my love, the voluntariness and sufficiency of my obedience, I will redeem them.” I think I am right in saying Holy Scripture discovers to us no other reason for redemption than the free love of God—the Father’s love in electing, the Son’s love in redeeming the Church of the living God, and the love of the Holy Ghost in regenerating her.

There is to be a transfer—there is a transfer in the text. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” One of the profoundest Scriptures in the Bible—one that perhaps may be called the pick of the Bible—is that in this Second Epistle to the Corinthians 5: 21: “For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” So there is to be a communication of the wealth of Christ—“that ye through his poverty might be rich.” By means of his poverty you, interested in him, are to

become rich. A solemn question arises here. How do these people, who by their fall and practice are poor, ignorant, destitute aliens, become rich? The blessing is not to be locked up in these sacred pages. No, there is to be a communication given out of God's greatness and goodness and love to the redeemed people who, when dead in trespasses and sins, do not want it, and never seek it till they are sought out. There is a communication made to them.

When does this communication begin? When God passes by the dead, loathsome, uncared-for infant and spreads over it his skirt, and utters the important and all-quickening word "Live!" This is the washing of regeneration, the new birth, the Divine motion and breathing of the Holy Ghost. It is the beginning of the knowledge of the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, as says the apostle James: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." Here is the beginning of true religion. The Holy Ghost takes hold of the sinner, fixes in him conviction of sin. In this work God is very great. He shoots an arrow into the conscience, and thus henceforth there is no rest till the atonement is made known. Thus the man who is born again does not merely think, or suppose that he is a sinner, he knows he is. Oh, but it is indeed terrible to be a sinner! But some will ask, "Is this being made rich?" I answer, Yes for it is the impartation of eternal life. The holy life which the Lord has imparted discovers to the sinner the unholiness of his own fallen nature, the pure light of God shining into his conscience shows him the malignity, the blackness, the demerit of his sin, and the testimony of the broken law, reaching the heart, the mind, the soul and the strength, causes him to perceive and believe that though he be the most moral man in the world, he is in his nature and heart-life just a mass of corruption, and lies of necessity under the most righteous curse of that holy, and just, and good law. Also some Scriptures which before have been read without any proper observation by him, now become powerful in his conscience. For example: "The thought of foolishness is sin." Every idle word is to be brought into judgment, also every unlawful look he has cast. All this is unspeakably solemn. The convinced sinner confesses that innumerable evils have compassed him about; his iniquities have taken hold of him so that he is unable to look up; they are more than the hairs of his head, therefore his heart fails him.

Now all this work of searching Jerusalem with candies prepares the way of the Lord's return with mercies. The sinner mourns and does one of the most Christian-like acts, he humbly confesses sin in the bulk, and also in many an evil act. Nor is

this kind of confession of sin legal. A sinner most sincerely and humbly confesses his sins when he sees by faith that he may be forgiven, sees that a sinner is capable of being saved. The sight attracts, moves, impels him to cry, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” And this in the Lord’s time brings the riches of Christ to the sinner, the blood of the everlasting Covenant is applied to his conscience, and peace flows like a river. Here the poor is made rich. If any of us have walked about any day of our life possessing sensibly the purification of conscience by the blood of Christ, we then felt how rich we were in the sight of God. It is the Spirit who applies the blood of Christ to a guilty conscience, taking away the stain so utterly, so completely, that the sinner says to God: “I’m clean I Just God, I’m clean!”

Then the sinner becomes rich in justification. Christ said he knew he should not be condemned; now his children come into that position. They are not condemned, The Holy Ghost teaches this great truth in the scripture: “Righteousness delivereth from death,” There is no law claim on you if you are justified. God is a just God as well as a Saviour, and if you are justified in the spotless robe of the Saviour’s righteousness, God hath no fault to find with you. You will be ever confessing your own sin and bemoaning it, and indeed the more you realise you are justified, the more you will be condemning and hating yourself for your sins, and the more you will mourn for them. But justification! Oh, to stand before God and the law and justice, and to know that neither the law nor justice can say aught against you, this is indeed being made rich. “That ye through his poverty might be rich,” and live for ever in his sight.

Further, they are made rich in holiness. There is a good deal of talk to-day about the “deepening of the spiritual life” and conventions for holiness; but I have thought that such things as are taught in those circles are very much like putting the branches of the tree in the ground and sticking the roots in the air. Holiness, what is it? Not something you have naturally imagined, or that you have wrought in your own mind. First, it is Jesus Christ who is made sanctification; it is thus a matter of imputation equally with the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Our experiences of holiness, to-day strong, to-morrow weak and almost dead, could not fit us to stand before God. On the contrary, if it is made out to you that you stand in the holiness of the Lord Jesus, that according to the teaching of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Christ is made unto you sanctification, as well as righteousness and redemption, then you have a standing—beautiful, wonderful,

unchanging—you are rich in his grace, rich in his righteousness, rich in relation to holiness, Jesus Christ being made all of it. From that pure, full river we derive power to walk before God, grace to abstain from the appearance of evil, and save ourselves from this untoward generation, to love the brotherhood and seek the peace of Jerusalem.

The poor are also made rich in knowledge. “Rich in knowledge,” some may say; “if you maintain that, if you prove that from the Bible, then you cut me off, for I am ignorant.” I will prove it if the Lord will help me. “This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Further, “We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” Again, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” Do not, if you can help it, confuse your acquired knowledge of the Bible with the divinely given knowledge of the Son of God in your soul. The former may increase, and it is good if it be so; but the knowledge imparted by a revelation of the Lord Jesus will enrich your soul in spiritual understanding, even though your guilt may hide it from you, newly contracted guilt may make you question it, and indulged sin make it questionable whether you are born again. But spiritual understanding will abide, and be renewed by the Holy Ghost, so that you will be able to say, “Well, I remember the condition I was in—distant, dark, and in bondage—the wormwood and the gall, and still have hope I remember, too, that a light came into my understanding; I got a sight of the Lord Jesus, and he came into my soul, I knew him, knew him for myself. I embraced him in the little arms of my faith, and ventured to call him my own, and he did not rebuke me.” You do know, when you know Christ, that wonder of all wonders.

And they are rich in prayer. Christ led the way—he prayed. He got answers. So do his people obtain answers. Every saint has, more or less, two sorts of answers to prayer. Answers in respect of providence; difficulties removed, supplies brought, promises obtained. But the best answers to prayer are those that satisfy the soul. When God says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;” “Thou art mine;” “I have redeemed thee;” I, even I, am he that blot out thy transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins;” “Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee;” oh, what a blessing these answers are. Oh, they are rich, are the people of God. If you have got one answer to prayer in your soul, heaven is there.

The way to heaven from the moment of that promise may have been, and will continue to be, rough, but the end is sure. And prayer comes from Christ by his good Spirit. "I will pour upon the house of David the Spirit of grace and of supplications."

They are rich in power. "No," you object. I say, they are rich in power. "To him that believeth all things are possible." Have not some here said, in the face of difficulties insuperable to themselves, "We shall get through;" and have they not run through troops, and by their God leaped over a wall? Have they not in some measure realised that great word, "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." Jesus walked on the sea, and many a Peter has followed him on seas of trouble and difficulty because they are rich in the impartation to them of a measure of that universal power which the Lord Jesus received on his ascension into heaven. "To them that have no might he increaseth strength." They are strengthened with all might according to his glorious power unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. Thus they overcome, and inherit all things.

They are rich occasionally in communion with God. The grand idea of communion is derived from the Trinity in union, a thought that is well nigh overwhelming, yet it is true. Communion is by two or more persons exchanging thoughts, confidences experiences. Bring that idea to the communion of God and the sinner. What does God do? He speaks to the sinner. He may have said very distinctly to some here, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." And what has the sinner in believing, humble return said to him? He has said, "Here's my heart. I have nothing better; it is a poor gift, but take it and bless it, do with it as thou wilt, and fill it with thy love, and cause it to walk before thee in the land of the living."

Lastly. "That ye through his poverty might be rich" with him in heaven. It is a poor life we live here. Vicissitudes, difficulties, matters of grief, and often "new troubles tread upon reliefs." But there is a prospect. I have had it set before me. What a prospect! Earth left, heaven given and entered, sin in the body of this death left behind, the King (seen occasionally here by faith) there seen in his beauty, without the veil of the flesh—"the wearisome veil," as Erskine calls it. Here we have occasional sights, there the uninterrupted open vision; here now and again the veil lifted, there no occasional views, but an endless open vision. "Now we see as in a glass darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part; but then we shall know even as we are known."

I hope it may please God to speak to his children here by the word I have had for a text, and that the rich grace of Christ shall be the subject of the Conference, and every paper read, or speech made, move along these lines. There are two camps—the camp of the saints and the camp of the sinners. May sinners who attend the Conference meetings say in their hearts, “Oh, put us into the camp of the saints, in our experience and sense of things.” Nothing else will avail us for safety and for heaven.

May it please the eternal Spirit to bear his witness with our spirit that Jesus Christ did in love to us become poor, that we through his poverty, his vicarious poverty, his willing poverty, his loving poverty, his wondrous poverty, might be rich in his grace, in communion with him, and rich eventually in glory!

Amen.