

The Pilgrim's Prospect

2 Corinthians 8:9

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Introduction

2020. What a year it has been. The number, 2020, itself has become a byword, a term of derision. When people are lamenting the latest crisis to appear in the news cycle, inevitably, one person in the discussion will pipe up and say, “Well, that’s 2020 for you,” or, “Hey, it’s 2020! What more can we expect?”

And on the one hand, that’s understandable. This has been a year that none of us will ever forget. A worldwide pandemic, a virtually-worldwide lockdown, the loss of lives, the loss of jobs, economic depression, the mandatory shutdown of schools, businesses, restaurants, beaches, and even churches. Then, in the midst of these health concerns, racial tensions once again reached a fever pitch, as the country watched an excruciating nine-minute video showing a man losing his life while in police custody. This sparked protests and riots all over the country, and we watched on the news as city after city went up in flames.

And if all that wasn’t enough, it’s an election year, which featured campaigns that were among the most contentious and divisive in recent memory. Two opposing worldviews colliding head-on in the form of two, shall we say, less-than-ideal figureheads, who seem to be the personification of the deep division that marks our country at the present time, as the supporters of each candidate believe the other candidate to be hopelessly corrupt and disqualified to serve in office. On top of that, the election that was designed to decide between those two candidates is now being hotly contested, with suspicions of widespread fraud threatening the integrity of the whole electoral process, and, as a consequence, the integrity of our democracy itself. And we still have six weeks to go.

When we set our minds on these things here below, there is the temptation to despair—to become discouraged, to give up, to throw up our hands and retreat into ourselves, to shut off our minds and deaden our affections, and seek solace in sin. Others of us are tempted to get *angry*. “If only government would have handled the coronavirus *this way!*” And “Anybody who’s paying any attention whatsoever would recognize that we need to combat racial injustice in *this way!*” And “If only you so-and-so’s would have voted for the right candidate!” And “We need to protest this illegal and illegitimate election!” We want to do everything we can to carve out a little portion of this world and call it our own. And we wed our affections to the world as if it’s our home, and then we become indignant when the circumstances of life barge in and rearrange

our furniture. And we want to fight back! We want to reclaim our territory! Or, if the fight looks unwinnable, we give up and despair.

And I think the same error lies at the root of both of those responses. I think at the root of both despairing apathy and indignant activism is the failure to remember that this world is not our home. We forget that we are pilgrims—that we are, as 1 Peter 2:11 says, aliens and strangers in this foreign land—sojourners, citizens of heaven, journeying to the country of our citizenship from a land that hated our Savior, and which is therefore promised to hate His followers. We expect this world, the whole of which 1 John 5:19 says, “lies in the power of the evil one,” to function as if it isn’t marred by sin. We expect it to satisfy the deepest longings of our souls. We expect it to welcome and accept us as if *weren’t* the subjects of the King who stands in *total* opposition to the *entire* world’s system.

Hebrews 11:13 says that believers in the promises of God “confess that they are strangers and exiles on the earth.” Rather than anchoring their hopes and their affections to this world, Hebrews 11:16 says, “But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” And “Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.” A few chapters later in Hebrews 13:14, he says, “For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.” Here we have no lasting city! Here we are strangers and exiles on the earth! We desire a *better* country! the country of our citizenship! the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God! where moth and rust do *not* destroy! where thieves do *not* break in and steal! where there is an inheritance reserved for us that is imperishable and undefiled and that will not fade away! We are pilgrims, friends!

And what occupies the thoughts and imaginations and affections of pilgrims as they travel on their journey? What is the occupation of the citizens of heaven, sojourning to the land of their citizenship? Philippians 3 verse 20 says, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” The citizen of heaven sets all his thoughts and affections on Christ, the King of the country of their citizenship, the One who makes heaven the paradise that it is. Christ is, you might say, the Pilgrim’s prospect. He is the One we look to, and hope in, and long for along our wearying journey.

That’s why in Colossians 3, Paul tells us, “Therefore, since you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” You have died to this world! You have been raised up with Christ, united to Him in His resurrection! So united to Him, that He is where your life is! And since *He’s* in heaven, you set your mind on heaven! You set your face like flint upon the country of your citizenship! The Christian pilgrim, the citizen of heaven, mortifies his preoccupation with the things below, and fixes His eyes on Jesus, Hebrews 12:2, the author and perfecter of our faith.

The antidote to the turmoil of heart that we experience as we mind the things below, is to raise the eyes of our hearts to heaven and behold the glory of our risen King, our conquering Savior, Jesus Christ.

And this morning, I want us to do just that. I want us to direct our thoughts to heaven, and to behold the glory of Jesus. And I want to do that by setting our minds on a truth that I think shows us His glory in a peculiar way. One author says of this truth that it is “the highest pitch of God’s wisdom, goodness, power, and glory” (Ussher). Another said it is “God’s greatest wonder, one that no creature could ever have imagined. God himself could not perform a more difficult and glorious work. It has justly been called the miracle of all miracles” (Jones).

What miracle of all miracles am I talking about? I’m talking about the incarnation of God the Son—the Word having become flesh and dwelling among us, John 1:14. The infinite, eternal, self-existent, self-sufficient, almighty God takes on the nature of finite, temporal, dependent, mortal humanity—without shedding His divine nature. The unchangeable God becomes what He wasn’t, while never ceasing to be what He was.

In the incarnation, the infinite God and the finite man are united together in One magnificent Person. In the God-man, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, fallen humanity is given a perfectly sufficient, perfectly suitable Savior from sin and judgment. Fully man, and therefore able to stand in man’s place—both to bear man’s punishment and accomplish man’s righteousness. And yet at the same time fully God, and therefore able to bear the wrath of God without perishing eternally, and able to bestow His infinite merit upon the innumerable sinners who come to Him in repentance and faith.

Among all the amazing works that Almighty God has accomplished in this world, the incarnation has a special luster of magnificence! The juxtaposition of the majesty of God with the humility of man renders the glory of the Lord Jesus—the glory of the incarnation—more especially brilliant than all other of God’s glorious works. And because that’s true, the study of Christ’s incarnation is a unique fount for our worship. And it’s a steadying, reorienting vision for pilgrims tempted to lose their way.

So we’re going to devote our time together this morning to magnifying the glory of God and the grace of Christ put on display in the incarnation. And to do that, we will turn to a single verse of Scripture: Second Corinthians chapter 8, and verse 9, wherein the Apostle Paul writes, “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 through His poverty might become rich.”

Now, this Mount Everest of a verse comes in the larger context of 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, where Paul is writing to the Corinthian church in order to stir them up to give generously to a

collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. And he begins this appeal by holding up the churches of Macedonia as an example of generosity to be imitated. In 2 Corinthians 8, verses 1 to 5, Paul says that the grace of God was so operative in the hearts of the Macedonian Christians that their difficult circumstances—which he describes as severe affliction and deep poverty—could not stop them from overflowing with joy in Christ, and begging Paul to allow them to meet the needs of the saints.

Then, in verse 7, he aims to stir them up by commending them for how the grace of God has worked in the Corinthians themselves. He commends them for their spiritual giftedness and maturity, and he sees that as a foundation from which to exhort them to excel still more in the grace of generosity: Verse 7: “But just as you abound in everything, ... see that you abound in this gracious work also.” And then in verse 8 he motivates them by saying, “I know you love the brethren in Jerusalem! Well, here is an opportunity to prove and express that love!”

But then Paul comes to the climax of his argument. He’s appealed to the example of the Macedonians; he’s commended the Corinthians themselves; he’s exhorted them to prove by their practice what he knows is in their hearts. But in verse 9, Paul now appeals to the supreme and purest motivation for Christian generosity, and for all moral and ethical instruction in the Christian life. Namely, the abounding *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ—the utterly undeserved, inexhaustible favor of God, in and through the person of Jesus Christ.

And Paul defines that grace as that which is preeminently displayed in the Gospel of Christ’s incarnation, and His life of perfect obedience, and His substitutionary death for sin, which was the very purpose for His incarnation. He speaks of “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that*”—that is, *namely*: “that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” Although in His pre-existent, eternal glory and deity He was in possession of spiritual riches whose wealth words are unable to describe, He nevertheless voluntarily and sacrificially renounced those riches, and embraced the poverty of life and death as a human being, precisely so that we, who were destitute of God’s favor and blessing, could be enriched with the very righteousness of God Himself.

And so the context of this verse is chiefly concerned with the display of Christ’s grace as a motivation for Christian generosity. But it is nevertheless a fitting text to bring our minds to reflection on and contemplation of the incarnation of God the Son. And it breaks down into three units of thought. First, we’ll give our attention to **Christ’s riches**. Second, we’ll meditate on **Christ’s poverty**. And third, we’ll consider **Christ’s purpose**. Christ’s riches, Christ’s poverty, and Christ’s purpose.

I. Christ’s Riches

Well, in the first place, then, let us contemplate **Christ's riches**. Paul says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that though He was rich.*"

And literally, this phrase is translated "though *being* rich." Paul uses a present participle, which expresses ongoing, continuous action. And that's significant, because when he speaks of Christ's poverty, he'll use an ingressive aorist and say, "He *became* poor." See, theology is often wrapped up in verb tenses. His poverty had a beginning, as we'll see, in His incarnation. But Christ had never *become* rich. From all eternity, He was *being* rich, or *existing* as rich.

Paul says something similar in Philippians 2:6, where he calls on the grace of the incarnation of Christ to stir the church to humility. And he speaks of Christ, Philippians 2:6, "who, although *existing* in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." He was existing in the nature of God. And then also in John chapter 1. In John 1:14 we learn that the Word *became* flesh. But in John 1:1 we read, "In the beginning *was* the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God." The Word *became* flesh, but the Word never *became* God! From all eternity—before there was a beginning—the Word was existing as God, in the richness of full equality with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

This Christ is the eternal Son, the One who from all eternity was fully subsisting in the divine nature. He is the image of the invisible God, Colossians 1:15—the very radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, Hebrews 1:3. And so He is rich as the possessor of all the divine attributes, and the possessor of all the divine prerogatives. All of the fullness of Godhood dwells in Him no less than in the Father, no less than in the Holy Spirit. He is the Creator of all things. Colossians 1:16: "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him." He is the Sustainer of all creation. Colossians 1:17: "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Hebrews 1:3: "He upholds all things by the word of His power." As its Creator, He is therefore the owner of all creation. In Job 41:11, the Triune God says, "Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine."

He is the eternally glorious One. Christ speaks in John 17:5 of "the glory which [He] had with [the Father] before the world was." 1 Corinthians 2:8 calls Him "the *Lord* of glory." And Isaiah chapter 6 gives us a glimpse of what it meant for the Son to exist in heavenly glory, as John 12:41 tells us that it is He, the Son, who is the exalted Lord that Isaiah saw seated on the throne of heaven. It is the train of the *Son's* robe that fills the heavenly temple! And it is to the glory of the *Son's* name—no less than the Father's name, no less than the Spirit's name, for it is one name—it is to that name that the bright, burning seraphim along with the rest of the angels of heaven sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy! The whole earth is full of His glory!"

And even beyond all of that—beyond the richness of His divine being: the fullness of God dwelling *in* Him and the glory of God emanating *from* Him; beyond the richness of His divine possession: that He is the Creator and thus the owner of Heaven and Earth—beyond even those things is the richness of His divine relations. Anyone in possession of all the riches that we just outlined would be infinitely wealthy, even if he possessed such riches in isolation—devoid of relationship, devoid of love. But the Son possesses those riches in the glory of perfect communion with and delight in His Father and the Holy Spirit.

In Luke 10:22, Jesus says that no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son. And though there are oceans of mystery wrapped up in that statement, one certain implication is that there is a unique knowledge and communion that exists between the Persons of the Trinity. Each member of the Trinity “has a unique, exclusive, all-comprehensive, all-penetrating knowledge” of the others. Our knowledge of God increases little bit by little bit, as we strive and strain to wrap our finite minds around the infinite fullness of God as He’s revealed Himself. And even when we are by grace able to grasp just a little more knowledge of God, we are at once confronted with the ineffable delight of knowing One so perfect, and at the same time confronted with the blessed despair that we could ever know Him fully. Oh, but the Son knows the Father in such comprehensive intimacy, that compared to *that* knowledge no one else knows the Father at all!

Listen to what John Murray says, “The knowledge of the Son of God is a knowledge for which there are no obscurities, no inscrutable mysteries. It is a knowledge that penetrates the very being of God, that comprehends the totality of the divine glory and that searches the deepest mysteries of the divine will. What tides of ineffable delight, without beginning or end, without ebb or flow, must eternally ravish the heart and mind of the eternal Son!” (3:228–29). Another commentator described this relationship as “replete with fathomless and inexpressible blessedness! ... Oh, who can enter into the boundless depths of joy in the fellowship of the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son in the Eternal Spirit! ... Oh the *blessedness* of God’s dear Son, basking in the eternal sunshine and joy of His Father’s blessing!” (Martin, 207, 208). O friends, has there ever been anyone rich like Christ was rich?

II. Christ’s Poverty

And yet. Though He was rich—though being rich—, yet for your sake He became poor. And here we come to our second point: **Christ’s poverty**.

And after meditating as we have for just a moment on the Son’s eternal riches, these words land on us with almost utter bewilderment. How could it be that someone so rich as Christ could ever experience anything that might be called poverty? Well herein we behold the peculiar glory of the incarnation—the matchless beauty of Gospel grace! Paul puts it this way in Philippians 2,

verses 6 and 7. He says, “Christ Jesus, existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of men.”

Even though Christ existed eternally, even though He was eternally existing in the very nature and essence and glory of God, even though He was existing in equality with God the Father, ruling creation in majesty, and receiving the worship of the saints and angels in Heaven, He did not regard the dignity of His station as something to be grasped. But He emptied Himself. He nullified Himself.

Now, that does not mean that in becoming man, the eternal Son of God ceased to be what He was as God, in the richness of His own divine being. That would be impossible. No, He remained the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He continued to fully subsist in the divine nature. He remained the possessor of all the divine attributes and all the prerogatives of God. Colossians 2:9 says of His incarnate state that “in Him all the *fullness* of Deity dwells in bodily form.” He delivers God’s Word to God’s people in Matthew 5, not as the prophets who said, “Thus saith the Lord,” but as the Lord of revelation Himself, who said, “You have heard it said, but *I* say unto you.” He declares sins forgiven in Luke 5, and when the Pharisees think to themselves, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” He reads their thoughts and says, “Yes! The Son of Man does have authority to forgive sins!” When Thomas bows before Him, and in John 20:28 worships Him as, “My Lord and My God,” Jesus exercises the divine prerogative to receive that worship. And He heals the sick, raises the dead, feeds the 5,000, and works the rest of His divine miracles, displaying His divine glory—the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And so Christ did not become poor by subtracting some aspects of His Godhood from Himself. Scripture does not teach that the Son exchanged His deity for His humanity. No, He didn’t become poor by ceasing to be what He was (God); He became poor by becoming what He was *not* (man). He became poor by addition, not subtraction—by becoming what He wasn’t, even while never ceasing to be what He was, by taking on a human nature, even while never shedding His divine nature.

So what then was His poverty, if not being deprived of His deity in some way? Just this: that though He had every right to continue in unlimited manifest power and authority, to radiate the very essence and glory of deity, to receive nothing but the most exalted worship of the host of heaven—immune from poverty, immune from pain, and free from all humiliation—He did not selfishly count those riches to be slavishly held on to, but sacrificed them to become man and accomplish salvation for sinners. One commentator said, “He surrendered all the insignia of divine majesty and assumed all the frailty and vicissitudes of the human condition” (Harris, 579). And I like that: He surrendered all the *insignia* of divine majesty. John Calvin wrote: “Christ,

indeed, could not divest himself of godhead, but he kept it *concealed* for a time, that it might not be seen, under the weakness of the flesh. Hence he laid aside his glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by *concealing it*” (*Philippians*, 56–57). He *concealed* the riches of the divine majesty of the Lord of glory behind the veil of the poverty of a slave. Though being rich, yet He became poor.

He is rich as the uncreated Creator, but poor insofar as He assumes a created human nature. The One who always was came to exist as a human embryo in His mother’s womb, and was born of a woman. He is, as Augustine said, man’s Maker made Man.

He is rich as the divine Son of God, and yet poor as He was born to a poor virgin who had been disgraced by suspicions of immorality.

He is rich as the rightful owner of everything in heaven and earth, and yet poor as He is born in a stable and laid in a manger—a feed trough—for a bed.

He is rich as the One whose glory fills the earth, who is rightfully worshiped by the saints and angels of heaven, and yet He is poor, as the one who was made for a little while lower than the angels (Heb 2:9).

He is rich as the sustainer of all things, upholding the galaxies by the word of His power, and yet poor—at the same time *being* sustained by the nutrients of his mother’s body.

He is rich as the immutable One, so perfect that He could never change for the better and so righteous that He could never change for the worse, and yet poor as the one who, Luke 2:52 tells us, “kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

He is rich as the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps 50:10), and yet poor as the man who had no place to lay His head (Luke 9:58). The foxes He created had holes! The birds whose life He sustained by His word had nests! But the Son of Man who had spoken the world into existence had no place on that earth that He created to call His own.

He is the bread of life, who out of His infinite fullness satisfies the hunger of every soul who feasts upon Him (John 6:35), and yet He experiences hunger.

He is the fountain of living waters (Jer 2:13) who invited the thirsty to come to Him and drink (John 7:37–38) and never be thirsty again (John 4:13–14), and yet He experiences the parched mouth of human thirst.

He is rich as the omnipotent One—the source of all strength—who calms the winds and waves with a word (Luke 8:25), and yet poor as one who grew weary from a day’s journey (John 4:6) and needed to sleep (Luke 8:23).

He is *the Truth* (John 14:6), slandered and accused of bearing false witness. The King of the angels, accused of being possessed by demons. The embodiment of faithfulness, betrayed by His friends.

The One who clothes the grass of the field and lilies of the valley (Matt 6:29–30) was stripped bare. The One who healed the sick with a touch has His back torn open by the scourges of sinful men. The brow that should have borne the crown of heaven was pierced by thorns.

The One who upheld the universe is collapsed under the weight of His own crossbar, and needs the help of a man whom He had made, whose life He was sustaining *at that moment*, to carry His cross to Golgotha.

In the majesty of Heaven, to look upon Him would have been to look upon the epitome of all beauty. But Isaiah, who told us in chapter 6 of the angelic worship He received in heaven, tells us in chapter 53 that on earth He had “no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men.” And the beautiful one—the one fairer than the fairest of ten thousand!—“like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” The worshiped became the despised. The blessed One became the man of sorrows. The Master became the slave. Friends, the rich became poor.

But His poverty did not reach its depths at the shame, and the pain, and the torture. We must raise our eyes to Calvary—up to Golgotha—and behold the one who was rich in that He had life within Himself, John 5:26, rich as the one who gives life to whomever He wishes, John 5:21, and see there the Author of Life humbly submitting to death. The sinless one, ever and only the worker of righteousness, as if He served sin paid the wages of death. “Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, My God, shouldst die for me?”

But it was not just death. If one so rich as God the Son had to know the poverty of death, one would think that at least it would be an honorable death. But no, as Philippians 2:8 says, “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, *even death on a cross*.” One commentator said, “The cross displayed the lowest depths of human depravity and cruelty. It exhibited the most brutal form of sadistic torture and execution ever invented by malicious human minds” (Hansen, 157).

In crucifixion, metal spikes were driven through the victim's wrists and feet, and he was left to hang naked and exposed, sometimes for days. Because the body would be pulled down by gravity, the weight of a victim's own body would press against his lungs, and the hyperextension of the lungs and chest muscles made it difficult to breathe. Victims would gasp for air by pulling themselves up. But when they would do that, the wounds in their wrists and feet would tear at the stakes that pierced them, and the flesh of their back—usually torn open from flogging—would grate against the jagged wood. Eventually, when he could no longer summon the strength to pull himself up to breathe, the victim of a crucifixion would die from suffocation under the weight of his own body. This was the most sadistically cruel, excruciatingly painful, and loathsomely degrading death that a man could die. And there on Golgotha, 2,000 years ago, the innocent, holy, righteous Son of God died this death. God! On a cross!

But it doesn't stop even there. The shame and pain of the cross was not the lowest depth of poverty to which the Son of God humbly submitted Himself. Deuteronomy 21:23 taught that anyone hanged on a tree is accursed of God. And Paul quotes this verse in Galatians 3:13: "Curséd is everyone who hangs on a tree." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, *having become a curse for us*. Worse than the pain, and the torture, and the shame: the self-improvement of the Son of God climaxes in His bearing of the divine curse, as the unmixed fury of the Father breaks over the head of His beloved Son, in whom He is well-pleased, as Christ bears the sins of His people as our substitute, and cries out in words that exhaust the depths of mystery, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

The Author of life dead. The fountain of all divine blessings become a curse under the wrath of God. The Beloved Son who basked eternally in the radiant smiles of His Father, now forsaken by His Father, and crushed under the weight of His Father's frown. Dear friends, no one was ever richer than the Son of God. And no one was ever poorer than that same Son of God.

III. Christ's Purpose

And why did He do this? Why should this what-seems-to-be terrible miscarriage of justice take place? Well here we come to our **third** point. We've meditated upon Christ's riches. We have raised our eyes to consider the mystery of Christ's poverty. What was **Christ's purpose**? Look again at our verse. "Though He was rich, yet *for your sake* He became poor, *so that* you through His poverty might become rich."

Dear Christian, He did this for you! It was your sin that He bore! It was your spiritual poverty that required the surrender of His riches! The price your sin required was nothing less than the death and the curse of the Son of God in your place! The wrath He suffered at His Father's hand: Christian, that was *your* wrath! The abandonment He experienced, that was *your* abandonment!

That cry of dereliction was *your* cry of dereliction! And yet you may go free into the cloudless peace of divine blessing! You, through His poverty, might become rich!

And rich, not in the passing treasures of this earth, which moth and rust destroy and which thieves break in and steal! Rich in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, Ephesians 1:3! Romans chapter 10 verse 12 says, “The Lord is abounding in riches for all those who call on Him.” In Romans 11:33, Paul erupts in that famous doxology in praise of the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! And in Colossians 2:3 he declares that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. Ephesians 3:8 speaks of “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Ephesians 2:7 speaks of “the surpassing riches of God’s grace.” Romans 2:4 speaks of “the riches of His kindness.” And all throughout Paul’s letters are references to “the riches of His *glory*” (Rom 9:23; Eph 1:18; 3:16; Col 1:27).

Dear friends, all the fancy cars, and million-dollar homes, and jets, and boats, and toys—all the gold and silver in the world couldn’t hold a candle to “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”

These are the riches of the loving election of the Father before the foundation of the world! The riches of union with Christ our Redeemer and Friend! The riches of the forgiveness of sins! The payment of our debts! The washing of our stains! The cancellation of our guilt! The riches of the imputation of righteousness! Clothed in garments of salvation—the pure white robe of Christ’s own obedience! Adoption into the family of God! The permanent indwelling and sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit! A cleansed conscience! Communion with the Triune God that grants an indomitable joy and a peace that surpasses all understanding! Made a partaker of the divine nature! Increasing conformity to the very likeness of Christ Himself! And one day to be free from all sin and suffering in the presence of Christ on the New Earth! All these riches are yours for the taking!

But they’re all wrapped up in the Savior! They are all stored up in the person of Christ! And dear friend, if you would take possession of these spiritual riches, you must come and take possession of Christ by faith alone this morning. If you do not yet know Christ, if you remain outside of Him, if you remain wallowing in the wretched poverty of your own sinfulness, I entreat you to confess your sins before God where you sit right now, and turn to Christ who has accomplished all your righteousness. He has descended the infinite distance from heaven to earth—from deity to humanity. The God whom you have offended by your sins Himself comes to you *in your own nature* and offers you terms of peace! How could you reject Him? How could you turn Him away? Not even the demons have committed so vile a sin as to refuse a Mediator who has assumed their own nature to offer them salvation! Don’t you commit a sin worse than demons, today! Dear sinner, turn away from your sins, turn away from yourself—disown your own righteousness—and put all your trust for acceptance with God in this sovereign Savior! And you, through His poverty, will become rich.

“For your sake,” He has done this, Christian. “For your sake.” And I want to read a bit of an extended quote to you, written by the Puritan John Flavel. It’s called, “The Father’s Bargain with the Son,” and it pictures that intra-Trinitarian council of salvation that took place before the worlds were made. And it captures something of the self-imposed poverty of the Lord Jesus Christ for your sake.

Father: My son, here is a company of poor miserable souls, that have utterly undone themselves, and now lie open to my justice! Justice demands satisfaction for them, or will satisfy itself in the eternal ruin of them: What shall be done for these souls?

Son: O my Father, such is my love to, and pity for them, that rather than they shall perish eternally, I will be responsible for them as their Surety; bring in all thy bills, that I may see what they owe thee; Lord, bring them all in, that there may be no after-reckonings with them; at my hand shalt thou require it. I will rather choose to suffer thy wrath than [that] they should suffer it: upon me, my Father, upon me be all their debt.

Father: But, my Son, if thou undertake for them, thou must reckon to pay the last mite, expect no abatements; if I spare them, I will not spare thee.

Son: Content, Father, let it be so; charge it all upon me, I am able to discharge it: and though it prove a kind of undoing to me, though it impoverish all my riches, empty all my treasures ... yet I am content to undertake it.

Conclusion

Behold your King, Grace Church. Behold your King in all the beauty of His grace, who as it were steps in between His people and their Judge and says, “Upon *Me*, Father, upon *Me* be all their debt!” Behold your King in the infinite worthiness of His person, who, because of His infinite righteousness can say, “Charge it all upon Me; I am *able* to discharge it!” Behold your King in the glory of His magnanimity—of His large-hearted humility—who says, “Though it impoverish all My riches—though it empty Me of My most precious treasure: even of the sweetness of My communion with You, dear Father—such is My love to sinners, that I am content to undertake it!” Dear friends: *that* is the Pilgrim’s preoccupation. That is what we are to set our minds upon in this world.

And as you meditate on this Gospel, revealed in the incarnation, life, atonement, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ—*worship* God the Son for His matchless grace. Which one of you—if you were found to be in such a state of intimate communion with God as to be said to be in the bosom of the Father—which of you could be persuaded to leave the Father’s bosom for all the

good and glory in the world? You wouldn't do it! Not a one of you! And yet the eternal Son—who actually *was* in the bosom of the Father, who enjoyed the sweetest and dearest communion with the Father that could be conceived—freely left Him, and laid down such riches, all so that you, through His poverty, might be rescued from *your* poverty, and would enjoy those very riches that He had left! O friends, who has ever loved like Christ has loved us? Worship Him for His grace!

And worship God the Father! Worship Him for *His* love to sinners in giving such a One as Christ over to suffer the fury of His wrath in the place of sinners! Flavel said, “Our dearest children are but as *strangers* to us, in comparison of the unspeakable dearness that was between the Father and Christ! ... It melts our bowels, it breaks our heart, to behold our children striving in the pangs of death: but the Lord beheld His Son struggling under agonies that never any felt before Him. ... That He should *ever* be content to part with a Son, and such an only One, is such a manifestation of love, as will be admired to all eternity!” (1:67). Friends, may the love of the Father be our daily object of admiration!

And worship the Father not only for His love, but also for His wisdom. Worship the Father whose mind is so vast, whose wisdom is so unsearchable, that He devised this plan of salvation. Only God Himself could ever atone for sin! And yet only *man's* sacrifice would be accepted on behalf of man! No one *ought* to pay except man, and no one *could* pay except God! And if God had convened the entire company of angels to employ all their collective wisdom and devise a plan to save sinners in such a predicament, they would have been at an eternal stalemate! And yet in His marvelous wisdom, God conceives of the unthinkable: that to reconcile man to God, God would become man!

The Second Person of the Trinity would take upon Himself a human nature, without altering the divine nature! The divine nature and a human nature would be bound together in the single person of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet, as the Chalcedonian Creed puts it, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son.” These truths that we struggle and strain so mightily to understand don't even make God break an intellectual sweat! They're elementary to Him! And that ought to bow us in humble wonder and move us to praise and worship of God for His wisdom.

I'll close with the words of the Puritan pastor and professor, Stephen Charnock, who wrote the following of the incarnation: “What a wonder that two natures infinitely distant should be more intimately united than anything in the world ... that the same person should have both a glory and a grief; an infinite joy in the Deity, and an inexpressible sorrow in the humanity; that a God upon a throne should be an infant in a cradle; the thundering Creator be a weeping babe and a

suffering man;—” And we could add: that the God so rich should be made a man so poor. Charnock concludes, “[The incarnation astonishes] men upon earth, and angels in heaven” (*Works*, 2:150).

May it never cease to astonish each and every one of us. And may it be a sweet refreshment to weary pilgrims tempted to confuse this world with their home. May it be the preoccupation of the citizens of heaven, who eagerly await this Savior *from* heaven, that we set our minds upon Him, rather than the things that are on earth. May His glory be the object of our gaze, and may it remind us, strangers and exiles on the earth, that here we have no lasting city, but are seeking the city which is to come—the city where we will one day soon enjoy face-to-face fellowship with this all-glorious Christ.