

We've Forgotten the Grace of Giving

THE GREATEST EXAMPLE OF GIVING

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Text: 2 Corinthians 8:8-9

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Series: Confessions of an Imperfect Church (2 Corinthians)

Introduction: Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 8. We are continuing our series through the book of 2 Corinthians entitled, "Confessions of an Imperfect Church". And like the imperfect church at Corinth, we have a long way to go in our growing and changing in Christ. Our confession today is: "We've Forgotten the Grace of Giving". This evening we saw the Reasons for Giving. Tonight are looking at the Greatest Example of Giving, and another time we'll look at the Blessings of Giving in chapter 9.

The Persian Monarch

A wonderful story was told many years ago about a Persian monarch. We would call him a king and they would call him a Shah. This particular Shah reigned in Persia in a time of great splendor and magnificence and lived in the midst of all of that wealth and prosperity. But he had a heart for people who were poor and common, and so he decided that he would dress himself as a poor man, and that he would descend from the lofty heights of his splendor down to the commonest man that he could find and try to make a friend out of him. And such a man was a man whose job it was to stoke fires and prepare fires that could then be put into little containers and taken around the palace to keep people warm. He worked all the time in ashes and soot and smoke and filth, way, way down in a basement.

The king then put on the garments of a poor man, descended the dark, damp, cellar stairs and came down to where the man was seated in a pile of ashes, he was called a fireman, appropriately, and he was tending to his fires. The king sat down beside him dressed in rags himself, and began to talk. At meal time the fireman produced some coarse black bread and a little bit of water and they ate together and drank together. And then the Shah went away.

But he came back day after day after day after day, again and again because his heart was filled with sympathy that eventually was demonstrated to that man in this longing just to be there to share a little bit of his common and difficult life. He gave the man sweet counsel from his wisdom and experience. This poor man opened his whole heart and loved his friend, so kind and so wise, and he thought so poor like himself.

At last the emperor thought, "I can't keep this up, I have to tell him who I really am and so I'll tell him and then I'll ask him what gift he would like from me, now that we're friends." So he said, "You think I'm poor but I'm not, I am the Shah, your emperor. What would you like?" He expected the man to petition him for some great thing but he sat, simply gazing in wonder and love. The king said, "Have you understood what I've told you? I can make you rich. I can make you noble. I can give you a city. I can give you anything. What do you want?"

The man replied according to the story, "Yes, my lord, I understand. But what is this you have done to leave your palace and your glory to sit with me in this dark place, to

partake of my coarse bread, to care whether my heart is glad or sorry? Even you can give nothing more precious than that. On others you may bestow rich presents but to me you have given yourself, it only remains to ask one thing...and that is that you never withdraw your friendship."

Genuine Love Looks Like Jesus' Love

That's just what Jesus did, a King who came down to dwell among common men to give them His life and His friendship. We are reconciled! That very thing is stated in **2 Corinthians 8:8–9** (ESV) — "I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9 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." Paul says, essentially, follow this example. You know your love is genuine when it looks like Jesus' love.

Here in this very ethical, very practical, pragmatic section of 2 Corinthians where Paul is talking about giving money to the support of the saints, right in the middle of this practical section is tucked this profound doctrinal verse.

Here we have a gem that points us to Christ. You thought we were talking about giving and finances and generosity. When we give we can remember this diamond outshining all the other jewels around it. It's only 21 words in the Greek, and when translated into English even a child can get it. "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." There are no difficult words. There are no confusing words. The only theological word is five little letters: GRACE.

Though it can be easily grasped as to its simple straight-forward meaning, the fullness of what it says is incomprehensible. With one reading you understand what it says, but with an eternity you may never understand all that it involved.

This is the story of Christ from **riches** to **poverty**. This is the story of every believer from **poverty** to **riches**.

Review: First Example of Amazing Giving

Remember what we learned this morning.

The Jerusalem Christians were POOR. Remember Paul takes about ten years of his life in his third missionary journey and he gathers a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. They are **cut off from their families**, there has been a **famine** in the land, and they are severely **persecuted**. Enter the Corinthian Church.

The Corinthians were RICH. The Corinthians were a church that was well off. They had the plush seat so to speak. They had the projectors. They had the nice sound system. They had the cutting edge website. But they were not growing as they should, and Paul said their lack of giving would demonstrate their need to grow more in Christ. They were the first to give a small offering to the Jerusalem cause, but they had forgotten about it. Both Titus and Paul were urging them to complete what they had started. Now enter the Macedonian Christians.

The Macedonians were POOR. Remember Paul gives two examples of amazing giving in this chapter. The one we looked at this morning – the Macedonian Christians. These were three churches – Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. It was the Afghanistan of

the ancient world. They were war-torn and persecuted. And yet these poor Macedonians were **BEGGING** to give toward the poor Jews.

So we see this first example that extreme poverty added to extreme grace equals extreme giving. Paul said of the Macedonians: “their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part” (8:2). Indeed, they were literally “begging” to give!! (8:4).

Second Example of Giving – Greatest

But as he thinks about that, as he thinks about how that love manifests itself in giving, his mind goes immediately to the greatest love and the greatest gift, and that involves the Lord Jesus Christ. When you talk about giving you have to talk about Christ. Jesus is love incarnate. No example is better than Jesus Christ.

Paul had been speaking about the Macedonians and they were a human model for giving, but they gives one that infinitely exceeds even that amazing example. Paul goes way beyond the Macedonians here to the most generous, the most gracious, the most momentous giver of all: the Lord Jesus Christ. If love gives, this is the greatest love because this is the greatest gift. Christ is the *supreme example of giving*. And so he says in **2 Corinthians 8:9** (ESV) — “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”.

So here we have our outline...

Outline

- I. The **Riches** of Christ.
- II. The **Poverty** of Christ.
- III. The **Grace** of Christ.

Rich people do help poor people but I’ve never heard of rich people making themselves poor in helping the poor! Rich people give out of their riches, but they almost never impoverish themselves in the process. They normally give and are no poorer for the giving. But Jesus did something spectacular. Jesus became poor that we might be made rich! Jesus gave ALL he had and entered the level of poverty.

2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV) — “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...” If you want the greatest example of giving, then here it is. You know the giving of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is common knowledge to all believers. We all know it. Paul says, “that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich”.

And then he describes it in simple terms. Jesus was rich. Jesus became poor. He did this so we might be rich. We are going to look at three sides of a diamond to see the GREATEST EXAMPLE of giving. First, the riches of Christ.

I. The **Riches of Christ – “*though he was rich*”**

2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV) — “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”.

A. The riches of Christ are not **earthly** wealth.

Now when we talk about the riches of Christ, what are we talking about? Are we talking about some earthly material wealth? No.

B. The riches we're talking about here refers to His **eternal** glory.

What we're talking about is *the eternality of Christ*, or the *preexistence of Christ*. He is a member of the eternal Triune. And the eternity of Christ or the eternality of Christ, listen carefully, is the most crucial truth in all of Christology. Therefore it is the most crucial truth in the Gospel. And what is that? That Jesus is eternal. There was never a moment when Jesus Christ did not exist. Not always, obviously, in human form but the second member of the Trinity is eternal. That is the most crucial truth in Christology. And it is the most often attacked by the cults and false teachers who want to strip Christianity of its power and its truthfulness. Because if you do not have an eternal Christ, you strip Jesus of his incommunicable attributes. Those are those traits that make Him God Almighty. He's eternal: no beginning and no end. He's omnipresent – everywhere at once. He's omniscient – knows all things possible and actual. He's omnipotent – He has all power and by Him all things exist.

The riches of Christ are His eternal power and Godhead. He is Almighty God. Strip Him of His eternality, and you have no salvation. You have no Savior. Jesus Christ is the eternal God, not dependent on any other for His existence, not even on God the Father. He is self-existent and eternal.

Objection: Arias

By the way, it is not enough to say He is preexistent. Arias the heretic said He was preexistent and not eternal. The modern day Arians say Christ is pre-existent in the form of an arch angel. That's straight from the pit. Jesus Christ is both preexistent and eternal!

Jesus Christ was rich – in other words, He was and is the God who owns absolutely everything. If we don't establish that, then

1. Listen to the Prophets on the Riches of Christ's Glory.

See Mic. 4:2; Isa. 9:6.

- **Micah 5:2** (KJV) — “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”
- **Isaiah 9:6** (ESV) — “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Sometimes we puzzle about Jesus having the title of “Everlasting Father”. Be very careful with that. That does not mean that Jesus is the Father. That’s a heresy called modalism. It’s like God is one person revealed in three ways. That’s a rejection of the Trinity. Jesus is one with the Father, but Jesus is not the Father. Jesus is the Father’s Son. And He is here in Isaiah being called “everlasting Father” or literally, “Father of Eternity”. He’s the creator of all things. And that brings us what to what the apostles say about the glory of Christ. Of course all of this is so abbreviated, so surface.

2. Listen to the Apostles on the Riches of Christ’s Glory.

See Jn. 1:1-3; 17:5; 10:10; Col. 1:15-17; 2:9; Heb. 1:3; Jn. 28:20.

- **John 1:1–3** (ESV) — “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”
- **John 17:5** (ESV) — Jesus says, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”
- **John 10:30** (ESV) — “I and the Father are one.”
- **Colossians 1:15-17** (ESV) — “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Jesus is the premier one. He is the supreme one. He is the one above all others who is called the image, or the representation of the invisible God.
- **Colossians 2:9** (ESV) — “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”.
- **Hebrews 1:3** (ESV) — “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

So Jesus Christ is eternal God. And as eternal God, Jesus is as rich as God is rich. We sang it this morning – Jesus is God of gods. And the gods that people worship are not gods at all. There is only one true and living God. We say with the Apostle Thomas: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

And as God, Jesus owns everything. He owns the universe and all that is in it. He has all power and all authority and all sovereignty and all glory and all honor and all majesty and He owns all that is created and uncreated.

The wealth of our Lord Jesus is beyond comprehension. It is boundless. It is infinite. He is infinite and His wealth is as infinite as His being.

- *David* called Him God (Matthew 22:43-45).
- *Isaiah* called Him God (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6).
- *Jeremiah* called Him God (Jeremiah 23:5-6).
- *Matthew* called Him God (Matthew 1:23).
- *Christ* called Himself God (John 5:17-18; 8:58-59; 10:30-33; Revelation 1:8).
- *John* called Him God (John 1:1; 1 John 3:16; 5:20).
- *The blind man* called Him God and worshipped Him (John 9:35-38).
- *Thomas* called Him God (John 20:28).
- *Peter* called Him God (Acts 10:34-36).
- *Paul* called Him God (Acts 20:28; Philippians 2:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13).
- *God the Father* called Him God (Hebrews 1:8-10).

Charles Hodge, the great theologian, wrote,

“All divine names and titles are applied to Christ. He is called God the mighty God, the great God, God over all, Jehovah, Lord, the Lord of lords and King of kings. All divine attributes are ascribed to Him. He is declared to be omnipresent, omniscient, almighty and immutable, the same yesterday, today and forever. He is set forth as the creator and upholder and ruler of the universe. All things were created by Him and for Him and by Him all things consist. He is the object of worship to all intelligent creatures, even the highest, all are commanded to prostrate themselves before Him. He is the object of all the religious sentiments, of reference, love, faith and devotion. To Him men and angels are responsible for their character and conduct. He required that man should honor Him as they honored the Father, that they should exercise the same faith in Him they do in God. He declares that He and the Father are one, that those who had seen Him had seen the Father. He calls all men unto Him, promises to forgive their sins, to send them the Holy Spirit, to give them rest and peace, to raise them at the last day and give them eternal life. God is not more and cannot promise more or do more than Christ is said to be, to promise and to do.”¹

End quote.

Jesus Christ is rich in the sense that He is God and He is as rich as God is rich, possessing eternity and all that it contains.

II. **The Poverty of Christ** – “*yet for your sake he became poor*”

2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV) — “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”. He did this for you, not for Him.

A. Christ’s poverty was not mainly **economic**. *Many make this mistake.*

¹ Charles Hodge. *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1872), 382.

- Augustine: “grace of poverty”
- Thomas Aquinas: “vow of poverty”
- John Calvin: “sanctified poverty”

What does this mean that Jesus became poor? This has really been misunderstood through history.

Augustine’s mistake

You can go back, for example, to Augustine. In calling on his readers to imitate Christ, Augustine listed the graces of Christ's life which the faithful could emulate. Among them he said is the “*grace of poverty*”, and he supported that by quoting our text here in 2 Corinthians 8:9 and then urged Christians to live lives of poverty in this world. That led to all sorts of confusion with monasteries and convents.

Don’t get me wrong, much of what Augustine writes is very helpful, but his mistake was to say that Christ becoming poor was economic poverty.

Thomas Aquinas’ mistake

Thomas Aquinas also looked at this verse and said, “The appropriateness of the life of poverty which Christ led is based on the fact of 2 Corinthians 8:9. We too should take a vow of poverty because Christ lived such a poor life, as indicated in this verse.”²

Calvin’s mistake

Even John Calvin in writing his commentary on 2 Corinthians says, when he comes to this verse,

“We see what destitution and lack of all things awaited Him right from His mother's womb and we hear what He Himself says... “The foxes have holes, the birds of the air of nests, the Son of Man has not where to lay His head,” (Luke 9:58). Thus He sanctified poverty in His own person so that believers should no longer shrink from it and by His poverty He has enriched us.”³

Well is that really what this is all about? Such a handling of this text and making the poverty of Jesus somehow a commentary on His economic status or His material circumstances is very common and even done today.

Jesus did not live eliciting sympathy for His poverty. It wasn’t as if His economic poverty had some kind of redemptive virtue. A similar thing is often done when people preach on the crucifixion and they spend all their time talking about the pain and the suffering and the agony that Jesus endured as if eliciting sympathy for agony somehow was connected with believing in redemption. The profound pain on the Cross was that Jesus endured the WRATH of God! The pain the Romans inflicted was like a mosquito bite in comparison to the infinite justice He endured for our sins.

B. Jesus’ poverty was that He as God became **HUMAN** (Phil. 2:6–11)

² Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica, Vol. 4, Part III, First Section* (New York: Cosimo, Inc, 1991), 1973.

³ John Calvin. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: 2 Corinthians and Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eardmans Publishing Co., 1964), 111.

2 Corinthians 8:9 says nothing about Jesus economically. It's true that Jesus came into this world in a cow's feeding trough, a manger. It is true he lived an itinerant life and had no where to lay His head. It is true when He died the soldiers were dividing His one meager garment. He didn't own the cross or the tomb wasn't His own. But all of this earthly deprivation has nothing to do with this verse.

Listen, Jesus didn't make us rich by becoming *economically* poor. It isn't that He had to live in lowly circumstances. It is that God had to become man, that's the impoverishing.

What was the poverty of Jesus? The incarnation. That's how the rich became poor.

- He was “born of a woman, born under the law”, *Galatians 4:4*.
- He was made “in the likeness of sinful flesh”, *Romans 8:3*.
- He had to submit to the cross, *Colossians 1:20*.
- He needed to descend from David - a mere man, *Romans 1:3*.
- “The Word became flesh”, *John 1:14*.
- He was “made for a little while lower than the angels”, *Hebrews 2:7*.
- He as God was “manifested in the flesh”, *1 Timothy 3:16*.

Christ as Almighty God became incarnate in *lowly human flesh!* This is Christ's poverty! That was the issue. He laid aside the free exercise of all of His prerogatives. He left being face to face with the Father, took on human form and no where is it better explained than in *Philippians 2*

Philippians 2:6–11 (ESV) — “...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” The poverty is Jesus who is God took on humanity. And God died. Jesus in all His richness as God went all the way to death. It's that that's on the mind of Paul when he says He was rich and He became poor.

So the eternal God rich becomes poor, humbled into human flesh, killed, executed at the cross. That's His poverty. Although free and sovereign over all the created powers of the universe, He Himself comes under the powers, tastes the full measure of their thrust even to the cross. And for our sake He did it, for our sake He did it.

III. The **Grace** of Christ — “so that you by his poverty might become rich”

2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV) — “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”.

We saw the **riches** of Christ, the **poverty** of Christ, and now the **grace** of Christ. His purpose, clear, "...though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich".

So when Paul says all of this is "for your sake" what does he mean?

- A. Does God want to make poor sinners materially rich? No.
- B. Does God want to make poor sinners spiritually rich? Yes!

Eternally rich? Yes. Rich with what riches? Rich with the same riches that He possessed and possesses. Rich in salvation, forgiveness, joy, peace, life, light, glory, rich in honor, rich in majesty.

We are so rich we are called joint heirs with Christ. Paul says in **Romans 8:17** that we are God's children, "and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ".

Peter says we are promised "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (**1 Peter 1:4**).

Jesus says in Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit [the beggars] for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We have nothing to commend ourselves. We are as poor as poor can be. We hunger and thirst for the basics. And He came to make us rich, to make us as rich as He is rich.

For us, to be made rich, is to be made like Christ. We are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son" (**Rom. 8:29**).

The very life of God dwells in us. We are "partakers of the divine nature" (**1 Peter 1:4**). That's pretty rich!

We are heirs of the cosmos. Jesus says in **Matthew 5:5** "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

We are the possessors of the eternal life of God. We will be made like Him. We will reflect His glory. We will be managers and co-owners of His heaven and His earth as His dear children. That's breathtaking!

We will possess the eternal glory of the new heaven and the new earth and all that it contains and we will possess the new Jerusalem, the crown jewel of eternity.

1 Corinthians 3:21–23 (ESV) — "For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Brothers and sisters, you must never forget that it was by His self-imposed and willing poverty that Jesus made us rich. This self-emptying, this self-sacrificing love by which we are so blessed and for which we are so thankful is exactly, Paul says, the reason why we need to give to others.

As he stooped to be poor to make others rich, so must we. What a standard! Paul is saying I don't want you to simply give, *I want you to follow the Lord's example and I want you to give until you are impoverished.* That's the way Christ gave.

Conclusion: Fred B. Craddock, back in 1968 in a journal called, "The Interpretation Journal," wrote this:

“There's nothing mundane and outside the concern and responsibility of the Christian. There are not two worlds. There is one. Money for relief of those who are poor is as spiritual as prayer. The offering for the saints in Judea was for Paul a definite implication of the incarnation. It is no surprise that the discussion of the one should bring to mind the other. The offering, in fact, provided an occasion for teaching the meaning of Christology and Christology informed and elicited the offering.”⁴

End quote.

In other words, Paul saw the offering as an expression of the central truth of Christianity and that is that Christ made Himself poor to make somebody else rich. How about you?

⁴ "The Poverty of Christ", *Interpretation Journal*, 22 (Apr. 1968), 169.