

2 Corinthians 8. 9. Bethesda meditation. 22 October 2006.

Last week we sang the spiritual song 'Give thanks with a grateful heart' – which includes the line, 'Let the poor say, "I am rich"' – though not, presumably, in the way the church at Laodicea did just that, Rev. 3. 17! And I want to think this morning of how it is that those who *were* poor have indeed been *made rich*.

Read 2 Corinthians 8. 9.

Note Paul's opening words: 'for you know'. Back in verse 1 Paul tells us of something which he *wanted* the church at Corinth to '*know*'. Namely, the example of open-handed giving set by the churches of Macedonia – by such churches as those at Philippi and Thessalonica – who out of their *deep* – their *acute* – poverty ... out of their rock-bottom destitution ... out of 'the abyss of their poverty', literally ... gave – and gave liberally – gave unstintingly – gave 'beyond their means' – to help meet the needs of their even poorer brothers and sisters in Christ at Jerusalem. But our text, verse 9, tells us that Paul is confident that they do not need to be told – that they already 'know' – about the *supreme* example of generosity and sacrificial giving – that of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And whereas in the case of the Macedonians Paul speaks of 'the grace' shown *towards them*, v. 1, in the case of the Lord Jesus, he speaks of 'the grace' shown *by Him*.¹ That is, they *received* grace – He *demonstrated* grace. And the *human* benchmark of love and sacrifice set by the Macedonians is wholly overshadowed by the *divine* benchmark of love and sacrifice set by the Lord Jesus.

They, the Macedonians, who were themselves extremely poor, gave *some of the little which they had* to make those *who were even poorer than themselves* to be *less poor*. But *He*, the Lord Jesus, who was immeasurably rich, gave *all His vast – all His fabulous – wealth* – making Himself poor – to make those *who were poor* to be *rich*.²

And His 'grace' – His favour shown to those who do not merit it, that is – His goodwill freely reaching out to help the undeserving³ – is measured by Paul in terms of *what the Lord Jesus was before He came into the world* and *what He became when He did*.

He was, Paul says, 'rich'.

And who can begin to compute the wealth of divine power and possessions – of divine rank and dignity – of divine bliss and blessedness – which were, rightly and eternally, His?

And yet He 'became poor'. A reference, as I understand it, not only to the fact of *His coming into the world*, nor only to the *lowly circumstances in which He lived when in the world*, nor only to *how He died* – but to *all* of these ... stretching from the moment the King of heaven divested Himself of the insignia of His majesty – of His heavenly riches and glory – right on and down to the extreme poverty of the cross – spanning His incarnation, His life, ministry and passion – embracing everything from His stoop to Bethlehem's manger to His death on Calvary's cross.

Yes ... the Lord of the universe – 'the Possessor of heaven and earth', Gen. 14. 19, 22 – was willing to leave His exalted station and to become poor. And it was, no doubt, to one aspect of this wealth He referred when He spoke – fondly and longingly – to the Father in John 17 of 'the glory which I had with you before the world was', v. 5.

His were *the untold riches* ... His *the indescribable glory* ... His *the lofty throne* ... His *the royal robe* ... His *the worshipful homage of the seraphim* ... His *every emblem of divine Kingship*. Yes – but what, we ask, did He *do* with all this?

- Whoever would have thought that One who had all the angels of heaven as His ministers should willingly become dependent upon a small group of women who ministered to Him out of their possessions, Luke 8. 2-3.
- Whoever would have thought that One of whom it was said that heaven was His dwelling-place, 2 Chron. 6. 30, should willingly have nowhere to lay His head, Luke 9. 58?
- Whoever would have thought that One who claimed all earth's 'silver ... and gold' as His, Hag. 2. 8, should have had occasion to illustrate one of His messages by referring to a coin supplied by His enemies, Mark 12. 15?
- Whoever would have thought that One who claimed 'every beast of the forest ... and the cattle upon a thousand hills' as His, Psa. 50. 10, would 'need' to borrow an ass on which to ride into Jerusalem, Mark 11. 3?

- Whoever would have thought that the One who shared His Father's glory in heaven, John 17. 5, should willingly exposed Himself to the ridicule and scorn of men, Luke 23. 35-39?
- Whoever would have thought that One who was lifted up on His heavenly throne, Isa. 6. 1, should willingly be lifted up on a cross, John 12. 32-33?

But, yes, He exchanged His glory for humiliation; His bliss for suffering; His riches for poverty. And what poverty! The word Paul uses here, translated 'poor', differs from that he uses in verse 9 of the following chapter – where the word 'poor' points to poverty in a broad sense – to having few possessions⁴. Whereas the word 'poor' here is very closely related to that used by Jesus in Luke 16 to describe Lazarus, and which is accurately rendered as 'a/the beggar', vv. 20, 22. That is, Paul is saying, the Lord Jesus became *abjectly* poor – He became the poorest of the poor.

And note please that He '*became*' poor: it was *not* that He was '*made*' poor. Although this is the only time this verb is found in the New Testament, it occurs several times in the Greek Old Testament – but only to describe those who *were impoverished* – either *by others*, e.g. Judg. 6. 6, or as a result of their *own sin and folly*, e.g. Prov. 23. 21. Only here in the entire Greek Bible is this verb used of poverty which was entered voluntarily – which was self-inflicted. Paul clearly wants us to grasp that the Lord Jesus *chose* to renounce His heavenly glory – that He *chose* to surrender and relinquish His inexhaustible riches!

And He did it that we – who *were* spiritually 'poor' – who were utterly bankrupt before God – might *become* rich. What a tremendous exchange.⁵ The Lord Jesus went, so to speak, *from riches to rags* that we might go *from rags to riches*.

He made Himself poor that we might be rich – rich in salvation's blessings, that is. In chapter 5 alone Paul had written of how we *form part of God's new creation*, v. 17, of how we *have been reconciled to God*, v. 18, of *the eternal house and dwelling-place in the heavens which is one day to be ours*, v. 1, and of how meantime we have '*the earnest*' (the down-payment or deposit) of *God's Spirit in our hearts*, v. 5. In short, in God's sight, we are not only *out of debt* – we have *inherited a fortune*!

And, if you will excuse the pun, it beggars belief that *He* – the Lord Jesus – was willing to pay for *our riches* with *His own*!

Sometime after writing this letter, the apostle told how the Lord Jesus had once said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive', Acts 20. 35 – and when Paul reported those words he was fully aware that the Lord Jesus knew far more about the blessedness of giving than any other! For, loving us with an intensity and passion unmatched by any other, He gave *all* His riches that He might enrich *us*.

I am reminded of an incident recorded by King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 9, 'There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it. But there was found in it a *poor*, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. *Yet no one remembered that poor man*', vv. 14-15. It is of course both bad and sad that the very folk the poor man had delivered should ever forget him – but at least his action on their behalf cost him no more than the exercise of his wisdom.

But are *we* to forget *the Rich One* who – at such enormous cost to Himself – *became abjectly poor* for us? Perish the thought!

Paul lays *emphasis*⁶ in our text on the fact that the Lord Jesus impoverished Himself 'for your sakes' – 'on your account/because of you', literally. He did it, Paul stresses, '*for you*'.

And I note that, according to chapter 22 of Luke's gospel, the Lord Jesus 'took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body which is given *for you*; do this in remembrance of me. Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed *for you*', vv. 19-20. And I note that double '*for you*'. And *the Rich One*, who became so poor *for us*, asks each of us this morning not to forget Him – as the citizens of the delivered city forgot the poor man – but, as He said, to 'do this in remembrance of me'.

Let us sing the first verse of 424 again — 'Here is love, vast as the ocean ... Who his love will not remember?'

Footnotes

¹ 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' is a formula which concludes many of Paul's epistles. And the word 'grace' is one of the key words of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 – occurring no less than 10 times in 39 verses.

² It has been said that no one can 'out-give' God. There is no better proof of this than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

³ The 'grace' of our Lord Jesus features in 2 Cor. 8. 9; 12. 9 and 13. 14.

⁴ It 'denotes the one who, having few possessions, must support himself by his industry', TDNT, VI, 37.

⁵ Compare how, according to the end of chapter 5, God make *Him* – the Lord Jesus – *sin* for us that *we* might become God's *righteousness* in Him, v. 21.

⁶ The words 'for your sakes' are emphatic by position in the Greek text.