

THE POVERTY OF GOD'S SON
2 Cor. 8:9

Scripture reading: Phil. 2:5-11.

Intro: There are four books in the NT which deal with the life of Christ on earth. They are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Of these, only two give us any information concerning the birth of Christ. These two are Matthew and Luke.

Luke gives us the most information. But both Matthew and Luke are concerned with the miraculous nature of our Lord's birth. Matthew tells how Joseph struggled with the fact that Mary was going to have a child; Luke tells us that Mary herself had said, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34).

The angel of the Lord told Joseph precisely the same thing which Gabriel (possibly the same angel) told Joseph: "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20b).

So, whether we believe it or not, the Bible makes it very clear that there was never a birth like that of Jesus of Nazareth in that He was born of a virgin, that He had no human father, and that His birth was due to miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit.

Now--if you were reading the Gospels for the first time you would begin to discover as you read that the accounts of His birth give us the explanation we need for the unusual things which He did and said--for the amazing Person that He was!

His life was without violation of the Word of God. He was without sin. He did not hesitate to violate their empty traditions, but He did not disobey the Scriptures. He taught as no man ever taught. He performed miracles that men had never seen before, and have not seen since.

John is really speaking for all four ^{of} the Gospel writers when he says toward the end of the Gospel of John, "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

All of the other writers of the NT writers concur in this conclusion. They all believe in the real humanity of Jesus Christ. But they also believe in the absolute Deity of Jesus Christ--that we have in Him the God-man, One who is unique among all men who ever lived on this earth.

I would like to state this morning that I also believe it.

I know that most of you do too. I wish that everyone here could come to this conclusion, that Jesus Christ did not begin to exist when He was born of the virgin Mary, but that He was actually without any beginning since He was AND IS the eternal Son of God!

Having said all of this I want to take you to a very important, but very unusual, NT text: 2 Cor. 8:9.

In doing so I am not going to pay a great deal of attention to the context. But just so you will know that I am not ignoring the context, let me say that this verse is an illustration.

In 2 Cor. 2:8, 9 you have the two most important chapters in the Bible on giving. The greatest example of giving to be found anywhere in the Scriptures (or out) is to be seen in events which were initiated by the birth of Jesus Christ.

Listen to the way the Apostle Paul expresses it. (Read 2 Cor. 8:9.)

Let me attempt a very literal translation of the verse, giving you the order of the words as they are found in the original text. It reads like this: "FOR YOU (pl.) KNOW THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT ON ACCOUNT OF YOU HE BECAME POOR, BEING RICH, IN ORDER THAT THROUGH HIS POVERTY YOU MIGHT BE MADE RICH."

(Re-read it.)

There are at least four truths which are either stated or implied in this verse concerning poverty and riches:

- (1) Jesus Christ was rich.
- (2) We human beings are poor.
- (3) Jesus Christ became poor.
- (4) He became poor that we might be made rich.

When you put all of this into the NT picture you can see that Paul means that Jesus Christ was rich before He became a man, that in becoming a man He became poor, and that through His coming into the world, man who is poor can be rich.

If you noticed the translation I gave you, you noticed this statement: "That on account of you He became poor, being rich."

What does this mean?

Here, again, you see the accuracy of Scripture. It means that in becoming "poor" He did not cease to be "rich"--that in becoming man He did not cease to be God although men would be inclined to deny His Deity because of His humanity!

Let us see if we can understand this verse. You have the basic message of the NT compressed into this one verse.

I. WHAT IDEAS ARE WE TO ATTACH TO THE WORDS, "RICH" AND "PCOR"?

It is certainly true that our Lord came to the earth in poverty.

Although He was born into the royal family of Israel, He was born at a time when the family had fallen into dire straits. On one occasion when one man expressed a desire to be His disciple, our Lord warned him by saying, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

Nothing in the Gospels would lead us to believe that our Lord possessed material wealth while He was here. Maybe this is what Paul means.

But, neither do we find that He made His disciples rich. Peter, speaking to a man in Jerusalem who had been lame from birth said to him, "Silver and gold have I none"! (Cf. Acts 3:6).

So we can eliminate riches in the sense that it was money. Surely material wealth would have nothing to do with the Lord before His birth.

There is a hint, however, of what Paul means in a story which the Lord told, recorded in Luke 12, beginning with v. 16. We speak of it as the parable of the rich fool. Do you remember the story? Let me read it to you.

(Read Luke 12:16-21.) Note especially v. 21.

Here is our key. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE RICH IN THIS WORLD'S GOODS, AND YET POVERTY-STRICKEN SPIRITUALLY! The two, worldly riches and spiritual riches, can go together, but not necessarily.

Jesus Christ throughout all eternity past had been "rich toward God." Every man born into this world since Adam's sin has been born in abject spiritual poverty. No man naturally is "rich toward God." Jesus Christ came to share in our poverty in order that He might make us "rich toward God."

This leads me to a second question.

II. IN WHAT SENSE ARE YOU AND I BY NATURE SPIRITUALLY POOR?

Paul answers that question with two words in Eph. 2:12. The words are these: "without God."

And because we are "without God," we are without life, without forgiveness, without hope, and according to Rom. 5:6 we are without the strength to do anything about it.

If you do not have God (and you cannot have God without Christ), then it makes very little difference what else you might have. YOU REALLY HAVE NOTHING. That is what the Lord was saying in His parable.

But, you say, is there nothing that I can do about it?

I must answer, absolutely nothing! BUT, this is just why the Lord Jesus Christ came to the earth.

So, now, let us ask,

III. IN WHAT SENSE DO THESE TERMS APPLY TO HIM?

"Though He was rich." Think of the relationship between the Father and the Son throughout eternity. We have a glimpse of it in our Lord's high priestly prayer in John 17:5, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

There had never been anything between the Father and the Son. All had been perfect. The fellowship had never once been interrupted.

But our Scripture reading this morning tells us how the Lord exchanged His riches with God for a poverty which you and I will never understand until we get to heaven.

He was born as a man. He lived a life on earth in which many never recognized Him to be any more than a man. He never once sinned, but Paul tells us right here in 2 Cor. that God "made Him to be sin for us." Isaiah prophesied it in the words, "And the Lord hath laid upon Him (Christ) the iniquity of us all."

But never was the poverty of our Lord more apparent than when He cried from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, a quotation from Psa. 22:1).

Oh, He did not cease to be the Son of God. He was rich in that sense. But He became "poor" because He experienced the consequences of our sin, the very thing which every man

will have to experience for himself if he does not find out how to be "rich toward God."

This leads me to my fourth question.

IV. HOW DO YOU AND I COME INTO THESE SPIRITUAL RICHES?

Our answer is in Eph. 2:4-9. Let me read it for you.

How do I get these riches, this life with God, this relationship which is out of my reach?

It is "by grace . . . through faith . . . the gift of God."

And how long will it last?

"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7).

In Eph. 1:3, Paul tells how rich a Christian is.

Concl: Is it possible that you are one who has treated the story of Christmas as a time when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, but you have never felt that this had any real meaning for you.

Let me say this morning that if you have never trusted God's Son as your Saviour, you are poor, you have nothing!

But that can all change if you will recognize how deep your need is because of your sin, and that Jesus Christ will give you forgiveness, eternal life, a heavenly hope, daily peace, and much, much more if you will only trust Him as your Saviour.

Most of us here this morning are Christians. May I have a word with you before I close.

When Jesus Christ dictated His letter to the Laodicean Church He used some very tragic words. Let me read them. Cf. Rev. 2:17, 18b.

What did He mean--that they had lost their riches in Christ, that they were no longer the children of God?

No, He did not mean that. But He did mean that it is possible for His people to mistake material possessions for spiritual riches. How rich are you?

Some one has said, "The Church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none,' but neither can it say, 'but such as I have give I thee.'"