

4. Christmas Day: Jesus came to save from Sin's Poverty (first 18 mins)

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[0 : 00] Do sit down and maybe you'd like to listen just as I read one verse from the New Testament, from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, chapter 8 and verse 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.

Church, we've been asking the question this Christmas, why Christmas? Why Christmas at all? Why did Jesus come in the flesh?

And over our last few Christmas services together we've been seeing already that in fact the Bible points us to many dimensions of the salvation that Jesus came to bring.

Last Sunday morning we saw that he came to bring forgiveness. That is, he came to be a saviour from sin's penalty. Matthew tells us he came, he'll be called Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

[1 : 03] Last Sunday evening we saw that he came also to bring liberation. That he would be a saviour from sin's power and dominion. As Romans 8 verse 2 tells us, he came to set us free from the law of sin and death.

Just last night on Christmas Eve we looked at another dimension in Hebrews chapter 2 that says Jesus came to give us victory. That is, he came to be a saviour, not just from sin's guilt and penalty, not just from its power, but from sin's dark personality, from the devil, from our great enemy since the beginning.

But this morning, just briefly, I want to look at yet another dimension to this great salvation that we celebrate at Christmas time. And perhaps it's one that's especially appropriate for Christmas Day itself when we're thinking about gifts and presents and giving.

And it's the lovely thought, the wonderful thought encapsulated so beautifully in that verse that I just read. Let me read it again. Yes, he came to bring us riches, riches beyond our wildest dreams and imaginings.

Jesus came to be a saviour from sin's poverty. I want to spend just a few moments this morning thinking about the wonder that that little verse encapsulates so succinctly.

[2 : 45] I won't go into the context there in the letter of 2 Corinthians, except to say that it does come in the midst of a passage, as you know, where Paul is teaching the Corinthians, who are a very materially wealthy people, a wealthy church, he's teaching them the meaning of true riches.

And therefore, all about the real meaning of stewardship of all their earthly wealth. And to do so, he brings them to think of the Lord Jesus Christ and his work.

Because therein lies the key to all right understanding of what true riches are. And also of what real poverty means and why it matters.

But first, though, we need to grasp what we're talking about. Paul is referring to something in this verse that encapsulates really the whole story of redemption.

The whole story of God's salvation, as we find it in the Bible. The whole story of the Christian gospel, the good news. So we have to go right back to the very beginning to begin to understand it.

[3 : 50] First thing to say is this. We ourselves were once rich. But we became poor. We became desperately poor because of our sin.

We became poor involuntarily because of God's curse. If you think back to the very beginning of the Bible, to Genesis 1 and 2, we read some of that last night at our carol service.

The essence of the world that God created was that it was a world, a cosmos of right relationships. Of rich and wonderful relationships in every single sphere of existence.

Because God is a relational God. He is Trinity. He is the three in one, the one in three. He is in perfect relationship. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Perfect in love. Perfect in faithfulness one to another. And so the world that this God created was a world that reflected his own nature.

[4 : 55] He is the covenant God, the God of relationship. And the world he created was in perfect relationship in every possible way that you can imagine. And it was in perfect relationship with himself as God.

He is the creator. He is the Lord. And everything that he creates is in perfect harmony with himself and with everything else. So that's why at the end of the creation account, the end of every day, God looked at what he had made and behold, it was good.

And by the end, when he created everything and created mankind, behold, it was very good. Everything was perfect. God's shalom, his peace, his well-being, his perfect, harmonious ordering of things pervaded his world.

Everything in the world was characterized by right relationship. The creatures to their environment. The creatures to man. Men and women to one another.

Men and women to God. Everything in perfect relationship. A rich and wonderfully glorious universe. That is the world that God made.

[6 : 12] Do you know, if we think about it, we know that actually it's rich and wonderful personal relationships that are our greatest treasure. Isn't that right?

It's not things that grieve us most when we lose them, is it? It's people. It's relationships. And we know that.

It may be painful when a thief breaks into your house and steals your wallet and your jewels and your television set and whatever else it might be. But how much harder is it to lose a loved one?

Through maybe a rupture of a friendship. Through, well, a tragic breakdown of a marriage relationship. Or through the last great and certain robbery of death.

That's our greatest impoverishment, isn't it? When we lose something so precious, something so rich and wonderful as a loving relationship.

[7 : 15] And our world today, our society today, is marked by poverty in relationships. Isn't that right? Loneliness and estrangement and misery.

And at last the grief of the loss of a loved one. The breaking, the stealing away of our richest treasures. That's our world, isn't it? And that is the impoverishment that sin brought into God's perfect world.

The world of rich and satisfying relationships in every sphere of imagining. Ruined. Ruined. Ruined. And Genesis 3 tells us very, very plainly that it was man's rebellion against God that did that.

Man's rich relationship with God himself was ruined. God was making human beings in his very image. And we have defaced that image.

And we've suffered a loss. Remember what happened? God puts a curse between humans and their environment. Cursed is the ground because of you, says God.

[8 : 23] Cursed between males and females, striving for the mastery of one another. Well, we know that's true, don't we? And of course, the great curse of death itself. Mankind removed from the presence of God.

From the tree of life. The life that we can have only from being in God's presence. Removed. And without that, we're condemned to mortality.

To dust. Just listen to how Genesis chapter 3 ends. Genesis chapter 3, verses 23 and 4. God curses man. Man who has been the crowning glory of his creation.

His very image. The ruler over everything. The one who had everything. The one who has nothing. From being a ruler, God makes him into a serf, a slave.

Listen. He sent him out of the garden to work the ground from which he was taken. He consigns his existence to being one of mortal flesh.

[9 : 27] He reminds him, it is from the ground you are taken. And to dust, you will return. Verse 25. He places a cherubim, angels with flaming swords to guard the gates to the garden and to the tree of life.

In other words, he shuts mankind off from the source of life. He condemns him to death. Now remember these three things. God deposing man from his throne of glory.

He demotes him to be a servant of the earth. He demotes him to be mortal flesh made of dust. And he condemns him to death. Sends him out of the garden.

Remember those three things. It is very significant when we come to the second thing that Paul says. Not only is it true that we were once rich and were made poor against our will for our sins.

But Paul says, Jesus was rich and he became poor. Not for his sin, but for our sins.

[10 : 35] And not against his will, not under God's judgment, but of his own free choice. For our sake. Though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor.

What does that mean? Well, after we sing again and I read another passage, I'll explain it. Really the best commentary that I know on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9 that we read come in another of Paul's letters, in Philippians chapter 2.

Just listen to these words that you know very well. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing.

Taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.

[12 : 08] See, what Paul is speaking about there is the existence that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of God had before all worlds, in the glory of heaven. Not so much the accompaniments of royal splendor, as we might think of them, gold and silver and jewels, and chariots and palaces.

No. Rather, the wonderful perfection, of intimate relationship, that he had with his Father. And though he had all of this by rights, Paul tells us that he became poor.

That's the extraordinary mystery, isn't it, that we sing about in our Christmas carols. Just listen to some of them. He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all.

Think of that. Mild he lays his glory by. Our God, contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.

He became poor. That's the mystery that Paul's speaking about in this verse. But listen to the way he describes that poverty in Philipians, as we read.

[13 : 28] Being in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, that is, held on to. But he made himself nothing.

Man, remember, the glory and image of God as he was made. Man was cursed by God. God made man nothing because of his sin.

But Christ, the glory and the image of God in his very essence, made himself nothing. For our sakes, he became poor, says Paul.

What did that mean for the eternal son of God? Well, we read it. He took the form of a servant, a bond slave. He was born into the likeness of man in human flesh.

That is, he had a body of the earth, of dust, of mortal flesh. He humbled himself further still, even to death itself, even to death on a cross, death under a curse.

[14 : 33] Do you see? The curse of slavery, of mortality, of death, the curse that man brought upon himself by God as a result of his sin.

Christ himself took all of these things voluntarily. We were made nothing by God because of our rejection of God.

He made himself nothing. Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.

The infinite depth of poverty that took him away from the rich glory of fellowship with his father as the only begotten, as the beloved son.

And he came to earth under a curse. He came to death where he plumbed the depths of eternal poverty for our sakes. One writer says this, The measure of how poor he became is seen not in the lonely manger at Bethlehem, although of course it is seen there and it's foreshadowed there, but in the desolate cry from the cross, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[15 : 54] And he became poor in the depths of poverty, of sin's separation from God. He became poor, says Paul, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

That is, that we might know and share the richness beyond telling of deep and intimate fellowship with the Father in heaven. The God that we abandoned, the God that we had scorned.

Because as Paul says elsewhere, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. For our sake, he became poor that we, through his poverty, might become rich, having all that he has.

As Paul puts it another way in the same letter in chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians, for our sake, he made him to be sin who had no sin. So that we, in him, might become the righteousness of God in right relationship with God.

That is, in rich, restored, wonderful intimacy with God, our Creator. Reconciliation. Now, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have become rich.

[17 : 17] rich. And when Jesus comes to reign, at last, right relationships restored in all the cosmos, forever. The richness of recreation, of new creation in Christ, all because, for our sake, he became poor.

The first Adam grasped at life, at riches, the tree in the center of the garden. and in grasping on riches, he laid hold upon death, the supreme poverty.

The last Adam grasped death, for our sakes, he became poor and he laid hold upon life, that we might become rich. That's, that's the gospel, that's the good news, that's the joy of Christmas.

That's why we sing, Lord, you are God beyond all praising, yet for love's sake became a man, stooping so low, but sinners raising heavenwards by your eternal plan.

Lord, you are God beyond all praising, yet for love's sake became a man. Friends, let me tell you this, if you've got hold of that, then the Christian gospel has got a hold of you.

[18 : 41] And there's joy to the world, there's joy to your world, because the Lord has come, and the Lord has come to you to make you rich. The Lord who makes you rich beyond all splendor forever and ever, because he became poor.

If you've understood that, those riches are yours forever. The riches of knowing Christ and through Christ having access to our Heavenly Father.

Restoring the world that was lost because of our sin. Recreating the richness and the splendor of a world and a universe and a cosmos that reflects the glory of our God.

if you've understood that, then Christmas is more than just a day on the calendar. It's the beginning of a new understanding of life forever.

It's the greatest riches and wonder that there is to be discovered in time and eternity. I hope that Jesus Christ means that for you this Christmas.

[19 : 52] And if it hasn't done, every Christmas, every day in the message of the good news, he calls out and he says, I, for your sake, became poor that I might hold out to you the riches of eternal grace of knowing me and of knowing my Father.

That's a message of Christmas. I hope that's the message that you are rejoicing in this morning. Let's pray just briefly before we sing our last song.

Heavenly Father, we are staggered by the wonder of the great exchange that Christmas celebrates, that you left the glory of heaven, that you left your Father's side and you took upon yourself all the sin and the curse and the poverty that is ours.

But you did it that we might be raised up and that through knowing you we might enter the wonder of a new creation kept in heaven for us.

And so we praise you for the wonder of Christmas, for the babe of Bethlehem and for the Savior of Calvary. and we pray that you would fill our hearts with this joy, a message of a gospel that undoes the curse of sin and that brings joy and rapture and wonder to birth.

[21 : 23] May it fill our hearts this day we pray for we ask it in Jesus Christ our Savior's name. Amen.