

A Saviour from Sin's Dire Poverty

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Thomas Schriff blessed God written to Well, good morning, everyone, and a very happy Christmas to you.

Well, we're going to do that as we sing our first hymn this morning. Christians awake, salute the happy morn on which the Savior of the world was born. Well, do sit, and as we do so, let's bow our heads and let's pray.

Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

[2 : 20] Well, if you turn in your Bibles with me to page 857, we're going to read together the familiar words from Luke chapter 2 about the birth of Jesus Christ.

Luke chapter 2 at verse 1.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

Must rather. ode inteon Instead of one moment, its cocoon is it? God, there, have a seat. Well, there, have a seat. We've been asking the question this year in our Christmas services.

[3 : 51] He's been with us for any of the others. Asking the question, why was Jesus born? Why did God himself come to this earth in the person of his son and take on our own human flesh?

Well, as the carols tell us, and we've sung often this Christmas, Christ was born to save. As we saw last Sunday morning, there are many dimensions to what that salvation means according to the Bible.

Jesus came to save us from sin's penalty. That is, he came to bring forgiveness. The angel said he will save his people from their sins, from the guilt of their sins.

But of course, there's more than that. The Bible also tells us that Jesus came as a savior from sin, sin as a deadly and a domineering power which enslaves the whole human race.

He came to bring us redemption, liberation, to set us free from the law of sin and death, as Paul says in Romans 8, chapter 1.

[5 : 01] And last night in our Christmas Eve carol service, we saw yet another dimension of this salvation that Jesus came to bring. He came as a savior from sin's dark personality.

He came to bring us victory over the devil himself. But on this Christmas morning, I want to think of one more dimension of this great salvation that we have in Jesus Christ, the king born at the first Christmas.

And it's perhaps especially appropriate for Christmas Day itself when I'm sure we're all thinking about gifts and giving. And it's the lovely thought, it's the wonderful thought encapsulated most beautifully in the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 9.

For you, he says, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

Jesus Christ came into this world, the Bible says, to make us rich, with riches beyond our wildest dreams.

[6 : 17] He came to be a savior from sin's dire poverty. Now, of course, that statement could easily be misunderstood. So I want to spend a few moments this Christmas morning just pondering the true wonders of what this one little verse encapsulates so succinctly about Christ, our great Savior.

I won't go into the context here in Corinthians except to say that it comes in the midst of Paul's teaching to this church in Corinth, a church where the people were very materially wealthy.

But he's teaching them about the meaning of true riches and true poverty. And he's teaching them, therefore, about having a right attitude to all of their earthly wealth, all their stewardship.

And to do so, he brings them to think very clearly about Jesus Christ and his work. Because therein, according to the Apostle Paul, therein lies the key to all thinking about real wealth and about real poverty in this world and why it matters.

So we need to grasp, of course, what he's talking about. And Paul here is referring to something that encapsulates really the whole story of redemption, the whole story of the Christian gospel.

[7 : 39] And so we need to go right back to the very beginning. And the first thing to say is that we ourselves, that is humankind, we ourselves were once rich.

But we became poor. We became desperately poor because of our sins. We became poor involuntarily as a result of God's curse.

Now, that's something that takes us right back to the very beginning of the Bible story. Right at the very beginning, we're told that the very essence of the world that God made as creator was that it was a world, a whole cosmos full of the riches of right relationships.

Rich and wonderful relationships in every sphere of being. At the very end of Genesis chapter 1, the first chapter of the Bible, the whole world is summed up like this.

And God saw everything that he had made and behold, it was very good. That's because God is a relational God.

[8 : 49] God is in the very essence of his being. He is Trinity. He is three in one and one in three. He is in perfect, eternal relationship with himself.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Perfect in love. Perfect in faithfulness to one another. By the way, that's why the Bible can say that God is love in himself.

There is existing perfect love relationship, even without any need for any other created beings or things.

If God's not Trinity, if God is not in himself relational and able to love, then God couldn't possibly be called love, could he?

In order to love, he would need others. So God would, in some way, be lacking in himself. That's why, by the way, the Islamic concept of God, Allah, cannot possibly be love in himself because he is only one.

[9 : 53] Therefore, in order to love another, he would have to create. He would be in need of something else in order to be perfect in love. But the God of the Bible is love in himself.

He is the relational God. And so naturally, of course, the world that he creates is a world that reflects his own nature. He is the covenant God.

He's the Lord. That's what his name means. He's the God of covenant faithfulness. Faithful in all relationships, utterly and perfectly. And the world that God creates is a world that was in perfect relationship with him and in perfect harmony with itself.

Everything was very, very good. God's shalom, God's peace, God's well-being, God's perfect harmony rules in all the world that he made.

Everything was characterized by right relationships. Creatures in right relationship to their environment. Creatures in right relationship to man. Man in right relationship to other men, women.

[11 : 00] And, of course, above all, all human beings in right relationship with God. That's what the first two chapters of the Bible tell us. That's the picture that they paint so vividly.

A rich and wonderfully glorious universe. And if you think about it, we know that it is, isn't it, rich and wonderfully perfect relationships with other people that are our greatest treasures in life.

That's what we cherish the most in our whole human lives, isn't it? We recognize that if there are people who are cold, who are disinterested in having relationships with any other people, we recognize that they have psychopathology, don't they?

There's something wrong with them. But for all normal people, it's not things that grieve us most when we lose them. It's people. It's relationships.

Now, we know that. It might be painful to lose money or jewels in a theft. It might be painful to lose your house even in a house fire. That's a terrible thing.

[12 : 06] But how much more painful to lose a loved one through the rupture of a friendship, through the rupture of a marriage.

These are terribly, terribly painful things. And, of course, the greatest robbery of all that any of us can ever experience in our lives is that awful theft of death itself.

That's the greatest impoverishment for us in our world, isn't it? I don't think there'll be very many people shedding a tear at the Christmas table today because it's their first Christmas without their

favorite car or without their favorite laptop or without their favorite bracelet or whatever it might be. But there'll be many tears this Christmas, won't there, when it's the first Christmas without a beloved husband or wife or father or mother or son or daughter.

That's true, isn't it? The poverty of a relationship that so marks the world today is when we've lost something so wonderful like that.

[13 : 17] And there is so much estrangement in our world. So much loneliness. So much misery. So much real grief. And, friends, that is the impoverishment, the great poverty that has come into our world because of sin.

The world that was created full of rich and satisfying and wonderful relationships and lasting relationships has been marred.

Genesis chapter 3 tells us plainly that it was man's relationship against God that destroyed his relationship with God and, therefore, as a result, all other relationships.

We are made in God's very image, but we have defaced it and we've scorned him. And the result was total rupture. Genesis 3 verse 8 says that man wanted to keep away from God altogether. They hid from God when he presents himself in the garden. And the result was that God cursed all our other rich relationships, too, just to show human beings how disastrous it is to rupture that relationship with God, to freeze him out of his world.

[14 : 35] We won't go into it now, but you'll remember the curse. A curse on the relationship between man and his environment. Cursed will be the ground because of you, says God. And curse between humans and other creatures.

And between humans themselves, male and female, vying with one another for the mastery. And, of course, above all, the great curse of death itself. Removal from the presence of God.

Removal from the tree of life. The life that can only be found in the presence of God. And so man was condemned to mortality.

From dust you're made and to dust you'll return. Listen to how Genesis chapter 3 ends. You'll know these words. You will have heard them many times, I'm sure.

Therefore, the Lord God sent man from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man. And at the east of the Garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

[15 : 43] God curses man who has been the crown of his glorious creation. His own image. His ruler for the world. The one who has everything.

God makes to have nothing. From being a ruler, he's left as a serf, as a slave. God sent him out of the garden to slavishly work the ground.

And God consigns his existence to that of mortal flesh. Which will go back to the dust from which it came. And God puts the fiery angelic beings with their flaming swords to guard the way to the tree of life.

In other words, he shuts him out of the realm of life and condemns him to the place of death. Remember those three things.

God deposing man from his throne of glory as he ruled the world. And demoting him to a servant bondage on earth. And to mere mortal flesh.

[16 : 49] And condemning him from death to death. Shut out from life eternal. Because that's highly significant. When we begin to think about the second thing that Paul says.

You see, not only does Paul say that we humans were once rich. But were made poor against our will because of our sin. Paul tells us that Jesus also was rich.

Do you see? And yet he became poor too. But not, notice, because of his sin. But because of our sin.

And not, notice, against his will. But out of his free choice. For our sakes. Though he was rich. Yet for your sake.

He became poor. What does that mean? Jesus was rich.

[17 : 47] And yet he for our sake became poor. He became poor because of our sins. Perhaps the best commentary on Paul's words there.

Are words that he wrote elsewhere to the church in Philippi. Just listen to what he says to them. In these words in Philippians chapter 2. 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 men. 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 other name. So that at the name of Jesus.

[18 : 44] 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 God the Father.

See Paul is speaking about the existence of the Son of God. Before all worlds in the glory of heaven. He was rich in splendor.

Not so much rich in the accompaniments of royalty. Gold and silver and jewels and power and all of these things. But rather rich in the wonderful and intimate joy of relationship with the Father. In the oneness of the everlasting Godhead. And though he had all of this by right. Paul says he chose for our sake.

To become poor. And that's the mystery isn't it? That's expressed so poignantly in some of the most wonderful Christmas carols that we love to sing.

[19 : 49] He came down to earth from heaven. Who is God and Lord of all. Mild he laid his glory by.

Our God contracted to a span. Incomprehensibly made man. He became poor.

The reigning Lord of heaven and earth. Became poor. That's the mystery that Paul is speaking about in these words. But listen carefully to the way he describes this poverty.

Being in the form of God he says. He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. To be held on to. But made himself nothing.

Man. Man. Remember. Is created. As the image of God. The glory of God. But was cursed.

[20 : 49] Because of his sinful rebellion. God made him. Nothing. For his sin. But Christ. The true glory and image of God. In his very essence and being.

Made himself nothing. For our sake. He became poor. And what does. What does Paul say that that meant. For the eternal son of God.

He says. He took the form. Of a servant. Became a bond slave on earth. And he says. He was born. In the likeness of man.

In human form. That is. He took on a body of this earth. A body of dust. Mortal flesh. Like ours. And he humbled himself. We're told. Further still.

Even. To death itself. Even death. On a cross. Under God's. Curse. You see. Isn't that striking? The curse of. Of slavery.

[21 : 44] And mortality. And the condemnation of death. The very curse. That man brought upon himself. For his sin. Christ.

The Lord of heaven. Took upon himself. Voluntarily. For our sin. We were made nothing. Because of our terrible rejection of God.

And yet he made himself nothing. Though he was rich. Yet for your sake. He became. Poor. With the infinite depth of poverty.

That took him away. From the. The riches. And the glory of fellowship. With his father in heaven. As the beloved. As the only begotten son. And it took him to earth.

This earth. Under a curse. And to a death. Where he. He plumbed the depths. Of eternal poverty.

[22 : 42] For. Our sake. Says the apostle. The summoner said. The measure. Of how poor he became.

Is seen. Not. In the lowly manger of Bethlehem. Although yes. It is reflected there. It's foreshadowed there. But in the desolate cry. From the cross. My God.

My God. Why. Have you forsaken me? He became poor. In the depths. Of the poverty. Of sins. Terrible separation.

From God. For. Our sake. Says the gospel. And so that we. Do you see. By his poverty.

Might become rich. Well. The prince. Of heaven. Left his throne. And became poor. Says the apostle Paul. So that you.

[23 : 40] Through his poverty. Might become rich. Jesus Christ. Came. Into the world. At the first Christmas. To be a savior. From sins.

Dire poverty. That we might know. The riches. That are beyond telling. The riches. Of a deep. And intimate. And everlasting. Relationship.

With. God. Our father in heaven. God. The creator of this world. God. The Lord. Of time. And eternity. The God. That we have abandoned. The God. That we have scorned. And spat at. For the God. That he came. To bring us home to. To know. And to cherish.

And to love. For in Christ. God. Was reconciling. This world. To himself. Not counting. Man's trespasses. Against them.

[24 : 38] Is what Paul says. In another place. For our sake. He became poor. So that you. By his poverty. Might become.

Rich. Or as Paul put it. Yet another way. In. Another letter. Also to the Corinthian church. For our sake. He made him. Who knew no sin.

To be sin. So that in him. We. Might become the righteousness. Of God. That is. Restored.

In rich. Right. Relationship. With God himself. That we might have. Reconciliation. That's what the Bible calls it. Reconciliation. Now.

In the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have become. Rich. In him. And then. One day. When Jesus returns. At last. We will join in.

[25 : 34] The right relationships. Of a holy. Renewed. Cosmos. Forever. And ever. In new bodies. In new life. In restoration. Of everything. That was impoverished.

By the rebellion of man. The richness. Of a new creation. At last. Complete in Christ. When no longer. Shall thorns.

Infest the ground. When no longer. Shall sins. And sorrows. Grow. Where fields. And floods. And rocks. And hills. And plains. When all nature. Will repeat.

The sounding joy. Of at last. His blessings. Flowing. Far. As the curse. Had been found. Across the whole world. And the glories. Of his righteousness.

And the wonders. Of his love. Will fill this world. As the waters. Cover the sea. That is the promise. Of the gospel. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's all because.

[26 : 29] For your sake. He became poor. The first Adam. Grasped. At life. At life. He grasped.

At the riches. That belong to God. He grasped. At the tree. In the heart. Of the garden. But what he laid a hold of. Was death.

Condemnation. Supreme poverty. But the last Adam. Jesus Christ. The Lord of heaven. He grasped. Hold of death.

He grasped. Hold. Hold of supreme poverty. For our sake. In order that we. Might at last. Grasp hold.

Of everlasting life. Friends. That is the message of Christmas. That is the gospel of Christ. We have. In him. A savior. From sin's.

[27 : 26] Dire. Poverty. A savior. Who has. Once again. Opened the gates. Of paradise. Opened the gates. Of heaven itself. For everyone. Who will heed his call.

So well might 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. If you have. Understood that. If you have got a hold of that. This Christmas.

Then the Christmas gospel. Has got a hold on you. And there is joy. To the world. There is joy to your world. Because God has come. The one who will make you rich.

[28 : 22] The one who will make you rich. Beyond all splendor. In receiving. The great gift. Of the joy. Of everlasting life. And the joy. Of everlasting love.

In the presence. Of the God who made you. And who so loved you. That he came. And embraced poverty itself. That you might be made rich.

I hope he is yours this Christmas. If he is not yours this Christmas. You can make him yours. This very day. That is what he wants. That is why he came.

It is the great desire. In the heart of God himself. That people like you and me. Should find the riches. That he came to bring. He longs.

He longs. To share his rich life with you. He longs. And the whole of heaven longs. To rejoice. In your homecoming. In your sharing.

[29 : 22] In the riches of the one. Who is beyond splendor. Jesus Christ. Came into this world. To be a savior. From sin's dire poverty.

Poverty. Don't let the savior pass you by. This Christmas. Join him. And join his life. Amen.