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Sermon Notes

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Christ Became Poor to Make Us Rich

2 Corinthians 8:9

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

I. The Retelling of the Christmas Story Is Essential to Our Faith

A. Few Stories Told As Frequently As This One

1. Every year, and the years go by faster and faster, I've found, Christmas rolls around and this story is told again
2. The story of the birth of Jesus Christ is in many ways the most famous part of His life... we hear it again and again
3. Perhaps because people love babies and there's something so alluring about the story of the birth of Jesus
4. The lyrics of Christmas carols keep the birth of Christ in our minds very effectively

B. Scripture Tells It a Variety of Ways

1. Simple historical narrative
 - a. Two main accounts: Luke 2 and Matthew 1-2
 - b. Worth recounting now

Luke 2:1-20 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to his own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room

for them in the inn. ⁸ ¶ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." ¹⁵ ¶ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Matthew tells the story of Jesus' genealogy through Joseph; of Mary becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit, of his resolving to divorce her quietly, of an angel speaking to Joseph in a dream:

Matthew 1:20-21 "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Matthew then tells us that Joseph obeyed what the angel had told him to do; he married Mary, but had no union with her until after the baby was born

Matthew 2 recounts the amazing story of the Magi who followed a star from the east to Bethlehem where they worshiped the child and gave Him gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh... but they also triggered the first persecution of Jesus... King Herod's vicious slaughter of the boy babies in Bethelhem

2. Doctrinal retellings and explanations

1 Timothy 3:16 Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

1 Timothy 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst.

3. Prophetic foretelling

Isaiah 7:14 The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

C. Easy to Become Numb and to Tune Out

1. When we hear it again and again, year after year...
2. It can seem like old news, an old story, with little power to amaze us, little power to move us

D. The World Garbles the Christmas Message... Worse Every Year

1. Materialism rises more and more, challenging one of Jesus' basic teachings:

Luke 12:15 a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

- a. Retailers count on Christmas on being a huge part of a successful year
- b. Advertisers assault us every hour with ads for jewelry and apparel and electronic gadgets and automobiles as fit ways to express our love for our loved ones
2. Along with this, secular "winter holiday" songs and themes dominate the public square—the mall decorations and the TV/radio airwaves... our increasingly secular mindset is allergic to public mentions of Jesus
 - a. Radio stations play "seasonal music"... not Christian hymns: "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire" and "silver bells" and "walking in a winter wonderland" dominate our brains with no mention of Jesus Christ
 - b. Characters like Santa Claus, "the Grinch," "Frosty the Snowman", "Rudolph the Rednosed Reindeer" divert the attention from Christ and make the season bright for atheists
 - c. Even Charles Dickens's classic "A Christmas Carol" with its character of Ebenezer Scrooge is stripped of any allusions to Christ...

C.S. Lewis notes a marked absence "of any interest in the Incarnation. Mary, the Magi, and the Angels are replaced by 'spirits' of his own invention, and the animals present are not the ox and the ass in the stable but the goose and the turkey in the poulterer's shop" ("The Decline of Religion," *God in the Dock*).

Although G.K. Chesterton defended Dickens's classic, as a defense of Christmas, he acknowledges that we "must not ask Dickens what Christmas is, for with all his heat and eloquence he does not know"

d. Christians DO KNOW what Christmas is...

E. Faith Comes from Hearing; Faith Strengthened by Repeating

^{CSB} Romans 10:17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.

F. Here: "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus..."

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

It is vital for our faith to keep going over the truth of the incarnation... to study the "mystery of godliness" with freshness and vitality!

The miracle of Christmas is summed up plainly in these verses:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And also in these verses:

Luke 1:30-35 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

And the reason for the incarnation is plain in these verses:

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

Matthew 20:28 the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Our text this morning puts the incarnation of Jesus in terms of WEALTH and POVERTY... and it is worthy of tracing out carefully the words in this potent verse

II. The Origin of Christmas: The Grace of Our Lord Jesus

A. The Text Begins with the Concept of GRACE

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

1. Grace is sometimes called “unmerited favor”... true but weak
2. Sometimes people use the acronym which spells out “G-R-A-C-E”: “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.” Perhaps few no verse in the Bible connects with that better than our text this morning
3. But even that is insufficient
4. To understand grace fully, we have to understand WHAT WE TRULY DESERVED, and WHAT WE TRULY RECEIVED...

Grace is the determination in the heart of God, based on the work of Christ, to do good, even infinite good, to those who deserved infinite wrath.

B. Christmas Started in the Mind of God Before the Foundation of the World

2 Timothy 1:8-10 God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us to a holy life-- not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

British Explorer John Hanning Speke solved an ancient mystery... the origins of the Nile River

On July 21, 1862, Speke located the outflow from Lake Victoria of the Nile River.

Six days later, Speke reached and named the Rippon Falls, where the Nile actually flows out of Lake Victoria

If we trace our personal salvation back to its origin, we would go back to before the foundation of the world

Before God created the heavens and the earth, He had determined to save us from our sins by sending Christ into the world

God had worked out this elaborate plan of salvation before there were any stars in the sky or any oceans or rivers on earth

God had worked the plan of sending His Son, born of a woman, in the fullness of time

C. Christmas Started by the Grace of Christ Before He Entered the World

1. Beyond the gracious and wise plan of God the Father, we have the AMAZING GRACE of Jesus Christ our Lord... it was He who decided to do this for us
2. This is the clear focus of the verse itself:

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

3. Jesus was willing to leave the glory of heaven for the suffering and death of earth
4. His grace is immeasurable and astonishing!!
5. He is the only human being in history who made a conscious decision to enter the world... as He says several times

John 18:37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

John 6:38-40 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Christmas was a CONSCIOUS CHOICE by Jesus to enter the world, to live and to die for us...

III. Where Christ Began: Infinitely Rich

A. The Simple Assertion of the Text

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Word "rich" = wealthy, abounding in resources

B. How Rich Was Christ Before He Entered the World?

1. Rich in glory shared with the Father

Jesus is the “radiance of God’s glory”

Before He entered the world, Jesus was shining with a glory that even the holy angels couldn’t bear to see

1 Timothy 6:16 [God] dwells in unapproachable light

Jesus Himself radiated that glory before He entered the world:

Isaiah 6:1-3 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

John 12:41 Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

So Jesus was RICH IN GLORY before He entered the world... so brilliant was His glory that the holy angels had to cover their faces

Isaiah 6 says that the WHOLE EARTH WAS FULL OF JESUS’ GLORY

ESV Revelation 1:16 ... his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

In His incarnation, Jesus left this glory behind... this radiant shining brilliance... at the end of His time on earth, He asked the Father for the glory back

John 17:5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

This is an amazing request, since in the Book of Isaiah,

Isaiah 42:8 I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.

But before He was born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus filled heaven and earth with His glory!!!

2. Rich in achievements in creation

John 1:3 Through [Jesus] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Colossians 1:16-17 For by [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Psalm 104 recounts the amazing ways the Lord sustains all living creatures... Jesus was the crafter of the physical world and He is also its sustainer. Before He entered the world, Jesus sat on a throne of glory, with great satisfaction looking out over all He had made and delighted in His achievements:

Psalm 104:31 May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works

3. Rich in power over the universe

- a. Before He entered the world, Jesus reigned in power on the throne of the universe
- b. He openly ruled over heaven and earth, and all things did His bidding
- c. His power was openly displayed and unquestioned
- d. He ruled over stars and planets, over winds and rains, over birds and fish, over angels and men... nothing could resist His will or hold back His hand

Daniel 4:35 He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

4. Rich in possessions

Psalm 95:4-5 In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

Psalm 50:10-12 every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. ¹² If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.

Psalm 60:7-8 Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter. ⁸ Moab is my washbasin, upon Edom I toss my sandal; over Philistia I shout in triumph

5. Rich in angelic worship and service

Daniel 7:10 Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

Isaiah 6:3 they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

6. Rich in happiness and satisfaction

- a. Before He took on a human body, Jesus never knew pain or suffering

- b. He lived in perfect happiness and in pleasure at every moment
- c. EXCEPT ONE THING: He saw the damage sin had done to the universe and to His people... and His heart was grieved over these things; but in Himself, He existed in perfect pleasure at every moment at the right hand of His Almighty Father

That is what it means “Though He was rich...”

IV. Where Christ Ended: Infinitely Poor

A. Christ’s Free Choice

B. Christ’s Poverty: The Infinite Downward Journey

Philippians 2:6-8 being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

1. Becoming a human being
 - a. Weak
 - b. Beset with suffering
 - c. A servant
 - d. Temptable

Hebrews 2:18 he himself suffered when he was tempted

- e. Able to become hungry, thirsty, tired
- f. MORTAL: able to suffer and to die

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

2. Born a baby: Stripped of visible glory and power
 - a. Helpless... needing to be swaddled in cloths by a human mother
 - b. Needing to learn everything... how to sit up, how to walk, how to eat solid food, how to talk
 - c. Think of that: Jesus was the WORD OF GOD, yet he had to learn how to talk

3. Jewish: a conquered people
 - a. Under the heel of the Romans
 - b. Effectively slaves in their own Promised Land
4. Poor parents
 - a. Joseph and Mary were clearly godly... but they were also clearly POOR
 - b. Joseph and Mary offered two turtledoves for their newborn baby
 - c. That means they were POOR

Leviticus 12:7-8 "These are the regulations for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl. ⁸ If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering.

5. Stunning poverty in the circumstances of His birth
 - a. Even poor people have better birth circumstances than Jesus did
 - b. He was born in a barn and laid in a manger... they were in many ways like homeless people
 - c. His poverty would continue the rest of His life

Matthew 8:20 "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

6. Servant of all... a humble attitude toward everyone with a need
7. Hated, opposed by many
8. The ultimate poverty: death on a cross
 - a. The infinite downward journey was made complete when Jesus died under the wrath of God on the cross
 - b. Our sinbearer, suffering in our place... despised and rejected, hated and mocked, stripped of all possible dignity and glory, rejected in some mysterious way even by God the Father
 - c. The ultimate poverty was His atoning death under the wrath of God

C. Still Rich, Though!!

1. Rich in deity: He never stopped being the Son of God

2. Rich in power: He displayed supernatural power over demons and people, over the winds and waves, over fish and birds, over disease and sin, over life and death...
3. Rich in wisdom: No one ever spoke the way He did
4. Rich in love:

Matthew 3:17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

John 5:20 the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.

V. What Christ Accomplished: We Became Rich

A. It Was All for Us! "For your sake..."

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

B. We Were Poor... Though We Didn't Know It

Revelation 3:17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

1. Everything we owned would someday be taken from us by death

1 Timothy 6:7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

2. All of our beauty and power and strength and skill were temporary and fading

Isaiah 40:6-7 "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them.

3. We were rebellious and under the wrath of God

Romans 3:10-18 "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

Titus 3:3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

4. We were powerless to resist the devil and to save ourselves

Romans 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

5. We were dead in our transgressions and sins

Ephesians 2:1-2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

6. We were under an eternal death penalty

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death

Matthew 25:41 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

C. He Made Us Rich

1. Rich in forgiveness
2. Rich in righteousness
3. Rich in adoption
4. Rich in inheritance
5. Rich in the Holy Spirit

D. Christ Returned to Heaven Richer Than When He Started: He Gained Us!

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

E. Christ Gets Richer Every Year... and So Do We!

VI. Application: How Christ's Love Should Compel Us

- A. Receive the Gift of Grace... this is the Real Christmas Present
- B. Revel in the Gift of Grace... Meditate on How Christ's Poverty Has Made You Rich
- C. Understand How this Grace Compels Us to Be Generous to Others

1. Immediate context: Paul's urging the Corinthians to be financially generous to the poor and needy
2. Earlier statement: "Poor, but making many rich..." Sacrificial evangelism and missions
3. Learning to follow Christ every moment in making others rich
4. Passion for the unreached peoples of the world

JoshuaProject.net says there are 7,296 unreached people groups with 2.91 billion people who are outside the hearing of the gospel

5. Passion for poverty-stricken people

- Nearly half of the world's population — more than 3 billion people — live on less than \$2.50 a day. More than 1.3 billion live in *extreme* poverty (less than \$1.25 a day).
- 1 billion children worldwide are living in poverty. 22,000 children die each day due to poverty.
- More than 1 billion people lack adequate access to clean drinking water and an estimated 400 million of these are children.
- In 2011, 165 million children under the age 5 were stunted (reduced rate of growth and development) due to chronic malnutrition.
- 870 million people worldwide do not have enough food to eat.
- Preventable diseases like diarrhea and pneumonia take the lives of 2 million children a year who are too poor to afford proper treatment.
- As of 2011, 19 million children worldwide remain unvaccinated.
- A quarter of all humans live without electricity — approximately 1.6 billion people.
- One billion adults are illiterate. About a quarter of the children in the poor countries do not finish primary school.

These issues of poverty should move us deeply...

We are RICH in the gospel... we should be passionate to take the gospel to the unreached people groups of the world

We are RICH in material things... we should be passionate about alleviating suffering in the wisest possible ways... not by merely giving handouts, but by thinking about how to enable people to care for their own families by their own labor long-term

Christ desires us to be passionate about “making many rich”