

**Our Riches Came at Christ's Expense
2 Corinthians 8:9**

Living in the presence of God and basking in His glory as in a mirror, so that we might be transformed into very image of Christ, hopefully will become, if it is not already, our greatest pleasure transcending every other pleasure that this world has to offer.

But if this is going to happen then what do we need to understand? We need to understand as best as we can the height, the breath, and depth of God's love for us. For if we can understand God's love better it will invariably drive us into His presence, knowing as we behold His glory as in a mirror in the face of Christ, that we will be transformed into the same image, which is for us, in terms of our everyday experience, a foretaste of future glory.

So how important is it for us to have a growing understanding of God's love for us? It is extremely important.

Therefore in light of its importance and in light of the fact that our celebration of the birth of Christ is only a few days away, I would like to use our celebration of Christmas as an opportunity to focus on God's love for us.

And the passage of Scripture that I would like us look at this morning in terms of that focus consists of a single verse, **2 Corinthians 8:9**.

But before I read this verse for you and before we begin our examination of this particular verse, I would like to provide for you a little background.

Hopefully you remember that Paul wrote **2 Corinthians** while on his third missionary journey. And one of the things that he was trying to accomplish while on this journey was the taking up of a special "relief offering" for poor Christians living in Judea, an offering that the Corinthians a year earlier had committed to.

Unfortunately the Corinthian believers, in light of their spiritual struggles both individually and corporately, were failing to do the things that would have been necessary if they really did intend to fulfill their commitment. They had lost their way.

Paul in **2 Corinthians 8:9** is seeking to get them back on course by pointing them away from the things that had been occupying them to Christ's love and to the grace that He had poured out upon them.

So now let us read **2 Corinthians 8:9** and see if this is not so. **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** There it is. Paul is pointing the Corinthians away from the things that had been occupying them to the love and grace of Christ that he tells them that they knew.

Now it is important for us to note that Paul is not saying that they knew about Christ's love and grace. No! He told that they actually knew it. In other words, they had experienced it. They experienced Christ's love and grace. So how had they experienced it? In order to answer this question we need to understand the meaning of grace.

So what exactly is grace? Grace can be defined by an acronym: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Had the Corinthians experienced this? Had they experienced God's riches at Christ's expense? Absolutely! And if there is any doubt about this all we have to do is to continue to read **2 Corinthians 8:9**. **“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 through His poverty might become rich.”**

So had the Corinthians experienced the grace of our Jesus Christ? Had they experienced God's riches at Christ expense? And the answer based on **2 Corinthians 8:9** is yes! They had!

And how did Paul frame the reality of what he had just told the Corinthians about knowing the grace of Christ?

Paul frames the reality of what he has just told the Corinthians about knowing the grace of Christ by pointing them to Christ's incarnation and to truths associated with it.

Isn't this exactly what he is doing in **2 Corinthians 8:9** when he said, **“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 through his poverty might become rich.”** Clearly Paul is speaking about the incarnation of Christ and the truths associated with it to frame the reality of what he has

just said about the Corinthians knowing the love and grace of Christ. So what is my hope for this message as we focus on what this verse has to say about the incarnation of Christ and the truths associated with it?

My hope this morning, just a few days removed from our celebration of the birth of Christ, is that God might use this verse that focuses on the incarnation of Christ and the truths associated with it to help make His love for us come alive. And that this growing understanding of His love for us might drive us into His presence and that we might behold His glory as in a mirror, in the face of Christ, and be transformed into the same image, thus serving as a foretaste of future glory.

So, what truths associated with the incarnation of Christ does Paul highlight in 2 Corinthians 8:9?

The first truth associated with the incarnation of Christ that Paul highlighted was this: Christ before His incarnation was rich. Let us now read **2 Corinthians 8:9** and see if this is not so. **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich.”**

So the question that we must ask ourselves is this. How was Christ rich? Paul’s reference to Christ being rich in 2 Corinthians 8:9 is not a reference to His economic status but rather to the glory that He shared with His Father prior to His incarnation (Revelation 4-5). So what might this past shared glory that Christ enjoyed with His Father prior to His incarnation look like?

I believe that we get a glimpse into this past shared glory and what it might have looked like by looking at a future heavenly worship scene recorded for us by the Apostle John in **Revelation 4-5**.

In these two chapters there are five glorious hymns of praise. Two of those hymns are found in **Chapter 4** and are directed at the one on the throne, or in other words to God the Father. And the remaining three hymns of praise are found in **Chapter 5**.

The first two are directed at the Lamb, or in other words to God the Son, who is pictured as seated at the right hand of His Father’s throne, and the final hymn is directed at both the Father and the Son.

And who sang those hymns? The first hymn was initiated by a quartet that John called “**the four living creatures,**” most likely cherubim, an exalted order of angels. They were then joined in singing the first and second hymns directed to the Father and the third hymn that was directed to the Son by “**24 elders.**” We believe that the 24 elders in this passage represent the church.

When the fourth hymn in **Revelation 5** that was once again sung to Christ began, this heavenly choir was again expanded but this time exponentially with the addition of angels, myriads upon myriads, and thousands of thousands.

And how does this worship scene in heaven end. It concluded with a final hymn of praise at the end of **Revelation 5** directed both to God the Father and to God the Son.

So now let me read for you what they said in this final hymn of praise. “**To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.**” And then **Revelation 5:14** it tells us this “**And the four living creature kept saying, ‘Amen’ and the elders fell down and worshiped.**”

Paul referred to Christ as having been rich in **2 Corinthians 8:9**. I believe when Paul referred to Christ as having been rich he was referring to the shared glory that He enjoyed with His Father prior to His incarnation when He and His Father with all of their perfections on display received from the heavenly hosts what was due them, which was unrestrained and uncontainable worship as we have seen in **Revelation 4-5**.

These are the riches that Christ enjoyed prior to His incarnation. These are the riches that Paul had in mind in **2 Corinthians 8:9** when he referred to Christ as rich.

So let me ask you this question. Did Christ consider His riches, or in other words this shared glory with His Father prior to His incarnation that produced unrestrained and uncontainable worship, as something to be grasped? No!

Let me now read for you **Philippians 2:6-7a**. “**Who, although He** [referring to Christ] **existed in the form of God** [or in other words, even though he

shared the very character and essence of God], **did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied Himself** [or made Himself of no effect, or perhaps we could say made Himself as nothing].

And this leads us to the second truth associated with the incarnation of Christ that Paul chose to highlight in **2 Corinthians 8:9**.

Christ's incarnation, that He willingly chose to embrace, brought Him to poverty. Let me go back to **2 Corinthians 8:9** and see if this is not so. And what does it say? It says this. **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor.”**

When Christ chose to leave behind the riches that He enjoyed with His Father by veiling His glory in human flesh, He not only suffered the veiling of His glory by taking upon Himself human flesh but he opened Himself up to far greater suffering.

Let me now read for you **Philippians 2:8** and see if this is not so. **“Being found in appearance as a man [referring to Christ], He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** So now we understand a little bit more about Christ's poverty.

Christ's poverty did not end with His glory being veiled in human flesh. It extended to Him becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, which was His Father's will for Him (Philippians 2:8).

Christ's dying on the cross was the most costly act of obedience in the history of the world. There has never been nor ever will be an act of obedience so costly.

So why would I say this? First of all, let us look at it from a physical standpoint. And what do we know about crucifixion? We know this: Crucifixion was developed by the Persians and perfected by the Romans and from a physical standpoint was the most cruel and painful death that man had ever devised. But there is something else that we need to understand.

Whatever Christ suffered physically is nothing to what He suffered spiritually while on the cross (Mark 15:33-34).

Let me read for you the words of Christ in **Mark 15:33-34**. “**When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. (34) At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’**”

So, what is this all about? What exactly is taking place at that particular moment in time that would cause Him to cry out in this way? It is really not very difficult to explain.

First of all, the Bible teaches us that when Christ willingly allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross as God’s sacrificial lamb, He became so closely identified with our sin that **2 Corinthians 5:21** tells us that He became “**sin.**”

Let me now read this verse for you. “**He [God the Father] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him**”

So if this was in fact true that Christ was so closely associated with our sin that He is described in **2 Corinthians 5:21** as having become “**sin,**” what would we expect to happen next? We would expect Him to die. And why would this be? We would expect Him to die because **Romans 6:23** tells us that the wages of sin is death.

And what kind of death is this talking about? It is not only talking about physical death, which is the separation of the human spirit from the body, but also spiritual death, which is the separation of the human spirit from God. And this of course would have to be the way it would be.

In order to be our substitute on the cross and so that He might be able to pay the debt we owed to God because of our sin, Christ had to experience not only physical death but also spiritual death. And now with this understanding we can better appreciate what exactly was taking place when Christ cried out from His cross, “**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**”

When Christ cried out to His Father, “Why have You forsaken Me?” He, not in respect to His deity but in respect to His humanness, had experienced

spiritual death.

There has never been or ever will be a more costly act of obedience than when Christ humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. So why did He do this? Why did Christ choose to abandon the riches He enjoyed in heaven to embrace the extreme poverty He came to know through His incarnation?

This leads us to the third truth associated with the incarnation of Christ. And what is that truth: Christ's incarnation and deep poverty He experienced through it has made it possible for us through faith in Christ to become rich. Let us go back and read **2 Corinthians 8:9** one more time. **“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 through His poverty might become rich.”**

So in what way are those who exercise faith in Christ rich? Those who exercise faith in Christ become rich because they, in receiving the gift of eternal life, come into a personal relationship with God the Father and God the Son and will share their glory (John 17; Romans 8:18-19).

And if there is any doubt about this let me read for you **Romans 8:18-19**. **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.”**

My hope in celebrating Christ's birth is that it will afford us to focus on His love for us as expressed in His incarnation and I would hope that it might drive us into the presence of God the Father so that we might behold His glory as in a mirror, in the face of Christ, the one who loved us and gave Himself for us, providing us the opportunity to be steadily and continuously transformed into the same image which will be simply a foretaste of our future glory when we stand before Him face to face.

May God give us the grace to understand His great love for us, and may our growing appreciation of that love continue to drive us into His presence so that we might be transformed.