

BRYAN STATION BAPTIST CHURCH

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RICHES TO POVERTY

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II Corinthians 8:9 *“...though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor...”*

Christianity is a religion of benevolence as well as a missionary religion. It not only perpetuates itself by making new disciples, but it has a benevolent concern for its members. All the benevolent institutions of this world are the by-products of the Christian religion. One never finds hospitals and children’s homes where the gospel of Christ has not gone. Galatians 6:10, *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”*

When Paul’s gospel was under fire from the Judaizers, a conference was held in Jerusalem to look into the charge that Paul was not preaching a full gospel. And in the Galatian letter he tells us that the result of the investigation was that the brethren had nothing to add to his gospel, and gave to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship; and then he adds, Galatians 2:10, *“Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.”*

And so while doing the work of a foreign missionary, Paul heard of the distress among the saints at Jerusalem, and decides to do something about it. This compassion for the poor was in the heart of the Christian religion. Paul went from church to church and sent Titus and others to the churches to raise money for the poor believers in Jerusalem.

As an aid in raising money

from the Corinthians he challenges them from several sources. He tells them

how liberal the churches of Macedonia had been. He tells them that he had been telling other churches that Corinth was one of the first to promise and to start to do something. He tells them that when he had urged Titus to go to them and help raise the money, that Titus already had the matter on his heart and was going of his own accord. He calls upon them to give as proof of the sincerity of their love. He wants them to give liberally to justify his glorying on

their behalf. But the climax of his appeal is the story of Christ giving all He had. And this is the way he puts it. II Corinthians 8:9, *“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”* Who can deny that Paul was a money getter? I expect for his day there was never anything comparable to the

offering he raised for the poor saints in Jerusalem. However, Paul never raised any money for himself. From

riches to poverty is the story of Christ’s redeeming love. Let us consider the riches of Christ. Paul said He was once rich. There is no sin in being rich unless riches have been dishonestly acquired or dishonorably used.

Christ was rich in position and honor. He was in the form of God, which means that he had the glory of a mighty Sovereign. Think of the glory of kings and queens and presidents and prime ministers, but all their glory is nothing compared

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to the glory our Saviour had before He came to this earth. And He gave up this position and took on Him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death.

Philippians 2:8, "***And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.***" From sovereign to servant is the story of Christ and His love.

He was rich in possessions. All millionaires of earth's history were but paupers compared to Jesus Christ. He owned everything by right of creation, for by Him were all things made. But He became poor in material things; so poor that he had not where to lay His head; so poor that he had to be buried in a borrowed tomb. But, glory to His name, He did not need that tomb very long. How could He, who is life, remain dead? Christ was not a victim of death; he was death's master. He lay down His life and He took it up again. What a mighty Saviour! And how foolish not to trust Him!

Christ was rich in pleasures. All pleasure is not sinful; however, the pleasures of sin are only for a season. What delights must have been Christ's while He was in the form of God! He had the love and glory of the Father and the worship and obedience of all the holy angels. But while here on earth He was a man of sorrows. He was truly the forgotten and forsaken man. He was spit upon, slapped in the face, scourged on the back, crucified on the cross, mocked of men and forsaken of God. Who can comprehend the sufferings of our Saviour? Who can ever love Him enough? Who can ever lay at His feet long enough? Who can ever praise Him enough? From riches to poverty; who can measure the distance? "*None of*

the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters He passed through."

Christ's poverty was voluntary. Nothing was taken from Him. He became poor of His own free will. How unlike all other men! Men as a rule strive and struggle to keep out of the pauper class. Some are poor because of sickness and death. Doctors and funeral directors get wealthy through the misfortune of others. This is not against them, for what would we do without physicians and morticians?

Some are poor because of indolence. They are shiftless and lazy and try to get along without honest toil.

And some are poor because of others. They have paid debts for children and signed notes for others only to have them to pay. George William Curtis (1824-1892), one time editor of Harper's Weekly, economized for years and gave up all hope of ever being wealthy in order to pay the debts inherited from his father. President Grant sold the presents he had received from the crowned heads of Europe in order to pay the debts of his insolvent son. Grant said, "Better poverty and honour than wealth and disgrace." Financial integrity is a must for every Christian and a double must for every preacher. It is a grievous sin to default in a financial obligation. Romans 13:8, "***Owe no man any thing, but to love one another...***"

Let us remember that Christ was deliberately and voluntarily poor. He did not have to be poor. He could have made bread out of stones. He could have commanded all the gold and silver of this earth, for "*The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.*" Christ could

have fed upon the fat of the land. He could have ridden in a coach of four; yea, He could have ridden in heavenly chariots of glory. But He chose to walk the dusty highways.

Let us remember also that Christ's poverty was for the sake of others. There is no virtue in poverty, just as there is no sin in possessions. Our Lord's poverty would have been senseless if nobody had benefitted by it. Romans 8:9, "***But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.***" He was not poor just for the sake of being poor. He was not poor without a purpose. He was not poor through indolence, for at an early age He said, Luke 2:49, "***...I must be about my Father's business.***" He must have worked at the carpenter's bench until about thirty years of age. He must have been the main support of His widowed mother until the time of His death when He committed her to the care of the apostle John. John 19:26, 27, "***When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.***"

Christ was not poor just in order to be a sensation and to be a spectacle. He was poor for the sake of others. He was poor because He was in the business of human redemption and to redeem us He had to give Himself and all He had. Redemption is a costly business. Matthew 20:28, "***Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for***

many.” To take us to heaven He had to suffer the horrors of hell. To make us rich in heaven He had to become poor on earth.

He was not poor for any pleasure in being poor. He took no delight in poverty as such, but He took delight in redeeming sinners. And He could not redeem sinners and be in a place of ease and pleasure and plenty. Every believer should think of himself as a high-priced person, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. And there is nothing to be added to what He paid, for He paid it all. John 19; 30, “...*It is finished...*”

When Leonardo Da Vinci took a friend to see and criticize his painting of the “Last Supper,” the friend remarked that the most striking thing in the picture was the cup. The artist took his brush and wiped out the cup, saying, “Nothing in my painting shall attract more attention than the face of my Master.” And so in our salvation Jesus Christ is “all and in all.” It is Christ who makes the difference between heaven and hell. Nothing must be added to faith in Him so far as salvation is concerned.

What is our reaction to this story of God’s marvelous grace? What is our response to this story of His love? Are we trusting Christ Jesus and Him alone for everlasting life? Riches in glory are the blessings He purchased by His poverty here on earth, a poverty climaxed by His cry from the cross, John 19:28, “...*I thirst...*”

Dr. A. C. Dixon tells this story in one of his books. “The son of a Presbyterian minister was arrested and charged with treason. He was tried and convicted and sent to prison. The aged father, eminent for his learning and Christian

character, circulated a petition and secured hundreds of signatures, urging President Grant to pardon the boy for the sake of his parents. The pardon was granted and given to the father to deliver to the son in prison. On arrival at the prison he was taken by the warden to the cell where his son was imprisoned. Standing with his hand on the grated door he said, “John, I have good news. I have a pardon from President Grant, and you can now go home and see your mother before she dies.” But the son made no reply. “Do you understand me, John,” the father continued, “Here’s a pardon for you; you can go home with me.” And then the son said, “Father, I am sorry to cause you pain, but I cannot accept it. I have decided not to be under obligation to this political administration, and I will serve out my time.” The father’s heart was

almost broken. He fell against the grating and would have sunk to the floor if kindly hands had not supported him.

I sometimes wonder what the Heavenly Father must think of poor perishing sinners who refuse to trust Jesus Christ and receive forgiveness through His blood. And I also wonder at those who claim to accept pardon and then have no sense of obligation to live to please Him Who became poor for our sakes that we might be rich. My dear lost friend, won’t you trust Him and then live for Him? May the Holy Spirit lead you to do so, is my prayer for you.

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

You shall accept your place of service enthusiastically,
believing that God has called you to this task.

You shall do your very best,
even when the results are disappointing.

You shall seek to learn your job so you can do it well.
You shall be faithful to the worship services of your church.

You shall study the Word of God and spend time in prayer each day.

You shall pray for those who are not Christians and seek to lead them to Christ.

You shall speak well of your church and joyfully lead others to do likewise.

You shall work with the entire program of your church
and cooperate with the pastor as well as other leaders.

You shall follow God’s plan of Christian stewardship and set an example for others.

You shall give generously of your time and finances
to support your church and missionaries.

You shall seek God’s leadership in all matters and follow his will above all else.