

2 Cor 8:9

The NT contains several single verses that summarize the entire Gospel message into one weighty statement. Examples might be John 3:16, 1 Cor 15:3-4, or 2 Cor 5:21. Such verses capture the main elements of the Gospel in one pithy statement.

Tonight I want to consider one such summary statement of the Gospel:

2 Co 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.

This verse stands within a passage in which Paul is exhorting his readers to give generously to an offering he was collecting for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Jesus is an example of one who gave generously for the benefit of others. In fact, Jesus gave more and it cost him more than anyone else ever did. But it was through his generosity that we are saved. Gratitude for this grace should motivate us to give generously. God's grace as displayed in the sacrificial work of Christ is the best example of true generosity.

What Jesus gave generously was his own life. He left the glories of heaven, took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross.

Today is Good Friday, the day that we especially commemorate the death of Christ. His death was a good example of generosity, but it was far more than that. 2 Cor 8:9 tells us several important truths about Jesus' death.

- I. Jesus' death was an expression of grace.
 - A. Grace is unearned favor; it's kindness extended toward those who don't deserve it; it's good will or a kind disposition to others.

One writer defines grace as "the utterly undeserved, royally free, effective, unwearying, inexhaustible goodwill of God, active in and through Jesus Christ; [grace is] God's effective, overflowing mercy" (Cranfield, 106, as in Garland, 376).¹
 - B. Such grace is part of Jesus' nature. It's the grace "of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Bible often describes Jesus as full of grace.

John 1:14 John describes Jesus as *full of grace and truth*.
John 1:17 ... *grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*.

¹ Quote taken from Mike Riccardi, "The Gospel of Self-Imposed Poverty"
<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=119181117474>

- C. Commonly in the NT, the word “grace” is translated “gift.” Grace is a gift. We don’t earn it—it’s free. God is by nature gracious; he delights in extending grace and mercy toward underserving sinners.
- D. The fact that Jesus left the riches of heaven to come to earth for our benefit is an expression of grace/favor/kindness/generosity.
- E. Paul reminds us that we “know” the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 1. We know it in the sense that we understand the fact of this grace. Jesus demonstrated this grace by coming to earth and dying on the cross for us. That is a fact of history that we can know logically or factually.
 - 2. But even more than that, we can also know this grace personally in the sense of accepting this gift. We can receive it for ourselves; we can know it personally and experientially.

App: Do you know the grace of God in this personal way? Have you experienced the saving grace of God yourself? Have you accepted the gift of God’s grace? It’s not enough merely to acknowledge the fact that Jesus is full of grace. To *know* the grace of God, you must experience it by faith.

Trans: Jesus showed his grace toward us by dying on the cross that we might be saved. His death for sinners was an expression of kindness and mercy.

II. Jesus’ death was an expression of humility.

- A. Jesus was rich.² This describes Jesus before the incarnation, before he took on human flesh. There are several senses in which Jesus was rich:
 - 1. He was rich in His *person*. Jesus, as the Second Person of the Trinity, existed eternally in the glory of heaven. Long before taking on a human nature, the Son of God enjoyed full equality with God in heaven. Cf. John 1:1—“... the word was God.”
 - 2. He was rich in His *position* as King of kings and Lord of lords. From all eternity, Jesus was the Son of God and enjoyed all the privileges of that position.

John 17:5 mentions the *glory which [Jesus] had with [God] before the world was*.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 656.

3. He was rich in His *possessions*. The Bible affirms that all creation ultimately belongs to God.

Ps 24:1 *The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof, The world and those who dwell therein.*

Ps 50:10 *For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.*

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

Quote: The most absolute right which can exist is that acquired by the act of creation; and this right the Son of God possessed over all gold, and silver, and diamonds, and pearls; over all earth and lands; over all the treasures of the ocean, and over all worlds. The extent and amount of his riches, therefore, is to be measured by the extent of his dominion over the universe; and to estimate his riches, therefore, we are to conceive of the scepter which he sways over the distant worlds.³

So it's quite an understatement to say that Jesus was rich. As the owner and creator of all things, and as the very God of heaven, his riches were infinite, beyond our comprehension.

And yet...

- B. Jesus became poor.

1. He left his glorious position to come to earth. Jesus' coming to earth was a huge step down, a condescension of epic proportions.

Illus.: If you've ever read the Mark Twain novel, "The Prince and the Pauper," you are familiar with the story of the prince who temporarily traded places with a poor boy. While the prince was impersonating a pauper, he experienced all the pain, frustration, and injustice associated with a life of poverty. He traded a life of great privilege for a life of great dishonor.

That's what Jesus did; he became poor. He set aside his glory and became a pauper.

³ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: II Corinthians & Galatians*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 182.

2. Theologians call this the *kenosis*—Jesus’ laid aside the glories of heaven and came to earth as a man.

Php 2:5-9 Jesus ... made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

3. John 1:14 tells us that “the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” The eternal Son of God took on a fully human nature.
4. Interestingly, the Son of God became poor *by addition*—he added humanity to himself. He didn’t leave his divine nature behind. He didn’t cease being God. He put on the weaknesses of humanity and temporarily veiled/concealed his deity. God took on human flesh. And he didn’t become a human king. He was born into a very humble family.
5. Jesus was born in a stable/shed to a poor family. His first bed was a feeding trough. Jesus’ earthly parents were peasants. They were working class people who lived very humbly.

*Luke 1:48 For he hath regarded **the low estate of his handmaiden:***

4. Jesus at one point said that he had no place to lay his head; he was virtually homeless. The foxes and the birds had homes, but he had none. There is no indication in the Bible that Jesus owned much of anything.
5. As he was hanging on the cross, he asked his disciple John to care for his mother, Mary. Typically, the first-born son would provide for his widowed mother, but Jesus had nothing to give Mary.
6. You may remember that the soldiers gambled for his clothing at the foot of the cross. It seems likely that Jesus died owning virtually nothing—no home, no money, not even any clothing. He had to be placed in a borrowed tomb. Jesus experienced true poverty.

7. And the full extent of his poverty happened when he died on the cross. The lowest point of Christ's poverty had to be his suffering for our sins as our substitute. Jesus experienced the depths of poverty as he endured the outpouring of God's wrath against sin. He became a curse for us that we might avoid the curse of sin.

Trans: Jesus was poor. He was born into a humble family. He lived among the poor and never acquired any wealth. His ultimate poverty is seen as he's hanging on the cross, stripped of every physical resource. He truly became poor.

III. Jesus' death presents an opportunity to be rich.

- A. Why did Jesus leave the glory of heaven and come to earth? Why did he take on the weaknesses of human flesh? Why did he suffer and die? Here's the reason/purpose: "that ye might be rich." He voluntarily surrendered the glory of heaven in order to provide us with spiritual riches.

- B. When we hear the word "rich," we often think in financial terms. Wouldn't it be nice if all Christians were financially wealthy? I don't think we'd have a hard time making converts if believers immediately became wealthy upon their conversion to Christ.

- C. But the riches that Jesus offers are not financial in nature.

1. In fact, Jesus didn't have a lot of good things to say about earthly wealth or about wealthy people.

Mt 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

Mt 13:22 ... the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Mt 19:24 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

1 Tim 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

2. For the most part, rich people did not follow Jesus. The Bible mentions a few notable exceptions, but not many. Jesus attracted common folks, not the elite.

3. Paul tells us

1 Cor 1:26-29 ... *that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

App: Christianity is not a faith that attracts rich and powerful people. It's very difficult for wealthy, influential people to humble themselves and accept the Gospel message. Christianity is for those who admit their spiritual poverty. It's for those who don't put their trust in money and personal power.

D. The riches that Jesus offers are spiritual in nature. What riches do we have thru Christ?

1. Christians have access to incredible spiritual riches: the Bible, the church, fellowship with other believers, purpose in life, assurance of salvation, comfort in trials, God's presence with us, prayer, peace *with* God, the peace *of* God, the ministry of the HSp, adoption into God's family, a clean conscience—the list could go on and on.
2. The entire Christian life, everything associated with Christ, could be described as “rich.”

Ephesians 2:7 speaks of *the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

Eph 3:8 Paul counted it a privilege to *preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;*

App: The Christian life is a rich, meaningful, satisfying experience. And when this life is over, God has promised us an eternal home in heaven where we'll enjoy “all things.” Christians enjoy a rich and meaningful life here and now, and when we die, we will experience true, unimaginable riches in heaven.

1 Corinthians 2:9 ... *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

E. We receive these riches “through his poverty.”

1. It’s “through” Jesus sacrificial death that we receive the riches available to us. Jesus paid the ultimate price so that we might enjoy the ultimate benefits. He provides these riches freely to all who follow him.
2. If we want these spiritual riches, we must gain them *through* the person and work of Christ. We do not earn them. We receive them as a gift through faith, not by our own works. Cf. Eph 2:8-9.
3. Jesus provided the one and only means of salvation—Acts 4:12. If you do not seek salvation through the work of Christ on the cross—i.e., through his poverty—you will not be saved.
4. Jesus said that you can gain the whole world and lose your own soul (Mt 16:26; Mk 8:36). You can have all the riches the world has to offer, but if you don’t have Christ, you are truly poor.

Jesus spoke a parable about a rich man who laid up goods for many years to come. His plan was to eat, drink, and be merry. But God required his soul of him, and he lost all the things he had accumulated.

Luke 12:21 *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

5. When your life comes to an end, what will money get you? A nice casket? A beautiful tombstone? A spot in an expensive mausoleum? You can buy all of that, but you can’t buy a place in heaven.
6. On the other hand, you can be dirt poor financially here and now, but if you have Jesus, you are truly rich. You have the kind of riches that have nothing to do with money or this world. And you have the promise of heaven, where you will enjoy all the riches that God will give his children.

Conc.: Are you “rich” this evening? You might not have two nickels to rub together, but if you have accepted the gift of grace described in this passage, then you’re rich.

Every believer has experienced the riches of God's grace. We were in slavery to sin; we were in great debt because of our sin. But in turning from sin and confessing Christ as Lord and Savior, we are released from slavery, adopted into the family, and granted great riches in Christ.

If you sense your spiritual poverty this evening, you can receive true riches from Jesus. You can enjoy all the things God promises to give to his children. But you must receive these riches through the poverty of Christ. You must accept Jesus' death on the cross as the payment for your sin.

Those of us who have accepted this gift should rejoice in the richness of the Christian life. We have a rich life now and the promise of eternal riches to come. Of all people, we should be the most joyful and thankful for the riches God has provided. And we recognize that we enjoy such riches because of the poverty of Christ. We are rich because he became poor.