

2 Corinthians 8:9-12

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] I want to speak to you tonight from one verse and it's on the red sheet that you've given. It's a sentence. Let me read it to you. It's the same that's right at the top. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty might become rich.

It's very, very simple. If you fall asleep, remember this one thing from tonight, alright? He was rich. That's the first half of the talk. And the second half of the talk is he became poor. He was rich. There are many ways, aren't there, to be rich. I expect when you hear the word riches, the first thing that comes to your mind is probably the same as mine. It's pound signs, isn't it? It's the riches of wealth and fortune. When we think of rich people, we think of a person who's able to afford all the kinds of things that you and I are not able to afford. The lavish lifestyle. The luxury goods. The regular foreign holidays. But you can be rich in other ways, can't you? So somebody saw me in this last couple of weeks floundering with my two small children trying to get them into the car.

[1 : 17] And they said to me, Paul, you are a very rich man. And of course it was true, but the timing at that point wasn't exactly what I wanted to hear. So here's the thing, isn't it? We all know, we all know to be rich, you've got to possess something.

There has to be something you have which makes it right to call you rich. So we can be rich in contentment, can't we? We can be rich in happiness. Rich in satisfaction. And in all of those things, cold, hard cash could be completely absent. We've just heard those words, I've just read them. From that verse on the red insert, that Jesus was rich. Now think about that for a moment. How was he rich? How was Jesus rich? The son of a mother whose reputation was always under a cloud. They were not married, you know. And the word began to get around. He was born to Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth. An honest living for this family, yes. But Jesus is a backwater boy from a backwater town.

[2 : 25] And there's not the slightest scrap of evidence to suggest that Jesus of Nazareth in his earthly life was rich in any way at all. There may be, might not be money in religion for some people.

But for Jesus, the mass popular interest in his teaching and the growing band of his followers didn't actually lead to personal wealth. He didn't accumulate a fortune.

So how was he rich? When we hear those words, the Bible says, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.

The Bible is making a claim. The Bible is making a claim that before Jesus was born as a baby, he was in fact something else. Becoming poor describes his entrance into the world.

But it was an entrance he made as somebody who was previously rich. He took to himself a whole new being.

[3 : 31] Which was different to what he had previously been. You see, another way to be rich is by background, isn't it? It's where you've come from. It's maybe the family name you inherit.

Not the job you do that makes you rich. Jesus had a history. Before he entered history, his background, if you like, was that he was with God.

From the very beginning of the world. That's what we've just read. From the beginning of time itself, Jesus was with God. In fact, there was never a time, the Bible tells, where Jesus did not exist.

He was with God. And he was God. And here is why Jesus was rich. Because he possessed all that God possessed.

Why is God rich? Why is God rich? Is it because God is wealthy? No, it's because God owns everything.

[4 : 31] You take whatever there is in the world that is good. And is true. And is beautiful. And is right. And it is all God's by right. He owns it. He possesses it.

From the deepest depths of the furthest ocean. To the highest height of the most remote corner of the galaxy. It's all God's name written on it. And God does not simply love.

In the way that you and I love. So love is something, isn't it? We do for others. And we do it in small amounts in some cases. Or large amounts in other cases.

Sometimes we are rich in love, aren't we? Sometimes we are poor in love. But God is not like that. The message of the Bible is that God is love.

He is fabulously wealthy in love. He possesses it. It belongs to him. God does not have glory. God does not have light. God is glory.

[5 : 35] And God is light. And before there was a universe. Jesus existed with a glory. And with a splendor. And with a radiance. So magnificent.

That a million suns in the sky. Would be like shadows compared to his brightness. He is that glorious. He was adored by his father. He was worshipped by the angels.

And the fact that Jesus was rich. Rich like this. Rich in ways that our best poets can never capture. That our greatest songs could never express. The fact that Jesus was rich like this.

Is why you are here tonight. At Christmas time we come as close as we possibly can. To expressing the beauty of Jesus' riches.

It's why a friend or a work colleague. Or a family member asks you to come along tonight. It's why if you're part of our church family. We gather like this. It's because we believe that the words that we sing.

[6 : 40] Are true. And that they are more beautiful than anything else. In all the world. We sang it already. I wonder whether you noticed it. He came down from earth to heaven.

Who is God and Lord of all. We'll sing it later. Christ the everlasting Lord. Offspring of a virgin's womb. But for many of us tonight.

God can feel. Can't he? A little bit like that. Submarine periscope. I don't know whether you noticed that in the newspaper. That it was spotted supposedly. Off the west coast of Scotland last week. A marine. Submarine periscope. And some people on the west of Scotland last week. Claimed to have caught sight of it. And it made the national news. It's a good story. But actually as you read about it.

There just doesn't seem to be any proof. So we go on a long search for him. We experiment. We dabble. We wonder. But if God is there. If God is there.

[7 : 37] How on earth would I know? How can you know? He might be rich. He might have made the stars. And built the universe. But God seems very good at keeping himself to himself.

Doesn't he? Every now and then. Maybe you've heard an echo. Or you've seen a footprint. Something's happened in your life. Where you sense something.

And you wonder. You just wonder. If there might be something. Someone out there. Watching over you. You see the stars.

You lose a loved one. Loved one. Maybe you gain a child. But then. Just like the periscope in the ocean. The moment is gone.

It's fleeting. And you're not sure. What you've seen. Or what you've felt. And life goes on. And God is absent. But Christmas.

[8 : 31] Means this. Christmas means. God has a face. And God has a name. And God is kind of looking for you. And you don't have to go searching for him.

In the Bible. There is no parable. There is no story. Of the lost shepherd. Being tracked down. By the conscientious sheep. There's not. No.

The Christian claims. Completely the other way around. That we have bankrupted ourselves. And we become badly lost. And the rich God.

The rich God. Who made us. Has come to find us. Part two. He became poor. I think.

Wouldn't we. We would all like to meet someone rich. I mean really. Truly. Fabulously rich. Because if we're honest. We somehow wish.

[9 : 29] Don't we. That it would rub off on us somehow. That they'd let us in. On their wealth somehow. In some way. What would it be like. To meet the richest man in the world.

And to be friends with him. I've got a mate. Who's got someone in his church. It's a very very. Who knew a dog.

Who was. There's somebody in my church. Who was best friends. When he was growing up. With Steve Jobs. At the founder of Apple. The CEO. The creator of Apple. And when my friend learned. That this guy in his church. When he was growing up. Was best friends with Steve Jobs. All through their teenage years. He was starstruck. This person in his presence.

Had been in the presence. Of one of the most famous. And wealthiest men in the world. I've got a PC. Apples do things to people. Don't they? And he'd become awestruck. At apples. And.

[10:25] This man. Steve Jobs. My friend said. What was he like? When he regained the power of speech. What would it be like. For you to meet the rich God.

God with a face. God with a name. Jesus was so rich. That for him to enter earth. And live. In the most glorious palace.

That could ever be built. With the greatest kings and queens. That there have ever been on earth. As his attendants and servants. Well that would have been. An amazing act of common sense. Wouldn't it? That would have been humbling.

For the rich God. Think about it. The queen leaving Buckingham Palace. Or Windsor Castle. To live at 10 Downing Street. When the Prime Minister. She moves in with him.

It would hardly be hardship. For you and I. Would it? But it would be a massive step down. For her. Such is. The greatness of her office. And. And the wealth.

[11:22] Of her position. She'd think. What is this little. Terrace box house. Do people live like this? Imagine the queen. Moved. From Buckingham Palace. To Coronation Street.

Lived on that funny little street. With the Rovers Return on the edge. With Deidre Barlow. If she's. If she's still in it. How humbling that would be. How is it that people live like this?

You might think. But what did Jesus do? The rich God. Who is Lord of all. He came down. From heaven to earth.

And his shelter was a stable. His cradle was a stall. Though he was rich. Yet for your sake. He became poor. There is more wonder here. Isn't that?

Than we can ever express. It is. Inexplicable. The creator of the heavens. On the earth. Is now born. On earth.

[12:17] Under the heavens. The one who made his mother. Now feeds. From her. The word of God. Lies in a manger.

Unable to speak. He who spoke the galaxies. Into being. Spoke gibberish. To his mother. He who brought mankind. Into existence.

Became a man. He who held the world. In his hands. Was held in a mother's hands. Do not miss. The scale of this journey. From riches. To rags. There are many ways. To be poor. Aren't there? You can have money. And still be poor.

You can have no money. And still be poor. You can have lots of money. And you can lose it. You can squander it. To become poor. Or you can have it taken from you.

[13:14] For you to become poor. But who does this? To be rich. And choose. To surrender it.

In order to be poor. Who chooses. Voluntary bankruptcy. When you have the richest person on earth. In his autobiography.

Eugene Peterson. Has a chapter called. The treeless Christmas. Of 1939. When he was seven years old. For that Christmas. And that Christmas only.

For some reason. His mother decided. There would be no Christmas tree. In their living room. No family ride. In the open truck. To Lake Blaine. To cut down. A beautiful Douglas fir.

No ascension. To the loft. For the tinsel. And multicoloured lights. No running out. Into the gravel road. To look at the tree. In pride of place. In front of the window. For everyone to see.

[14:09] With the best lights. In the neighbourhood. This was an annual ritual. I loved so much. Says Peterson. That year. The year his mother chose.

To have no tree. The regular ritual. Of going from home to home. To look at each other's trees. Brought only a Christmas. Of humiliation. For a seven year old boy. He says.

I kept my friends. Out of our house. I was ashamed. To have them come in. And see them bear. A treeless room. I made up excuses. To keep them out. I lied. My sister is a contagious disease. I told them. Mother is really mad. And I can't bring anybody in. It's so typical isn't it. But the fact of no Christmas tree. Could not be hidden. Our front window.

Was always on full display. And yet. Now as an older man. Looking back. Here is what Peterson writes. The feeling I had that Christmas. When I was seven years old.

[15:05] May have been the most authentically. Christmas feeling. I have ever had. Or will have. The experience of humility. Of being misunderstood. Of being an outsider.

Mary was pregnant out of wedlock. Joseph. An apparent curve. Jesus was born in poverty. Every other downward journey.

You can ever imagine. It comes with boundaries. Doesn't it? So you say. Prince William. Spending a night on the streets. You know. Isn't that incredible.

Apart from the following day. He goes back home to his palace. And has a shower. And gets into his warm bed. President Obama. Flies into. War torn. Iraq or Afghanistan.

And he spends Christmas. He spends Christmas. Has Christmas dinner. With the troops on the front line. And it looks great on camera. Doesn't it? Looks great in the press. But it's a limited presence.

[16:06] Isn't it? It's limited by time. It's limited by bodyguards. Ten minutes. Half an hour. Maybe that's all you get. And then the royal presence is gone.

Long. In 1863. A priest called Joseph Damien. Inspired by the example of Jesus. Went to live in a leper colony. On one of the Hawaiian islands.

Lepers had been banished there. Without family. Without friends. Without any kind of help. Damien lived among them. He buried their dead. He cleaned their water system. He built them homes.

He started to put school. And a hospital. And two church buildings. He lived among them. Until one Sunday morning. In 1885. 22 years. After he arrived. He began his sermon.

With these words. We lepers. Because he too. Had contracted the disease. And that is. Isn't it? A downward journey. Without limits.

[17:07] Jesus did not come with boundaries. He did not say this far. And no further. That the step of becoming a child. Is incredible isn't it? But that is just the beginning. Of the long downward journey.

Into homelessness. Exhaustion. And eventually. The prime of life. To shame. Mocking. Spit. Scourging. The nails of crucifixion.

And that is why the words. We read on this. For you know. The grace. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was. Rich. Yet for your sake.

He became poor. And do you see the reason? Just glance down. At the last part of that sentence. So that you. You tonight. By his poverty. Might become rich.

Who chooses voluntary bankruptcy? When you're the richest person imaginable. You choose it. When there is something. That you can only do.

[18:10] When you are poor. And not when you are rich. And something. That you need to do. To save the men. And women. You made and loved.

Let me try and run this up. Before he entered. Into history. Jesus was God. In all his perfection. That's the teaching of the Bible. He was invulnerable.

To pain. To frustration. To embarrassment. His supremacy. Was total. His power. Was unrivaled. His majesty. Had no end.

It was limited. It was limitless. And here's the thing. He could not die. He could not die. And so God became a man.

He substituted himself. For people who deserve to die. To give them life. He became. What he was not. And that is the meaning of Christmas. The meaning of Christmas.

[19:10] Is not just that God has a face. Not just that God has a name. But that he's a face like yours. And a name like mine. He became truly human.

To die. In order that you might become truly rich. And have a relationship with the God who made you. I'm going to pray.

I'm going to read the words of this poem. This hymn. That's written on your sheet. It's great. And we'll probably sing it on Christmas morning. So if you want to come and sing it. We'll sing it on Christmas morning. But I'm going to pray.

And maybe. For the first time. You want to make this poem. Your prayer. And at the end of it. You want to say. Lord. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

And thank you for the Lord Jesus. I'll read it. Pause for a moment. And then I will pray. Lord. You were rich. Beyond all splendor. Yet for love's sake.

[20 : 09] You were rich. Beyond all splendor. Throne for a manger. Did surrender. Sapphire paved courts. For stable floor. Lord. You were rich.

Beyond all splendor. Yet for love's sake. Became so poor. 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. Lord. You are love. Beyond all telling. Saviour and King. We worship you. Emmanuel. God with us.

Within us dwelling. Make us and keep us. Pure and true. Lord. You are love. Beyond all telling. Saviour and King.

[21 : 07] We worship you.