

BY HIS POVERTY WE BECOME RICH

II Corinthians 8: 9 and Philippians 2: 5-11 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Roy L. Laurin in his book, published in 1985 by Kregel, "Where Life Endures," tells of a Christian attorney who went to Korea on a visit. As he was traveling the country, he noticed in a field beside the road a rather strange scene. He saw a young man about eighteen or nineteen years of age pulling a plow. Holding the handles of the plow was an older man, the boy's father. This attorney was moved deeply and he took a snapshot of it and said to his guide, "What a strange thing that is! They must be very poor family." The guide agreed, "Yes, they are poor but I know the story behind this. A few months ago, the church where this family belongs, was building a new sanctuary. They appealed to all their members to contribute or sacrifice something for Jesus. This father and his boy wanted to give but they felt they had nothing to give. Then it dawned on them that they could give their only ox to the Lord. So they killed their ox, cut it up, and sold the meat in the city market. Then they gave all the proceeds of selling the meat to the building fund of their church. This particular spring they had to pull the plow themselves." The attorney said, "That must have been a most remarkable sacrifice for them." The guide replied, "I know their response. They didn't think so. They thought they were rather fortunate to have had an ox to butcher, and sell the meat to give to the Lord's work." That attorney was moved even more. When he got back home, he came to his pastor here in the states, showed him the picture, and said, "Pastor, I want to double my giving to the church this year. I have never given anything that cost me something. I want to do some plow work for the Lord Jesus Christ!"

Today, in this Lenten Message, the Lord is moving my heart to focus on one verse-II 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 by His poverty might become rich." When we think of Calvary's cross and what Jesus left in Glory to come to earth, to die in our place, it is a stark picture of sacrifice beyond compare. Did Jesus face poverty for us? Yes, He faced abject, utter poverty. He was stripped of His clothes, stripped of His dignity, dying as a criminal in disgrace. Perhaps one of the major aspects of Jesus' poverty in dying for us as sinners is what Paul teaches us in Romans 5: 8 where we read, "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In Peter Marshall's epic book, "The Light and the Glory," on pages 323 and 324, he tells a remarkable story of a Baptist minister, Pastor Peter Miller, a man who was a close personal friend of George Washington in the days of the American Revolution. He pastored a church in Pennsylvania where another man lived named Michael Wittman. Michael Wittman did everything to oppose the work of Pastor Peter Miller. He was involved in an act of treason, a turncoat act against the government of the United States. As

a Tory, a collaborator with Britain, Michael Wittman was arrested and taken to Valley Forge, some seventy miles away, to appear before General George Washington. At his trial at West Chester, it was proven that Michael Wittman had given the British invaluable assistance on numerous occasions. He was found guilty of being a spy and sentenced to death by hanging. On the evening before the execution, an old man arrived at Valley Forge. This old man had walked 70 miles to Valley Forge to see General Washington. The elderly man, Peter Miller was ushered in to see the General without delay.

George Washington looked carefully at this strange old man who appeared at Valley Forge. "Peter Miller?" said Washington. "General Washington, I have come to ask a great favor of you," he said, in a kindly tone. "I shall be glad to grant you almost anything," said Washington, "for we surely are indebted to you for many favors. Tell me what it is." "I hear," said Peter, "that Michael Wittman has been found guilty of treason and that he is to be hanged at Turk's Head to-morrow. I have come to ask you to pardon him." Washington was startled, and a cloud came over his face. "That is impossible," he said. "Wittman is a bad man. He has done all in his power to betray us. He has even offered to join the British and aid them in destroying us. In these times we dare not be lenient with traitors; for that reason I cannot pardon your friend." "Friend!" cried Peter. "He is no friend of mine. He is my bitterest enemy. He has persecuted me for years. He has beaten me and spit in my face, knowing full well that I would not strike back. "And still you wish me to pardon him?" Washington asked. "I do," answered Peter. "I ask of you a great personal favor." "Tell me," said Washington, with hesitating voice, "why is it that you ask the pardon of your worst enemy?" "I ask it because Jesus did as much for me," was the old man's brief answer. Washington turned away and went into another room. Soon he returned with a paper on which was written the pardon of Michael Wittman. "My dear friend," he said, as he placed it in the old man's hands, "I thank you for this-- this example of Christian love. Peter Miller was directed to Michael Wittman with the pardon. He put his arm around the shoulders of his enemy, Michael Wittman. Then he led him out of the shadow of death at Valley Forge, back to his own home, no longer his enemy, but his forever friend. No comparison in history matches the poverty Jesus faced to make us rich. I ask you, "How did Jesus become poor to make us rich? Secondly, I want to explore the why question, His motive. Why did He do it for you and me? First how, then why?"

HOW DID JESUS BECOME POOR? IT WAS BY EMPTYING HIMSELF.

(I.) This self-emptying is best explained by Paul in Philippians 2: 5-8. Paul tells us, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God (now that explains our text—'though He was rich,') did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the

form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” The Greek word for “emptied Himself” is **kenoo**. Kenoo comes from the word kenos, means to empty or to neutralize or to take what has positive effects and render them neutral. It means to humble oneself utterly. Do we understand what Jesus’ poverty is all about? From all eternity, Jesus was, He is, and He ever will be God, God the Son. When He came to earth incarnate, born of a virgin, He never left His divinity in heaven. He rather was both divine and human, no less God than God the Father, and no less man than we are. Jesus is ever the Son of God, a title He received and accepted. He also called Himself the Son of Man during His earthly years. Paul tells us that Jesus did not regard equality with God the Father a thing to be grasped. He wasn’t robbing God the Father and taking something from God the Father that He did not rightfully possess when Jesus said He was equal with God. The Jews in Jesus’ day heard Jesus’ words and they accused Jesus of “making Himself equal with God.” John 5: 18 tells us, “For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Jesus, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also He was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” So when Jesus left heaven’s portals to become a man, He was at the top of the ladder. The descent down for us began as **(1) Jesus “emptied Himself” and made Himself of no reputation.**

When Jesus became poor for us, He emptied and divested Himself, not of His deity, but of His glory. He stripped Himself of the insignia of His majesty. He never used His divine glory for His own benefit. Rather, Jesus lived down here on earth as a true man. He didn’t pretend or masquerade as a man; no, he was a man as I am a man. At times, in scripture, we see flashes of Jesus’ glory that sometimes emanated from Him. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus momentarily revealed His glory. When Jesus was arrested, John 18: 5,6 John tells us of the time when Jesus asked the Romans soldiers with Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane whom they were seeking. Their answer was—“Jesus the Nazarene.” Jesus then spoke His glorious divine name, the divine name they could not bear to hear or say. Jesus said “I am...I am He.” It wasn’t robbery for Jesus to be equal with God. Neither was it forgery for Jesus to use God’s divine signature—“I Am.” That great poet, John Milton wrote, “That glorious Form, that light insufferable He laid aside: and He with us to be, Forsook the courts of everlasting day, and chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.” Without the Glory of heaven, whatever Jesus said on earth was always true. He had no poverty of glory or poverty of truth. But Jesus did limit Himself to being born a baby boy. As a baby boy, He had to learn and grow to manhood. The second step down Paul writes about in Philippians 2: 7 is that **(2) Jesus took upon Himself the form of a servant.**” When Jesus emptied Himself, divesting Himself of kingly apparel of the Son of God, He donned an apron as the

Servant of God, and to us. Jesus washed His disciples feet, much to their consternation and amazement—John 13. Laying aside His royal garments, Jesus wore a towel. Jesus’ own words in Mark 10: 45 were “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Jesus’ poverty became lower yet. Philippians 2: 7 has step (3)—“**Jesus was made in the likeness of men.**” Interestingly, Jesus was man not in the likeness of any one man, singular, but He was made in the likeness of men, plural—like all of us. As all of us, Jesus became hungry, Matthew 4: 2, He was tempted, Matthew 4: 3, though without sin. (Hebrews 4: 15), and He got tired, Mark 4: 38. Jesus was not just an individual, but He was our Representative of the whole human race. When the great railway engineer, George Stephenson died, his long funeral procession contained a group of plain workmen who carried a banner with the words inscribed on it, “He was one of us.” That’s what Jesus became. He came from the ranks of a plain workman—a humble carpenter. In far greater fashion, Jesus became poor—Step # (4) **Jesus was born in appearance as a man.** Philippians 2: 8 says, “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself...” The highest place in heaven was His, yet He was born in an insignificant village, to a lowly virgin mother, laid at birth in a borrowed cradle, a manger, and after being stripped of His clothes, He was crucified, and He was buried in a borrowed tomb. Jesus chose poverty to make us rich. Even as we as believers, have the treasure of God the Holy Spirit in our hearts in earthen vessels or clay pots, so Jesus limited Himself and humbled Himself to be as we are--unremarkable as a man. He was just an ordinary man. Isaiah 53: 2 prophesied of Jesus, “He has no stately form or majesty that we look upon Him nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.”

Step # (5) is found in Philippians 2: 8 tells us (5) **Jesus became obedient to the point of death.** Why? The Scriptures declare that Enoch walked with God and God took him Home without dying. Elijah escaped death going to heaven in a chariot of fire in a whirlwind. Jesus could have done the same. We as believers, if we are alive at the rapture, will go Home to Jesus without dying. By suffering death, however, as a man dies, Jesus showed His obedience as a Servant of God to the hilt. He did not want to be an exception, a man who never had to die. Step # 5 is not yet the bottom of Christ’s poverty. Step # (6) is found in Philippians 2: 8 which tells us, (6) **Jesus died, even death on a cross.** Crucifixion was the worst of deaths, nailed hands and feet to rough hewn wood. It was a criminal’s death in Jerusalem’s public crucifixion ground where all could scorn and ridicule and mock Him. To prove the depth of this final step down to poverty, (7) **Jesus was crucified between two thieves.** Psalm 22: 6,7 prophesies of His death, saying, “But I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All who see Me sneer at Me...” That’s poverty at its lowest—below the worst

poverty in America, China, India, or Mexico. Jesus started out in Glory as God—then He became a man like all of us,—and lastly, he died as a worm. When we see the awful poverty Jesus took on for us, it ought to tear at our hearts to our hymn revised. Isaac Watts said it well, “Alas, and did my Savior bleed? And did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?” In 1990, Hope Publishing in their hymnal called “The Worshipping Church” revised the first verse, saying, “Alas! And did my Savior bleed, and did my sovereign die, Would He devote that sacred head for sinners such as I.” Why do we shy away from rightly portraying the poverty of Jesus? Charles Wesley also said it well in verse 2 of his hymn, “And Can It Be.” He wrote, “He left His Father’s throne above, So free, so infinite His grace! Emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam’s helpless race! Tis mercy all, immense and free, For, O my God, it found out me. Amazing love! How can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!” How did Jesus become poor? It was by emptying Himself. 2ndly, lastly,

WHY DID JESUS BECOME POOR. HE BECAME POOR TO HELP UNLOVABLE SINNERS LIKE ME AND YOU NOT TO PERISH, BUT BE

RICH. (II.) Look again at our text. In II 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, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Why did Jesus do it? It was for your sake and my sake. Why should this poverty come to the sinless Savior? John 3: 16 can so easily become too familiar to us. Think of why Jesus came as we say this verse together. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Jesus didn’t want you or me to perish. I ask you to think about the poverty of Jesus tonight when you lay your head on your pillow. Put your head down humbly. Matthew 8: 20 tells us that during His earthly ministry, Jesus said, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.” Wherever I travel, I have a special therapeutic pillow I take along. Jesus had no such pillow. When you pay your taxes hopefully soon, before April 15th, do it humbly. Matthew 17:27 tells us Jesus had no money to pay His taxes so it necessitated Him having a fish caught that had the necessary and appropriate coin in its mouth to pay Jesus’ taxes. When a friend supports and affirms you, be humble, not proud. In Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, none of His disciples or friends stayed awake and watched and prayed with Him. When Jesus’ arrest occurred, Matthew 26: 40, 46 tells us that “they all forsook Him and fled.” When someone defends you, be humble. At Jesus’ trial, no one defended Him. When you balk at the lack of respect you are given in the hospital before surgery, be humble, not arrogant or angry. On the cross, the soldiers stripped away Jesus only personal possessions, all the clothes that He wore. Mark 15: 24 tells us “And they crucified Him and divided up His garments among

themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each should take.” Jesus became poor for me, for you. No home, no money, no possessions, no defenders, and not even a tomb of His own in which to have His body placed at death. Why? It was for you and me—so we would not only have a home to live in down here, but a home in heaven, by repenting, believing and receiving Jesus.

There are 87 New Testament references to the Son of Man. 84 in the Gospels, one in Acts, and two in the Book of Revelation. There in Revelation 1: 13, we see “And in the middle of the lampstands, I saw one like a Son of Man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet and girded across the breast with a golden girdle.” And in Revelation 14: 14, we read, “And I looked, and behold a white cloud and sitting on the cloud was one like a Son of Man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. Beloved, the Son of Man will come on a white cloud from heaven just as He ascended into heaven after His resurrection. He is the Son of Man coming as the conquering King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Lord of all the earth. What a contrast between Christ’s first coming in poverty and His second coming in power. In between, He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4: 15. And finally, as the Son of Man, Luke 24: 7 tells us that the “Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” Even today, in Glory, Jesus is still the Son of Man. Remember, as Stephen was stoned, He saw Jesus and he cried out, “Behold, I see heaven opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.” (Acts 7: 56) There is indeed, a great Man in the Glory now! Christ called Himself the “Son of Man” much more often than “the Son of God.” Eternally, Jesus will ever be both the Son of Man and the Son of God.

In all Jesus’ poverty, He did possess something important. He bore our sins in His own body on His own cross. He carried my sins with Him on Calvary’s tree. Because Jesus was obedient unto death, even death on the cross, Phil. 2:9 declares, “God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a Name above every Name.” Through His poverty we become rich. Through His homelessness, we have mansions in Glory. Through Jesus’ terrible death at Calvary, we have everlasting life. Yes, with Paul, we have to say, we do know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake, He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” But glory, He came to make us rich—and He truly has. And He delights to identify with those whom He has redeemed. He is not ashamed to call us “His brethren.” (Hebrews 2: 11. And today, with Peter, we answer the question Jesus posed to him and the other disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? Oh, then with Peter, cannot we also say, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” (Matthew 16: 13, 16) I close today by sharing

with you an old, old song that embodies our text, written by Paul White in 1933 after he was meditating on our text for today. These are the words:

“Born among cattle, in poverty sore, Living in meekness by Galilee's shore, Dying in shame as the wicked ones swore: Jesus, wonderful Lord! Weary, yet He is the world's only rest, Hungry and thirsty with plenty has blest, Tempted He promises grace for each test: Jesus, wonderful Lord! Friend of the friendless, betrayed and denied, Help of the weak, in Gethsemane cried, Light of the world, in gross darkness He died: Jesus, wonderful Lord! Wonderful, wonderful Jesus! He is my friend, true to the end; He gave Himself to redeem me--Jesus, wonderful Lord!”