

The Gift-Giver's Guide

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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, have you all found the perfect gift? After all these weeks of hints, ad browsing, holiday gift-guide consideration and bargain hunting, have you found for that someone in your life that “perfect” gift? I know that some of you can’t wait for that someone, maybe a child, maybe a spouse, maybe a dear friend, to open that gift that you have so carefully considered, and you have so lovingly packaged, longing to see on their face expressions of surprise and joy; of delight and acceptance. There is something about giving, is there not, that brings great joy and delight to the giver?

And whatever that so-called perfect gift is – I would suspect that most of us here know that any gift we give at Christmas will only fill a temporary need or desire. How many of you remember what you received for Christmas a year ago; two-years ago; five years ago? As believers in Christ, we give gifts at Christmas in part because we are imitating, however inadequately, something we have seen and learned from our God and our Lord Jesus Christ. God, we know, gave us His Son according to John 3:16 so that whoever believes in Him would have eternal life. Jesus, we know gave His life as a ransom for many according to Mark 10:45. I say “we know” and yet we so easily forget or conveniently ignore that our motivation for giving to others is to find its very root in the lavish generosity of God and of our Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus was the greatest giver this world has ever known. And anyone who claims to be a follower of Christ, is to give, whether it be gifts at Christmas, or offerings to the church, or of time to specific ministries, with the same attitude of lavish, joyful generosity. So let me ask you, do you give with such lavish joyful generosity? Do you plan to give your gifts in a couple of days with such godly delight? Do you give to the needs of others and to the ministry of Christ’s church with such utter gladness? Should it be only at Christmas that the world sees such lavish generosity? Are believers called and equipped to be bountiful, extravagant and prolific givers? If so, how and what does such a life look like?

I submit to you that since Jesus was and is exceedingly generous in the giving of His life for His own, for those who claim to know Him, these ought to follow His example and be exceedingly generous. And if we are to be exceedingly generous, we must know and make known Jesus, the true gift-giver’s Guide, the One who by example has not only shown us how to be generous, but also gives us the means by which to be generous.

Jesus, by way of His life and person, is to be our gift-giving Guide; the one whom we emulate, that we might be generous like Him; and the one whom we communicate, that we might generously make Him known. To explore this point, I would draw your attention to our text, 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.

From this text we will see four characteristics of the generous heart; four things we need to know and make known if we are to be a generous people. For the heart of the godly giver knows...

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1. The grace of Jesus
2. The riches of Jesus
3. The poverty of Jesus
4. The gift of Jesus.

Before we explore these four characteristics, let me put this verse into context. Here the apostle Paul is giving to the church at Corinth the ultimate motivation for practicing generosity – that motivation being the example of Jesus Christ. You see, about a year before Paul wrote this, he had informed the Corinthians about the poor conditions of the mother church in Jerusalem. At that time, the Corinthians pledged to take up a collection, a rather generous collection to help the brothers and sisters in Christ back in Israel. The city of Corinth was in what we would know as southern Greece. It was a city of commerce and great wealth. No doubt many of the Corinthian believers were influential, affluent and wealthy. But it had come to Paul's attention that nearly a year after the Corinthian Church had made their pledge to give so generous a gift, that their enthusiasm had begun to wane and they had not done much to encourage giving. As Paul was planning to come to Corinth and receive their gift, he writes then to remind them of their pledge as well as to give them some motivation for giving. First, he gives them the example of the Macedonians in verses 1-5. Macedonia was what we would know as northern Greece. And in comparison to Corinth, the people of Macedonia were not as affluent or wealthy. Yet Paul shares with the Corinthians how these Macedonians gave not only monetarily but of their very lives. 2 Corinthians 8:2 tells us that they gave while under a **"great ordeal of affliction"** – some kind of difficulty that is not specified, I believe so that we would understand that the attitude of generous giving is not determined by the trials we endure; and additionally that these gave out of **"their deep poverty"** – that is to say that they were overly, abundantly generous when it was apparent that they were not wealthy, at least by the world's standards. We are not given any indication as to the amount of the gift, which I believe is so that we don't try to attach percentages or make inappropriate comparisons. Let us remember that according to Jesus in Luke 21, the widow's two small copper coins were of infinitely more worth to God than the gifts of the rich.

But the greatest motivational example for being generous given to the Corinthians was not the Macedonians, but rather was the example of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we see then this four-fold picture of the generosity of Jesus Christ - four things we need to know for ourselves, practice ourselves and make known to others.

I. The Grace of Jesus

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Our text begins with a statement of fact – **"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ..."** Anyone who knows Christ is to know the grace of Christ. These believers were said to be in a continual state of knowing, of perceiving, of being aware of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the question arises, what is this grace we are to know? What does Paul have in mind when he writes this?

In our circles, we are generally accustomed to define grace as "unmerited favor" – especially when we speak of the grace of salvation, meaning that we do not earn salvation but rather God graciously grants salvation. We see this of course in Ephesians 2:8-9 –

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8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Sometimes we speak of grace in terms of “divine enablement” - the God-given power by which a person lives for the glory of Christ. Paul speaks of grace this way in Ephesians 3:8

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...

Now then, perhaps you have considered grace in more than just “unmerited favor” and “divine enablement” but 2 Corinthians 8:9 did open my eyes to see grace in yet another way, an important way that we may be guilty of sometimes overlooking. If we go back to the beginning of 2 Corinthians 8, we find that this word “grace” has already been used three times. Look with me:

1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work [grace] as well. 7 But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work [grace] also.

Let me just simply say that the word grace, as it is used here, speaks of “generosity” or “lavish liberality.” Paul was calling the Corinthian believers to note the lavish liberality of the Macedonians, a generosity that had been inspired in them by the very generosity of God. And now, in 8:9, Paul reminds the Corinthians not simply of unmerited favor or divine enablement, but of the greatness of the generosity of Jesus Christ. **“For you know,”** says the apostle, **“of the lavish generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ...”** The word “grace” here could also be translated as “gift” so as to say, “For you know the superlative gift of our Lord Jesus Christ...” For Paul, the perfect gift was not going to come from the Corinthians. Nor did it come from the Macedonians. Rather the perfect gift must be recognized as coming from and in the person of our Lord, the Master, the Captain, our supreme example – Jesus Christ.

All Christian giving, whether it be gifts at Christmas, offerings to the Church, or helping people in need, ought to be motivated by this, that they are simply reflections of the lavish generosity of Jesus Christ, who, as we will see in moment, gave us everything truly needful.

II. The Riches of Jesus

“...that though He was rich...”

So, we first have seen that the heart of the giver is to know the “grace” or generosity of the Lord Jesus and now, moving on in the text we see that the heart of the giver is also to know the riches of Jesus. **“For you know...the riches of Jesus...”** The assumption of Paul here is that these Corinthian believers knew of the “riches” of Jesus. But what is meant here

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by “riches” - a term that simply means to be overflowing, or abounding with something. Are we speaking here in terms of monetary or material wealth? Certainly Paul has already shown the Corinthians that the Macedonians gave not simply materially, but according to 8:5, they gave themselves, their very lives to the work of the Lord and to the benefit of the saints according to the will of God. So, it would be hard to see that Paul is speaking here of Jesus being materially wealthy. To be sure, being God, He owns the cattle on a thousand hills – the whole world belongs to Him according to Psalm 50. But the currency of Christ’s riches here refers more to His position and relationship to God – the currency is His divinity; that Jesus enjoyed the position and the presence of God. Look with me at John 17:24-26:

24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 26 and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

Jesus was rich in that He was face to face with God, in perfect, peaceful, harmonious relationship with the Father. This pictures for us the pre-incarnate relationship of God the Father and God the Son. *No one is more rich than the one who is in the fullness of the presence of God.* And this was the place and position of Jesus prior to His coming to earth as a baby to be the Savior of man. In John 17:5, as Jesus confirms that His work to save mankind is coming to completion prays to be once again brought back into the riches of this face to face relationship with God saying,

Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

What are the riches of Jesus? Well, what was it that meant more to Him than anything else? The love of God the Father – to be in the precious, peaceful and pure presence of God.

III. The poverty of Jesus

“...yet for your sake He became poor...”

So, we have seen the grace or generosity of Jesus as well as the riches or privileged position of Jesus and now we see the poverty of Jesus. The heart of any true giver needs to know the poverty of Jesus. Now, if the riches of Jesus speak of His divine position, then it stands to reason that the poverty of Jesus, rather than referring to some kind of monetary deficiency, must refer to His human position. In other words, we see here the condescension of God, of God becoming man – what we call the incarnation – of God becoming flesh or human. Jesus moves from the paradise of heaven to the poverty of humanity. Beloved, here we have one of the most profound considerations of giving, at least from the Christian perspective – *for you haven't really given anything until it first cost you something!* When Jesus came to this earth to give His life a ransom for many, it cost Him something; it cost Him His privileged position with God along with His very life.

We see this idea summed up well for us in the familiar words of Philippians 2:6-8 where we read:

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6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The poverty of Jesus was not so much about being born in stable, or being brought up in a working class family, or even about not having a place to lay His head as an adult. May I suggest to you that the poverty of Jesus is more about His humbling Himself – literally taking the form of a slave says the Philippians text as opposed to dwelling in glory. When Jesus, the eternal Son of God came to earth to become the Son of Man, He set aside His supremacy for suffering; His comfort for the cross. Before adding humanity to His deity; before submitting Himself to the crudeness of Mary's womb, Jesus was in the glorious splendor of the majesty of God. Compared to where Jesus came from, any supposed wealth of this earth would seem poor.

Notice that our text says that he **“became poor”** – indicating that He never lost His riches; He never lost His deity, but simply added “poverty” – that is the existence as man. As one has said, “For He assumed poverty, yet did not lose His riches. Inwardly He was rich, outwardly poor. His deity was hidden in His riches, His manhood apparent in His poverty.” (Hughes)

And why did He become poor? **“For your sake”** – Here is the reason why Jesus came. Here is the true meaning of the incarnation; the true celebration of Christmas. Jesus came for our sake, for our benefit. By becoming man, Jesus would generously offer Himself as the sin sacrifice making all who trust in Him at peace with God. As our brother Tyler so aptly reminded us last week from 1 Timothy 1:15

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

Jesus divested Himself of the riches of His position in heaven, came to earth, “born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4), made, “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3) – and why? “For your sake...” – for our benefit – He came to save sinners, to pull us out of this dreadful and damning condition of alienation from God. But the remarkable thing is, Jesus did not simply move us from negative to neutral; from iniquitous to simply innocent – no, this ultimate and lavishly generous gift-given takes the sinner from total wickedness to total righteousness; from a state of being broken and deformed, unfit for the Lord's use, to healed and transformed, useful vessels in the Lord's service. This leads us then to our final point.

IV. The gift of Jesus

So, we have seen the grace or generosity of Jesus, the riches of Jesus, which speaks of the glory and position He had before He became man; the poverty of Jesus, namely the taking on of flesh; and now finally, we see that the motivation for the believer in giving is that be believing in Jesus, in trusting that we are sinners in need of saving, in trusting in Jesus sacrifice alone, we receive the most generous gift of all, that **“through His poverty”** – that is, through His becoming man and dying for our sin, we **“might become rich.”**

And what does it mean to be rich? Are we talking about wealth and affluence? No, we have already noted that the riches of this text speak about a perfect, peaceful relationship with

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God. Beloved, this is why Jesus came, to give the perfect gift; to transform those who believe in Him into model expressions of His generosity. I believe it was C.S. Lewis who once said, "The Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men may become the sons of God." This is simply another way of saying that "that though Jesus was rich, being the Son of God, yet for our sake Jesus became poor, being the Son of Man, so that you, the sons of men, through His poverty, His experience as a man, might become rich, the sons of God." What did Jesus give us when He came to earth? Beloved, He gave us Himself, He gave us His life, He gave us righteousness, He gave us forgiveness, He gave us reconciliation, peace with God. This is the gift of Jesus to all who believe. We who were His enemies; we who would have rather lived for ourselves apart from God, have been brought near by Jesus.

And what is to be our response to this? Why is it important for believers to know the grace, the riches, the poverty and the gift of Jesus? Because in a world that seems to easily forget what gift is most important, the believer is to be a monument, a memorial, a marker of grace – of the lavish generosity of God. We are to be filled with gratitude that God has been so generous with us that we desire to be generous with others, generous in the Lord's work, indeed generous with our very lives.

Have you found the perfect gift? Have you? Do you know Him? Do you know Jesus? Do you know of His grace? Do you know of His riches? Do you know of His poverty? Do you know of His gift? John 1:12-13

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And, if you have received Him, if you are believing in His name, if you have become a child of God, if you know these things to be true, then are you given to others this most precious gift? Are you making known the grace, the riches, the poverty and the gift of Christ? The Macedonians did. The Corinthians were exhorted to – and now, some 2000 years later, the Holy Spirit is calling you to receive and believe Jesus and then to proclaim Him – who has shown you and called you to be as generous with your lives in your gifts and service to Him, in your gifts and service to His body, in your gifts and service to others. May Jesus be your gift-giving Guide, that we might give even as He has given to us.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Soli Deo Gloria

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