

The Giving of the Lord Jesus Christ
II Corinthians 8:8-9

When everything is right, you do not have to pressure Christians about giving. All such pressure is really a contradiction of the Christian way of life. Paul recognized this and acknowledged this in this word of instruction to the Corinthians. "I speak not by commandment, but by the occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love." As an Apostle, he could have given a command about such matters, but he chose the better way. The Christian life is one of "grace, and not one of "law"." The response of the Macedonian Christians was a work of grace in their lives, not a response to law or duty. Paul wanted the same response from the Corinthians to the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

In putting their offering in the proper context, Paul points to one other example. "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 is so characteristic of Paul. He uses the great truths about our Lord to set the duties of the Christian life in their proper perspective. In this simple encouragement to liberality in stewardship the Apostle sets before us a deep insight into the very nature of the incarnation itself. Did you notice how he presents Jesus? He is the "Lord Jesus Christ." "Lord" identifies Him with deity and lordship. He is the One who has all of the rights. Jesus identifies him with us. He is the One who has taken upon Himself our humanity. "Christ" identifies him with the Old Testament scriptures and the hopes of Israel. He is the One sent from the Father to accomplish His purposes on behalf of His people. His generosity is to be our example.

It is appropriate that we consider his "giving" on a night when we are coming to the Lord's Table. This table is designed to keep us ever mindful of how and how much He gave.

I. THE MOTIVE OF HIS GIVING

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ give what He gave? Grace! "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is that beautiful New Testament word that brings so much hope to the hearts of guilty sinners. Our God has been revealed to be a God of grace. The best explanation of everything that Jesus Christ did for us is grace.

What is grace? How do you define it? Grace is love in action. Grace is love in action toward someone who does not deserve it. Grace is unmerited love. So the giving of the Lord Jesus was not motivated by the worthiness He saw in us, but rather by the unworthiness. He gave Himself because of His love toward us. Unless our gifts are motivated by this kind of love, they are unworthy. You remember the word of Paul, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I gave my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." Oh, it might make a name for you to give your body to be burned, you might get written up in all the newspapers of the land, but unless it is a deed of love, it will

not be remembered when you stand in the presence of the Lord. Your giving of your goods to feed the poor might profit as a tax deduction, but it will not gain any recognition when you stand in His presence unless it is motivated by love. The example of the Lord Jesus reminds us that grace is the proper motive for giving.

Another word that helps us understand the motive is “for your sakes.” In the original text, these words are placed in a place of emphasis. Jesus did not give selfishly. This is just the nature of true agape love. He had no self interest in the gift . . . it was for your sakes. I have difficulty with this. There is so much of self in me that it is only by the enablement of the Holy Spirit that I am able to approximate this kind of giving. It is only as He works in me that my motives are free from self-interest. If I am not careful, I am like the fellow who stood up in a meeting and declared, “I want to give a thousand dollars anonymously.” Jesus gave for your sake and my sake. His only motive was His love for us.

II. THE MEASURE OF HIS GIVING

How much did He give? While no one could ever tell how much He gave, Paul does offer to us an inspired insight into the measure of His giving. “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.” Those words need no exploration. “Though he was rich” . . . with these words we are taken to the eternity before the event of Bethlehem. Before Bethlehem, He was customarily, eternity “rich”. He was rich in glory. He shared in the eternal glory of the triune Godhead from all eternity. John declared, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Surely none of us can begin to comprehend what this must have meant to Him. He was rich in love. As the only begotten of the Father, the only begotten Son, He had been the object of the Father’s love from all eternity. The love of God is eternal. Before there was ever a creature upon which He could share His love, there was love within the Godhead. He was rich in praise. He knew the pleasure of the praise of the angelic choirs of all eternity. He was rich in things. Since He created everything that is, it was His. Surely the earth was His, and the fullness thereof and they that dwell therein, for He hath founded it upon the seas and established it upon the floods.” So He was rich!

But to know the measure of His giving, we must understand that “he became Door.” This verb points us to a point. When did it happen? Surely it is primarily a reference to the moment when the incarnation began. At the moment “he was made flesh”, compared with what He had known from all eternity, he became poor. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, “he emptied Himself”. We will never be able to comprehend just how poor He must have felt in that moment. “Poor” is the word for abject poverty. And of course, it is true that during the incarnation, He lived out His days in personal human poverty. He was born in the poorest of circumstances, lived his life without any of this world’s wealth, died leaving nothing except the garment on his back, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

How much did He give? Surely, when you consider the measure of His gift, V: makes our attempts at stewardship seem rather embarrassing. Some of us are still arguing about tithing. We fear that a tithe might be more than the Lord would

expect. We need to remember that the supreme example for our stewardship is not Abraham giving a tithe to the King of Salem, but rather the King of glory laying aside His glory to become a poverty stricken man for us. He did not hedge or hold back, but gave His all. He did not take half of our weak humanity, but rather became a man. He did not become just a ruling man, but rather because a servant. He did not become a special protected man, but rather became so exposed to our humanity that he was tempted in all points just like us. He did not become a protected man, but rather tasted of our kind of death. He became poor! The supper reminds us just how far He went in the giving.

III. THE MISSION OF THE GIVING

What did His giving accomplish? What purpose did He have in mind when He became poor? "That ye through His poverty might be rich." What a mission!

The riches He brought to us through His poverty are the important riches of life. They include "life itself". He said, "I am come that ye might have life, and have it more abundantly." Can those of you who are Christians imagine for a moment what life would be like without the knowledge of Him and the relationship that you have with Him? What if you had to pick up the burden of guilt He has -taken away? What if you had to live with the dread of the wrath of God all over again? What if that emptiness you once knew in your inmost being was to return? He gave His all that you might have this LIFE!

These riches include the glory which He knew with the Father before He came to the earth. He came to be what we are in order that we might share with Him in the sonship and glory of the Father. Because He gave, we can now be assured that we too have a place in the Father's house.

These riches include the precious gift of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit which He knew in the presence of the Father, now abides in the hearts of those who obey Him. The same fullness that He knew, we can now know! No wonder the Apostle; writes of the "unsearchable riches of Christ." Who can begin to calculate what He has brought to us through His poverty.

But the implication of this verse is searching! Since He is our example in giving, we are to share in this mission. We are to use whatever God has put at our disposal in order that others might know the riches of Christ. It is as we participate with Him in giving that the message and love of God comes to those who are in such great need.

CONCLUSION

Surely if we use His giving as the standard by which we measure our giving, we will remove all pride from our hearts. Pride is always a temptation to those who give. But our giving is to ever be a grateful response to what God did for us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us prepare our hearts to be givers as we sit at the table "in remembrance" of Him.