



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 8:7-9

“Grace Giving, part II”

TRANSCRIPT

I like that expression, “We’re happy to see some new faces out there.” I just want to know that -- those of you that have new faces, would you please see me after the meeting [laughter] because I need a new face. And I’d like to know where you got it. I like that expression, anyway. For those of you that have new faces to us, we hope you enjoy the time together.

I forgot that I had not called in to the office to tell them before I went to Colorado the Scripture reading for the message today, and this morning I went into a little explanation of how it happens that we have 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 in the bulletin. As is so true of people that are getting old, I had in my mind thought that maybe I’d talked to Ms. Ray and had told her something wrong. And I went into this little spiel about it this morning. And then Mary Ann Nichols came to me and said, you didn’t tell us anything. We just sat in the office and figured out what you might have as the Scripture reading today.

And when I was doing this message, I thought it would be real sad if we passed over verse 9 without paying it a bit of attention since we’re not hurrying through 2 Corinthians on this series. And so the Scripture reading for today is verse 7 through verse 9 of 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

And so if you have your Bibles turn with me to this passage, and we’re just going to read the three verses beginning at verse 7 through verse 9. In a moment, I will read but I wanted to say that this past two weeks I have been in Colorado at Breckenridge, not vacationing. I was sitting in hotel room over half of the day writing on a computer lectures, lecturing to a group of young people on the subject of epistemology in the morning, or how do we know, and of course directed towards spiritual things, and then at night on the subject of grace at law. And I’m so happy to be back in Dallas where you don’t have to get up and put on a sweater in the morning, waste all that time, and then put it again on at night -- back here where you can just go out without putting on any sweater. Yesterday morning when I left to come back to Dallas, it was -- they had predicted a little snow on the mountains. And you could look out and see just a little fine bit of snow, not much. I’m just so glad to be back here where there is plenty of oxygen [laughter] and it’s nice and warm and the sun is out. No rain but to bother you at all. Hasn’t the Lord blessed us in Texas? [Laughter] Why are you laughing? [Laughter] Well, let’s read these three verses for our Scripture reading today, 2 Corinthians chapter 8, verse 7 through verse 9.

“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 also. I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. 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.”

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. And let’s bow together for a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for the blessings which Thou hast showered upon us through the Lord Jesus Christ. We have truly been enriched, and we thank Thee that the riches that we have are not temporal. They are eternal. How wonderfully Thou hast blessed us, generously thou hast given to us. And we have been so ungrateful, ungrateful before we were brought to the knowledge of the Lord and ungrateful afterwards. Forgive us our sins.

We ask Thy blessing upon us. We pray Thy blessing upon this assembly of believers, upon its elders and deacons and members and the friends who are with us here today. May, Lord, the blessing that comes from the triune God be the blessing of every one of us. We’re grateful for this land in which we live, and we pray for our President. We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ over the face of this globe. Wherever believers are, minister to them, Lord, at this present time. Thou hast at such great cost redeemed them for Thyself. Bless them. May they built up in the word of God and may they fruitfully serve the eternal purpose that Thou hast in magnificent wisdom and power ordained.

We pray for the sick and ill especially, Lord, we bring them to Thee. Minister to them encourage, console, strengthen, give healing as Thou doth will. I commit them all to Thee especially those whose names are listed in the calendar of concern. Remember each one of them and others too, Lord, whose names are not there but who need the ministry of our great God in heaven. Be with us in this hour and the hour of this evening. May Thy name be exalted in our midst.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] I’m sorry. I must apologize for saying it because I’ve said it before but one of the last things that I heard Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer say -- and I didn’t hear it personally. It was reported to me by someone before he died. He was speaking in the Northwest, and they sang as the hymn just before he was to speak the hymn you have

just sung. And he was a man about eighty years of age. And he went to the pulpit, and he said, “I still say there is no higher ground than in Christ.” And everyone remembered it of course because there is no higher ground than in Christ. It’s perfectly proper for us to sing that the Lord would make real the position we have in our Christian experience, but there really is no higher ground than to have the position signified by that prepositional phrase “in Christ.”

Well, we’re returning today to the second of our series of studies entitled Grace Giving. And we are studying 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9 in the continuous exposition of this marvelous personal book of the Apostle Paul. As you in my audience know, I am convinced that the church has failed abysmally in its teaching and practice of biblical stewardship. Its errors and excesses have led inevitably to the recent scandals. The less flamboyant are feeling the shoes pinching, too. The problems, however, arise from basic biblical errors. It’s not a question of exercising what might be called proper use of modern media technology. It’s not a case of integrity as over against a lack of integrity. It’s a case of scriptural principles ultimately.

David Hubbard, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary, a man whom I know, in *Time* magazine in one of the issues of this month, August 3, had these words to say, as never before skeptics have fuel for their fires. They may see this as reflecting on the excesses of the whole evangelical movement.

Now, my reaction to that is not to feel sorry about that but rather to say I am happy if that happens because the excesses of the evangelical movement need correction. And so therefore, I do not feel that the things that have happened have been bad. Ultimately, they will be good if they make us turn to the Scriptures and ask ourselves the question, What do the Scriptures say about stewardship? What do the Scriptures say about Christian giving? And therefore, I hope that as a result of this we will do that, at least to some extent.

There is a fundamental need to examine the Scriptures again on the issue of biblical giving. If we just had the mentality and the spirituality of the Bereans and would ask ourselves through the study of the Scriptures, daily if necessary, whether these things are so. How much better off we would be, how much better the world would be because they would see more clearly the power of God and what we are seeking to proclaim.

Now, of course, I’m not suggesting in any way that Christians are not to give. I think many Christians, as is evident from the scandals have been giving foolishly. They have been giving in a way that has been dishonoring actually. They have been giving in ways that surely are unwise. And we’re not suggesting that we are not to give, of course. We’re going to be judged by how we use the things that God has given to us. They are entrusted to us. We don’t have anything. They are things that are ours as a trust from the Lord God.

And so our responsibility is to ask ourselves if God has given some material possessions to us for a time for we haven’t figured out a way yet to take it with us, but at any rate, he has given them to us for a time. And when we pass out of this world like we came into it, naked, then we want, if God enables us, to have the Lord say, you have handled your trust well. I know so much about myself in which I have not done that I would like, by God’s grace, for my last years, at least, to be years in which I do that which pleases him in matters of stewardship.

Now, it’s possible to give generously and not give enthusiastically. It’s obvious that the Lord would have us give. He would have us give generously as we are enabled by Him to do so and to do whatever we can do enthusiastically. As I mentioned the story of a person who was speaking with a friend or perhaps he was speaking to a pastor and he was asked, how much can you give? And he said, remember, well, I think I could give about ten dollars and not feel it. And the other fellow said, Well, give twenty and feel it.

Well, yesterday I was looking at a little book that I have on 2 Corinthians. And this particular author of the book said that he had heard the story of a miser who said, my

pastor says that I ought to give until it hurts but for me it hurts to even think about giving. [Laughter] And I guess there are many of us that feel the same way and therefore we don’t give. We’re not saying that we should not give. We’re saying that we should give Scripturally.

Now, let me begin by not referring specifically to the text, but take about ten minutes and discuss some misunderstandings of biblical stewardship that are not specifically found in this passage but found in the Bible. For example, these two chapters, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, are the normative text on Christian giving. How many of you have ever heard an exposition of this chapter? Well, probably not a lot of you. How many of you have ever heard an exposition of these chapters with stewardship in mind? They are the two passages in the New Testament that stand out as apostolic teaching on giving. Most of us have not had the privilege of hearing much ministering on 2 Corinthians.

Now, we have in the Chapel because in the Bible study a few years back Sam Storms gave a series of messages on 2 Corinthians. Those of you who were there heard good exposition of these chapters but most of us have probably not heard anything about 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 on Christian stewardship because so often if we expound these chapters we’ll have to change our principles. Think of it. The Apostle Paul has devoted two whole chapters to the question of stewardship, and the word “tithe” is not mentioned once. Think of that.

How many of us have been trained to believe as professing Christians that the tithe looms large in stewardship? It’s not found. The essence of the church’s teaching historically has been, if I may put it this way, legal. Not legalistic but legal. That is, the tithe has been taken out of the Mosaic law because after all it sounds good. Give ten percent. Most people are not giving ten percent. They’re giving two percent or one percent. And so take the tithe out of the Mosaic Law and use it as a standard for Christian giving. So the essence of the church’s teaching is legal. It’s Jewish, as our Lutheran

friends rightly have observed. It is Jewish. R.C.H. Lenski, the well-known Lutheran commentator and an evangelical man, has said it is Jewish based on the Old Testament tithe. Many of us know Malachi 3:8 through 10 for the simple reason that it’s been cited in passages, expositions, pamphlets urging us to give to the church.

Now, before we look further, let me remind you of the historical situation, then I’ll come back to the misunderstanding of the tithe. The apostle has arrived in Macedonia that little body of believers up there have given self-sacrificially. They gave themselves first to the Lord. And then not only gave -- the apostle knew they were so poor that they didn’t have the money to give if you looked at them but they begged him that they might have a part in the offering for the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea. So they begged out of poverty to have a part, enthusiastic, generous giving.

Now, the apostle so anxious that the Christians in Jerusalem be helped and then more broadly that they would realize that there is one church of both Jewish believers and Gentile believers is urging the Corinthians to follow the suit of the Macedonians. He’s not asking for money for himself. He’s asking for money for the Jerusalem believers. That’s an important principle.

Now coming back to the tithe. He doesn’t say to them by the way give 5 percent more than your tithe. He asks them simply to give generously and to prove their love by what they do.

Now, let me say something about the tithe so that we’ll have our understanding correct about it. The first place we said it was legal. In the second place, if you studied the Old Testament, there was not one tithe, there were three tithes actually. We don’t have time to give you the Scripture references. I have them before me. The tithe was not even giving. It was a debt just like April the 15<sup>th</sup> in the United States. That’s not a gift to the government. You write the IRS and say, I’m happy to be able to send this check as a gift to you. And I imagine they just laugh uproariously in the offices of the IRS when they

receive your little letter with your gift to them. It’s not a gift. It’s what you owe. It’s a debt. That’s what the tithe is. It was income tax. They had to pay it.

Furthermore, the tithe was specifically given to the Levites. Now, the Levites didn’t have the privilege of a piece of property. They could go out and make their living like the other tribesman. They had to do the Lord’s work. They had to busy about the tabernacle and the temple. And so being involved in those things God provided for them through the tithe, the 10 percent. And later on it appears the priests perhaps also participated in this. So the tithe was given to the Levites perhaps the priests.

Furthermore, if we put ourselves under the law in any way, then we obligate ourselves to do the whole of the law. When we were expounding Galatians, we came to chapter 5 in verse 3 in which the apostle says with reference to circumcision, the legal requirement he says, and I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is under obligation whereby to keep the whole law. In other words, start out obeying the law, acknowledging its right to direct your life is to put yourself under whole law.

James later says you know to break one of the parts of the law is to be guilty of the whole. You become a lawbreaker just as today. If, for example, you’re speeding the highway and you’re running eighty miles an hour and you’re pulled over to the side and issued a ticket then you have become a member of that class of our society which we call lawbreakers. Well, it’s not as bad as some other crimes but nevertheless you belong to that category. You are a lawbreaker. I imagine that most of us who’ve driven a car very long have had that unhappy experience. We have been lawbreakers. Well, of course, we’re spiritual lawbreakers from the beginning but nevertheless the tithe was never imposed on New Testament believers.

I would challenge any of you in the audience that has any question about this whatsoever turn to the New Testament look up the little word T-I-T-H-E and then the plural. And look at the few places in the New Testament it is mentioned. And in every case, except one, it is a reference to the Old Testament law. And the other case is a

reference to the fact that before the giving of the law, Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. In the right of the epistle, the Hebrews, I think, mentions it as I remember - I didn’t look this up. I’m going by my memory about three times in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the epistle of the Hebrews. In other words, the tithe is never imposed upon New Testament believers.

And, finally, the tithe was to be paid in Jerusalem. It is specifically stated that the tithe is to be paid in Jerusalem. So you who want to put yourself under the law and affirm that you’re under the tithe, look, you’re two thousand years too late and five thousand miles too far away to carry out the requirements of the tithe.

Now, I contend that that is something that is so plain in the New Testament that the only way that we could miss it is to try to avoid it. That is, don’t study it. Be afraid that it might change your way of doing so don’t have anything to do with it. I know there are people who tell me that they’ve been tithing, and God has been blessing their lives. There was a well-known man. He had a large corporation. He used to travel over the United States as a Christian man, and he was a Christian man. And he would extol the virtues of tithing and tell how the Lord had blessed him in his tithing, and I had become a successful man because he had tithed.

I don’t deny that the Lord had blessed him because the Lord evidently had blessed him. I knew him, but I didn’t know him that well. I knew about him a whole lot. I suggest that it was case of false epistemology, if I may use the expression since I’ve been using it for the last two weeks. You see if the Lord blessed him -- and I think the Lord did -- he didn’t bless him because he tithed. He blessed him because he gave. There’s a whole lot of difference between the two. He didn’t understand, finally, why the Lord was blessing him. He didn’t bless him because he tithed. He blessed him because he gave.

That’s one of the principles we will come to understand in these chapters. So it’s very important for us to analyze the Scriptures properly -- study them and then analyze them properly. I’d like to say before we turn to these two three verses we also

misunderstand, in my opinion, though not so egregiously, grace giving. We say we give according to the principles of grace giving. That is, it’s voluntary giving because God has blessed us in Christ. That’s grace giving.

Now, I’d like to suggest that it’s true in the case of grace giving we have that which ideally should be voluntary according to gratitude but we should remember that we are to give not because we think we owe it but because we want to truly give voluntarily. Furthermore, in grace giving, it is not what we would say constant proportion giving. That is, we don’t always give just ten percent or fifteen percent or five percent as the case may be. What the New Testament teaches varying proportional giving, for the experiences of life vary. There are some times when believers earnestly like to give and are unable to give. The Scriptures lay no obligation on such people who are suffering to give as we shall see. So we may give five percent, ten percent, twenty percent. That is left for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and our obedient response to him.

We should give not because then it is a duty but out of gratitude. And we don’t give to satisfy the law of Moses. We give in order to satisfy the heart of God and not legalistically but to express devotion to him. So every time someone puts a dollar in any kind of collection plate or seeks to give to Christian works, it’s to be generous as God has blessed us, and it’s to be out of gratitude for what we have received.

Now, let’s turn to our three verses and, first of all, just a quick handling of verses 7 and 8 because we want to spend most of our time remaining on verse 9. The apostle gives two specific reasons to give here in verse 7 and verse 8. He says -- now remember he’s writing from Macedonia. He’s writing to the Corinthians. They have not been responding to the apostle’s ministry because when the false teachers came among them, they became disturbed and actually are in a sense mistreated the apostle for the ministry that they had had there. But when Titus got there with the letter from Paul they had repented. That’s all described in verse 6 through verse 11 of the preceding chapter. Perhaps it’d be good to quickly read beginning at verse 6 of chapter 7.

“But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; (When Titus came up to Macedonia and told what had happened when he went there with Paul’s message,) and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more. For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it -- for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while -- I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.”

Now verse 7 of chapter 8 he says,

“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, (that is, by that letter) see that you abound in this gracious work also.”

So in other words as you Corinthians abound in the gifts that God has given to you -- and you may remember that in the first letter in about verse 5 he had said that the Corinthian church exceeded other churches in the spiritual gifts that God had given to them. He had given them such great spiritual gifts that they had misused them and were not exercising them according to Scripture and he had to write Corinthians 12, 13, and 14

to admonish them regarding the exercise of spiritual gifts in the assembly. And so he says here, you abound in gifts and in love now abound in this grace. That is the giving to the poor in Jerusalem. And then in the 8<sup>th</sup> verse, the second of the reasons, he says,

“I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others (that is, the Macedonian’s example) the sincerity of your love too.”

So the Macedonians are the occasion for proving the love of the Corinthians, and he would like for them to be seen as those who have a sincere love for other believers in the giving to the poor in Jerusalem. .

One of the commentators on 2 Corinthians in a very popular book has said, a man of great learning and perception once remarked, ask yonder son what art thou doing, and he will answer if he could the will of God. Ask those waves of the ocean, and they will answer the will of God. Turn to a tiny flower drinking in the dew, what are doing? And the flower will answer if it could, the will of God. Man, highest of God’s creation, listen to me, what are you doing? Is not the answer thus what I choose? I please myself. I do as I will. I assert my independence of God as though he were not. I’m afraid many of us respond that way. I know I have. We really are not that concerned about the will of God.

Now, if anyone needs a supreme incentive for giving the 9<sup>th</sup> verse expresses it. The apostle says,

“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.”

This text is so rich that one ought to preach on it a series of messages, but I want you to notice a couple things are important. Notice the profound connection between

doctrine and practice in apostolic teaching. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor that you through his poverty might become rich. What is Paul doing?

Why, he’s exhorting the Corinthians to respond to the needs of the saints. And how does he do it? By giving them sweet little sentimental messages that have no relationship to Christian theology. No, no. This is one of the great texts of theology. There are people who go about saying we want something practical. We don’t want theology. Oh, I have often wished I could be there with the apostles when someone uttered that comment in front of the apostles. And since I’m not there, I have to answer for the apostles. Are you stupid? Don’t you realize that theology determines all practice? And any good practice, loyal practice, God-honoring practice is grounded in the theology of the Bible. That’s what Paul is doing here. He just doesn’t insert this to have a sweet thought in the midst of exhortation. Notice the ground of what he’s talking about. What a lovely example this is of the practicality of the revealed truth.

Now, looking at the text itself. Isn’t it striking, too, that the supreme self-surrender of the Lord Jesus is presented almost as a passing illusion? He doesn’t say anything more about it in verse 10. Just introduces it like this and passes on. You know why? Because he had taught them that in the beginning. He didn’t have to say this is new teaching. They knew it. And so he can just express it, and they remember. Yeah, that’s what he taught us when he was here before. He spoke a lot about that, and so now he just mentions it, a kind of passing illusion. So from the beginning he had taught them the mystery of the saving humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I think it’s striking, too, that he says you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, you read through these two chapters, and they have to do with giving. What word would expect to find in this chapter? And the next? Money. Wouldn’t you? Money. Find it. It doesn’t occur. The apostle doesn’t use the term “money.” Money is indifferent. It’s how you use money. It’s what you think of money that’s important. We

have magazines called Money. Look in them. You won’t find anything that has a whole lot to do with what Paul says, of course. You know I describe money, he calls it fellowship, ministering, grace. That’s interesting, isn’t it? He calls it grace.

For example, in verse 7, see that you abound in this gracious work, also. And so that’s why he says for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s his giving. Grace. That’s why we say grace giving because giving is a work of grace. And as Paul says here grace should lead to grace. That is, the grace shown us should lead to grace giving, the kind of giving that is a faint picture of the giving of the Lord Jesus for us.

Now, looking in our text more carefully, notice the pristine condition of our Savior as he describes it. Incidentally, there is only one other passage in the New Testament that is a close parallel with this, although the idea is found everywhere, but it’s Philippians chapter 2 in verse 7 the great kenosis passage in which, I pronounce it that way because of the accent in the original text, we know it as the kenosis passage. But in Philippians 2:6, the apostle states concerning the Lord Jesus after saying have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus who although he existed in the form of God 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. The pristine condition of our Lord is in the form of God.

Now, to say it simply, that means he possessed all the essential attributes of deity. He was God. So he says here, you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor. He existed in the form of God possessed all of the attributes of deity. And incidentally this text does not have to do with the incarnation of our Lord only but his humiliation precisely. As a matter of fact, our Lord is still incarnate but he is talking about the time when he became incarnate and then suffered the humiliation of his earthly experience. So you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor. How was he rich? Well, he was rich because he existed in the form of God. He is rich because as he

prayed in his great high priestly prayer, Lord, restore to me the glory that I had with Thee by Thy side before this work began. The glory of the second person of the Trinity residing with the eternal Trinity, the glory of being loved by the Father, loved by the Spirit and returning the love of the Father and the Spirit, the perfect love that existed between the eternal trinity.

And furthermore, not simply enjoying the possessions that existed in that pristine relationship, timeless relationship in the past having all of the power that has gathered around the Trinity as a result of the creation. The Lord Jesus forming in his own mind the architectural scheme of the universe plotting out the ages and the things that are going to happen, all of the things that are transpiring are the result of the thinking of the mind of the eternal God. And as they are carried out in history, they are the reflections of what was done back there. He’s not surprised by anything that had happened even the fact that some of you were late to the service this morning that was all known by the Lord. And the fact that some came early, that’s all known to the Lord. No offense you understand just be on time next time. [Laughter]

All of these things were things that came out of the mind of God, and the Lord Jesus was integral in the thinking of the eternal trinity. Rich, powerful, creating, preserving, directing towards a conclusion that is set out in the word of God. Magnificent, isn’t it? You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, no one has ever been richer than our Lord with the Father and the Spirit, the richest beings in all of this world.

One other point, if you’ve got a Greek text before you that expression “though rich” is an expression that means rich throughout that all that transpires. That is, when he became poor in one sense he was still rich. In other words, as far as the human condition into which he entered, he was poor, but so far as the eternal sonship that characterized him always rich. Rich before the incarnation and humiliation, rich during the incarnation and humiliation, rich throughout the ages of eternity. Not rich and then poor in that

sense only in the human sphere having to do with the human nature, this divine person passed through the experience, but always rich even in the midst of his poverty.

Now, let’s look at the magnificent condescension. He became poor. That word translated “became poor” is word that in Greek means to cower, to crouch. In other words, it’s a word that expresses abject poverty. We say of certain people in our society sadly they live at the poverty level. That is, they’re poor. They have something but they are poor. The Greeks had a word for that, too. When they wanted to describe someone who was poor in that sense, they described him as *penes*, poor. This is not that word. This is a word that express more abject poverty.

In fact, we could say that the Lord Jesus Christ beggared himself. He became poor in that sense. He beggared himself. Well, the passage I read for in Philippians said he emptied himself. That’s somewhat the idea. Oh, think about it. Think when the situation took place in heaven and the angels were there and the announcement is made -- if it was made, I wasn’t there. I may be thinking humanly. Maybe I’m thinking media-wise, but the announcement is made that the second person of the trinity is going to come down into this society. And can you not imagine the thought of the angels as that went on? All the questions that would be asked and the son as he has unfolded something of the ministry would say to them, I do not disdain the womb of a virgin, as he explained things to the heavenly hosts. The infinite will become an infant. The one who bears the pillars of the universe is going to be carried about by the weaker sex, a woman. The one who you might think would come and tell Caesar move out of your palace. I’m going to live here now that I’m here is one who sleeps in a stable when he’s born, not even a Marriott Inn. He’s the one who made the worlds all about him and yet born to a carpenter, stands at a carpenter’s bench and makes the little things that carpenters make and has made the universe.

We say Prince of Peace. We could say Prince of Poverty. And talk about King Creseus on the other hand. Here is really King Creseus. Rich infinitely, and yet poor as

the Son of God. Isn’t it striking? The one on whose shoulders the world hangs is the one who passes through the experiences that our Lord passed through.

Now, why did he do it all? Paul says it. You can see how this kind of exposition should go on for hours and hours to do justice to it. No one could do justice to it. I don’t know anyone who could do justice to it. Maybe an apostle could do justice to it, but none of the rest of us who try to expound the word of God could do justice to it. I guess if we were to do justice to it about the closest thing that you could do would be to start at Romans 1, verse 1 and expound the eight chapters to chapter 8, verse 39, and then you could say that’s an introduction to what it means to be enriched by the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. I’m not going to do that. I know some of you are saying, Thank the Lord. [Laughter]

Notice he says you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor that you through his poverty might become rich, rich in the enjoyment of eternal salvation, rich in the enjoyment of the Holy Spirit who guides us constantly through the experiences of life and through the word of God and through a special ministry to us in sanctification and who will conclude the work of sanctification ultimately by making us like him. We surely have been enriched.

Now, I want to tell you that if you had the biggest and richest portfolio in the world, you’d be a beggar by the sight of this. Your riches are temporary, though we admire you. We often covet, but this is the true riches. Think of it. The great machinery of providence about us, God’s control of every little thing is ours. It’s ours. It’s directed toward the caring for us every moment of the day, every one of us who is a believer. We all, by God’s grace, the great machinery of divine providence, the great economy of grace is directed toward the building up of the saints of God who are the objects of his love and affection. That’s to be rich. You can put your money in a bank. You can put it in a lock box. You can invest your money in real estate, and you can say that’s real money. Foolish. That’s like a cistern. But our riches are like a fountain that bubbles up in the

mercies of God that are shown us all the time constantly throughout all the experiences of life. That’s what it is to be rich. Made rich. Made truly rich. Blessed by the eternal fountain of God’s grace in Christ. I need to close.

If a poverty-stricken Christ did so much for us in poverty, hanging on a cross naked, crying out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,” as he bears our sin. And then a moment later says, “It is finished,” the work of redemption concluded. Our salvation made secure in the sovereign wake of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. If the poverty-stricken Christ did so much for us in his poverty and by his poverty, what he can do, my Christian friends, now that he sits at the right hand of the throne of God as the son of God, ruler of this entire universe and soon to be seen all as king of kings and lord of lords?

So we appeal to him in the experiences of life knowing he’s there. He who with nail prints in his hand routed Satan. What can he now do for us now that he’s on the throne? There’s only one response that we could possibly give to this. We repose ourselves from time and eternity upon the bosom of the Son of God. May God help you to do it.

I ask you a question. Have you been made rich by him?

I left out one little phrase because it’s so important. It’s good for a conclusion. He says, you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for *your* sake, for *your* sake, for Christian sake, for your sake he became poor that you through his poverty might become rich. That’s what he’s done for us, for your sake. Do you say perhaps? Some do say this. I’m good enough without Christ. I don’t really need him. I’m perfectly satisfied. Or can you say God taught me my nothingness.

There was a church that thought of itself as rich. A whole church, can you imagine it? A whole church. Can you imagine people in Believer’s Chapel saying we are rich? Well, I think maybe I can in some cases, fortunately not in most. But the church if we are to see it the Lord said you say I’m rich. I’ve become wealthy. I have need of

nothing, and you don’t know that you’re wretched and miserably and poor and blind and naked. In the Greek text, that’s something like this. It’s expressing one kind of idea. It said you are a wretched, poor, miserable, blind kind of church, all said very emphatically.

I had a good experience these last two weeks. There’s a group of young people not very large, maybe about a dozen. And I lectured to them for two weeks. Started on Monday went through the week through Saturday. Preached for them on Sunday morning. And we had a congregation last morning, last Sunday. I think that there were twelve or fourteen, and we had a real good time. And then I started lecturing again on Monday and went through Friday night. And they don’t have a whole lot of money, and I told them that I would pay my way up there and speak for them free of charge. They wanted to know how much I should ask. They really didn’t know me from that standpoint because I would never tell them anything like that. And so when they finished, they wanted to do something for me. And so they went into Denver, and they went into an old bookstore.

And I’d been mentioning -- I occasionally mentioned the word John Calvin [laughter] and with them I was calling him Johnny Calvin [laughter]. And so when Friday night came and the last message was over, one of the young men -- they go to the Chapel, incidentally -- and he came up to me before the crowd. And he said, Dr Johnson, he said, we just want to give you something to let you know we appreciate you coming talking to us. They gave me a package. I opened it up, and it was an old book. And it was a book dated in 1561. It was an edition of Calvin’s *Institutes* in Latin. I think it’s probably the last edition issued while he was still living because he died three years later. And they gave it to me out of appreciation, and you know I had been reading *The Institutes* up there. This is in Latin. So I’ll probably read it a little slower for a time. My eight years of Latin come in for good use occasionally, but anyway I had been reading just the previous week again.

I was reading out of someone else’s edition something about Calvin’s conversion. That’s striking but there is no real account of John Calvin’s conversion. He never goes into details about it. He would not have been a success of a testimony meeting by giving all kinds of sensational things. He didn’t do that. But there was one phrase that he said that touched my heart as I read it. He referred to his conversion in his commentary on the psalms. And he said this, “God subdued my heart to teachableness.” God subdued my heart to teachableness. You couldn’t say it any better than that. God subdued my heart to teachableness.

So I ask you, do you feel your poverty? Riches are found only in the veins of our Lord Jesus Christ and the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross. May God help you to do what Isaiah called upon Israel to do, to turn. Turn unto him. Look unto him to the ends of the earth. If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in Christ, we invite you to turn to him -- not to us, not to Believers Chapel, not to any individual, to no one but him. Use the text that was the conversion text of Mr. Spurgeon. Look unto me. Unfortunately in the New American Standard Bible, it’s turned, but the meaning is the same. Turn to him. Look to him. And in looking to him, receive eternal life. If you’re here today, that’s our prayer for you. Turn to him from your poverty to true riches. May God help you to do it. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee. Who could ever express to Thee proper gratitude for that which Thou hast done? O Father, through the Holy Spirit, touch hearts that Christ, the rich one, may be exalted.

For his name’s sake. Amen.

