

PM Matthew 2:1-12 & 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 Untold Riches

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Date: 25 December 2022

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[0 : 00] verses 1 to 12. Matthew 2, verse 1. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose, and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea.

For so it is written by the prophet, And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judea, are by no means least among the rulers of Judea.

For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly, and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

[1 : 24] And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child. And when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose, went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother.

And they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Now we turn to 2 Corinthians, and chapter 8, the first 15 verses.

[2 : 37] 2 Corinthians 8, verse 1.

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves, first to the Lord, and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus, that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.

But as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of grace also.

[4 : 08] I say this not as a command, but to prove, by the earnestness of others, that your love also is genuine. 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.

And in this matter, I give my judgment. This benefits you, who a year ago started, not only to do this work, but also to desire to do it.

So now, finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness, your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

As it is written, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Let's come before God in prayer.

[5 : 42] Father, we thank you for that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ of which we have read, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich.

Truly, Lord, we know ourselves to be rich in all kinds of ways, that compared with millions around the world, we are rich in this world's goods.

And we pray that you will help us to be generous to those in need, and at the same time to be wise. Lord, we know that there's a bottomless pit of need, and so many people crying out for help that we couldn't possibly meet every demand.

And yet, Lord, we desire to do whatever you direct us, to be generous to the people around us. Lord, we thank you for times when we ourselves have been in need, and others have been generous to us.

Lord, may that ever be the case, especially among your people, that there will be a sense of mutual care. But we thank you much more that we are spiritually rich, that having received salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, all the riches of heaven are ours.

[7 : 19] And we pray that you would help us to share what we have, not that we can give heaven to anyone, but we can point them to the one and only true Savior who will bring them to heaven.

Help us to proclaim Christ Jesus the Lord, the one who came into this world to save sinners. Pray, Lord, for your blessing upon us as a church.

Only a few of us tonight, but there are many others connected with this church, and we pray that each and every one of them, in their own situations tonight, might know your presence and blessing.

We pray, Lord, for the ongoing work of the church, for the meetings that are planned over the coming days. Pray, Lord, for the meeting on Wednesday for Jonathan leading that, and for Jack and for William leading the services next Lord's Day.

We thank you for the various visiting ministers who come to help us, but we pray that the time will come soon when we will be able to have a settled minister of our own.

[8 : 41] We pray for this nation around us in all of its many troubles. We pray particularly for those in authority. We pray for King Charles.

Lord, thank you that he has continued the late Queen's tradition of making some prominent mention of Christianity in his Christmas speech.

But we know, Lord, that his own understanding of this is vague. Lord, bring him to a clear and accurate knowledge of the gospel. We pray for those in government.

Lord, here we are with a prime minister who is a Hindu and a first minister who introduces ungodly legislation. Lord, these are sad conditions.

We pray, Lord, nonetheless for them as the elected leaders and ask you to protect them and guide them. We pray that you will deliver us from all ungodliness in our land.

[9 : 49] We are swept over by a flood of ungodliness. Lord, we long for days of revival here in Scotland. We pray that you will draw near to us each in our personal needs.

Bless each household in this congregation. Bless the families. Be with the children as they grow up. And grant them, Lord, to have happy childhoods.

And at the same time, childhoods in which they will remember having learned of the things of God, grant that they may come to personal faith in Christ, embracing the faith that they are taught.

We pray, Heavenly Father, for those who are in any kind of trouble amongst us, particularly we pray for Margaret's continued recovery. Lord, watch over us now.

Keep us and guide us in all things. And guide us into your truth as we look into your word shortly. Bless us through your word we pray. We ask it in Jesus' name.

[10 : 59] Amen. Well, let's sing again before we look at the scriptures. psalm 72.

Well, let's turn now to the word of God and 2 Corinthians chapter 8. I want us to look for a short while at verse 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.

rich. The greatest texts in the Bible sometimes come in the most unlikely settings.

At first sight, 2 Corinthians 8 doesn't look a very promising chapter for a Christmas text. Christ. This is a chapter about money.

[12:28] But there in the middle of it is this glorious verse which sums up the whole meaning of Christmas. The background is Paul's collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

There were actually two collections in the New Testament for the poor. The first is in Acts 11, soon after Paul's conversion.

A man called Agabus had prophesied that there would be a famine. This happened in the days of Claudius. So we're told the disciples at Antioch, which was a wealthy, mercantile city, determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul, who of course later became known as Paul.

But then years later there was a second collection. Having been sent out as a missionary to the Gentiles and having established churches throughout the eastern Mediterranean, Paul started a collection for the saints at Jerusalem among the Gentile churches, which he himself would take to the elders there personally.

[14:09] Now this was only partially a charitable collection. It was also a diplomatic mission.

There were tensions between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. There were disagreements about the law of God. Paul wanted to demonstrate the essential unity of the Church of God.

He wanted to show the love that the Gentile Christians had for their brethren who were of Jewish background. And he wanted to prove his own love for his countrymen.

Jewish Christians had raised questions about Paul. There was Paul saying that it was not necessary to keep the ritual law of God in order to be saved.

That seemed very strange to them. And they were questioning whether he was denying his Jewish heritage. He wanted to demonstrate that he still loved his fellow countrymen.

[15:27] Now in Macedonia Paul had been overwhelmed by the generosity of the churches giving beyond their means. In Corinth however they promised much but it had come to little.

They had never completed the collection that they had started. Paul in this chapter is urging them through Titus to get it finished.

to prove that they too can excel in this grace of giving. And to encourage them in this he reminds them of the generosity of Christ who certainly completed his magnificent gift to us.

He didn't just come to Bethlehem starting his mission he carried it through to its finish. Well I want us to consider this evening that grace of our Lord Jesus Christ under three headings very simply dividing this verse up the riches he gave up the poverty he embraced and the riches we have received.

So first the riches he gave up though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor.

[17:09] Later on we'll be singing that lovely hymn on the back of your notice sheet. I gather that it's unfamiliar to most of you.

Used to be a favourite amongst evangelicals in the areas where we lived. But it's a hymn that describes in beautifully poetic language the riches that Christ gave up in coming into this world. Just reading that first verse thou who wast rich beyond all splendor all for love's sake became poor thrones for a manger didst surrender sapphire paved courts for stable floor.

The author of that hymn incidentally Frank Houghton was a missionary to China in the 1920s and 1930s and he himself made very considerable sacrifices and endured a great deal of suffering for the sake of Christ.

Christ of course was the son of God and as such he had lived from all eternity in his father's presence and love and favour sharing with him in the creation of the world and in the ruling of this world.

[18:47] John says in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. Jesus himself speaks of the glory that he had with his father in his prayer in John 17 shortly before the cross.

He says and now father glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the foundation of the world.

Frank Houghton's hymn captures just a little of that glory that he had. The glory of heaven itself. Those sapphire paved courts in the hymn are not just the hymn writer's imagination.

It's a reference to Exodus 24 and verse 10 where Moses took the elders of Israel up onto Mount Sinai to seal the covenant and there they saw the God of Israel and it says there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire like the very heaven for clearness and they beheld God and ate and drank.

Now since the scripture says that no man has ever seen God we have to assume that it was the Son of God that they saw enthroned in heaven above that sapphire pavement.

[20 : 28] Similar image occurs in Ezekiel 1 and verse 26 where Ezekiel saw in a vision the likeness of a throne in appearance like sapphire and seated above it a likeness with a human appearance the Son of God in a pre-incarnate appearance that was Christ that Ezekiel saw but the glory that he had was not just the splendid surroundings but the fellowship that he had with his father and the power that he had as the ruler of the world.

In Proverbs 8 there is a long poem in which wisdom speaks which many take to be Christ speaking since all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ.

Christ and he says there that when God laid out the foundations of the earth I was beside him like a workman and I was daily his delight rejoicing before him always.

That was the glory that Christ had. Those were the riches that he enjoyed. Christ became man he gave up that privileged position in heaven.

He never gave up his divinity of course he remains the son of God forever. He never gave up the favour of God or indeed the fellowship of God.

[22 : 22] He lived his life on earth in close fellowship with the father and the father certainly favoured him. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. And the angels still worshipped him even while he was here upon earth even as a baby.

But by coming down into this world he was descending into a world of sin and that was a great sacrifice. Let's look now secondly at that poverty the poverty he embraced.

For your sake he became poor. That poverty began when he condescended to become man.

Famous words of a hymn our God contracted to a span incomprehensibly made man. It would have been a step down if he had merely soared down from heaven like Superman.

But in fact he was born in the lowliest circumstances possible. Born to a virgin. Born in a stable because there was no room for them in the inn.

[23 : 46] Laid in a manger because there was no bed for him. In a little town of Bethlehem up in the Judean hills.

We sometimes hear of a rags to riches story where a humble person rises up to greatness. I suppose Abraham Lincoln is one of the most famous examples.

Born in a log cabin. He eventually became president of the United States of America. Living in the White House. Possibly one of the greatest presidents they ever had.

But here is a riches to rags story. Quite literally riches to rags. the Son of God wrapped in swaddling cloths.

Wrapped in rags. And it didn't stop at Bethlehem. He had a humble upbringing as the son of a carpenter.

[24 : 56] Although he amazed the teachers in the temple at the age of twelve with all his knowledge, as far as we know, he never had any formal education with any of the great and famous schools of the rabbis.

He was an outsider throughout his ministry, viewed with suspicion, criticized, hated, reviled, rejected.

And then came the greatest humbling of all, the cross. Quoted Philippians 2 this morning, I make no apology for reading it again.

Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

cross. That little word even sums it up. Even the cross, the lowest he could possibly go.

[26 : 13] Not merely dying, but dying on a cross. A shameful, agonizing death. death. But it was all for your sake, Paul says.

He was dying for us. Laying down his life as a sacrifice for sin. Bearing not just the physical pain of the cross, but the spiritual pain.

the agony of the wrath of God, suffering in our place so that we might be saved. Now, for Christ, of course, that wasn't the end.

Praise God, he was raised from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he is seated now at the Father's right hand in glory. His prayer has been answered.

God has given him the glory that he had before the foundation of the world. Indeed, his glory is greater now because he bears that glory now in human form as well as the Son of God.

[27 : 30] He is enthroned in heaven now and he will reign forever and ever. To carry on that quote from Philippians 2, therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But what about us? Let's look now finally at the riches that we have received. He became poor that you through his poverty might become rich.

What riches have we received as a result of Christ coming into the world? Well generally speaking of course not material riches.

Some Christians are wealthy of course but the vast majority are still very poor in terms of this world's goods. But if you're a Christian then you have received immeasurable spiritual riches in Christ.

Paul says that we have been raised with Christ. Indeed he goes further and says that we are seated with him in the heavenly places. He has raised us heavenwards and we have received with him the riches that he now has.

[29 : 11] They are shared with his people. He and his people are inseparably connected. Paul says in Ephesians 1 God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

So you can't say well yes God has blessed me in some ways but there's other ways in which he hasn't. No he's blessed you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

You have everything. All things are yours Paul says in 1 Corinthians. He says in Ephesians 3 that God had given him this grace to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

That doesn't just mean the riches of Christ himself as the son of God and savior of the world but the riches that we have in Christ.

We've received first of all of course the forgiveness of our sins. We're washed in the blood of Christ cleansed from every sin.

[30 : 24] That has opened the door of heaven itself to us. us. We've been granted fellowship with God. We can approach him in prayer.

How extraordinary that is. This little group of us here tonight and earlier on we spoke to God.

Sinners like us allowed into the presence of the Lord with the promise that he would hear us.

We're blessed with his presence every day. The Lord Jesus Christ could say that he was daily his delight. That he enjoyed the fellowship of the Father from all eternity.

We've been drawn into that fellowship. Sometimes we may not be aware of it. Sometimes we may turn away from it. but the Lord is there.

And we have this immense privilege of being in fellowship with the living God. We've been granted eternal life.

[31 : 37] We have that life already. And we will have it for all eternity. Jesus says whoever believes in me though he may die yet shall he live.

And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. We've received the Holy Spirit as the seal of our redemption.

Teaching us and guiding us. Revealing the things of God to us. Christ himself is in us. The hope of glory.

We've been made citizens of heaven. with the prospect before us of enjoying those sapphire paved courts. Of being gathered together with the angels and with all the multitude of the redeemed around the throne of Lamb.

Praising the God of heaven and the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. We've become the children of God.

[32 : 48] Indeed Paul goes so far as to say Romans 8 17 we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. It says in Revelation his servants shall worship him they will see his face and his name shall be on their foreheads and they shall reign with him forever and ever.

Shouldn't we feel rich? how rich the Lord has made us. And all of this is ours by grace remember. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's his free gift to us. We've done nothing to earn us.

We simply received it by faith. Now what are we to say to all this? Well at the very least this generosity of Christ should encourage us to be generous to others.

That remember is the context. That's actually why Paul says this. He wants these Corinthians to give generously to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

[34 : 04] He wants them to give sacrificially just as Christ gave himself sacrificially for us. He is very diplomatic about it.

He doesn't want them to be burdened so that others are eased. God doesn't expect more of us than we're able. But even so, when Christ has shown such abundant generosity to us, how can we not be generous to others?

But surely it goes beyond that. We ought to receive this great gift of salvation with gratitude and with joy.

Someone sent you a check for a million pounds, I think you might find time to say thank you. Christ has given you this abundance of riches.

Shouldn't we be thanking him forever more? We ought to praise God for this salvation and we ought to serve Christ sacrificially and to give ourselves unconditionally to him just as he gave himself for us.

[35 : 22] You know those wise men in Matthew 2 bringing their gifts to the Lord Jesus. They I imagine were wealthy men and I don't suppose that those gifts were any great hardship to them and I know that those gifts all had a symbolic meaning but they do also show us that right spirit of generosity and of commitment to Christ.

They were prepared to give of their best to this baby who was the son of God. And we should be the same shouldn't we? prepared to give ourselves to give all that we have for the service of Christ. It's rather sobering to reflect that when Paul actually delivered this gift to Jerusalem it was not actually well received.

there was a riot in Jerusalem because they still regarded Paul with suspicion and he was arrested and he ended up under house arrest in Rome.

Sometimes when we try to be generous it doesn't work out. Sometimes we get pain and hardship for all the love that we've shown.

[36 : 53] But I don't think Paul regretted it. He says in Acts 21 13 I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

That's the true response to the grace of Christ toward us. Total sacrificial unconditional commitment to him.

May the Lord give us that response. Amen.