

Thou Who Wast Rich - Christmas Eve 2024

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[0 : 00] Amen. Please take your seats. And if you would, please take your Bibles.

Let's open them up this evening to the book of 2 Corinthians. The book of 2 Corinthians. Our text this evening is just one verse. It's chapter 8, verse 9 of the book of 2 Corinthians, but it's packed full of truth and meaning for us to unpack this evening.

If you would, I always encourage our people to have a Bible open in front of you. I know it's just one verse tonight, but I'd love for you to be able to see with your eyes as you hear with your ears from the truth of God's Word tonight.

And if you have come here this evening and you don't have a Bible at all, please take one of those around you home with you as our early Christmas gift to you. It's heavy on our hearts that each one of you would have a copy of God's Word and take that home with you.

2 Corinthians 8, verse 9 says this. 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.

[1 : 22] Father, would you take the next few moments as we open up your Word together and would you just change eternity even for one soul in this room tonight?

And God, we ask that you would move each one of us to awe and wonder as we consider and think on Christ and who he is and what he's done and the glory of Christmas. Father, would you be honored and glorified in all that we do?

We ask in Christ's name. Amen. Well, just a couple weeks ago, I was working at a coffee shop.

Sometimes I like to go and get a good cup of coffee and think and type and write and study.

And I made the mistake of eavesdropping on a couple of women having a conversation. Ordinarily, I promise you I try not to listen in, but this was hard to avoid.

I had taken my headphones out. I was packing up, getting ready to leave, and the conversation was loud enough for everybody in the room to hear what was happening. One lady was complaining to the other lady loudly about a holiday office Christmas party that she had recently been to.

[2 : 35] For one, I think strikes number one and two for her was that the party was dry, and that was an issue for her. But also, for another, they had played a white elephant gift exchange, and as is usually the case with a white elephant gift exchange, there's maybe one, maybe two really, really, really good gifts, and everything else is garbage.

And everybody wants to fight and trade and exchange and use their steels to get one of those one or two gifts, and then everybody else leaves and goes home disappointed. Well, this woman, in her mind at least, had brought something really good and worth holding on to.

She had come there with her treasure, but she was complaining that she had left with somebody else's trash. And as I listened to them talk and listened to her complain, I thought, you know what, this lady has no idea just how Christ-like she is right now.

And she may not realize it, and apart from the complaining, but she was a picture, an image of the message of Christmas and what Christ has come to do. Jesus has come bringing his treasure in exchange for our trash.

And the message that we hear tonight from the book of 2 Corinthians and Paul, it teaches us that at the very heart of this story of Christmas is God's plan to exchange the treasures of heaven, to exchange our sin for Christ's righteousness.

[4 : 02] He gets us, and we get him. It's the most unfair gift exchange in the history of gift exchanges. We get his righteousness, and he gets our sin.

We get his riches, and he gets our poverty. It's a terribly unfair exchange, but this is what Christ came to do. And so let's see it in our passage tonight, and we'll see it in three parts this evening.

We'll see who he is, who Jesus is, what Jesus has come to do, and why it matters for us this Christmas. Who is he?

What has he done, and why does it matter? First, here at Christmas, we need to remember who he is, and it's almost too easy to miss this. As we think about the baby in the manger, this little child born to the Virgin Mary, this helpless and weak infant.

By all appearances, he's just an ordinary child. We set up manger scenes at Christmas. We see him laid there in a manger. We see him surrounded by the animals.

[5 : 07] It's easy to miss the glory of who this child is. Well, Paul here in 2 Corinthians, he gives us three truths about who Jesus is. Three descriptions here in this one verse.

He says, First, this child is the Lord. For you know the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord.

Meaning, he is the one that owns everything. Meaning, he has all authority and all power. He is the king of heaven and earth.

This baby in the manger is God in the flesh. He is Lord. Our problem, whether we realize this or not, is that we want to be Lord.

We wrestle with Christ and want to kick him off of the throne and establish ourselves on the throne of our life. We want to be in charge. We want to call the shots. We want to do what we want to do and nobody can tell us otherwise.

[6 : 07] We want to be Lord of our lives. But Paul tells us here that this child, Jesus, truly is Lord. And as Lord, he is owed all glory and all honor and all praise and all respect and all submission and all obedience.

He is owed everything that you have. There is a reason that when the wise men came to visit Mary and Joseph, they see the child and Matthew says they fall down and they worshipped him.

Why? It is because they knew that this was no ordinary child. This child is the Lord. Not only this.

Paul says, this child is the Christ.

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. You should know Christ is not Jesus' last name.

Christ is a title. It means anointed one.

It means Messiah. And by calling Jesus the Christ, what he is doing is he is showing that Jesus is the one that all of the Old Testament has been leading up to for years and years and years and years.

[7 : 22] The entire Old Testament is leaning forward in anticipation of when will the Christ come. Paul says this child, Jesus, he is the one that was promised in Genesis chapter 3 to Eve, the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent.

This child, Jesus, is the promised son of Abraham who will be a blessing to the nations. This child, Jesus, is the promised son of David who will be king and reign forevermore. This child, Jesus, is the head and the guarantor of a new and perfect, better covenant who will write the law of God on our hearts.

He will be our God and we will be his people. Every promise of God is kept in Christ. And as such, this child, by right, third description, is rich beyond our wildest imagination.

Paul says, he was rich. Now, that's a strange way to describe a newborn baby, isn't it? If a baby is born into a wealthy family, you might say, well, now he's rich or he will be very rich.

Well, Paul says, he was rich before the moment he was born. This child in the manger is rich in eternity before the moment when he comes and takes on human flesh.

[8 : 41] Why? Because this child in the manger is God eternal in the flesh. This child is the eternal Son of God. By right, he is the heir of all the glories of heaven.

And by right, he has enjoyed for all of eternity all the privileges and all the pleasures of knowing God in communion and relationship for all of eternity.

He by right rules over all things. He created all things. All things exist for him. He owns everything. You think of the richest person you know.

It's just but a fraction of the richness of Christ. This is how Paul describes him. The eternal Son of God. But yet, second, look at what he's done.

Paul says, this King of glory, this God, this Messiah, though he was rich, yet, for your sake, he became poor.

[9 : 46] This is at the very heart of the gospel message. If you want to understand the message of the gospel, we need to understand this, that the eternal Son of God, though he was rich, he set

aside his right, he humbled himself, and he became man.

the eternal word of God, the one through whom all things were made, he stepped down into his creation in order to redeem it. He wrapped himself up with human limitations.

I mean, think about it. God eternal, who has no beginning, now has a birthday in Jesus Christ. God omnipresent, who's everywhere, in all places, at all times, is now located in a manger in Bethlehem. God omnipotent, who's all powerful, who's stronger than any imaginal thing, is now wrapped up in human weakness as a child who can cry and feel pain and who eventually will grow and will die. God omniscient, who knows all things, will grow in wisdom and in stature. He'll learn, he'll develop like you and I. He was rich, and yet, he became poor.

[11:01] We've been walking through the book of Philippians together on Sunday mornings. In Philippians chapter 2, it says it like this. Paul says, 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. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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.

Friends, we should marvel at this fact. We should be in awe at this. that God has become a servant. That he who is rich has become poor. This is what we see in the manger. We see God himself wrapped up in the weakness of human flesh. He stepped into the mess of this broken and fallen creation in order to redeem it.

He didn't have to become weak. He became weak because we are weak. He didn't have to become poor. He became poor because we are poor. He did not have to step into our mess, but he came because he loves sinners and he wants to redeem what's broken.

[12:36] We sang one of our, one of my favorite Christmas hymns just a minute ago. I love the line that we sang from Hark the Herald Angels sing, Mild he lays his glory by, Born that man no more may die.

Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth. This is why he's come. When we see this child in the manger and we see the weakness and we see the lowliness and we see the humbleness of it all, we ought to marvel because this is God setting aside his riches and glory to come for our sake.

So third, why does it matter for us? Why does it matter for you? Maybe you've heard this before and this is all familiar information for you.

Maybe you just don't really understand or see what difference it makes for your life. Just look again to 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9 and see what Paul says. He says, he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Would it make a difference for you for your life if I told you you could be rich tomorrow? If I told you that tomorrow morning and you're stocking you got 10 million dollars, would that make a difference for you?

[14:01] How about 100 million? A million, million. The highest number you could possibly imagine. If I told you you could have all the money in the world, would that make a difference for your life?

Friend, Paul says, Christ who owns all who is truly rich came to offer and to give sinners who are poor true riches.

What does it mean to be truly rich, church? Those who know God are truly rich. Those who have had their sins forgiven are truly rich.

Those who no longer carry this burden of sin and shame and guilt on their back, that is what it means to be truly rich. Those who have the joy and peace of knowing the source and the fountain of everlasting life and light, that's what it means to be truly rich.

Those who have been united to God and united to one another and brothers and sisters in a church family, that's what it means to be truly rich. Those who have the guarantee of the Holy Spirit in us and all the fruits that He bears in our life, life, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, that's what it means to be truly rich.

[15:21] I used to be the poorest man on earth. I still don't have much money. But you are looking, nobody in this room is richer than me. By the grace of God, He who was rich for my sake became

poor so that I by His poverty might become rich.

He was born of man that we might be born of God. He stooped low that we might be raised up. He became like us that we might become like Him. He died that we might live.

He became sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. He became poor so that in Him we might become truly rich.

John Calvin says it like this. He says, This is the wondrous exchange made by His boundless goodness. Having become with us the Son of Man, He has made us with Himself sons of God. By His own descent to the earth, He has prepared our ascent to heaven. Having received our mortality, He has bestowed on us His immortality. Having undertaken our weakness, He has made us strong in His strength.

[16:35] Having submitted to our poverty, He has transferred to us His riches. Having taken upon Himself the burden of unrighteousness with which we were oppressed, He has clothed us with His righteousness.

Does this sound like a fair exchange to you? It's not. I'll give you another quote. R.G. Lee, he says it like this. He describes the glory and the mystery of the incarnation as the deep descent of Christ. I love this quote. Listen to this. From the heights of glory to the depths of shame. From the wonders of heaven to the wickedness of earth. From exaltation to humiliation.

From the throne to the tree. From dignity to debasement. From worship to wrath. From the halls of heaven to the nails of earth. From coronation to the curse.

From the glory place to the gory place. In Bethlehem, humility and glory in their extremes were joined, born in a stable, cradled in a cattle trough, wrapped in swaddling clothes of poverty.

[17:41] No room for Him who made all rooms. No place for Him who made and knows all places. Oh, the deep humiliation of the Creator to be born of the creature.

But, in His descent was the dawn of mercy. Because we cannot ascend to Him, He descends to us. this is what we celebrate at Christmas. Christ has come down to us to bring sinners like us who cannot climb our way to God to bring us back up to Him.

Are you rich this Christmas? friends, friend, do not leave here without knowing for certain that Christ has exchanged the glories of His riches for your poverty.

Do not leave here this evening without knowing for certain that tomorrow morning when you wake up on Christmas morning that you are reconciled with the Holy God by faith in Christ.

[18:52] This is totally unfair, but it's a gift of God's grace. Do you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor so that you by His poverty might become rich.

This verse inspired one of my favorite Christmas hymns. We didn't sing it tonight. Our church has sung it before. It's not one of the more popular ones, okay? I realize that. It's called Thou Who Was Rich Beyond All Splendor.

It goes like this. Thou Who Was Rich Beyond All Splendor All for love's sake becameest poor. Thrones for a manger didst surrender.

Sapphire paved courts for stable floor. Thou Who Was Rich Beyond All Splendor All for love's sake becameest poor. Thou Who Art God Beyond All Praising All for love's sake becameest man.

Stooping so low, but sinners raising heavenward by Thine eternal plan. Thou Who Art God Beyond All Praising all for love's sake becameest man.

[20:00] Thou Who Art Love Beyond All Telling Savior and King we worship Thee. Emmanuel within us dwelling. Make us what Thou wouldst have us be.

Thou Who Art Love Beyond All Telling Savior and King we worship Thee. Let's pray. Father, we worship Thee this evening.

And we worship You, Father, for Your glorious plan of salvation. We worship You, Christ, for coming. We worship You, Christ, for setting aside Your glory in heaven and coming down in weakness and in frailty.

Father, You didn't have to do this. Christ, You didn't have to do this. And yet, out of love's sake for sinners like me. You came. We praise You for this, Lord.

We pray that You would be honored. We pray our hearts would be fixed on You this Christmas. We pray You would be exalted. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.