

**GOD'S UTMOST FOR MAN'S HIGHEST**

By Paul S. Rees, D.D.

"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" (II Corinthians 8:9).

Paul, in our text, pointed the Corinthian Christians to the earthly career of Jesus Christ, and said, "There, you have the reason why you should give your utmost for God's highest. It is that God in Christ has given His utmost for your highest. Behold the grace of God in His holy Son! See how rich He was! See how poor he became! Then remember that He stripped himself of His riches, that you might be relieved of your poverty. He became a pauper that you who, without God, are already paupers might be made princes." And the only word, cries the apostle, that says it all is the shining word "grace." Packed into that word, like the flash and gleam of a diamond, is God's utmost for man's highest.

## I.

**The Pattern of Grace that Jesus Portrayed**

"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"

To these early Christians, like Paul, God had done something that was breath-takingly amazing in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He had made a new kind of entrance into the world's history and life. He had come as He had never come before—directly, physically, and with utmost sacrificial intent. He had come to complete a bridge that would span the gulf between His holiness and man's sinfulness—a bridge over which sinful man could walk in newness of life and be at home in the heart of a holy God. And to this whole, matchless, divine undertaking—including a manger that gives us a Christmas, and a Cross that gives us Good Friday, and an empty tomb that gives us Easter, and the tongues of fire that give us Pentecost—the early Church gave the word "grace."

It was this word which the Spirit of God in the primitive Christians seized upon, and gave it a new element. This new quality, they said, might be seen in the undeserved favor of God's love extending forgiveness and fellowship to the children of men. It is holy love dealing with sin, and overcoming it.

Here is beauty in its absolutely highest expression. God's beauty in Christ! That first of all, then the beauty that He creates in those who receive Christ, who are conformed to His likeness, and are constrained to ascribe to God all the honor and the glory.

One very cold night, it is told, Henry Ward Beecher was walking down a Brooklyn street when he came upon a newsboy who was so cold that his teeth were chattering as he tried to shout the headlines of his papers. The great preacher stopped to have a friendly word with him. One paper was certainly enough for his own use, but Mr. Beecher bought all the papers the boy had. Then he said to him, "I'm afraid you are very cold tonight, my boy." The grateful little fellow, his eyes glowing with gratitude, replied, "I was very cold, sir, till you came by, but now I am warm."

Let that heart-kindling incident be a thought-elevator. On a far higher level you and I, and millions like us, can say, as we look into the face of Jesus Christ, "I was very weak, and lonely, and guilty, and full of conflict, till You came along; and now I am strong and forgiven and harmonized."

Such is the pattern of grace which we see in Christ Jesus of Bethlehem and Calvary.

## II.

**The Price of Grace that Jesus Paid**

"Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor."

Jesus Christ "became" something at Bethlehem, but before that certainly before that—He "was" something. He was "rich;" He became "poor."

In what sense was He rich? Certainly He was rich in deity. The full bloom of Godhood has always been His. As the Fourth Gospel puts it, "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Or, as the writer to the Hebrews eloquently expresses it, He stood related to God as "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1:3).

He was rich in property. The Christianity of the New Testament so fully and intimately identifies Christ with God that He, Christ, becomes as truly the creative source of the universe as the Father. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by him and for him" (Colossians 1:16).

He was rich in glory. "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with the before the world was" (John 17:5). Here, of course, our little intellectual yardsticks are too short to measure the radius of Christ's thought. Whatever glory there be in the infinite and uncreated Godhead in that far realm where angels and archangels employ their lips for adoration and their wings for service, exactly that belonged to Jesus Christ the Son of God!

Now this, declares Paul, was the rich Christ who for our sakes became poor. As the apostle expresses it elsewhere, "Though he was in the form of God (He) did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross."

Who can seriously stand before such a fact as this—the impoverishment of Christ for us—without asking what made Him do it? To that question the only accurate answer is: Grace! By which we mean that He did it not because He owed it to us to do it nor because any pressure from "higher up" compelled Him to do it. He did it because He is the kind of God He is: forever seeking to reveal Himself—mind you, Himself; not his power merely but His character, His heart, His purpose—and forever bursting with eager longing to put away the black barrier of sin that stands between His human creatures and Himself.

## III.

**The Purpose of Grace which Jesus Christ Pursued**

In giving us God's utmost for man's highest what was the aim of this manger-cradled Redeemer? The text answers

"Though he was rich . . . he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."

From the standpoint of its end-result in human lives, the wonder of the Calvary Gospel is this that "God has stooped to earth veiling

the Divine with the human, that we may rise to heaven, clothing the human with the Divine." This are Maclaren's words. Christ's impoverishment has become, if we will only trust Him, our enrichment. He has taken our moral bankruptcy that He might invest us with the inexhaustible solvency of His love. He became what we were that He might make us as He is!

God wants us to be rich! Rich, not in gold bricks or green paper or bonds with government seals on them! But rich as the inspired writers of the New Testament understands riches!

"Rich in faith," for example James uses that phrase in his epistle. Perhaps that sounds pious and abstract and impractical. If so, take another look at it. In the New Testament faith is set over against works. Why? Because God doesn't need any work out of us? Not at all. But because He can get the most out of us if He can show us that we must give up our self-reliance, our little strutting about it, our own cleverness, our pitiful bragging about our own accomplishments, and open up our whole being to His promises and His power. Then our life is never a matter of getting to the end of our rope, because we started by getting to the end of that; our life is a matter of getting to the end of His resources, and to them there is no end. That, if we would only realize it, is what makes a man rich—rich in faith.

And then "rich toward God." Jesus uses this phrase in Luke 12:21. Let us call this being rich in fellowship. In English usage we do not always have money in mind when we say "rich." Obviously there is no connection with a bank account when you say that a certain person sings with a "rich" voice. We mean that it is a voice that is singularly free from harshness or any trace of discord. Well, apply that to your relationship to God. Jesus Christ's purpose in your life is to remove from you—even though you may be a Christian—everything that puts sand in the machinery of your fellowship with God. With your dedicated consent, He will take away your sandpaper harshness of spirit, your divided desires, your jealous moods. He will make you, by His sanctifying Spirit, "rich toward God"—rich in harmony and communion.

Rich in faith! Rich in fellowship! And, to name one more item in this inventory of the Christian's wealth, rich in fruitfulness. In the 6th chapter of this second epistle to the Corinthians Paul says that the real Christian goes about in this world "making many rich." Which means, in the language of the Spirit, that when we are rich ourselves in the love and beauty, the peace and joy of Jesus Christ, we have wealth to share.

Are you rich? Am I? We are, if we know the Christ of Calvary. For we both need to remember—you and I—that God's Utmost for Men's Highest calls for a worthy response—Man's Utmost for God's Highest!—Heart and Life.

**ARTLESS ALIBIS**

J. B. Chapman

Last night I preached as well as I could, and then exhorted and pleaded with the people to let God have His way. About twenty responded, and there was much earnest prayer about the altar. In the midst of the prayer meeting, a brother, a stranger to me, approached, commended me for my efforts, and entered freely

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