

THAT YOU MIGHT BE RICH

by Ray C. Stedman

The central passage on giving in the New Testament is the eighth and ninth chapters of Second Corinthians. The subject is dealt with in a wealth of practical detail. And in the midst of the eighth chapter in the very heart of this treatment of giving and as the chief example of what Paul is talking about, he sets before us the pattern gift. In Verse 9 Paul 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 by his poverty you might become rich. {2 Cor 8:9 RSV}

There, telescoped into one marvelous verse, is the whole moving story of redemptive love, indissolubly linked to the subject of giving. "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder," {Matt 19:6, Mark 10:9 KJV}. Paul calls attention first to the beauty of giving. He says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." The word *grace* deserves close attention. Every craft has its medium of expressions. Artists express their abilities and gifts through the medium of paints or sculpture. Mechanics use metals. Doctors employ their abilities through the use of medicine. Preachers are shut up to words as their medium. Every preacher worth his salt must give himself to the study of the meaning and the use of words, and there is no word that so richly repays study as this word *grace*. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This word belongs to a very large family. It has a brother named *Charity* and a sister named *Mercy*, and a whole houseful of cousins, such as *Kindness*, and *Favor*, and *Goodwill*, and *Pity*, *Thanksgiving*, and *Reward*. All of these are translations of the word *grace* as it is used in our Scriptures. But the basic meaning of this little word is beauty, charm, loveliness. We see this in the English word "graceful," by which we mean beauty of line or movement, and from this basic meaning, beauty, the word came early to mean also "acts of beauty." Kindness and mercy, for instance, are the most beautiful acts possible to human beings. Now Paul seizes this word and, writing to his friends at Corinth, he says, "You are familiar with the beauty of Jesus Christ. You know that the compelling beauty that drew you to him is nothing else than his self-giving love."

That is what grace is. There is no beauty like giving. There is no charm more attractive than a generous heart. We all sense this in some degree, for every one of us wants to be known as a generous, openhanded, prodigal person. None of us likes the title "stingy" or "miser" or "scrooge," or any word that implies niggardliness in giving. That is, we all want to be known as generous; we do not always want to be generous! That, by the way, was the first evil to appear in the Christian church.

Remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira, a man and his wife who simply wanted to have the reputation for a generosity which they did not possess, and because of the hypocrisy of seeming to give more than they actually gave, God the Holy Spirit struck each of them dead, for they were attempting to imitate the beauty of generosity.

"Now," Paul says, "contrast that with the Lord Jesus." The quality that endears him most to us, the glory, the beauty of his life and being, is his readiness to give of himself, holding nothing back. "You know the grace, the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul goes on to describe this, and in doing so he sets before us the nature of giving.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, {2 Cor 8:9a RSV}

You can see that uppermost in the apostle's mind is the thought of the incarnation of Jesus: "though he was rich, yet ... he became poor." When he had everything, when he was rich in power, when he had omnipotence at his command and could do all things in the universe, he became poor. He laid it all aside, he became

powerless so that, as he walked here among men, he said of himself, "The Son of himself can do nothing, absolutely nothing, it is the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works," {John 14:10 KJV}. He became poor, he surrendered the independent use of his mind to the Father and the Father's will and he became absolutely nothing!

When he was rich in love and had all the angels of heaven to adore him, "continually bowing down," as Isaiah tells us, "crying out, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts'" {Isa 6:3 KJV} he laid it aside, he became poor and came to be the one of whom Isaiah could write, "He was despised and rejected by men ... we esteemed him not ... he was stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted," {Isa 53:3-4 KJV}. When he was rich in resources, when everything was his ("of him and through him and to him are all things" the apostle writes {Rom 11:36 KJV}), yet he came so that he could say of himself "the Son of Man has no place to lay his head," {Matt 8:20 NIV}. He had no home, they had to borrow a manger in which he could be born; he had to borrow a penny when he wanted to perform a miracle; he depended on others for his clothes; he went about with no certain dwelling place; and when he died they had to borrow a grave in which to lay his body. He had no place, nothing of his own. One of the most poignant verses in all of Scripture is found at the close of one of the chapters in John's Gospel where John records that "all his disciples left him and went to their own homes, but Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives." He had no home to go to; he had no place to lay his head. Is it not strange that we who call ourselves Christians seek to live as kings, but he who was the King of Kings lived like a pauper?

He gave it all up, Paul says. Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he entered into the poverty of human existence and held absolutely nothing back, not even his own life. We are remembering this as we gather about the Lord's table. There on the hill of Calvary, on a rugged, bloody, cruel cross he poured out everything he had. All that was his, all that he could call his own, his own life he poured out for us. John puts it in one pregnant phrase, "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end," {John 13:1 KJV}. He went the entire limit, he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Now that is giving. That is what Paul is talking about. No reserves, no half-measures, no conditions, no holding back, pouring out everything that he had. That is the great pattern of giving.

What Paul is saying here is that we have never truly given until it costs us. I must confess there is something almost shameful about the way Christians continually seek some kind of an angle to get something for ourselves in giving. A pamphlet came across my desk the other day prepared by a Christian organization and sent out to a large Christian mailing list, the whole theme of which was how to make money by giving, how to make it worth your while to give. It seemed to me this struck a sub-Christian note. Is it not significant that we seek to give only if we feel we can deduct it from our income tax? There is nothing wrong with deducting gifts from our income tax, I do not mean that, but what bothers me is the reluctance that Christians sometimes have to give anything beyond that. "If I can't deduct it I won't give." And yet the example of the Lord Jesus is that he gave without any expectation of return whatsoever. He had no thought of anybody giving back to him, but freely poured out all that he had. Do we tend to give only out of our surplus, if we have something left over, to give that? But true giving means some degree of self-impoverishment. That is what Paul is getting at. It is only when we have something less because we have given to another that it can be called true giving. It is to become poor when we have been rich, that is what giving is.

Dr. Roy L. Laurin tells in one of his books about a Christian business man who had gone out to Korea on a visit. As he was traveling about he noticed one day in a field beside the road a rather strange scene. He saw a boy about eighteen or nineteen years of age pulling a plow, and holding the handles of the plow was an older man, evidently the boy's father. This tourist took a snapshot of it and said to his guide, "What a strange thing that is. I suppose they must be very poor people." The guide, who was a Christian, said, "Yes, they are poor. I know the story behind this. A number of months ago, when the church to which these people belong was erecting a new building all the members were asked to contribute something. This father and his boy wanted to give but they felt they had nothing to give, until it dawned upon them that they could give their only ox. So they killed the ox, cut it up, sold the meat in the market and gave all the proceeds of it to the building fund of the church. This spring they have had to pull the plow themselves." The businessman said, "That must have been a most remarkable sacrifice for them." The guide said, "They did not think so. They thought they were rather fortunate to have an ox to give." That man came back to his own pastor in this country, took the picture to him and told him the story, and said, "Pastor, I want to double my giving to this church this year. I have

never given anything that cost me something. I want to do some plow work for the Lord Jesus Christ!"

That is what Paul is saying here. Giving is sacrificial. It is impoverishing us in order that another might have.

Then he moves to the last aspect of the great pattern Lord's giving in which he shows the purpose of giving.

... that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. {2 Cor 8:9b RSV}

In other words, giving finds its meaning only when others are made rich by it. Giving is never directed inward, it is always outward. It is never for our benefit, even indirectly or remotely. Its intention is the enrichment of others. We need to think carefully, at length, about this. Sometimes we give to our family, to our children or our relatives, and feel that we have given. But when we give to our own family, we are only giving to an extension of ourselves. We share the same life; we are really only giving to ourselves. It is perfectly right to do this. The New Testament makes clear that he that does not care for his own household has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel -- but do not call it giving! True giving is directed to others, preferably others who have no claim upon us at all, even those who deserve nothing.

This is what Jesus did. "When we were enemies," Paul says in Romans, "Christ died for us," {cf, Rom 5:8-10}. While we were yet without strength, when we were opposed to God, as his enemies, he gave himself for us.

In the days of the American Revolution there lived in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, a Baptist pastor by the name of Peter Miller. He was a man who enjoyed the friendship of George Washington. In that same city there lived another man named Michael Whitman, who was an ungodly scoundrel, who did everything in his power to obstruct and oppose the work of the pastor. On one occasion, Michael Whitman was involved in an act of treason against the government of the United States. He was arrested and taken to Philadelphia, some seventy miles away, to appear before General Washington. When the news reached Peter Miller that this man, his enemy, was appearing on trial for his life before General Washington, Peter Miller walked the long seventy miles to Philadelphia to appeal for the life of this man. He was admitted to the presence of Washington because of his friendship, and when he came in he began without delay to speak for the life of Michael Whitman. Washington listened to him and heard his story through, and then said, "No, Peter, I cannot give you the life of your friend," Peter Miller said, "My friend! My friend! This man is not my friend; he is the bitterest enemy that I have!" Washington said, "What! You mean to say that you have walked seventy miles through the dust and the heat of the road to appeal for the life of your enemy? Well, that puts the matter in a different light. I'll give you, then, the life of your enemy." And Peter Miller put his arm around the shoulders of Michael Whitman and led him out of the very shadow of death, back to his own home, no longer his enemy, but a friend.

That is what the Lord Jesus has done for us. When we were enemies, when we were yet without strength, when we were helpless, when we were opposed to God, fighting him every way that we could, rebelling against his precepts, living our own self-centered lives without any regard for his rights, using his goods and his resources and all that he makes available for our own self-centered purposes -- while we were enemies, Christ died for us! That is giving!

He did it in order that we might be rich. As we gather here as believing Christians about the table of the Lord, is there anything that more eloquently expresses the richness of Christ than the fellowship that we now enjoy? How rich we are as we gather here, rich in love! Every one of us who knows the love of God knows what a treasure this is. How dull, how barren, how cheerless and dreary our lives were before we knew the warmth and the glory of the love of God. What a difference it has made in our hearts! How rich we are in truth! Here we have his Word opened to us again and again. We have gained insights into reality that we never had before. We have seen things at last in their right perspective. Life has been brought into focus. We have discovered what is important and what is unimportant, what is trivial and what is of tremendous importance. We have had our own character, our own nature unfolded to us. We have discovered some of the reasons why we act as we do and the way to correct these faults.

How rich we are in power! How we have been able to put our foot upon things that have mocked us and baffled us for years, but in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we have been able to rise above these things! True, we have battles yet ahead of us. Perhaps we are struggling with some right now, but as we look back we can say, how far we have come and how much we have overcome by the grace of the Lord Jesus. How rich we are in daily mercies! Who of us is starving, or without proper clothing? How much we have, how rich we have been made by the gift of the Lord Jesus!

Do you know why we have been made rich?

Do you notice where this puts us?

We have now been made rich by his poverty, which means that we are now right where Jesus began. When he was rich he became poor that he might make us rich, and now we are rich.

Why?

In order that we, too, might become poor to make others rich!

This is the way the life of Jesus Christ is made visible in this day and age. It is as Christians reduplicate the self-giving ministry of Jesus Christ, pouring ourselves out on behalf of others, that others see the glorious miracle of self-giving love that transforms and changes life.

He has made us rich in order that, out of our riches in Christ, we may begin to pour out to others that which has been given to us.

"Freely ye have received, freely give," {Matt 10:8b RSV}.

Title: That you Might be Rich
Series: The Christian and his Possessions
Scripture: 2 Cor 8:9
Message No: 2
Catalog No: 69
Date: June 7, 1964

[PBC Homepage](#) | [Discovery Publishing](#) | [Ray Stedman Library](#) | [Series Index Page](#)

[Copyright \(C\) 1995 Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.