



Christ Our Hope

December 10, 2023

2 Corinthians 8:9

Clint Pressley

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.

(Pastor prays)

I wear a suit every Sunday. I do that because it's like a uniform for me. I don't have a very good fashion sense. You don't have to have a very good fashion sense to wear a suit. It's all put together for you. It's gray, or it's blue, or some variation of the two. You go inside your closet and you find a white shirt or a blue shirt. I only have two kinds of shirts that I wear on Sundays. I don't know why, maybe I'm just boring. So you don't have to think much about a suit. You just put it together and find a tie that doesn't scare the children and you're ready for the day. I'll wear those suits a couple of times before they go to the dry cleaner. So that means that, from time to time, I'll put my hand in the pocket and find something I left from the previous Sunday. Oftentimes it is a note someone gave me or a lot of times it's a drawing a child has drawn of me or something that's a reasonable facsimile of me. They will give that to me from time to time. But there are some shining instances when I reach into my pocket and find a \$20 bill. In the distance, I can hear the "Hallelujah" chorus and I celebrate the treasure that I have discovered.

This verse is like reaching our hand into the Bible and finding a treasure we didn't know was there. This little verse is tucked away in the middle of what Paul is teaching the church at Corinth. He's teaching them about Christian giving. And in this little pragmatic section on giving, there is this profound doctrinal jackpot. It's just 21 Greek words found in the middle of Paul teaching this church how they ought to be giving. He's discussing taking up an offering for the brothers and sisters of a Christian church in Jerusalem who are suffering. They're poor and they're having a hard time. And so Paul is going to other churches, and he's convincing the churches to give to the people in Jerusalem. He wants to convince the Church of Corinth to give. In verses one through eight, he says that they should know that the Church of Macedonia—even though it's a blue-collar church and they don't have much money—they are poor too, but they gave a whole lot. Now, you don't want the Church of Macedonia to do more than you.

That is what it says in verses one through eight, but then he thinks maybe that argument is not strong enough, and that brings us to verse nine. And in verse nine, Paul lifts up the Lord Jesus; he ups the ante. He holds up for us Jesus Christ as the greatest example of love and sacrifice that the world has ever known. And today, here's what I want to do. I want to just spend some time in this verse. I want to squeeze this verse right here for all the nutrients we can get as we set our minds and our hearts on the coming of the Lord Jesus and all that brings. It is Christmas. I want you to take heart. Take heart...

There Is Hope For Us Because of Christmas

In fact, that's the word I'm going to use, the word *take*. I want you to *take*. I want you to get several things. Here's the first thing. I want you to...

Take Hold of What We Already Know

Do you see the phrase right there in verse nine? *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*. You know it. Most of us sitting here this morning, we don't need some new doctrine. You don't need a new teaching. You don't

need to have something that's going to be theologically sort of explosive for you that you've never thought of before. You don't need me to say something profound and life-changing. That's not why you were here today. The truth of the matter is, you don't need a new revelation; you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. A lot of you sitting right here, you need to get your head up and take hold of what you already know. Are you depressed or defeated? Are you sad, discouraged, burdened? Have you been hurt? Are you guilty? It just comes in waves, the guilt and shame. Today, I want you to take hold of what you already know, for you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. See the word *grace*. I would underline that word, *grace*. You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is *grace*? *Grace* can be defined in lots of different ways. For our purposes, it's best to think of *grace* as unearned love, undeserved love, unearned affection from Jesus. Or you might think of it like this, it is the undeserved way that Jesus thinks of you and acts for you. You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. When you think of the word *grace*, you might divide it up in several ways. There are three ways to understand grace. One is the word *common grace*. The other is the word *sustaining grace*. Then, finally, there is *saving grace*.

Let's talk about *common grace*—it's for everyone. The Bible says that it rains on the just and the unjust. It rains on mean people. It rains on nice people. That's common grace. When the sun comes out, the sun shines on people who are Christians and people who are not Christians. That is common grace. It is for everyone, whether you believe in God or not. Common grace is a great thing. This morning, I had a piping hot cup of coffee; that was common grace. Hot coffee—common grace. Bottled water—common grace. Today you drove to church and the air stayed in your tires. It was common grace that somebody was smart enough to make a tire to fit on a rim that didn't deflate and it got you here. But it didn't happen because you were nice. It's just common grace. That's the way the world works. Sitting in a building with air conditioning is common grace. If you get sick or you hurt yourself, you can go to a doctor and God has made it so the doctors have been educated, whether they are Christians or not, to treat you; that is common grace. The fact that you can fall in love—common grace. Mean people fall in love. People who

aren't Christians are able to fall in love. An umbrella is common grace. You don't get an umbrella just because you're a Christian. You can be hateful and have an umbrella. Electricity—common grace. A good steak on your plate is common grace. Chocolate is common grace. Plastic is common grace. The American-made V8 is common grace. I enjoy the change of the seasons from summer into fall, fall into winter, and winter into spring; we all enjoy that. It's common grace to stand on the beach and look out at the vast ocean and think about how beautiful it is. You don't have to even recognize that there is a Creator. You can see that it is beautiful—that's common grace. Go to the mountains, look out across the mountain range, and you can see that and recognize that it's beautiful, even if you don't say God did that. That is common grace. You've got a good family pet that you really love, that's common grace. It's a gift from God. Or if it's a cat, it's from somewhere else. Just kidding, cat people. Just kidding. Cats are wonderful, common grace. You've got indoor plumbing—common grace. That's just a gift from God. Penicillin that cures—common grace. 10,000 other things that you can list that God has given His broken creation in His kindness, He has given to us in this fallen world and it's good. Paul says that you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not just common grace, though. Let's bring it down a little narrower. That would be *sustaining grace*. Some of you know sustaining grace. You can stand right here at the end of this year and look back over 2023, 2022, and 2021—the last three years—and I want you to think with me right now about what God has carried you through. That's sustaining grace. He has sustained you when you didn't think you were gonna make it, and yet here you are. That wasn't because of your strength. That's grace, for you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Think about the sickness that you've been through. Think about some of the hurt, maybe you have walked through a divorce. Divorce is one of the most difficult things to walk through, it feels like you're dying, and yet God has walked you through that. Think about the tragedy; a lot of you have walked through some sort of tragedy. Here you are in 2023, and it's one of those things, and you wonder how in the world were you going to make it through that, and yet it is the sustaining grace. And Paul says, look, you need

to remember because you already know this. You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Somebody has done you absolutely wrong—you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you've made mistakes this year, terrible mistakes. Be careful how you talk about mistakes. To make a mistake is morally neutral; so you make a mistake. It's morally neutral. You chose the wrong thing. It was a neutral act. Let's not describe sin like that. Sin is not a mistake. Sin is a willful act of real rebellion against what you know to be right. That's not a mistake. That is a sin. Don't you look at that sin now and see God, in His grace? You don't walk around with the guilt of that because you don't have to, you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're homesick or lovesick or have been mistreated at work, you have been handed a cancer diagnosis and you wonder how you are going to walk through that at this age. Paul says, you know the grace. Something that you should claim is the promise of Scripture. The promise that God has made to his people in Isaiah 43:2. What did the Lord say? *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* You ought to take that verse right there and pray that verse right there: *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* I'm praying that right now. You need to take hold of what you know.

That's common grace and sustaining grace but there's something else here that we know as a Christian. There's the Christian gospel here that is the *saving grace* of God. *For you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.* You know that grace, all of you here that are Christians. You have put your hope and trust in the righteousness found in Christ. That is the gospel, and it is saving grace. It is the saving grace of God found in Jesus. That is the gospel. If you are a visitor here or you haven't been to church in quite some time, and you walk into this building and you think that you are not worthy of being here, you are right. That is the right attitude. If you were worthy, grace would not be necessary. You would have done that on your own merits. The understanding of grace is that we are not worthy. That's the whole point.

That's why we feel guilty for sin. We understand we don't deserve to be in the presence of God. And Paul says that you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace is the gospel. Grace tells us that God created us in His image. Adam and Eve, He put them in a perfect place, in the Garden, but they fell into sin. That's the story of Genesis. By Genesis chapter three, the curse of sin had taken hold of Creation. It has made it so that men and women are not in fellowship with God. They are not in fellowship with one another. In Genesis four, the first murder happened—brother killing brother. And it goes downhill after that. And we inherited that sinful nature. That sin is not just mistakes we make. That sin is not just bad, it is rebellion against God. God who is a just judge, He must punish sin. He says that the wages of sin is death. But He is not just a just God, He's also loving and good and kind. He gives us Jesus. This is the gospel. This is Christmas. Jesus, although rich, He becomes poor. Jesus comes to Earth and lives as a man. He is fully human and fully divine. He earns the righteousness that we can't. He's in perfect fellowship with God. He keeps every command and then goes to the cross, and here's the gospel: God punishes his Son instead of us. He takes our place on the cross, so the wrath of God has been poured out there, and the way that is appropriated for us is you trust that Jesus did that for us. And if you trust that, what happens is that you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I'm asking you this morning, to take hold of what you already know. Let me give you something else to consider. Here's the second point, number two:

Take Seriously Who You Know

So take hold of what you know; you know the grace. Take seriously who you know. You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you see that in verse nine? It is an unusual thing for Paul to do in the middle of a letter. A lot of times at the end of the letter, in the doxology, he might say, "the Lord Jesus Christ," but right here, it's in the middle of the letter. It's like he's given us a creed. He gives the full name of the Incarnate God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is asking us to take this seriously. Slow down to see all who Jesus is.

Let's break that phrase down, "the Lord Jesus Christ." He is the Lord. So Paul writes in Philippians 2:9— *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.* And the passage goes on to say, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. What comes with His lordship? How do we understand lordship? When I say, "Jesus is Lord," what do I mean by that? Let me give you just a couple of words to sort of fill in what Lordship is. Here's the first one, it's a big one. It's the word *sovereignty*. That means that He is Lord over your life, that He is master over your life. He is master over your life and your actions and your dreams and your future and your situation. You might say it like this: Christ is in control. Here is another word to understand the Lordship of Jesus; that is the word *prerogative*. Most of us here as Americans understand individual rights. We want to have the prerogative to make our own decisions. When it comes to having Jesus as Lord, we give up prerogative. Jesus has prerogative. The way the Bible teaches it in Romans chapter nine is that it's the understanding of God being the Potter and we are the clay. God, as the Potter, takes the clay and He shapes the clay into whatever He wants that clay to be. So what Romans nine says is, *Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?* Jesus has prerogative. Now what does He do in your life that you've been resisting and fighting and are bitter about? What has been painful in the hard providence that He's been shaping and using to sand you down and make you into what He wants you to be? He has prerogative. He is Lord. Will you know the grace of the Lord?

But it's not just the Lord, it's the Lord Jesus. The Lord is divine. Jesus is human. The Lord Jesus understands. When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and he found out Mary was pregnant, the Angel of the Lord came to him and said to Joseph that Mary will give birth to a son. You will call his name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins. There's the humanity of Jesus. There's the mortality of Jesus. That Jesus was born like every other baby that's ever been born. That Jesus would live and breathe air and eat food and be hungry and tired. That Jesus would die, be susceptible to

being pierced and killed, and wounded. That Jesus, when He was alive, would be tempted and He would resist that temptation on our behalf. That Jesus was able to live and look at the 10 Commandments and lay them out and fulfill every one of the 10 Commandments, every law of God. Jesus, as a man, lived like Adam was supposed to, in perfect fellowship with God. When you come in here, you realize you're not worthy and you are not righteous; you're a sinner. Quit looking at your righteousness and look to Jesus. This text says you know the grace of the Lord Jesus. Take seriously His righteousness. The Bible says your righteousness is filthy rags. Your righteousness, on the best day that you've ever had, is filthy rags. Look to Jesus. Jesus takes your condemnation. Jesus takes your guilt as a man. He takes the place of humanity. It's important to understand He is not just the Lord, He's divine. He is Jesus. You know the grace of the Lord Jesus.

The title is Christ. Peter would say, "You are the Christ, you are the Anointed One. From time immemorial, you are the fulfillment." When you read your Bible, you see all of the symbols, all of the foreshadowing, all of the types, all of that is found in the Old Testament and they are pointing to Christ. All of the prophecies, we read them in Isaiah 53. We see all of that is pointing to Christ. All of those predictions are pointing to Christ. All of the leaders in the Old Testament, Joshua, and even some of the judges there. Then you get to Samuel and, finally, Saul, who would be king. We have pictures of a king like David. They are there, He is the King. He is Lord divine. He is Jesus the man. He is Christ the King. And there you can put all of your joy, all of your hope, all of your future, all of your forgiveness, all of that is found in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, take hold of that. You already know you know the grace. Take to heart, take seriously, who you know. I'll give you the third one.

Take To Heart the Meaning of Christmas

That's the rest of the verse. Join me there in verse nine: *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.* Here is the incarnation. This is what we're gonna sing about tonight. Though He was rich,

for your sake, He became poor. Let's just break the phrases down. Let's start with the rich, then we'll go to the poor. He was rich. There was no one richer than Jesus. Jesus would say, "Before Abraham was, I am." He, in His pre-incarnate state, before He was born as a baby before He became man, He was rich. The Bible tells us that Jesus has been living from eternity. He was there with the Father before the incarnation. He was endlessly happy in uninterrupted fellowship with God the Father in the presence of billions of angels, and the angels worshipped Him. He was rich. He was living in unapproachable glory and light; He was rich. He lived in perfect love. He lived in perfect peace. He lived in perfect holiness. He lived in perfect joy. He lived in perfect sustenance. He did not depend on anything outside of Himself for His own existence. There has never been a time when Jesus did not exist. Paul in Philippians two says that He was found in the form of God. He was rich but He became poor. Philippians 2:6-7 says, *who, though he was in the form of God, 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.* This is what Christmas is. He was born of a peasant girl into a world where He was under the law. There had to be sacrifices made for Him after He was born. Romans eight says that He was born into the likeness of sinful flesh. Hebrews two tells us that although in His pre-existent form, He was worshipped by billions of angels, for a little while He was made lower than the angels. He was rich, but He was made poor. He left Heaven's glory and was tempted in every way. People would say they'll follow Him anywhere. Jesus would have to say that the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Although He was rich, verse nine says He became poor. He was rejected. He was ridiculed, He was persecuted, betrayed and spat upon. He suffered and was beaten. He was crucified and dead. Although He was rich, He became poor.

Now go back with me to the verse. I left out the middle because I wanted to bring it in at the end. Although He was rich, see that phrase in the middle, yet for your sake, He became poor. It's intensely personal. From the highest Heaven, Jesus descended to Earth. And not only descended to Earth, He goes to the cross and to the grave for your sake. But why? Why does this happen?

Why is it necessary? You'll find it in the verse. Look at the end of the verse again. Do you see it? Look at that little phrase—*so that you by his poverty might become rich*. That is what is known as a purpose clause. It is telling you why all of that happened. By His poverty, by coming to Earth, and going to the cross, you might become rich. Not like a prosperity preacher would tell you. The things on Earth will rust and moths will eat. But in Heaven, we are rich. We have what Christ had before He became poor. Rich means you have all the blessings of God. Rich means you aren't a slave to sin. You've been adopted by the blood of Jesus. You are a child of God, a son, or a daughter of God. Rich means you've been restored. You've been healed. You've been forgiven. Rich means it's going to carry you through. You have relief. Joy will return. Which means there is hope and true life and inheritance. In Revelation chapter three, when Jesus is rebuking the churches because they think they are doing well, Jesus says, "You don't know, you are wretched and pitiable and poor and blind and naked." And here Paul is telling us the greatest news possible. You know what that news is in verse nine. You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor so that by His poverty you might become rich. Brothers and sisters, there is hope for us because of Christmas. I want you to take hold. You already know these things. Take hold of what you already know. Take seriously who you know. You know the Lord. He's God. Jesus lived and died for you. Christ, He is king. And then, take to heart of the meaning of Christmas. That although He was rich, for your sake He became poor so that by His poverty you might become rich.

(Pastor prays)