

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 459, 01-02-2021 †† Epiphany

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

2 CORINTHIANS 8

9For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that through His poverty you might become rich.



Famous gifts! What kind of is gold to a baby? Did Jesus like it? Did He like His myrrh? What do today’s rich and famous want and want to give for Christmas?

Some joker signed me up for Katie Couric’s morning emails. Who did that? Anyway, it was funny. I’m reading them, in case you thought I needed a different way to get my news. One thing I discovered was her writeup on what different celebrities wanted to give and receive for Christmas. Here are some things on the list: New bookends. New pillows. Pajamas. Chocolate. Ballroom lessons. A massage. Sheryl Crowe was sending Willie Nelson’s CBD products.

Some celebs wanted to give to their favorite charities, which is cool.

Kristin Chenoweth made me look twice. At first I thought it was brownies from Salvation something. On second look, she said, “I’m gifting my favorite Keto brownies from Salvation Snackfoods.” Salvation/ salivation ... same difference. Not at church.

Padma Lakshmi had the most thoughtful idea, “I don’t really want any gifts this year. I just want people to talk to each other more, for the world to be less polarized. You can’t really gift someone these things, but that’s what I really want this year, for all of us. Some common ground.”

Gabrielle Union was also impressive, “I’m looking for something that can’t be found under a tree. I’m looking for the gift of peace. Whether that’s gifting therapy sessions, yoga classes, babysitting, or a sound bath, I know there’s nothing the soul needs more than peace.”

Today we have the answer to what we want to give and receive. We might be inspired by the Magi. However, today’s answer comes from heaven.

HUNGER FOR THE RICHES OF CHRIST

1. Who is hungry

In this chapter, Paul urges the Corinthians to collect offerings for the aid of the poor Christians at Jerusalem. In this text, Paul's point is to persuade those gifts. You could take it as a stewardship lesson. But there is also a larger focus in view.

There are two kinds of poor: those who are poor in earthly goods, and those who are poor in spirit. He isn't really talking about people who are poor in money and want to get rich. Here the hungry ones are the poor in spirit. They are often poor in earthly things, too, so there is some overlap. In Psalm 40:17, David said he was poor and needy when God's Law was on his heart, but he had piles of gold.

So these poor are sinners who are poor in good works—poor in that which is pleasing to God. Now it is true that Paul says, "*There is no difference [among sinners], for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" So all men are spiritually poor—so poor that there is no good thing in them in the sight of God.

That arrogant Herod in his palace at Jerusalem was poor, broke, and destitute in God's sight, but he did not realize it. He thought he was rich in spirit. That was his whole goal in having Bible scholars on hand, to show Jerusalem and God how religiously rich he was. The world is full of such spiritually proud men and women, who imagine themselves rich in virtue and in good works. But the distant wise men who appeared in Jerusalem were of a different mind. They knew that they were poor, and they acknowledged it by wondering at and worshiping the little King. They are a sample of the poor that Paul means.

Who does not belong to the poor in spirit? First, those who trust in themselves that they are righteous. Second, those who walk in sin, but they do not repent of it and have no intention of forsaking it. In our days, this class of sinners is just too numerous even among churchy folks. They are those who secretly –or more or less openly—live in sin. And when they come to communion and are asked whether they are sorry for their sins and are resolved to amend their sinful lives, they affirm it. But what they say and what they promise is only talk. There is no resolve in the heart. The mouth has run off and left the heart behind. These are sinners who say they are poor and hungry, but they are not.

If you have walked in any sin, then look and see whether it is truly your heart's desire to get rid of that sin ... and get rid of it so bad you never walk in it again. Then only do you belong to those who are *in deed* and *in truth* spiritually poor.

To increase this spiritual poverty, consider what Paul implies by the words, "*That through His poverty you might become rich.*" The words do not only say we are poor, but they also imply there is no ability in us to make ourselves rich. If you don't have a nickel to your name, but strong arms and determination to make a living, you aren't so poor yet. But if you have nothing but a debt hanging over your head, sick or crippled and can't earn a nickel, then you're poor indeed.

If you think you can do something to earn righteousness before God, you are not altogether poor in your own mind. But if you find yourself obliged to join in the Creed, saying, "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, or come to Him," then you have the right kind of "poor."

This is the point where we must arrive. We must realize there is no strength in us to make the least beginning to earn God's favor, but, as far as we are concerned, we must remain poor. We acknowledge our inability to provide for our own souls. For Jesus Christ did not come to enrich the rich. His delight is making rich the poor.

2. How they are filled

How does He make the poor rich? "*Through His poverty.*" The preincarnate Christ was rich, with authority above the highest heavens. He rules a throne room. He is the Lord who says in Psalm 50:12, "*If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is mine, and all that is in it.*" Rich in attributes, like omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. But He became poor for our sakes. He was born poor and became even poorer. When traveling around, He lived on the benevolent gifts of Galileans, and He said, "*The Son of Man has no place to lay His head.*" Then in His death, He was even poorer, for He was deprived of His own clothes. St. Bernard said, "Jesus Christ was poor in His birth, poorer in His life, the poorest in His death."

And not only did He become poor bodily. There is a poverty that is far worse. When Job lost his property, he still blessed the name of the Lord. But when he

thought God had turned against him, he whined and wished his mother's womb had been his grave.

Did you ever read that Jesus Christ complained about His bodily poverty? You never did. But when the darkness enveloped Him on the cross, He was heard to cry out, "*My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?*" How poor is that? Forsaken of His Father, deprived of all light and comfort, He was poorest of the poor.

Why all the poverty? "*So that through His poverty you might become rich.*" He became poor to earn riches for us. What riches? Forgiveness of sins, the grace of the Father, freedom from the curse, hope in death, mansions in heaven. These are our riches in Christ and jewels of which to be proud. Proud? Yes, proud on purpose. We ought to be proud of the riches of the soul in Christ like a freezing, starving beggar is proud of alms. We prize it that much. Is your soul hungry? Here is your opportunity. Here are riches for your soul, all you need.

You say, "I know that I need them. How do I get them?" Just listen. Jesus Christ commanded someone: Go, preach the good news! Proclaim my salvation to all! These riches are preached to you. When you listen, you must hold fast to what you hear. When you hear, you must hold fast with your heart.

Hold fast to what? Hold fast to the Word you hear and what that Word says. The whole Word sounds like a long lesson, but it can be very short, "To you who repent and believe in Jesus, I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Hold fast to that Word in your heart, and you have what it expresses, the forgiveness of sins, and having the forgiveness of sins, you are rich. For it is true once-and-for-all what the catechism says, "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

You maybe sigh, "That is just the trouble with me; it's so hard to believe that sin is forgiven. My heart is like a leaky vessel. The Word slips away from it so easily. If only I had a stronger vessel for the treasure." Is that your wish, the craving of your soul? I'm glad to hear that, because it shows that you know your poverty and you do hunger for the riches of Christ. You have the same ailing that the apostle Paul has, for he writes: "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us*" (2 Cor. 4:7). For this very reason, because the vessel of our faith is often so weak, the good Lord instituted His Supper, that in eating and drinking His body and blood, our hearts

might be reassured, and the hand of our faith might be strengthened. “*Blessed are those who are poor in spirit,*” in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**