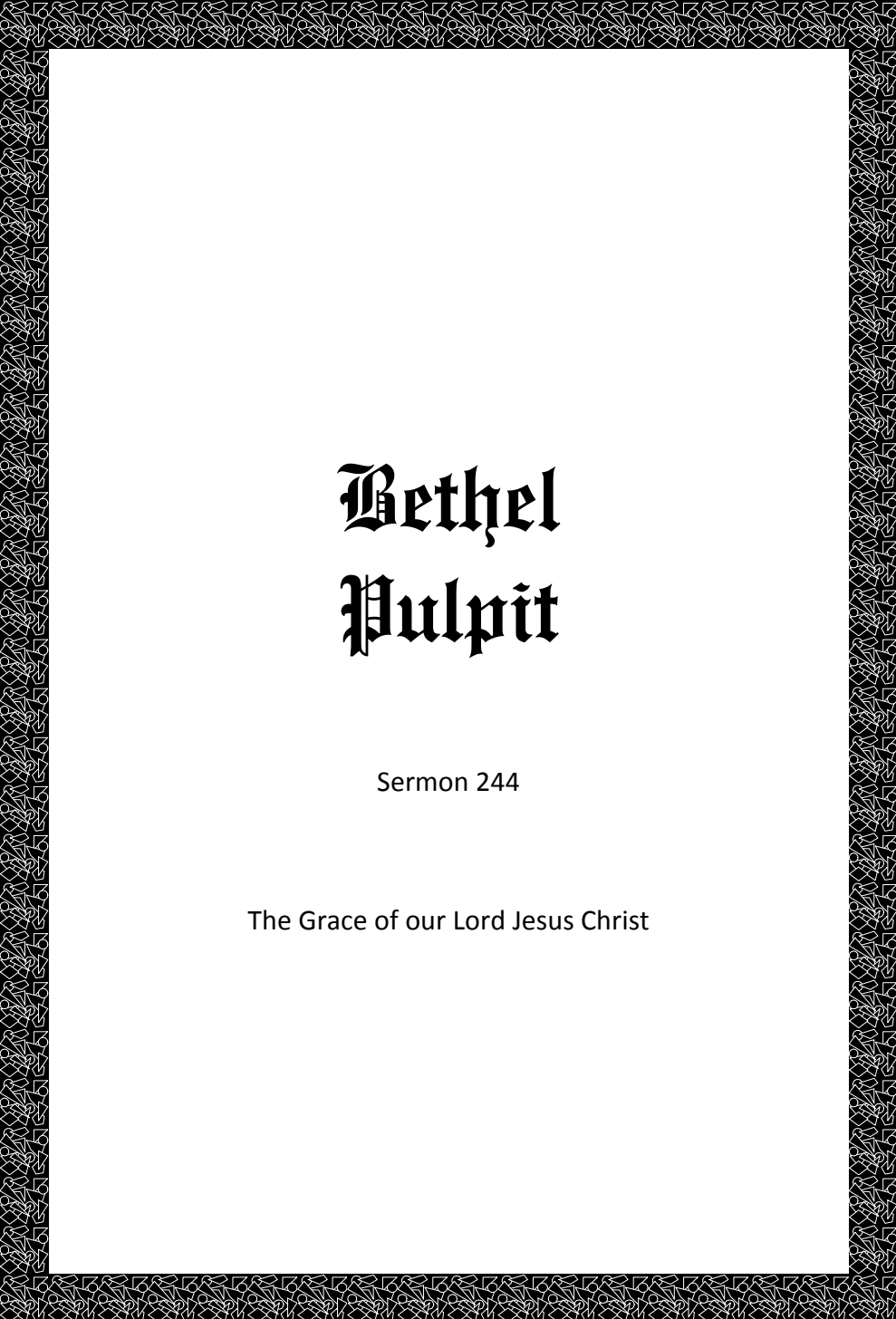




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 244

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 1st September, 2005**

Text: “*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*” (2 Corinthians 8. 9).

This is one of the best-known and best-loved verses in the Word of God. I do not think anyone will contradict that. There is everything in it: Christ in it, salvation in it, heaven in it. It is texts like these that are the glory of the gospel, words like this that meet a guilty sinner’s need. It is truths like this, texts like this, used by the Spirit of God, that establish the people of God in their faith; texts like this that feed their souls – here is the Bread of life; truths like this that endear Christ to them, make Christ precious to them. Beloved friends, may Christ be made precious in this beautiful and glorious text this evening.

“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.” Now just one word before we actually come to this verse. It is in a strange place in Scripture. You sometimes find these gems of divine truth in strange places. This is a completely practical chapter. Really, the subject of this chapter is *Christian giving*. Well, you find in quite a lot of places in Scripture there is a practical subject, and right in the middle of it some beautiful word comes in. Let me just give you another example in passing: Paul speaking about how wives should behave, how husbands should behave, and then suddenly, “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” And so here, speaking of all these practical things, practical godliness, Christian giving, and then this beautiful word.

But in passing, let us never forget that in the context it is given as Christ’s glorious example, that He gave everything, that He gave Himself. And above all this, sweetly constrained by the love of Christ, how God’s people should act, how they should behave. Well, may the blessed Spirit of God lead us into the glories of this text.

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” To me this is a very beautiful expression: “Our Lord Jesus Christ.” It comes so often in the New Testament. Mind you, that is a lovely expression, “The Lord Jesus Christ.” But this goes one step better: “*Our* Lord Jesus Christ.” I trust many of you can come in there. “Our Lord Jesus Christ,” our only hope. “Our Lord Jesus Christ,” His precious blood our only plea. “Our Lord Jesus Christ,” our only Foundation. “Our Lord Jesus Christ,” the one thing needful. May it be well-engraved on our heart. “Our Lord Jesus Christ,” the One we seek, the One that some of you have found. It is very beautiful. You see this glorious Person, but living faith says, “He is ours.” Living faith says, “He is mine.” “Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

But then this also is a very beautiful expression: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” I should think it is perhaps the most oft-repeated word from this pulpit. Why do I say that? Because it begins the benediction at the end of all our services: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Some of you, I know, love the benediction. It is very easy, though, to take it for granted. It is very easy to speak it formally. It is very easy to hear it formally. But sometimes I find it very attractive at the end of the Lord’s day. So many faults, so many failures, so much deadness, so much sin – we wish it were different. But before we go home there is something in love and mercy we are reminded of: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” What a theme! It is that pardoning grace, grace to cover all your sin, grace to make your heart soft, grace to supply all your need, grace to be with you as you leave the sanctuary and go home to meet your various concerns.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” displayed sovereignly in the covenant of grace when He willingly became His people’s Substitute, Surety, everlasting All, as He received the gift of the church from the hands of His Father, knowing that it would cost Him His life.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” One thing I have noticed over the years. When the New Testament speaks of *grace*, it does not just say that it *is*, or it *exists*. It uses expressions like this: it *reigns*. “As sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign.” It is reigning grace. It *abounds*. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” It is abundant grace. I wonder what grace means to some of you here this evening. Do you find it attractive? The free grace of God. It is that wonderful favour that He shows in saving sinners, that wonderful favour in

receiving them, that wonderful favour in forgiving them – completely undeserved, completely unmerited, free, sovereign grace. Paul here says, Ye know it. I hope we do. It is a sad thing if we do not know anything of grace. But surely concerning this congregation this evening, surely we can say of many of you, “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” I think you all know what it is. I hope that all of you know an attraction in it, see a preciousness in it, and I trust that many of you know and feel it and experience it in your hearts. Never forget,

“His grace shall to the end,
Stronger and brighter shine;
Nor present things, nor things to come,
Shall quench the spark divine.”

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now beloved friends, I suppose in the New Testament “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” is revealed in so many different ways, and all of them very attractive. But the Holy Spirit chooses out this one which is above everything else – in His love and in His matchless condescension: “That, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” So I am sure you all realised why I read Philippians 2. Perhaps it is the best commentary in all Scripture on this verse I have read to you. “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” Could I just probe you young ones for a moment or two? Are there any passages in Scripture that you love? Thinking of Philippians 2, when I was a teenager and I was first concerned, there were some chapters in the Bible and I used to love just to get my Bible and read them, various chapters in the Bible, and this was one. I often used to read Philippians 2 in my Bible and read these beautiful words. I wonder if some of you have a chapter like that. You dare not say it belongs to you. You dare not claim an interest in it, but you see such a beauty, such an attraction.

Well, there is not any better commentary than this. “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” “Being in the form of God” – this is *our Lord Jesus Christ*. From all eternity He was in the form of God. He “thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” That is a strange expression, but you know what it means. If you are a robber, you take something that does not belong to you. Well, when the Lord Jesus claimed that He was Almighty God, He was not a robber; He was not taking something that did not belong to Him, because He *is* true Almighty God.

He “thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation.” You have this wonderful stoop, this downward stoop step by step. “He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” And then His glorious exaltation. But what a commentary on this: “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor”!

“Though He was rich.” Now it is difficult for human beings to speak of the riches that the Lord Jesus Christ possessed from all eternity. Really it is the subject I was trying to speak to you about on Lord’s day morning, the glories of Proverbs 8 when from all eternity He was in the bosom of His Father, “rejoicing always before Him,” and He “was daily His delight.” He was rich in the ineffable love of His Father towards Him. And that is something you and I cannot completely understand, what that was to the Father, what that was to the Son, as He “was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him,” His only-begotten Son, the Son of His love, the Object of His Father’s affections. That is what it means here. “Though He was rich,” and rich in His own personal glory as the Son of God from all eternity, and then at creation rich in the adoration of angels. We cannot really contemplate that glorious, blessed, eternal state which belonged to the eternal Son of God from everlasting. Human words fail, but the Word expresses it like this: “He was rich.” And faith has a little glimpse of it, and faith believes it. “He was rich.”

But what about this: “He became poor.” I think it was the godly Puritans who felt that the greatest act of condescension was the incarnation rather than the death of Jesus. They felt that this was so often passed over, what it was for the eternal Son of God to leave those riches of glory that He might be born in a stable – this is poverty – and laid in a manger. It is a good verse:

“Rich in glory, Thou didst stoop;
Thou that art the people’s hope;
Thou wast poor, that they might be
Rich in glory, Lord, with Thee.”

“Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” In history there have been mighty rulers who have been turned off their

thrones and they have perhaps had to live in poverty or in obscurity. Only just to mention one or two: we think of Cromwell's son, Richard Cromwell, who was Lord Protector of England, almost the ruling monarch following his father's death, but then for perhaps forty years afterwards he lived in obscurity and poverty. We think of Napoleon III, the last of the French emperors, and he had to flee into exile in England and live as an ordinary man. But this was nothing compared with the glories of heaven and the poverty of earth. He became "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And you see His willingness in it. These great men and emperors who had to go into exile or live in poverty, they did it reluctantly, but the Lord Jesus Christ did it willingly. "How willing was Jesus to die!" And what about that verse:

"He left His radiant throne on high!
Left the bright realms of bliss!
And came to earth to bleed and die!
Was ever love like this?"

"Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." The wonderful love in it, the matchless condescension in it! O but to think of the poverty of the Saviour from Bethlehem to Calvary. "A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." It was a life of poverty. One chapter ends, "And every man went unto his own house." But, "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives." He had no earthly home. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests." Not just the harmless creatures, but vicious creatures, foxes. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head."

"Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." We think of that borrowed boat from which He preached, and that borrowed ass on which He rode into Jerusalem, and that borrowed grave in which He was buried. "For your sakes He became poor." But especially this speaks of Gethsemane, the judgment hall, the garden scene, the sweat of blood; the cruel scourging and mocking and spitting, and then the cross. "There they crucified Him."

“Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” This is the point: “For your sakes,” for the sake of His people. It is His wonderful love towards them. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” “For your sakes.” It is that they might be delivered from a deserved hell and reach an undeserved heaven. “For your sakes.” It is that they might be pardoned and forgiven and cleansed through His precious, sin-atonement blood. “For your sakes.” It is that they might be saved in Him with an everlasting salvation.

“Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” So many displays of the grace of God; so many displays of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. But you see this great work excels them all. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” It was that His poor, lost, ruined, guilty people might be with Him in heaven for ever and ever. It was that He might do everything for them that they could never do for themselves. It was that wonderful display of mercy.

“Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” O but this is it, to have a personal interest. Dare you claim one? Have you a hope of one, a personal interest? “For your sakes.” “For your sakes,” who have no other hope but in His blood. “For your sakes,” who seek after Him. “For your sakes,” who pray for His mercy, who pray to be washed in His precious blood. “For your sakes,” who want Him, who must have Him, who cannot do without Him. “For your sakes,” who cling and cleave to Him of vital necessity. “For your sakes,” who make Him your only hope, your only foundation. “For your sakes,” who have to say, “Other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on Thee.”

“Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” May the Holy Spirit lead you into this tonight. The old divines used to speak of *appropriating faith*. It was not free will, but faith which lays hold of Christ, especially in His sin-atonement sufferings and death. And let us be clear on this: God-given faith, real faith, *is* appropriating faith. It does lay hold on Christ. O but may the Holy Spirit bring this with power into your heart. And how will you know? Because it will have an effect. Christ will be precious. Your affections will go out in love after Him. You will have a soft heart.

“For if with lively faith we view
His dying toil and smart,
And hear Him say, ‘It was for you!’
This breaks the stony heart.”

“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.” Poor sinners who *are* nothing, who *have* nothing, are made rich. It is “for your sakes,” who feel your poverty; “for your sakes,” who by nature are poor; “for your sakes,” who feel you can bring nothing to merit God’s favour. “He was rich, yet ... He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” There are really two things here: that God’s people are made eternally rich, and they are the only people who are eternally rich. The wealthy of this world are not rich – that is, not what the Word of God calls riches. O God’s people are eternally rich. The second thing, the ground upon which they are eternally made rich is that their Lord and Saviour was made poor. And it was for their sake. O but the Holy Spirit will show you the difference between real riches and false riches, riches which “profit not in the day of wrath,” and the glorious riches of the grace of God, “the unsearchable riches of Christ,” “the exceeding riches of His grace.” It really means this: that the things which are truly precious are the things of God in Christ and they are given to the people of God. If you had the poorest man in England and you gave him a million pounds, he would be made rich. And poor, lost, ruined sinners are made rich in Christ because of what He gives them.

You realise this is a vast, inexhaustible subject. What are the riches of God’s grace in Christ which He gives to sinners who are poor and who are made to know and feel their poverty? Well, one thing, He gives them a glorious righteousness in which they will shine eternally in heaven. O the preciousness of it! It is for the chief of sinners. Look at that man Manasseh. He was a vile man, a cruel man, an evil man, a murderer. People were afraid of him. Literally the streets of Jerusalem were steeped in blood, running in blood. But look tonight and see this man clothed in this precious, white robe, singing, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” That is what it is to be made rich. Christ takes away the filthy rags of a sinner’s righteousness and we are willing to part with it. By nature we cling to it – O but to confess it, to seek to be rid of it, and then to be clothed in this precious robe of Christ’s righteousness.

That will make you rich. “No age can change its glorious hue; the robe of Christ is ever new.” That is true glory, true majesty, true riches.

At times I speak to you about that quaint, godly, eccentric man, great preacher though with many faults, Rowland Hill. I think perhaps no minister of the gospel had a more glorious funeral. He was an aristocrat. The chief mourner was Lord Hill, his nephew, the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, in all his splendour. It was a most majestic occasion. But the godly saw something more precious and majestic when the vast congregation stood and sang Rowland Hill’s favourite hymn:

“Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.”

“That ye through His poverty might be rich.” What else? An interest in His precious, sin-atoning blood, and whoever has that is rich indeed. He might be that poor man that the good bishop saw with nothing but a crust of bread and a pot of water, crying out, “All this, and Christ too!” That man is truly rich. To have an interest in the precious, precious blood of Christ. Our hymnwriter calls it “invaluable blood.”

So you might go on. An interest in the promises, bound up in the covenant of grace, made a child of God with God as your Father. These are true riches. So you can go on. O but especially to have Christ Himself. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” This is where true riches are. And He who made Himself poor that His people might be eternally rich, He gives Himself. John Newton, singing of the miser and his gold, ends up: “*Having Jesus*, I have an immortal store.” And then heaven at last, heaven with all its glory; and you are not thinking so much of the riches of the pearly gates and the golden streets, but you are thinking of the riches of the Lamb once slain, now for ever exalted. “That ye” – poor, wretched, ruined sinners – “through His poverty” – on that ground alone, the work He accomplished – “might be rich” – eternally rich. Well, may the Holy Spirit seal our interest here.

“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.”