

From Rags to Riches

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and turn to the New Testament book of 2 Corinthians.! It's about right in the middle of your New Testament.! 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

We're going to read the first nine verses. And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy, and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testified that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

So we urge Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and in your love for us, see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

[1 : 15] I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

Few stories in life are more interesting than lives that go from rags to riches.

Maybe a poor immigrant family came to America with nothing but the clothes they were wearing, and through hard work, that family built a business and now has amassed great wealth.

Maybe it was just a young boy living in poverty, and he's making millions now, just because he learned how to throw, or catch, or kick, or shoot, or hit a ball, from rags to riches.

[2 : 30] Maybe a poor single mother had an idea, and got a deal in the shark tank, and now she's making millions.

Stories of going from rags to riches. But I suppose for every such story, from rags to riches, there is also a story about those who've gone from riches to rags.

Those very same professional athletes, I've read of those who had their millions, and just squandered it, and now they're broke. Maybe somebody won the lottery, or inherited a fortune, but is now homeless.

Maybe through tragedy, through serious health problems, lost it all. Maybe somebody gambled on an investment, and it went bad, and they've lost all that they had.

They went from riches to rags. Now, the Bible has both kinds of stories. Both kinds of those stories. In fact, everyone here who is trusting in Christ alone to save them has a testimony of going from rags to riches.

[3 : 43] We were spiritually bankrupt before God, and now we have become rich in Jesus Christ. Rich beyond telling. And that's my desire for everyone here, to be rich in eternals.

Rich in things that count, and that will last for eternity. Now, such testimonies of rags to riches, such as many of you have, are only possible because of the testimony of another who went from riches to rags.

And that captured the amazement of the Apostle Paul. He never got over the wonder that one so rich would become so poor to enrich him. And he writes of it here in our text that we've had read for us in 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

He's urging the Corinthian believers as a church to be generous in their giving. And he appeals to this one who was so rich and became so poor to enrich them as the motivation.

Now you be rich. You impoverish yourself somewhat to enrich others, even as the Lord Christ has done for you.

[5 : 01] Notice the riches to rags and the resulting rags to riches in this verse. 2 Corinthians 8, 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

Consider first our Lord Jesus Christ going from riches to rags. Never in all time was anyone richer. Never did anyone become poor. You know he was rich. He was rich. Have you thought how rich he was? Have you taken inventory and added it up, taken an audit on our Lord's wealth?

Well, he was rich in possessions as the Lord of all, wasn't he? There's a principle of ownership found in the Bible that says what God makes is his.

And that means that the Lord Christ could lay claim to everything because nothing was made without him. And so he claims in Psalm 50, verses 10 and 12, every beast of the forest is mine.

[6 : 23] And the cattle on a thousand hills. The creatures of the field are mine. The whole world is mine and everything that is in it.

So it all belongs to him. The wealth of all the nations, the money in every bank, in every business, every person belongs to him.

The wealth in every mine, those gold mines and silver and diamond mines, every drop of oil under the oceans and under the earth.

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. Psalm 24, 1. Now that's rich, but there's more to our Savior's wealth. Deuteronomy 10, 14, to the Lord your God belong the heavens.

So not just the earth and everything in it, but the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. So, yes, the earth, but also outer space and the highest heavens.

[7 : 28] So the whole universe, heaven and earth, is his. But now, most of you have lived long enough to know that you don't tally up a person's wealth just by the material things that he possesses.

What are true friends worth? What's a true friend worth? They're worth more than money, aren't they? So as we weigh up the wealth of our Lord Jesus, we have to think of his relationships.

And he was so rich in relationships, wasn't he? In heaven, before he came to earth from all eternity, the Lord Jesus enjoyed face-to-face intimate fellowship with his Father and with the Holy Spirit.

And perfect love flowed between them. Uninterrupted delight in each other. The Father declaring, this is my beloved Son in whom is all my delight.

So the very best of human relationships on earth are just a dim shadow to the rich relationships that the Son of God had with the other persons of the Triune God for all eternity.

[8 : 47] He was rich in relationships. And then he was rich in glory and honor. In heaven, Christ enjoyed the continual praises of angelic hosts.

They knew who he was. And they never grew tired of declaring his praises. He was the favorite of heaven, the center of attention, ever so rich in glory and honor.

And the creation here itself, the creation also declared his glory. He was rich in service. Think of the thousands upon thousands of servants that he had.

The myriad of angels, his servants, obeying his will, running on his errands, serving his interests, riches. So, how do you calculate the riches of Christ?

Well, you don't. You throw your calculator away. There is no way to tally his wealth. Rich beyond measuring. He literally had it all.

[9 : 54] But you know that though he was rich, yet he became poor. He went from riches to rags. Well, how poor did he become?

Poor than any had ever been or ever shall be. Here he is, the king of heaven, and yet he leaves that perfect home in heaven and he came into this sin-cursed world where Satan had his rule over the hearts of men and they hated him.

He laid aside the perks and prerogatives of deity and became a man. The Bible says in the fullness of time, God sent his son born of a woman.

It's saying he was as much a human being as any of you who were born of woman. He had a real body and a real soul capable of pain and suffering and sorrow.

The creator and giver of all things. The great I am that I am who has soul independency, dependent upon no one, nothing outside of himself and yet here he is now, a human baby developing in the womb of his mother, absolutely dependent upon her for life.

[11 : 14] He became poor, poor, not born in a palace or a mansion but in a stable and laid in a feeding trough. Born not into a wealthy family but a poor carpenter's home, a laborer and suffered

the loss of his stepfather Joseph.

Yes, he had losses. He became poor. He too took up the hard life of the carpenter trade, the carpenter from that nowhere town called Nazareth.

He became poor without reputation, without anything that would cause men to say, wow, look at him, look at his wealth.

No, he was poor and when he went about his three years of public ministry, he said, foxes, they've got their holes to live in and the birds of the air have their nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.

Often sleeping beneath the stars with the sod as his bed, homeless, living on the charity of others, some women that followed them and gave them food.

[12:32] He became poor, living on the charity of others. And though he was the law giver, he was born under law. As a human being, under God, that means he was born under God's law.

As man, that means he's now under obligation to obey all the laws of his heavenly father. So born under law, that means he must obey. He owes obedience to God's commands.

His whole life would be paying off that debt. He's paying the debt of perfect obedience. That's what he owes God as a man. And that's what he gives God.

But he takes on that debt of being born under the law. And instead of the rich praises and honor that he enjoyed in the holy atmosphere of heaven, he's now enduring the mistreatment from the hands and mouths of wicked men.

The world that was his, made by him, was the world that did not know him or want to know him. He came into that which was his own and his own received him not.

[13:41] He was the light of the world and the world loved darkness rather than the light. His own brothers didn't believe in him. Many of his initial followers abandoned him.

His own disciples did not understand his mission and would forsake him in his greatest hour of need. His enemies hated him. The religious leaders hated him.

They twisted his words. They slandered and falsely accused him and condemned him to die as a blasphemer, a fake messiah.

Mocked, scorned, beaten, abused, whipped, nailed to a shameful cross. All the material possessions that he had were the clothes that he wore to his crucifixion and those were stripped from him and divided by the soldiers as they gambled for the robe that was seamless.

He who was rich became poor. But he became poor still for he willingly took upon himself the sin debts of all of his people.

[14:52] You know that sin is a debt that demands a payment. And on the cross Jesus was not only receiving from men their hatred but he was taking to himself the sin debt.

of all who would trust in him. If you co-sign for a loan, that means that if the person you're co-signing for can't pay the loan, it's on you and you've got to pay.

And though Jesus himself personally never sinned, when he stood in our place, he who never sinned became sin for us. and the father laid on him the iniquities of us all.

So that means that on the cross he's now carrying our debts. How poor we made him. Each of our sins, my sins, each one of my sins, deserves the payment of eternal hell to settle the cost of my offense to the holy creator creator that is my God.

So he hangs on the cross as the greatest sinner, spiritually bankrupt with all this huge debt of all my sins and all the sins of those that would ever trust in him.

[16:13] He impoverished himself by taking our debt. But there's even more because on the cross the father demanded the payment for sin and he poured out his wrath on Christ our substitute, the one who was rich with eternal love of the father.

Remember the rich relationship to know the father's love and delight in him and to to to show that and reflect that back to the father. He's now stripped of that shining face and fellowship and as the father turns his face away, the son knows and feels the pain of being forsaken by his heavenly father.

He feels the pain of enduring infinite wrath and cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? So the rich relationship he had, oh how poor he is to be forsaken.

He hangs on the cross then totally impoverished, bankrupt, poorest of the poor and he finally dies when all he had left was his breath. That too was given up in death.

that's poor. That's real poor. That's poverty beyond telling. And we say, why? Why?

[17 : 37] Why would one so rich become so poor? You know, there's a lot of people today that want to go from rags to riches, but there's nobody that wants to go from riches to rags. And yet that's what Jesus here does.

Why? Why would he do that? Well, the text tells us, doesn't it? It wasn't an accident. It wasn't forced upon him. It was voluntary. For your sakes, he became poor.

For your sakes, he impoverished himself so that you through his poverty might become rich. rich. He saw you in your poverty. And he wanted to enrich you.

So he became poor for you. For your sake. Is that not the greatest expression of love? And that's what it took for poor, bankrupt sinners like us to ever become rich toward God.

So let's consider and follow how we went from rags to riches. He went from riches to rags. Let's trace out how we go from rags to riches. We start out poor.

[18 : 43] Have you seen a baby born recently? They come into the world with nothing. That's poor. And we were not even our own.

We were his because he made us. So we had nothing and we ourselves were not our own. We were his. So we start out as debtors. We start out owing God.

He made us. We belong to him. So we owe him our lives. We owe God our allegiance. We owe him our love. We owe him our trust.

We owe him our obedience, our worship. We come into this world as debtors. We owe. We owe.

We owe all this to God. Furthermore, we too were born under God's law, born with the obligation to keep his commands.

And so we owe obedience to God as summed up in those two greatest commands to love him with all of our heart, not keeping back anything for ourselves, but to love him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength, and then to love our neighbor like ourselves.

[19 : 53] No less. But just like we love ourselves. We had this debt, a debt we owed, perfect obedience to God's commands.

But did we keep them? No, we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We've broken God's commandments. And that's what the Bible calls sin.

How many commands do you need to break to become a lawbreaker? James chapter 2 and verse 10 says, whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all. Well, that's the way that God does his accounting. There's no, well, you got most of them or you got some of them or you even got one of them. No, if you've broken my law once, you've broken the whole law.

It stands or falls together as a unit. You're either a law keeper or a lawbreaker. And if you break it once, you're a law keeper. And so that incurs a further debt now.

[21 : 03] We owed him our obedience, but we didn't give it. We didn't give what he demanded. Perfect obedience. So now we owe a further debt. We now owe a penalty that must be paid.

You owe obedience to the traffic laws. And if you break that traffic law, you might owe us further penalty, right? A couple hundred bucks maybe.

So there's the first obedience you owe to the law, but then if you break it, you owe a penalty. And that's the way it was with our God. Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law.

It doesn't continue to do everything written. You can't say, well, I obeyed it once or I obeyed it. No, continues to obey. And not just some things, but everything written in.

And if you come short, you're a lawbreaker. And now you come under the curse, the penalty for breaking the law. to be eternally cut off from God's mercies and his loving kindness, to know only his wrath and justice in the outer darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[22 : 22] Jesus taught of it more than anyone else. Indeed, the wages of sin is death. The second death is the lake of fire. Hell is the place where sin must be paid for.

So we were in debt big time. We were poor. Very poor. Furthermore, we didn't have anything to pay off our debt.

How do you pay off that debt? You can't. Nothing we do can remove that debt. Now, a lot of people think that, well, if I do a good deed, it'll make up for a bad deed.

Where'd you get that idea? That's not God's accounting. He never, you already obey him full obedience. So your obedience doesn't get you any extra credit to take off your bad marks.

No, you owe that to him all the time. So we owed this huge debt, eternal hell, a penalty to pay, and we had nothing to pay it, nothing to pay it with.

[23 : 26] It would take all eternity for us to pay our debt in hell and never would we be able to make the last payment, say, at last I get out.

At last I can go to heaven. That never happens, you see. That's why hell is forever, because we would never make the last payment.

So we were dirt poor toward God. You know, some people think they've got some wealth to offer to God. They think that they've got some righteousness, a little bit of righteousness to offer to God. But, you know, the Bible calls that filthy rags. And so that itself is not anything of riches to offer to God. So that was and is the condition of everyone who's outside of Jesus Christ.

We came into the world with this debt and every sin of ours incurs the greater debt. And that's how Christ finds us in sin. Over our head in debt, unable to pay.

[24 : 34] Now, here's the amazing good news of the gospel that rather than just call for the debt to be paid, God sent his son in love and offered him.

So that through Christ becoming poor, we might become rich. He knew our poverty and he didn't just say, OK, pay up. But he said, here's my son.

And he will pay the debt. And if you trust in him, your debt will be forgiven. So that believing on him, you might be lifted from your rags to his riches.

Because he died, we now live. Because he was cursed, I am blessed. Because he was forsaken, I am accepted.

Because he suffered my hell, I inherit his heaven. Because he paid the penalty for all my sin, all my debts have been wiped clean. I doubt if there's a one of us who knows the precious value of the blood of Jesus Christ.

[25 : 42] It will take the day of judgment to prove the preciousness of Jesus' blood. When we stand before God and the books are opened and our page is opened and turned to, and we are standing before God.

And there's nothing of sin on our page. There's not a slightest taint of a mark against us of sin.

What did that? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. That's the power of the blood of Jesus. That it wipes away our sin on God's books in heaven.

Why? Because Jesus paid it. That's what it means. His blood is his life given on the cross in our place so that those sins have been paid for.

He suffered the infinite wrath of God that I would have been suffering. And so on my page in heaven, his blood blots out my sin. And as I stand before God, there will not be one sin on my page.

[27 : 00] On my book. My record. But there's more. There's the righteousness of Jesus. Because Jesus obeyed all the commands completely all the time.

His righteousness, his goodness is put to the account of all who trust in him. So instead of finding sin on my record in heaven, those sins are blotted out.

They're not found anywhere. But instead there is found perfect marks, A pluses all over the record. Where did that come from? That came from Jesus becoming a man born under the law and obeying that law so that we might have a righteousness in heaven.

That is just what we need for entrance there. It was for our sakes that he became poor, that we through his poverty, his coming down and obeying the law, his going to the cross and suffering our penalty for a broken law, that we might become rich.

But you know, though these riches in Christ are for everyone who comes, as we heard already this morning, not all are made rich.

[28 : 15] It's not an automatic thing because Jesus died. Everybody, all sinners become rich. Not at all. Many refuse to come to Christ and so remain poor. And I fear most do not know just how bankrupt and poor they are before God and just how good and gracious Jesus Christ is to poor sinners.

Recently, I was gone for a couple of weeks and before I left, I paid some bills. I do it the old fashioned way with the checkbook. One debt was for fourteen hundred dollars and I wrote a check for that amount, put it in the envelope, put the stamp on, put it in the mail box.

But I forgot to enter that check into my checkbook register. And that means I thought I was fourteen hundred dollars richer than what I really was.

So I was poorer than I realized. But thinking that I had that fourteen hundred dollars, I continued to write checks. Well, of course, why wouldn't I?

I've got that money in the bank, so I thought. But at some point, my real money in the bank ran out and they started sending me notices in the mail of insufficient funds to cover the checks that I was writing.

[29 : 41] But I wasn't home to read that mail. And so the checks just kept bouncing. You see, I thought I was richer than what I really was.

My account was really bankrupt, but I didn't realize it. I thought I was doing better than that. And I only figured it out when I examined the bank statement.

Ah, and I saw the real condition of my account at the bank. I'd forgotten that fourteen hundred dollar check. And I think that's a picture of what we have in the world today.

A lot of people thinking they're richer toward God than what they really are. They're bankrupt. They don't have anything in heaven. But they think they do. They think they've got some credit there.

And again, what do they go to? They go to their their baptism. They go to their church membership. They go to their being honest and trying to love their neighbor and treat others well and reading their Bibles and praying and and doing good.

[30 : 50] And so they think they've got money in the bank. Do you know what that money is? It's monopoly money. It's not legal tender in heaven.

What would my banker think if I came in with those magenta five hundred dollar monopoly dollars and tried to pay off my debt? You say it doesn't work here. We don't recognize that at all.

Do you know that's the way heaven regards man's righteousness? Your righteousness? Mine? It's not perfect. Everything we do is tainted by sin. And so it's not the legal tender of heaven.

The only money or riches that Jesus Christ recognizes is perfect righteousness that matches his. And that's what Jesus won for us by obeying every command.

Perfect righteousness. And when a sinner that's bankrupt puts their trust in him all of his perfect righteousness is put to our account. That's why we're accepted.

[31 : 53] That's the only money accepted in heaven. That's the thing that throws the gates of heaven open. It's what Jesus has done. His obedience. His blood. That cleanses us from all sin.

And gives us a righteousness that puts us in good standing with God. You see to come to Christ savingly is to come as a bankrupt sinner.

We've got to sometime in our life come to the point where we see what we are in heaven's view. Not what do I think my account in heaven is?

But rather what is God's account in heaven really like? You know God gave us his law so that we would be able to understand what our account in heaven is.

Here's my standard he says. Are you reading his commandments? That's the standard. And have you broken them? Then you know you've got debts in heaven that are unpaid.

[32 : 55] then you know you need a savior. And he's provided the perfect savior with all the righteousness any sinner could ever need.

Come to him. Come as a bankrupt sinner. Own what you are. Nothing good to offer you God.

Nothing but my debt of sin. Receive me. Have mercy on me. For Jesus' sake.

And he never never turns one such away. But will lift them from rags to riches. And you will be rich toward God.

Rich in all that matters. You will get his righteousness. He will take your sin. You will get his acceptance. He will take your condemnation.

You will get the father's favor because Jesus takes the father's wrath. And best of all he gives you himself. Himself.

[33 : 58] When you're counting up riches what is that? To have this God. The God of the Bible. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as my God. Committed to me.

For me. No longer against me. Think what spirit dwells within you if you've come to Jesus. Think what spirit. The spirit that hovered over the waters and brought order out of the creation.

The spirit that can give new life. Think what spirit dwells within you. What a father's smile is yours. Think about your heavenly father's everlasting smile.

What a savior died to win you. Obeyed for you. Died for you. Rose for you. Lives for you. Coming again for you. This God is your God. He counts you as his.

You count him as yours. That's your greatest treasure. Your portion in life. Your portion for all eternity. And in Christ we have been enriched in every way the scriptures teach us.

[34 : 59] Indeed nothing is the same with Christ. Our whole lives have been enriched. Your job. Your marriage. Your relationships. Your talents.

whatever it is. Your hobbies. Everything enriched in Jesus Christ. How rich I am since Jesus came my way.

Redeemed my soul and changed my night today. How rich how very rich I am. Such peace and joy I never knew before and countless blessings from his boundless store.

And with all this heaven is my destiny. How rich I am. There's a greater glory in a sunset. There's a brighter twinkle in a star.

There's much more promise in a rainbow. More music in a singing bird by far. All things have changed. My eyes once blind now see.

[36 : 04] The whole wide world is now a symphony. And with all this heaven is my destiny. How rich how rich I am. And my lost sinner friend all this could be yours today.

You came poor. Poor on God's accounting. You could go home rich. Not just in your own thought like I was thinking I was no you could go home really rich with Christ.

He offers himself to you. Come to me. Come to me. me. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's why he came.

It was for your sakes. Though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor. That you through his poverty might become rich. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know what grace is. It's undeserved. And that's why it's good news. You don't have to work for this marriage. You don't have to work for this treasure. It's a gift. It's grace.

[37 : 05] And I think a helpful definition of grace is God's riches at Christ's expense.

So yes you can go from rags to riches. And it will be God's riches. Not at your earning. No you never get it that way. But at Christ's expense.

The expense of his obedience and blood. by his impoverishing himself you can become rich. A final audit is coming.

We must all appear before our maker and the books will be opened. Don't be found in that day with one sin on your account.

Get into Christ. His blood covers all of our sins. But if you wait till the day of the audit it'll be too late. the day of grace will be past and gone.

[38 : 04] You must seek him here in this life. You don't know about tomorrow so seek him today. He's ready to enrich you if you're ready to be enriched through Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Our eternal God and heavenly father we do know of the grace of Jesus Christ but only because you told us.

we would be in darkness. We would still be thinking that it's through our own goodness or own religious deeds that we could somehow become rich in heaven.

So thank you for the gospel. Thank you for sending your son. Lord Jesus thank you for your perfect obedience and your willingness to give that to any repenting sinner who comes and looks away from self and casts all their weight and trust upon you.

bring some here today to that rejection of any hope in self and casting their all upon you the savior.

[39 : 11] We do thank you for how we who have come have been made rich in every way. We thank you that heaven will show us just how precious that blood of Jesus is just how precious his obedience is and how effective his righteousness is to make us rich.

send us then in the joy of it and in the new life for those who are trusting in you. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.