

Series: **Christmas 2017**

CDOBC – beginning on 12/3/17

Today's Title: **"Christmas Grace"**

December 24, 2017 - Matthew 1:23; 2 Corinthians 8:9

OBJECTIVE: To help people know that Christmas is about God, in His grace, for our eternal benefit, gave us Himself!

Matthew 1:23

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel (which means, God with us)."

A wonderful story was told many years ago about a Persian monarch - which they would call a Shah. This particular Shah reigned in Persia in a time of great splendor and magnificence and lived in the midst of all of that wealth and prosperity. But he had a heart for people who were poor and common, and so he decided that he would dress himself as a poor man, and that he would descend from the lofty heights of his palace, down to the commonest man that he could find and try to make a friend out of him. He found a man whose job it was to stoke and prepare fires that could then be put into little containers and taken around the palace to keep people warm. He worked all the time in ashes and soot and smoke and filth, way, way down in a basement.

The king then put on the garments of a poor man, descended the dark, damp, cellar stairs and came down to where the man was seated in a pile of ashes - he was called a fireman. The king, in disguise, sat down beside him and began to talk.

At meal time the fireman produced some coarse black bread and a little bit of water and they ate together and drank together. And then the Shah went away.

But he came back day after day after day after day, again and again because his heart was filled with sympathy that over time was demonstrated to that man in his longing just to be there to share a little bit of his common and difficult life.

He gave the man sweet counsel from his wisdom and experience. This poor man opened his whole heart and loved his friend, so kind and so wise, and he thought so poor like himself.

At last the Shah thought, *“I can't keep this up, I have to tell him who I really am and so I'll tell him and then I'll ask him what gift he would like from me, now that we're friends.”*

So, he told the fireman, *“You think I'm poor but I'm not, I am the Shah, your emperor. What would you like?”*

He expected the man to petition him for some great thing but he sat, simply gazing in wonder and love.

The king said, *“Have you understood what I've told you? I can make you rich. I can make you noble. I can give you a city. I can give you anything. What do you want?”*

According to the story, the man replied, *“Yes, my lord, I understand. But what is this you have done to leave your palace and your glory to sit with me in this dark place, to partake of my coarse bread, to care whether my heart is glad*

or sorry? Even you can give nothing more precious than that. On others you may bestow rich presents but to me you have given yourself, it only remains to ask one thing...and that is that you never withdraw your friendship.”

Christmas is a celebration of the Almighty King of the universe descending to Earth, taking on human flesh, to love us. It's one of the greatest historical events the world has ever seen.

I say one of the greatest - because I have a great deal of difficulty ranking the conception and birth of Jesus above the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus.

Christmas is a divine stake driven into the ground which marks for each generation that great work of love in which God became flesh - humbled Himself “...made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

(Philippians 2:7)

But let's be honest - this line of thinking - considering the condescension of Jesus as part of Christmas - this is not common in our society.

In fact, if they were honest, I think many would ask:

“What is so great about this baby born about 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem?”

“What is so great about God becoming flesh...what's the big deal about that?”

Our culture's view of Christmas says a great deal about their view of God.

As I observe the culture, I see the general understanding of Christmas as a time to celebrate and enjoy family and friends - a time for gifts - a time to indulge in all sorts of food and material things. There is nothing really wrong with much of this - but I learn more about the culture's view of God by what is absent in their celebration.

- Jesus is absent.
- The conception and birth of the Messiah - the Savior of the world - is absent.

The culture celebrates the surface elements of the holiday - and is either ignorant or ignores the deeper spiritual truths of Christmas. On this Christmas Eve...can I ask you:

- What is your view of God?
- What are your thoughts about God at Christmastime?

Middle Ages - not a time in history any sane person wants to relive, but one good thing about the Middle Ages was they had a high view of God. The big problem is their view of God didn't always lead to a transformed life - it didn't lead to a greater love for their fellow man and woman - but when you visit Europe you will see elaborate cathedrals - magnificent feats of engineering and construction which reach high up to the Heavens - with large steeples which

point upward. These places of worship reveal their view of God as Mighty, Sovereign and Transcendent over all things. Today those Cathedrals are empty shells - Europe has for the most part abandoned the God of the Bible.

- What is America's view of God?
- What is America's thoughts about God?

You would be hard pressed to have a description which would apply to a large percentage of people. But when you look at our buildings in the towns and cities across the country, you would find 3 common things:

- Shopping Malls and Restaurants
- Magnificent sports stadiums
- Heath Clubs

Materialism...physical appetites...entertainment...Physical Health & Appearance - these are the gods in America - these are the places of worship.

But Christmas gives us the opportunity to think more deeply about God.

Christmas gives us the chance to see the amazing love and grace of God.

Christmas gives us the greatest gift we could ever receive - the gift of Jesus - the one and only Saviour who can save us from our sins.

So, this afternoon, I invite you to a greater understanding of the magnitude of what God did that first Christmas, I want to consider this verse:

2 Corinthians 8:9

“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.”

“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

What does the grace of Jesus have to do with Christmas?

What is grace? Grace is ‘undeserved favor’ - getting what you don’t deserve - receiving something even though you didn’t earn it. This is what many of us will do tomorrow morning - we will give gifts out of love, not out of merit.

Christmas is a manifestation of God’s grace, because Jesus becoming human was a gift the human race didn’t deserve.

Jesus, the Creator of the universe, set aside the privileges of deity, and willingly limited Himself in a physical body.

The frailty and limitations of human flesh was fully embraced by the 2nd person of the Triune God...so He could reveal God to us...love us...befriend us.

In this act of grace, He could reveal the truth, wisdom, kindness, justice, holiness and love of God.

Christmas in all its fullness stands in great contrast to the selfish, prideful and violent world we see all around us. Jesus gave everything - He stooped low, and became a man, so you can receive what you could never earn.

This is “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

“that though He was rich...”

How was He “rich”?

As Creator, He owns all things - everything is His.

Hebrews 1:10

“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of Your hands...”

He made it all...which means He owns it all!

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, that historical event was not where He started to exist. He eternally existed before His birth in Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”

Isaiah 9:6

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

John 8:58

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

John 17:5

“And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed.”

Colossians 1:19

“For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...”

Colossians 2:9

“For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...”

Hebrews 1:3

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.”

Charles Hodge (Theologian 1797-1878)

“All divine names and titles are applied to Him (Christ). He is called God, the mighty God, the great God, God over all; Jehovah; Lord; the Lord of lords and the King of kings. All divine attributes are ascribed to Him. He is declared to be omnipresent, omniscient, almighty, and immutable, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is set forth as the creator and upholder and ruler of the universe. All things were created by Him and for Him; and by Him all things consist. He is the object of worship to all intelligent creatures, even the highest; all the angels (i.e., all creatures between man and God) are commanded to prostrate themselves before Him. He is the object of all the religious sentiments; of reverence, love, faith, and devotion. To Him men and angels are responsible for their character and conduct.

He required that men should honor Him as they honored the Father; that they should exercise the same faith in Him that they do in God. He declares that He and the Father are one; that those who had seen Him had seen the Father also. He calls all men unto Him; promises to forgive their sins; to send them the Holy Spirit; to give them rest and peace; to raise them up at the last day; and to give them eternal life. God is not more, and cannot promise more, or do more than Christ is said to be, to promise, and to do.”

Reference: Systematic Theology, v. 2, p. 382.

How was Jesus rich?

He was rich beyond human realities.

He was rich beyond measure in His personhood - in His being.

There was nothing He didn't have...

Nothing He didn't own...

Nothing He didn't create...

Nothing He didn't rule over.

His richness...His *wealth* was the vastness of His deity - the power and privilege of His deity.

“He became poor...”

Throughout Church history, many have misunderstood the poverty of Jesus by equating economic poverty with the statement of Jesus becoming “poor” in this verse.

This verse is not a sanctification of economic poverty.

It's a statement of what Jesus left when He was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary.

One aspect of the poverty Jesus embraced was entering the stream of history by taking on human flesh.

Romans 8:3 - He was born “in the likeness of sinful flesh...”

John 1:14 - “the Word became flesh...”

Hebrews 2:7 - “You made Him for a little while lower than the angels...”

This was His poverty. Setting aside the free exercise of His prerogatives as God, and taking on human form - human flesh.

Philippians 2:6-7

“...though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

A second aspect of the poverty Jesus embraced was by taking human sin upon Himself. He gave His body - a sinless body - to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.

2 Corinthians 5:21

“He made Him to be sin who knew no sin...”

Colossians 1:20 - “by the blood of His cross.”

The eternal God...eternally and divinely rich, became poor by leaving His place in the Heavens and becoming flesh - becoming human - and gave Himself as a

sacrifice - a humiliating, degrading, torturous death on a cross.

This is the poverty of Jesus.

This is the glory and wonder of Christmas - that God loves us so much that He exchanged His Heavenly glory and riches to become one of us.

But why did He do this?

This is the ultimate question for you to know the answer to this evening.

Why is Christmas so important for you today?

“for your sake He became poor...”

He did this for you.

Jesus gave everything - He stooped low, and became a man, “for your sake” - so you can receive what you could never earn.

“for your sake” What did you receive? What did He give you that you could not earn?

“so that you by His poverty might become rich.”

Jesus was: *“Rich in salvation, forgiveness, joy, peace, life, light, glory, rich in honor, rich in majesty. We are so rich we are called joint heirs with Christ. We are promised an inheritance in heaven which will never perish, spoil or fade away. We are rich, we are as rich as God is rich.”*

(Source: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/47-59/the-poverty-that-made-us-rich>)

2 Corinthians 5:21

“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (the wealth of God!)

1 Corinthians 1:5

“...that in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge...”

1 John 3:5

“You know that He appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin.”

This is the wonderful, glorious, deeply significant truth and celebration of Christmas.

I love presents...I love new clothes and cologne - but Jesus and the forgiveness He offers me is the glorious celebration and gift of Christmas.

Apply it...

The sacrificial model and example of Jesus - in His grace He gave everything - “for our sake”.

He gave completely - motivated out of love for you - He gave Himself for you - He became poor, so you could become rich.

So, we should follow His example and give *for the sake of others*. Give so others will be blessed. Allow the generosity of Christ to motivate your own giving and serving.

Give because giving produces great joy in the giver!

But we also see a principle at work in Jesus' giving - you have to receive the salvation He offers you.

He doesn't force His forgiveness on you - He offers it - gives it - but you must receive it.

The Bible tells us we must recognize our spiritual poverty. This means we have nothing - no amount of good works or church attendance or taking communion can ever make us right with God. We must admit our spiritual poverty and our need for His riches - His forgiveness. **Matthew 5:3** "Blessed are the poor in spirit".

Spiritually...we are as poor as poor can be, and Jesus came to make us rich, to make us as rich as He is rich!

So, Christmas is about giving...but also about receiving.

Receive...as one who needs what Jesus is giving!

Not receiving sweaters or phones, "my pillow" or an "instant pot" ...but receiving the rich grace and forgiveness of Jesus.

Have you received Jesus and His offer - His gift of forgiveness?

Have you put your faith in Jesus?

Make tonight - this Christmas - the Christmas that you became "rich" - with the riches of Jesus Christ.

Prayer