

I had not expected to be speaking today, but it is always a privilege to open the Word of God, and especially here on Christmas Sunday. Last week, the *Open the Bible* team had our Christmas gathering: Lunch followed by a gift exchange, otherwise known as a white elephant gift exchange. You know how these things work. Everyone brings a gift. Some are useful, others are horrible, and people can choose either to open a gift or to steal a gift that has already been opened from someone else. The game works because there are some things that people would like to have, and other things that people want to get rid of.

“I don’t want to go home with this!” “I want to go home with that”

God offers us a great exchange, in which what Christ has becomes ours, and what we have becomes His. I want us to see,

- What this exchange meant for Jesus, and
- What this exchange means for us
- Why we need this exchange, and
- How this exchange can be ours.

We’re going to focus today on three aspects of this great exchange.

This first is that Christ exchanged riches for poverty.

## **1. What this exchange meant for Jesus**

### **a. Riches for poverty**

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor... (2 Corinthians 8:9).*

*For you know...*

Here is something that every Christian knows: The Lord Jesus Christ was rich. He shared the life of the Father in heaven. He shared the Father’s glory. He shared the Father’s love. He shared the Father’s work: All things were made by Him. Nothing was made without Him. The Lord Jesus Christ was rich, and He became poor. He was born in a stable.

Here we have the beauty and wonder of Christmas.

Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor, all for love’s sake, becomest poor.  
Thrones for a manger did surrender, sapphire paved courts for stable floor.  
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor, all for love’s sake becomest poor.  
(Frank Houghton)

But Christmas was just the beginning. God offers us a great exchange. For Jesus this meant exchanging riches for poverty, and it meant exchanging life for death.

### **b. Life for death**

When John introduces Jesus at the beginning of His gospel, he says, “*In him was life*” (John 1:4).

God sustains us one breath at a time. But Jesus has life in Himself. Listen to these words of Jesus:

*For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself* (John 5:26).

This is very different from life as we experience it. For all of us, there was a time when we were conceived. Before that we were not. Our lives began. They were given to us. But the Son of God has *life in Himself*. There was never a time when He was not. In Him was life, and this is why He, uniquely is able to share the life that is in Him with all who follow Him.

Our lives are fragile and dependent. An accident or illness can bring our lives to an end. But Jesus could say,

*No one takes my life from me. I have power to lay it down I have power to take it up again* (John 10:17-18).

The Son of God has life in Himself. But when He became a man in Jesus, He entered our experience of death. When Peter writes about the death of Jesus, He says that *even angels long to look into these things*, (1 Peter 1:12). How the Son of God could become a man, and how the One who has life in Himself could die is a mystery that even angels cannot understand. And if angels can't grasp it, we shouldn't be surprised that it is beyond what we can fathom!

Charles Wesley caught something of the mystery and wonder of this in a verse of his hymn 'And Can It Be':

Tis mystery all! - the Immortal dies, -  
who can explore this strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries,  
to sound the depths of love divine.

He left His Father's throne above-  
so free, so infinite His grace –  
emptied Himself of all but love,  
and bled for Adam's helpless race.

God offers a great exchange to us. For Jesus this meant:

- Exchanging riches for poverty
- Exchanging life for death.
- Exchanging righteousness for sin.

### **c. Righteousness for sin**

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...* (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV)

Jesus had no sin. He lived the perfect life that none of us has lived. He fulfilled all that God requires of us. But *God made him who had no sin **to be sin** for us*.

Isaiah puts it this way, *The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all* (Isaiah 53:6).

Our sins were laid on Jesus. They were counted as if they were His. He stood in our place. He bore our guilt as if it was our own.

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, (1 Peter 2:24).*

Why would Jesus do this? There can only be one answer to that question: His great love for us.

- It was love that moved Jesus to leave heaven's glory and be born in a manger.
- It was love that led Jesus to lay down His life on the cross.
- It was love that led Jesus to bear our sins – to take them on Himself so that they would no longer be on us.

*Greater **love** has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:13).

*God shows **his love** for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8).

*God so **loved** the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

God offers us a wonderful exchange: For Jesus this meant, exchanging riches for poverty, life for death, and righteousness for sin.

What does this great exchange mean for us? Since it is an exchange, it means precisely the opposite for us from what it meant for Jesus. What He gives, we gain. God offers us a wonderful exchange and what this means for us is that we exchange our poverty for Christ's riches.

## 2. What this exchange means for us

### a. Poverty for riches

*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*** (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Writing to Christian believers, he says, Jesus did this *for you*. *Though He was rich, yet **for your sake** he became poor.*

The Lord Jesus Christ left heaven **for you**. He was born in a stable **for you**. He became poor **for you**, and he did this *so that you by his poverty might become rich!*

I have a friend in England who was born into a wealthy family: He has an Oxford degree, and he was being groomed for a high position in a large company owned by his father. He went on a missions trip to Egypt and was so moved by the poverty he saw there that he left the comfort of his life in London and went to live with a community of people who live at the edge of a landfill site. I don't know anyone who has identified with the needs of the poor as completely as he did. After a couple of years, he was back in London, and we had lunch together. He was frustrated. With all his sacrifices he had made, he had begun to

wonder if he was doing any good.

I will never forget what he said: *“There is no value in identifying with the poor unless we can do something to help them.”*

A new thought was forming in his mind. Perhaps he could do more for the poor by returning to his career and living a generous life. This is why the second part of this verse is so crucial. Christ became poor. But that’s not the end of the story. The value of what He did is in the second part of the verse: He became poor, so that **you** by his poverty might **become rich**.

This is why Paul tells us that *We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ*. Paul lists these blessings in Ephesians 1: Here’s what is ours as a result of Christ’s coming into the world, and all He has accomplished:

In Christ, we are loved.

In Christ, we are adopted.

In Christ, we are redeemed.

In Christ, we are forgiven.

In Christ, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Christ, we have a glorious inheritance in heaven.

Dear friend, whatever trial, pressure, or stress you are experiencing, remember this; that if you are in Jesus Christ, you are rich!

*Bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name*

*Bless the Lord O my soul and do not forget all His benefits (Psalm 103:1).*

God offers us a wonderful exchange. What this means for us is that:

We exchange our poverty for His riches.

We exchange our death for His life.

## **b. Death for life**

*For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might **live with him*** (1 Thess 5:9-10).

Jesus died for us so that we might *live with Him*. And notice that He died so that we might live with Him, whether we are awake or asleep. That means while we live and when we die. Christ wants you to *live with Him*, and here’s how that works: He will make His home with you, while you live, and you will make your home with Him when you die. Listen to these words of Jesus,

*“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14:23).*

Christ makes His home with us until we make our home with Him. He will move in with you until you move in with Him. Death when it comes for a believer is an immediate translation into the glorious presence of Jesus. When we are asleep, we shall live with Him! To be away

from the body, for a Christian believer is to be *at home with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Many of you will be feeling the loss of someone dear to you, who is no longer with you. If your loved one was in Christ, take this to heart:

*Christ died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*  
(1 Thessalonians 5:9-10).

Your loved one lives *with Him*. Jesus says to His disciples *I am with you always*. That means in every circumstance of life, through the dark passage of death and on into eternity forever. God offers us a wonderful exchange. What this means for us is that:

We exchange our poverty for Christ's riches.

We exchange our death for Christ's life.

We exchange our sin for Christ's righteousness.

### c. Sin for righteousness

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV).

Jesus took our sin as if it was His own. And He gives us His righteousness, as if it was our own. Martin Luther used an analogy to help us grasp this wonderful truth.

When a couple get married, they share what they own together.

What's mine is yours.

What's yours is mine.

If you marry someone with money, you have money that was not yours.

If you marry someone in debt, you have debt that was not yours.

The Bible pictures the relationship of a believer with the Lord Jesus Christ as being like a marriage.

It follows that what Christ has becomes ours,  
and what we have becomes Christ's.

So Luther says, "the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as if it were its own and whatever the soul has Christ claims as His own."<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after we were married, Karen and I bought a new record player. We're talking vinyl here folks. Who would ever have imagined that it would make a comeback! Karen and I both had a collection of vinyl records when we married. Her father was a professional musician. He played violin with the Academy of Saint Martin in the Fields, and he often led the orchestra. So Karen brought to the marriage a good collection of classical records, all of which I enjoy. I brought into the marriage a collection of 1970s pop, in which she had no interest whatsoever, and looking back 50 years later, I can understand why.

---

<sup>1</sup> Freedom of a Christian p. 60.

I'll never forget coming home one evening, to find that Karen had sorted out our records into two piles on the living room floor. She pointed to one pile and said, "These are yours. They're the rubbish!"

What Christ brings to us are His riches, His life, and His righteousness. What we bring to Him are our poverty, our death, and our sin. When Christ binds you to Himself, he takes on all the rubbish. He takes our poverty and makes us rich. He enters our death and gives us life. He bears our sin and clothes us with His righteousness. When faith joins you to Jesus, all that is yours becomes His and all that is His becomes yours. As a believer, you can say, the Lord Jesus Christ died for me. He made my sins His own. And since He has made my sins His own, they are no longer mine. They are taken from me.

As a believer you can say, I am alive in Christ, and the life that is in me will never die. I am righteous in Christ, so there is no condemnation for me to dread.

*"God made him who knew no sin be for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

This is the great exchange that God offers to you.

### 3. Why we need this exchange

If we were already rich, there would be no need for Christ to become poor. If we were already headed for eternal life, there would be no reason for Jesus to die on the cross. If we were already righteous there would be no reason for Jesus to be made sin. But none of these are the reality of our lives. In the book of Revelation, Jesus spoke to church people who clearly thought they were living in a way that was pleasing to God.

*"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked (Revelation 3:15-17).*

Our need of Christ is greater than we think. Greater even than Christians think. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, (Romans 3:23). And apart from the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, every one of us here, speaker included, would be completely and utterly lost forever. Even at our best, we don't have what God requires of us. And if you don't have what you need, your only hope is that you will receive it from someone else.

I was talking on Thursday on my weekly call with one of my granddaughters. She is twelve years old, and we were talking about the story of the thief on the cross. The thief said to Jesus, "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" And Jesus said to Him, "*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.*" (Luke 23:42-43)

I asked my granddaughter what she thought of the story, and she said, "the other thief not say to Jesus, 'Would you remember me too?'" What a great question!

This man heard the most marvelous promise being made to someone else. Why did he not say to Jesus, "If that promise is good for Him, would it be good for me too? If you can do that for him,

could you do it for me? Could you get me into heaven too?" But the thief on the other side of Jesus was totally unresponsive to the grace that could have been his.

Is that you? You have friends, family who believe. They have trusted Jesus and this great exchange is theirs. In Christ they are rich. In Him they have life. In Him they are righteous in the eyes of God. What they have could be yours! So why would you not believe? Why would you not receive what God offers to you in Christ?

God offers you a wonderful exchange. Christ became poor so that you may be rich. Christ died, so that you might live. Christ took the weight of your sins on Himself so that you could be clothed in His righteousness. Why would you hold on to poverty, death, and sin when riches, and life, and righteousness can be yours?

#### **4. How this exchange can be yours**

*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*  
(John 5:24)

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and eternal life will be yours. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will not come into judgment. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the act of believing you will pass from death to life.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Tell Him today that you are done with resisting His grace and ask Him to give new life to your soul. Tell Him today that you want to be done with sin and ask Him to clothe you with His righteousness. Tell Him that you have seen your need of Him and ask Him to give you all He has promised to those who believe.

The great exchange will be yours. In Christ you will be rich, in Christ you will be righteous, and eternal life will be yours.