

## **Downward Mobility-The True Meaning of Christmas** **2 Corinthians 8:1-9**

Our passage ends by saying that Christ was rich but for our sakes became poor, so that we through his poverty might be made rich. When and how was Christ made poor after being rich? When and how was Christ rich before he was made poor? There is no way to answer these two questions unless you believe that the baby born in the manger was God become man, who had existed in the form of God and possessed equality with God before he was conceived and born.

Existing as and equal to God, in heaven before coming to earth, he was rich. He was rich in heaven with the glory, power and wisdom that only God possesses, before he came to earth. Before his life on earth, our Lord Jesus Christ possessed and exercised, experienced and exhibited the prerogatives that are God's and his alone. He had freely and always exercised, experienced and exhibited the wealth of glory, power and wisdom that God, and only God, does.

When God the Son came to earth, he became poor. By taking on human nature, he chose to experience great limitations. He continued to possess all the prerogatives and powers of God, but to be truly human he chose not to access them as he had in heaven. Therefore, people did not immediately fall down in fear before him. If he had not released the visibly, abundant glory he possessed as God in heaven, every human would have fallen before him the moment they saw him. Also, though he possessed infinite power and knowledge, he did not use these as he did in heaven. Often Jesus was weak, though he had access to unlimited power. We are also told that Jesus grew in wisdom and at one point he spoke about his return at the end of time and said "No man knows the day or hour, not even the Son of Man (meaning himself)." It might help to think of someone who has billions of dollars in his bank account, but who withdraws nothing from his account and lived as if he were poor, when we try to understand God the Son on earth. Ultimately, his poverty on earth meant being abandoned and dying naked on a cross.

This verse also says our Lord Jesus Christ did this so that we through his poverty might become rich. Though many prosperity preachers use this as a proof-text for their claim that Christ died so that all Christians could become materially rich, this isn't the prosperity gospel that is being taught here. We know this by going back a couple of chapters to 2 Cor. 6:10 and thinking about what is said there about poor and rich as it relates to the apostles and believers at that time. But even what is said immediately before this verse makes this clear. In verses 1-5, Paul tells about the churches in Macedonia giving generously to an offering for the relief of the saints (in Jerusalem where there is a famine). These Macedonian churches gave beyond their means because they were, themselves, in extreme poverty. Would Paul praise these Christians if they were in poverty and Christ had come to make them wealthy? No. Their wealth was in generosity and it was joy that they had in abundance, despite their poverty.

This text doesn't teach the prosperity gospel, but the generosity gospel. The gospel is about Jesus, who sacrificed the enjoyment of his spiritual riches when he left heaven to be a man and die in shame for us. This good news makes those whose hearts have been melted by it, rich in joy and therefore possessing a wealth of generosity, even when they are poor. Though these Christians are viewed as those who have nothing, they actually possess everything that is really valuable.

The gospel changes the heart of anyone who believes it and he or she becomes gracious and generous in many ways, including giving joyfully, willingly and sacrificially to the work of Christ in their own church and through it to the ends of the earth.