

## I. Introduction

- A. I want to set up today's message with a cartoon, because that way you know it's going to be good.
  - 1. The cartoon shows a classroom of kids about to say the Pledge of Allegiance. All the kids are standing except one. He's sitting with his legs crossed on the desk in front of him.
  - 2. The teacher says, "Kevin, it's your right not to stand for the Pledge—but let me introduce you to someone who can't stand because he was defending that right."
  - 3. Sitting in front of Kevin is a United States Marine, in uniform, in a wheel chair. He's in the wheel chair because he was out fighting for the freedom of people like Kevin, who just don't get it.
- B. What emotions do you feel when you think of a kid like Kevin?
- C. I feel anger. I want to yank him to his feet and tell him to put his hand over his heart and stand still.
- D. I also feel humbled and grateful for that Marine. I want to go say thank you.
- E. We'll come back to this cartoon in a minute.
- F. There's one key Bible verse I'd like us to wrap our minds around today. Here it is.
  - 1. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9, NKJV).*
- G. Would you think with me today about the subject of gratitude and giving? I want to do that by listening to God through our first Bible verse slowly. In low gear. One phrase at a time.

## II. Gratitude and Giving

- A. For you know...
  - 1. The most important thing about you is what comes into your mind when you think about God.
  - 2. Not how much money you have, not how big your problems are, and not how many success stories you can point to. That's all nice, but it doesn't really define you.
  - 3. The most important thing about you is what comes into your mind when you think about God. Do you know Him? Do you know what He's like?
  - 4. Because that will define you and determine how you operate your whole life.
    - a) Your marriage. Sexuality. Raising kids. How you live a single life. How you earn money and spend money. How you treat other people. Everything all comes home here.
  - 5. "For you know..." this verse says. And there are a whole lot of people in our church who have a pretty deep knowledge of God and a pretty deep knowledge of the Bible. I celebrate that. I want us all to get there.
  - 6. Maybe you feel the opposite is true of you. You feel like a rookie. You don't know your spiritual right hand from your spiritual left hand.
  - 7. If that's you, I want you to know how glad we are that you're here today. We welcome you.
  - 8. Life with God is a lot like learning how to golf. When I learned to golf, I started on the driving range. I'll never forget how I set the ball on that little rubber tube, set up, swung the club, and completely missed the ball. It takes a lot of swings to get the hang of it.
  - 9. And then there's that horrible moment when you go to a golf course and actually have to tee off. My first tee-shot was at a little nine-hole golf course near Chicago called Tam-O-Shanter. My Uncle Bill took me golfing. The course was crowded and when it was my turn to tee off, there were a whole bunch of old men standing around waiting, and I was freaked out.
  - 10. I teed up the ball, swung the club, and sliced the ball about three fairways over—with everybody watching.
  - 11. That's how God stuff feels when you first start. I get it.
  - 12. Because there's stuff you're supposed to know and you don't know it.
  - 13. My Uncle caught up to me as I was headed to look for my ball, and he said this: "Bill, everybody standing there started just like you started. Don't worry about it."
  - 14. And I want to say to you—everyone here started right where you're at. We felt clueless. We felt nervous. We felt like we were going to mess up. We get you. Don't quit. Stick with it. We're glad you're here.
  - 15. So our verse says, "So you know." Know what?
- B. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - 1. If you take away grace from the message of Jesus, there's nothing left worth preaching, worth believing, or worth fighting for. Grace is the soul of the gospel; without it the gospel is dead. Grace is the music of the gospel; without it, the gospel becomes the clanging pots and pans of legalism and religion.
  - 2. God deals with sinful people on the basis of justified mercy. That means we start guilty and ashamed, Christ absorbs our guilt and shame in His death on the Cross, and God gives us a pardon, full and free.
  - 3. I know as soon as I say "sin" many people check out. They think, "Oh, you're one of those people." But of all the doctrines of Christian theology, please realize this: the doctrine of sin is the most empirically verifiable, yet the most intellectually disdained truth of them all. You KNOW you're somehow broken, and every day you prove it.
  - 4. Even still, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - 5. The kindness and mercy of God is a justified kindness and mercy. It isn't leniency. It isn't God sweeping our sins under the rug. It isn't God looking the other way. It can't be. A holy God can't not punish sin. He declared, "The soul that sins, it shall die." And so a death penalty must be inflicted. Nothing less would make for a holy God. And nothing less would make for grace.

6. We live in an age where grace is confused with leniency. To make God lenient is to erase His holiness and violate His justice. To make God lenient is to imagine a universe in which the scales of justice are not only thrown out of balance; they are thrown in the dumpster.
  7. God's grace is a justified grace. It comes logically after the death of Christ, and is grounded and rooted in that death. Take away the death of Christ, and you take away grace. Take away grace, and you take away the gospel. Take away the gospel, and all you have left is the bad news of humans, by human effort, striving to merit the approval of God.
  8. There's a mind-blowing phrase in the Bible: that God justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5). To justify means to declare righteous. God declares ungodly people righteous. Really? That's like calling fire cold and water dry. How can God declare unrighteous people to be righteous?
  9. Because of the Cross.
  10. If Christ had not died, the sinner could not come near to God. If Christ had not died, God could not have justified the ungodly.
  11. If Christ had not died, the righteousness of God would have delivered swift and certain retribution. If Christ had not died, grace and guilt could not have looked each other in the face.
  12. But now, love and holiness have met together, and God is just and the justifier of every person who believes in Jesus.
  13. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  14. What is grace? Grace is more than leniency, and grace is more than love. Grace is love at an infinite cost. It is the solution to the dilemma of God's holiness and our unholiness. It allows love to triumph without holiness losing.
  15. Grace is the uncompromised, unrestricted, unrecompensed (un-repaid) loving favor of God toward moral train wrecks like us. It is unearned. It is unmerited. It flows from the immense heart of God because of whom and what He is, irrespective of whom and what we are or what we have done or not done.
    - a) List all your failures, go ahead. Grace erases them all.
    - b) List all your sins, don't miss even one. Grace has erased them all too, once for all.
    - c) Go ahead and list all your needs, and your deficits, and your debts and your worries. In grace, God takes care of you, and watches over you, and supplies all your needs.
    - d) Where you messed up, grace forgives you.
    - e) Where you're broken, grace heals you.
    - f) And where you're needy, grace supplies you.
  16. Grace is the work of God, and the unwork of you. It is the burden of God for the unburdening of you. It is God's sweat and your rest.
  17. Grace is the triumph of God's power over our weakness; God's wisdom over our foolishness; God's forgiveness over our guiltiness; and God's love over our waywardness.
  18. The grace that saved you is the grace that keeps you saved and will one day take you safely home.
  19. And in between, His grace will take care of you every single day.
  20. What do you need that grace has not supplied? And what have you done that grace has not enabled? You might say, "I have what I have because I worked for it myself."
  21. Maybe, but who gave you the mind that thinks and the hands that function and the lungs that breathe to do the work to get the money to get what you have?
  22. God. By His grace. You are what you are by the grace of God.
  23. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...
    - (1) In the continuing saga of the UPrep Jr. Pee Wee Panthers football team, and our march toward football glory, I have some catching up to do with you. We lost yesterday, but only by four...touchdowns. And we lost last week, but only by four...touchdowns. But, we won three games ago (the week Josh preached) by three touchdowns. Yes, we did.
      - (a) During yesterday's game, at halftime, we were down five-zip, and one of our coaches looked at me and said, "I think we need some divine intervention." I said, "I already tried that."
      - (b) He said, "I think I gotta work a little harder for the big guy."
    - (2) But grace means that working hard for the big guy isn't the plan. God doesn't want your works: they stink (Isaiah 64:6) like the high school locker room we were in yesterday.
    - (3) If we didn't have the grace to win yesterday, we at least had the grace to lose with style.
    - (4) Grace never fails.
  24. So let's remember what we're talking about. Our key Bible verse for today begins with these words: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- C. That though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor...
1. Here in one line is what Jesus did and how He did it.
  2. He was rich. What does that mean? That refers to everything Jesus enjoyed in heaven before He first came to earth. He is fully God, the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. His home was heaven. He lived in the

- nicest house, on the nicest block, in the nicest subdivision of the whole cosmos. He had more servants than you can count—called angels. The Bible says ten thousand times ten thousand of them, and that's just getting started.
3. If we spent a thousand lifetimes counting and weighing His treasures, we could never come close. He had power. He had wealth. He had glory. He had honor. He had praise. He had comfort. He had prestige. He had happiness. He had contentment. He had laughter. He had joy.
  4. He had everything the cosmos could offer, and far more, because He had the love of the Father and of the Spirit.
  5. He was rich, says our verse. He was higher than the highest.
  6. YET—and there is the big turning point.
  7. Yet for your sakes He became poor.
  8. How did Jesus become poor?
    - a) He laid aside His crown, and He laid aside His glory. He laid aside all the comforts of heaven, and He came into this world. God became man without ceasing to be God. He became poor.
    - b) When He came into the world, He didn't come as a conqueror or king. He came as a baby; born to a young virgin girl, in a stable, in Bethlehem. He had no crib and no pillow. Just a trough and a tattered blanket and some hay. He became poor in His birth.
    - c) He became poor in His life too. He wasn't rich. He had no mansions. The Bible says He had no place to lay His head. He was a blue collar worker, a carpenter, and never had a savings account. He was rich, but He became poor—in His birth and in His life.
    - d) But He became poorest of the poor in His death. Because there has never been and never will be a death like Jesus died.
    - e) Jesus died by crucifixion. He endured a false arrest and false trials. The soldier spit upon Him. They blindfolded Him and took turns punching Him, saying, "If you're the Son of God, tell us who hit you." They scourged Him. That means they ripped His back open with a whip, down to the muscle and bone. They crushed a crown of thorns on His head. They stripped Him and mocked Him and sentenced Him to death and made Him carry His own cross. He was rich, but He became poor.
    - f) John Stott writes: (The cross of Christ, p 24)
      - (1) "Crucifixion seems to have been invented by 'barbarians' on the edge of the known world, and taken over from them by both Greeks and Romans. It is probably the cruelest method of execution ever practiced, for it deliberately delayed death until maximum torture had been inflicted. The victim could suffer for days before dying."
      - (2) "Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion, except in extreme cases of treason. Cicero in one of his speeches condemned it as 'a most cruel and disgusting punishment...To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to kill him is almost an act of murder: to crucify him is—what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed.'"
    - g) And yet Crucifixion was not the worst part of Jesus' agony.
    - h) Because when the Romans nailed Jesus to the Cross, heaven went to work.
    - i) God reached down into you before you were ever born. God Himself lifted out of you every failure, every shame, and every sin. God collected your lies. God collected your dirty little secrets. God collected your crimes and misdemeanors. God gathered up all your selfishness, and your hatred, and your hypocrisy, and your gossip, and your slanders, and your bullying, and your deceptions. He took out of you every sin you have ever committed and ever will commit.
    - j) And God placed them all on that one man, Jesus Christ, hanging on the Cross. After God slammed the full weight of all your sin onto Jesus, God did something the devil never saw coming.
    - k) God declared Jesus Christ GUILTY, and pronounced the sentence of death. The execution was swift and certain and sure.
    - l) Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
    - m) And He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
    - n) Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
    - o) He became poor for your sake—He became poor as your substitute, your scapegoat, your sacrifice, your sin-bearer.
    - p) He became poor.
    - q) Why?
    - r) That's the last phrase of our verse today:
- D. That you, through His poverty, might be made rich.
1. After three hours of agony on the Cross, Jesus cried out again—He said, "IT IS FINISHED."
  2. What was finished? Everything that had to happen to bring you to God. Jesus did it all. Jesus finished the task. Jesus did the work.
    - a) And because He did the work, you can be forgiven.
    - b) Because He did the work, you can be saved.
    - c) Because He did the work, you can go to heaven.

- d) Because He did the work, you can have the free gift of eternal life.
- 3. Have you ever said yes to that gift?
- 4. In just a moment, I'm going to show you how to do that. But I want you to sit tight for a moment—because I want to say something to all our church people who have already received this wonderful gift of salvation through faith in Christ.

### III. Giving

- A. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9, NKJV).*
- B. You were poor. He made you rich.
- C. Now here's the question: what are you going to do about that? How do you respond?
- D. Jesus was walking one day, and He came across ten men with the terrible illness called leprosy. He healed all ten of them, and they ran off, so excited and happy to be healed.
- E. Then a light bulb lit up on one man's head, and He ran back to say thank you to Jesus, and to praise Him for the gift of healing.
- F. Jesus said, "Hey, didn't I heal ten of you? Where are the other nine?"
- G. I think He might be saying that to some in our church today. Where's the genuine thank you? Not just the thank you with the lips, but with the life?
- H. You've said the Pledge of Allegiance to our country and that's great, but where's the genuine, authentic, heartfelt pledge of allegiance to your Savior? That gratitude, that loyalty, that thanksgiving that says all I am and all I have is from You and for You.
- I. I am preaching today from the main chapter in the whole Bible about generosity for the kingdom of God. Second Corinthians chapter eight and nine. I am trying to make a case why we should release our money into the kingdom of God.
- J. Reason one: He made me (last week).
- K. Reason two: He saved me (this week).
- L. Do you remember the cartoon we had at the start of this message?
- M. Well—here's what I want to say to you with all love and affection, as your pastor, and also with all seriousness.
- N. Whatever money you have—yes, it's yours. You have every right to it; keep it. Keep it all, if you like. Cross your legs on the table, and just keep it.
- O. But first, let me introduce you to someone who gave up everything He had so you could have everything you have.
- P. His name is Jesus. He saved you. He saved you at unspeakable cost. He made you. He saved you.
- Q. You are either going to be one of the nine who takes His grace and runs away. Or you'll be the one who turns around and says, "Thank you." Thank you in prayer. Thank you in worship. Thank you in how you live every day. And thank you every time the offering plate passes by.
- R. Today's paragraph of the Bible goes on to talk about giving your tithes and offerings to God and it says this:
  - 1. *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7, NKJV).*
- S. God loves a cheerful giver. Do you know what that means? It means your attitude toward the offering plate is the acid test of your real gratefulness to Jesus. Don't kid yourself; giving is about the heart.
- T. Our worship team is going to come, and we're going to take our offering. Can you just view that offering plate as your thank you note to Jesus?
- U. But before we do that, there are some of you today who have never received Jesus as your Savior—and I want to talk to you right now.