

Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, January 14, 1973

Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (41:15)

... played was announced; if it was I didn't hear it, but I think I recognized it as "Nearer my God to Thee." And whenever I hear that hymn, or especially the playing of it it reminds me of the time the Titanic went down, I think it was in 1912. And the musicians played that; I don't know whether it was sung, but at least they thought that the people in the water, or still on the ship, would recognize it. But I've often thought, what a contrast. "Nearer my God to Thee" can mean nothing but despair and lack of hope and trouble for the unsaved. It could administer a little bit of comfort to those who were about to meet God, that knew Him.

But that was not what I wanted to speak of this morning. I wanted to continue with a very famous, a very favorite and well-known verse in the book of II Corinthians. It is akin to the one that was quoted, the famous one John 3:16. the one that tells us that God so loved, so very dearly loved the world. The word so in that gospel, in that verse, is in the Greek a very extreme expression, it's "so very dearly" loved the world. And that must forever cause a great deal of wonder to us, as we think of ourselves and see the world around us, and the way it is going, to think how that could be possible. How could God, that has been rebuffed, and reviled, and hated, cursed, and despised, not only in his place in the Glory, but in the person of his Son, for the name of Jesus Christ is on a great many lips, and it is used about as commonly as the name of God, and always in a derogative sense. Men vent their anger, and their hatred, and their concerns, and use and blaspheme the name of God and of Christ, for which they will pay, as the Scripture tells us, from the Lord's own words themselves, "By thy words thou shall be justified and by thy words thou shall be condemned."

So everyone needs the salvation that is so freely offered, and this last hymn that we sang, "The Wonderful Grace of Jesus," is the subject of the verse that I have in mind. And you need not turn to it, because it's just a very short verse, perhaps even shorter than John 3:16, which I think has only some 23 or 25 words. And that verse in the eighth of II Corinthians, verse 9. And we all always ought to remember these famous, these well-known verses, these text verses by their reference, so we can point them out to people so they'll know that it isn't our word, but these are the words of Holy Writ. They're the words that God has sent his Son from Heaven to give to us.

Because Paul, who wrote these words that I'm about to read, saw the Lord himself, heard his voice from Heaven, and was commissioned to be his representative, his Apostle. The words in the King James Version and all other versions are very similar, hardly a change in them, just as John 3:16. John 3:16 could not be misunderstood, it's a word so simple, spoken of by a Divine Person, the one who knew what he was talking about, and the one who was to live out in his body, in his life, and embodied the embodiment of truth. So in this 9th verse we read that "We know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich," or when he was rich, "yet for your sakes he became poor, that you, through his poverty, might be made rich" or might be rich, or enriched.

This is one of the, quite a number of verses in this particular book that presents a paradox. For whoever heard of a person, rich, becoming poor, to enrich others? Of course you might think that a philanthropist, who was rich to begin with, might give away all his wealth. But there are mighty few of

such, aren't there. The rich hang on to theirs, and they give a little bit of what they've got, perhaps to perpetuate their name, and to create fame for themselves. But here was one who reverses the order. He was rich to begin with, yet he became poor, that through his poverty, through his poverty, millions might be made rich, might be made rich for all eternity.

You see the philanthropist who gives a little of his wealth enriches somebody else for a time, but he can never do this, what this verse speaks of, "made rich for eternity." And that's what every one of us who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as our savior, who have put our trust in him for our life here, and for the life that's to come. Because every one has a life to come. There's no such thing known as annihilation, not even in nature. Werner Von Braun, I think, the German who was captured by the Americans at the end of the war, World War II, and was the head of the space program, those mighty satellites that take men to the moon, he was in charge of that, and that's one of his expressions. That was an expression of his faith. There's no such thing in, not even in nature. Werner Von Braun, I think, the German who was captured by the Americans at the end of the war, World War II, and was the head of the space program, those mighty satellites that take men to the moon, he was in charge of that, and that's one of his expressions. That was an expression of his faith. There's no such thing in nature as annihilation. Everything that is here will either be changed, or remain as it is. There's no such thing as a thing coming to nothing. We burn a paper, for instance, we burn our rubbish, but that rubbish goes into another form, that ascends into the air, and it becomes something else.

This thought of the apparent contradiction in this verse is very similar to others that we have in this book. For instance, at the end of the book the apostle writes of his experience that he has a "thorn in the flesh." [II Corinthians 12:7] We don't know what that was; some think it was some affliction of his eyes that made him repulsive, and that interfered with his speaking, with his travelling. But whatever it was, he did not get relief from it, though he asked the Lord three times to remove it. The Lord answered him that His grace was sufficient for him, and the apostle concludes the story by telling us that "when I am weak, then I am strong." Now we can't explain that physically; a weak person can't at the same time be a strong person. But when he was weak, this was physically, when he knew that he was suffering, he could realize that in God's sight he was strong, in faith he was strong, spiritually speaking.

And then other instances of it he speaks of having nothing, yet possessing all things. Dying, and yet we live, and so on. But that was not what I had in mind this morning. It's the verse in its totality. This is a revelation; I don't think there's another verse in Scripture like it. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ took him to this earth, took him from his place in the Glory as a member of Deity, with all the power and glory that that meant. Took him to this scene, took him to a place in which he would meet nothing but contradiction, with disgust, with hatred, with everything but what he came to give us.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, I believe, speaks of the attitude of God, because the grace of God is spoken of much more than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the Apostle evidently had told these people, these Corinthians, who, by the way, were a very wicked people to begin with, and enumerating some of their wickednesses in the first epistle he tells us "but now, you're washed, you're cleansed, you're sanctified, you're made holy in the sight of God." [I Cor. 6:11] See, the righteousness of Christ is imparted to those who believe on Him, and so, the Apostle, writing to these people that he had been preaching to for 18 months, no doubt visiting in their homes, just as he says in the 20th chapter to the people of Ephesus. Visiting in their homes, meeting them night and day, preaching to them, and

counseling them. They knew the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, because that was a revelation that God had given to him, the Apostle Paul, and he was commissioned to spread this abroad, to make it known. And in those days the licentious and idol-worshipping Greeks, they had instantly, a great many of them, instantly saw that this was so far better than anything that they had had up to that time. They forsook their idols, they changed their lives, they repented of their sins, they received the forgiveness of God through Christ, and were made new creatures in Christ. As he says, “wherefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.” [II Cor. 5:17] Everything is changed. We still have the old nature. We still are what we were at the beginning, but we have a new nature, we have a divine nature, that responds to God and to Christ. And we are indwelt with the Spirit of God which gives us an interest in Godly things, and makes us fit for His presence.

And we know, he says the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that introduces us into the subject that it is a wonderful thing to be a Christian, because the Christian has a knowledge that no one else has. The unbeliever could not say “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.” He couldn’t say that. He’s probably grouching or grieving about things that are, that happened to him; he has a miserable time. And we are told that the pleasures of sin are just for a season. So if there is a time when fun is had, and so on, this passes away. But the spiritual things, the things that God in Christ can minister to us, through the Word of God and through the Spirit of God, they last for eternity. They are things that can’t be lost.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, it speaks of the tremendous compassion that God has for His creatures. It speaks also of His good will. That was what was announced through the angels and the shepherds, that the glory of God is here, and it’s peace on earth. It could have been peace on earth, had men received him. But anyway, the remainder of the verse, the remainder of the statement still remains true, good will toward man. That was the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

John tells us in his gospel that “the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” [John 1:17] Now that does not mean that the law of Moses was wrong, or that there was anything wrong with it, it just means that the law of Moses was going to be superseded by something new in the world, that is the fullness of grace and truth. That’s what came by Jesus Christ, and of his fullness have all we received grace upon grace. It is as if God was piling up the good will, and the love of his heart, that sent his son to die for human beings, if they would only repent and receive forgiveness, and belong to him, become his children and sons, by faith.

So we see a little bit of that grace in the first visit of the Lord to his city, his home city, his home town, of Nazareth. Luke 4 tells the story that was he was born in Bethlehem of course, but brought up in Nazareth. But when he became a man, presumably when he entered upon his ministry, he left Nazareth, and came and dwelt in Capernaum, as we’re told. And Nazareth and Capernaum are two cities that lay a claim to the Lord Jesus to his birth, to his life, but strange to say, those sites are not well-known now. They show a place where the Lord is supposed to have been laid, as a babe, but I’m sure that isn’t the place, because any worship there would not be true worship. It would be worship because of his having being born there. Just think of the Lord, the Lord chose the humblest place in all the earth, not even a place where a child would be born, either in a home or a hospital, but because there was no room for him at the inn, the mother had to be taken to a stable. And the Lord was not only born there, but laid in a manger. So he had associated with the lower creation; that shows the physical lowliness of

his birth.

But when he came back to Nazareth on one occasion, as we're told in the 4th of Luke, and I imagine this must have been very shortly after he came and dwelt in Capernaum, the Lord went into the synagogue. There was no temple in Nazareth; none of the small cities in the land of Judea had such. It is only in Jerusalem. But when the Lord went there, he took up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and found the place where it was written, "the spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." [Luke 4:18] And that's what he was about to do. And when he had finished that passage, up to the place where it says "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord," he rolled up the scroll, for there were no books in that time, he rolled up the scroll and then began to preach and say these wonderful words, words never before spoken at any time: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Can you imagine what a claim that was? Here, this is his instant claim to Deity. What could be a higher thing than to say the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me? Here he identifies the Spirit of God with God Himself, Jehovah God, in his person. There's the Trinity. And he begins to speak, then he begins to enlarge on that, to preach the gospel to the poor. And it says the effect of that was electric. They marvelled at the words of grace that were proceeding from his mouth. That must have been a wonderful thing to have been there. To have heard Deity in the person of a lowly person, a lowly man, yet a perfect man, one in whom there was no sin, could be no sin, one that was speaking as God Himself. They wondered at the gracious words, the words of grace that proceeded from his mouth.

But you know, John tells us in his first chapter, in addition to all the beautiful statements made there about the coming of the person who was the creator, the Word, the Light, the Life, he tells us that this person was full of grace and truth. You see grace, while this is a wonderful thing, it needs something else, and truth must be a part of it, must be aligned with it. And that's what the Lord then proceeded to do.

He then told these people in the synagogue at Nazareth that there were many widows in the time of Elijah, there were many lepers in the time of Elisha. In the wonderful land that the Lord was living in which had been for 1500 years, or perhaps nearer 2000 years, the special land that God had favored and protected, because as you look at the map of Israel you see on the one side the Mediterranean Sea, but to the north of it is Lebanon and Syria to the east of it is Jordan, and to the south of it is Egypt. and all of these were enemies of the land of Israel. They were constant enemies, although probably in those days, before Christ, Syria and Lebanon were not the land we know today. But they were in that geographical location. Israel, the land of Judea, was ringed about with enemies; God was preserving them.

But it says that "not in all the land that God was so signally preserving did he visit the widows that needed help, or did he visit the lepers that needed cleansing." Not one of them, he says, was saved, "except the widow of Zarepheth, and Naaman the Syrian." [Luke 4:27] You know what that, then there was another electric shock as it would, as it seemed, came through the audience, and their admiration, and the sense of grace and love that was in this man's voice and heart changed immediately to hate. And what was the result? They stopped him, took him out of that synagogue, and led him to the brow of a hill, with the avowed intention of casting him down. But they didn't succeed. In a few words it tells us that he passed through the midst of them. Perhaps they were, in Indian fashion, assembled like on the sides of an aisle, and expected him to pass through and they would beat him to death. But he passed

through the midst of them, and went his way.

And likewise, in Capernaum, the Lord did most of his wonderful works, and as I spoke on it some weeks ago, he had to say that “if all the mighty works,” the works of power, God’s power, infinite power, “had been done in Sodom, they would have repented.” [Matthew 11:21] They would have seen the hand of God, they would have seen the power of God and admitted their wickedness, and they will only receive a lesser punishment than you.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: what a wonderful thing it is. That still expends today. That word, that Grace, a divine word. If you look it up in the dictionary, you will only find only one or two meanings attached to the spiritual meaning, which our Bible tells us is God’s grace, the infinite favor that he has towards man, his creature that has revolted against him. So sinned that today, it’s so common that it’s doubted whether there is a God. And God seems in some respects to be disappearing, just like the universe; they speak of the advancing universe that’s receding all the time.

Well God’s grace still continues with man. He has provided a way of salvation, the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men has appeared. It appeared first in the time of the Lord, 1900 years ago, when he came to Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Capernaum. But those were not his real homes, for he said, “the son of man has not a home, he has no place to lay his head.” He was so rejected, so despised, as Isaiah 53 tells us, that he had no part here. And only for the fact that he was in constant communication with his Father, and knew what it was to speak to Him, to receive strength from Him, to know that he was imparting the very words of God here, to a rebellious nation, and then to a hostile world.

For at the cross of Calvary it was both Jew and Gentile. Though the gospel in the Old Testament seems to be directed mostly to the Jew, yet there are passages in Isaiah that show that it was for all the world. “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” [Isaiah 45:22] Just think of the tremendous size of the earth, compared to the small nation of Israel. It used to be the size of the state of Massachusetts, 7000 miles. But I think in the last 10 years they have increased that, though they’re not expected to hold it, or at least they’re asked not to hold it. I don’t think it’s inhabited, so it’s probably of not much use to them, other than a little bulwark.

This is the grace of God that brings salvation to man. But man has to want it. Man has to feel that he needs it. Salvation is never thrust upon us, though there are passages in the Scripture that seem to show that if it was not thrust upon us we wouldn’t receive it. But whether that be so or not, no one receives the salvation of God without accepting it. We must want it, we must accept it, we must receive it. And then to prove that it is genuine, the genuineness of our reception of that gospel, we must follow on. We must become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s a corollary of the wonderful statement that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is available for all.

But the verse continues, “that though he was rich,” and the only change in that that I’ve seen in other versions is that it was “when he was rich.” And of course that’s true too. Now I’m not acquainted with the Greek, and there are so many copies of the Greek that it would be impossible, unless you had access to all these copies, to know whether that “when” was absolutely in the original. But it is true, isn’t it.

We sang “though the cattle upon a thousand hills,” but that’s just the very smallest fraction of what the Lord owns. He owns the universe; he created it by the word of his power. Though there may be different interpretations of the first chapter of Genesis, the very first statement is that God created it,

and it must have been by his word. To create something out of nothing: that's God's work, God's alone. And there are at least a hundred passages in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, that attest to the fact that it is God that has created the world. John's gospel, first chapter, shows us that the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, the person who walked this earth 1900 years ago, was the active agent in that creation. It was his word, it was his act. Here he comes into this scene, gives it all up, gives up all claim to his creation, and acts here as Adam's successor. Adam was a type of Christ, but just in the opposite form. Adam sinned, and lost everything. Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, came into this scene, and has gained everything. He regained it for God, he restored the glory of God. Of course we don't see this with our eyes, but this is a spiritual truth, that the Scriptures prove.

And so, "though he was rich," or "when he was rich." Now that, I think, is a beautiful proof of his Deity. For when was he rich on earth? Just the opposite: he came into the poorest kind of birth, led the simplest kind of life, he was a carpenter. Every man had a trade in those days; the Lord took the trade of a carpenter, that is a builder. And what a wonderful suggestion; that he was the one who had framed the universe. He was the builder of the universe. All things came into being by him and nothing that is in existence, has life, came into being without him.

But it says, it continues, "that though he was rich," or "when he was rich," "he became poor." And what was the reason for that? It was for our sakes. He was the one that was to carry out, was to fulfill, the prophecies in the Old Testament. The 53rd of Isaiah, if you read that, it's the most remarkable passage in all Scripture that shows that here was a person doing something for others. He was perfect, but he's doing this for imperfect people, and doing it in suffering. Anyone else that would have come, any human being that would have received the treatment that the Lord Jesus Christ received, would have blasted, with the power he had, would have blasted the universe out of existence, smashed it to smithereens. But all the hatred, all the contempt, all the opposition that he received only carried him further, nearer to that place where he would become poor.

The Scriptures attest the physical poverty of the Lord. Just think of the time, when with his disciples, he was asked whether it was right to give tribute to Caesar. He didn't have a penny; he said show me a penny. And though he knew all things, and knew that Judas was carrying on this deception, and crookedness, and the covetousness that led him to that final act of selling the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, he went on with it. Just think of the time when he went into the fields with his disciples and crushed the grains of wheat on the Sabbath. And that immediately aroused the hatred of the Pharisees, the Scribes; they said it was unlawful to do this. They had the Law of Moses, and a lot more, but they didn't have a single bit of the grace, the compassion, the good will, the favor, the lovingkindness that we were singing of this morning, the mercy. All these qualities that only a Divine person can show in all its fullness. They didn't have any of that, but he was full of it. And that led him to the place where he became, finally, poor, poorer than the poor. No one has ever done what he did for the sake of man. All the philanthropy of all the centuries doesn't compare in the slightest degree with the greatness of the suffering, with the agony, with the atonement that was wrought through Christ.

Just think of what he bore. It was not only the curse of God, but it was the curse that had been pronounced by the Spirit of God in the book of Deuteronomy. Cursed is every one that hangeth upon a tree. Every body had to be taken down before sundown, every one that was hanged. The Lord fulfilled that. He also took the curse that he had himself pronounced in the Garden of Eden: "cursed is the

ground, for thy sake.” [Genesis 4:11] And then he took the curse of the broken Law. Galatians tells us that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us. Just think of the power of that, of the tremendous implication of that. All the curse that existed upon every one that did not continue in all the works of the Law to do them, he took that upon himself. That is the secret, that is the revelation, that is the meaning of the phrase “he became poor.”

And the final thing is that we though his poverty, we through that extreme experience that he suffered upon Calvary’s cross, six hours of pain, six hours of awful suffering, three hours at the hands of men and Satan, three hours at the hand of God. And at the final end of it he would say “it is finished” and “father into thy hands I commend my spirit.” The work of atonement was done. Some have said how could it be possible that in three hours he could atone for all the sins of men. I do not know how to answer that, except to say that here was an infinite being, God Himself. It’s difficult for us to imagine a person so lowly, for he had said “I am meek and lowly in heart” [Matthew 11:29] and proved that by his character, by his conduct. For such a person to suffer the wrath of God, but it is an infinite person against finite, and we little know the power of the infinite. The infinite is beyond our imagination, beyond our understanding. And I think when we see the Lord, not as the person he was on earth, but as the person he went back to heaven, the one that first ascended, but the one now that has ascended far above the heavens, that he might fill all things. Our admiration, our love, our wonder will be tremendous. It will probably be far above any thought of ours now. But that’s what we’re going on to.

And these are the riches that he means. God speaks through his servant to Timothy, he said “charge them that are rich in this world,” [I Timothy 6:17] those who are physically rich, who have money, who have fame and glory, charge them not to be satisfied with that, not to count on that, because that’s passing, but to enjoy the rich things of God. God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. The “all things” there are the spiritual things, the things that we have now, but we scarcely realize how great they are.

For instance, the forgiveness of sins, the salvation, the eternal life, the inheritance that we have in Christ, the righteousness of God in Him, the state that we’re in, the place that we have before God. Boldness to enter into the holiest. Just think of it, the High Priest alone could go once a year, could put aside that veil, and enter, and offer the blood. And we have instant access at all times, into the very presence of God, that which even the high priest had no privilege to do.

So we are enriched tremendously. And I would ask that anyone here, who has heard this verse spoken on so poorly, because it’s a divine utterance, the Spirit of God has indicted this for your pleasure and mine. If you’re not sure of the truth of this, of the fact that without it, you’ll face a lost eternity, or an eternity with the lost, that you need the experience of forgiveness of your sins, you need to come to Christ and receive that peace and rest that we spoke of some weeks ago. “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” [Matthew 11:28] If you haven’t experienced that, friend, make it your business. That’s the most pressing business of the day, of the month, of the week, and the year, and all your life here, but it’s only available until the Lord comes, and that may come at any moment. The Apostle, the same Apostle that wrote this letter, by divine inspiration says “now, now, now is the day of salvation.” May we pray.

Blessed God our Father, we ask thy blessing upon what has been thy word, what has been spoken in weakness. We thank thee that in weakness there is spiritual strength. We ask that each one may

receive the gift of God which cost thee so much, which is offered so freely to us, without money, or without price. It we could pay for it, it would annul the value of the blood of Christ, of his death on the cross and his life for us now. So we pray that each one here may have received the gift and may enjoy some more as we go along, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though, when he was rich, for our sake he became poor, that we, through that infinite poverty, might be infinitely enriched. We thank thee for this, in the Lord's precious name, amen. The meeting is over.