


CHARLES H. SPURGEON

HARLES HADDON SPURGEON, a celebrated English Baptist preacher, the son of an Independent minister, was born at Kelvedon, Essex, June 19, 1834, and died at Mentone, France, Jan. 31, 1892. After a few years schooling at Colchester and at an agricultural college at Maidstone, he became in 1849 usher in a school at Newmarket. The next year he united with a Baptist congregation, and at sixteen preached his first sermon in a cottage near Cambridge. He met with almost instant success, and in 1852 was called to be pastor of a Baptist congregation at Waterbeach. In 1854, he accepted the pastorate of a Baptist society in New Park Street, Southwark, London, and within a short time the chapel, which had heretofore been but poorly attended, proved far too small to accommodate the throngs who flocked to hear him. During its enlargement, the youthful preacher held forth at Exeter Hall, having now become, at twenty-two, the most popular preacher of his day. In 1861, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, a building seating six thousand persons, was erected for the use of his congregation, and of this Mr. Spurgeon continued pastor until his death. In 1864, he engaged in a controversy with the Evangelical party in the Established Church on the subject of baptismal regeneration, several hundred thousand copies of his sermon on this occasion being circulated. A strong Calvinist, Spurgeon was not always, and in some essentials not at all, in sympathy with many of his own denomination, and in 1887 he withdrew from the Baptist body. In his earlier career his preaching was more or less sensational in character and aimed at oratorical effect, but as years passed his eccentricities and mannerisms were modified without the loss of any of his original earnestness. His natural gifts for public oratory were great, and he possessed a clear and sympathetic voice. In the later years of his ministry, the value of his work came to be generally recognized, and a cordial feeling sprang up between him and a number of prominent Anglican churchmen. Mr. Spurgeon wielded no small share of political influence, and his custom of alluding from the pulpit to the leading events of the day made him at times a power to be considered. After 1855, his sermons were issued weekly, in a publication known as "Sword and Trowel," their circulation being enormous, and some of his volumes of discourses were translated into the chief European languages. The more important of his many published books include: "The Saint and His Saviour" (1857); "Morning by Morning" (1866); "Commentary on the Psalms" (1865-70); "John Ploughman's Talks" (1869); "Readings for the Closet" (1869); "The Treasury of David" (1870-85); "Lectures to My Students" (1875-77); "John Ploughman's Pictures" (1880); "My Sermon Notes" (1884-87); "Storm Signals" (1885); "All of a Grace" (1886); "According to Promise" (1887); "The Messiah" (1898); and "Autobiography" (1898-99). Two of Mr. Spurgeon's enterprises have been of incalculable good, viz., his "Pastors' College" (opened in 1855 and rebuilt in 1874), which has already trained 500 ministers, and "The Stockwell Orphanage" (opened in 1869), which has received and educated close upon 1,000 orphans.

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CONDESCENSION OF CHRIST

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."—2 Cor. viii, 9.

THE Apostle, in this chapter, was endeavoring to stir up the Corinthians to liberality. He desired them to contribute something for those who were the poor of the flock, that he might be able to minister to their necessities. He tells them that the churches of Macedonia, though very much poorer than the church at Corinth, had done even beyond their means for the relief of the Lord's family, and he exhorts the Corinthians to do the same. But, suddenly recollecting that examples taken from inferiors seldom have a powerful effect, he lays aside his argument drawn from the church of Macedonia, and he holds before them a reason for liberality which the hardest heart can scarcely resist, if once that reason be applied by the Spirit.

"My brethren," said he, "there is One above, by whom you hope you have been saved; one whom you call Master and Lord: now, if you will but imitate him, you cannot be ungenerous or illiberal. For, my brethren, I tell you a thing which is an old thing with you and an undisputed truth—'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.' Let this constrain you to benevoience." O Christian, whenever thou art inclined to an avaricious withholding from the church of God, think of thy Saviour giving up all that he had to serve thee; and canst thou then, when thou beholdest self-denial so noble,

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power to say to all things, "Be," and they should be. Herein, then, lay his riches; this creating power was one of the brightest jewels of his crown.

We call men rich, too, who have honor, and though men have never so much wealth, yet if they be in disgrace and shame they must not reckon themselves among the rich. But our Lord Jesus had honor, honor such as none but a divine being could receive. When he sat upon his throne, before he relinquished the glorious mantle of his sovereignty to become a man, all earth was filled with his glory. He could look both beneath and all around him, and the inscription, "Glory be unto God," was written over all space; day and night the smoking incense of praise ascended before him from golden vials held by spirits who bowed in reverence; the harps of myriads of cherubim and seraphim continually thrilled with his praise, and the voices of all those mighty hosts were ever eloquent in adoration.

It may be that on set days the princes from the far-off realms, the kings, the mighty ones of his boundless realms, came to the court of Christ and brought each his annual revenue. Oh, who can tell but that in the vast eternity, at certain grand eras, the great bell was rung, and all the mighty hosts that were created gathered together in solemn review before his throne? Who can tell the high holiday that was kept in the court of heaven when these bright spirits bowed before his throne in joy and gladness, and, all united, raised their voices in shouts and hallelujahs such as mortal ear hath never heard?

Oh, can ye tell the depths of the rivers of praise that flowed hard by the city of God? Can ye imagine to yourselves the sweetness of that harmony that perpetually poured into the ear of Jesus, Messiah, King, Eternal, equal with God his

Father? No; at the thought of the glory of his kingdom, and the riches and majesty of his power, our souls are spent within us, our words fail, we cannot utter the tithe of his glories.

Nor was he poor in any other sense. He that hath wealth on earth, and honor too, is poor if he hath not love. I would rather be the pauper, dependent upon charity, and have love, than I would be the prince, despised and hated, whose death is looked for as a boon. Without love man is poor—give him all the diamonds, and pearls, and gold that mortal hath conceived.

But Jesus was not poor in love. When he came to earth, he did not come to get our love because his soul was solitary. Oh no, his Father had a full delight in him from all eternity. The heart of Jehovah, the first person of the Sacred Trinity, was divinely, immutably linked to him; he was beloved of the Father and of the Holy Spirit; the three persons took a sacred complacency and delight in each other. And besides that, how was he loved by those bright spirits who had not fallen! I cannot tell what countless orders and creatures there are created who still stand fast in obedience to God. It is not possible for us to know whether there are, or not, as many races of created beings as we know there are created men on earth.

We cannot tell but that in the boundless regions of space there are worlds inhabited by beings infinitely superior to us; but certain it is, there were the holy angels, and they loved our Saviour; they stood day and night with wings outstretched, waiting for his commands, hearkening to the voice of his word; and when he bade them fly there was love in their countenance and joy in their hearts.

They loved to serve him, and it is not all fiction that when

there was war in heaven, and when God cast out the devil and his legions, then the elect angels showed their love to him, being valiant in fight and strong in power. He wanted not our love to make him happy, he was rich enough in love without us.

Now, though a spirit from the upper world should come to tell you of the riches of Jesus he could not do it. Gabriel, in thy flights thou hast mounted higher than my imagination dares to follow thee, but thou hast never gained the summit of the throne of God.

“Dark with insufferable light thy skirts appear.”

Jesus, who is he that could look upon the brow of thy Majesty, who is he that could comprehend the strength of the arm of thy might? Thou art God, thou art infinite, and we poor finite things are lost in thee. The insect of an hour cannot comprehend thyself. We bow before thee, we adore thee; thou art God over all, blessed forever. But as for the comprehension of thy boundless riches, as for being able to tell thy treasures or to reckon up thy wealth, that were impossible. All we know is that the wealth of God, that the treasures of the infinite, that the riches of eternity, were all thine own: thou wast rich beyond all thought.

The Lord Jesus Christ, then, was rich. We all believe that, though none of us can truly speak it forth. Oh, how surprised angels were when they were first informed that Jesus Christ, the Prince of Light and Majesty, intended to shroud himself in clay and become a babe, and live and die! We know not how it was first mentioned to the angels, but when the rumor first began to get afloat among the sacred hosts you may imagine what strange wonderment there was.

What! was it true that he whose crown was all bedight with

stars would lay that crown aside? What! was it certain that he about whose shoulders was cast the purple of the universe would become a man dressed in a peasant's garment? Could it be true that he who was everlasting and immortal would one day be nailed to a cross? Oh, how their wonderment increased! They desired to look into it. And when he descended from on high they followed him; for Jesus was “seen of angels,” and seen in a special sense, for they looked upon him in rapturous amazement, wondering what it all could mean. “He for our sakes became poor.” Do you see him as on that day of heaven's eclipse he did ungird his majesty? Oh, can ye conceive the yet increasing wonder of the heavenly hosts when the deed was actually done, when they saw the tiara taken off, when they saw him unbind his girdle of stars and cast away his sandals of gold? Can ye conceive it when he said to them, “I do not disdain the womb of the virgin; I am going down to earth to become a man?”

Can ye picture them as they declared they would follow him! Yes, they followed him as near as the world would permit them. And when they came to earth they began to sing, “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men.” Nor would they go away till they had made the shepherds wonder, and till heaven had hung out new stars in honor of the new-born King.

And now wonder, ye angels, the Infinite has become an infant; he, upon whose shoulders the universe doth hang, hangs at his mother's breast; he who created all things and bears up the pillars of creation hath now become so weak that he must be carried by a woman! And oh, wonder, ye that knew him in his riches, while ye admire his poverty!

Where sleeps the new-born King? Had he the best room in Cæsar's palace? hath a cradle of gold been prepared for

him, and pillows of down on which to rest his head? No, where the ox fed, in the dilapidated stable, in the manger, there the Saviour lies, swathed in the swaddling-bands of the children of poverty! Nor there doth he rest long; on a sudden his mother must carry him to Egypt; he goeth there and becometh a stranger in a strange land. When he comes back, see him that made the worlds handle the hammer and the nails, assisting his father in the trade of a carpenter!

Mark him who has put the stars on high and made them glisten in the night; mark him without one star of glory upon his brow—a simple child, as other children. Yet leave for a while the scenes of his childhood and his earlier life; see him when he becomes a man, and now ye may say, indeed, that for our sakes he did become poor.

Never was there a poorer man than Christ; he was the prince of poverty. He was the reverse of Cræsus—he might be on the top of the hill of riches, Christ stood in the lowest vale of poverty. Look at his dress, it is woven from the top throughout, the garment of the poor! As for his food, he oftentimes did hunger and always was dependent upon the charity of others for the relief of his wants! He who scattered the harvest o'er the broad acres of the world had not sometimes wherewithal to stay the pangs of hunger! He who digged the springs of the ocean sat upon a well and said to a Samaritan woman, "Give me to drink!"

He rode in no chariot, he walked his weary way, footsore, o'er the flints of Galilee! He had not where to lay his head. He looked upon the fox as it hurried to its burrow, and the fowl as it went to its resting-place, and he said, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but I, the Son of man, have not where to lay my head."

He who had once been waited on by angels becomes the servant of servants, takes a towel, girds himself, and washes his disciples' feet! He who was once honored with the hal-lujahs of ages is now spit upon and despised! He who was loved by his Father and had abundance of the wealth of affection could say, "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me."

Oh, for words to picture the humiliation of Christ! What leagues of distance between him that sat upon the throne and him that died upon the cross! Oh, who can tell the mighty chasm between yon heights of glory and the cross of deepest woe! Trace him, Christian, he has left thee his manger to show thee how God came down to man. He hath bequeathed thee his cross, to show thee how man can ascend to God. Follow him, follow him, all his journey through; begin with him in the wilderness of temptation, see him fasting there, and hungering with the wild beasts around him; trace him along his weary way, as the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. He is the byword of the drunkard, he is the song of the scorner, and he is hooted at by the malicious; see him as they point their finger at him and call him "drunken man and wine-bibber!"

Follow him along his *via dolorosa* until at last you meet him among the olives of Gethsemane; see him sweating great drops of blood! Follow him to the pavement of Gabbatha; see him pouring out rivers of gore beneath the cruel whips of Roman soldiers! With weeping eye follow him to the cross of Calvary, see him nailed there! Mark his poverty, so poor that they have stripped him naked from head to foot and exposed him to the face of the sun! So poor that when he asked them for water they gave him vinegar to drink! So poor that his unpillowed head is girt with thorns in death!

Oh, Son of man, I know not which to admire most, thy height of glory or thy depths of misery! Oh, Man, slain for us, shall we not exalt thee? God over all, blessed forever, shall we not give thee the loudest song? "He was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor."

If I had a tale to tell you this day, of some king, who, out of love to some fair maiden, left his kingdom and became a peasant like herself, ye would stand and wonder and would listen to the charming tale; but when I tell of God concealing his dignity to become our Saviour, our hearts are scarcely touched. Ah, my friends, we know the tale so well, we have heard it so often; and, alas, some of us tell it so badly that we cannot expect that you would be as interested in it as the subject doth demand.

But surely, as it is said of some great works of architecture, that though they be seen every morning there is always something fresh to wonder at; so we may say of Christ, that though we saw him every day we should always see fresh reason to love and wonder and adore. "He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor."

I have thought that there is one peculiarity about the poverty of Christ that ought not to be forgotten by us. Those who were nursed upon the lap of want feel less the woes of their condition. But I have met with others whose poverty I could pity. They were once rich; their very dress, which now hangs about them in tatters, tells you that they once stood foremost in the ranks of life. You meet them among the poorest of the poor; you pity them more than those who have been born and bred to poverty, because they have known something better. Among all those who are poor I have always found the greatest amount of suffering in those who had seen better days.

I can remember, even now, the look of some who have said to me when they have received assistance—and I have given it as delicately as I could, lest it should look like charity—"Ah, sir, I have known better days." And the tear stood in the eye, and the heart was smitten at bitter recollections. The least slight to such a person, or even too unmasked a kindness, becomes like a knife cutting the heart. "I have known better days" sounds like a knell over their joys. And verily our Lord Jesus might have said in all his sorrows, "I have known better days than these."

Methinks, when he was tempted of the devil in the wilderness, it must have been hard in him to have restrained himself from dashing the devil into pieces. If I had been the Son of God, methinks, feeling as I do now, if that devil had tempted me, I should have dashed him into the nethermost hell in the twinkling of an eye! And then conceive the patience our Lord must have had, standing on the pinnacle of the temple, when the devil said, "Fall down and worship me." He would not touch him, the vile deceiver, but let him do what he pleased. Oh! what might of misery and love there must have been in the Saviour's heart when he was spit upon by the men he had created; when the eyes he himself had filled with vision looked on him with scorn, and when the tongues to which he himself had given utterance hissed and blasphemed him!

Oh, my friends, if the Saviour had felt as we do, and I doubt not he did feel in some measure as we do—only by great patience he curbed himself—methinks he might have swept them all away; and, as they said, he might have come down from the cross and delivered himself and destroyed them utterly. It was mighty patience that could bear to tread this world beneath his feet and not to crush it when it so

—canst thou then be selfish, and regard thyself, when the claims of the poor of the flock are pressed upon thee? Remember Jesus; think thou seest him look thee in the face and say to thee, “I gave myself for thee, and dost thou withhold thyself from me? For if thou dost so, thou knowest not my love in all its heights and depths and lengths and breadths.”

And now, dear friends, the argument of the Apostle shall be our subject to-day. It divides itself in an extremely simple manner. We have first, the pristine condition of our Saviour—“He was rich.” We have next, his condescension—“He became poor.” And then we have the effect and result of his poverty—“That we might be made rich.” We shall then close by giving you a doctrine, a question, and an exhortation. May God bless all these and help us to tell them aright.

First, then, our text tells us that Jesus Christ was rich. Think not that our Saviour began to live when he was born of the Virgin Mary; imagine not that he dates his existence from the manger at Bethlehem; remember he is the Eternal, he is before all things, and by him all things consist. There was never a time in which there was not God. And just so there was never a period in which there was not Christ Jesus our Lord. He is self-existent, hath no beginning of days, neither end of years; he is the immortal, invisible, the only wise God, our Saviour. Now, in the past eternity which had elapsed before his mission to this world, we are told that Jesus Christ was rich; and to those of us who believe his glories and trust in his divinity it is not hard to see how he was so. Jesus was rich in possessions. Lift up thine eye, believer, and for a moment review the riches of my Lord Jesus before he condescended to become poor for thee. Be-

hold him sitting upon his throne and declaring his own all-sufficiency. “If I were hungry, I would not tell thee, for the cattle on a thousand hills are mine. Mine are the hidden treasures of gold; mine are the pearls that the diver cannot reach; mine every precious thing that earth hath seen.”

The Lord Jesus might have said, “I can stretch my sceptre from the east even to the west, and all is mine; the whole of this world, and yon worlds that glitter in far-off space, all are mine. The illimitable expanse of unmeasured space, filled as it is with worlds that I have made, all this is mine. Fly upward, and thou canst not reach the summit of the hill of my dominions; dive downward, and thou canst not enter into the innermost depths of my sway. From the highest throne in glory to the lowest pit of hell, all, all is mine, without exception. I can put the broad arrow of my kingdom upon everything that I have made.”

But he had besides that which makes men richer still. We have heard of kings in olden times who were fabulously rich, and when their riches were summed up we read in the old romances, “And this man was possessed of the philosopher’s stone, whereby he turned all things into gold.” Surely all the treasures that he had before were as nothing compared with this precious stone that brought up the rear. Now, whatever might be the wealth of Christ in things created, he had the power of creation, and therein lay his boundless wealth. If he had pleased he could have spoken worlds into existence; he had but to lift his finger, and a new universe as boundless as the present would have leaped into existence. At the will of his mind millions of angels would have stood before him, legions of bright spirits would have flashed into being. He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. He who said, “Light be,” and light was, had