

“Rich in Every Way” | 2 Corinthians 9:10-15 | Stewardship III
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→ Introduction??

This week I did a little experiment...I went to a website called globalrichlist.com. And it's pretty cool...you can enter in your yearly salary and it will tell you, based on data from 2008, where you stand in terms of wealth *in the world*. Not just the US...the world. So, I entered my salary and I was shocked to see that I am richer than 99.01% of the rest of the world. No Kidding! I am the 5,318,404th richest person on the face of the planet. In 2008, by the way, the population of the planet was estimated at 6.69 billion people.

Did you catch that? Jen and I are richer than over 6 billion other people on this planet. And clearly, we are not doctors or lawyers or hedge fund managers or professional athletes or musicians. I don't know where you fall but I can say that the things that Jen and I have access to, the stuff that we can buy, the security we have, is beyond the comprehension of the vast majority of the world's population.

We have been made rich in every way.

One of the things that I like to do is do yard work. Raking leaves, mowing, that sort of thing. I've done it my entire life...I grew up working for my dad on a golf course and when I was younger I spent my school breaks deadheading rhododendrons. As I got into high school I spent my summers on a mower, mowing fairways and greens. I worked for my uncle and his landscaping business.

But what I've really come to love in the last few years is gardening. Planting vegetables and herbs. I'm probably cutting it a little too close but Jen and I put in peppers and tomatoes in our front yard a month or so ago. We have herbs growing in containers in our back yard. There's Brussel sprouts, lettuce, kale in another container. That's not even to mention the lemon tree hanging over the fence from the neighbors and the orange tree that's loaded with oranges right now, on the cusp of ripening!

If you like to garden, too, you know that there is no better feeling than reaping a harvest, no matter how small, after planting a seed and tending to your plants. This beautiful created world, this amazing planet where seeds grow into plants and produce fruit that we can eat and sustain ourselves. How incredibly blessed we are to live in a place where the soil, from dirt, comes the things that sustain us and our everyday lives?

Truly, we have been made rich in every way.

I have mentioned this from the pulpit before, and I have reiterated it in meetings of the Church Council and Elders, but one of the traits Jen and I love about St. Mark is how welcoming and friendly you all are to everyone who walks in those doors. Over and over we have experienced first-hand the close-knit nature of St. Mark, from individual families to the congregations as a whole.

Often times we take our relationships for granted. We take people for granted, especially if we see them week in and week out. We take for granted that they will be here next week. We take for granted the work that they do. Don't we, often times, when we're deep in the weeds of our own lives and busy schedules, forget how important friends and family are in our lives? But look around. Look at the people in this place you have come to know and love. If you haven't been attending St. Mark for very long and haven't gotten to know many people here, I would encourage you to make the effort. Go out on a limb and introduce yourself.

In our relationships with one another, with the body of Christ, we have been made rich in every way.

I know, I know. There are many times in life when we don't *feel* rich. Rather, we feel burdened by bills and debt. We are terrified that the slightest hiccup in life will put us in the red and we won't be able to overcome it. Living in a place like Silicon Valley, even though you might make a generous salary, it just doesn't go as far as you would like it to. Even if Globalrichlist.com tells us otherwise, we might not feel exactly *wealthy* all the time. And truth be told, material wealth is not a given in the Christian life. It's not a promise from God.

But wealth in God's grace? Being made rich in Him? That *is* a promise that we can trust in. That *is* sure and certain. As we read two weeks ago, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). In this amazing, incredible exchange, Christ took on our sin and we took on His righteousness. Christ took our rags, and gave us his fine robes. Christ took our *spiritual* poverty and gave us inexpressible wealth in Him. Because of Him our treasury is overflowing with the grace and love that God has for *you*.

And yet, God continues to pour more and more into us. God is not content to give us just barely enough to ensure we continue to trust in Him. No, God gives and gives and gives the riches He won for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the drum I continue to pound as often as I can. The riches of God for you and for me, the Gospel of Jesus delivered to us through the Word of God, comes in so many different ways. We have only to receive. In Bible Study. In Worship. In the Sacraments. Through the forgiveness we receive from one another. God does not hold back. He is continually giving to His people.

We have been made rich in every way.

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The first person in the world to become a billionaire was a man who knew how to accrue wealth. He was a millionaire at the age of 23 and a billionaire at 50. Everything he did, every decision, attitude, and relationship was focused on acquiring wealth and power.

Indeed, through his hard work and industriousness, he had become rich in every imaginable way.

But at the age of 53 he became sick. His entire body was racked with pain. In complete agony, his body could only digest milk and crackers. One associate of his wrote, "He couldn't sleep, wouldn't smile, and nothing in life meant anything to him." His personal physicians predicted that he would die within a year.

One morning, however, the billionaire awoke and announced that he wanted to channel his assets to hospitals, research, and mission work. On that day, the John D. Rockefeller Foundation was born. And from the generosity of this one man eventually came the discovery of penicillin, cures for current strains of malaria, TB, and diphtheria. And the work began by Rockefeller continues even now, more than 100 years later.

But perhaps the most amazing part of this story is that the moment he began to give a portion of his money away, his body chemistry was altered too. So much so that, although he was on the verge of death at age 53, John Rockefeller lived to be 97 years old.

Rockefeller had been made rich in every way but those riches, when they had become an end to themselves, nearly killed him. Our text this morning from 2 Corinthians affirms that we, too, *have been made rich in every way*. But there's a second part to that in verse 11. The refrain for this morning isn't complete. Verse 11 continues with what grammarians call a ***purpose clause***.

Verse 11 says in full, "You will be made rich in every way *so that* you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God". John Rockefeller found this out the hard way. As a miser, he was a miserable man on the verge of death. But as a philanthropist, he continued to live a long and fulfilled life. He wasn't made rich for his own sake. He was made rich *for the sake of others*.

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We recall, of course, that the Corinthians had certainly been made rich in every way. As a port city and trading cross-roads, they had access to it all. But their wealth was not a means in and of itself. No, it was a tool given to them so that they could be generous people, contributing to the needs of others and giving to the ministry of the church. We, like the Corinthians, have been made rich in every way. Financially we have been made rich. Through the natural resources created by God we have been made rich. In our relationships, we are rich. And certainly, by God's grace we have been made rich in Him.

We have been made rich in every way...*so that* we can be a generous, giving people with the ultimate purpose of pointing others to Christ. That makes sense, doesn't it? That God gives to us not so that we can simply be blessed. But so that we can be a blessing to others and so that they, too, might be made rich in the grace of our Lord Jesus.

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I used to listen to Paul Harvey in the afternoons with my mom. You know, that segment he called "The Rest of the Story". He would set you up in the mornings, leave you with a cliff hanger until the afternoon. Well, the Corinthians have a "Rest of the Story". So you wonder

what happened to the Corinthians? Last week we saw how they had pulled their support of Paul and the church because of those false apostles running around preaching a false gospel.

What happened then, I wonder? Did Paul's appeal to the Gospel spur them on? Did his reminder to them of their identity in Christ and their wealth in Him bring them back into the fold? Or did they lose heart and lose faith? It seems like a question that might be lost to history, doesn't it? But amazingly enough, we actually know the answer.

The answer is found in a piece of literature called 1 Clement, it's the oldest existing Christian writing after the New Testament and, interestingly enough, it is written by a church leader named Clement to the Christians in Corinth! Did Clement mention anything about their stewardship? Did he mention their generosity? Did they live out what Paul proclaimed to them in 2 Corinthians?

Actually, yes! I'm happy to say they did! Clement remarks that the Corinthians were known for "giving more gladly than receiving" (1 Clement 2:1). "Giving more gladly than receiving". Isn't that amazing? A people who one wanted out, who wanted to withdraw their support for Paul, were later known for "giving more gladly than receiving"!

Grace – a word Paul used 12 times in 2 Corinthians 8-9 – empowered the Corinthians to continue on in their generosity. To keep on supporting the ministry of the church because of the surpassing riches they themselves had received from Jesus. In the same way, God's amazing grace in Jesus Christ empowers us to also be known for "Giving more gladly than receiving".

We have been made rich in every way. Why? *So that* we can be generous on every occasion, pointing others to Jesus. Amen.