

2 Corinthians 9:8-11

Dear Friends in Christ,

Do you think of yourself as rich? Probably not if you think of yourself in comparison to Bill Gates or Warren Buffet, but you are rich. In fact, you are probably richer than they are, because riches aren't counted only in dollars, or net worth, but the even greater spiritual blessings of forgiveness, peace, contentment, faith, hope and love which God graciously showers upon you.

What Paul says to the Corinthians applies equally to each of us today. **God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ... You will be made rich in every way.**

Five times in one sentence the Holy Spirit moves Paul to use some form of the word "all." "All", every grace, no gift of grace is missing. "In all things, at all times," no matter what the situation, everything is provided at the right time. "All that you need." If it's needed it's provided. "**The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.**" And twice he uses a verb that means "overflowing". What more could Paul say? How much clearer could it be? God has made you rich in every way.

Let's count some of the ways in which God has made us rich, because we are often tempted to think that we are not rich, but poor.

God has graced us, blessed us, making us rich in material possessions. Just think about it. You drove here in a vehicle that is worth thousands of dollars. Some of our fellow Christians in our mission fields have to walk. They can't even imagine owning their own vehicle, no matter how old or broken down it might be. When you woke up this morning you were lying on a bed probably worth hundreds of dollars. You were in an air conditioned room. You were able to use indoor plumbing. You had fresh, safe drinking water by just turning on a faucet. You could take a hot shower. You opened a refrigerator and had your choice of all kinds of foods to eat. You had a number of choices of clothes to wear when you looked in your closet. And the list could go on and on of things we tend to take for granted. We don't even think about them because there are just there for us every day. Even the poorest people we know usually have a roof over their heads, a car, a cell phone and a TV. But many people in the world don't have these things that we tend to take for granted and consider necessities. God has truly graced us. He has made us rich in material blessings.

And God has made us truly rich by making his spiritual blessings abound among us. Think about how amazed Luther and the people of his day would be to see how readily available the Bible is. They had to go to a library to read one and it was in Latin, not even their own language. Families today often have multiple Bibles in their homes. There are children's Bibles. There are numerous versions in English, not to mention almost every major language spoken on the face of the earth. Anyone with a computer and the internet can read the Bible online and do all kinds of searches for different words or ideas presented in Scripture. They would probably also be amazed at how much we take access to the Bible for granted and how little people know about what's actually in the Bible, even though they could pick it up and read it any time they wanted to.

People in many other parts of the world would be amazed at the freedom we have to gather for worship. I'll never forget the person from an eastern block country who stopped by the Grace July 4th booth one year. They were completely amazed at the fact that we could have a booth out in public and hand out Bible tracts on a national holiday and not have to worry about getting into trouble. No government authority tells us when we can or can't worship, or what we can or can't

say in worship. What a blessing from God! I pray we truly appreciate our freedom of religion before God allows it to be taken away.

We have frequent opportunities to receive the Lord's Supper. We have Christians scattered through out the United States and Canada, Mexico and South America, all over the globe, so that when we travel we can often find others who share our faith with whom we can worship and receive the Lord's Supper. We just had a Synod convention, and although there were difficult decisions regarding finances, the delegates could prayerfully focus on those issues without having to be concerned with disagreements over doctrine.

What Paul said of the Corinthians is true of us. God has made us rich. He has given us every grace. He has given us all that we need for our bodies and souls, in fact, much more than we need. His grace to us is overflowing.

You are rich. Believe it! None of us should ever be caught telling someone we are poor. We have more physical and spiritual blessings than any people who have ever lived on the face of the earth before us. To whom much is given much is also expected. God expects not only that we will acknowledge how blessed we are and give him thanks and praise, but that we will put the gifts he has given us to good use.

Did you hear it in Paul's inspired words? Those who have received such abounding blessings from the Lord **scatter abroad their gifts to the poor**. God showers us with his grace, with all these blessings so that we can **abound in every good work and be generous on every occasion**. God provides seed to the sower not only so that he might have bread to eat, but so that he might have even more to plant next season and increase the harvest even more.

If we are blessed by God more than any people on the face of the earth ever have been, then surely there should be no needy people among us. There should be no place on the face of the earth that we aren't trying to reach with the good news about Jesus.

But, instead of being generous, too often we give in to our selfish sinful nature and to the selfish values of the world around us. Too often we think like the people in Malachi's day. We worry that if we are generous, if we give what we have away, we won't have enough for ourselves. That seems to make sense, but God says just the opposite is true. He tells the people of Malachi's day that the reason it might seem that they don't have enough is because they have become selfish and have not put God first. They have not been generous. As a result, he has not given them rain. He has allowed pests and diseases to destroy their crops and minimize their harvest. He tells them that if they stop being selfish and put him first, he will open the flood gates of heaven. He will keep their crops free from pests and diseases, and they will find that they have all they need and more so that they can be generous on every occasion.

The Bible makes it very clear that good works don't save us. But it also makes it very clear that those who are made rich by God as we have, will do good works. Sitting on our blessings, being complacent, hoarding them for ourselves, failing to use our blessings to help others in their physical and spiritual needs is sin.

May God use this economic down turn and the cut backs that have had to be made in the work we do together as a Synod expose our sins of selfishness. May we be reminded that if we become selfish and try to hoard God's blessings for ourselves and not use them for the purpose God has given them to us, those blessing will be removed and given to others; just as they were from the Jews and just as they were from Germany. May we be reminded to daily confess our selfishness and rejoice in the unselfishness of Jesus who gave up everything for us. **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.**

God has made us rich in every way, physically and spiritually, so that we can be generous on every occasion. As John says, **If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?** The physical needs of our neighbors, especially those who are brothers and sisters in Christ, are occasions for us to be generous. We can respond to those needs by just keeping our eyes open looking for opportunities to serve each other, asking our friends and neighbors if there is any way we can help them. We can respond to those needs by making use of the Committee on Relief whenever we hear of a natural disaster; or our Synod's Humanitarian Aid Fund that helps provide things like wells so that people can have clean water in their villages, and when they come to get the water they also hear about Jesus, the Water of Life. We can be generous with our time and talents, Americans today have more leisure time than any generation before us. Look for occasions to be generous with your time and talents instead of sitting in front of the TV or playing video games. We can be generous with our offerings trusting that God will do what he promised and not only provide for our needs but bless us so that we can be even more generous.

All this generosity has one goal. It is to **result in thanksgiving to God.** The specific occasion Paul had in mind was the Corinthians' eagerness to take up an offering for the poor in Jerusalem. When the Christians in Macedonia heard about this need and what the Corinthians were planning, they begged to be a part of the offering, even though Paul considered them to be so poor they were almost in need themselves. And when this offering was delivered and people saw how generous their fellow Christians had been, they would certainly give praise and thanks to God.

Just imagine how much more someone will thank God if, through what you share with them personally, or through a missionary supported by your offerings, they realize that they were headed straight for Hell, but Jesus died to save them. There is rejoicing and thanksgiving among the angels in heaven over just one sinner who is brought to repentance and faith in Jesus.

God has made you rich. Believe it. Think about how he has made every grace abound to you! Use it. Be watching for every occasion God provides for you to be generous, and let your generosity result in thanksgiving to God.