



This Sunday we continued with our new topical series at Magdalen Road, looking at the counter-cultural 'shape' of the Christian life – especially that 'the way down is the way up'. Why is it that God says we must be weak to be strong, foolish to be wise, go through suffering to enjoy glory, be slaves to enjoy true freedom? We will, each week, be seeking to challenge our 'natural' thinking processes, asking God to help us to think more and more as he does – and trust him that what he says is best.

This week we were thinking especially about the topic of money and focused on 2 Corinthians 8v9 – the core of Paul's argument as he urges the Corinthian church to follow through on their pledge to help with the collection for the Jerusalem church. As we began we noted a number of issues as we come to consider money – the way that, internally, it affects our hearts, but also the way that we relate, externally, to the culture around us and how we have grown suspicious of giving as charities motivate us by making us feel guilty. We also noted how there are many wrong reasons to give in church (eg to impress others, to earn something from God, to 'pay God back' and because it's what everyone else does).

Jesus, though he was rich, became poor for us.

We noted that at the emphatic heart of the verse, sits the phrase 'for you'. This is not 'out-there somewhere' theology for us to file away, but rather it matters to us. For you, the richest man in all the world, in all of history, became poor. He was rich because he had everything and yet gave it away for us. He was the one whom all the angels adore, and yet he becomes a suffering servant – despised, rejected and scorned. John describes it that he loved his own 'to the end'. No half-measures or reserves or conditions. He poured out everything he had.

We, though we are poor, became rich in him.

Our poverty is seen in our sin – it's seen so clearly in the way in which we relate to money, assuming what we have. or what we would like, defines us. We noted the way that Christians living in poverty around the world, often have such contentment because they know that in 'global monetary terms they are poor, but in eternal spiritual terms they are rich'. They are overflowing with riches in Christ. And they believe it. Through the cross, our poverty is replaced with his riches.

We ended by remembering that the application Paul wanted for the Christians in Corinth, was to make sure that giving happens. They had pledged but he wanted them to follow through. We noted how easily we can plan to give – picking up the forms etc, but then failing to follow-through. Or it might be that we, despite pay-rises etc, don't bother to review or up our giving, because it takes effort and because money easily has a hold on us.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

In what different ways do you think society perceives money?

Why do you think people give to charities?

Why do you think people give to church?

Why do we struggle to give?

What's the context from the surrounding verses (v1-9) that highlight the situation Paul is writing into?

What are the various motivational methods he uses to urge them to be generous?

What is the paradox at the heart of v9?

How was Jesus rich?

How are we poor?

In what ways do we become rich as becomes 'poor'?

How do you think poorer Christians from around the world are able to be so joyful and content? What would need to change in your life for this to be true?

How does this verse motivate us to give?

What do you think is the evidence that we 'get' this verse?

Do you give regularly to the church / other Christian organisations / individuals?

Why / why not? What good and bad 'motivations' for giving do you have?

When / why do you review your giving?