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HE BECAME POOR

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HE BECAME POOR

The apostle Paul makes an interesting comment about Jesus in his second letter to the Corinthians (8:9) where he says "though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor."

A lot of people become poor because of circumstances beyond their control, but Jesus became poor by the deliberate decision of His will. This is the exact opposite of our normal human will. The whole of our society directs its will to becoming rich and richer, and richest if possible. God did not make us for this but rather to serve one another. Business should be service but it is being turned into making money as its primary objective. And so the whole of modern society aims at increasing its possessions and becoming richer. Even dedicated Christians and Christian institutions like denominations may find themselves seeking money as their first objective, anxious at least to maintain their present position money-wise if not to improve it slightly but Jesus willed to become steadily poorer. In the end He willed to lay down His own life; no-one took it from Him but He willed to lay it down. This is complete poverty as far as this life is concerned. He became poor. St. Paul's life story is similar, he appears to have been born into a rich home and he had excellent prospects; but he became poor; he constantly set his will in that direction, involving himself more and more in poverty. He too, in the end, laid down his life in the course of his ministry.

There is a curious phenomenon often observable amongst Christians, that a man or woman may decide to give up his standard of living and his prospects in order, for example, to become a missionary or minister or minister's wife, or take on some other form of service and then after this initial decision, which puts him permanently into a lower income bracket, he begins to be concerned with accumulating just a little extra; a few extra fees, a little better salary, or he may be concerned about the

sort of house he is asked to live in or the sort of suburb.

There was a similar phenomenon in St. Paul's day with the ministers of the gospel seeking to make a living out of the gospel - peddling the gospel as St. Paul puts it in 2 Cor. 2:17 or making merchandise out of the gospel as Peter put it in his second letter (2 Peter 2:3).

It is rather an awful concept - making money out of the crucifixion of Jesus and anxious to get a little bit more for the ministry of the gospel. St. Paul set his will resolutely against this temptation which he said other ministers had fallen into. He set his will resolutely in the direction of accepting worsening conditions, hardship, poverty, injustice and exposure to the elements, if his ministry involved these things, and finally accepting the loss of his life in the course of his ministry. If Christians are to follow Jesus, as Paul did, we must set our wills in the same direction and be willing to accept injustice. For example, to accept with a quiet mind others getting larger salaries and our contemporaries forging past us in worldly circumstances and so on. And if ministers marry, then their wives too, must share this outlook.

Jesus became poor; He set His will in this direction. But of course there was the wonderful strength of knowing that in all His poverty God was with Him, and (as Jesus Himself taught His disciples) for those who seek God's Kingdom God will provide whatever is necessary in the circumstances. Our experience will be that of the psalmist who had never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread. God will provide the needs of his servants and the needs of their families.

There is a second point, Jesus became poor for the sake of other people; "For your sakes He became poor". He did not choose poverty for its own sake as though there was

some virtue in poverty; neither riches nor poverty commend us to God, though both have their temptations. But Jesus accepted poverty as the way through which He was able to bring blessing to others.

Notice St. Paul does not say: "for God's sake He became poor" but "for our sakes He became poor". It is possible to bypass personal relationships by ascribing everything directly to God and His glory. We can impersonalise our lives or our ministries by saying that we do these things for God's sake. God does not want us to become poor for His sake. We accept poverty (if that is His will for us) simply in the course of our ministering to others. We must be thoroughly concerned with other people's welfare; thoroughly alerted to the disaster of other people's eternal prospects so that we give ourselves entirely and completely to serving them. Our becoming poor must flow from our sense of their need and from our ministry to enrich them. Jesus' ministry had as its object other people and their needs. He came to minister and to give His life a ransom for others. It is possible to be thoroughly orthodox in our Christian opinions and impeccably upright in Christian rectitude without real affection for other people. This is not the way of Jesus. It is true that He drew His strength for His ministry from His love and obedience to His heavenly Father and from fellowship with Him and He was conscious of glorifying God in His ministry but the direction of His ministry was towards other people. It was because He was full of compassion for others in their godlessness in their need, of a sense of the awful peril overhanging them through their godlessness that He gave Himself as a good shepherd to win them back to God. He came to save His people. In this he has set us an example. "For your sakes He became poor".