

## ***Living an Incredible Life***

### How to Get Rich: God's Incredible Generosity

Ephesians 1:3-14

April 6, 2008

I want to start this morning with my main point. And I'll make it so clear and so simple that you can't possibly forget it. Here it is: God wants you to be rich. Yes, I said it. Now I'll say it again: God wants you to be rich. Okay, now let's all say it together: God wants me to be rich. Say it again, louder: **God wants me to be rich!** Wow, okay now we just have to add one catch: we're going to take another offering and you're going to put a lot more in the plate and then God really will make you rich.

Wow, Matt has really gone over the edge. Yes, I want to be a televangelist. Actually, I don't want that, but I do want you to be rich in Christ. There are two themes that appear prominently in the first half of this book called Ephesians. We're not going to walk through the entire book verse by verse but we are going to look at these themes as they appear in chapters 1-3. The concept of riches occurs six times in the first half of the book. (Refer to the handout). So the two themes tie together like this: (1) God is rich – loaded, excessively wealthy ... (2) God likes to share. He wants you to be rich with his riches.

This theme starts right from the beginning of the letter (read 1:3). I have to warn you up front that the riches mentioned are a very specific kind of riches. Sorry, it may not be money put in your bank account. Notice that God is talking about spiritual blessings in Christ. Aw, rats! Some of us are with Woody Allen when he said, "If there's really a God, why doesn't he do something for me – like deposit a million dollars in a Swiss bank account in my name." But that's not the kind of riches God has promised to every one of his children. These are spiritual blessings designed to unite us to the real riches of living in and through and for Jesus Christ. So let's look at the six times riches are mentioned in the first three chapters:

**#1) 1:7** – God acts towards us in accordance to the riches of his grace. In other words, God is loaded and he chooses to splurge on us. God is rich – in grace, in mercy, in forgiveness, in spiritual power, in creativity – and he relates towards us like a rich God not a poor or miserly God. As an example of acting according to riches, a few years ago my brother-in-law Mark sent (what to us) was a generous gift of money. It surprised me and I assumed that it was a clerical error. "No," he explained, "A while ago I invested a chunk of money into a business venture and it all paid off so I wanted to share it with the rest of my family." Mark was acting towards us in accordance with his riches. God does the same thing. God acts towards us in accordance to his riches. Specifically, because God has acted towards us in accordance with his riches in Christ Jesus, ...

**#2) 1:18** – "The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints." When God counts his riches, what does he count first? Does he count the cosmos – littered with strings of clusters and "superclusters" of galaxies stretching hundreds of light-years across the sky?

Does he count the mountains and the oceans? Does he count whales and orchids and elephants and redwood forests and herds of antelope? No, at the top of his list, he counts us. He inherited us and it makes God glad. Have you ever thought that God gets a kick out of having you as his son or daughter? Did you notice verses 4 and 5? God adopted you. Some of you have been adopted or you have adopted your child. You know in a very special way what adoption means. It means that someone didn't belong to you via the birth process, but that you chose to choose someone who already existed. You didn't have to care for this child. There wasn't a connection from DNA and bloodlines. At one time, this person didn't belong to you and you would not recognize him or her on the street. But in spite of all that, you chose that child and said, "You are ours now. You belong to us."

God did the same for us. In a sense, although God created us, we walked away from God. We did not belong to him. Notice Ephesians 2:12-13. Notice the key words: separate, excluded and far away. We were estranged from God. We weren't in the family and God didn't have any obligations towards us. But notice verse 4 again – "He chose us in him ..." and verse 5 "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters through Jesus Christ." God didn't have to do it; God *chose* to do it – and he wanted to do it. Notice verse 5 – "in accordance with his pleasure and will." Did you hear that word pleasure? Some of you were raised in homes where there wasn't a lot of love. Maybe your parents did things for you but they were basically annoyed with your presence. They served you out of duty but certainly not delight. That leaves a wound, my friends. Don't cover it up and say, "Nah, it didn't hurt because they tried." No, it hurts. And you know what hurts the most? Some people view God that way. God may love you but he's pretty annoyed by you. That's not what the Bible teaches. God loves you and it gives him pleasure to adopt you into his family, it gives him pleasure to lavish you with his grace. It makes him feel good! He delights in you.

You know, I delight in each of our children. They are so different – in their gifts and their passions and their personalities and learning styles and preferences about worship styles and even in their unique bents toward sin. But I delight in all of them. I wouldn't want to give one of them back. They make me feel like a very rich man. Did you ever think that God feels the same way about you? When you come to Jesus Christ and say, "You are my all in all. You are the only one who can forgive my sins and fill me with resurrection power for life. I trust in you." Then the Bible says that you have been adopted by God the Father. You belong in his family – and he won't kick you out. You can come to him as your Heavenly Father and lay before him all your cares, all your burdens, all your hopes and all your plans. God feels rich because he knows you. Doesn't that give your life so much dignity and hope and joy and security?

**#3) 2:4** – "God is rich in mercy." What is mercy? Mercy is God's action towards you to give you what you don't deserve. Mercy isn't soft and passive. In softball we have something called the "mercy rule." When you're up by a ridiculous number of runs you show mercy by ending the game. Mercy = non-humiliation. But in the Bible God's mercy is always powerful and surprising and even shocking. Mercy is when what-you-have-coming doesn't come to you; instead, you get what-you-never-expected-or-even-

deserved. So in chapter 2 verse 1 it says, “You were dead in your trespasses and sins.” And then it gets even worse (read verses 2-3). But look at what happens when God acts in mercy (read verses 4-6). Do you see what mercy looks like? It’s powerful – it takes dead people and it makes them fully alive. It’s surprising. Notice how this point gets emphasized again in verse 5 – “even when we were dead in our sins” God still made us alive. How? Because God is rich in mercy.

**#4)** Then in verse 7 we discover more about God’s riches – “in order that in the ages to come God might show the incomparable riches of His grace.” First, God’s riches are incomparable. There is no human standard for God’s wealth. I can’t say, “It’s like the bank accounts of Bill Gates plus Johan Santana times twenty.” That’s a pathetic and inaccurate comparison. Nothing compares to God’s riches. Second, God wants to display his incomparable riches of grace to us in the “coming ages.” What does that mean? God wants to show you his riches not just once when you accept Jesus, not just when you show up for church services, not just when you’re down and out or up and out. God wants to display the riches of his grace and kindness right now, tomorrow, next week, the next phase of your life, when you’re feeling hopeful, when you’re feeling desperate, when you’re feeling strong and whole, when you’re feeling weak and broken, when you walk in truth and when you fall on your face because of your sin. God wants to display the riches of his grace to you for all eternity.

**#5)** 3:8 – Paul refers to the “unsearchable riches of Christ.” Translators of the Bible have tried to find an English word that captures the Greek here – unsearchable, in-explorable, untraceable, unfathomable, inexhaustible and inscrutable. The word literally meant – “Not to be tracked.” It’s like trying to find a snow leopard, the rarest and most beautiful of the large cats, hiding in granite cliffs way up in the Himalayan Mountains. Snow leopards are tough to track – but God’s grace is also impossible to track and hunt down. Once you think that you’ve arrived and you say, “Finally, I get God’s grace. I thoroughly comprehend the riches of Jesus Christ. I’ve plumbed the depths of it” you’re arrogant, deluded or just shallow. The Nobel prize-winning poet Cezlaw Milosz wrote a tiny but brilliant poem called “Learning.” It goes like this: “To believe that you are magnificent. And then to gradually discover that you are not magnificent. Enough labor for one human life.” Based on Ephesians 3:8 I would put it this way: “To believe that I understand God’s grace. And then to gradually discover that it was deeper and richer and more amazing than I ever realized. Enough labor for one human life – but then I get all eternity to discover more and more and more and more about the incredible riches of God’s grace.” You’ll never get to the end of his unsearchable riches of grace in Christ Jesus.

**#6)** 3:16 – “I pray that out of his glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being.” Here the riches of God are connected to our prayer life. As a matter of fact, based on this verse, we could say that God’s riches can be unleashed in a supernatural way through our prayers for others. That’s simply astounding! Did you know that you had that privilege and opportunity? Let’s say you had a very rich friend or relative. And this friend told you, “Look, we both know that I have an incredible supply of financial resources, but I want you to know that I have a

heart too. You are my friend or my relative and I want to take care of you. So if you ever need anything, ask me. I never want you to scrounge around through dumpsters to get through life. Come to me and ask me because I'm here for you, my friend. And if others have needs, you can come and ask me on their behalf as well – because I'm generous to anyone who has needs. The door is open all the time for you.” Wouldn't that be an amazing privilege? We have something better: through Christ God has become our Father. God wants us to come to him with our needs, and God wants us to come on behalf of others. When we come, when we ask, when we pray, God unleashes his riches on the heads of other people.

Of course we have to remember that these are spiritual blessings not necessarily material blessings. And they are blessings that connect us to Jesus Christ. In the first 14 verses of Ephesians Christ is used 15 times. Sometimes people get angry when God doesn't give them exactly what they ask for. They assume that God doesn't exist or that God is hard of hearing or hard-hearted. So they stop praying. God always listens to our prayers, but God always says yes or no based on one criteria: will it make us more like Jesus Christ? Will it fill us with the power and the pleasure and the love of Jesus Christ? Will it unite us more deeply with Christ within us? “Too bad,” you might say. “I don't want that. I just want to be rich or comfortable or happy. I want to be in a relationship with someone who loves me the way I deserve to be loved. I want to pass biochemistry. I want to get accepted at College \_\_\_\_\_. That is God's job in my life.” No, that's not God's job. God has infinite riches to bless you spiritually so that you will become more like Jesus Christ. Why does God want us to have that so badly? Because God knows that when we are more like Jesus, we will be happy and satisfied and joyful and loving and equipped for whatever life throws at us.

So in Ephesians we are led by the hand on a tour of God's magnificent riches. This first half of the book ends with a doxology, a little worship set, that responds to God's riches. Read Ephesians 3:20-21. What is God's glory? Someone has defined it like this: “God's glory is the beauty and brightness of his infinite perfections.” Worship is our response to God's glory. Everyone worships. No one is a non-worshipper. You will sing a doxology to something. So when your heart breaks out, “Glory to God!” it's like a college basketball team carrying off their coach, or like a standing ovation at the Met, or like crowds cheering for the Yankees. Everyone longs to sing a doxology. But God's glory is over everything. God's resources, God's riches are more magnificent and more incredible than anything in the universe. So that's why we praise God above all else. The knowledge of God's riches causes us to break out in praise to God. We let loose!

Notice where this glory of God is found? “In the church.” Where? In the church? What about nature? What about mountains and jungles and waterfalls and outer space? But God's glory in the church? Are you kidding? That's what he said – in the church. Now this doesn't just mean Three Village Church. We're just a tiny speck of the real thing called the church. We matter to God but we're just a tiny piece of the church. But the church is the place where God's glory is revealed. The church is the place where those separated from God get reunited. The church is the place where the excluded get included. The church is the place where those who are far away are brought near.

The church is like a hospital for sinners. We come in and we're sick – and some of us stay sick for a long, long time. Some of us are still recovering – even after thirty or forty years. But Jesus is making us better and we're changing and growing. And we may get irritated with others – “Why isn't he getting better faster? How come she's still so sick?” – but then we remember: hey, this is a hospital. It's for sick people. And Jesus gets all the glory because he's the one who makes the dead come to life and the sick come back to health. That's why we're here.

So God is incredible. God is incredibly rich and he wants to share that with you. So do you know this wealthy God? Have you experienced his wealth? Are you experiencing life according to the riches of his grace? What kind of life are you living?

First, some of you aren't in a relationship with the Father who wants to share his riches with us in Jesus Christ. You are still “far away.” The Bible is very clear that there's only one way to enter into the riches of this relationship – “through Jesus Christ.” He's the path; he's the door; he's the bridge that brings the far off (all of us) back to the Father's house. Step on the bridge. Walk across it. Trust it.

Second, some of you are children of God but you live like your Father is a miser. You've lost the joy of being God's son or daughter. You think about your sins way too much and you never get over them. You live like your daddy is a poor man. You don't have any confidence. You're groveling around begging for mercy when mercy has been lavished on you by your Father.

Third, some of you are rich but you've become selfish in your riches. You're not like Paul who said, “This grace was given to me ... Why? ... “To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” In other words, I was blessed to be made a blessing. I was made rich so that I could share those riches with others. You just want to hang out with your other rich friends.

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