

## POSSESSING CHRIST

Sermon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2018

2 Corinthians 6:10c

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 6:10c: **having nothing and yet possessing everything.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Apostle Paul suffered much hardship throughout his ministry. Indeed, listen again to some of the trials he and his fellow ministers of God faced, “*in great endurance, in troubles, in calamities, in difficulties;* <sup>5</sup> *in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots; in hard work, in sleepless nights, in hunger;* <sup>6</sup> *in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in sincere love,* <sup>7</sup> *in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness on the right hand and on the left;* <sup>8</sup> *through glory and dishonour, through bad report and good report; as deceivers and yet true;* <sup>9</sup> *as unknown and yet well known; as dying and, you see, we go on living; as chastened and yet not killed;* <sup>10</sup> *as made sad but always rejoicing; as beggars but making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing everything,”* (2 Cor. 6:4-10).

It is the last few words of what we just read that we want to focus our attention on this morning, as we consider a paradox in what Paul says, something that is fully strange, and yet equally comforting. He says, **having nothing and yet possessing everything.**

“**Having nothing,**” Paul says of himself and his fellow ministers. Of all those treasures which the world cherishes, those things for which the world is willing to sacrifice time and money and convenience, Paul had little or nothing. What did he have when he came to Corinth? He was not one of the world’s renowned orators whose fame had spread far and wide, who by the magic of their eloquence and the charm of their personality held their hearers spellbound, so that thousands would travel great distances to have an opportunity to see and hear them. No, in the very

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city of Corinth there were many who remained unimpressed by his sermons and addresses. They said, “*His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing,*” (2 Cor. 10:10).

Paul did not come to Corinth as the founder of a new school of philosophy, as the exponent of human wisdom and science, astonishing the world by his logical deductions, compelling his opponents by sheer force of reason to accept his system, or at the very least to acknowledge it as one of the greatest achievements of the human mind. No, he himself states that his *message and teaching were not with wise and persuasive words*, (1 Cor. 2:4), and consequently he met in Corinth with a reception like that which he had experienced in Athens, whose philosophers scoffed and mocked, “*What is this babbler trying to say?*” (Acts 17:18). So unreasonable did Paul’s message seem that Festus, the procurator of Judea regarded it as the ravings of a madman.<sup>1</sup>

Neither was Paul one of those rich merchants who so often came to Corinth, impressing the people by their immense wealth, forcing their attention, if not their reward, by a lavish display of riches. No, he was a Jew, a member of that nation generally despised, ridiculed, hated, persecuted, only recently expelled from Rome. He was moreover a poor Jew, without home and property, dependent on the meagre support he received from a handful of Philippians, who themselves were not blessed with an overabundance of material gifts; and when their support failed, he carried out his work as a tent maker in order to make a living.<sup>2</sup>

This unknown, penniless Jewish Rabbi, what message did he preach? Paul tells the Corinthians that, when he came to them, he resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.<sup>3</sup> The heart of the Gospel is Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, and this is the message Paul proclaimed to Jews and to Greeks alike. That was all he had to offer; this simple but glorious message, and what an offense it was to the Jew, what folly to the Greek! If this is all he had to offer, this and nothing more, why preach this foolishness, this utterly unreasonable message, why waste time and trouble to spread this vain, idle, useless, meaningless prattle? In the eyes of the world, this world who imagined that it could get along just as well without this Jesus of Nazareth, Paul had nothing worthwhile to offer.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 26:24

<sup>2</sup> Acts 18:3

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2

Not much has changed today. The world still has this same opinion about Jesus. To this day the world despises Christians and their message and will have nothing to do with their doctrines. It is as true today as it was in the days of Paul when he wrote: <sup>26</sup> *Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.* <sup>27</sup> *But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.* <sup>28</sup> *He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are,* <sup>29</sup> *so that no one may boast before Him,”* (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

If the Corinthian Christians needed evidence that the people who count in this world hold the message of the cross to be folly and weakness, they needed only to look all around them. How many “*wise by human standards*,” how many “*influential*,” how many “*of noble birth*” in Corinth were members of their congregation? There weren’t many, and the leading citizens in Corinth shunned this group of Christians. The men of wealth, the city fathers, the merchant princes, the scholars, the first families of the city would have nothing to do with this crazy religion a traveling Jew was peddling in Corinth.

The pagan philosopher Celsus, who lived in the second century after Christ, expressed the view of prominent Jews and Greeks when he wrote that a glance at the membership of Christian congregations in his day would prove that the Christians “show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and little children.” The German philosopher Nietzsche (whom Hitler admired) condemned the Christian faith as “a favouring of the botched and degenerate, and a despising of the rich, scholarly, noble, healthy, and strong.”

How many of the people who control the press and television in our country, how many leading entertainers, how many industrial magnates, how many noted scholars are simple, believing, church-going Christians? Perhaps there are some, but they are few indeed. It is more so that many prominent and wealthy people make fun of those who “still adhere to that old musty book full of superstitions and fables, the Bible.”

This is to be expected. As Paul once said, “*an unspiritual person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him*,” (1 Cor. 2:14). Such people cannot understand why a Christian should waste time and money and suffer inconvenience and ridicule for the sake of that Christ, who

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means absolutely nothing to the man of the world. In the eyes of the world a Christian has nothing.

Still it is true that Paul could confess to **having nothing and yet possessing everything.**

Though he could not offer to the world such treasures and gifts as they desired and cherished, Paul could offer something that in reality far outranks all earthly possessions, that treasure whose possession ensures the possession of all things - *Christ Crucified, the Son of God.*

Possessing by faith Christ Jesus, the Son of God, Christians possess – we possess - above all, a perfect Saviour who is able to *save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them,* (Hebrews 7:25). Because Christ is our possession, we know and believe in that God-appointed Redeemer who in His own body nailed on the cross, took our sins and paid for them there, who is the Propitiation for the sins of the world, who was *bruised for our wrongdoings... and through His wounds we have been healed,* (Is. 53:5). We now possess a righteousness which even God must accept as perfect, since it is the righteousness procured by His own Son, who Himself is over all, God blessed forever. This righteousness puts to silence all the accusations of a guilty conscience and fills our hearts with the peace of God, which passes all understanding, a peace which the world with all its riches and so-called knowledge does not know and cannot comprehend, a peace which enables us to bear all the ills and woes that this sinful world throws at us. We bear with glad willingness whatever the Father's wisdom and the Saviour's love and the Spirit's grace has chosen for us. We face even the darkest future with calm and confident trust in our reconciled Father, knowing that even the blackest cloud of tribulation cannot forever hide, even though it may temporarily darken that sun of grace which has been shining in the heavens of God's faithfulness ever since Christ died on Calvary.

Possessing Christ, we have a Saviour who enters into our hearts and cleanses them and fills them with true love to God and fellow-men, so that whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, we will not only think of, but in the strength of our perfect Saviour, we will do these things.

Possessing Christ, we need not fear even death itself, because for us, death is

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nothing more than a messenger of peace who calls us out of the vale of tears to that happy home above, where there shall be no more sin, neither sorrow, nor weeping.

Possessing Christ, we may not be numbered among the wise and learned of this world, yet in Christ we have that wisdom which none of the princes of this world can know; that wisdom which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, which neither has entered into the heart of man; that hidden wisdom of God, which He ordained before the world for our glory and now has been revealed to us by His Spirit in His holy Word; that wisdom, that knowledge, which can make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

Possessing Christ, it is true that we may not be classed among those men upon whom the world will heap its honours and glories. The world at large may know little and care less about the children of God. Their names may not appear on the front pages of the newspapers. They may never have been interviewed on the burning questions of the day. They may be unknown, unnoticed, unhonoured in the world. Yet theirs is the greatest conceivable honour. Why? Because their names are inscribed in heaven, entered in the Book of Life as God's children, God's very own, God's peculiar people. On this earth, in their midst is Christ Jesus, who rules and guides their hearts by His holy Word. In their midst is the Holy Spirit, uniting their hearts through the bonds of brotherly love. Can greater honour be conceived than that which through Christ has been granted to the believing children of God?

Possessing Christ, we may not be rich according to the standards of this world, yet we are actually the richest people on earth, possessing treasures which all the silver and gold in the world cannot buy: the grace of God in Christ Jesus, forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. We have treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt and where thieves do not break in and steal.<sup>5</sup> We have an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, that does not pass away, even when this world and all its riches and all its glories shall be consumed by fire. It is on that last day that the true riches of the Christian will become manifest before all the world; for that new earth and new heaven, in which dwells righteousness, shall be forever our own. There the one true God *will dwell with them, they will be His*

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 3:15

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:19

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*people, and God Himself will be with them as their God, (Rev. 21:3).*

Dear friends, according to the world's standards, it may look as though we have nothing, yet through Christ we possess everything. It was the same with Paul. Nothing has changed. But like Paul, let us continue working with God, and plead with our fellow men not to receive the grace of God in vain. Let us cling to Christ and the riches we already possess, namely, the forgiveness of all our sins and eternal life. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, eternal Lord and Creator of all things, You are our light and our salvation; You are all we ever need. We, Your children, come before You in prayer, and ask You to place Your hands on us in blessing.

Bless us with sincere faith in Your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that we may believe in Him with all our hearts, trust in Him alone for salvation, and have the assurance of everlasting life through Him. Renew us through our baptism day by day, as we live in hope and wait for our complete salvation in the new creation.

Keep us in Your fatherly care in this world, which has been ruined by sin. Guard us in all times of danger, and protect us in every peril. Keep us safe, by Your grace, that we may never lose our faith because of our sins and frailty. Grant that we may keep growing in faith and spiritual understanding. When death approaches, make us strong by Your sure promises, and finally give us the joy of Your eternal presence, complete redemption of our bodies, and resurrection to life eternal.

Fill Your Church with Your grace and power, O Lord, so that the light of Your truth may shine throughout the world. May all people know Your will and rejoice in Your salvation. Equip our pastors to be Christlike in mercy and love, and true leaders of Your people. Give us true joy as we serve You and one another, living in newness of life.

Hold Your hand of blessing over our land. Preserve us from war, earthquake, destructive storms, famine, disease, violence, tyranny, persecution, treachery, and rebellion. Guide those in government, business, education, and entertainment, so that they may live in the knowledge that You are Lord, and no other god may share Your glory.

Be gracious to all our homes and families. Enable children to grow in body, mind, and spirit, enjoying favour with God and man. By Your Spirit equip all parents with Christian faith and insight, and the constant desire to obey Your will.

Be merciful on all who suffer sickness, sorrow, the weakness of age, the weariness of hard work, separation from loved ones, uncertainty about the future, broken relationships, or any other burden. Give them Your rich peace. Show Yourself to be a God always ready to help, and give faith, trust, courage, and hope to all in need.

We pray for these things to You, heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, is the one God, to be praised for ever and ever. Amen.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Job 38:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD answered Job out of the wind-storm:

<sup>2</sup> “Who, then, is making My purpose dark by talking without knowledge?

<sup>3</sup> Please get yourself ready for action like a man, that I may question you! Then you must instruct Me! <sup>4</sup> Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you know how to discern it! <sup>5</sup> Who determined its dimensions? Surely you know! Or who stretched a measuring line over it? <sup>6</sup> On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, <sup>7</sup> while the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God were shouting for joy? <sup>8</sup> Who shut off the sea with doors when it burst from the womb and came out, <sup>9</sup> when I made clouds its garment and very thick cloud its

infant-wrappings, <sup>10</sup> when I marked out My limits for it and set its bars and doors in place, <sup>11</sup> and when I said, ‘You may come as far as this but no farther, and here your proud waves will meet opposition?’

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

<sup>1</sup> As men who are working with God, we also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For He says: “At a favourable time I have heard you and on the day of salvation I have helped you.” Look! Now is the favourable time. Look! Now is the day of salvation.

<sup>3</sup> We do not lay any kind of obstacle, to avoid discredit on our ministry. <sup>4</sup> Rather, in everything we commend ourselves as the ministers of God: in great endurance, in troubles, in calamities, in difficulties; <sup>5</sup> in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots; in hard

work, in sleepless nights, in hunger; <sup>6</sup> in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in sincere love, <sup>7</sup> in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness on the right hand and on the left; <sup>8</sup> through glory and dishonour, through bad report and good report; as deceivers and yet true; <sup>9</sup> as unknown and yet well known; as dying and, you see, we go on living; as chastened and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup> as made sad but always rejoicing; as beggars but making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing everything. <sup>11</sup> O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you. Our hearts have opened wide. <sup>12</sup> We are not being narrow in our feelings for you, but you are being narrow in your hearts toward us. <sup>13</sup> Treat me as I am treating you! I am speaking to you as my children. You, too, should open your hearts wide!

Mark 4:35-41

<sup>35</sup> That day, when evening came, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let us go over to the other side!"

<sup>36</sup> They left the crowd and took Him along in the boat just as He was. There were other boats with Him. <sup>37</sup> A violent windstorm came up, and the waves kept beating into the boat, so that the boat was already

filling up. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping on the cushion. They woke Him and asked Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are drowning?"

<sup>39</sup> When He had been wakened, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Be quiet! Be silenced!"

The wind stopped, and it became very calm.

<sup>40</sup> He asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

<sup>41</sup> They were very afraid and kept saying to one another, "Who is this, then, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"