

The Unsearchable Riches of Christ

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[0 : 00] Now I'd like to draw your attention to words you will find in the chapter we read, Ephesians chapter 3, words you will find in verse 8.

Ephesians 3 verse 8 And to me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ?

These words in particular, the unsearchable riches of Christ. Paul was one of the humblest of men. And son of Tarsus, he was one of the proudest. At one time, he thought in no little of himself. Circumcised the eighth day of the seed of Israel, of the stock of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, touching the righteousness that is in the law that he said, blameless.

[1 : 25] He thought, as one put it of himself, that God himself didn't know how good a fellow he was. And as for seal, oh yes, Paul always had a super abundance of seal, persecuting the church.

This is how it manifested itself in the unconverted, budding rabbi, Saul of Tarsus. As Jesus said to his disciples, the time will come when those who persecute you will think that they are doing God's service.

So Paul thought, when he aided and abetted the stoning of Stephen, when he went on the way to Damascus to bring back prisoners whose only fault was that they were Christians.

and then you remember what happened. Saul of Tarsus, the straight-laced rabbi, the persecutor, the injurious, the proud, the insolent, was apprehended of Christ Jesus, arrested by him on the way, and changed right about, face right about, and a quick march back, he became a Christian.

Not only did he become a Christian, but he became a chosen minister of Christ, a chosen vessel to carry the gospel to the regions beyond.

[3 : 05] He became especially the minister of the uncircumcision, that is, the missionary to the Gentiles, as Peter was chosen as the special minister to the circumcision, to the Jews.

And Paul magnified his office, but he minimized himself. And to me, he says, who are less than the least of all saints.

That's how he reckoned himself. He didn't think of himself more highly than he ought to have thought, who are less than the least of all saints. Why?

Because he said, I persecuted the church of God. I think Paul, when he became more mature in the Christian life, and advanced more in grace, rated himself even lower than this.

It depends on how you look at it, whether you say lower or higher, where he called himself the chief of sinners, of whom I am chief.

[4 : 15] And to me, who am less than the least of all saints. Well, this is what grace can do. And when grace humbles, it doesn't humiliate.

It humbles, but it doesn't humiliate. And when grace humbles, grace is doing its greatest work. As God says to the prophet, to that man will I look who is of a humble and a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word.

That is the man to whom I will look. That is the man whom I will receive. As in the case of the publican, the penitent publican, who beat upon his breast and with downcast eyes, exclaimed, God be merciful to me, the sinner.

He went down to his house, Jesus says, justified. While the Pharisee who prayed near, if he prayed at all, and just gave utterance to a catalogue of all his virtues, was rejected.

My friends, this is the real mark of grace. Augustine was once asked, what was the first step in godliness? And he replied, humility.

[5 : 35] And then he said, he was asked, what is the second? And he said, humility. And the third, humility. It's of the very essence, the grace of humility is of the very essence of sanctification.

But what I want to look at particularly tonight is what Paul says here about his own mission to the Gentiles. And to me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

This was the commission he received. This grace. Grace to preach. Mind you, Paul, considered as a gracious deposit or a gracious commission, things that we might dismiss as secondary or unimportant.

One time he was made the repository of gifts for the Christian brethren, the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

these were collected by the Gentile Christians and sent on to the relief of the poor in the church of Jerusalem. And Paul said, this is a grace, stewardship, a trust, a grace given to me to discharge.

[7 : 01] I wonder if we look upon our own work for Christ. Do we look upon it as a grace or as a chore? We say it's not important.

Ah, but anything that we do for the Lord is important and is a grace. But the grace that was given to the apostle was certainly outstanding.

It was to preach or proclaim among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. And it's this last phrase I want to look at, taking it not detached from its context but within the context of the verse as the proclaimed and preached grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ.

To begin with, doesn't it seem a daunting thing even to attempt to preach on a phrase like this?

How can one search out what is unsearchable?

Isn't it really a presumptuous thing for any mortal to get up and speak of the unsearchable riches of Christ?

[8 : 22] Well, in one way it would be. Except that you don't need to search out to exhaustion anything to prove its worth or to see its goodness.

Why, later in this chapter the apostle speaks about being able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and the length and the depth and the height. Can anyone know the length and the breadth and the depth and the height of the love of God?

To know the love of Christ which possesses knowledge, there's a paradox, to know something that possesses knowledge. Well, for one thing, you can catch a glimpse, you can see a detail, you can apprehend what you can't comprehend, you can touch what you can't grasp with your hand fully round.

And it's good for us to realise at the first, at the outset, that we cannot search out the unsearchable riches of Christ to perfection any more than we can know the almighty to perfection.

But it is only right and proper and good for ourselves indeed to look at the matter of the apostles preaching among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

[9 : 48] Now, I think, although I don't like to try to itemise so great and grand and majestic and glorious and infinitely above us a thing like the riches of Christ, I think that we might say that the riches of Christ fall into two categories.

There's a category of his, what we might call, intrinsic wealth. That is, the wealth of Christ in himself. And then there's the other category and I think this is the category that the apostle is thinking of especially here, the riches of Christ for the enrichment of sinners.

The riches of Christ for the appropriation of faith. The riches of Christ which he proclaimed among the Gentiles which is the very essence of the gospel of salvation.

And while I would like to spend more time on a second, it might be well for us to look at the first because these two are connected.

The intrinsic wealth of Christ as the God-man and then the wealth of Christ to be appropriated by faith for the enrichment of believers, for the reception and even sinners.

[11 : 19] First then, there's the riches of Christ, what I call the intrinsic riches, the riches he has in himself. And again, we might say, though again, I don't like to try and atomize it or to break it up or to try to put it into pigeon holes, yet at the same time it might help us and we remember that Christ's riches, in this way, belong to him both as God and as man.

Think of the riches of Christ as God. All that God is, Christ is. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

In him, says the apostle, dwells the fullness of the God head bodily. The fullness of the God head. The very essence and attributes of God are in Christ.

He is the eternal and the infinite and the unchangeable Son of God. There never was a time when the Son was not, as the old creedal statement fruits it.

He was begotten, but not made, the only begotten of the Father from all eternity, the begotten Son of God. And in him dwells all the fullness of the God head.

[13:02] God gives not the spirit by measure unto him. God gives him. God gives him. And so there is the majesty of Christ.

He was rich with the majesty of God, with the royal, divine dignity. And he was rich with the holiness of God.

God. And at times, these things flashed through even in the days of his flesh on earth. It did, you remember, at the miraculous draft of fishes, when Peter, who was stripped in order to take in the draft of fishes, looked and he saw the divine glory of Jesus.

And he cast himself into the sea, and he said, depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. You see, he caught a glimpse of the uncreated glory and holiness of Jesus.

And John says the same thing. The world was made flesh, he says, and dwelt among us. The world that was in the beginning with God, the world that was God, and we beheld his glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

[14:32] And that same John had a glimpse of that glory in the risen Christ when he saw a vision of him in Patmos. He records it in the opening chapter of the book of Revelation, the Apocalypse.

And there you have a picture of the glory and the power and the majesty of Christ. as a son of God. And do you remember what John says?

The beloved disciple, the disciple that lay in the bosom of Jesus at the supper, I fell at his feet as one dead.

He was rich with all the riches and the wealth of the Godhead. he was rich with all the power of the Godhead too.

One word he could have annihilated all his enemies. One word and the scribes and the Pharisees and the high priests and all the temple soldiers or servants would all have fallen before him and been annihilated.

[15:47] But he suffered it to be so. And then he was rich as man. You know, in one sense, there scarcely was a poorer person than Jesus of Nazareth.

he was worse off than the very birds of the air and the beasts of the field. Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man is not where to lay his head.

Many a time he slept in the open and his locks were wet with the Jews of the night. When he died, he left nothing behind him but the clothes he stood up.

There's an affecting story told. about William Chalmers Burns, one of the most apostolic of missionaries, a man who might have made his name because he was richly endowed mentally by his creator, might have made his name in affairs.

At one time his ambition was to be a lawyer because lawyers were rich and had good houses. Then he became a minister, he became a missionary. When he died out there in China, his effects were brought home.

[17:03] When his young nephew looked on what they had brought in the box, he found a Bible, some odds and ends, the flag of the houseboat in which he lived.

I don't know what the young fellow was expecting, perhaps he was expecting treasure from China. He looked and he said, Uncle Willie must have been very poor. So he was. But he was rich in other things.

You see, a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses, and if we are thinking in terms of the legacy that Jesus left behind, oh my friends, think what that legacy was.

Think of what's contained in the will of the testator, in the last will and testament of the Lord Jesus. The whole of salvation is there, the whole of heaven is there.

But I'm thinking of himself as man. A man's true wealth is not in his possessions.

[18:06] We judge people by what they have, by what they've gathered, by what they've inherited, by what they've made for themselves, by their bank books, by their stocks, by their houses, and we judge whether people have been wealthy or not, when we find out what they've left behind when they die.

But these are just things. That's not wealth. These are things. Wealth is what you are. True riches is what you take with you when you die.

And true riches consists in character, the person you really are. if that's good. And there was Jesus. Think of his riches as the sinless son of man.

The second Adam, who came sinless into this world, and who went out sinless, though he bore the sins of many. He was put to death, but not for his own sins.

He bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressor, sinless, but not for his own. He needed not. Which of you convicts me of sin?

[19 : 27] He said. And they were silent. When the woman was taken in adultery, Jesus said, that him that is without sin among you first cast a stone at her, they all dropped their stones and slunk away.

they were convicted and the eldest to the youngest. But Jesus didn't slink away. He was left. And the woman was left.

What the dramatic confrontation. The sinless son of God, the sinless son of man, and the woman that was a sinner by her own confession.

She couldn't deny it. He didn't go, she didn't go, because she was, so to speak, still in the dock, waiting for sentence. And he didn't go, because he had no need to go, he was sinless.

Here is one who was man, even as man, is rich. Rich in character, rich in a balanced character, rich in righteousness.

[20 : 42] The sinless son of man. faith. But it's not so much the intrinsic riches of Christ, which the apostle, I think, is speaking of here, not the riches of Christ that he has, so to speak, for himself.

The riches that one doesn't share, though, mind you, if he weren't rich in this way, then we couldn't be rich either.

But the riches for the appropriation of faith, the appropriation of faith, riches for the reception of sinners, riches in offer in the gospel, for Paul says, to preach among the Gentiles, to proclaim, to offer the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Christ. What were these riches? Well, I think in one word, they are the wealth of redemption, the riches of salvation.

All that is contained in the word salvation belongs to the riches of Christ here.

[22 : 01] And what is contained in salvation? Well, for one thing, and first and foremost, the forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness of sins.

Now, I'm not sure that this is something that the sinner always appreciates as his most crying need. sometimes it's something much more mundane, much less in importance it may be.

It may be a sense of depression, a sense of being out of it, a sense of the emptiness of a Christless life.

But this basically is the first and foremost need of any sinner. You remember when the psalmist was enumerating the mercies of God and asking his soul not to forget the benefits of the Almighty.

This is how he enumerates them, who forgives all thine iniquities. The very first, who forgives all thine iniquities. for unless our sins are forgiven, we have no hope of eternal life.

[23 : 27] There is no blessedness where there are unforgiven transgressions. Until our sin is put away, how can God deal with us as righteous?

and this is the blessing that Jesus came to give. Son, thy sins are forgiven thee.

Go and sin no more. Neither do I condemn thee, Jesus said to this poor sinner. Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more, who forgiveth all thine iniquities.

But, Jesus goes further than that. The wealth of what he offers in this way goes even further than just cancelling out the debt of sin.

I refer to justification. Not only does the sinner who receives the riches of Christ, have his sins removed, but he receives a positive endowment of righteousness.

[24 : 47] An endowment that never can be whittled away or squandered. It's, to use a figure, as if somebody had got hopelessly into debt.

And then some kind benefactor, and wealthy enough, came along and said, I'm going to pay off all your debts. What do you owe? Well, this person may say, I'm ashamed to say, but I owe £100,000 and I haven't got anything at all to pay with.

All right, I'll write out a cheque for £100,000 and cancel your date. But then, the real anxiety of the person would be, but how am I going to prevent getting into debt again?

I have no income. And I cannot live without an income. But suppose this friend says, look, I'm going to clear off your debt of £100,000 and I'm going to endow you with a million pounds.

And surely, no matter what rate of inflation it is, I think we might, in spite of all that the inner revenue would take away by income tax, I think we might all live quite comfortably upon the interest of £1,000,000.

[26 : 08] It would take some time for inflation to catch up on that. Well, suppose that person did well then, this poor person would no longer be poor. He would have no longer any anxiety about falling into debt again.

And this is what the righteousness of Christ means. It means that we receive, the moment we believe upon Christ not only the blotting out of our sins, the cancellation of our debt, but we receive the endowment.

The endowment of all Christ's righteousness. The endowment of all Christ's righteousness, not split up into little portals of righteousness.

And it's not on a million pounds worth of righteousness, or even a billion pounds worth of righteousness. You see, our acceptance with God doesn't depend upon what we do ourselves, or what we can earn by our own merit.

It depends entirely upon the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

The great slogan of the Reformation was, righteousness by grace through faith alone.

[27 : 24] Righteousness by grace through faith alone. And Jesus taking our place as our substitute, giving obedience to the law of God during those 33 years of his life on earth, and especially dying upon the cross.

In that sacrificial death that you'll be commemorating on the Lord's day, he has brought in, he has cancelled your death, and brought in everlasting righteousness for all them that believe.

But then again, among the insertable riches of Christ, to be appropriated by faith as his gift to the sinner who will receive, as a matter of the preaching among the Gentiles, is the fellowship of God. Possibly, I'm not going to say possibly, I believe it really, the most awful thing of sin is its separating, destructive influence.

Sin divides. its anti-social nature. Sin is essentially anti-social.

[29 : 02] It divides, it breaks up, it isolates. It's like a cancer in that respect. It isolates soul from soul, man from God.

This is the very essence of hell, to be banished from the presence of God. My friends, there's no company in hell, and it's not because it's empty, but there's no company in hell.

There's no real camaraderie among sinners ultimately. they may have something of it on earth while they live. There's no fellowship.

There's no communion in sin. Sin is destructive of fellowship. It's an isolating evil. it it it it it it it banishes man from man and man from God in in whom his life is.

But with Christ and by his grace there is a restoration to the fellowship of God. And in restoring to the fellowship of God there is a restoration of communion among men.

[30 : 30] You think of the early church. What a closely intimate society they were. Meeting together for prayer meeting together to break bread.

Nobody lacked anything there. if anyone had property he sold it and divided the proceeds among those who had need. And he did it out of the communism of love.

And you know what the heathens said? They looked at them and they envied them and they said how these Christians love one another? They wouldn't say today but they said it then.

And that's why they were attracted to the Christian faith. That's one reason why the church grew. Because Christians loved each other. There was a warmth of fellowship between them.

There was a real communion of spirit. A real fellowship. And that fellowship was real and warm and intimate because you see the fellowship with God was warm too.

[31 : 38] Truly says John our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ. And this I think is the very essence of heaven. It's that fellowship and communion with God the Father with Jesus Christ the Son through the Holy Spirit of promise and through them with the church of the first born through God with the church of the first born written in heaven the society that is blessed indeed.

Forgiveness justification adoption into the family of God fellowship and complete sanctification in the end.

God likeness. You see you can't have intimate fellowship unless you're in agreement. Can two walk together except to be agreed? And so my friends you have here the riches of Christ the

unsearchable riches of Christ and I've only touched upon them for the reception of faith. And I can't before going into that a little more deeply I can't leave this without mentioning the paradox the riches of Christ are associated with the poverty of Jesus. For you know says the apostle writing to the Corinthians for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that being rich he became poor that ye through his poverty might be rich yes the riches of Christ that are associated with the poverty of Christ there would be no riches of Christ to offer to sinners if it wasn't that Jesus became poor if it wasn't that he became poor even to the dust of death poor to be abandoned by his disciples to be rejected by the men he created to be cast out by his own covenant people to be condemned by the magistrates who had their power by delegation from himself and finally to be forsaken by

[34 : 18] God the Father oh we can't understand it that's the poverty of Christ and that poverty is a source of our riches God in proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ Paul had to preach the cross of Jesus but then let me say that this and the unsearchable riches in this sense are for the appropriation of faith when Paul preached the unsearchable riches of Christ it was by way of offer to the Gentiles and my friends in proclaiming this to you tonight I'm not proclaiming it in a detached sort of way this is not an academic study this is not a mere cold theological exposition this is a proclamation of a gospel it's evangelical the riches of Christ are held out to you are you poor well here is riches for your appropriation here is treasure that you may enrich yourself with

Christ is offered in his riches to everyone who believes are you a sinner here is forgiveness for you in Christ do you feel stripped of all righteousness here is righteousness that you can never go through the imputed righteousness of Christ for the justification by faith are you lonely here is fellowship and communion do you feel sinful in yourself polluted well here is a source of sanctification for the grace of God that brings salvation to all men has shone forth teaching us and teaching us effectively to deny ungodliness and worldly lust and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world and hopefully too looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great

God and our Saviour Jesus Christ this is what is offered to everyone who will receive it all you need listen again and I'm closing with this this is prayer of the apostle that he would grant you according to the riches same word the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith that he being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge that's wealth indeed isn't it the love of Christ that and here is it all summed out that he might be filled with all the fullness of God out of his fullness of John have we drawn and found grace for grace don't think you're going to impoverish Christ by drawing on his riches you don't empty the well by filling your little bucket from it you don't impoverish Christ by being enriched with his communicable wealth the wealth that he lays open for a sinner that you may be filled with all the fullness of God can you think of anything more than that well the apostle can't now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask why you think he's asked the ultimate don't you that we might be filled with all the fullness of God he is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us and to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages world without end amen oh lord our god open our eyes that we may see open our hands that we may receive open our hearts that they may be filled empty us that we may be filled with the fullness of

God empty our lives of the trash that so often fills them and fill our lives with the true wealth the true riches and make us rich with the riches that Christ came to give for sinners to give to sinners the riches of his redemption the wealth of his salvation may we be filled with all the fullness of God through him who is able to do for us above all that we ask or think truly our hearts faint and fail and faith itself falters but thou art the strength of our heart and our portion forever so leave us not oh Lord watching as spectators the display of the wealth of Christ but may we be among those who partake of the benefit and receive those riches that are for sinners only by faith in him

[40 : 06] Amen Amen sometimes the sphere of you in the una way meant to that and again when a and they in the fear of