

THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

"Unto 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." Ephesians 3:8.

No follower of Christ ever had a lowlier sense of his own importance and at the same time a more exalted sense of the grace and glory of the Saviour than had the Apostle Paul. In this text, the Apostle does not say that he is the "least of all the saints." That would have been a very humble self-estimate, but he places himself in a lower category still, "less than the least." Thus he violates the modern rules of grammar in order to express his own unworthiness. As he came to know more and more of the riches of the grace and glory of his Lord, he came to have a more profound consciousness of his personal sin, so in his first letter to Timothy he calls himself "The chief of sinners." Humility of soul is the hall-mark of the child of God.

"They who fain would serve Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within."

After Paul was saved, the one consuming desire of his life was to preach the gospel of Christ in such a way as to magnify Christ and to be a blessing to humanity. He counted this his greatest privilege. He entered upon this task with intense delight. No greater privilege has been given to man in any day. It is one that presupposes an experience of grace and a clear revelation of the glorious gospel. I cannot preach with the same zeal and power that Paul did, but I can preach the same gospel under the leadership of the same Spirit that Paul did.

Our text does not mean that Christ was rich in money. He sent Peter to catch a fish in whose mouth he would find a piece of money sufficient to pay tribute to the government. Jesus said, "Go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto them for me and thee." Matthew 17:27. Neither does the text mean that Christ was rich in houses for He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Matthew 8:20. Nor does it mean that He was rich in forests, for the cross on which He died was the cross of another. Neither does it mean that He was rich in lands, for even the grave in which He was buried belonged to another.

This suggestive phrase "the unsearchable riches of Christ" is Paul's way of trying to express the wealth of grace and glory that the believer has in Christ. It is a phrase that will repay prayerful thought, and is capable of thrilling all true lovers of the Saviour. This word, which is translated "unsearchable", is used twice only in the New Testament. When writing to the church at Rome concerning the wisdom and knowledge of God, Paul said, "O, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out." Romans 11:33. When writing to the Ephesians some years later, he used the same word to describe the opulence of Christ.

This word has been translated "unsearchable"; "exhaustless," suggesting the inexhaustibility of the wealth of Christ, as lasting as eternity; "fathomless," suggesting the immeasurable depths of the treasures which are ours in Christ; "unexplorable," suggesting the continental breadths of the riches of love Divine. The fact is that there isn't any word in the English language, or in any other for that matter, that is capable of expressing the length, breadth, height, and depth of the plenitude of grace which is ours in Christ. Language simply breaks down under the weight of it. The love of God could not be put into a word except the "Word made flesh," and it had to be expressed by a deed, even the death on the Cross.

In connection with this verse, Bishop Moule, of Durham, whose saintliness and scholarship none who knew him could ever question, contributed a very beautiful suggestion. He speaks of the "unsearchable riches of our Christ." He translated the article by the pronoun, suggesting that Christ belongs to us -- to you and to me. What music there is in the personal pronoun! He is our Christ.

I. A Subject For Wonder.

In a powerful charge to young ministers, Joseph Pearce used this verse and said, "The unsearchable riches of Christ excited the Apostle's highest surprise and wonder, challenged his keenest powers of mind and heart, moved him to his profoundest depths of feeling and passion, evoked his loudest Doxologies of praise, took him captive, and held him in delightful thrall."

1. The riches of Christ's goodness.

"Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Romans 2:4.

(1) His creation of us.

(2) His preservation of us.

We are preserved and upheld by His power.

(3) His providential care of us.

He furnishes us all of the elemental factors of life, such as air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, clothes to wear, and houses in which to live.

(4) His redemption of us.

In addition to His written Word, He has given us the earnest preaching of the glorious gospel of Christ.

2. The riches of Christ's grace.

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace." Ephesians 1:7.

"That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace, in kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:7.

(1) His redeeming Love.

He left the glory which He had with the Father, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death. "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8.

The love of Christ extends to the vilest sinner. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." I Timothy 1:15. The love of Christ is unbounded.

(2) His pardoning mercy.

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Isaiah 55:7. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." I John 1:7. Christ met Saul on the way to Damascus, pardoned his sin, saved his soul, and commissioned him to preach. He found Jerry McAuley in the gutter in New York City, pardoned him, saved him, and empowered him for service. Christ found us, pardoned us, saved us, and gave us eternal life.

(3) His consoling grace.

Christ saved and comforted the soul of the sinful woman at the well of Jacob. He gave comfort and strength to the poor widow at Nain. He spoke peace to the sad hearts of Mary and Martha. Every heart must sooner or later go into the deep valley of human sorrow. It is an unspeakable comfort to know that there is no sorrow to which we are liable for which Christ does not have a comfort.

3. The riches of Christ's gifts.

"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him." Romans 10:12.

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." I Timothy 6:17.

(1) The forgiveness of sins.

"Every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins." Acts 10:43.

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you to forgiveness of sins." Acts 13:38. His forgiveness is "According to the riches of His grace."

(2) Acceptance with God.

(3) Adoption into His family.

(4) Peace of conscience.

(5) Unspeakable joy.

"Ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory." I Peter 1:8.

(6) A home in heaven.

4. The riches of Christ's glory.

"That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." Ephesians 3:16. He has provided for the full satisfaction and infinite enjoyment of every soul who receives Him. His unsearchable riches include a treasury of wisdom, a bank of merit, a storehouse of rewards, from which the soul may continue to draw throughout eternity, without exhausting or even diminishing the supply. His unsearchable riches cannot be calculated, measured, fathomed, described, exhausted or diminished.

These unsearchable, exhaustless, fathomless, and unexplorable riches of our Christ are a glorious subject for our wonder and meditation.

(1) Scholars have meditated upon and tried to explore them. They have written scholarly books about Christ, and yet not one of them has been able to do full justice to the wealth of His grace and the transcendent glory of His character. The unsearchable riches of Christ are a startling and an unceasing wonder to the reverent scholarship of every age.

(2) Philosophers have meditated upon them and tried to discover the secret of His unique and undying influence.

So far as we know, our Lord never put anything down in writing, except once when He wrote something on the ground, and yet all great literature for nearly two thousand years has been influenced by Him. No library is big enough to contain the books written about Him. So far as we know, Jesus never painted a picture, and yet the greatest paintings in the galleries of the world have been inspired by Him. He never composed any music, and yet many of the mightiest compositions owe their existence to Him. He never wore a crown, except the crown of thorns, and yet the most powerful kings stand in reverence when the "Hallelujah Chorus" is sung. The far-reaching and gracious influence of Christ can be explained only on the basis that He was God manifest in the flesh.

It will be a good thing for our minds to dwell much on the unsearchable riches on Christ. It will introduce us into a world of mysteries, realities, and delights. It will put a new light in our eyes, a new courage into our hearts, a new note of triumph into our testimony, a new abandon into our service, and a new hope into our future.

II. An Object for Appropriation.

The riches of Christ's goodness, grace, gifts and glory may be unsearchable and past finding out in their length, breadth, height and depth, but they are not unavailable. They are all at the disposal of the believer in Christ. The Saviour and His unsearchable riches go together. If Christ dwells in our hearts, then all His wealth of grace is ours, too, for life and service. These riches may be fathomless, but at the same time they are usable.

Think of how Paul appropriated these riches of grace and glory in Christ. He went from village to village, town to town, and country to country disbursing the unsearchable riches, and exemplifying them in his own life in an unusually lovely character and a regnant influence. He knew how to welcome the grace and glory of Christ into his heart and life.

What about you and me? Do we know how to draw on the Bank of Heaven to meet our need? Why is our spiritual life so poverty-stricken? Why is the Word of God so neglected and so often supplanted by the questionable printed matters? Why is it such a trial to go to worship? Why the reluctance to engage in definite spiritual service? Is it not due to our failure to appropriate as we can and ought to do the fabulous provision which is stored up in Christ to meet our most clamant needs?