

CHRIST'S FULNESS

"And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." John 1:16.

Nineteen centuries ago John wrote this supreme summary of all Christian experience. At that time it described precisely what had happened to the early followers of Christ. They were plain people as the world would count them. They had no property or wealth. Few of them had more than elementary schooling. Their social status was inferior. Their country was occupied by a foreign power. They belonged to a despised race. Even among their own people they were looked upon with scorn by many. But they had been with Christ and an amazing transformation had taken place in their lives. When they were called upon to explain what had happened to them their jubilant statement was: "We have received from the fulness of Jesus Christ, grace heaped on grace in endless succession."

We would bear testimony to the fact that we have received a supply from the fulness of Christ, and that His riches are available to all men. We are not able to give an adequate definition of Christ's fulness, nor does it lie within our power to make an inventory of it. Christ is always more than our highest conceptions of Him, and the sum of all the best words about Him through the ages are but a stammering attempt to express what His glory means.

I. The Revelation Of Christ's Fulness.

Paul had to deal with many who had neat and clever schemes into which they attempted to fit Christ. The Judaizers sought to confine Christ within the frame of the Mosaic law, demanding that even Gentiles must become Jews before they could be Christians. Some mystery religions in the Roman Empire attempted to wrap Christ in their secret rituals, to which only a few initiated would have access. Various Gnostic philosophers were busily at work trying to limit the fulness of Christ to certain years of His life, or to make His fulness a mere abstraction.

But Paul refused to accept any limitations of Christ. His words in Colossians 1:15-20 form the classic statement of the dimensions of the fulness of Christ. "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:15-20).

1. In creation.

"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (Colossians 1:16). John 1:3 states the same fact with equal clarity. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

These are steadying words in a day when our minds are so intensely focused on atomic energy. We have caught a glimpse of the Creator's deposit in His creation, and we stand in awe in its presence. We hold in our hands the possibility of banishing want and drudgery from the earth, but thus far we have not seemed to know what to do with this power except to threaten to kill each other with it. Surely, Christ must have had another purpose in placing such staggering power into every particle of matter.

This incalculable deposit of energy in the physical universe is a divine parable of the infinitely greater power of His love. Even when man chose evil and hid from God, the love of God could not be thwarted: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

2. In His incarnation.

In Jesus Christ, God came to live among us. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Paul expressed it in the following words: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3). "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-7).

When Jesus Christ came to earth He was so far ahead of what men expected or what they have seen since that He stands as the one unique person in all history. His character was so pure and His mastery of life so complete that His enemies could find no other indictment against Him than that He did good on the Sabbath, that He let a sinful woman touch His feet, and that He ate with sinners. He could turn His clear eyes on the sly watchers among His audience and challenge them: "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" (John 8:46), and under His gaze they wished the earth would swallow them up. Finally, they had to summon false witnesses to put Him to death. But some received Him, and to them He gave the power to become the children of God.

3. In His victory over Satan.

In Jesus Christ is redemption from sin. The chief human problem is sin. Sin is man's declaration of independence of God; it is man's rebellion against God; it is man's aspiration to take the place of God. Constant attempts have been made to explain away sin or to minimize its importance. But sin remains the most stubborn fact of life, and man cannot save himself in spite of his ingenious attempts to do so. Man needs a divine Saviour. He needs Christ.

4. In the fellowship He establishes among Christians.

The fellowship of believers derives its glory from the fulness of Christ. Around the world people of all tongues and nations know the Christian fellowship which transcends the barriers of language, culture and customs. There is no fellowship like that which we enjoy in the family of God.

We do not claim that this fellowship is perfect. As we think of the fellowship of the believers, we realize that there are imperfections. We do not understand each other as we should. We do not love each other as we ought. We sometimes quarrel over minor things and neglect those of greater importance. We can never be exempt from the obligation which Christ laid upon us in John 15:12: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."

When the word "fulness" is applied to Christ in the New Testament, it always has a special meaning. It refers to His divine completeness. It means that He has all the attributes and powers of God. It declares that He possesses every excellence and contains every resource.

There is in Christ a fulness of essential deity, for, as Paul said, "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." In Him there is a fulness of perfect manhood. There is also a fulness of atoning efficacy in His blood, for "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." There is a fulness of justifying

righteousness in His life, for "there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." There is a fulness of grace to pardon, to regenerate, to sanctify, to preserve and to perfect. In Him there is a fulness beyond our ability to imagine.

There is laid up in Christ, as in a treasury, a boundless supply of all that any sinner can need in time or eternity. He is rich in mercy, grace, wisdom, love, righteousness and salvation. He abounds in everything that a soul needs for its salvation. In Him there is enough for all, enough for each, and enough for evermore. He has a fulness of salvation for our deliverance from sin, of wisdom for our instruction of strength for our weakness, and of grace for all our needs.

II. The Reception of Christ's Fulness.

This verse suggests the thought of fulness and that of filling. His fulness constitutes an inexhaustible reservoir. Our filling reminds us of an illimitable endowment. Oh, what a fulness He has! Oh, what spiritual destitution we have! This abundance in Christ is exactly suited and intended to meet our need, to supply our deficiency, to relieve our poverty and to satisfy our hunger and thirst.

There is something depressing about an empty basket. It may be strong. It may be very well made. It may even be quite artistic. But if it is empty it is fulfilling no purpose and is a useless weight on your arm.

In the empty basket there is a parable of human life. A man may possess an attractive personality, he may be cultured and talented, but apart from God his life is empty of good. Every believer has a need before God. None of us have approached so near to Him that we cannot draw any nearer. None of us are so conformed to His image that we cannot become more like Him. None of us are reflecting so clearly the glory of the Lord that we cannot reflect it better.

Does our text find an echo in your experience? Have you received of Christ's fulness? Have you availed yourself of His great power? Have you gazed into the depths of His love? Have you drunk from the never-failing fountains of His grace? Do you now crave to be filled with Christ's fulness? If so, you are very near to blessing, for He fills the hungry with good things.

If you are a Christian, then, you have received, out of Christ's fulness, the priceless gift of peace with God. You could not find any way to get right with God. Your conscience was troubled. You dreaded to meet your Judge, for you realized that you were His enemy. You searched for peace, but without success. Then you came to Christ and trusted Him. You obtained "peace through the shed blood of His cross." Since then much more of His fulness has been opened up to you.

As we stand amazed in the presence of Christ and see His indescribable glory, Why do we so often fail to experience the fulness of Christ? Our failure to live the maximum Christian life springs from our unwillingness to fulfill the conditions whereby Christ can have full possession of our lives. Forgiveness is not all that God has for us. Many Christians drift through life without knowing much more of grace than this. Forgiveness is a marvelous gift, but, after all, it is only the clearing away of the debris of past sins to make way for the building of a Christian life.

Perhaps just now you need strength for trial. You may need to be braced against the shocks of time. Or, you may need patience under the little difficulties of life. You need grace or divine help. If things get worse tomorrow, He says, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Of course it is! The fish might as well doubt the sufficiency of the ocean as that you should doubt the sufficiency of God's grace. Grace comes like the waves of the

ocean. When one blessing comes there is another close behind it. Plenteous grace with Him is found; all the grace you shall ever require between now and glory you shall find stored up in Him. There is no end to the boundless resources which there are for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to meet all of his needs as they arise. His grace continually fills up and supplies all of our needs. There is no lack in Him. Whatever your needs may be, His resources are equal to them.

Stretch out the hand of faith and take all that you need from Christ's fulness. His supply is far greater than your need. However, we cannot receive His fulness if our vessels are half full with our own merits. We must be emptied of self before Christ can fill our hearts and minds with Himself. It is only when we stand before Him as the "poor in spirit" that we can receive the blessing of Christ's fulness. Without personal commitment to Christ we cannot receive and enjoy His fulness.

There is no limit to the possibilities for a Christian in view of Christ's fulness. Who would dare to set a limit where boundless grace is concerned? It matters not to the Lord what you are when He takes you up, for He sees what you can be when His work is completed. It is not natural talent, but Christ's fulness, that makes the difference between a man like D. L. Moody and a fruitless Christian.

Christ's fulness always carries certain obligations with it. It is the obligation of love freely taken but never relinquished. If we draw from His fulness of grace and truth, we must communicate them, we must tell about them and bear witness to them. Christ's fulness guarantees that our resources for this task will be adequate. He never gives us a task without also giving us the means and the ability to do it. Christ wants us to leave all and follow Him. But how small that "all" is beside the fulness of Christ!

"Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."