

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XLVIII : DIGRESSION #2 - PAUL AS MINISTER OF THE MYSTERY TO THE GENTILES (3:1-13)

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. 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; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 KJV)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 NIV)

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you the nations, if, indeed, ye did hear of the dispensation of the grace of God that was given to me in regard to you, that by revelation He made known to me the secret, according as I wrote before in few [words] — in regard to which ye are able, reading [it], to understand my knowledge in the secret of the Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit — that the nations be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in the Christ, through the good news, of which I became a ministrant, according to the gift of the grace of God that was given to me, according to the working of His power; to me — the less than the least of all the saints — was given this grace, among the nations to proclaim good news — the untraceable riches of the Christ, and to cause all to see what [is] the fellowship of the secret that hath been hid from the ages in God, who the all things did create by Jesus Christ, that there might be made known now to the principalities and the authorities in the heavenly [places], through the assembly, the manifold wisdom of God, according to a purpose of the ages, which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have the freedom and the access in confidence through the faith of him, wherefore, I ask [you] not to faint in my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 Young's Literal Translation)

Paul as Minister of the Mystery to the Gentiles (3:1-13)

The essence of what Paul is saying is as follows:

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles —

*if, indeed, ye did hear of **the responsibility of managing the GRACE of God which was given to me, namely, that He made known the mystery that the Gentiles should be***

joint – heirs

and joint – body

and joint – partakers

of His promise in Jesus the Messiah through the gospel;

this **GRACE** was given to me

- **to preach** the unsearchable riches of the Christ among the Gentiles
- **and to enlighten** all as to what is the plan of the mystery

in order that [hina] the untraceable wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and to the authorities in the heavenlies through the ecclesia.

Therefore I ask you not to lose heart in my tribulations on behalf of you which is your glory.

v 8 — 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, — ἐμοὶ τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις αὕτη ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐαγγελίσασθαι τὸν ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτον τοῦ Χριστοῦ [emoi tōi elachistoterōi pantōn tōn hagiōn edothē hē charis hautē en tois ethnesin euangelisasthai ton anexichniaston plouton tou Christou,]

As shown in the summary above, Paul is saying that ...

this **GRACE** was given to me

- **to preach** the unsearchable riches of the Christ among the Gentiles
- **and to enlighten** all as to what is the plan of the mystery

This week we will look at verse 8, the first portion of Paul's statement above.

is this grace given, — ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις αὕτη [edothē hē charis hautē] this briefly repeats the thought of v. 7. *“In this instance ‘the grace given’ is that grace which enables him to discharge his missionary commission, although one needs to realize that this ‘special’ grace is part and parcel of the comprehensive grace by which he became a Christian. Further, God works effectively in Paul’s life, for although he is deeply conscious of his own unworthiness, this does not hinder him from assuming his missionary responsibilities in relation to the Gentiles. He sets about fulfilling this task energetically, profoundly aware that God has called him to do it.”* [O’Brien, 240f] *“The grace of God given to me’ is the expression used by him, to intimate that it was a peculiar gift, as compared with what had been bestowed on others. Not that he alone had been elected to discharge that office, but that he held the highest rank among ‘the teachers of the Gentiles,’ — a title which he employs on another occasion as peculiar to himself. ‘I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not,) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.’ (1 Timothy 2:7.)”* [Calvin, 253]

that I should preach — εὐαγγελίσασθαι [euangelisasthai] The word translated ‘preach’ is where we get our word ‘evangelize.’ *It means ‘generally to bring or announce good news; predominately in the NT, as making known God’s message of salvation with authority and power tell the good news, make known the gospel, evangelize.’* [Friberg Lexicon] The noun form is used mostly by Paul and in translated ‘the good news, the gospel.’ That the word itself basically means ‘bring good news’ is evident from its usage in the following verse (exact same word as in Eph 3:8):

*‘And the angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and **bring** you these **glad tidings**.”* (Luke 1:19 NKJV)

AN UNUSUAL OBJECT OF THE VERB — “The object of the verb, *the unsearchable riches of Christ*, is rather unusual. Often the verb ‘to announce the gospel’ is employed specifically with the ‘gospel’, or some element of it, as its direct object (1 Cor 15:1; 2 Cor 11:7; Gal 1:11,23; cf. Rom 10:15). In other instances where no object is expressly mentioned it is clear from the context that the preaching of the gospel is in view (Rom 1:15; 15:20; 1 Cor 1:17; etc.). Here in Ephesians 3:8, however, **Paul uses rhetorical language to show that his proclamation is about the wealth of divine grace and glory which Christ possess in himself and which he lavishly gives to others.**” [O’Brien, 241]

*‘Moreover, brethren, I declare to you **the gospel** which **I preached** to you, which also you received and in which you stand’* (1 Cor 15:1 NKJV)

*‘Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because **I preached the gospel of God** to you free of charge?’* (2 Cor 11:7 NKJV)

*‘But I make known to you, brethren, that **the gospel** which was **preached by me** is not according to man.’* (Gal 1:11 NKJV)

*‘But they were hearing only, He who formerly persecuted us now **preaches the faith** which he once tried to destroy.’* (Gal 1:23 NKJV)

*‘And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who **preach the gospel of peace**, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’* (Rom 10:15 NKJV)

among the Gentiles — ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν [en tois ethnesin] “Paul’s God-given commission is to announce the good news of Christ to the Gentiles. It is the business of an apostle to preach to others in continuation of Christ’s own ministry.” [Wood, *Ephesians on CD*]

the unsearchable — τὸν ἀνεξιχνίαστον [ton anexichniaston] *the word is literally ‘to trace out’ with the alpha negative, therefore ‘that which cannot be traced out.’* [Wuest; see also Vincent, Word Studies; A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures] *“Strictly not to be tracked out or detected; unsearchable; hence, of God’s ways impossible to understand, inscrutable (Rom 11.33); of spiritual blessing given through Christ too much to be measured, infinite, beyond one’s ability to imagine (Eph 3.8).”* [Friberg’s Lexicon] *“The πλοῦτος [ploutos, ‘riches’] thus contained in Christ is the whole wealth of the salvation He bestows; and this is ‘unsearchable,’ i.e., not in the sense of inexhaustible, but rather in that of unfathomable, ‘past finding out,’ such as cannot be fully comprehended by man; cf. Rom. xi. 33, the only other NT occurrence of ἀνεξιχνίαστον [anexichniaston, ‘untraceable’]; also Job v. 9, ix. 10, xxxiv. 24, the only occurrences in the LXX. It is a picturesque and suggestive word, meaning literally such as cannot be traced out by footprints.”* [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 306]

THE NEED FOR SPECIAL REVELATION — “The term ἀνεξιχνίαστον [anexichniaston, ‘unsearchable’] is particularly appropriate for describing God’s grace in Christ here since Paul has just explained that God’s plan to include Gentiles and Jews on equal terms among his people ‘in Christ Jesus’ would be utterly unknown apart from the special revelation of it to Paul, the apostles, and the prophets. *No one would have been able to ‘trace out’ the logic of the Scriptures to this conclusion; God had to reveal it.*” [Thielman, 213]

IN THIS INSTANCE, THE INSUFFICIENCY OF SPECIAL REVELATION — *“Somewhat paradoxically the apostle has written, on the one hand, of the mystery of the gospel being revealed to him (v. 3) and, on the other, of that message focusing on the riches of Christ, which are ‘unfathomable’! ... In the gospel of Christ that came by revelation there were vast treasure houses of his riches which had not been explored and depths which had not been plumbed, either by the apostle himself or any other Christian. His riches were ‘infinite’. So in revealing himself God had graciously given himself to men and women, but he is not comprehended by them, nor does he submit himself to humankind’s intellectual or technical control. ‘Revelation creates rather than annihilates wonder, awe and respect’... ‘The god who has been comprehended ... is always an idol.’”* [O’Brien, 242] *“The adjective is used of God’s activity in the world (Job 5.9; 9.10; 34.24; Rom 11.33; cf 1 Clem 20.5); it is an extension of this usage that we find in Eph 3.8 in that what is praised is God’s mercy rather than his activity in creation... Implied in it are both the wonder of God’s activity and the inability of the human mind, even after revelation, to deduce and plumb the depths of God.”* [Best, 318]

THE PRIVILEGE OF SPEAKING THE NAME OF CHRIST — Forgive the long quotes but the comments by Albert Barnes (1798-1870) are worth reading:

“The word rendered ‘unsearchable’ occurs but once elsewhere in the New Testament (Romans 11:33), where it is rendered ‘past finding out.’ It means that which cannot be ‘traced out,’ or explored; which is inscrutable, or incomprehensible. The meaning here is, that there was a ‘sufficiency’ in Christ which could not be traced out or explored. It was wholly incomprehensible. The fullness of the riches in him could not be appreciated. There is no more emphatic expression in the New Testament than this. It shows that the heart of the apostle was full of admiration of the sufficiency and glory that was in the Saviour; that he wanted words to express it; and that he considered it the highest honor to be permitted to tell the world that there were such riches in the Redeemer.” [Barnes, Ephesians on CD]

“It is a privilege to preach the gospel. So Paul felt. It was an honour of which he felt that he was by no means worthy. It was proof of the favour of God towards him that he was permitted to do it. It is a privilege — an honour — to preach the gospel anywhere, and to any class of men. It is an honour to be permitted to preach in Christian lands; it is an honour to preach among the heathen. It is an honour far above that of conquerors; and he who does it will win a brighter and more glorious crown than he who goes forth to obtain glory by dethroning kings, and laying nations waste. The warrior goes with the sword in one hand and the torch in the other. His path is marked with blood, and with smouldering ruins. He treads among the slain; and the music of his march is made up of dying groans, and the shrieks of widows and orphans. Yet he is honoured, and his name is blazoned abroad; he is crowned with the laurel, and triumphal arches are reared, and monuments are erected to perpetuate his fame. The man who carries the gospel goes for a different purpose. He is the minister of peace. He goes to tell of salvation. He fires no city; lays waste no field; robs no one of a home, no wife of a husband, no child of a father, no sister of a brother; he goes to elevate the intellect, to mould the heart to virtue, to establish schools and colleges; to promote temperance, industry, and chastity; to wipe away tears, and to tell of heaven. His course is marked by intelligence and order; by peace and purity; by the joy of the domestic circle, and the happiness of a virtuous fireside; by consolation on the bed of pain, and by the hope of heaven that cheers the dying. Who would not rather be a preacher of the gospel than a blood-stained warrior? Who would not rather have the wreath that shall encircle the brows of Paul, and Swartz, and Martin, and Brainerd, than the laurels of Alexander and Caesar?” [Barne’s Notes on NT]

We look at witnessing all wrong: ‘we are obligated as believers to tell others of Christ.’ — that is entirely backwards! We are honored and privileged to be able to speak that Name!

‘RICHES’ IN EPHESIANS: PAUL’S PHRASE HERE IS UNIQUE IN EPHESIANS — **riches of Christ;** — πλοῦτον τοῦ Χριστοῦ [plouton tou Christou] The word is singular but every translation I checked translates this as ‘riches.’ It is used fourteen times in the NT, five of which are in Ephesians. “Although πλοῦτος [ploutos, ‘riches’] is used elsewhere in Ephesians (1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:16), the particular phrase τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ,’ is unique to this verse.” [Lincoln, 183] The word ‘riches’ in other Ephesian verses:

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7 NKJV)

“the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18 NKJV)

“that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph 2:7 NKJV)

“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16 NKJV)

But Paul’s use here is unique:

“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8 NKJV)

JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF IS THE ‘RICHES OF CHRIST’ — *“The total phrase draws out the wonder of the good news. The riches are those of Christ, which are either those which he supplies, if so they would be those detailed elsewhere in the letter, or those which consist in Christ himself (so 1.7, 18; 2.7; 3.16); in view of usage elsewhere in the epistle the second alternative is preferable.” [Best, 318] “Christ himself constitutes the content of the riches of the gospel, and the wealth of the salvation to be found in him is unfathomable. Yet, for all the glory attributed to Christ by this formulation, in the context its thought is subordinated to the ministry of the apostle. It is to Paul that grace has been given to make these glorious riches of Christ available to the Gentiles.” [Lincoln, 184] *Unsearchable riches of Christ; riches which cannot be traced; past finding out,* may mean either the riches or blessings which Christ bestows, or the riches which he possesses. Both ideas may be included, though the latter is doubtless the more prominent. *The ‘unsearchable riches of Christ’ are the fulness of the Godhead, the plenitude of all divine glories and perfections which dwell in him; the fulness of grace to pardon, to sanctify and save; everything, in short, which renders him the satisfying portion of the soul.*” [Hodge, 116]*

THE RICHES OF CHRIST IS TRUE WEALTH — *“If these ‘unsearchable riches of Christ’ are that wealth which he possesses in himself and which he bestows on those who are ‘in him’, then something of their content has already been mentioned in Paul’s exposition of Ephesians 1 and 2, particularly in the introductory eulogy of 1:3-14, where significant elements in God’s plan of salvation — which includes Gentiles within the sphere of blessing — are enunciated. **Because these amazing riches of God in Christ are true wealth, then the gospel Paul proclaims will enrich his hearers immeasurably as they respond. Here the wealth of God has been lavished in a wonderful way. Paul is so convinced of this that he is almost overwhelmed at the great privilege given to him as a missionary of proclaiming God’s great kindness in the Lord Jesus Christ.**” [O’Brien, 242]*

HIS GLORY WILL NEVER DIMINISH — *“In Christ there is unsearchable riches. None can understand the fulness that there is in him; none can exhaust it. Millions and hundreds of millions have been saved by the fulness of his merits; and still those merits are as ample as ever. The sun in the heavens has shone for six thousand years, and has shed light and comfort on countless millions; but his beams are not exhausted or diminished in splendour. To-day, while I write — this beautiful, calm, sweet day (June 24, 1840) — his beams are as bright, as rich, as full, as they were when they were shed on Eden. So of the Sun of righteousness. Millions have been enlightened by his beams; but to-day they are as full, and rich, and glorious, as they were when the first ray from that Sun reached the benighted mind of a penitent sinner. And that fulness is not to be exhausted. No matter how many partake of his abundance; no matter how many darkened minds are enlightened; no matter though nation after nation comes and partakes of his fulness, yet there is no approach to exhaustion. The sun in the heavens may waste his fires and burn out, and become a dark orb, diffusing horror over a cold and cheerless world; but not so with the Sun of righteousness. That will shine on in glory for ever and ever; and the last penitent sinner on earth who comes to partake of the riches of the grace of Christ shall find it as full and free as did the first who sought pardon through his blood. Oh, the UNSEARCHABLE RICHES of Christ! Who can understand this? Who can grow weary in its contemplation?” [Barne’s Notes on the NT]*

SINNERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR LOST CONDITION — *“There is no good reason why any sinner should be lost. If the merits of the Saviour were limited; if his arm were a feeble human arm . . . and if his merit were already well-nigh exhausted, we might begin to despair. But it is not so. The riches of his grace are unbounded and inexhaustible. And why then does the sinner die? I can answer. He dies like the man who expires of thirst while fountains bubble and streams flow all around him; like him who is starving amidst trees loaded with fruit; like him who is dying of fever in the midst of medicines that would at once restore him; like him who holds his breath, and dies while the balmy air of heaven — pure, full, and free — floats all around him. If a man thus dies, who is to blame? If a man goes down to hell from lands where the gospel is preached, whose is the fault? It is not because the merits of Christ are limited; it is not because they are exhausted.” [Barne’s Notes on NT]*

“WE ARE HALF-HEARTED CREATURES” — *“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” [C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses] I am speaking to you, and I am speaking to myself: we are often so foolish! We give lip-service to the spiritual while we seek after the material. May God forgive us and give us grace to live with eternal values in mind!*