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mon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Richmond Chapel on Friday evening 28.4.72

Hymns: 692, 529, 373

Reading: Ephesians 3 and 4 (1-12)

Text: Ephesians 3.8

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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".

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The Ministry of the Gospel is a divine appointment, and the fact that it has been maintained generation after generation all through this Gospel dispensation of time, proves that it is of divine origin, is with divine authority, is attended with a divine blessing, and is an appointed means the Lord is disposed to use in various ways; for the instruction, reproof, comfort and edification of His dear people, as well as to convince sinners of their sad condition. Often the Lord has used the appointment of the ministry unto this end; to convince of sin by the Holy Spirit, and to reveal His salvation; and in relation to this the Apostle Paul is an outstanding instance. He is a remarkable instance of the sovereign purposes of God in the choice of him unto this end and in the grace that was conferred upon him to discharge His ministry, to be a vessel in the hands of the Lord, to proclaim His name among the Gentiles, and to write these gracious letters. We may have cause to be thankful for the mystery to which the Apostle here refers, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" ... "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel". That was the mystery, and it is a mercy that the Lord should dispose that poor Gentiles who were then looked upon as strangers and foreigners should be no longer such, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God. It will be a great mercy friends if you and I are incorporated in this mystery, for if we are then we shall have a religion that will take us to heaven.

The Apostle's point is that the Lord made him a minister to proclaim this mystery, and a blessed minister indeed he was, as we know when we read in the Acts of the Apostles of his experiences,

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how he suffered, what boldness was given him to proclaim the mystery of the glorious Gospel of Christ. But in the verse I have read those things did not inflate him with pride and self-confidence and conceit of himself. We may well say that we cannot agree with him, in this point of view, when he describes himself as less than the least of all saints; but my late pastor used to say, "We will not dispute with the Apostle Paul about this; he said what he felt and we feel the same!" indeed much more so, for we have much more reason to feel less than the least of all saints. It is a great mercy friends when much grace is productive of much humility; but this is not according to nature, it is the sanctifying work and grace of the Holy Spirit. Here then is a personal reference, not "unto me who am one of the greatest preachers of my time", but "am less than the least of all saints". I believe this is what a sweet blessed revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ does. It lays a poor sinner low, it lays a minister low too; it laid the prophet low when he said that all his righteousness was as filthy rags, for he had seen the King the Lord of Hosts. Every manifestation of the Lord in our souls will lay us low. We find Job saying, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee". What then? "Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes"; and this is one of the sweetest spots that any minister can feel to be in, for it is a sweet and blessed effect, it is productive of Gospel repentance in the heart, grief because of our own dreadful sins and guilt, and yet love to Christ Who has come over it all, and granted us a sweet token of His love.

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given". It is noticeable that grace was given in a particular sense to the Apostle Paul to exalt Christ. It is said, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified". When the Apostles, as recorded in Acts 4, were threatened if they continued to speak to the people, they took no notice, whatever the cost might be, and though they were strictly forbidden, they went into the temple and ceased not to preach and to teach Jesus Christ as the yea and amen of the Gospel; He was the yea and amen of the Gospel then, and He is just the same today. The great end of the

Gospel ministry is to exalt Him. Why? Because His Father has exalted Him, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins". The yea and amen of the Gospel ministry is a once crucified but now exalted Saviour. Where is He exalted? He is exalted in three particular places; in the first instance the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted in heaven, that is as relating to His sacred humanity and His mediatorial power; "every grace and every favour comes to us through Jesus' blood". In the first chapter the Apostle says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ". All spiritual blessings flow through Him. There has never been a person walk this earth more worthy to be exalted than this blessed Person, the Son of God, as relating to the position He occupies in heaven. He fills us. I have often mentioned what Asaph said in Psalm 73, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee". As though he would say, 'without Him my heaven would be no heaven'. There He is, discharging His blessed covenant office as Prophet, Priest and King. There He is, adored by angels, adored by redeemed spirits who have come out of great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. We shall never tire, if we get there, we shall never tire of that glorious, blessed, holy worship. We shall, as we read, cast our crown at His feet and crown Him Lord of all.

But there is another place where Christ is exalted and that is in the Gospel ministry as I have already mentioned. If a ministry is not Christ-exalting it is really no ministry at all. I know there are other attending features with regard to the precepts and a great number of things, but really all centres in exalting a precious Christ. Sometimes it has been very, very sweet to do so. It is a poor effort at the best that any of us can make to exalt Him. When I had preached about three times I went to see a dear old man who was very ill, and with his heart very warm and his countenance

shining, in the prospect of his departure he said, "Lift Him up, lift Him up", and it was not long before he was lifted up into glory; dear man. Although he had never walked in the ordinances of the Lord's house he knew the Gospel; and is not this what the Lord has appointed ministers for, to be a witness to Christ in His glorious, divine, eternal Personality as the eternal Son of God, and in the perfection of His work, His sin-atonement sacrifice? Christ is everything when it comes to vital realities in our eternal salvation. He is the blessed foundation upon which our hopes stand. In these days there is a tendency to drift away from the atonement, but may the Lord help us in our poor labours; and I know this will not offend my ministerial brethren here, - may the Lord help us in our poor labours to exalt the sin-atonement Lamb, because if we have no interest in all that He is and has done, we shall sink into everlasting perdition, fall under the wrath of offended justice and drop into hell. Sometimes I feel so sad because I fail to exalt Him as I would. He is infinitely worthy. If it could be so to speak that we were to enter heaven, what should we hear up there? "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive riches, honour, power and blessing". Do you feel that you could unite in the song of the redeemed there? I believe I could.

There is another place where the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted and that is in a poor sinner's soul when the Lord blesses him, when a precious Christ is revealed to him, and when His sweet love is shed abroad in the heart, Christ is exalted there. O sometimes it has been very sweet to read in the Song, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to his banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." If that love is shed abroad in your heart you will know something of what good Berridge said, "Living tongues are dumb at best. We must die to speak of Christ." Has He ever been exalted in your heart? I believe He was in my heart when I was in hospital, I felt such a sweet flowing out toward Him because He was flowing into me in the 20th. of John. Dear friends we do need real things. You may say, I have not had them; no, but that

is nothing against you, if you long for them, if you are conscious of what you lack, and in your soul are seeking for a manifestation of the Lord Jesus to your soul. There is nothing to discourage one seeking for what they feel to lack.

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given". So it is those who feel to be less than the least who make the greatest preachers as this grace is given, "that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ". What are these unsearchable riches? They are beyond us, they are beyond us really, because they are unsearchable, and we cannot search what is unsearchable. It is something like Newton said of the child going down to the sea shore with his tiny bucket and filling it with the sea water, as much as he can carry while the ocean lies unexplored before him; but even if it is only a drop, if it is sea water that he has got in his little bucket; it is part of the ocean. If the sweet love of Christ is shed abroad in your heart it will be so to speak just a drop of this mighty ocean. These unsearchable riches of Christ are the blessings of the everlasting Gospel as they centre in His glorious Person, His finished work, and His blessed intercession in heaven. Here are riches that are unsearchable in their fulness; and yet the Apostle would have these Ephesians to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, but he does not say, "You cannot know anything of this because it passes knowledge". He would have them to know something that passeth knowledge, and here are the riches, here is the wealth, here is the abounding wealth of Christ's riches, they shine forth in His love. If you know what it is to have that love shed abroad in your poor heart, then you will understand the Apostle when he says it passes knowledge; and that point we can be quite willing to leave, if we are favoured with a drop of the mighty ocean, for that will be the best witness we can have that one day we shall see Him as He is. The riches of love!

But there are riches of grace. Writing to the Ephesians the Apostle says, "In Whom we have redemption through his blood". He keeps to the vital point, "through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace". The riches of His grace shine as it were with a sweet ray of heaven through His blood,

for here is our redemption, here is our hope, here is our standing, here are our prospects, all come through His blood. Riches of grace! But not only so; there are riches of power. Before the Lord Jesus went up into heaven He said to His disciples, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth". What does the Apostle say of Him now? He says of Him, that "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them". He is able to save not a little sinner but to the uttermost. These are coming sinners then who come with their emptiness, sin, guilt, death, with the burden that weighs upon them, to His mercy seat. "All power is given unto Him". He has a universal power; He reigns a King; He is King of kings and Lord of lords, but there is a particular power; a universal power does not incorporate redemption, but this particular power is the powerful effect and result of Calvary in the salvation and redemption of a poor wretch who must otherwise sink into hell. This is our mercy, riches of grace revealed in His substitution. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich". What amazing grace; and so it was felt to be by the hymn writer when he said,

"Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound!)  
That saved a wretch like me;  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see."

Riches of grace - and some of you can look back upon that grace that found you and called you, otherwise you would never have found Him. "We love Him because He first loved us". Unto me is this grace given that "I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ".

There are riches of glory. I am sure there are because they are mentioned here, "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man". Where are the riches of His glory to be seen? In two or three places. First as I have mentioned in heaven, as we cannot see them down here; yet there they are in their fulness - riches of glory. O what a day it will be if we are really prepared

to die. What a day it will be to exchange earth for heaven. Sometimes to me it seems more than I can anticipate, that a day will come when I shall see Him as He is. It seems more than I can anticipate, or realise, but it will be true of every poor sinner saved by grace. It will be true of everyone of them from the least of them to the greatest, small or great. It is a mercy that the Gospel comes down to meet the case of bankrupts. In fact we must come to that place as in the case of those debtors; one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty pence, but it was not until they had nothing to pay that he frankly forgave them both.

This is a Gospel which a poor bankrupt loves; and is not this the Gospel that your dear pastor preaches to you according to the ability that the Lord may give him? I feel sure it is his heart's desire to exalt Christ, to bring forth the precious from the vile as the Lord's mouth. It is a solemn position to hold; it is a trembling thought to stand before God and before fallen man, but it is the Lord's appointment. These are dark and heavy days; they seem very different from the days when I was young. The Lord appears to have gathered most of His people into the heavenly garner. When I was a lad I used to go to Galeed when there was usually a congregation of four to five hundred on the Sabbath day. I used to hear the people talking, going down the road, about the preaching. How did you get on? They used to be talking about the sermon. I wonder how much of this there is today; but, although this is a sad day in many ways, still His servants are to labour on in season and out of season. A good minister said not long ago that if he only preached when he was in season he would not be preaching at all.

Here is a Gospel to preach, then, but I must leave it now. I hope that your dear pastor will be helped and enabled to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, for there is no better subject upon the face of the earth. And I hope that he may often feel his soul watered by the sacred unction of the Spirit of the Lord in this place, and may it be sweetly felt. I will close with saying I hope we may keep close to the atonement; it is so vital, so real, so fundamental, so sacred. May the Lord help us to cleave to real things and may your pastor be helped to preach them as grace may be given him. Amen.