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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 17 December 1933

EPHESIANS 3 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"

I do not intend to enter upon the case of Paul's call to the ministry and Apostleship, Apostleship to the Gentiles. It was a remarkable thing that a persecutor and an injurious person God should make so eminent a minister of Christ as the Apostle Paul. It was grace, grace given, imparted, according to the effectual working in him. And the anointing - for the grace was the anointing - the anointing was to this end, that he should preach among the Gentiles - O happy Gentiles - the unsearchable riches of Christ. I say, O happy Gentiles; God had eternally made them part of His Church of which Christ was eternally constituted the Head, but that had been hid, as the Apostle here tells us, it was hid in God. God, that is to say, had not revealed it and brought it into open manifestation. For ages and ages mercy was confined to the elect nation, the Jews. He taught them the gospel by signs, ceremonies, sacrifices and types. But now the time had come when that should cease, when He had no further use for that law, because Jesus, the promised Seed, had come. Happy Gentiles - myself one of them, I hope; many of you belong to them - when God should visit them and send to them the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ. It is called a mystery because it had been hid from ages and generations that the Gentiles should be called, but now had come the blessed day when, as Hart writes of the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, cloven tongues - cloven perhaps to show that now salvation is no longer confined to the Jews. God made a distinction between Hebrew and Gentile, Hebrew and heathen, and Jesus emphasised it. As long as the distinction lasted, under the law, and until the veil was rent from top to bottom, He solemnly emphasised it. When dealing with the Syrophenecian woman - "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs" O but that ceased. She, Gentile though she was, had a prevailing faith even as Jacob had, as

Abraham had, and by faith she, as well as they, had justification. Now the Apostle declares this mystery which had been specially revealed to him as the Apostle of the Gentiles. "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 fellow-heirs, and of the same body" - spiritual body, the body of Christ - "and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel," - the first promise was in Eden; the Seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent - "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" - a bit of arithmetic for some; less than the least - "is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

What I have to do, what I design, if the Lord will help me, is to speak of the Lord Jesus as possessing unsearchable riches. First the riches of His eternal Deity. Christ here spoken of is the blessed Son of God incarnate and any who should speak of His unsearchable riches leaving out His divine Person in the Godhead would begin infinitely short. We shall never understand the being of Jehovah, but Christ declared - "I AM THAT I AM". He revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush. He spoke of Himself, as related in the gospel of John, "Before Abraham was I am". Not, I was - that might have been some time before Abraham - but I am means eternally before Abraham. All that is proper to God is proper to Christ. His eternity, omniscience, independence; everything proper to Deity is proper to Christ. Some of us desire more and more to embrace this truth as it is to be embraced by faith in the Person of Jesus Christ. O, think of it; that beautiful Psalm which I read (136) expresses in my view this Person, Christ. He was with the church in the wilderness. He delivered Israel from Egypt, He overthrew Pharoah and his host. He slew mighty kings; He made a way for His ransomed to pass over. All, all these His works had distinct relationship to His church. I regard that

Psalm, which I have read before without noticing it, as a very remarkable Psalm relating to God's enduring mercy to His church. Judgements, destructions, overthrowing of kings, casting down of thrones, all because His mercy endureth for ever. This is the God we adore; this is the God we trust. This is the God we look to and hope in and expect, at times, to see by precious faith here, and hereafter to have an open vision of. Look to this God. There may be some here who are troubled about their souls; they have never had forgiveness spoken to them as yet. Born again, they see sin. God has caught them, caught them by conviction, caught them by the law, caught them by their consciences, and has held them, is holding them thus. But the one thing they want to attain is that to which they have not yet attained, the forgiveness of their sins. Now how are they to have that? They are to have that through Christ. King of kings, you will sing one day; God of gods, Lord of lords, slayer of mighty kings, you will say, He has slain my enmity, He has removed my guilt, He has conquered my sins, He has bruised Satan under my feet at times. This is the God I adore. O, if faith could stretch her wings in the power of the Spirit now and look at the expanse of God's mercy as it is revealed in Scripture and see that sin, the biggest enemy we have; law coming on that, guilt coming on that, death coming on that, and all these enemies pressing on the conscience, pressing on the soul, pressing the sinner into dismay, yea into despair; I say if faith could stretch her wings, she would see One who is King, Lord, God, having power to forgive sin. Riches? They are in Him; they belong to Him naturally as He is God; riches of mercy unsearchable. Take one or two instances from the Scripture in this point. David. David knew that for his double sin of adultery and murder there was no mercy for him by the Mosaic law. He knew that he ought to have been stoned according to Moses, and he declares that in the 51 Psalm. "For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering". It is as if he said - Thou hast not commanded any sacrifice for my sins; there is no sacrifice ordered in the law for such guilt as mine. I would give all my kingdom if I were required to do it. But now he seeks for mercy. "Have mercy upon me, O God". "Have mercy upon me", that is the point my friends. Oh when the Spirit comes and shows you how unsearchable this mercy is, and makes you pray as you are praying; makes you pray one day perhaps more effectually than ever before - "Have mercy upon me", "Wash me thoroughly from mine

iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin", then you will say the Lord has opened my lips. Guilt had closed them and sealed them; now blood has opened them. My mouth shall show forth His praise.

You take Manasseh; he made the streets of Jerusalem flow with blood. O, but mercy prevailed, mercy laid hold of him. God caught him, caught him by the thorns. God may have caught you by thorns of conviction and opening to you the floodgates of your own wickedness, giving you to see how those floods have overflowed. O but God heard him; God was entreated of him.

You take the third instance, Saul of Tarsus, an injurious person, a persecutor, and in the zeal of his false religion he thought that he ought to do what he did against the saints. Now what did God do with him? Forgave him. Now you have here something of the unsearchable riches of mercy in Christ as He is God.

But secondly look at Christ, which means "the anointed One". Jesus is the Saviour - the Lord Jesus Christ, the anointed Saviour. We have that In Isaiah 11 - The rod out of the stem of Jesse and the Spirit of the Lord was given to Him, rested on Him, made Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, and that Spirit we read of in the same prophet. "And now" says Christ "the Lord and His Spirit hath sent Me". And later in the same prophet we have this spoken by Christ Himself. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek." This is Jesus Christ. Luke tells us that on a day when He was to enter His public ministry He went into the synagogue and the Scripture was handed to Him and He opened it and found that Scripture I have just quoted. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me". So we come to this, it means that the Man Christ Jesus was filled with the Spirit without measure. God gave not the Spirit unto Him in measure. He gave Him the fullness, the entire Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God dwelt in the Man Christ Jesus and was with Him. He went about doing good and God was with Him. Isaiah tells us, or the Lord by the prophet Isaiah tells us, that He relied on His Father. He prayed. He said "The Lord My God will help Me." The Spirit was with Him and we are told in the Hebrews that He offered up strong cries and tears and was heard in that He feared. What is all this? Part of His unsearchable riches. That He

guides, and blesses, and helps and teaches, supports chastises, brings back again and again His dear people purchased with His Own blood and you will never get to the bottom of this, never. Never be able to fully embrace this, the unsearchable riches. Dig as much as you can, pray and meditate, you will never get to the bottom. The Holy Ghost will give you a little here and a little there. But this anointed Preacher, Jesus Christ, was anointed to preach good tidings. Good tidings are tidings that come from a far country. What is that far country? Heaven, God's abode. Eternity is His time. The Lofty One speaks and Jesus is the Lofty One, anointed to be the servant of His Father, willingly becoming the servant of His Father, and receiving that anointing that He might preach to sinners. I would like to be able, by the Lord's help, to speak to you about this preaching, preaching to sinners. The holy Lord Jesus made sin; the holy Saviour having a broken heart; the blessed Redeemer under the curse. The equal of God, that is the equal of the Father, incarnate, receiving a commandment from His Father. What commandment? To lay down His life. Of all things this is one of the most mysterious and unsearchable, that the Son of God incarnate should receive a commandment. He had a revelation given to Him as you read in the 1 chapter of Revelation. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him" concerning things that were shortly to come to pass. But here is the commandment received by the Son of God incarnate, that He should come and take of the Seed of the woman and be made sin, a curse, and voluntarily, vicariously, die, rise again, ascend into heaven, and then preach, by the Holy Spirit given to Him without measure, the blessed, glorious gospel. He sees a poor sinner, troubled, burdened with guilt, crying mightily, often night and day. He gets some tokens; still he is burdened, he is troubled, he has not had the one thing he desires, and that must make him sure that salvation has come to him, the forgiveness of his sins, and this is that that he is after. Who should preach it to him? A minister preaches it but he has no power to convey it. I declare it to you from time to time, but I have no power to give it you. You believe in the forgiveness of sins, but you need the application of the blood of Christ that your faith may receive that. The effectual Preacher is the Lord Jesus by His good Spirit, for He sends the Spirit. No child of God ever received the Holy Ghost in the absolute sense; that is to say, just simply as He is God; he receives Him from Christ. He

anointed Christ to preach and Christ sends Him to all His children, and that is what the Apostle John writes when he says - "Ye have an unction from the Holy One.". That unction is the Holy Spirit and He teaches of all things and purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. How far have you run away from God? As far as sin and the devil could drive you. Not perhaps in external wickedness, but in your heart. An infidel, a blasphemer, and everything that is evil. And how far does the unsearchable wealth of Christ extend? Well may your faith listen to it. "He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them." When you have got to the uttermost you can go no further. O what riches of grace. In the Romans we are told that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound". Now that is one branch. Have you faith; have you a grain of faith in the blessed Lord Jesus, in the riches of His love in forgiving sin? Have you faith to lay hold at all of that you have in the Psalm? "If Thou, LORD shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared" (Psalm 130). Absolute forgiveness, free forgiveness. Our legal hearts, our proud hearts, though we are not aware perhaps of the pride or of the legality, would make forgiveness conditional. No, says one poor seeker. Yes, if you were a little better; if you were sure of your repentance being right; if you were sure that you loved the Lord, then you could believe He would forgive you, which means, if you were not so wicked; if you were not so lost; if you were not so entirely given up as you feel yourself to be, then you could hope. That is to say, your partial goodness would be the ground of your hope. A rotten foundation, that; you will never stand on it. No, when you are lost you will be saved. You cannot expect, you cannot hope, to be saved until, as Hart expresses it, you are utterly lost. If you have got one mite left in your purse it will have to go. The last thing that was thrown out of the ship in which Paul was, the ship which was to be broken, was the wheat. The last thing for you to give up is self and the bit of concealed self-righteousness. O, how hard it is to be a sinner! You do not think it hard you say because you know you are a sinner. I say how hard it is to be a sinner. I could sing in earlier days - "Rock of Ages" and "Nothing in my hand I bring" with an ease and a lack of discernment that I cannot use today. "Nothing in my hand?" No religion? No goodness? Not a good thought? Not a right

conception? Not my confessions? Not my desires? Not my wishes to be better than I am? Nothing! Nothing means nothing. O it is hard. I am old and I have lived many years in a profession, and have spoken, tried to preach the gospel, but it never was harder to me than it is today to be a sinner. I am not living in sin; thanks be to God. No man, so far as I know, can come and charge me with open sin, but I have sin; I am full of it. Can you search the unsearchable depths of mercy? Well some of you may think I have dwelt too long on that point, but it is a very important point, very important. So important as that you will have no certainty until you reach it; until you can say feelingly, the Lord God has forgiven my sin, and put away my guilt.

Secondly there is the unsearchable patience of Christ. O what riches here. Patience? He is called the God of patience, and well it is so. Some of us have not much patience with our fellow creatures, but God, the infinite God, has infinite patience. There is no perfection in Him that is not eternal, therefore perfect; think of it. Now think of your own cases, your poor cases. "When for the time ye ought to be teachers" - this applies to me very much - "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you". "Ye have need of milk, not of strong drink." Paul's patience with the people of God was sorely tried but he was inspired and helped in that particular to look at this. God has not cast us off, has not cast me off. You who feel your sins; have made a profession it may be for some long time; still barren, with ill-manners, stiffnecked ways, brows of brass, hearts of iron, wills as stubborn as sin and the devil can make them, and all against God who has been so good to us. We may put with this patience, God's pity. "Like as a father pitieth his children". The pity of patience with an unruly son. The pity of love that cannot, will not, disown the relationship. So is God's patience; so is God's pity. Borne with us. O, said God to Samuel, they have not rejected you in asking a king; they have rejected Me. Yet, said Samuel "The Lord will not forsake His people". He has made you His people, therefore He will not forsake you. This was His goodness expressed in pity, in patient bearing with them, with all their stiffnecked ways. Unsearchable. When you can count your sins, when you can fathom the unfathomable depths of your deceitful and desperately wicked hearts, when you can remember the times you have

departed from the Lord, when you can weigh your guilt, when you can set all these things up in your heart and mind and take the plumbline and fathom them, then, even then, you wont have fathomed the unsearchable riches of Christ. His patience. "O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself." Israel says, when convinced, that is true Lord. What does He say? When guilt closes the mouth, seals the lip, and causes the sinner to feel he dare not pray, He says - this God says, this good God, this patient God, says - "Take with you words, and turn again unto the LORD: Say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips." Ephraim was chastised and how did Ephraim behave himself? As a bullock in a net. But then, after that the Lord made the chastisement work well with him, and he said - After that I was chastised I smote upon my thigh. And what did the Lord say? I have heard Ephraim, I have heard him, I have been looking after him, watching him, keeping his steps. I have heard him bemoaning himself thus. And what will He do? Heal him. I will heal him, says the Lord. My bowels are troubled for him; he is Mine, notwithstanding. God will not disown relationship which He Himself has set up. Is he my dear son? How can I deny it? I have made him My son. Patience! Who can search it out? I am the oldest perhaps in the congregation and I am the oldest sinner and the chiefest sinner. It is no boast; it is my shame, it is my sorrow. But then I can say this, I have had more patience from God manifested to me than any of you have had; much more. Unsearchable patience. As God's nature is love, so it expresses itself in His patient forbearance, in His tender pity with His children.

Unsearchable riches of wisdom how to deliver the godly out of temptation. Many a godly soul has said I do not know how it can come to pass. The Holy Ghost by Peter says - "The Lord knoweth how", as well as when, "to deliver the godly out of temptation." Perhaps the Lord has caught you and set your feet in stocks that He may prevent you wandering further away. He has sent some providence that has got hold of you. He has allowed the devil to come and invade you and destroy your comfort. He has allowed the devil to blow up, by temptation, the evils of your hearts. You are in a sore condition. O poor, tempted creature, what are you to do? You say, I do not know how I shall get out of this. Peter tells you; may your faith lay hold of it. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation."

Roaring seas, rolling, raging waves, are no block, no bar, to God. An enemy behind, a rolling sea before, are no bar to God. He divided the sea; He divided it and they passed through as by dry land. He knew how to do it. He lets things come to an extreme; He lets devils loose; He lets sin loose up to a point, but it shall not break out into open conduct. He lets these things be. And what for? To magnify His wisdom. Who is the wisdom of God? Jesus Christ. "Christ, the wisdom of God". Ah, one day you will say the way is quite plain and you go free. You say, as a bird is loosed out of a snare, so my soul has escaped the snare of the fowler.

The unsearchable riches of Christ are here. All creatures are instruments. Mighty kings, instruments; no obstacles. Every creature Christ has dominion over. King of kings, Lord of lords, ruling all the universe. What can escape His eye? What can prevent His wisdom from taking a gracious effect when the time comes. The unsearchable riches of Christ, of this blessed Lord Jesus. I think sometimes that I love Him a little and when we get, by faith, an extended view of Him, then we trust Him more, we love Him more, we see that we shall never be able to love Him enough; never be able to thank Him and praise Him enough.

Now I have said a little. May the Lord in mercy make it a little useful to some of you if it can please Him, enabling you to look to Him, and trust Him, even where His path is in the mighty waters and His footsteps are not seen. Even where He may be making the clouds the dust of His feet.

Trust Him, He will not deceive us
Though we hardly of Him deem;
He will never, never leave us,
Nor will let us quite leave Him

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AMEN.