

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
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EPHESIANS 3 v 8

"And to 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"

Of himself, as a minister, Paul said he was made one; I was made a minister. It would be a wonderful blessing if every preacher in the kingdom this evening were standing and preaching, being made a minister. Pulpits would have a very different sound than what many of them have. The immediate reference, as I judge, to the word "unsearchable riches of Christ" is the mysteries which God, in other ages, kept secret. They were hidden in Christ. But now they were revealed, particularly in their fulness, to the Apostle Paul. To other Apostles and prophets they were revealed but, comparing His Epistles, particularly this and that to the Colossians, with other Epistles, it would seem that he had a fuller revelation of the mystery which constitutes the riches of Christ than others and the mystery is, as you know, in these chapters - second and third especially - the union that God has effected, in Christ, between the Jew and the Gentile. The Gentile church now is on the same footing with the Jewish church. They are one, made one, and in this wonderful union there will be found by the Church throughout eternity the unsearchable riches of Christ. He will be the first and the last, and all that the Church needs she will receive from His fulness. "Of His fulness have all we received and grace for grace". And the Apostle in the lowliness of his heart, in the sweet, shall I call it sweet judgment of his humbled spirit, says that he is the least of all saints. Happy for us it will be if we in our own measures can follow him in this. "Less than the least of all saints". But it was given to him, while he was in this judgment of himself, to preach among the Gentiles, he being specially set apart for the work of the ministry among the Gentiles, that he should preach among them. Preaching is declaring, announcing, alleging, demonstrating. Not offering, but

just preaching, speaking, announcing, telling as enabled, as commissioned, what God has done in the Person of Christ for the salvation of the Church. O what a subject. Each minister would feel, no doubt, that he is not fit to speak, not worthy to take this mighty subject into his lips, but each one has to do it, and to each one, made a minister, there will always attach the "woe if he preach not". "Woe unto me if I preach not" said the Apostle. And this mysterious union which God was pleased to hide from generations, but at last to reveal to Paul, consists in many particular regards. First of all it is the communication of eternal life. "I give unto My sheep eternal life". "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold" They all are to be partakers of this wonderful life. Our natural life is a very temporary one, short at the longest, very short, a moment, a speck, a point just in regard to, in comparison to, eternity. But eternal life has in it two particular things or qualities. Its duration - no end to it. If the Lord has given us that, our destiny is a most blessed one. We must be in heaven one day, and be where Jesus is. Nothing can separate us from Him if we are living His given life. "I give unto My sheep eternal life". He is that life. God has put that life in Him, and it is to last. All the changes, difficulties, the obstacles, the temptations, the sins, the pollutions that the people of God experience, have no influence with regard to this life. It must, it will, outlive them all. Each child of God says - Woe is me, woe is me. I cannot do the good that I would. I do the evil that I would not. But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is unsearchable. We shall never know, in this time state, nor fully throughout eternity, what the infinite depths of light and glory this eternal life is. And the second quality of it is that it is purity itself. Indeed, if it were not pure it could not be eternal. Any imperfection or sin must put an end to that which has it. This life is absolutely pure, as pure as God Himself. But then while struggling here against sin, the people who possess it, have much conflict. Many stumblings in their own souls. Many deaths come upon them, and consequently many sinking fears and the highest expectations of their souls are often damped by the power and the pollution of indwelling sin. "As the days of a tree are the days of My people" says God. The tree has its seasons; a winter season when all life appears to be gone from the tree. So the people of God find it in their experience; they have their winter. But a winter state should

be distinguished from a backsliding state. A winter state is not a bad state. Yea, there is growth and there is a strengthening for the future, the fruitfulness that has to come. If any of us are in a backsliding state it is to be distinguished from a winter state. Christ inviting His Church to come with Him - it is not reproof here in this particular - He says just this, the winter is past, the season is come for you to send forth new life, as it were, buds, leaves. The summer comes, then fruit; then again a gathering. So if any of you be in this winter state you will need grace to hold fast and you will receive it. This is the first thing, the life of the Lord Jesus, the pure life, the blessed life, the life that longs for God, that loves Him, loves Christ in His Person, loves Him in His work, loves Him for what He is, loves Him for what He gives, loves Him for what He has promised, loves Him in prospect of eternal blessedness with Himself. And this life brings to pass another part of the mystery, namely union. Union with Christ and union with the Church. First, with Christ. The moment a sinner is born again, he is one Spirit with Christ. He does not know it, but he really is one Spirit with Christ. "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit". And when the life of Christ is imparted by the Holy Ghost, then the person who is so blessed is one with Him, one Spirit. Many members, one body; bread, one bread. Union. The Jew blessed with grace, the Gentile blessed with grace are one in the Son of God. This is part of the mystery and the Apostle particularly speaks of it. He says to the Gentiles, "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners". You used, to be; you were without God, without hope in the world. You knew not the language of Canaan. You were not in the city, you had none of its privileges, none of its blessings, but now in Christ "Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ". No more strangers. Though we know very little of the Lord Jesus this is true of us if we have His life that we are not strangers to Him; He is not a stranger to us. Views of His Person are given, hints of His mercy fall on the heart, gleams of hope, beams of His kindness on the cross reach the soul. Ye are no strangers; He is no stranger to you. If you get another glimpse of His face, you would say, I have seen that face before. When you hear Him again you recognise His voice. "My sheep know My voice". When you feel His power touching you, it is just what you had before, larger in measure, but O you have known it before; not a stranger. And what a mercy that the Lord knows His children,

knows them better than they know themselves. And one thing He can never say to them, however He may chasten them, however severely He may deal with them occasionally, however far off they may feel from time to time from Him, and from His Mercy Seat; one thing He can never say to them - "I never knew you". Why, He could not say that to one whom He has blessed; one who can say to Him, "Thou hast known my soul in adversity". To that person Jesus will never say, "I never knew you". No more strangers, a mutual knowledge of each other; Christ and His people; mutual friendship between them. I call you friends. He is the Friend of sinners, and out of His fulness there come many mercies to them and comforts occasionally are bestowed on them. No more foreigners; used to belong to another kingdom. You used to be the servants of sin and the subjects of the god of this world, but now the kingdom that is to know no end and the King who is to sit on His throne for ever and ever. You just are His subjects. The kingdom of God has come; come without observation, but it has come, and you have felt it. There is an authority where there is a King. There is a subject where there is a kingdom, and the King and His subject are in agreement. O, they agree as to the law, the law that proceeds out of Zion. They agree with the gracious prediction, Shiloh is to come and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be. Blessed King, King in His own house, King on His own throne, exercising sweet authority. Authority in every word spoken, authority in every promise given. Authority in every look bestowed. Singular is the authority and sweet. The unsearchable riches of being made a member of the body of Christ, a subject of King Jesus, born into His kingdom, brought up in His house, nourished by His truth, strengthened by His Spirit. The unsearchable riches of Christ.

The riches, in the next place, of His love. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love". Very wonderful. No one ever got that word with power without feeling astonished; without, as to the substance of it, saying - "On such love my soul still ponder"; "Why O Lord such love to me". You will know where to put the emphasis when you get this precious love of Christ. And it is unsearchable in the wealth of it, in the pureness of it, in the sweetness of it, in the authority of it, in the comfort of it, in the blessed power of it. You may forget many things; you may forget even this, as to your personal assurance of it, but every fresh glimpse of Christ, every fresh hint you have of

His goodness, every fresh touch of His Spirit will bring more or less distinctly this experience back to your memory. O it is wonderful, the patient love of Christ. I am astonished at it, as to my own case; the patient love of Christ. No man would bear from a fellow creature the slights that Jesus bears with from His people. No man would continue to love one who showed the awful ingratitude that His people show to Him; the neglect of Him, the refusal of a sleepy soul to open the door when He knocks and asks admission. But His love is patient, like Himself; cannot be turned away from its object. The unsearchable riches of Christ. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love". And the effect of that in His dealings was the drawing with lovingkindness, and that drawing is expressed in another Scripture where the Lord said, in Hosea I believe it is, "I drew thee with bands of love, with the cords of a man". The bands of eternal love, the cords of the sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. These, cast round a tempted soul, round one who always is objecting to himself as being utterly unworthy, cast around him, they draw him. When God draws a person He draws him away from the world, and what is more He draws him from himself and He draws him to the Lord, to the cross, to the throne of grace. He draws him. Wonderful is the effect of that blessed drawing of Jesus Christ. No end to it. Unsearchable. Unsearchable in the comforts of it. Paul speaks of the comfort of love, the comfort of being loved, the comfort of feeling the love, the comfort of knowing that the love is cast around you, goes before you, and brings up the rearward.

The unsearchable riches of His power. We speak of power, God's power. Not naked omnipotence, no; the power of God. And He shows this power in several ways - in many ways, but several - which I will name. He shows it sometimes in breaking a rocky heart to pieces, not to destruction, but for mercy. He wont always have a hard-hearted subject. He wont always have one who is like a rock. He gives a hart of flesh, a feeling heart, tender, sensitive. The power of God does that. Sometimes He exercises it in His word. Sometimes there is a powerful healing. The prayer of the Psalmist suits some well - "Heal me, O Lord, for I have sinned." Jesus went about doing good, healing all manner of sickness and disease. He heals His people by the power of His grace in their souls. Sometimes He exercises His power by fortifying their minds in respect of affliction. He says, faint not

when thou art rebuked. Despise not the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him. And when He lets you know by some gracious teaching and touch that the affliction is not in anger, but in love sent to you, that will greatly fortify you. That will bring about in you the experience of the prophet who said - "I will bear the indignation of the Lord for I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause." This is one way in which the Lord exercises His power, the unspeakable riches of it. He uses it in the church, not for destruction, except the destruction of the flesh, but for edification, for instruction. The unsearchable riches of His power will be known by support, the support He gives to the soul, sustentation, nourishment. He gives His word, and where the word of a King is there is power. He gives His word for meat, for nourishment. "Thy words were found and I did eat them and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart". He gives His word in promises - "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt neither shall the flame kindle upon thee". The Hebrew children found it thus. They walked in the fire and the smell of the fire did not pass on them. So we can never search out the riches of the mighty power of the Lord Jesus. As He conquered death on the cross so He conquers death in His people. The death in their feelings He removes. Death in their circumstances He removes. Death of various sorts He just conquers and brings them forth more than conquerors. So they know the unsearchable riches of omnipotence. Omnipotent pity, omnipotent kindness, omnipotent guidance, omnipotent deliverance on all sides. In many particulars the saints know something of the unsearchable riches of the power of Christ.

That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ's pity and sympathy. It is very wonderful. Human sympathy is beautiful, consoling, comforting. Only real sympathy is possible alone where there has been the same suffering and I have often thought of that Scripture "He is able to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way". "Able to succour them that are tempted, in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted". O tempted soul, you may think you are forgotten. Jacob did. "Why sayest thou O Jacob and speakest O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord and my

judgment is passed over from my God." Why do you say it? O, some may say, He does not come to me. He does not hear me. How do you know that He does not hear you? I get no answers. Well, but when you began to cry in some particular trouble were you informed that it would last only so long? No. Do not judge the Lord's time by your own. Do not take delays on His part to answer your prayers for denials. Delays are not denials. But He does not help me. You may be lying against your right in saying that. Can you pray? O I must do that. Can you cleave to the cross? I have no other hope. Do you plead the blood of Christ? I must do that if I pray at all. Do you look to His Person? Do you hanker after Him? Well, you say, I am obliged to do that and I wish to do that. Then never again say you are not helped, for help is in all those exercises of faith. Faith is helped, though sense be not comfortable.

The unsearchable riches of His sympathy, His pity. He will bring you out. He will work deliverances. He will glorify Himself in your exercises and in the tribulations which have befallen you.

The unsearchable riches of His promises. The promises of God are yea and amen to the glory of God by us; by us to whom they are given, and they are for the glory of God in their fulfilment. And if you have had one fulfilment of one promise you have not emptied that promise, never will. As long as you live, you will need and be receiving fulfilments of the promises of God. "Yea" God's "yea" is as firm as heaven. "Amen". God's "Amen" means that there shall be a fulfilment of all that He has said and a realisation of all that you have expected. And sometimes you will say - I have said it - I did not expect, I did not think, the promise meant so much. You will be sure to say it. It is more full of goodness than you can imagine. And this makes, as I have said at times, this makes a weak believer firmer than heaven and earth for "heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away". It must be fulfilled.

The unsearchable riches of Christ's communion. The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ. The cup which we drink, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ. O, how great is the communion of Christ. Communion is receiving something from Him. Communion is His receiving something from you. Communion with

Him means that He conveys to your soul blessings and tells you that He will never leave you nor forsake you. He tells you that He will be with you to the end. He tells you that you are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh and members of His body in particular, and when you hear Him speak such things to your soul then you have communion with Him. And when you are enabled to go to Him and a little to love Him and cast your burdens on Him and trust Him; trust Him for His goodness and faithfulness and wisdom and power, then He gathers fruit in the garden and He is delighted with it. But O, the riches of His communion can never, never be searched out. A mine that can never be dug empty; a river of pleasures that will never dry.

The unsearchable riches of Christ in glory. Every member of His body must be with Him eventually. Ah, it is a wonderful thing to have a hope of heaven; there is so much earth and earthly troubles and sin and bondage and fear and temptation; the days of darkness and many backslidings and many evil things. To be enabled to look through them all, beyond all of them and feel that there is, has been wrought in you, a blessed union with the Lord Jesus so that you may be able to say - This thing I find; He loves me so well He will not leave me behind. Not a hoof shall be left behind.

Now Paul was commissioned particularly to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. I have only hinted at things. What a blessing it is to be made a minister of the gospel, the everlasting gospel. God makes ministers, real ministers. Nobody else can. "Whereof I am made a minister" says the Apostle. Once a persecutor of Christ in the persons of His disciples, now called by grace he has a second call, called to preach. And so effectual was the call to preach that he said "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel". God would follow him with stroke after stroke, blow after blow if he did not preach the gospel. It was his delight to preach the gospel. I believe that there was no pleasure that Paul had, after the joy of his own salvation, like the pleasure he had in preaching Jesus Christ. And as it was in him in so large a measure, so it must be in a smaller measure to every anointed minister. The one thing he delights in is preaching the everlasting gospel. One theme, one God, one gospel, one justification, only one, and the subjects wont be finished when the ministry dies. The Person of Christ and what God has made Him,

what He is to His people; how united to God they are in Christ, how like Him they are by being blessed with sanctification and justification; how blessedly they walk when they walk by faith; how comfortably they walk when they feel the Lord is with them and how in their worst hours, their darkest times, Christ is to them the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely. May the Lord make this gospel spirit and life to you, for there is no life without it. Everything that we can possibly need we have in this everlasting gospel wherein the glory of God shines above every dispensation of other kinds that he holds with men.

Amen.