

032 - The Unsearchable Riches of Christ - Ephesians 3:7-8 - 2015-02-22

Call to Worship: 1 Chronicles 29:12-13

Scripture Reading: Psalm 50:10-15

Sermon: "The Unsearchable Riches of Christ" Ephesians 3:7-8

Benediction: Romans 11:33-36

Ephesians 3:7-8 [the gospel,] of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. (8) 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

Paul, writing from prison in Rome, has told us that He was a prisoner of Christ Jesus for our sake, appointed a steward to dispense the grace of God to as knowledge of the mystery that we who are not by nature Jews should be partakers in all things with the saints not by becoming Jews, but through faith in Jesus Christ by the gospel!

Now the apostle of Jesus Christ goes on to tell us more about the nature of being a servant of Jesus Christ, how

It is by the grace and power of God that the least deserving are given the privilege and ability to do tremendous service in the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

TEXT

Ephesians 3:7-8 [the gospel,] of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. (8) 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

BODY

It is by the grace and power of God that the least deserving are given the privilege and ability to do tremendous service in the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- I. By God's grace and according to God's power a sinner becomes a servant of Jesus Christ (6b-7)
 - A. minister
 1. Greek *diakonos* G1249 meaning "servant"
 - B. by the gift of God's grace
 1. a person is *not* made a servant of Jesus Christ because he is, on his own, deserving of it
 2. he is made a servant of Christ because God favors him, undeserving as he is; God is full of grace, and looks favorably on undeserving sinners
 - a) if you look at yourself and see that God has made you a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - b) then you look and see that others die in their sins, still in full rebellion against God
 - c) and you ask, why am I saved and my neighbor is lost?
 - d) the answer is: God is full of grace; for nothing good in you, He looked favorably on you; He loved you so much that while you were still a sinner Christ died for you; He loved you so much that He predestined you to be saved in His own Son, Jesus Christ
 3. then whatever place of service God gives such a Christian, whatever role of serving the Lord grants, that is a gift of God's grace, also
 - a) a government official
 - b) a mother or father
 - c) a husband or wife
 - d) an employee or employer
 - e) a son or daughter
 - C. according to God's power
 1. God's power converts a sinner to faith in Christ Jesus
 - a) you remember what we learned of this in chapters 1 and 2
 - b) a sinner coming to faith in Christ is not a matter of the sinner making a choice; it is a matter of God working to produce faith and repentance in that person, in effect bringing the dead to life
 2. God's power makes a servant of Christ able to do his service
 - a) able to start
 - b) able to do it
 - c) able to keep at it
 - D. Paul was a certain kind of servant---a minister of the gospel
 1. gospel, of which I became a minister

2. It is popular to say that every Christian is a minister
 - a) in that the word “minister” really means “servant,” it is true that every Christian is a servant of Christ Jesus
 - b) but the word “minister” has traditionally been used as shorthand for this term here “minister of the gospel”
 3. So I don’t think it is good practice to say, “We’re all ministers” or “Every Christian is a minister” because it blurs the distinction between those whom God has made ministers of the gospel and the rest of God’s church; (of course that’s what many would like)
 4. But as Paul teaches us here, we believe, of all whom God makes ministers of the gospel, that each one is undeserving in and of himself; but God is full of grace, and looks favorably on undeserving men, and makes them ministers of the gospel
 5. We believe that God makes a man able to be a minister of the gospel “fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit”
 - a) fitted - made suitable
 - b) gifted - made able
 6. Then those that God has fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit, the churches may call to preach the gospel
- II. God’s grace is so great that He gives the least the privilege of serving the greatest (8a)
- A. Paul stands as a prototype of the servant of Christ who was the very least likely, the very least deserving, yet was chosen to the highest place of service
 1. He was least among the apostles
 - a) while the 12 were walking with Jesus
 - b) he was walking with the Pharisees
 2. He was the worst enemy of Christ and His church
 3. He had committed the worst offenses
 - a) taken part in the murder of the most righteous men
 - b) tried to force devout servants of God to blaspheme the name of Jesus
 - c) dragged even women out of their homes and put them in prison
 4. He was the most expressive of his own remaining sin
 5. Yet God is so full of grace, His grace is so great, that He made Paul the most honored, most influential, most helpful, most effective servant,
 - a) serving the highest cause: preaching the riches of Jesus Christ
 - b) serving the most people: basically to the whole world
 - B. Paul certainly was “less than the least” in ways that no one else can be; but his words regarding himself still give voice to the sentiments of every servant of Christ Jesus
 1. because I know my own sinfulness, and by the work of the Holy Spirit inside me I have come to hate it, I think of myself as the less than the least of all the saints

2. and so I glorify God's grace in that He has given me a place as a servant of no less than the Lord Jesus Christ
 3. and He has allowed me to serve the precious human beings whom He created in His own image
 4. He has allowed me even to serve the saints of the Lord, those for whom the Lord Jesus shed His precious blood; those adopted to be the sons and heirs of God in Jesus Christ
- C. And Paul's words about himself help us understand preachers in our generation, also
1. God has not sent us exalted angels, sinless and glorious and powerful, to preach to us the riches of Jesus Christ
 2. Instead He has taken poor, wretched, miserable, vile, prideful, rebellious, feeble, frail, flawed men and made them preachers of the gospel
- D. The same holds for those who are not preachers per se, but who live lives of good works to prove the truth of the gospel, and who speak of Jesus Christ at every opportunity
1. you are not perfect angels, but sinners saved by grace
 2. it pleases God for you to show the truth of the gospel by your lives
 3. it pleases God for you to teach your children and answer anyone who asks
- III. By God's grace, He has sent such servants to preach to us the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ (8b)
- A. unsearchable; unfathomable; immeasurable; vast beyond finding out
1. like the depths of the sea *used to be* to us
 2. like the universe still is to us
- B. So, what are the unsearchable riches of Christ? just limiting ourselves to Eph.
1. riches of God's grace
 - a) Eph 1:7 Redemption and forgiveness
 - (1) Christ has redeemed us through His blood; from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13) which had power over us because of our law-breaking (Titus 2:14)
 - (a) a. Galatians 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT CONTINUE IN ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO DO THEM."
 - (b) b. Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us

(for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"),

(c) Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed

(2) that we may have forgiveness of sins

b) Eph 2:7 God's kindness toward us

(1) God has so far shown us His kindness by raising us from spiritual death, making us alive together with Christ, saving us by grace, through faith in Christ

(2) He now intends to continue showing His kindness toward us through all eternity

2. riches of God's glory

a) Eph 1:18 the inheritance He has for His saints

(1) Matthew 5

(a) the kingdom of heaven

(b) comfort from our mourning

(c) the earth

(d) fullness of righteousness

(e) seeing God

(f) being called the sons of God

(2) Revelation 1

(a) a place in the new heaven and new earth (v. 1)

(b) a share in being the bride of Christ (v. 2)

(c) a dwelling place with God (v. 3)

(d) a wiping away of every tear by God Himself (v. 4)

(e) freedom from death, sorrow, crying, and pain (v. 4)

(f) the fountain of the water of life---meaning everlasting life (v. 6)

b) Eph 3:16 the strengthening of the inner man through His Spirit

By God's grace and according to God's power a sinner becomes a servant of Jesus Christ

God's grace is so great that He gives the least the privilege of serving the greatest

By God's grace, He has sent such servants to preach to us the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ

It is by the grace and power of God that the least deserving are given the privilege and ability to do tremendous service in the great cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[the gospel], of which I became [was made] a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me

KJV: was made Geneva: am made ESV: was made NASB: was made
NKJV: became YLT: became NIV: became

Colossians 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Romans 15:15-16 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, (16) that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into.

Acts 26:12-18 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, (13) at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. (14) And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' (15) So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (16) But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. (17) I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, (18) to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

JRY:

Here we have the origin of the term "minister of the gospel"

Calvin:

to avoid claiming for himself more than is proper, he affirms that it is the gift of the grace of God, and that this gift was an exhibition of divine power. As if he had said, "Inquire not what I have deserved; for in the free exercise of kindness, the Lord made me an apostle of the Gentiles, not for any excellence of mine, but by his own grace. Inquire not what I formerly was; for it is the Lord's prerogative to 'exalt them of low degree.'" (Luk_1:52.) To produce something great out of nothing, shews the effectual working of his power.

Gill:

not according to his natural capacity, his liberal education, or acquired learning; but according to a gift, a ministerial gift bestowed upon him, for such service

this gift of grace does not design the grace of God wrought in his soul; nor the doctrines of grace, the subject of the Gospel ministry; nor the efficacious grace of God, which makes that successful and useful to the souls of men; but a gift of interpreting the Scriptures, and of explaining the truths of the Gospel to the edification of men; and which is a distinct thing from natural abilities, human learning, or internal grace; for there may be all these, and yet a man not fit to be a minister of the Gospel; what qualifies men for that is the above gift, which God, of his sovereign good will and pleasure, gives to some of the sons of men:

JRY:

let every person who has the privilege of serving in the cause of Christ consider it a gift of God's grace; Paul considered it that despite how it included all manner of labor and suffering

by the effective working of His power

by the *energeian* of his *dunameos*

JRY [from Gill, Vaughn, and others]:

- first, the effective working of His power converts a sinner to faith in Christ
- second, the effective working of His power makes him able to preach the gospel

Trapp:

Enabling me to accept and improve that gift of God's grace; whereunto I should otherwise turn not the palm, but the backside of the hand.

Gill:

the power of God is seen in working grace in the hearts of men, thereby making them believers in Christ; and it is also displayed in the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on men, which is called a being endued with a power from on high; thereby making men, and not angels, and these oftentimes the meanest and weakest, ministers of Christ; and likewise in assisting them in their work, and in carrying them through it, and in making them successful in it, to the conversion of sinners, and the edification of saints.

Vaughn:

[not quoting] initially in his being made a Christian and an apostle; also in the miraculous signs and success that accompanied his work

Bayne:

So that we must grow up to know our insufficiency, and to look up to God for strength and ability in everything we undertake, making him our wisdom, our strength, and to empty ourselves of all hope or help in ourselves, or in any means; but let the Lord be our strong arm of salvation, and our all-sufficiency in all things.

Observe what it is that maketh a minister, the ministerial gift which God of grace giveth. The church doth not make, but declare and authorise for exercise those whom God doth qualify for such purpose

to me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles

1 Corinthians 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

JRY:

this is not hyperbole; when the Lord Jesus Christ called him, Paul was the church's worst enemy, with the death of Stephen and others on his record and his conscience

yet Paul here gives utterance to the thoughts of every servant of Christ Jesus; because we know our own thoughts and no one else's, we know more of how bad we are than of how bad other people are

Bayne:

Though there be diversity of gifts, some more, some less excellent, yet we must neither immoderately admire the one, nor underprize the other.

Hodge:

That he who was a persecutor and blasphemer should be called to be an apostle, was in his view a wonderful display of the grace of God.

Gill:

it was great grace to intrust the apostle with such a ministry, to put such treasure into an earthen vessel; it was great grace that qualified him for it; and it was great grace in particular to the Gentiles, that he should be appointed to publish these among them; and so the apostle esteemed it, and himself unworthy of such honour.

the unsearchable riches of Christ

Barnes (as others):

that which cannot be traced out or explored; which is inscrutable, or incomprehensible.

Barnes:

The meaning here is, that there was a sufficiency in Christ which could not be traced out or explored.

Hodge:

The unsearchable riches of Christ, are the fulness of the Godhead, the plenitude of all divine glories and perfections which dwell in him; the fullness of grace to pardon, to sanctify and save; everything in short, which renders him the satisfying portion of the soul.

Calvin:

the astonishing and boundless treasures of grace, which God had suddenly and unexpectedly bestowed on the Gentiles.

The Ephesians are thus reminded how eagerly the gospel ought to be embraced, and how highly it ought to be esteemed.

Trapp:

Should not ministers be made welcome that come to men on such golden messages? In Christ are riches of justification, Tit_2:14; sanctification, Php_4:12-13; consolation, 2Co_12:9; glorification, 1Pe_1:5.

Poole:

all that grace of Christ which he was to make known to the Gentiles in his preaching, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, 1Co_1:30.

Bengel:

Here heavenly riches are commended

Gill:

the riches of Christ, as God, lie
-in the perfections of his nature,
-in the works of his hands,
-in his empire and dominion over all, and
-in the revenues of glory, which result from thence;
and these riches are underived and incommunicable, and are ineffable, yea
inconceivable:

his riches, as Mediator, lie
- in the persons of the elect,
-in the grace that is laid up in him for them, called the riches of grace, and

-in the inheritance he is possessed of for them, called the riches of glory; and these rich things are communicable, as well as solid, satisfying, and lasting; and they are unsearchable to the natural man, and cannot be fully investigated by believers themselves; they will be telling over to all eternity: and they will appear unsearchable, when it is considered what they have procured, and what blessings have been dispensed according to them; what a large family Christ has maintained by them, and how richly and fully he has provided for them, and to what honour and grandeur he raises them all