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The Unsearchable Riches of Christ

T. Austin-Sparks



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The Unsearchable Riches of Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from messages given in 1965. The spoken form has been retained verbatim.

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Chapter 1 - The Riches of His Grace

Two passages of the Word, firstly in the letter to the Romans, chapter 11. Letter to the Romans, chapter 11 at verse 33: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out". The letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 8: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ".

So, with the enablement of the Lord, we are going to move in these deep waters and seek to discover a little of the unsearchable riches of Christ - the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge. The apostle who used these words was striving against the limitations of language to give expression to something of what he had come to realise as to the Christ, as to the salvation in Christ into which he had been brought. He does use these many superlatives... straining to find words: unsearchable; inexhaustible; unfathomable; infinite wealth of the riches; oh the depth.... This man was able to speak in this way just for one reason, and you and I will never be able rightly to use such language unless we go the way that he went. In order to find things which are deep, you have to go into the depth. You will never find deep things in the shallows. You have to go down, and down, very low. And that in itself explains the Lords dealings with His people. It is the answer to the cry of the heart in deep and dark and difficult places and times. Why? If we could but realise it, we should hear the answer coming back: that you may discover and appropriate spiritual wealth. These riches do not lie on the surface at all; they are the *hidden* treasures of dark and secret places. And wealthy souls are ever and always those which have touched something, not all, of the depth in their walk with God.

Here is a man whom you know from the many things that he has placed on record; a man who had many otherwise-inexplicable experiences. His catalogue of sufferings and adversities of every kind is written for us, largely in his second letter to the Corinthians; half a chapter is taken up with the things which befell him, and in other places too, he makes reference to his sufferings in Christ. And if ever a man had a reason to ask why, it was that man. "Why, Lord, are you letting me spend a night and a day in the deep? Being again and again and yet again thrashed with rods. Imprisoned, dealt with treacherously by mine own brethren..." and so on and so on. "Why, Lord? I am devoted to You. I have a heart for You. I am not seeking mine own ends, but Yours! I am utterly committed to Your interests. There are many who are not so committed, and they don't have to go the way that I'm going. Why?" For such a man, with such a devotion, such an abandon to the interests of his Lord, suffering more than any other man, perhaps of the whole apostolic company. Not one of us will measure up to this mans suffering, although we may sometimes think that ours are just about the limit. But, very few, and I imagine that very few in this little company this afternoon, have not had times when they've asked the big "Why?" as to the strangeness of the Lords dealings and the Lords ways with them.

Does it not strike you very forcibly, this? It's very significant that such a man, *such* a man cries for language to express what *he* has seen in the Lord Jesus and says: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable... and past finding out... To me, not the greatest of the apostles; to me, not the greatest saint; to me, not as one more than any other, but less than all; the least of all saints, to the least was this grace given, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ". The riches... a man who we know because for two thousand years the Church has been drawing upon the riches which *he* reached and received through trial and suffering, riches which are coming to us from that man, still, today, perhaps now... may it be so, today, for that reason. It may

sound discouraging, but there is no other way.

Some time ago, on one of my visits to India, we came down in the flying boat on the Persian Gulf. And as I stood on the Gulf of Persia, the confluence of the Euphrates, I looked out and saw the pearl fishers way out there in the depths, spending their long, patient hours seeking goodly pearls; a lonely and perilous business. For there, as I saw, just leaping out of the water, sharks looking for prey. And then later that night, after dark, I went into the Persian market, the bazaar, through the narrow aisles between the stalls, and I saw displayed on those stalls the glorious pearls and other gems, almost priceless. There they were, been brought in from the depths, polished and displayed. And then, as I boarded the flying boat to go on to India, a pearl merchant came on with his cabinets of gems and pearls. These were bound in iron, with strong padlocks on them. And as that sheik sat in his seat, he kept his eye on those cabinets and would not take his eye off of them all the time, until we landed and he delivered them to the merchants in India. Values... precious things, from the depths. They were costly, because they *had* cost. They were valuable, because there was painful and lonely vigil behind their obtaining. Perils had been associated with securing them.

This is a parable, this is what Paul is really talking about - the perils, the loneliness, the long drawn-out vigils, the sufferings and the afflictions to obtain the riches, and that not for himself, but for the Church. He said, "I fill up that which comes short of the sufferings of Christ... for His bodys sake, which is the Church". I say, there is no other way for us to do more than talk about and read about and use the language of the riches. There is no other way for us to possess them than to go into the depths and find them.

The *unsearchable* riches. Does that sound like a contradiction? You have them and they are unsearchable? You have them and yet they're too deep to lay hold of? It sounds like that, but Paul simply means *all* the meaning, *all* the value, *all* the wealth that is here, only a little of which we may know in this life, all that wealth is really beyond us, it's too great... past finding out. Well, that is where we begin with the riches, but we don't end there, for we are going to look, as the Lord will help us, at some of these riches, these unsearchable riches.

And if you at any time care to look into your New Testament with that word in hand: "riches", you will see how it is connected with different things: the riches of this and the riches of that, the riches of another thing. The riches are of... well, "The riches of His grace", "The riches of His Glory", "The riches of His Inheritance in the saints", "The riches of full assurance of understanding", and so on. These are many-sided riches. I don't know how far the Lord will lead us, but we can begin where the riches do begin, and where we have to begin: "the riches of His grace".

The Riches of His Grace

There is another word linked with that: "the riches of His grace and goodness." "Despisest thou" asked the apostle, "the riches of His *grace* and goodness?" That word itself will *always* be beyond us. We may as well settle it now and throw up our hands in utter despair right at the beginning. You and I are never going to fathom *that* depth, comprehend, *that* fullness, understand *that* grace. I don't hope for a moment to be able to plumb the depth of that word; here we can only just dip into these depths, "the riches of His grace and goodness".

Now, we have a very hackneyed way of defining grace. It's been put into a phrase, and we throw it off, and we don't get very much further than that. Ask, "What is the meaning of grace?" the traditional answer is: "Grace is unmerited favour". Yes, it is, it is. Unmerited favour. That very definition does introduce us to the basic character of grace, but it's weak; it's a weak definition.

Unmerited favour... yes, thank God for that, but what do you mean by that? That you have no merit, and God just comes to you because you have no merit; nothing to merit grace.

But I want to say to you, dear friends, that it's more than that, it's *worse* than that on one side, on our side. Grace does not only come to where there is no merit, grace comes where there is a great deal of demerit. *Demerit!* That's stronger than no merit. No merit may be negative, demerit is positive. Everything that is not only without merit, but of the nature and character - that is perfect demerit. You and I are not only without worthiness, you and I are worse than that. Everything, everything positive that we should not be!

If you turn again to the man who is speaking this way, not only does he say, "To me, who am less than the least of all saints", he says: "I am the chief of sinners", "of whom I am chief". That's positive; not only less than the least, but positively, the chief of sinners. "I persecuted the Church... I gave my consent to the murder of His beloved servant Stephen". And he will tell you a great deal more about his *demerit*, not only his lack of merit. Everything that was there that was an offence to God, and that stood, if it *could* stand, if anything *could* stand in the way of grace, it was there. But, you see, grace just means that demerit, not only no merit, but *demerit* does not set grace aside. Grace is just grace, whatever the condition, however great the demerit... that is grace. You and I as Christians have got to learn that. Oh, this, as we shall see perhaps as we go on, is something that the Christian has to reckon with even more than the unsaved. I say that, and leave it for the time being.

And if you and I are really moving with God, you and I are coming more and *more* to the place where we do say from the depth of our being, "But for the grace of God... for me, a Christian, after all these years, but for the grace of God I will not be saved, I will not get through." It takes, as I understand it and see it, a great deal more grace for me now as a Christian than it did to save me at the beginning.

Now, that may seem strange to say that, but I am returning to it again. For, are we not discovering what we didn't know even at the beginning, the presence of the demerit in ourselves? But that is just the character of grace, that is what grace means, you see. Grace has no meaning unless that is true. And then let us note this other thing about grace: *Grace never recognises any debt*. Grace is not a payment of any debt; grace is not in our debt at all. God is not dealing with us in grace because He owes us something. This is only another way of speaking about the absence of merit and the presence of demerit. No, no one has a claim upon the grace of God. This God is not our debtor; grace doesn't recognise any such thing as being in debt and having to pay its way with us. Grace (and here is our superficial language again) grace is free grace, *free* grace. It is *not* something with which God is trying to pay us back for something. It is all the other way around, isn't it? We are the debtors, God is the creditor, and grace is just grace. And there is nothing else to say about it; it is just His free, spontaneous movement without any obligation; without any obligation. That is the basic nature and character of grace.

When we realise that, when we realise that, the demerit about ourselves, and God is under no obligation to us, and then He just makes "grace abound where sin aboundeth, grace does so much more abound". Then we begin to understand what the depth of the riches may be. We are introduced into a realm that is beyond us, isn't it? It's beyond us. And any soul that has not come to the time and state of just wondering in amazement at Gods voluntary, spontaneous, free, unmerited favour... the soul who has not come there, has not begun to know the meaning of such words as "the riches of His grace". That can never be a wealthy soul.

So much for the present, at any rate, about the character of grace, but you know that grace is always

set over against works. And although we are so familiar with this truth, let us just dwell upon it for a moment, upon works and grace. You see, this represents a change, a complete change and reversal of position; of position. Grace changes place with works, or changes the place of works. Grace does not obliterate works. Grace does not say there are never to be works. Grace will demand works and, if it is rightly appreciated, grace will get much more and much better works than any before. But grace does just change the place of works, you see? Works, the works of the Law... what were the works of the law, or are the works of the Law? They are the works in order to *get* merit, are they not? To *get* merit, that is the idea. To get merit, to obtain merit, to pay God back with your merit.

So look at the Scribes and the Pharisees. Oh, how abhorrent, obnoxious, was their behaviour, their activities and pretences to the Lord Jesus Himself. Merit by works... giving God something for His enrichment. Yes, works of the Law to obtain merit with which merit to give as currency to pay God; putting God into our debt making Him our debtor?! And we are doing all these things, you see, to get ourselves out of discredit, *discredit* and give our credit to God. The works of the Law, in order to obtain that, to present to God our merit. Works, in that place; the merit. When grace comes in, you see, grace puts the works in another place altogether and takes them out of the first place and puts them into the last. And instead of Law being first, it's grace first; it's grace first. Instead of works for merit being first, it is just Gods own grace without any works whatsoever to obtain *any* satisfaction and pleasure of God.

And then what? All works haven't been ruled out of the universe. When grace has come in, you and I, if we have really grasped the meaning of grace will work more than anyone else has ever worked. But now they're the works of *appreciation* of grace, not to obtain it, not to merit it, but the works of thanks to God for His unspeakable gift of grace. It changes the place of things, puts things right around the other way. Someone has put this into a rather cryptic phrase: "Works do not justify, but the justified person works". Well, that is quite true. "I laboured," said the Apostle, "more abundantly than them all". And that was true, that was true, but was he seeking merit? Then he had no right to talk about grace, but he is the man who *does* talk about grace, and he "laboured more abundantly than them all" because of the overwhelming grace of God to him. The position was entirely reversed; not law and works to *obtain* favour, but works of love and devotion because of favour obtained. It's a complete reversal.

Now then, what about Gods work of grace? And we'll begin this part and leave it for the time being.

God's Work of Grace

What was true in the first material, natural creation, is true spiritually in the new creation. And you know it so well, it only needs to be mentioned, and at once you will jump to it. There was chaos, there was darkness, there was the absence of God. God moved in, dispelled the darkness, turned the chaos into cosmos order and got to work: He got to work, step by step, and stage by stage, upward, upward all the time; creating, ordering, providing a beautiful earth, a beautiful earth - a wonderful place. So is the description of it. And then, when He could look upon all His work and pass *His* verdict, the verdict of an infinitely perfect God, so meticulous, so exacting, Who will never pass anything that is imperfect. When He has finished it all, He puts man right into the middle of it, and says: "There you are, that's your inheritance. That's your inheritance! Your inheritance is *what I have already done*. What you've come into, is something, not that you have got to make, but what I have already made. Not that you have to do, but I have already done. You begin your vocation in gratitude where I end My work on your behalf, for you".

You can clearly see the corresponding truth in the New Creation. It's not working *unto* something, it's

working *after* everything has been done! You and I come *into* Gods perfect work. Of course, the simple form of preaching the gospel is to speak about "the finished work of Christ", but do we understand these glib phrases? All that God has done *in*, and *through*, and *by* His Son Jesus Christ in the *perfecting* of salvation, of redemption, of His *work* so that the reception of His Son back to heaven is simply because God has *nothing more to do* so far as providing the ground is concerned. He could never have gone back to heaven unless the work was full, and final, and perfect. If there had been one further touch or stroke, He would not have gone back. They would not have received Him in the heavens. If we may so speak, they would have said, "Look here, You have left undone something - I have not found Thy works perfect before My God". And He would have had to come back again, but He didn't. God had *in Him* perfected and finished His New Creation and then He began with us, to bring us into it and say, "Look here, you haven't got to work *unto* this, you've got to inherit it, take possession of it, live in the good of it, learn to *understand* what you've got and appreciate it". These are the works of God. They're finished! They're finished, so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned.

The works of grace... if that garden and that creation is something grand, beautiful and glorious from the hand of God, and wholly satisfies His heart, His Son is more than that. More than a symbolic creation, an earthly thing, His Son is the final fullness of perfection. And *He gives us His Son!* He give us His Son. You and I have not grasped that, this is where we are in so much trouble, dear friends, there is no doubt about it. I would go so far as to say that nine-tenths of our spiritual troubles are here, that we are listening all the time to the accuser and the condemner. When things go hard, difficult, contrary, and against, and the devil is saying, "It's because of something about you, your demerit; something's wrong with you". And you go and plead with the Lord, and say, "Lord, what is it that You've got against me?" You spend your hours pleading with God to show you what He's got against you, and why it is, and what the thing is that He has against you that is resulting in His dealings with you in this way. And so the enemy is just turning us aside from this. But while there's a work of grace going to be done (and we will come to that presently) to conform us, to change us, we are not now under judgment and condemnation. We are under grace! And satan will *never* cease in this life to undercut grace and bring us back under law to bondage. But you and I really do need (are we seeing?) to grasp these unsearchable riches of His grace. The *riches* of His *grace*.

Gods work is completed for us to inherit. There'll be a battle, a tremendous battle, as there was with Israel in the land after they crossed the Jordan and got *through* the death of Calvary - the battle in the land to get the possession of our inheritance. But, and is it not hackneyed again and so familiar, that before ever we get a foothold, the Lord has said, "I have given it to you"? "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, I have given you." "I have given you!" It is secured in Christ for us.

Now, there I must leave it for the present, but I think that though these are *truths* with which we are familiar, the great truth remains. You and I as the Lords own people, beloved of Him, have got to learn more and more deeply the meaning of the first thing: *the grace of God*. The grace of God... what grace really is and what grace really means. And with all, how deep, how vast, how unfathomable and unsearchable are what the Word calls, "*the riches of His grace*".

Chapter 2 - The Power of God

"Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out... Unto me, who am the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ".

"The unsearchable riches of Christ." Having noted that this word "riches" is linked with a number of things in the New Testament, we have commenced our meditation with the first of these connections: "the riches of His grace". We have said a little about the basic character of grace, something about the works of grace and the works of law. And we have gone on to look at Gods work of grace, of finishing His work for man before ever man comes into the picture at all and is then called into the work which God has finished. This is the grace of God.

Now let us for a few minutes look at the free action of the Holy Spirit as:-

The Spirit of Grace

You know that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Grace. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Grace, that the Holy Spirit *is* that, and the Holy Spirit comes to us as that? And the Holy Spirit is freely given to us through faith, as the Spirit of Grace. Here *is* the Grace of God: we never earn or merit the Holy Spirit, He is *freely* given, to faith. And although it may sound like repetition and labouring the point, I *do* want that we should be impressed with this: that the Holy Spirit, given freely as the Spirit of Grace, brings to us from God all that Grace means. We have the Holy Spirit in possession, in-dwelling, we have in Himself, His very Person and Presence, all that Divine Grace means. He is that Spirit of Grace.

Now, with Him, we have the *free action of God*. The free action of God! The Bible begins in a very simple way, so simple that you hardly notice it. It's something written, set down, you read it and you hardly know or notice what you have read. "Now the earth was without form, and void; darkness was over the face of the deep." and on we go. "And the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the deep..." and on you go again. What was there in *that* condition to merit the presence and action of the Holy Spirit? The initiative was all with the *Spirit* of God, over against a set of conditions utterly contrary to Himself. And yet this brooding was a very active thing, a very energetic thing, a very purposeful thing; in a word: the Spirit of God brooding, hovering over that state of things was the presence of God to change the whole situation, because God wanted it changed, that's all. Just that! God wanted it changed. And He took the matter in hand. There was not only the lack of merit, but plenty of demerit. We don't know, there has been surmising, perhaps guessing, perhaps right guessing, that that state of things was due to some judgment which had come upon the creation, which we will not speculate about at all. There was a state which was altogether contrary to the mind of God and the state could do nothing about it for itself. It was the *free action* just the free, voluntary, unearned initiative and action of the Spirit of God.

Now, dear friends, you and I are here, and there are multitudes in our position, as we believe, saved; born anew, children of God, who would say we are a new creation in Christ. How did it happen? Did we go up into heaven to call Him down? Did we go into the deep to bring Him up? Did we go to the uttermost parts of the earth to find Him and persuade Him? We really did nothing about it. We are where we are and what we are by an action altogether apart from anything that we did in the matter.

He did it. He did it, He did it all. We did nothing toward it, indeed our condition was all *against* Gods thought and Gods mind and yet He took the initiative and He did it by His Spirit. That is the Spirit of Grace, you see, taking things in hand, taking things in hand to have them - to make a beginning. To make a beginning, to have things not as they were, but as God intended and intends them to be. That's all very simple, isn't it? But there's much more in that for our heart-ravishing than perhaps we're aware of, because perhaps our salvation is taken too cheaply, taken too much for granted. It's those people who know best than most, what they *really* were, what a chaos they were, what darkness they were in, what disruption there was in their lives - it is those people who know that most and best, who know that their salvation was nothing of their doing; it was the *free action of the Spirit of Grace*. We will add to that in a minute.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit has brought God to us. *He* has brought God to us, He is God, very God, He has brought God to us, but what does that mean? In other words, what *are* the riches of His grace? Now, we are going to dwell upon that this evening, in part, at any rate. And we'll begin with another three things with which we are so familiar.

First of all, as the Spirit of Grace coming as God to us, He comes as the *power* of God into our lives to *do* all that God wants done. Now, that's a simple statement, but He has come to do it. He has come to do it! It's no more of ourselves, than it was of the first natural, material creation that brought about the change. No more of ourselves, it's the power of God that has taken this thing up. Is it too common place as to evoke no response in our hearts? Are we not more, and more, and ever more aware that whatever has been done, or is being done, or has got to be done is by the power of God?

The Power of God

And what power! What power! Is darkness a power? Is it a power? Well, perhaps you have some experience to make it possible for you to say, "Yes, I know". When you've got to move into this world, where the Lord is neither known nor recognised, nor acknowledged, apparently not wanted, and you realise that darkness is an awful power, "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people". They're in darkness, and what can you do about it? You can talk, you can do all that is in your power, but you cannot break this thing until the Spirit of *Power* as the Spirit of Light breaks in on that soul, on that life, in that realm. It wants the *power* of God.

Darkness is an awful power. And if that is true in this side of the world where there has been so much light given and so much truth given, and there is so much Christian tradition, you go to the other side of the world - you go to those dark places of heathendom. You have only got to move in such a place, such a country as India where the gospel has not touched, and you can *feel* the darkness. It is *evil*. It's positively evil! It's like that.

You may feel it in a traditionally Christian world or realm. I will never forget my first visit to the city of Rome; and wanting to see various things, I went to the Colosseum to see the place where the Christians were flung to the lions. And I went to this and that, and then I went into St Peter's church. And, you know, I couldn't stay. After a very short time, I had to go out. I felt ill; *physically ill*! A sense of awful death came on me physically, and I was glad to get out of the place. It was an *atmosphere* of death and darkness to the spirit. But, if that's true there, as I say, you go to other parts of the world and you can *cut* the darkness. It's so strong. It's a terrible thing.

When the Spirit of God as the Spirit of Light entered into this darkness which was over the face of the earth, it met an awful power, it was dealing with an awful power, and it called for the exercise of the Infinite Power of God to break that reign of darkness. It called for the Divine Fiat: "Let there be

light" - the Word of His Power. Oh, that our hearts cry and crave for the knowledge of that Power in His Word more. If the smallest percentage of all our speaking had the *real* Power of God in it, something would happen. Something would happen, it would be a fiat, an act of God to speak. That is why the Lord Jesus is called "the Word" because where *He* comes as the Word, something happens, something happens! The devil is exposed, as when He was here and cried out, "I know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God". Hell felt the impact of the Word. Men, sinful men, cried out in His presence like that. The point is, darkness is a terrible power.

The disruption in our humanity is a terribly strong thing. We are, every day, almost every moment of our lives, up against that breakup in the humanity which is ours, or the breakdown of it, the disorder of it, the disintegration of it, the disruption of it. We *know* that our humanity is a broken down thing. We are all the time striving to pick it up and build it up and hold it up. We know it's a power, a terrible power - the disorder and chaos in ourselves. The Spirit of God came of His own accord, of His own accord as the Spirit of Power to deal with what no other power in this universe could deal with; to change it. And that's where we are in the new creation; it's *what the Spirit of God has undertaken to do with us*. And surely there are few, if any, in this place tonight who would not echo the words of the apostle, "*Kept by the power of God*". You know you would not be a Christian today, you would not be going on with the Lord, you would not be standing true, but for the keeping power of God. In a world like this, there is such a power against what is the Lords.

Well, this is the Spirit of Grace, you see, that has come to take it over. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Grace is the *custodian of the Divine Perfection*. He has taken responsibility for realising Gods End. Oh, thank God for that! Knowing ourselves and the awful forces that there are in our nature; knowing the world, or something of it, and the awful forces that there are in this world; and knowing the devil and something of his inimical hatred and opposition to what is of God, anything that's of God, we say, "Well, the only possibility is if God Almighty does it, sees to it". And that is the Spirit of Grace that has come to take it up, to do it - the free action of the Holy Spirit.

See, we read, you know we read John 16. We read John 16, and if I asked you what's in John 16, you'd have the answer. Well, you know John 16 is, "I am going away, I am going away. You see Me now, you won't see Me anymore. I return unto My Father... for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come, if I go away, I will send Him to you..." and on and on and on, what He will do, what He will do when He is come, when He is come; *when He is come*. It's all so natural, all so effortless, it seems; it's just going to be! It's just in the order of things. He's coming and He's going to do this and that; and *that* is all there is to it. It's just that He is coming, "I am going to send Him". We read it, we know the content of the Word, but do we realise that all this just means that the Holy Spirit is taking over all that Christ came to initiate, to carry it right through to its End. He's just going to do it; it's what He's come for. He is the Spirit of Grace, and grace is just God doing *all* that God *can* do without asking for any merit or any payment. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of that grace as the power of God, but that's one of the riches: the riches of His power through grace.

We ought, you see, to get down to our Bibles and have a word study, and a passage study here, and there, and there. Perhaps if I only just remind you, it will start off something. Have you not noticed that grace is many-sided in the New Testament? And one of the sides, or aspects of grace is that it is an energy. It's an energy, it's a power. It's a force in our lives. "There was a messenger of Satan given me to buffet me." And although these are not the words that the apostle used, this is what he meant, "I cried out to the Lord: Take this away, because I can't endure it. I shan't be able to go on with this thing. I'll not be able to get through; this is too much, this is too strong, this is too great a burden. It's going to limit me; it's going to spoil my life. And He said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: My strength is made perfect in weakness.'" Grace there is introduced as over against the conscious

inability of the apostle to *go on* with what he had been called for on him, what had been put on him. His natural reaction was, "I just cannot! If I've got to have this, I'll just not be able to. Take it away, Lord". He said, "I asked Him three times, take it away, Lord; take it away, Lord; take it away! Life is impossible." He said, "My grace is sufficient for thee" - everything is possible to grace. It's a power, you see. It's a power; an energy in the life. We *do* know this in measure, not as we ought to, we have had to say many times, "But for the grace of God I should have acted very differently from what I did. But for the grace of God... grace saved me. Grace kept me. Grace held me." It's the power of God as the Spirit of Grace. But *there* is where the riches begin.

But what next? He is called the Spirit of Wisdom.

The Spirit of Wisdom

Later we will have something more to say about wisdom, but just for the moment what does that mean? What is wisdom? To begin with, what is wisdom? Wisdom is more than knowledge, you know. You may have a lot of knowledge and have no wisdom. And the people who have got the most knowledge, have got the least wisdom; they are the most foolish people with all their knowledge. What is wisdom? It is knowing *how* to do things, or how to do it. Knowing how to do it. That's a simple formula for wisdom. As I said, there's more to say in another connection, here it is.

I remember a few years ago I heard or read a little incident of a firm of engineers who were given a contract to do a certain job. And when it was done they sent in their account, more or less general, and it was a very big account. And the people who had to pay the bill sent it back and said, "Look here, this is not good enough. I want you to explain this and tell us how you make up this bill". The firm sent back, "Materials: so much. Time of workmen: so much. One or two other practical things: so much"; but when those things were added together, it didn't come up to the whole account. And they wrote underneath: "Knowing how to do it: the balance".

Ah, well, knowing how to do it. It's quite a big part, you see, in the whole business, isn't it? They might have had the materials, and they might have had the workmen, and they might have had all the other things, but not knowing how to do it, what would have been the good at all? They would never have done it.

Wisdom is knowing *how* to do it. And here is the Spirit of Grace in this way: Grace knows how to do it. We have to learn a lot about that, have we not? But Grace knows *how* to do it: to take up the problems, handle them and solve them, negotiate the situation to a successful and triumphant issue, handle the people concerned - how to handle them; oh, and a thousand other things which require knowing how to do it.

Now, I do say, and I am quite sure that I am speaking the truth now, that you and I are many times brought to the place where we don't know how to do it, or what to do. We just do not know, we haven't got the wisdom for the situation. Perhaps you are in it now; I am, but the Spirit of Grace is the Spirit of Wisdom; *He* knows how to do it. We have some experience upon which we can say, "I never thought it would be done, and I never imagined it would be done like that, the way the Lord has done it. What the Lord has done, how He has done it, that never occurred to me that He would do it like that!" And when you think of it, was there any better way, could it have been done better? No, no. The riches of His grace is the riches of His Wisdom. Grace... in the Wisdom of God.

If you and I do believe in the grace of God brought to us by the Spirit of Wisdom (and I almost hesitate to say it because I know I am involving myself as well as you) we ought never to despair of a

situation. He knows *how* to handle that, *how* to get us through that, *how* to resolve that. We do not know, and in the presence of this quandary, this problem, we cry out. It wants something so deep and so great that it's altogether beyond us. It may be in time, but certainly in eternity, we will say, "Oh, the depth of the Wisdom... the depth of the Wisdom! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out."

The Spirit of Grace is the Spirit of Power. The Spirit of Grace is the Spirit of Wisdom. The Spirit of Grace is the Spirit of Life. He is called:

The Spirit of Life.

"The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus". By the Spirit, we are told, Jesus was raised from the dead. Raised from the dead through the eternal Spirit - through the eternal Spirit; the Spirit of Life.

We need not go back again for our analogy to the first creation, the operation of the brooding Spirit, and the result of the life in the creation - both in the animate creation and in man - is the other kind of life. It's all the result of the presence of the Spirit in the new creation, it's like that. But here again, it's not just a Christian truth, a Christian doctrine. The gift of eternal Life is not just one of those things that we come into when we become Christians. This Resurrection Life is a *continuous abiding* from day-to-day in power and experience. It's put in all the tenses of the Christian life and salvation: "We *were* raised together with Him, that we should walk in newness of life". That's in the past tense. We are *now* living in the good of that, that "the life whereby Jesus conquered death should be manifested *in our mortal flesh*". That's present tense. And this goes on to the future, the future: a great revelation of Life in its final, full, perfect expression. This Resurrection Life is not something only that happened when we were saved. It's a Power to work *in us* continually now. Well, you know it so well in theory and teaching, but this is the Spirit of Grace.

Oh, thank God for the power of this Divine Life which is demonstrating itself continually! And it seems to me, it does seem to me, I have often said this in the past, that it seems more and more to be the case that the further you go on, the deeper this Life has to go, because you're taken so much deeper, more deeply into death. The experiences of going down become deeper and greater than ever they have been before, so it seems, and therefore the power of His Resurrection becomes *greater* all the way along. This is a very hopeful thing for us. Perhaps some of you are feeling today that well, you're touching bottom and perhaps you're saying, "Well, this is the end". But do not forget that Resurrection is a reality, it's not a theory. It is not just a doctrine. It's an experience and a continuous experience. And, dear friends, the great revelation in the Word of God is that in the end, in the end it's going to be up and not down.

I usually, when I go into a lift [elevator] and there's a lift man there, I have a little joke with him and say, "Your life is full of ups and downs, isn't it?" He says, "Yes it is, sir." I said, "Where's it going to finish; up or down?" And he looks rather wise, and he knows that something's coming... we know how it's going to finish. We know how it's going to finish! It's an elevation life that we have. And we may from time to time descend, but we are going to ascend as many times as we descend as the Lords people, and the final movement is an ascension. This Life *is* that way, it must seek out and find its own source. Where it began, it will end. It began in God, and it will end in God. This is the Spirit of Grace, the Spirit of Life.

I know, dear friends, that I have only said things with which you are familiar, but sometimes our most familiar things, *because* of their familiarity, lose their power and it's as well to be reminded of them.

Now, I have mentioned these three aspects of grace as three great and primary riches of grace and how rich they are. What I have next to say, if the Lord wills, would take considerably longer than we would have time for this evening, because they really do take us into the depths.

So I'll leave it there, but you've enough to get on with, you've enough to get on with what I have said this evening, or what, I trust, the Lord has said. You go away and let your hearts, as well as your minds, dwell upon this.

You know, we miss a lot, dear friends, we miss a lot because we hear, we hear, we go away, and do nothing. It would be very good, all to our good, of real value if, after tonight, we just recalled these things, and went to the Lord very quickly, and said: "Now Lord, this is what is said; this is the truth. I look to You to make that good in me. The Spirit of Power, the Spirit of Wisdom, the Spirit of Life... it's said that these are features of Your grace, brought in the person of the Holy Spirit. This is the teaching of the Word of God. It mustn't stay in the Book. It must come into reality, into my own life. And Lord, I count on You to make this true, make this real and so, more than ever."

Chapter 3 - Redemption and Wisdom

In verse seven, of Ephesians 1: "In Whom we have our redemption through His blood... according to the riches of His grace" - our redemption according to the riches of His grace. This matter of redemption is a very big one, it could take many hours of consideration, and, like election, it is a matter which has been misunderstood and in some ways it has been distorted. There has been a good deal of confusion over the matter of this priceless wonder of our redemption - the meaning of that word.

There may be an element of truth in it, but it is just there that the confusion arises when redemption is pictured as a matter of taking a slave out of bondage by paying the redemption money. Well, I say, there may be an element in that idea or interpretation, but the difficulty and the confusion arises when you ask the question: "To whom is the money paid?" Has God got to pay the devil something to get back that which he has taken? Is God a debtor to satan? Has God got to go into satans slave market and put up a price to redeem that which satan has captured? You see, it is an untenable idea, an unthinkable thing that God is at the mercy of satan, that satan is in the position of saying, "If You'd like to pay me an adequate price, I will let You have what is in my possession". We will never recognise that. So we have got to revise our idea of this matter of redemption. I say there may be an element of truth in it, it may go just so far, as we shall probably see, but that is really *not* the whole truth, and if we are not clear, we shall be in some confusion.

So, I want to try and make this thing clear, for it is important that we have a right *understanding* of things. We rejoice in redemption, we sing about redemption, we can never make too much of redemption, but there is some real *value* in understanding what we are talking about - having a right apprehension of the words and terms that we use so commonly. And I just trust that what I say about this may not make it seem to be a complicated thing, but rather to help us to appreciate the real meaning of redemption.

Now let us begin where it does begin. Redemption begins with being "unto God". It is:

Redemption Unto God.

You know the great word at the beginning of the book of the Revelation: "hath redeemed us *unto God*" - unto God. That means that something has been taken from God which is Gods right. And if something has been taken from God, the balance of things has been upset; things are not equal, things are not complete, there is something lacking which belongs to God. And, that being the case, things are unequal, things are unbalanced. If there is a family, and in that family there are two sons belonging to the one father and one son is removed, the balance of the family is upset; it's lopsided, it's one-sided, and the fathers possession is divided and incomplete, an *unequal* position obtains. If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, that is his complete lot, that's everything, his fulness, and one of those sheep is lost, the *balance* is upset, the thing is not complete; his possession is interfered with, disturbed, and things are out of proportion. If a woman has a necklace with ten pieces of silver hanging from it, and one of those pieces of silver is lost, then the balance is upset, she has not got *all* that belongs to her; things are unequal, the balance is disturbed.

The bringing back of those lost things, whether it be a son, or a sheep, or a piece of silver, restores the balance to the owner - that is redemption unto God. God has *all* that belongs to Him, is His right, and there is completeness restored: "Redemption unto God". But what is it, really, that has been lost?

Of course we have the parables and the illustrations in the Scripture, it's just an illustration: a son, a sheep, a piece of silver. Many other things are employed to illustrate the truth, but they are only illustrations. What is it *really* that has been lost, that has, by being lost, upset the balance? It is Life! It is Life. Now, here is the deep mystery of redemption.

What we are met with in the Bible throughout, and, of course, I can't trace this thing in half an hour, but what we are met with in the Bible throughout is this very matter of the disturbance of the balance of Life and Gods demand that that balance shall be restored. *He* is the Author, Fountain, the Origin of the whole sum of Life. Life is God's. He alone is the *rightful* Lord of Life. Life is Gods, it belongs to God. It is as though, if I may put it this way, God has so much Life, just so much Life, which is a complete measure of Life - a fulness of Life, an ultimate of Life - Life is just so much in God and with God, not less, not more, but just so much. Take something of that Life away, and you upset the balance of Life. The whole thing is out of proportion. And redemption means restoring that balance, by restoring the fulness. Well then, there you have your Bible.

We're in these days very much occupied (or the government is, and perhaps the country) is occupied with this matter of capital punishment. Capital punishment; a life has been taken, therefore another life must equalize the situation and put it straight, put it right; the balance of life must be restored. That's the heart of capital punishment as in the Law of Moses - or before the Law of Moses, in the law of the first covenant, "Whosoever taketh mans life, his life shall be taken". The law of capital punishment. Oh why? Just revenge? Just revenge, just judgment only? Malice? "You do that to me, I do that to you", is it just that? No, there's a deep principle here. So much life has been taken by the slaying of that man. God says, "That's got to be put straight; that's got to be equalized, the balance has got to be restored" - the law of capital punishment. The law of the cities of refuge for the manslayer; a very interesting matter is that of the manslayer, and the cities of refuge provided... because he has taken life, and the avenger of blood is on his track to equalize this, to take his life, to put it straight, put it even, measure everything up again. Of course, that's negative, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, but we haven't finished yet. You can see the principle is quite clear, I think, that it's just a matter of restoring the balance of things. Restoring the balance. Now, through the Old Testament it's like that, and it's all wonderful illustration of great Divine truth. The point is, life has been taken which *belongs to God*; belongs to God because He is the Author of Life. It's been taken, and God demands, because He is an equal God: equality, or equity, or righteousness - which is a perfect balance of things - belongs to God. And things *must be even* in Gods universe, not out of proportion, not out of order, not out of measure, but just perfectly even. When we come to the end of redemption, everything will be even, everything will be straightened out. There will be nothing out of balance or out of proportion, but all will be just right; just right. And righteousness will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. And no one will have any ground for a quarrel with God. It's just *right*.

Now, that's the point, you see, over this matter of redemption: it's a question of Life. There is, in Gods order, in Gods universe, in Gods system of things, a great *equalizing* principle. You can *never* be in fellowship with God and be unrighteous in a detail. Your fellowship with God, your oneness with God is upset, is unbalanced and it's like a dislocation of a limb in the body if there is a point of unrighteousness in life, in business transactions, or in relationships. That's unrighteous; all right, the balance is upset, and God is going to demand that that is straightened out, evened out. Righteousness is a *tremendous* thing with God, because it just means that God has things balanced, perfectly balanced.

Now, the focal point then, as we have said of this, is Life. Now, the Old Testament tells us that the blood is the life. The blood is the life. You and I can never, never straighten this matter out. Man can

never put this thing right with God. Man can never give God that which has been taken from Him. Therefore, His Own Son took flesh and blood and Christ's *infinite* blood, infinite blood... we have never yet fathomed the depth of the wonder of the blood of Jesus Christ - it's a term for His Life - His *infinite* blood is given to God to restore the balance, to make up what has been lost, what has been taken from God by ruthless hands by the murderer who has come in. He restores to God by His own, let us repeat it, *Infinite Blood*, because it's got to be sufficient to meet the demands of an Infinite God on the one side, and of *all men* on the other side. Yes, sufficient Life, poured out by Jesus Christ, God's Son, for God's satisfaction, that God shall have all that He has a right to. And poured out to meet that demand of God in *all men* from whom this Life has been taken. The payment is not to Satan, it's to God. It is *redemption* by His blood *unto God*. There follows this: that because man is, by this terrible thing that has happened, in a position of weakness, of defectiveness, of helplessness; he is in bondage. He is in bondage... he is helplessly in bondage.

Now you, of course, can take your illustration from your Old Testament: Israel in Egypt - always referred to as the land of bondage. They were in bondage, that is the word which governs their position there. How were they delivered from that bondage? "Oh," we say, "by the blood of the lamb". By the blood of the Lamb, the operation was two-sided. It depended entirely upon the attitude of the heart, the attitude of faith. *If* unbelief and rebellion of heart as in Pharaoh and the Egyptians, persisted, the blood testified against them. Against them; it was their undoing. But Israel was just as much in bondage to sin, to the world, as Egypt was. Just as much, there is no difference. The difference which did come about was by their attitude toward the blood. If any Israelite had by unbelief or rebellion of heart refused to take that shed blood and sprinkle it upon the doorposts, the lintel, the threshold, making a circle of blood, they would have gone the same way as the Egyptians: remained in bondage and death and under judgment. But, recognising that of course they didn't understand, they didn't know what we are talking about, but they had the simple prescription, and the simple command, that they should take that blood of the lamb without spot, without blemish, take it and sprinkle it. And with that simple demand, arose the demand for the obedience of faith, and thereby that blood answered for them to God's requirements.

God knew the secret, the mystery of that blood. God, Who is the Timeless, the Eternal God, was not moving so many hundreds or thousands of years before, He was moving then and there on the ground of His Own Son at Calvary, the Passover Lamb. And He knew the meaning of it, while Israel did not have the understanding. But God knew, and He just made His simple requirement. But bound up with this deep, this fathomless mystery of Life, Life, God has a right to life. God must have that which is His own: Life. And so the lamb with its shed blood symbolically answers to God's demands and in that life blood poured out, it is *unto God*. You remember, that through all the Old Testament ritual in Israel, the blood belongs to God. The blood belongs to God, it is sacred unto God, "Don't *you* drink the blood, don't *you* appropriate the blood; that's poured out unto God, that's God's, God's right". You know that preserve of the blood, don't you? It is God's, it represents the Life which belongs to God, and in the giving of that, God has His right, His portion; what belongs to Him.

So, when we come to this word in Ephesians 1: "We have redemption through His Blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." We have redemption through His blood. "And hath," says John, "redeemed us *unto God* by His Blood". If you would like to change the word you can, "We have redemption through His poured-out Life, redeemed unto God through His poured-out Life," that's the meaning of it. The Lord Jesus, because of the *infinite* value of His Blood, the *infinite* measure of that which *He* gave in His Cross *unto God*, satisfied God perfectly in this matter of His requirement, *His* demand. And, although the explanation may sound a little complicated and difficult - well, of course, it is - it's the unsearchable riches. Oh, the depth of the riches is beyond us, but after all, in experience it's very simple.

You know, dear friends, when you and I, at the beginning of our Christian life, take by faith the virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ, we don't understand that, we do not comprehend its meaning, but in simple faith we see that it is by way of the blood of Jesus Christ that we are saved. And in that simple, but genuine heart-faith in the efficacy and virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ, we take it and give ourselves to God on the ground of it. What is our first consciousness? Everything is all right. Everything's right. The dislocation has been adjusted, the unbalanced state of things has been put straight - we call it peace with God. Peace with God! It's only another way of saying the same thing: God has what He requires for His satisfaction. And if God is satisfied, you and I will be well satisfied. If there is that in us which satisfies Him, the Spirit will bear witness.

And, although I say again we do not understand, we are in the depths, the mighty depths, a depth which it will take *eternity* to comprehend, there's the simple beginning of this fact: everything was distorted, deranged, unbalanced, there was something lacking that was essential, vital to our peace, all that sort of thing. And now we have peace with God, the balance is restored, God is satisfied. In our hearts we feel, although we cannot explain it, well, somehow or other a great adjustment has taken place. Things are equal now, things are straight now. Put it as you will, it's a consciousness, isn't it?

And what is true in that sense of the initial aspect of our salvation will be an abiding law throughout our Christian life - that if on any matter whatsoever, God's rights are being withheld, if He is not getting that which is His due, in that measure we shall lack the fulness of His rest and His peace - sort of now, if not an unbalanced state of things, there's an oscillation in the balances. Do you know something about that oscillation in the balances of your heart? Just not steady. Just not steady, something here that is uncertain, that's wavering, that's not sure about this yet. But immediately you and I get that thing cleared up with God, it may be only one thing, but get that straightened out and God gets what He is requiring; peace is restored. It's a wonderful truth in the Christian life, isn't it? It's simple in that way, but that is the explanation. "Oh, why have I been holding out so long? Why didn't I get that thing cleared up before now? I have been spoiling everything for myself, because the Lord has not had what He had a right to."

Now, redemption is *initial*, redemption is *progressive*, and redemption is *final*. There are the three tenses. You can change the word from redemption to salvation if you like, it's the same thing. We *were* saved, we *are being* saved, and we *shall* be saved; those are the three tenses of salvation. Well, the first is what He has done for us perfectly and completely, and which we have accepted. The second of the process of redemption or salvation is that God is getting more and more of that requirement of His in our life, and as He does, we are knowing more and more the balanced life, the steady life of rest and confidence. But thank God, for that will go on to the end of our days - salvation will continue right to the last breath, there is that ultimate, perfect salvation when with that throng around the Lamb on the Throne, we shall sing, "And hath redeemed us unto God by His Blood". That is the final aspect and phase of redemption; it's all in the infinite value of the blood of Jesus. See how great this is? Well might the apostle here include this in the riches of His grace, the *unsearchable* riches of His grace, the depth of the riches of His *Grace* - providing God with that which we could never give Him, answering to God for His righteous demands which we could never do. All these words are bound up together, "He is made unto us from God righteousness, sanctification, redemption". Righteousness... the righteousness which is of God through faith in Jesus Christ. God has provided it all in His Son.

Now, I will add just a word here as to the next thing in this group, the five-fold group of the riches of His grace, it will not take me more than a few minutes to do this, because it's so closely linked in

with what we have been saying.

Election, Adoption, Redemption

Verse 8, "Which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence". He... made to abound to us, in all wisdom. One of the riches of His grace here is this wisdom which He has made to abound unto us. Of this so many-sided and full matter of wisdom made to abound unto us, Christ made unto us from God wisdom, I am only going to say one thing in this context with what we have said, and what the rest of this chapter contains. What is "wisdom" in its meaning here? Well, when the apostle, (we will put it this way) when the apostle has tabulated these five *profound* things, *unexplorable* things, he goes on his knees. Now, that was something extraordinary, for a Jew very rarely knelt down to pray; he always stood up to pray. If it was in the synagogue he stood up - Paul refers to this in one place: when you stand, praying. The common attitude and posture of prayer for the Jew was standing and lifting up holy hands. It's only occasionally that you find a certain one on his knees. You will find Daniel on his knees. And now here Paul says, "I bow my knee unto the Father". "I bow." What is this? Why this unusual attitude and position? Something unusual is at stake or is involved. It's an occasion for something *extraordinary*. You'll agree that that was so with Daniel, remember when he prayed, there was something tremendous involved.

Now the apostle says, "I bow my knee," there is something here that is a *tremendous* matter. And what does he ask, he pray for? He has said all these things; he *knows* how incomprehensible they are: "I bow my knee unto the Father that He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened, that you may know." Now you've got the heart of wisdom. What is the heart of wisdom? It is the *gift and ability of seeing right into the heart of things*, the ability given to see into the heart of things - the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Now Paul is writing in this letter about the mystery hidden from ages and generations, from before times eternal, hidden in Christ, now *brought out* from the hidden place and committed, conveyed. Paul is trying to explain this, to speak about this mystery and these five things are in the mystery: predestination, foreordination, redemption.... Anybody here doubt that they are mysteries when men have been putting themselves into intellectual distortions through *hundreds* of years to explain just these words: predestination, foreordination. And they're still going on with it. Paul knows how *deep* are these riches of His grace, what a tremendous thing is brought to us in Christ, and before it all he falls down on his knee, "I bow my knee to the Father, that He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation..." *wisdom and revelation*, that is, the ability to see into the *heart* of things. And all I can add to that is that the Holy Spirit *has* come, *is* with us, in order to disclose to us the heart of these things.

Perhaps the greatest need of Christians today is to see the meaning of the things that they believe; to see the meaning of what true Christianity is, the meaning of all these things that make up our Christian faith. They are depths beyond our reaching, they are abysmal things, these things. And we need an ability, God-given ability to be able to see into the heart of this. But thank God that is possible. Thank God the Holy Spirit is given for that very purpose! And what I am saying to you, dear friends, is just this, that you and I may have this same Spirit and this work of the Spirit to open our hearts, the eyes of our hearts, to give us this wisdom to see into the heart of the things of Christ. And what a wonderful thing it is just to see a little way in... to be able to say, "My, I never saw that before! That is light! That is *indeed* illumination, that is revelation, that is the truth!" It has an effect; it is not just the mental pleasure, fascination - it does something in us. It puts us into a position where we cannot throw that away easily, it has become a part of us! We will never say we can do without that, "Well, that's all very wonderful, that's all very nice, and so on, but let's come back to the

simplicities, to the things easily understood..." you can't do that once we've seen into the heart of things. You cannot throw it away, you cannot part with it easily. To do so would be to do irreparable damage to our own spiritual life. I and this truth, this light are one, it is not some *thing* that I have got, it is myself, my very self, my very life. I have seen; *God* has made it known to me. No use... I can't explain it all, but there it is, it's myself; He's made it a part of myself. That is wisdom, *that* is wisdom: seeing right into the heart by the opened eye; knowing in an *inward* way, an *interior* way, the meaning of the things we've heard and read and, perhaps, believed.

But, dear friends, as I think you will see from what I have said this afternoon, there is a depth, a fulness in such a word as "redemption" which we have only just touched the fringe of. And everything else in our salvation is in the same category, it's of the dimensions of God Himself. And it's going to take eternity for us to comprehend, but it is given to us here to know, and to know more and still more of the depth of the wisdom of His grace!

Chapter 4 - Elected and Selected

I will read again the passages which are basic to our present meditation in the eleventh chapter of the letter to the Romans, at verse 33, "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out."

The letter to the Ephesians, chapter three, verse eight, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints was this grace given to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ."

And seeing that we have not yet said all that we have to say for this present time about the first context of riches, that is, the riches of grace, we will just look at one or two other passages in that connection.

In the Ephesian letter, chapter one, and verse seventeen: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in *the knowledge of Him*." Now, that is following what we have in verse seven of that chapter: "In Whom we have our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the *riches of His grace*." The apostle's prayer at the end of that chapter for a spirit of wisdom and revelation has to do with the apprehension of the riches of His grace, "according to the *riches of His grace*". Chapter 2 and verse seven, "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of *His grace* in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus..." the exceeding riches of His Grace.

We have already considered some things related to this grace, which are the riches thereof. We have seen the nature of grace. We have seen God's work of grace. We have set grace over against our own works or merit. And we have seen that the great initial of Divine grace is in the free action of the Holy Spirit, to bring us into that grace.

Before we go on to look still more deeply into this fathomless, unsearchable ocean of Divine grace, let us remind ourselves that just as grace is the *beginning* of everything for us, and with us, so grace is the *continual basis* of everything to the end. What is true of the beginning, is true throughout the whole life of the child of God. It sounds like a contradiction, but it is not, to say that the Law of Grace governs the whole life of the people of God. What grace begins, grace carries on, and grace crowns. We will never be off the basis of grace. And we shall discover as we go on, increasingly how we are bound, just bound to grace for everything that comes to us from God - for everything that we know of God, for everything that we can be or can do, it will always be grace; nothing else. We will never move from that grace, from that ground on to any other.

That sounds simple, but this is something which confronts us every day of our life. And all the way along we shall be simply compelled by the Holy Spirit to recognise this *and* to accept it; to take this position: "Now, this is all a matter of the grace of God, we will never get by this, we will never get any further, only by His Grace", so that we are steadily moving, but really moving in a practical way, toward that passage which we have just read: "That in the ages to come, He may show the *exceeding* riches of His grace toward us". In the ages to come... the riches of grace will be exceeding and displayed in us!

I think we are beginning to realise that that *is* a fact. I think more and more we are becoming aware that it has got to be more grace, and still more grace. And if we have any difficulty about that, it feels

that that is rather difficult, and it's going to be more and more difficult, it's going to require more and more grace, let's put this climactic statement over the whole life in the ages to come: "To shew the exceeding riches of His grace toward us". Now, you can't get to that point where it's so great, so complete, perfect, full and final, you cannot leap there in one day or in one experience. The whole of the life of the people of God is a pilgrimage of grace.

I expect you know, and it's worth our pausing here to note it, or remind ourselves of it, I expect you know that Peter's letters are founded upon this one word: "grace". It's a great pity that the translators have not given us the correct translation in every case in Peter's letter. But Peter, as you also know, represents the Church as in its pilgrimage. Paul represents the Church as in the heavenlies, having arrived, very largely, viewing it from above. But Peter is viewing it here, and says, "I beseech you as pilgrims and strangers". Pilgrims - that's Peter's standpoint - the pilgrimage of the Church, and the great word of the pilgrimage with Peter is the word: "*grace*". He has so much to say about grace.

When I referred to the unfortunate translation, you will probably remember he said, "If you take persecution, opposition, ill treatment joyfully, this is", and the translators have put the word: "*acceptable* with God." But the real word there is "*grace*"! The word in the original is, "This is *grace*". The pilgrimage contains persecution, opposition, misrepresentation, and what not and if any man knew about that, Peter did. And if any man knew the meaning of grace, it was *that* man who had denied his Lord in such a way as to feel that he had sinned beyond the possibility of forgiveness. If ever you had done a thing like that thrice, in a vehement angry way declared that you didn't know Jesus Christ after having been with Him for three years, in the closest contact, to spare yourself and so strongly and wrathfully refuse the suggestion that you had any association with Him at all. If you had done that, or I had done that, I think that would be good ground for believing in the unpardonable sin. Don't you? No wonder he went out and wept bitterly. No wonder the Lord had to make a special mention of him when recalling the scattered disciples after His Cross, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, and to Peter..." and to Peter, mentioning him by name.

Well, that is old ground, so familiar, but we can understand why Peter's great word was *grace* can't we? Grace, yes, well, grace for the pilgrimage. And what Peter is saying so much about in his letter is "the sufferings," the sufferings of this present time, and it's grace all the way along, the whole journey calls for grace. But, and this belongs to a further consideration, "It is grace unto glory". Grace unto glory.

Well, I think it was worth reminding ourselves of that, that what grace begins (and we all know that it's through grace that we begin, the grace of God that brings us into salvation) but grace is going to perfect the work; going to carry it right through and crown it at last. I'm sure that the top stone will be brought forth with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it".

Now, when we talk about the riches of grace, we're within the realm of the unsearchable, the inexhaustible, and we shall never be able to fathom these depths, but I think we can for a little while go a little bit deeper this evening. And I want you to come to this first chapter of the letter to the Ephesians. I am not going to make anything of this - it may be a coincidence or there may be really nothing in it - but you know that the number in Bible numbers, the number of grace is five. Five. And here in this chapter, we have five of the exceeding riches of His grace. And when I say "exceeding", I am quite sure that as we look at them you will say, "That is beyond me. I cannot comprehend that, that's too big". But, nevertheless, you know we are allowed to look at big mountains, even if we cannot compass them or master them, and it sometimes does us good to look at them. But, thank God, these are not just objective things that are presented to us here, we are in them, we are in them. And so we just look at these five great, I think the greatest, riches of His grace.

Chapter four then, chapter one then (sorry) at verse four, "Even as He chose us *in Him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love". He chose us... in Him... before the foundation of the world. Do you understand that? Can you comprehend that? This is election - very troublesome word in theology and doctrine. But we are not at this moment interested in theology, nor in Christian doctrine as such. What we are concerned with is spiritual value, because we're talking about riches, riches. I have studied a good deal of theology in my time, but I can't say that I've got much wealth out of it, many riches. It's as dry as dust. And studying the subject of "election" as a doctrine, oh how arid it is! How lifeless. And yet here it is in the Word, it is definitely stated that "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world". There was an election, which took place in those eternal counsels of God, which included us if we are today *in Christ Jesus*. We are *in Christ Jesus*, because we were chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world.

You see, to begin with, you're dealing with a Timeless God. What was a matter, so far as time was concerned four thousand years ahead, was present with God before time began, because He is Timeless. Everything which for us is future time, is always present time with God. And so, for Him in effect, Christ *was* then, we were then, in effect we *were* then, and God acted on eternal ground. That may not be very helpful or interesting, but let us look at this matter of "election". I'm going to change the word, I don't like that word "election", although in certain forms it is in the New Testament, "Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." That is Peter, and the elect is there mentioned as a body, but I say again, I'm not fond of this word "election" because of its associations. So I'm going to change it and speak about "selection" - it's the same thing in meaning and in working.

Selection

Now then, when we get that word, we are helped. The nation of Israel was "selected" out of all the nations. Selected, "chosen" if you like, "elected" if you like. But God looked on all the nations of the earth, and selected Israel, among the nations. Did that mean that God rejected all the other nations, because He selected this nation? Did it mean that He selected them to be saved, and all the other nations to be lost, because they were not selected?

Well, let us come into this room, here we are, a little company of people. Allow me, not to take the place of God, but just to take this place by way of argument, of wanting something done. I want something done and I look over this company, and of course this is not true, I know everyone fairly thoroughly, but I look over and I say: "Brother, I want you to come alongside of me for this thing that I want done. I select you from this company, for the thing that I want to do. Now, don't jump to conclusions, either you or the others! Do not jump to conclusions that you are more important than all the others, and that you are better than all the others, that you are more worthy of this than the others, for that is not true. And you others, do not jump to the conclusion that because I don't select you, any one or all, that *you* are rejected by me and have no place in this plan of mine. Don't conclude that, that you are less worthwhile than this one, less worthy, because you are not selected for this thing. Come to no such conclusion."

The Lord selected the nation of Israel and said, "I have chosen you, not because you're better than the other nations, not because you're better. Not because you're more worthy, but I have acted sovereignly and chosen you, or selected you from among the nations, because I have a purpose that I want fulfilled. Now, My purpose is just this: to use you to the good of all the other nations. All these other nations are going to come into blessing through My use of you, My selection of you."

Let's go to the Bible. What was the covenant with Abraham, the first of this nation? "In thy seed shall *all* nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). That doesn't sound as though all the nations were rejected and consigned to be lost, does it, because they were not the selected nation. "In thy seed... in thy seed".

A great illustration in history: Joseph. The beloved amongst his brethren, the beloved of the father. Joseph... sold into Egypt. Through Joseph, Egypt was saved from death, from famine and death; not only his brethren, the children of Israel, and his father, but through Joseph the blessing of life, salvation came to the land of Egypt, to the nation of Egypt. A chosen one, a selected one of a nation took real blessing to the nations of the world.

Election - chosen, selected, whatever word you like to use - just means the purpose; to serve God in a purpose; not that you should be saved and the others appointed to be lost. See the twist that has been given to this word, how false it is! And we know right through their history that whenever Israel forgot, lost sight of, and failed to fulfill their vocation to the nations, they were put under a state of abeyance as to their very calling. They were in the nations *for* the nations, and when they made themselves an *exclusive* body, shut up to themselves, despised the nations, and called the Gentiles "dogs" and had no dealings with them, and said, "We are the people, and we are the only people", God so heartily disapproved that He withdrew their vocation, and sent them into captivity.

And, mark you dear friends, the two thousand years of Israel's history *since* their rejection of the Son of God is because they failed to recognise their own calling that through Jesus Christ they could be made a blessing to all the world. They put a hedge around themselves and said, "We are the beginning and the end of everything, God is only interested in us, the other nations are doomed..." just the reverse of their very calling, "In thy seed". And That Seed, says Paul, is Christ, "shall all nations of the earth be blessed." And when, instead of being a blessing they became really a curse amongst the nations, God said, "That's enough. You have cancelled out your own vocation, your own calling, your own election. You have cancelled it out." And Israel for these two thousand years has been in the outer darkness with much weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. That's how it is, isn't it? Why? Because in the Son of God, their vocation for the whole world was secured, and they rejected their own vocation when they rejected Him. That's history. And that is the meaning of "election" - selected, not to be saved as over against all others to be lost, but for a purpose: the *blessing* of all others, the salvation of all the others who will be saved.

Now, you see we come to Ephesians 1:4, "the Church chosen in Him before the foundation..." What for? To be a blessing! The vessel and instrument of God is to be a blessing to the whole world. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, speaks of the Church as "the Jerusalem which is above, the Jerusalem which is above, which is our mother". John, in his vision, sees "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming *down* from above out of heaven from God". Paul has seen it there, the new Jerusalem, our mother. John sees the coming down of the new Jerusalem from above, our mother, and he goes on to say: "The nations shall walk in the light thereof". The nations shall walk in the light thereof, so there are nations that are extra to this selected nation. And this selected nation, Peter again: "Ye are a chosen nation", this selected nation, the Church, has *been* selected to be a light to the nations in the ages to come. "The nations shall walk in the light thereof." This is, as I see it, the *true* doctrine of election.

Now, if you and I are *in* Christ, as a part of that nation, of that Jerusalem which is above, that holy city, you and I have been called and chosen in Christ to form this body, which is symbolised as the city, to diffuse the light of grace in the ages to come to the redeemed nations that they shall see the full manifestation of the grace of God, the exceeding riches of His grace to us-ward.

Now, dear friends, when I'm saying these things, I am all the time catching my own breath. I know quite well that I am involving myself in something which will be a very real test, the ground of very deep testing. And, I say this: that because of the greatness of the vocation, which is to display the exceeding riches of His grace, not only to angels, but to nations, redeemed nations in the ages to come, because of that, you and I will have to learn the meaning of grace very deeply. If it's to be displayed in its fulness, my, how you and I are going to be *made* to know the necessity for grace, the greatness of grace. It's all grace. May that not explain the fiery trial of which Peter speaks in connection with grace? "Think it not strange concerning the *fiery* trial... you're in heaviness for a season, through manifold trials". Why? Well, he just says there: grace. The grace. Grace... to know it and to show it. Chosen.

What grace! How deep is this grace! If this is true, and not imagination, and not only beautiful ideas, but if we *could* see with John the nations, redeemed nations of the earth walking in the light of what God has done in us, deriving their blessing through this vessel, if we could just see that, then we should bow and say, "Unsearchable riches... Oh the depth of the riches! How great is grace, that in the ages to come, the ages to come, He might show forth the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness to us".

Well, I have taken a lot of time on only one of the five of these riches of grace, but it wants a great deal more, doesn't it, to explore that one realm. Perhaps I might take another this evening, and if we don't get further it doesn't matter. For the time being we go into the next verse of Ephesians 1, at verse 5: "Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will".

"Foreordained us unto adoption as sons unto Himself through Jesus Christ." That all wants breaking up, but I will just be content with this phrase, this part of the whole:

"Unto Adoption as Sons."

Selection? Adoption? What does that mean? Paul has more to say about that in his letter to the Romans in chapter 8, where he is defining sonship. He is saying, "These are the sons of God, that are led by the Spirit of God... If any man have not the Spirit, he is therefore not His, none of His" and he is explaining that it is by the Spirit that we become sons of God. Now here he goes right back, "Has foreordained... unto adoption". And one meaning of adoption is certainly this: that an *adopted* one does not stand on the natural ground of sonship, but is brought in from the outside.

This letter to the Ephesians, as you know, was written almost entirely, if not entirely, to Gentiles brought in from the outside, called outsiders by the Jews, but this goes far back before Israel was a people and existed, foreordained, to be brought in from the outside and made sons. You are not sons by nature, and you are not sons, or children of God on natural grounds at all. It disposes of the whole *theory* that everybody by natural birth is a son of God, a child of God. Not true, now not true: the sons of God are brought *in* on other than natural ground. They are not the "born ones" they are the "adopted ones". The Church is an adoptive body. We are not of the Church by nature. We're not. You know, this has been a controversy both in the natural realm, and in the religious realm, for hundreds of years. In the natural, the scientific realm, a controversy has raged for three hundred years, or did rage for three hundred years on the question of life, life; the origin of life.

Now, one side of the argument represented by highly qualified intellectual scientists, argued, argued and tried to prove that life is spontaneous. It is there, naturally, and it just comes about of itself - just comes about of itself. And they wrote wonderfully high-browed books about this, and argued and

had their conferences - life is just there and it comes about of itself. The other side took this position, "No, not at all. Life can only come *from* life. It does not come from nothing; it can only come from life. And if life springs up, life comes into being, you will track it down to some living organism". You see, the whole science of microorganisms, the very air, the very dust of the air, is impregnated with some organism; minute, too minute for the natural eye to see, but put under certain tests in the test tube, you'll see, you'll discover there's a living organism there. *Always*, life is coming out of life. It does not come out of nothing, it comes out of life. Well, in the end, of course, the second side won. The great Lister proved it, wrote over the whole of the argument, "the theory of spontaneous life is dead, it's killed". And he carried out all the experiments to prove that if you bring sufficient heat or cold to the enth degree there upon a substance, so intense, far beyond normal heat, you will never be able to produce life from that material.

Now this same thing, is what I'm getting at, this same kind of argument and contention has gone on for hundreds of years in the religious world. It's a very large school of people, theologians who say, "We are sons of God by natural birth". Humanism is built upon that: human good, natural good, and you've only got to develop the natural good in people, and it may take a few millions of years, but in the end they'll become God; the deification of humanity is in the very nature of man. How, under the experiments of two world wars, that theory can stand, I don't know, when we discover what really is in man and what he can do when man has been developed to the highest level of education and civilisation and we know what man can do to man, and is doing today. How you can speak about the natural sonship of God inherent in man without any special intervention or operation!

Well, there's the other side when it comes to the Bible, the Word of God, it says, "Only from Him Who has life can life be derived". Life, eternal Life, can never be unless it comes from a Living Source. There must be Life, eternal Life somewhere before you can have it; it must come from there, it does not come out of what is dead. The simple cry of the angel on the resurrection morning has a profound meaning, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" That's incongruous, contradictory, belonging to two worlds, there is nothing of life where there is death! Two worlds. No use seeking life amongst the dead. You can only seek life where life is: the Living Source, the Eternal Life, "In *Him* was the Life".

Now you see this sonship. Oh no, we are not sons of God by natural birth, by adoption being brought in from the outside and *given* life - we haven't got it. Of course, you people don't need such an argument, do you? But, perhaps it's helpful for us to recognise that we are brought out of nothingness, so far as a relationship with God is concerned, and *given* that which makes us children of God which we do not have, which we *cannot* have, only by adoption. I know there are other fuller meanings of adoption, but this is its basic meaning: brought in from outside and made members of a family to which we do not belong by nature. No, only by new birth are we adopted and brought in. What a wonderful thing this is, *the grace of God!* "Ye who were once afar off are now made nigh, who were *not* children, now made children..." You were not sons, now made sons.

And what a terrible plight and state is represented by that word "not"; "not" and, "were afar off". God only knows the great chasm that was between us and Him and His family by nature. And there is a terrible chasm. It has got to be bridged, and we've got to be brought over that chasm; and that is the grace of God that does that. And the bridge is in Christ Jesus.

Our adoption is in Christ, as our election is in Christ. He is the Bridge Who comes over and brings us to God and brings us in. How unsearchable are His judgments, oh the depths of the riches, the riches of His grace. We are truly in deep waters, we can only wonder and worship. If this is true, if this is what the Word of God teaches, I believe it does teach this, if so, how deep are the wonders and the

mysteries and the riches of grace in His kindness unto us. Kindness to us: "You who were once afar off, by His *kindness*, are made nigh." In other words, by His grace.

I think we must leave it there for this evening and not overload and leave these other three things for any other time that the Lord may choose.

Chapter 5 - Consummation in Christ

The unsearchable riches of Christ and their fivefold presentation in the first chapter of the letter to the Ephesians, we now come to the fifth: from election to adoption, from adoption to redemption, from redemption to wisdom - the ability to see into the heart of it all - we come finally to: consummation. Verse ten: "Unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; *in Him*, I say, in Whom also we were made a heritage". "To sum up *all things in Christ*." That is the consummation of the riches of His grace, for grace is the first great context of that word "riches".

It is helpful if we remember the standpoint of this great letter. The apostle who wrote it had, in his other letters, or in most of them, been dealing with things *now* because he had been in close contact with the present conditions in all places where he went amongst the Lord's people in numerous localities where churches had been born. All the problems, the requirements, the affairs of present life were pressing upon him. And most of his letters up to this time were occupied with those present time demands, needs, problems, and situations. But when he was released from all that, and that phase of his life and ministry was closed, an end to his journeying and his scattered preaching had come, and he was shut up in the prison in Rome, it was more than a release from local responsibilities; it was a release of his spirit out into the all-comprehending, the vaster ranges of all that in which the local things were set. He was now able to release all that was pent up in him, the accumulation of experience, of knowledge, of revelation. He had only been able to give it, so to speak, piecemeal, here and there and there, but *now* all that he had in his knowledge of the Lord could be set forth and given out in these final letters, and in this one in particular. And when he is so able to unburden himself, his reach and range is no less than from eternity to eternity.

And so he immediately, in writing this letter, immediately in what we call the first chapter (there were no chapters when he wrote it, it was just one continuous outflow) but here right at the commencement, he plunges into the eternity past. "We were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world... predestinated, foreordained..." he's right back there in the past eternity. And before he has got through, he will have leapt right over into "the age of the ages", that's his phrase in this letter: from eternity to eternity. He is comprehending all that lies between the two eternities of what he calls the eternal, the timeless purpose of God in Christ.

It's important for us and helpful to recognise that standpoint. Helpful in this way: while you have got to face all that is in these other letters, the problems of the letter to the Romans - tremendous effort on the part of the apostle to solve some of the fundamental problems of life, and the whole question of sin and death and justification, it's a tremendous letter and the problems in Corinth... terrible problems - might well have made him despair and give up everything and say, "It's useless. Look at this, look at these people, look at these professing Christians! What's the good of anything, or what's the good of it all?" And just goes down on it in despair. The problems in Galatia, what problems... and so on. But, well, you've got to take notice of those things, they are; they are facts, they're realities and terrible realities calculated to take all the heart and all the hope out of you. But we need not think back into those days, we've only got to look into the state of things amongst Christians today in what is called the church, and we could easily give it all up and say, "Well, what is the good of it, as we know it?" You have to face it, take account of it, know it is real; it's not all imaginary - very real. What are we going to do with it? Well, just look back into the past eternity to see what was intended, and look into the future eternity and see it realised. God, from eternity to eternity - through all these

vicissitudes, all these difficulties and problems, at last is shown here to have *exactly* what He planned to have a way back there. It is going to be. The consummation of all things will be as God intended before time was.

Does that help you? It ought to help us, for here it is positively stated not far on in the letter: "In the fulness of the times... a dispensation of the fulness of the time to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth". Let us stay for a moment, just to get clear about this word "dispensation". The margin says, "stewardship". The root of the word means, "a house order" or "the household order": the order, the system, which obtains. But the word grows and is enlarged and comes to mean something more than just that. It comes to mean the carrying out, and putting into effect of the purpose. Dispensation or stewardship means the carrying out, the carrying into effect of the purpose of everything. In the fulness of time the whole purpose will be carried out and put into effect. When the apostle said that there was given to him a stewardship of the mystery, he meant that he was called to have something to do with the putting into effect of what was in the mind of God. So much, for the moment, for the word here: "dispensation," as it's translated.

What is this putting into effect? Well, it says, "to *sum up* all things in Christ". And that is not satisfactory, it's not adequate, it means: to *gather together*, to *reunite* all things in heaven and in earth *in* Christ. And the emphasis is upon that word "*together*". Together! That's a thrilling thought, that in the fulness of the times putting into effect of the purpose means everything will be at last together. Together. Not just outwardly, we are together in this place, but I wonder if it could be said of us all in an inward way that we are absolutely together here. It's a grand thing, isn't it, when we really are in spirit, in heart, in an inward way, in object, in purpose, in outlook *together*. That's a mighty thing. That's a grand thing. That's a *fruitful* thing. That's a joyous thing. It's everything we desire. When you think of the opposite, the opposite, when you are not together, when two people who have to live under the same roof are not together, it's a miserable... not life, but existence - a company of people who have to meet outwardly together, but are really not *inwardly* together - it is not a happy state. There's a strain, there's an atmosphere, there is a lack. But it says that the putting into effect of God's purpose will be found at last in *togetherness universally*; that is the riches of His Grace. The riches of His Grace. But see the setting of that... what a history stands over against that.

The Bible, from one standpoint, is a record of the opposite to that togetherness. The effect: the result of an *interference* with God's purpose. It began, apparently outside of this world, what we could call the cosmic disruption in this universe. Various hints of it are given to us, one apostle speaks about the "angels which kept not their first estate... now bound in everlasting chains". Angels which "kept not their first estate". What a hint as to Lucifer's primeval position. And then coveting, just the next step up; the place of the Son of God, equality with God. And through that pride and ambition, bringing about that terrible disruption in the very realm of God Himself. There, a disruption in the heavenlies and that is not something that happened and was concluded in some undated period called, "before the world was" or "before times eternal". That very realm today, called "the heavenlies", the very atmospheric realm occupied by principalities and powers, world rulers of this darkness, hosts of wicked spirits, is a realm of utter confusion and conflict. And sensitive believers know it, that it's an atmosphere of conflict, strife and disruption.

It began there, and then its repercussions came down to this created earth when God had made all things to His own pleasure and satisfaction and said, "It's very good", put man into it and gave man his "helpmeet" - the one meet to help him. It was not long before that thing which had happened above broke in and disrupted the first human family. And Cain murdered his brother; family life is broken.

And you move on to the race, which has grown, multiplied and expanded, and you come to Babel and the disruption of the human race, and the breakout into conflicting nations with the strife and confusion of tongues. The whole earth is full of confusion: Babel. On you go, and there arises the story of Israel, a family, tribes, and then that's broken. The ten and the two divided, fighting each other - schism in Israel. On further, and the awful disintegration, disruption of the exile; a long story of everything being contrary to what God intended in the breakdown of human relationships, the state of confusion. Confusion! It didn't stop with the Old Testament, and with the exile, it's there when you come into the New Testament. It's there. A terrible atmosphere of conflict you meet immediately you open your gospels. And God brings in something very beautiful at Pentecost, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread and prayers. Now we said it before, this touch of schism breaks in again, to divide it all, to spoil it all and the rest of the New Testament is the story of battling with *this*, this *thing*: division, division, division. Schism, strife, disintegration. The great appeal is for fellowship and oneness.

Go on... and what about today? What about today? Well, the world has grown so much bigger than it was in those days. It's a much bigger world altogether, new countries have been discovered and populated. A far greater world, and with the literal, historical expansion and growth, what has happened? Was there ever a time when there was more conflict, more confusion, more strain in relationships than there is now? Truly the prince of the power of the air is very busy. Today this world holds more of this confusion, divisiveness, strain in relationships than ever before. Despite every effort of every counsel, and every union and every effort of man to bring the nations together, it all breaks down every time. Isn't it true? Well, alright, that's how it is, and it isn't, of course, all right, it's very wrong. But you see what the apostle is telling us here by revelation to him from the Lord Himself, that the great work of God in Christ through grace is going to see that *whole historic system* of disruption brought to a complete end. And the things in the heavens, and the things of the earth are reunited *in Christ* - *together* again in Christ in the fulness of the times. That is what the apostle says, what the Holy Spirit says is the consummation of it all. What a tremendous phrase this is: "*in Christ*"! In Christ! Mark you, it's in Christ, we are not talking about that popular theory of universalism, we are talking about what is in Christ. There will be a lot afterward that is not in Christ. Not in Christ, but it's altogether outside of His domain, of His Kingdom, of His realm - outside, completely. But the realm of *this* creation, and of this cosmos, heaven and earth, will be *His* realm, "the kingdoms (plural) of this world shall be the (singular) kingdom of our God and His Christ". One kingdom, and that *within* Christ is a one united, together, state of things; in Christ. Of course this really doesn't need arguing. We know quite well that if there is any hope at all for anything like this now, it will only be as we really are in Christ and stay there. If we get out of Christ into ourselves, we get into disruption and confusion. If we abide in Him, if all of us abide in Him, then we are together in an inmost way.

Hence, the necessity in the first place for position; position *in* Christ. And then: abiding in Christ. And then: growing in Christ. And then: perfected in Christ. It's a process; it's a work of grace to abide in Christ. The trouble is, dear friends, that we do meet one another so much; you meet me and I meet you, and you have to say so often, "that's *him*", and I have to say, "that's *you*". That's you; that's just you. You know what I mean? It's just ourselves: our way of thinking, our way of talking, our way of expressing ourselves - the outcoming of ourselves, or the forthgoing of ourselves in some way. It's there. And it's a real joy and relief and pleasure to meet a person and not meet them, but meet the Lord! Isn't it? Just to say, when we've been with them, "Well, I wasn't struck and impressed by *them*", but I was with the Lord in them and about them. What impressed me was the *grace* of God in them". Grace... bringing Christ out, making Christ the impression; grace doing it. Now, that is exactly what Peter means by growing in grace. It means the diminishing of all that is outside of grace, of ourselves. Growing in grace. When we *do* come into contact with one another, it's more

Christ as the effect and result than ourselves - what we want, what we think, how we think things ought to be and all that whole gamut of self-interest and self-life. Christ... unto the consummation the Spirit of Grace is seeking to *displace* that which is *not* gracious, and bring Christ Who is gracious, more fully into being where we are concerned. For the consummation is that all things will be united in Him and He will fill all things; it will just be Christ. You've heard that so often; it will just be Christ.

Oh, what a grand day it will be when the ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of redeemed individuals are utterly one person, because it's all Christ, and no more of this ugly self. It's Christ. Now that, says the Word, is what God intended from the beginning, that is the eternal purpose of God, that is the explanation of all the conflict in this universe; to spoil it, to hinder it, to contradict it. But that is what the Word says is how it is going to be in spite of everything. In spite of everything.

Dear friends, we shall agree with one another then, absolutely agree with one another. We shall. We shall all be saying the same thing, all be doing the same thing, it won't be monotonous and uninteresting to be *all* occupied with one thing. What will that be? There are various ways of putting it, but I think it will be: What a lot we owe to the grace of God! That will be our eternal occupation: the wonder of His grace, the marvel of His grace. If the apostle was able to say, in the presence of his large and yet so imperfect apprehension and knowledge and realisation of the grace of God, "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out", if he could say, "It was given to me, the least of all saints to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ", if in the imperfection even of that knowledge and ministry he could speak like that, what about when we come into the utter fulness of it in the ages of the ages? We will be saying all the time, "Oh the depth of the riches, the unsearchable riches, the riches of His grace". But do you notice that between the eternities of the past intention and purpose of God, and the ultimate consummation and realisation, the apostle just does say, "Walk worthy of the calling wherewith you are called, in all meekness" that's selflessness, lowliness. "Walk," he would say, "*in* the grace," which is going to lead at last to this oneness.

As far as people will allow us to do so, as far as we can make it possible for them to do so with us, let us ask the Lord that *this* grace, this grace of fellowship, of oneness, may be found in us increasingly now. Of course, there are a lot of Christians who won't let us, who won't let us, who make it impossible for us to have fellowship, to be together. But, as far as it is in our power, let us seek by the *grace* of God to live in the light of the day when He will reunite in Christ all things in heaven and on earth.

Chapter 6 - The Riches of Glory

We are going to spend a little time in these remaining hours with the second of the links of the riches, the unsearchable riches, and that is, "the riches of glory".

There are two passages to begin with, in the letter to the Romans, chapter nine at verse 23, "That He might make known unto us... that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, that He had afore prepared unto glory". "The riches of His glory... unto vessels of mercy... which He had afore prepared unto glory".

The letter to the Ephesians, chapter three at verse 16, "That He would grant unto you, according to the riches of His glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man". "According to the riches of His glory."

I think it only needs to be mentioned for you to call much to remembrance that grace and glory go together very much in the Scriptures. "He will give grace and glory", and we are "to be unto the glory of His grace". The glory is the result of the grace; grace is unto glory.

As to this word which it is not easy to understand, this word "glory", may I first remind you that this word is attached to each Person of the Godhead, the Triune God. God is spoken of as the God of Glory. Stephen said, "The God of Glory appeared unto our father Abraham". Paul, in his prayer, said that it was to "the Father of Glory" that he bowed his knee. "The Father of Glory," which simply means, the Source of glory, the very spring and beginning of glory; the Father of Glory.

The Lord Jesus is more than once referred to as "the Lord of Glory". In writing to the Corinthians, the apostle, when speaking about the folly of the wisdom of the princes of this world, said that had they really had true wisdom, they would not have killed "the Lord of Glory". The Lord Jesus is "the Lord of Glory". If Father means Source, Lord means Government. The government is committed to Him, and it is upon His shoulders and He will govern all things with glory in view, which we shall see shortly. And then, as to the Holy Spirit, He is distinctly called, "the Spirit of Glory" - "the Spirit of Glory may rest upon you". So the whole Godhead is compassed and characterised by this one thought of glory. It is the Triune God of Glory.

Think again, and you will see that the whole Bible is horizoned by glory. It begins with God as the God of Glory moving into a very inglorious situation and turning it into a glorious one. God was able to say, "It is very good" and whenever it's like that, as again we shall see, that is glory - when it's very good. The end of the Bible is "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, having the glory of God". The Bible is thus bounded by this thought of glory. Christianity is compassed by this same thing. Its inception was glorious, it came in with glory, and the last thing about it is glory again. The Church is horizoned by glory. It was born in glory on the day of Pentecost; indeed, that was a day of glory. And again, the last thing about the Church is in that great burst from the heart of the apostle, "Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all ages forever and ever" - you can't get after that; that's glory in the Church forevermore.

Christ is bounded by glory, although from the earthly standpoint His coming into the world was in humility and humiliation, in poverty, in weakness, in heaven it was: "Glory to God in the highest". In

heaven, from heaven's standpoint it was a glorious day when God's Son became Incarnate, for heaven knew what that meant. He passes by the way of suffering and sorrow, humiliation and the Cross, but it's a circle, or a cycle, then it's up to the glory. You have a bigger view of Him: that He had glory before the world was. "Father," He prayed, "Glorify Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" - equal with God in the glory before this world was founded in its order and that, "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name" - glorified. You see how everything has this encompassment, this horizon of glory, and that's the end; that is the end, that is the object.

Now we have to stop and break this up. What is glory?

What is Glory?

Perhaps the most difficult word to define, and explain; not the most difficult thing to understand and to know, there are two aspects of glory. One is its expression, its manifestation, its effect, its power; for whenever you come into the presence of the glory, you are affected by it, and powerfully affected by it. But, mainly in the old dispensation when things were more sentient than spiritual, that is, in the realm of the senses, the human senses, when God was dealing with man on that basis of his sentient life, in that dispensation it was something that could be seen. Something that could be seen, it was a radiance, it was a breeze, it was a terrific power that men were aware of by their senses. They could see and feel something in their souls. The expression of glory was not nebulous and abstract; it was something to behold. You will recall how true that was when the *glory* was manifested, when the *glory* appeared, it was often a terrible thing; always a very powerful thing. But, this was only one side. It was the expression or manifestation of glory.

It is thought, although we haven't, I think, in the Word very much of a definite statement to this effect, it's largely deduction, conclusion; but the conclusion may not be false or altogether wrong that before Adam sinned and fell, there was something about his body that was like a robe of glory, something beautiful; what we'd say is glorious. And when he fell and sinned, he lost that covering of glory and knew that he was stripped naked, and God had to cover him with the symbols of redemption. That may be an imaginary conclusion, but follow that through and you will find in the case of the Lord Jesus and in the case of glorified saints that there's something about their very person that is glorious. And I think just the faintest hint of that is found when God is glorified in the life, there's something bright about them, something indescribable, even about their appearance. If you have seen the passing of a real saint, so often there's some radiance about the face just afterward. If you have seen someone really born again out of the depths, there is something about the face that speaks of glory. Or to put it round the other way, when somebody is living out of touch with the Lord, that something about their face has gone. Isn't that true? You say, "There's something gone out of their face, it's not there what was there before, they've lost something." Put it as you may, you mean the glory in expression has departed.

Well, this is the manifestation side, but there's something that accounts for that. There is the other side, the deeper aspect, and that is the basis of glory. What is it that makes the glory? What is the basis of the glory? What is the essence of the glory, the reason for the glory, the very nature of the glory? What lies behind any manifestation at all now or forever? *Glory is the expression of the satisfaction of God's nature.* Now, that's a definition that you might well stay with, and think about, and dwell upon. And if you do, much will come out of the Word that will show you how true that is - the expression of the satisfaction of the nature of God. God's very nature, being what it is: holy, and righteous, and true, and everything that the very nature of God is, if it is satisfied, if it is satisfied and answered to, God finds that which corresponds to His very being, to His disposition, to His nature, to

His way of thinking, His way of acting, and all that which is just *God* in essence. When God finds that which answers to Himself, then there is a state of glory. There's a state of glory. When things are as God wills they should be, then it is glory.

We referred to the creation, and God had made all things and was able to say of His work, "It is very good", it was a glorious state, really a glorious state. It would really have been good to be there, and then, dear friends, such an atmosphere of contentment, and satisfaction, and rest, peace and joy - heart-ravishing, nothing present to irritate, to distress - God was completely satisfied; a state of glory in the creation. All followed through in other of the many connections of glory... take the Tabernacle. God gave a precise, meticulous, detailed prescription of the Tabernacle for the simple reason that it was not a Tabernacle that God had ultimately in mind at all, it was His Son. And the command from, and repeated, was: "See thou make all things according to the pattern which was shown thee in the mount". And when it was done, and all things were so made to a detail, to a thread, to a pin, so done, glory filled the Tabernacle, glory came down and filled. All things answered to God's mind, and there was glory. Every part of it was glorious, and the whole was glorious, because in every part it was as *God willed it to be*.

The same, of course, obtains in the case of the priests, the high priest and his sons. They were clothed, as we are told, with garments of glory prescribed by God Himself as to everything about them, the material, the colors, the shape, the size, everything was heaven-shown. And when the priests were so clothed, according to God's mind, they were called "garments of glory"; satisfying God. And what was true of the Tabernacle in all its parts and its priesthood is true also of the Temple later.

When David received the pattern, as it is distinctly said that he did, he said, "Everything that I have received from the Lord, I have received from the Lord", when it was done glory so filled the house of the Lord that the priests themselves had to go out. All this leading up to the New Testament: One Who was the fulfillment in Person of all this - Tabernacle, Temple, Priesthood and everything else - standing before God was so approved of God, so fully satisfying to God that He could be transfigured and clothed with glory. His raiment was white and glistening - glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration, because at that point He had satisfied the Father God on every detail. If from that moment He must come down from the mount, go to the Cross and all its agony and humiliation, suffering, and sorrow, that was not because *He* had disappointed the Father, that was in order to bring *us* to glory, to God's satisfaction.

This is the basis of glory: God's satisfaction. And you see from one little thing mentioned, that at the point that the glory came in and filled, man had to go out; and that is basic to glory: *the absolute exclusion of man by nature*. He is the trouble; he is the one that spoils and limits the glory; it's the natural man who keeps back the glory. Whenever *he* takes a place in Divine things, then the glory is either removed, or limited. Limited. Well, that is again a reflection on the Lord Jesus, there is nothing about *Him* that corresponds to the natural man. In Him, that first Adam, his whole race has gone out, been put out of the way; and He, of a new order, answers to God's thought about man and can stand in the eternal Light unconsumed. Christ in Person, and Christ in His work: perfect, perfect and therefore glorified. It is spontaneous, the glory, when God is satisfied; it just happens. It does not have to be invoked, implored, it just happens when God is satisfied. If God is satisfied, in part there is spontaneously by the Spirit of Glory indwelling the witness to God's satisfaction, in the sense of wonderful rest, quietness of heart... a sense of joy. Quite inexplicable in a way and yet, it is because the Lord is well pleased. The Lord is well pleased, and this state of satisfaction to God, the full pleasure of God, the answer to the very nature of God is what the Spirit of Glory is working toward in the Church and its members.

This explains all the activities of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the people of God collectively. The Lord is working, dear friends, or *trying* to work, according to how we let Him and answer to Him to obey the dictates of the Spirit of Glory, the Lord is working with us and in us as members of His Church as in the Church, that in the end the Church may be presented to Him "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing". A glorious Church, "Glory in the Church unto all ages, forever and ever". God's object is glory in His dealings with us.

We don't always feel like that do we? It doesn't always seem like that, it seems just the opposite very often, and yet it is true. But here, here it is that we, as the Lord's people, have got to have some understanding and recognise and accept something: that God's glory, the reaching of His glory, the manifestation of His glory now, is only along the line where that *glory alone* can have its opportunity and occasion. Which means that if there is any state whatever that limits the glory, spoils the glory, hinders the glory, that has got to be dealt with in discipline, and got out of the way. That is one thing that we have got to recognise - that discipline is a part of the work of glory.

But another thing that we have got to recognise in that very connection is that God's glory is *usually* reached along the line of adversity. Now, you take up the book of the Acts. The book of the Acts; what do you call this book? Well, you can call it by different names, "The Acts of the Apostles", "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" or simply, "The Acts" or whatever you like. I wonder if you've ever heard it called, "The Book of the Glory of God - The Glory of Christ"? It doesn't look like that always, but let us look at it again, from that very standpoint. We have said that it begins with the Church born in glory. No doubt about it, the day of Pentecost was a day of glory, when heaven came down. The Spirit of Glory descended and it was a state of glory, a state of joy, a state of Life, a state of new hope and prospect that Peter could say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". That was the very atmosphere and nature of the day of Pentecost: "Begotten again unto a living hope" after terrible despair a few days before. It was a day of glory.

But now let's pursue the course of the glory through the book of the Acts. It will not be long before we arrive at the terrible story of the martyrdom of Stephen; the hatred, the malice, the wrath, the wickedness, the evil against Christ, against this "Way" as they called it, and all of this Way - venting itself, blazing out against this young man Stephen, ending in the dragging of him outside of the city and stoning him to death. You say, "Tragedy! Defeat! Reverse, set-back!" Ask Stephen: "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God". "And all beholding him, saw his face as it were, the face of an angel". It was glory. And glory so real and so terrible that the chief witness against him and supporter of his death was smitten to the heart, stirred to the depths of his being and forced to redouble his antagonism to save himself, his own conscience.

However, out of Stephen came Paul. Is this defeat? Is this defeat? God is very ingenious: the Lord Jesus (may I use the word of Him) is very *clever*. Let men and devil, earth and hell combine against the Christ of God, the glorified Christ. How does it work out? Don't be too quick, too soon in drawing your conclusions and passing your verdict. Look to the end. We are dwelling in this letter to the Ephesians, the most wonderful document that has ever been penned by man. It came out of Stephen's death, Stephen's martyrdom. That's the kind of thing that glory does, you see. And if you think that that still needs strengthening, well, all right, pass on.

Herod seized James and executed him. A terrible set-back, a terrible set-back. Why, the devil has done something now, successful and triumphant; he has struck at this apostolic company, and slain one of its members. But Herod is up against the Glory. And before you end the chapter in which his

act against the Lord of Glory is recorded, Herod himself is smitten and eaten of worms, and the next thing in the next verse is, "And the number of the saved was a multitude, was multiplied". See the reaction of the Glory? This is glory isn't it?

You can see how the glory comes along the line of adversity, and it's only along that line that you really do know what the glory is. Well, Herod thought that it was a good thing he had done because it pleased the Jews, and he seized Peter, and put Peter in prison. Now, if *Peter*, if Peter goes, this is going to be something tremendous. Well, he takes all the precautions that a man in his position could take to secure Peter. So, he throws him, has him thrown into the inner dungeon, his feet made fast in the stocks, and four quaternions of soldiers to guard the prison. No hope for Peter so far as hell and men are concerned, but what does the Glory say? The Lord of Glory is interested in this matter, and simply says to the whole thing, "Oh no. Oh no, not a bit of it!" The angel of the Lord, as you know, visits Peter, his chains fell off, was bidden to gird his garment about him and follow, the iron gates opened. What's happened to the four quaternions of guards? They are hardly mentioned, they're as though they didn't exist. And out comes Peter.

Now here is something strong, very strong on the part of the evil powers against the Lord of Glory, and how simply the Lord of Glory answers it. But it's only that way, the Church was tremendously stirred and concerned that night, giving itself to prayer, "stretched out" it says, that prayer was made earnestly and the word "earnestly" is "stretched-outedly" by the Church. The taking of this matter so seriously, the Lord of Glory moves in and solves the big problem so simply. Infinite power can work in such a simple way, Peter and next: Saul of Tarsus.

In his rage, (he calls it rage himself) a culler of anger, wrath, hatred, like a boiling cauldron overflowing against those of this "Way" he goes to the High Priest and says, "If you will give me documents of authority, I will go to the farthest city and I will have arrested *all* who are of this Way, brought to prison and judgment and, if needs be, to death". He obtains the documents, the parchments of authority, the warrants of arrest, and starts out on his way to the distant city of Damascus, where he *knows* there's a company of these people of "the Way". "Saul, breathing out threatenings and slaughters," went to Damascus. And the Lord of Glory stepped across his path. And the Glory smote him to the ground. Forever afterward, this man knew the meaning of the glory and could speak about it so fully.

The point is that the glory, the glory comes along the lines of tribulation, suffering, and sometimes apparent defeat; apparent success of the devil himself and his emissaries. Sometimes it just does look as though now Satan has done it, he has succeeded, but that is not the end of the story. Not the end of the story. And so you go with this man from place to place, go with him to all these cities which he visited and see what happens. He later said that the Holy Spirit had witnessed to him that in every place bonds and afflictions awaited him. How true it was. We cannot follow his course, but we call to mind Lystra and such places, but pick out Philippi. Philippi - he went, and the reaction of the evil forces of Satan found Paul silenced in the prison, again fast in chains, back's bleeding from their thrashings. Surely Satan has won now, gained the day now, surely this is reverse and defeat. But we know the story now, the Lord of Glory had an interest in this matter, and when it's necessary, the Lord of Glory can create an earthquake and shake a prison to its foundations and loose all prisoners and save the jailor and his household *and* establish the Church in Philippi to which the apostle will later write, "My beloved and longed for, my joy and my crown...". He would say "crown of glory" and remember how it started, the way along which it came. He referred to it: "How shamefully," he said, "How shamefully I was treated in Philippi". Through shame, suffering and adversity, the glory came.

I don't know where to end, the whole of the New Testament has now sprung into life. Do you see the point? John has a lot to say to us about this thing. Right at the very beginning, the marriage of Cana in Galilee and the failure of the wine - an end of all human resources and man can do nothing. Then comes in the Lord of Glory, and it says, "This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and showed forth His *glory*". Glory where man's resources end, where humanly the situation is quite hopeless. That's the pathway of the glory. Or Lazarus... Lazarus, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified". And to the poor, baffled sisters, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" But the necessity for the manifestation of the glory was the utter end of all human hope; perfect helplessness on the part of man, then the glory comes in.

I wish we could believe it, and always believe it, when things are so hopeless, utterly hopeless, when it is quite impossible for us to do anything at all, we have to take our hands off and stand back and say, "Only the Lord God Almighty can handle this situation". May that not be the way of the glory? I wish we could believe it, really. If only we could always believe that these situations - which seem so often to be the work of the devil, his triumph, his complete triumph - are only the pathway of the glory, that in the end, when the *full* story is told, it will not be all tragedy, all defeat, but the end will be glory through grace. Glory through grace. There we stop for the present.

Chapter 7 - The Heavenly Bread

We are going to turn aside from the course that we've been following in the earlier meetings, and for a little time this morning be occupied with that which has been engaged in in this little while: the Lord's Table. And I would ask you to turn to one or two passages, firstly in the gospel by Mark, chapter 6. Mark 6 at verse 34: "And He came forth and saw a great multitude, and He had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them..."

The gospel by John, chapter 6 at verse 4: "Now the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude cometh unto Him, saith unto Philip, Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, Two hundred penny worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little." Verse 33: "The bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life, life unto the world. They said therefore unto Him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. Jesus said unto them. I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

The first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 23: "I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, how that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, This is My body, which is broken for you."

When Philip estimated that 200 penny worth of bread would be the very least to feed the multitude, he was putting the price far beyond their human resources. To him it represented a very costly undertaking to meet the need of that hungry multitude, those scattered and hungry sheep without a shepherd. But when he had put so large a value and estimate upon what was necessary, he was far below the actual cost of what was represented; that is, the Heavenly Bread. If he had multiplied a thousand times the 200 penny worth, he would never have reached the cost and the value of that which was symbolic at that time in the wilderness: the Bread of Heaven. That which was in the mind of the Lord... He knew what He would do, the Lord had in His mind the real meaning of what was taking place. And what was in the mind of the Lord was *infinitely* more precious than 200 pence multiplied many times. This indeed, from heaven's standpoint, from the Lord's standpoint, was costly bread; very costly bread, beyond the estimate of man. When the Lord proceeded to take the loaves and break them and give them to the disciples, at that time they little realised that they were called *into* that costliness; that they were being brought into actual association with the infinite costliness of the Heavenly Bread.

They had been called to minister in fellowship with His Son; they little knew it, they little recognised it at the moment, but He could have applied to *this* matter what He said in another connection at another time: "What I do now thou knowest not; but thou shalt know, afterward". "He took the loaves and brake... and gave". What an infinite fulness is found in that word "and brake". It's a pity that the revisers have taken from the text and put into the margin the words, "broken for you". But as you notice, it was there, and many authorities recognise that it was there, "My body, which is not only for you, but broken for you" - the infinite cost of that breaking.

And when He called them into partnership with this great breaking and distributing, He was really only in a symbolic way calling them into the fellowship of His sufferings which were to become the

Life of men. John gives us the full explanation of the incident in the wilderness, the feeding of the multitude. Jesus explains His act there. So what do we have? It is, in the first place, the infinite preciousness and costliness of every fragment of Christ that is offered to us. Every little bit, broken from Him, so to speak, and presented to us, contains the great costliness of His redeeming love, of His brokenness for our salvation. If at any time there is offered to us through a life, through a ministry, a word, or in any other way offered to us some small portion of Christ, as we have taken the fragment this morning each one of us, if there is offered to us a fragment of Christ, in every fragment there is embodied this *costliness* of our redemption, this *costliness* of the Life which He is and gives. This *costliness* in His brokenness, it's there... offered to us.

Do you not feel, dear friends, that the ministration of Christ to His people needs to be redeemed from the matter-of-fact, matter-of-course cheapness of the oft-repeated hearing of His word, receiving of that which really does represent Him? We have become so accustomed to hearing, going and coming, going and coming through the years, and hearing, and being offered, we begin to take it for granted. And if we don't do that, I think I would find your agreement if I said we don't recognise how *infinitely costly* every fragment of Christ is that is offered to us. It's like that. You and I need to be delivered from familiarity; the weakness of familiarity. Christ, in a sense, needs to be redeemed from our lack of appreciation of what any little bit of Him really does mean. That is the first thing that comes to us out of this record. The disciples did not at first realise what it meant that the Lord Jesus put the fragments into their hands to give to others, but in after life they did; you find that they realised that the ministry which was committed to them was not only a costly ministry, but a ministry of *infinite* importance. They entreated, besought, and prayed that those to whom it was offered should be *alive* to what was really being presented to them. They saw the tremendous issues bound up with every little bit of Christ that they had to offer. This is a word for us; to realise that when we take the loaf and break a small fragment, in that fragment in a symbolic way is represented *all* that the Lord Jesus had to give by His death.

And of course, there follows this: the fellowship of His sufferings is inseparable from any kind of ministration of Christ. To you this may not carry very strong appeal, because you do know something of it. I wish I could say this to a great number of those who have ambition to be preachers, ambition to get into what is called "the ministry". They think of it as something to gratify their own ambition in life. They go out, display themselves, take hold of it for themselves, make it serve their own glory: a reputation for themselves. The fact, the fact is if what we have read means this, that the fellowship of Christ's sufferings cannot be separated from any ministry of Christ, any true ministry of Christ, that ministry must be born out of a real fellowship with the Lord in His suffering. The brokenness must be transmitted from *Him*, to all who would serve Him. This again was something that these disciples came to know afterward. And that day, that day outside, the multitude, and the distribution through their hands, how little they understood what they were doing or what the Lord was doing and what the Lord meant by this; how little. But they were baptised into His sufferings later, and out of that baptism of His passion which they shared, came their ministry. And it was therefore ministry *impregnated* with the very passion and travail of His soul. It became, for them, a soul matter; not a professional thing which they were paid to carry out, not even a duty; but something which wrung *their* souls in many a Gethsemane where *they* had before God to say, "Not my will, but Thine" at very great cost.

Now this, of course, has two sides. I'm not speaking to a lot of preachers, those who would call themselves "ministers" (although it is such a mistake to put certain people into that category and leave the rest out, we are all ministers of Christ in some way) it works both ways; to us as those who are, every one of us, called upon to give something of Christ to this world of need and to His scattered and hungry sheep; to give something, in some way - by life, by word, by act, to give. But if

it is going to be effective, it will be just exactly as *His* giving of Himself was effective, on the same principle: it costs. It just costs. Anything that is of any value, costs. If we want our lives to be channels and vehicles for the transmission of something of Christ to others, let it be understood that such ministration of Christ necessitates a fellowship with Him in His suffering, and will explain *why* the Lord brings us into that fellowship, why the suffering, why the trials, the adversities, the afflictions of so many kinds. Why? That we should have something of Christ to give that carries the real value of our Lord.

Well, we could say very much about why much ministry does not go very far, does not count for very much. Those in it are not prepared to pay the price. Well, it works that way so far as our calling to minister Christ to others is concerned, it will inevitably come out of experiences of suffering and affliction if it is going to be as effective as His has been.

On the other hand, in the other way, dear friends, is not this a call to us for a new evaluation of *everything* and *anything* that really is Christ? If the Lord really does give a word which is the content of Himself, carries Himself in it, it really behooves us to recognise that this is not something which we can regard lightly. There is here the potential of His own infinite suffering; a new appreciation of any ministry that is a ministry of Christ. We say, "Easy come, easy go"; that ought *never* to be true of our relationship to the Lord, either as from Him to others, or as from Him to ourselves. The receivers must enter into His suffering as much as the givers, if there is to be value.

This is but a brief word, but it's just an emphasis upon this one thing: He took, He brake. He gave the brokenness to them. He gave of His own brokenness to them that they might minister *Him* in all the virtue of *His* sacrifice to others. It's a word of comfort because it explains very much. It explains very much, it explains *why* the Lord brings us into that fellowship of His passion, His sorrow, His suffering, His disappointment, His reproach, His despising, His rejection, His loneliness... and everything that went to make up His brokenness. He brings us into it in some way or other, if we are going really to serve Him. It requires broken ministers to minister a broken Christ.

And if we are really to come into the good of every bit of Christ that comes our way, presented to us, we shall only do it along the path, the pathway, of His suffering. There has to be something that happens between our hearing, between it being offered to us and it becoming a return movement to His satisfaction. Something has to happen. We take our food and presently our food becomes our action; but something's happened between. Something's happened between; that food that we took at our meal is going through a breaking up and a breaking down process - you don't know what's going on, or you do sometimes know what's going on in your bodies when you've had a meal; some don't, but some do - that there's a mighty struggle going on, that's all being broken, torn to pieces, changed and transmuted. Something's going on between the taking in and then the giving out in energy. Before what we receive of Christ and what we have to give can be made effective, there's something that's got to go on in us: real battle within over this thing, a real conflict over that word, a real challenge set up in us; the transmuting from the thing received, to the thing turned to vital energy. But is that true always of the congregation? The congregation comes together and the Word is preached, the sermon is given, the hymn is sung, and up and out until the next time. I'm afraid that is true very largely and very often. It's not for me to judge, of course, but having some long experience of that sort of thing, one has so often had to ask the question, "What was the good of that pouring out? What has resulted from it, that giving which was costly giving?" And one has so often to say, "Well, it was just taken; perhaps forgotten." And then another time, and yet another, and no battle over it. No exercise over it. No costliness in experience related to it.

If you and I are really going to be built up with the increase of Christ, it will be just in this way: "He took the loaf and break it" and break it! That is, He took Himself and was *broken*; broken. Oh, the anguish, the suffering, the sorrow, the travail of that breaking of Him... that we might come into the good of it and might have the good of it for others. The Lord make this not only a word perhaps of correction, perhaps of enlightenment, but a word of comfort for that's what we need as He takes us through trial, adversity and sufferings of various kinds - one this way and another that way - and we feel that it is a breaking process. We realise that it is in order that we shall have something really *vital* to give, for the Bread which comes down from heaven is for... the information? No. For: "the life of the world".

Chapter 8 - The Pathway of the Glory

We just continue in the consideration of the pathway of the glory. We have traced the glory through the book of the Acts up to a certain point, more especially in the life of the apostle Paul. When we come to the end of that book, we find ourselves in the presence of a consummate and inclusive revelation, expression, manifestation of the glory at the end of the earthly course of the Lord's servant Paul. It is impressive to note on the one side what an accumulation of opposing forces is represented in the last chapter of that book.

Way back there in Palestine, the imprisonment in Caesarea for two years, the tremendous uprising of the whole Jewish regime and hierarchy, and Gentile corroboration as in the case of the Lord Jesus, bitter animosity and hatred and scheming to destroy him, leading at last to his being sent to Rome for the final judgment - that putting into effect of all that uniting of earth and hell to have this man and what he represented done away, finished. In the midst of it, when everything seemed so flattening, particularly threatening to the one ambition of his life to preach the Word in the great imperial centre of the world, Rome, every circumstance seemed to say, "That will not be. That cannot be. You never will realise that life desire". The Lord just stood by him and said, "Fear not, Paul. As thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness in Rome and through it all, the storms naturally and the storms spiritually". Then the word is, "And so, we came to Rome..."but in Rome: a prisoner. All the adverse forces, spiritual, satanic and human determined to bring that ministry to an end by bringing that man to an end. Over a wide area things moved toward that. In churches in Asia, which owed their existence instrumentally to this man and owed all that they had spiritually to him under the Lord. They turned against him, "All they which be in Asia be turned from me". False brethren betrayed him. What an accumulation of evil things gathered and focused upon that prison in Rome, all saying with their own meaning: limitation, curtailment, shortening of tenure, of influence, and life. That's the natural, satanic situation very imperfectly described and set out.

On the human side, looked at just purely as a natural situation, everything in that prison and those chains seems to say what the enemy meant, and what men meant: this is an end and this is a curtailment in every way. And yet, looked at from heaven's standpoint, and from history's standpoint, it is the most glorious chapter of the whole book. They said: limitation - heaven said: enlargement. They said: narrowing down, curtailment - heaven said: expansion. They said: death, agony - heaven said: a new beginning, not only of the man in heaven, but of his ministry. For it was out of that prison, imprisonment and all that which was set for the ending of that ministry, out of that has come the greatest ministry that he fulfilled.

These letters from that prison embrace a fulness of Divine revelation that can be found no where else - an enrichment for the Church beyond, beyond our telling - an expansion of ministry far, far beyond the whole range of his missionary journeys personally. Today, in every country of this world Paul is known; perhaps not in every spot in every country, but in every country. From far East to far West, far North to far South, that man is known, and his ministry has gone.

And today, through all the battle and the controversy over what is called "Paulinism", the theological world through all the battle of the years, Paul is on top, you know. They just cannot cope with this man; they cannot silence him, they cannot account for him. You probably will not know a great deal of that battle. Those of us who have read and studied through many years of this conflict of ideologies and philosophies and theologies focusing upon this man Paul, know how at one point the

whole thing became just this issue: "Away from Paul, back to Christ," back to Christ, or "back to Jesus" as they put it, away from Paul. "Paul has betrayed Christianity..." this sort of thing, a terrific battle on that ground. But today, the very schools that were represented by that position are saying Paul is the interpreter of Christ, the supreme interpreter of Christ. So it is. That just by the way as pulled into the whole situation.

You see, this man's life started in a blaze of glory. Glory descended and struck him. As we said earlier, that glory went right through his life, he never got away from that. Never got away from that, he had seen the glory of the Lord and although the end of his earthly course seemed naturally to be so inglorious, so much speaking for apparent triumph of the forces which were against, two thousand years have not quenched that glory and he shines with it today. And we, a little minute fragment of a very great worldwide whole, are here at this time glorying in the glory which has come through that man. So, I say that the last chapter of the book of the Acts is just the consummate and inclusive setting forth of the whole book, showing the pathway of the glory. And just on that I want to close this time.

What is the Pathway of the Glory?

It has two sides. The one side is: *the reduction of the natural, human element*. It demands that; it will always work that way: the reduction, the nullifying, the weakening, the emptying, the undoing of the natural human element of man. Running alongside of that: *the positive increase of Christ*.

The pathway of the glory is, on the one side, an increasing, ever-increasing setting aside of the natural man, even as a Christian and in the work of the Lord, leading more and more to the consciousness that it must be the Lord, or there will be nothing at all. The human factor is *increasingly* of no account. That's the pathway to glory. Not a very happy thing, perhaps, to contemplate, if you look at it on that side alone. But it is true. Here is this man Paul, naturally and humanly in weakness, naturally and humanly in limitation, as a man in bonds. But there's the other side: the enlargement of what is of the Lord - the mighty, marvelous enlargement of Christ, so that these letters from the prison are a *matchless setting forth* of the *greatness* of the Lord Jesus. You only have to read the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians to see it - the place the Lord Jesus is given.

Now, you can see this, and it's as well that we do take at least a glance at it, by the opposite: go right through your Bible and you will see that whenever man put forth his hand upon Divine things, the glory went out. That is a word written over Eden isn't it? The Lord's precaution: "Lest he put forth his hand..." - lest he put forth his hand! The Lord knew quite well that if he put forth *his* hand on Divine things, that was an end of the glory, and that's exactly what happened. Right through your Old Testament, you can see this: case after case, when man pressed in, pressed in and put his hand upon Divine things; the glory went out.

You know how Isaiah says, "The day that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and lifted up, seated upon a Throne and His train filled the Temple" but, the tragedy of Uzziah! You remember that was the man, and one of the greatest, an idol of the prophet Isaiah himself, who reached great dimensions of power and influence and earthly glory, and then presumed upon it and forced his way into the Temple, to the Sanctuary, to the Altar. Fear came upon men and they said, "It does not pertain unto you, king Uzziah, to offer incense," but he spurned the warning and was smitten a leper and died in shame with all his own earthly glory gone. He forced himself in to lay *his* hand upon Divine things and so far as he was concerned, and for that time, the glory departed. It was a great reversing of the situation when Isaiah saw the Lord on the Throne, no longer Uzziah - the Lord on

the Throne. Then the glory comes back. When man usurps the place of God, the glory goes out. That's one instance.

You remember David, with the best of motives... remember the Ark (and the Ark is always the Ark of the Glory; remember that, always the Ark of the Glory) the glory of Israel is focused upon and centered in that Ark. David, with the purest and best of motives, thought of bringing the Ark to Jerusalem and mistakenly formed a new cart after the Philistine manner; a new cart, and put the Ark on it, contrary to the Divine Word to bring it up to Jerusalem. And they were apparently having a very good time on the road until they reached the threshing floor and the oxen stumbled, and Uzza put forth his hand upon the Ark... his hand... on the Ark. And the Lord smote Uzza; it's there that he died. The Ark was turned aside and for long, long weary months, it says, "The time was long..." it was in the house of Obed-edom and Israel were weary. The glory had gone because man had put his hand on Divine things. And so we could go on, like that. But there it is.

When the glory of life, glory of joy, glory of spiritual fulness, glory of Divine power departs and comes under a shadow or is eclipsed, or limited, it is usually because man's hand has touched the testimony. Man's nature has insinuated itself; that is, *his* judgment, *his* ideas, *his* thoughts, *his* will, *his* emotions - David's mind got to work, David's emotions got to work, and it was a very emotional scene that. A very emotional scene. And David's will got to work, so that his soul, mind, heart and will came out to touch Divine things. It was man. And whenever it's like that, if our judgments, and our emotions, and our decisions lay hold of the things of God, we will be left without the glory. The glory will depart, or the glory will be under eclipse, or the glory will be limited. It's a long story: "Lest he put forth his hand."

Well, that's the dark side, it's just as well, I say, that we take a glance at that, because that is so largely the trouble today. There's an absence of the glory, or a limiting of the glory, and our hearts cry for the glory to return. We are always asking and praying that the glory of the Lord may be manifested, known and felt. *We've got to get out of the way before that can be* - give the Lord *all* the place to be *all* the Lord.

So, on the one side, there is the limiting of human abilities and powers of mind and will, ability. The other side, by that limiting or excluding: the coming in of the Lord, the increase of Christ, that *Christ* is our wisdom, *Christ* is our strength, *Christ* is our will, Christ is all. Dear friends, that is the pathway of His glory it's painful to the flesh, very painful, because this flesh is very strong, stronger than we would believe; it's there.

But we must finish, and finish on perhaps a happier note, a much happier note. While we must understand what the glory demands and see the way of the glory, we do want to have at the end a final look at the ultimate glory. To do that we remember Peter's word, "When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory" - a *crown* of Glory... that's the end. It's a symbolic word, of course, a crown of Glory, I'm not very ambitious to have a literal crown put on my head, and for the life of me I don't see how I'm going to ever have three crowns on my head, literally; and there are three crowns mentioned in the Word. It means being crowned, having your life and your work *crowned*, capped if you like, with glory. That's the last picture: the crown of glory.

What is it? Well, I've mentioned that there are three crowns, and you know them well probably. There is "the crown of righteousness" that we are to receive on certain grounds. "A crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give" Paul says. "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me, and not to me only...". What was he meaning? Know that the last part of his life, one of his prison letters, was that beautiful

letter to his beloved and longed for children in Philippi, and he said, "Leaving the things which are behind... I press toward the mark for the prize of the on-high calling of God". But then, "I count not myself to have attained, neither am I already perfect: but this one thing I do, if by any means I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, but the righteousness which is of God through faith".

The last, longing cry of the apostle was that the righteousness of God through Christ should adorn him; he should attain unto it; that is, that he should stand before the Throne of the eternal burnings without any qualms, any fears, any flinchings; stand justified, stand in a righteousness not his own: perfect, perfect in righteousness. And that is what he meant by "the crown of righteousness," - to stand at last before the eternal Throne of Infinite Holiness, clothed with Divine Righteousness, with all his own unrighteousness and imperfection gone forever. "Robed in righteousness," that, he called the crowning thing for his life; the fullest realisation of his ambition, "That I may stand perfect, lacking nothing... I'm not already perfect, I have not already attained, but if only I can attain to being found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, but His righteousness." A glorious end!

That's a crown to covet, that's a crown to suffer for, to live for, to be abandoned for. A crown indeed of glory that! For, dear friends, you and I are in agreement on this, that if there's one thing we long for it is the full and final escape from our own sinfulness, this accursed fallen nature and all that it carries with it. The crown of righteousness... and then the crown of Life. "Be thou faithful unto death," said the Lord, "and I will give thee a crown of life". A crown of life - what is that? "Faithful unto death" - to be answered with a crown of Life! All right, that's perfectly clear, isn't it? The crown of Life means that death has no power, is robbed of its power, death as a power is destroyed, and Life, Divine Life, resurrection Life, is mightier than all the power of death - stand in "the power of His resurrection".

In that same letter, in the same part of that letter, as we have quoted in the Philippian letter, Paul utters those words so familiar to us, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection". The cry at the end of his life: "the Power of His Resurrection". That is the ultimate and final nullifying of death in all its forms and in its whole power; standing in the good of a Life which can never, never be touched by death again. Move over to John and the Revelation: "There shall be no more death," - "a crown of life."

And then the third crown is the one we are speaking about, "the crown of glory". You know what we've said about glory. Glory is the expression of the full satisfaction of God's nature. Can that ever be for me, for you, that crown; the full satisfaction of God's own nature? That is what He has called us to, redeemed us for, is working in us unto, and will work to the end for this crown of glory. And although perhaps at the end of our longest life, we shall not have reached the place where we do at that point *utterly*, fully, and finally satisfy the nature of God, well, in our last moments, in our last breath, there will still be a lot of imperfection about us; but, remember, when *He* takes the responsibility of ending the process, He makes up *all* that would have been if He hadn't done so.

There is in a moment, the twinkling of an eye, "we shall be changed". All that we lack then will be added. All that would have been if we had lived on and on and on under His grace, under His power and working, will be put to our account. "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness." I go to sleep not altogether in Thy likeness, but "I awake in Thy likeness". It's just that, the mighty thing that God is going to add to those who are faithful, faithful to the end; not perfect, but in the way of being changed into the same glory, from one degree to another, from one image to another. The crown of glory is God's final approval. God's final approval, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord".

And, believe me, the Lord will never be joyful, really, over what is not according to His own nature. But when He says, "The joy of thy Lord," He will have got what His heart had been set upon, and the crown of glory, God's full and complete approval, satisfaction. Oh, what a wonderful, almost unbelievable, prospect there is along the pathway of glory.

Well, I must leave all the rest with you; all the other connections of riches, and this very, very imperfect and limited setting forth of the riches of His grace and the riches of His glory. May the Lord just Himself follow on and teach all that we cannot teach, that we're yet to know about this, and use even this for our help, for our encouragement, to go on in the way of the glory, unto the everlasting glory.