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The Riches of His Grace

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"In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).

In his Letters the Apostle Paul uses the word 'riches' some thirteen times. Each occasion has a context which is deeply valuable. From these we take this one: "The riches of His grace", and we are going to let David and Solomon be our example of this superlative grace. I would just like that you look at one or two fragments in the first book of the Chronicles, chapter 28, verses 1-6:

"And David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that served the king by course, and the captains of thousands, and the captains of hundreds, and the rulers over all the substance and possessions of the king, and of his sons, with the officers and the mighty men, even all the mighty men of valour, unto Jerusalem. Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: as for me, it was in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God; and I had made ready for the building. But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou art a man of war, and hast shed blood. Howbeit the Lord, the God of Israel, chose me out of all the house of my father to be king over Israel for ever: for he hath chosen Judah to be prince; and in the house of Judah, the house of my father: and among the sons of my father he took pleasure in me to make me king over all Israel: and

of all my sons, (for the Lord hath given me many sons) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father."

"Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 3:1).

"And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly" (2 Chronicles 1:1).

We have said that the summit of Old Testament fullness was reached in Solomon, and we shall find that Solomon will lead us to Christ, and then Solomon will be eclipsed, as out of view, when the Greater than Solomon is here. Solomon's wealth and wisdom and glory and heritage are proverbial and fabulous, renowned, and far famed. He does represent the summit of kingship and glory in the Old Testament. Jesus Himself acknowledged the greatness of Solomon on two occasions, you remember. He pointed to the flowers in the field and said: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Solomon in all his glory was proverbial, even in those days; Jesus Himself acknowledged it. On another occasion He said: "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon," acknowledging the great place that Solomon had in the world of wisdom. But then Jesus added after that, "Solomon in all his glory", and 'Solomon in all his wisdom', that "a greater than Solomon is here". Solomon fades when Jesus arrives. The unsearchable riches of Christ! We have, then, to consider how in various respects Jesus is greater than Solomon.

One thing that we have been saying, and that is in our hearts in this time together, is our great need for a new apprehension of the Lord Jesus to adjust everything for us. But there are two preliminary considerations before we can proceed with this matter. Why did God magnify Solomon? For it says that "the Lord magnified Solomon above all that have been before him". The Lord endowed Solomon with this fabulous, proverbial greatness of wealth, dominion and wisdom. Why did He do it? God from eternity has only one person in view, and that person was not Solomon, nor any other one but His Son, and if the Lord so magnified Solomon, it was to bring His Son, the still greater, into view. Through the greatest thing He could do here on this earth to lead on to the much greater of the heavenly. God had His Son in view, the other One, the Greater than Solomon, and that is why He did it. I wish Solomon had known that! It would have saved him a great deal of historic tragedy. If we really saw that, and this One, this only One, were ever filling our vision, all these tragedies, mistakes and blunders that we make - or that Solomon did later - would be obviated.

Oh, the wonderful things that God said *seemingly* about Solomon could never possibly have been fulfilled in Solomon himself. They were quite beyond him! God was reaching beyond this man in the things that He seemingly said about him, and to him, and you have to pick up your New Testament in order to discover to Whom they really applied. Well, we may come on that as we go on, but the point is that we must not see Solomon as just the end in himself. We must look through him to Another and see that God in His sovereignty magnified and glorified this Solomon only with another One in view, and in the long run we shall see the Greater than Solomon, the Greater than the greatest that God has ever done on this earth.

Another thing we must remember in this preliminary consideration is that Solomon was not really himself. I mean this: Solomon was his father, David. Solomon was the fullness of his father, David,

and you can never see Solomon without seeing David. That is, it was not so much the person as the significance of the person that is present in contemplating Solomon. When you turn to the New Testament, Solomon is only referred to, at most a half a dozen times, almost in a casual way, but David is referred to in a very positive way over thirty times. That is a statement you must dwell upon, of course, to verify. When you open your New Testament at the first book, the Gospel by Matthew, you find that you have read but a few words and you are on David. He comes there, in that place of priority, right at the beginning of the New Testament. You go through the New Testament and, as I have said, you will find yourself with David more than thirty times. Right on the last page, in the twenty-second chapter of the book of the Revelation, David creeps up again. This man is something very wonderful, very full, and he has a very large place. There is one clause in Isaiah 55, and repeated in the New Testament, which defines this as "the sure mercies of David". Oh, to be able to plumb the depth of that! This morning we shall see a little of it - "the sure mercies of David".

All that pertained to Solomon was "the sure mercies of David", and that brings us to the first of the greatneses, the first of the "unsearchable riches of Christ", the first in Ephesians, and everywhere and always: The riches of His grace. Have you seen the riches of His grace as conveyed to us by Solomon? Having seen the great eminence of glory, of wealth, of wisdom to which God brought this man Solomon, we have to look to see where it all began. Where did all that begin?

There is a very dark background indeed to Solomon's birth and life. We have said that he was the fullness of his father, David. Solomon was the son of David's old age. He was not the only son - we read: "God hath given me many sons". We know some of them, and one in particular - Absalom. But Solomon was the son of David's old age, and it was an old age full of shadows: the shadows of tragedies, of sorrows, and of great mistakes. Solomon was related to the darkest clouds in David's life.

We know the story of David's great sin with Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. David, relaxing wrongly at the time when kings go out to battle, went up to the housetop (there are relaxations which are very dangerous!) and from the housetop he espied that beautiful woman, Bathsheba, and coveted her. His passions rose and he said: 'I must have her.' Passion is a very, very fertile thing in evil, and so he schemed to get her. You know the rest of the story - how he planned, plotted, to get her husband, Uriah, in the forefront of the battle, and then told the other fighters to retire and leave him alone to the enemy, which they did. Uriah was left and slain according to David's precalculated plan, and they came back to David and told him: 'It has succeeded. Uriah is dead.' Then David sent to fetch Bathsheba, and he took her. The child born of that iniquitous union was smitten by God. He languished for days and then he died. Nathan, the prophet, went to David with a message from God and wrapped it up in a parable about something that happened in the city, and he painted it in such lurid pictures that David rose in anger, in wrath, and said: 'The man who has done such a thing shall die.' Nathan pointed at him and said: "Thou art the man!" Nathan brought home the accusation in a smashing, crushing blow, and then added: "Thou shalt not die." We will see the point of that in a moment.

The depth and greatness of David's sin is seen in those terrible confessions, heart-brokenness and sorrows. We have to look at the Psalms, for they are touched here and there with this. In Psalm 32: "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." Psalm 38 verse 18: "For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin." And then a whole Psalm - Psalm 51 - one of the most terrible bits of literature in existence. Look at the heading of this Psalm: "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him after

he had gone in to Bathsheba." ... "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight." So the whole Psalm, which we will not read, but one more fragment: "Deliver me, O God, from blood guiltiness." Here we are; broken-hearted, penitent, standing at God's tribunal, pleading for mercy, full of self-condemnation, a conscience stained with iniquity, and God's face turned away, a desolation of heart. He cries: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, have mercy upon me."

David had sinned the sin which put him beyond the pale of the virtue of all the Levitical sacrifices. If you read the sacrifices and the conditions, you will find that they do not cover this sin, they have no provision for this. Even the cities of refuge which provided for the man-slayer would not take in David, because the man-slayer who found refuge there was the man who had caused someone to die *inadvertently*, without premeditation, by accident. So there was no provision for him, a man who had premeditated, planned, schemed, and brought about a death; the city of refuge had no place for him. No sacrifice is provided for him, therefore. In this Psalm 51, David says: "Sacrifice and offering and burnt offering thou desirest not" - 'It is no good. I have not any.' He was out of the pale of all their sacrifices and their virtue by premeditation. Oh, how far this man had gone! No wonder his conscience made him cry out like this! Uriah's death - murder - lies at David's door, and the little innocent babe's death lies at his door. What are you going to do with a man like that? What are you going to do with a sin like that? It is outside the pale of all God's Mosaic prescribing. What answer have we got to this? How can this man escape? How can glory be the end of that? There is only one answer, and there *is* an answer: Grace! Grace goes beyond all Old Testament limits.

David is the greatest Old Testament example of pardon through Grace. Remember that! That is why he is brought into view so much. That is the meaning of "the sure mercies of David". Why of David? Unsearchable riches of His grace! The son gathers into himself all that meaning of Divine grace, what grace can do in relation to a situation like that. How glorious! Glory can follow grace. "The glory of HIS grace" is a phrase in Ephesians. My, how deep!

You ask: Can there be anything greater, a greater demonstration of grace than that toward David represented in a temporal way in Solomon? (Underline that word 'temporal'.) Can there be anything greater than that? Is there greater grace than that represented by Solomon? Oh, yes: "A greater than Solomon is here!" As Son of Man, God's Son came into the inky darkness and blackness of the sin of the whole *race*, not of one man. He bore the judgment of that sin upon the whole race and brought God's infinite grace to the world - to the *world!*

Look again at that cross on Calvary's hill! Take another look, and listen. Listen to that bitter, heartbroken cry: "Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?" ... "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The word embracing all time and eternity: "forsaken... forsaken", David may have tasted something of that. Dear friends, when you look at that cross and hear that cry, you touch the deepest, deepest depth of human tragedy, that is, that the race, but for the grace of God, is God-forsaken eternally. If you have ever tasted a deep, deep sorrow within the compass of human capacity, you know that that hour of darkness is like an eternity. It is not momentary; it is like an eternity. It seems that an end of things for ever has been touched. In that moment when Jesus cried "forsaken, forsaken", He touched the eternity of man's destiny outside of God. That cry with that word "forsaken" is the measure of human depravity. We have yet to feel the tremendous impact of the Cross in this sense - that if Jesus had not gone there for us, we would be eternally forsaken of God. The face of God is

turned away. The blackness and darkness of eternal doom rests upon the race - but for the Cross of Jesus Christ and what He has done there as forsaken.

Have you ever tasted the slightest drop of death? Oh, yes, it is possible, even in our Christian, spiritual life. I confess that there have been times when I wondered if the Lord had gone out of my universe, if He was really still alive and if He had not forgotten me. I cried: 'Has the Lord forgotten to be gracious?' It was as though the Lord had gone. I could not find Him. I would pray, but I could not touch Him. A *little* experience like that is not God forsaking us, thank God! It never is, for He said: "I will never forsake you", but a little consciousness of the remoteness of the Lord from us is the worst experience of tragedy in our life. Oh, it is the most awful thing to have to go for a little while without the realization of the Lord, to be groping for the Lord and not finding Him, like Job, a righteous man: "I go on the right hand, he is not there; on the left, he is not there; I go forward, he is not there. Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" Have you had any experience at all like that? I do not want you to have it if you have not. Do not covet it. But some of you might just know a day, or a few days or more, of: 'Oh, where is the Lord? Where is the Lord?' It may be that the Lord lets us know something about that to bring us into that fellowship of His suffering and to make us understand how great a thing He has done for us, for He does not believe in theories and doctrines. The Lord is very practical. Experience is His school, and He will teach us in that heavy school of experience.

Yes, a greater than Solomon or David is here. He came, and He touched the deepest depth of human depravity which is found in that word "forsaken". Anybody who does not believe in the depravity of human nature, and a total depravity, has not yet seen the Cross of the Lord Jesus, and seen us there, forsaken of God, on the one side. Yes, grace reaches the deepest point of human tragedy, and that is man's forsakenness, but for Christ. Grace! What a word this is! If Solomon, in all his glory, was brought out of that terrible iniquity, judgment, outside of the pale of Levitical provision; if all his glory comes out of that, what can you say about it? What word is there to explain it? Only this one: Grace! We will go around that word for all time and all eternity.

Dr. J. H. Jowett, who was one of the greatest preachers of the last century, said this: "There is a word I have wrestled with so much. There is no word with which I have wrestled more than this one: Grace! It is like expressing a great American forest in a word. No phrase can express the meaning of grace. Grace is more than mercy, it is more than tender mercy, it is more than a multitude of tender mercies. Grace is more than love, it is more than innocent love. Grace is holy love, but it is holy love instantaneously going out in eager quest toward the unholy and the unlovely. It is the ministry of a great sacrifice, to redeem the unholy and unlovely into the beauty of God. The grace of God is holy love on the move to thee and to me and the like of me and thee. It is God's unmerited, undeserved going out toward the children of man that He might bring them into the glory and brightness of His own likeness." Well, that is an attempt to define this word.

Was not Paul right in speaking of the unsearchable riches of His grace? And Paul knew what he was talking about. There was a background to this man's life. 'I am not worthy,' said he, 'to be called an apostle. I persecuted the church.' He was on his knees before the Lord, and the Lord was showing him His grace and His mercy. He said: 'But, Lord, when Your servant Stephen was martyred, I was there, giving my consent. What ground have I for apostleship? What ground have I to be anything at all? My hands are stained with blood guiltiness, all premeditated, designed and enacted with terrific force. How dare I look up into Thy face and be a disciple, a child of God, to say nothing about being an apostle!' "But unto me, who am less than the least of all the saints, was this grace given to preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ."

If you cannot comprehend me, may the Lord register the impression upon us!

Prayer: How easily, with facile speech, we repeat: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Oh, Lord, challenge us with that word, lift us with that word, save us with that word. Can we dare to say, glorify us with that word? Oh, if all the words are forgotten, and our human efforts to convey it fail entirely, leave the impression! The grace of God is indeed the greatest thing in this universe for humans such as we are. We commit it to Thee; oh, give us to glory in Thy grace, for Thy Name's sake. Amen.