

**Preaching the Unfathomable Riches of Christ**

Scripture: Ephesians 3:7-11

Code: 49-12

You have heard music that was designed to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, and I want to take you to a portion of Scripture that does the very same thing. And we're there already, in the last few weeks; so go back to Ephesians chapter 3, Ephesians chapter 3, as we are working our way through Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. And I want to read the opening eleven verses of chapter 3. We've considered them in past weeks, but I want to bring us up to date.

Ephesians 3:1, "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This is a profound portion of Scripture for many reasons, but I want us to focus on verse 8 and a very important statement regarding the apostle Paul, who says, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." "This grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ."

Now remember, the apostle Paul is an apostle to the Gentiles; and as we've already learned in chapter 3 and back in chapter 2, Jewish people and Gentiles were full of hostility and hatred toward one another; there was a lot of historical reason for that. And when the New Testament arrived, and the church was established, Paul had the very difficult task of declaring both to Jew and Gentiles that there was no longer a distinction in the people of God, no longer a special covenant nation, as there had been under the Old Covenant, namely Israel. But rather that Jew and Gentile were equal in one body in Christ, and all the unfathomable riches of the Messiah—which is what the term *Christ* refers to—were available to the Gentiles to the same extent that they were available to the Jews. This was very difficult for Gentiles to understand because they saw Jews as a bizarre kind of religious cult. This was even harder for the Jews because they saw Gentiles as blasphemers, enemies of God, and enemies of their nation.

So Paul had this very difficult task of communicating that Jew and Gentile are one in the body of Christ. This is the church. It was such a tough message that it brought about into Paul's life immense hostility from the Jews. A riot started in Jerusalem; they tried to kill him on the spot—a Jewish mob

did. He was rescued by the Roman soldiers, taken into protective custody. Eventually he was a prisoner for years; he went to Rome. Eventually in Acts, chopped off his head, and he was martyred. What precipitated all of that was not so much what he had said to the Gentiles, but what he had said to the Jews about Jew and Gentile being one in Christ. That was a hard message for them to swallow.

And I said last week, unity in the church is a very difficult thing to achieve. There is a spiritual unity: All who are in Christ are one with all others who are in Christ. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with all other believers. But the practical outworking of that unity is a great challenge, and I think it can only happen when we become focused on the person of Jesus Christ, as we gaze at His glory. Second Corinthians 3:18, we're changed into His image, from one level of glory to the next, by the Holy Spirit. And as we become more like Christ then we become more like each other. Christ has to be the focus of everything in the church. And Paul declares that in that eighth verse when he says that it's in Christ where all the unfathomable riches reside.

Everything we need for life and godliness is found in Christ. And so he was over-awed by the fact that he had been given a grace, certainly a grace, a mercy from heaven to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ. This is the highest calling. This is the noblest task that any human being can ever do. This is the most exalted work. This is the sweetest joy. This is the task that is the most serious, the most impactful, the most necessary, the most honorable, and the only earthly task that has eternal value.

No behavior, no behavior comes close to the significance of preaching the unfathomable riches of Christ. And Paul says this a lot of ways in his writing, and I will remind you of a few of them just to set it in your mind. In Romans chapter 1, verse 15, he says, "So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first"—in chronology—"and also to the Greek"—or the Gentile. "I am eager to preach; I am not ashamed to preach."

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 18, he acknowledges, "The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . [So] we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

In chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians, he says, "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." He was eager to preach, he was eager to preach in the power of God; he was eager to preach Christ, and Christ crucified.

In Colossians chapter 1, as he comes to the end of that chapter, he says in verse 27, "God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." His objective was to preach Christ—to preach the unsearchable, unfathomable, untraceable riches in Christ—and so that everyone who heard and believed could be made complete in Christ.

And you do remember Romans, familiar portion of Scripture, in chapter 10. We can begin at verse 14: “How . . . will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” The message is clear: There’s no distinction between Jew and Greek. The same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him. For whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how will they hear without a preacher? The most important task there is to be the preacher of the untraceable, unsearchable, unfathomable riches that are in Christ Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul therefore says, “We do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus.” This is the high calling of the preacher. Honestly, I am reluctant to even comment on the low, shallow, man-centered preaching that dominates our day, tickling listeners’ ears with notions that make them feel better about themselves.

Paul preached not the dignity of man, not the satisfaction of man’s fallen heart desires, not the potential of man. He preached not man, but man’s Redeemer, man’s Savior. He did not preach principles of human achievement or pathways to human success or even moral reform; he preached salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. Paul did not preach to please people; he preached to convict them of their sin and convince them of all the glories available to them in Christ that would everlastingly overcome the sin and its sentence of eternal death. Paul did not preach to make people better in this life, but to introduce them to the Savior who would rescue them from hell and bring them into the glory of the life to come in eternal heaven. It’s little wonder, then, that in Galatians 6:14 Paul said, “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In Colossians chapter 2 and verse 8, Paul says this: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception”—human ideas—“according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” The unfathomable riches of Christ bound up in salvation.

People ask me frequently—more frequently, I guess, than you might be expecting—“As you study the Bible and have done it for all these years, do you discover anything new?” Only every day. Only every time I pick up the Scripture. I have a finite mind, and it’s far more finite than any of you might imagine. And I cannot comprehend the infinite realities of Christ and the ways of Christ. The riches of Christ are untraceable to me. The Word of God in the revelation of Christ is literally incomprehensible as to its fullness. I always say I feel like trying to grasp all of Christ is like standing on the shore of the Pacific Ocean and trying to sweep it back with a broom. I can’t even begin to comprehend what Christ is in all His glory. His riches are unfathomable.

That language is borrowed from Job, by the way. Back in the fifth chapter of Job, we read, “But as for me”—verse 8—“I would seek God, and I would place my cause before God; who does great and

unsearchable things, wonders without number.” I think we are well aware that that is true: that God is incomprehensible, that His ways are unsearchable, untraceable, unfathomable. Oh, we know enough about Him to be redeemed by Him and to serve Him, but we also acknowledge that He is far beyond our comprehension in His fullness.

Listen to the ninth chapter of Job. Job begins to talk about God. In verse 5, he says, “It is God who removes the mountains, they know not how, when He overturns them in His anger; [and it is God] who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; [it is God] who commands the sun not to shine, and sets a seal upon the stars; [it is God] who alone stretches out the heavens and tramples down the waves of the sea; who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades”—the constellations—“and the chambers of the south.” Then this tenth verse: “who does great things, unfathomable, and wondrous works without number. Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him; were He to move past me, I would not perceive Him. Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him? Would could say to him, ‘What are You doing?’” The unsearchable ways of God, then, were clear way back in the patriarchal period—to those in the time of the early patriarchs, as marked out in Job. God’s ways are unsearchable.

The New Testament version of all of that is found in Romans chapter 11, verse 33, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” So if you’re wondering whether you could focus on Christ for a lifetime and run out of material, the answer is no, not even close. You’re merely, at best, scratching the surface.

The riches of Christ are beyond our ability to trace. In fact in Romans 10:12 it says, “The same Lord is Lord of all”—Jew and Gentile—“abounding in riches for all who call on Him.” The riches are unfathomable, incomprehensible, boundless—and they’re in Christ. “Riches” is the *ploutos*, wealth, abundance. “Riches” is probably the best translation. Unfathomable means it can’t be explored, it can’t be comprehended, it can’t be traced, it can’t be tracked, it can’t be discovered. So we’re looking, in Christ, at a treasure that is inexhaustible, inexhaustible. In Him are all the riches of heaven.

Go back to Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” He “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.” Then he goes on to list them: things like divine election, sovereign love and predestination, adoption, redemption, forgiveness. He lavishes things on us out of the treasury of the unfathomable riches of Christ. This goes on all the way down to verse 14.

Now we’re talking about heavenly things, right; Ephesians 1:3, we have received all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. So let me stop right here and say we’re not talking about earthly blessings. We’re not talking about the horrendous prosperity gospel. There’s no promise you’re going to have a bigger car, a bigger house, bigger bank account, better job, get a promotion, or be healthy; there’s no promise of that. The promises of God in Christ are not tied to this fleeting life, which is a vapor that appears a little time and then vanishes away.

But how marvelous is it that the riches in Christ are eternal riches, and they come out of the treasury of heaven? They are in the heavenlies. He talks about the heavenlies so much in Ephesians. We just read it in chapter 1, verse 3: “Every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies.” Down in verse 20 of that first chapter, it says that He brought Christ out of the grave, raised Him from the dead, seated Him at His

right hand in the heavenlies, and then made Him the one who is over all of His people and all creation, and is the head of the church and the ruler of His body, “the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” It’s again heavenly riches.

Down in chapter 2 you find the same thing: in verse 6 that God has in Christ “raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenlies.” You find it in chapter 3, verse 10, “The manifold wisdom of God [is to be] known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies.” So this is synonymous with God’s everlasting, eternal kingdom. So the riches that are in Christ are not temporal, earthly, passing riches; they are eternal riches bound up in His kingdom, and only for those who live in the heavenlies because they live in His kingdom through faith in Christ.

So what exactly are these riches? Well, we can start with Ephesians. Go back to chapter 1, verse 7, and we can find specifically some things that are mentioned there in Ephesians; and we’ll look at those to start with. Ephesians 1:7, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.” So first of all, one of those riches is the riches of His grace. He needs a lot of grace because we need a lot of grace. His grace is rich; it is rich enough to forgive all our sins. It is rich enough to forgive all the sins of all the people who will believe through all of human history. It is rich enough to keep on forgiving us and forgiving us and forgiving us and forgiving us, as long as we live in this world. It is boundless, rich grace.

Down in verse 18 of that same chapter, chapter 1 of Ephesians, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” Not only is His grace rich, but His glory is rich. In other words He has future plans for us, to give us an inheritance.

If you go over to chapter 2, verse 7, you see the same thing, “In the ages to come He [will] show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” What are the ages to come? Eternity. In eternity He’s going to keep lavishing us with endless grace. His grace is rich to forgive our sins here and now, His grace is rich enough to pour out everlasting kindness on us in eternity, and that is the glory that is rich to provide our eternal inheritance.

Look at chapter 2 and verse 4: “But God, being rich in mercy”—mercy means He comes to us in our weakness, He comes to us in our inability, He picks us up when we are hopeless and helpless—and His mercy is rich “because of His great love with which He loved us.” He loves us with such a lavish love, such a profound love. Paul talks about it as having height and depth and length and breadth. This lavish love extends the riches of His mercy on us, covers us with His own righteousness, and supplies all our needs.

Look at chapter 3, verse 16. Paul is praying here, and he prays “that [the Father] would grant you”—that is believers—“according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.” So we’ve seen the riches of grace for our justification, we’ve seen the riches of mercy and the riches of grace for our glorification and our eternal inheritance; and here is the riches of His glory deposited in our sanctification, strengthening us with power through the Holy Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may settle down and be at home in our hearts. The riches of Christ have to do with our election, as we read in chapter 1. They have to do with our redemption. They have to do with our justification, our sanctification, and our glorification. And they are lavish to cover all of those areas: justification, sanctification, glorification.

In Romans 9:23, Paul says God made “known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory.” How rich does glory have to be to take us into His eternal presence, we who are so wretched in our sin? Riches for our election, riches for our justification, riches for our sanctification, riches for our glorification—all of this brings us through the redemptive plan into that eternal inheritance waiting for us.

In Colossians chapter 2, we can add to that verse 2, “That their hearts”—Paul is desirous of this—“that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining”—watch this—“all the riches that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” This is the riches of truth, the wealth that brings us understanding, and grants us by that understanding full assurance of our standing and our salvation and our present and our future.

The truth that grants us the knowledge of God’s mystery: In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. That is why in chapter 3, verse 16 of Colossians, Paul says, “Let the word concerning Christ richly dwell within you.” Is that what dominates your conscious mind? Is Christ your preoccupation? You gaze at His glory, and therefore be changed into His image from one level of glory to the next by the Holy Spirit—that is the Spirit’s work.

When the Word of Christ dwells in you richly, when the riches of Christ are deposited in your mind and in your life, what happens is you begin to be able to speak with all wisdom in teaching and admonishing. You begin to worship with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your heart to the Lord. When Christ is your full preoccupation and you are lavished with the riches that are in Christ, you become wise, you become a worshiper, you become thankful. And then verse 17, “Whatever you do in word or deed, [you] do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” You become thankful.

It’s when you are literally living in the lavish reality of divine riches that are yours in Christ, because you come to know Christ so deeply, because you study the revelation of Christ in His Word, so that the Word dwells in you richly. All the richness of Christ is only deposited in your life when you understand the Word of God. That’s what makes you wise. That’s what makes you a true worshiper. That’s what gives you joy and gratitude and helps you to live to His glory.

In Hebrews chapter 11 there’s another look at the riches from a different angle, going back to Moses. And Moses chose, verse 26, Moses chose “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.” Moses was living in Pharaoh’s palace; Moses had all of the Egyptian wealth at his disposal. It meant nothing to him. He chose, rather, the reproach that came with focusing on the Messiah to come, who wasn’t going to come for a long, long time. But Moses was looking ahead to the riches that come from heaven, that were basically going to be earned in the arrival of Messiah but were already available to those who were faithful; and he chose that over the treasures of Egypt. I can tell you that there are certainly many people sitting in churches these days who would gladly take the treasures of America, whatever they are, before they would ever think of a reproach that might be on them for Christ, because they’re looking for something now and not the reward that comes in the future.

You know, Paul went through so much in his ministry, so much suffering, and he gives us an insight

into why he did that. In 2 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 4, he talks about endurance, affliction, hardship, distress—verse 5—beatings, imprisonment, tumults, “in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing.” Why did he go through all of that? To some, he was a hero; to others, he was an enemy. Why did he submit himself to that? Verse 10, “As poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.” I mean, virtually he had nothing of this world’s goods, but he had all the heavenly riches that were in Christ. Is that not enough to preach Christ? What gross disregard there is in so many pulpits of the call to preach Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I think of it so often as I hear, whether it’s on the Internet or television or radio, people preaching or talking or whatever you call it. And I’m always asking, “Lord, why don’t they preach Christ? What more can you want than all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies? What more can they want than to be made complete in Him?” But it seems that they are happy to tickle people’s ears.

It’s a privilege to preach Christ. And I just wanted to establish that based on what Paul said and say a few things about it that come out of this text. Back to Ephesians 3. It’s a privilege to preach Christ, but you have to understand some things before you run to go into that responsibility. I mean, we all give testimony to Christ as believers, but to embark upon this most sacred task with the greatest accountability and responsibility and the greatest potential for chastening from the Lord Himself, you want to stop and think about what you’re doing. “Stop being so many teachers,” James says, “because theirs is the greater condemnation.”

If you’re thinking of being a preacher of Christ, hopefully you’re actually thinking of being a preacher of Christ—the unfathomable riches of Christ. That would eliminate many preachers, just that: Just leave us with those who preach Christ, and forget the rest. But if you’re thinking even to do that—and it is the highest calling, the noblest task, the most serious duty, the supreme joy—there are a few things you need to understand. And I’m going to give you just a few of them that are in this text.

We’re talking about heavenlies here. So you’re preaching Christ, you’re preaching the riches of Christ in the heavenlies. So basically you’re connecting with heaven, not earth. You’re connecting with heaven, and you’re asking to draw down heaven. And you don’t rush into that. So there are several things you need to recognize.

One, this is a heavenly calling, this is a heavenly calling. Look at verse 6: the last word, *gospel*, “the gospel,” then verse 7, Paul says, “Of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me.” Now I know the gospel must be preached, Romans 10:14, “How will they hear without a preacher?” But how do I know that I am to be the minister who preaches the unfathomable riches of Christ? Well, you say for Paul it was easy. He’s on the road to Damascus, and the Lord interrupts him, makes him blind, knocks him down, calls him into ministry; you can read about it in the ninth chapter of Acts. Paul had an unmistakable calling into ministry.

In 2 Timothy 1, he talks about Christ Jesus and says that, in verse 10, “[He is] now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher.” Paul never had any doubt about his

calling. He had been appointed by God as a preacher, and he uses the terms, in verse 7, “of which”—the gospel—“of which I was made a minister.” That’s a passive verb. “I was made a minister.” “It wasn’t something I sought on my own. It wasn’t my desire because I thought I had certain skills, or I thought I could be successful. It’s not an entrepreneurial decision to make. I was made a minister.” And by the way, “minister” is the word *diakonos*, which means a table waiter, which means a servant. “I was made a servant, a waiter.” And if you were made a minister, then you recognize; and if you are only a servant, you recognize that you were made a servant under someone else’s authority. And it is the authority of Christ Himself, who has all authority over His church.

So Paul knew that he had been made, by the Lord Himself, a servant and a preacher. That’s why in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 16, he says this: “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I’m under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” If you don’t preach the good news concerning Christ, and you were called to do that, condemnation is then pronounced on your head.

Paul says in verse 17, “If I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.” Nobody should ever engage in preaching the unfathomable riches of Christ who doesn’t have a heavenly calling. Paul understood that. He says, “I don’t deserve a reward for this; it’s required of servants that they be faithful,” he said. “So if I don’t preach the gospel, woe is me.”

In Colossians chapter 1, twice, in verses 23 and 25, he makes that same statement. End of verse 23, Colossians 1, “I, Paul, was made a minister.” Verse 25, “Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.”

Now look, I know we’re talking about an apostle, but the principle is nonetheless the same. If you’re going to engage in this, of all tasks, you need to have a heavenly calling. And so the immediate question comes, “If I don’t have a Damascus Road experience, how do I know if I have a heavenly calling?” And I would suggest briefly there are five things you need to know to ascertain that you have a heavenly calling.

Number one is internal: a strong desire. Paul talks about desiring the work of the ministry. A strong internal desire, a restlessness in your soul; a desire that’s so strong that it excludes all other desires.

Secondly, a strong external encouragement. In other words, there are people around you that know you that are pressing upon you and saying, “You need to do this. You need to preach Christ. You need to be in ministry.”

Thirdly, a loving concern for others, because you’re going to spend your entire life giving yourself away for other people, because the grace gift that’s given to you is for them. So a strong internal desire, strong external encouragement, and you have to be defined by a loving concern for others. That often is missing among people in pastoral leadership, who are there because they want to promote themselves for their own glory, grandeur.

There’s a fourth principle, and I think this is very important: an overwhelming constraint to know and speak the Word of God, an overwhelming constraint to know and speak the Word of God. Strong



desire in the heart, strong encouragement from those outside, loving concern to give your life for others, and an overwhelming constraint to know and speak the Word of God.

And fifthly, confirmation by the church. Confirmation, like Paul said to Timothy, “You were confirmed in this ministry by the laying on of the hands of the elders of the church.” I mean, you may have a more unique call to ministry. You may feel like there was an incident or a message you heard, or a sermon or a book you were reading, or some moment in time when the Spirit of God prompted your heart, and you felt that in some ways heaven had touched you. I’m not saying that’s not true, but I am saying these are the things that need to mark someone who steps into this calling. It is a heavenly calling. And Paul was made a minister; and I read you three times where he says that, and then he says, “If I don’t preach, I’m under a curse.” You need to feel that kind of constraint.

But there was more behind Paul’s ministry. Not only a clear understanding of his heavenly calling, but a clear understanding of the need for heavenly power. Go back to verse 7, the end of the verse, “According to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given.” He always talks about his call with grace; third time he talks about grace. He says, “Look, I have nothing to offer. I have to minister according to the working of His power because as far as I’m concerned, I am the very least of all saints. And even doing this is a grace work of God.” Grace gives the calling, and grace gives the power.

Again, comparing what he said in Colossians—and he wrote these two epistles at the same time—listen to Colossians 1:29, “For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” “Striving according to His power, which mightily works in me.” How do you know when it’s God’s power and not yours? When it’s not just successful, but it’s spiritually life-transforming. When the effect of your ministry is not more people but different people—transformed people, regenerated people, sanctified people—then you know that your proclamation of the Word, energized by the Spirit, is transforming them on the inside.

The measure of a man’s ministry is not the size of the congregation; it’s the spiritual life of the congregation because therein lies the work which only the Holy Spirit can do. Paul knew that.

In the fifteenth chapter of Romans and verse 15, “I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God”—it’s always grace because he’s so unworthy—“[grace] to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable”—why?—“sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” He didn’t want to do anything in the flesh, anything in human energy. Nothing about human effort had any interest to him; that’s why I read you, earlier in 1 Corinthians 2, “I didn’t come to you in human wisdom, enticing words of human persuasion.”

In verse 18 he says, “I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.” It’s all about what Christ has accomplished. It’s all about the power of the Holy Spirit. That’s what sustained Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 4, he says—I love this, “We have this treasure”—of the gospel—“in clay pots, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.” Why? Because as he says in verse 8, “I am the very least of all saints. I am the least.” In Romans 7, he says he’s a

wretched man, who has not yet been delivered from the body of death.

In 1 Timothy chapter 1, listen to his testimony; it's remarkable. First Timothy 1, verse 11, he says he's been given the gospel of the blessed God as a trust. And in verse 12, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into ministry"—there it is again—"even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." How do you go from being the foremost sinner to being the preacher of the unsearchable riches of Christ? It's mercy. It's grace. He uses both those terms.

Now what about the sin in his life? Did that not disqualify him? The weight of the sense of sin on Paul comes not from the amount of transgression on the outside, but the sense of sin on the inside. When sin gets to the outside, you're disqualified. Qualifications are laid out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Paul is not saying that "I'm counting up the amount of transgressions on the outside"; he's simply saying, "There is always the incessant battle on the inside." But he could also say in 2 Corinthians 1:12, "My conscience is clear, that I've conducted my life in a blameless way."

How do you get to the place where you're that humble? I'll tell you one way not to get there: by promoting yourself, by building your brand—whatever that means. There's one way to get to this kind of humility; it's pretty simple: Just focus on Christ your whole life. He'll crush you under the weight of His glory.

Anytime you hear a proud preacher, you're listening to a man who has no real, clear love for and understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ; because when you come to Christ and you plunge into the untraceable riches of Christ, you lose all pride. It's a crushing reality. Focus on Christ produces humility. Humility leads to power. Second Corinthians 12, Paul says, "When I'm weak, then I'm"—what?—"I'm strong. God's power is perfected in my weakness, my weakness."

There's a third thing you have to recognize before you run into this responsibility. Not only a heavenly calling and heavenly power, but heavenly truth. Now look at verse 9. Paul says this is the task: "to bring to light"—that's exposition—"to bring to light what is the stewardship of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." What is that? Well, we know what that is.

Go back to verse 3. He talks about the revelation that came from God regarding the mystery. And verse 4, he says he had insight and could provide understanding into the mystery of Christ. And what was the mystery of Christ? It was something that was hidden, verse 5, in the past and is "now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." And what is it? "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." It's the gospel, and it's the one body made up of all people: no male, no female, no slave, no free, no Jew, no Gentile—we're all one in Christ. And that is the gospel.

So in verse 9, he says, "[My calling is] to bring to light"—just to turn the light on—"what is the stewardship of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." In other words, "My job is to turn the light on revelation, and in particular, the New Testament, which is where

the mystery are all explained.

So another way to say it is the third thing you have to consider if you want to do this—is that you'll give your whole life to heavenly truth, heavenly truth, heavenly truth. And by the way, the New Testament isn't done by some other deity, because the One who has revealed this mystery is the same One, Paul says, who created all things. So we don't have one God in the Old Testament and another one in the New. And the fullness to that truth is what you saw back in chapter 1, verse 18. Paul says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, seated Him at His right hand in heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, dominion, every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of all who fills all in all." The full sum of the gospel. So you're give the rest of your life to heavenly truth, not earthly information.

But finally, you must consider not only a heavenly calling and heavenly power but heavenly truth, and then a heavenly purpose: Why are you doing it? Verse 10—this might surprise you: "So that"—here's the purpose; and the word *purpose* even appears in verse 11, as you'll note—"so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This might shock you. What is God's purpose in us? Preaching the unsearchable, unfathomable riches of Christ so that the manifold wisdom of God in the gospel might come to the church, be known through the church. But that's only the intermediate objective. The final goal is "to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies." We do what we do in order to bring the multifaceted, multicolored display of divine wisdom in all that connects to our redemption to the church, and then through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. Who are they? Angels. Angels. That sound strange to you? But that's exactly what he's saying.

What is God's goal in this whole redemptive plan? To put the church on display to the angels. Verse 11 says, "This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord." His purpose was not to save sinners; that was an intermediate goal. His purpose ultimately was to put on the display of saving power to the holy angels. Holy angels.

Peter says in 1 Peter 1:12 angels desire to look into these things. No angels were redeemed. The fallen angels were eternally dismissed from the presence of God, assigned to the lake of fire. There's no salvation among angels, so angels have no experience of mercy, or grace, or forgiveness, or transgression, or redemption. But they are very interested in that. They are absorbed with knowing the fullness of God's glory, and to see redemption, and grace, and mercy, and forgiveness, and salvation, and justification, and adoption, and all the facets of salvation. They have to look outside themselves. Paul makes a statement in 1 Corinthians 4:9 that we are spectacles to angels, spectacles to angels.

Do you remember Luke 15? What happens in heaven when a person is redeemed? The angels rejoice. The angels rejoice. Paul in 1 Timothy 5:21 charges Timothy, "I solemnly charge you in the

presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels.” “They’re watching you, Timothy.” First Corinthians 11:10, they’re watching how women conduct themselves in the church. They desire to look into these things. Hebrews 1:14, they are ministering spirits to the church.

It is only through the redemption of the church that the holy angels can see the full panoply of the multicolored wisdom of God. They learn of God’s power in creation. They learn of His providence in history. They learn of His triumph over sin and death and hell through the unfolding plan of salvation. They learn it from the redeemed church.

Let me close with having you look at Revelation 5. It’s a glimpse of heaven. And those in heaven—we’ll pick it up at verse 9—including angels and redeemed souls, “they sang a new song” in heaven—this is a picture of heavenly worship—“Worthy are You to take the book and break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Here are the angels, along with the glorified saints, praising God for a salvation they couldn’t experience but saw through the church. “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.’

“And I looked,”—in verse 11—“and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures”—who were four particular angels—“and the elders”—who are the redeemed—“and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands”—referring to the angels. All of a sudden all the angels in heaven are saying this: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” How do they know that? They see it through the church. “And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be [glory, blessing, honor,] dominion forever and ever.’ And the four living creatures”—who are angels—“kept saying, ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshiped.” So God uses the preaching of the unsearchable riches of Christ to build the church, which then becomes to the angels the demonstration of the manifold wisdom of God that extends beyond anything they personally experience.

So what is the goal of what we do? Eternal worship of saints and angels. Is there any higher calling than that? Let’s pray.

Father, thank You for the truth. May Christ be exalted, lifted up. May His unsearchable riches continually be discovered by us as we faithfully gaze into His glory on the pages of Holy Scripture. Thank You for this revelation. Amen.

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