

The Boundless Riches of Christ

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[0 : 00] And so just that heartbeat of how can we get the gospel to new places? They're not a great presence here or a great presence there. And so how can we do that?

And so it just was a really good fit. So I heard about you way before you ever heard about me kind of thing. Like because I just heard about the different church plants of St.

C's. And so we've actually been praying for you guys for quite a while now. So I want you to know that. We've been here for almost two years. We absolutely love it.

In April, we actually went to Orkney and stayed in Craig's parents' cottage. And just through Easter break. And one of the scenes, we went to a place called Markhead.

And just absolutely lovely, absolutely gorgeous views. And it just kind of hit me that after a while, as we're walking along the coast, seeing the cliffs, hoping to see puffins, you know how it goes, I just realized that all of a sudden, it's like it's not quite as beautiful as it was 30 minutes ago.

[1 : 10] Like it's almost like in my finite human mind, there's only so much of this beauty that I can take in. And I started feeling a little bit frustrated.

Like there's only so much beauty that my eyes can behold before all of a sudden, all right, let's look at something different. I need something different to kind of stimulate that.

We've kind of talked about it all the time, how as we're walking around Edinburgh, and it's such a charming city and the beautiful old buildings that all of a sudden, you have to remind yourself to keep looking up and keep noticing the beauty and not get, you know, numb to the fact that Arthur's Seat is beautiful and that you're at this, you know, you see these beautiful sights.

Like we just, as humans, it's like we have this limit. And it can be kind of frustrating if you want more and more of that beauty or whatever.

We come to this passage today in Ephesians 3 with a little bit of that. I was actually going to preach on the next passage, verses 14 through 22, 21, excuse me.

[2 : 21] And it begins in verse 14, for this reason. And when you start studying the Bible, when it says something like for this reason, you got to ask the question, okay, for what reason? And it pushed me back to the previous paragraph.

In our English Bibles, we have paragraphs. And as I was reading through that, I was just stuck on this phrase that Paul says, this grace was given to me to preach to the Gentiles the boundless or unsearchable riches of Christ.

A lot of times we can grow a little bit numb to the beauty of the gospel and the amazing things that Jesus has done for us.

And we start thinking about how incredibly rich are the riches of Christ. It's like we've got this little finite limit on how much we can take in.

And it gets a little frustrating. And, you know, Paul says in Corinthians that it's like we look through a glass dimly, you know. But I think that as we just go to this prayerfully, thinking about the riches of Christ, that he is gracious to keep teaching us more and more and more.

[3 : 43] Some of you may have been Christians for a really long time. And it will never, we'll never stop learning about the beauties of Christ and the riches of Christ. And one day in heaven, that limit, that finiteness will be taken away and we'll be able to see him as he is and understand his glory more and more and spend eternity doing that.

But we come to this passage in Ephesians chapter 3 in kind of the context. Paul is in prison, probably in Rome, under house arrest where he is writing this.

And even though he's in house arrest, I don't know if any of you have been to Rome and to the Mamertine prison that they think they call Paul's prison, you know, may or may not have been something like that.

That's not where he was at this time. He was under house arrest, but it was at least bad enough that in chapter 6, he refers to it as being in chains.

And it's very possible he might have actually been chained to something or to a Roman soldier as he was even under house arrest. But he's in prison and he would call it bad enough to say that he's in chains.

[4 : 56] And he's writing to a church that he actually has a really strong relationship with. In Acts chapter 20, it tells us that he calls the elders of this church in Ephesus to himself and kind of gives this last farewell, if you're familiar with that passage.

And it says, like, after he addresses them, that they are just, like, weeping together because they realize this is the last time they're going to see each other. So he's writing to people that he has a fond affection for.

They love him. He loves them. And it could be an occasion, based on what we read in this passage, where they're a little distraught because he's in prison.

They don't want him to be in prison. They don't want the ministry to stop. And he's telling them to not be distraught because of his sufferings. And essentially what he says is Jesus is worth it.

Okay? So that's where we get when he gives this little, it's almost like a little aside. Like he kind of steps away from what he's writing for a brief moment to give this view of what he sees his role as, as he became a servant of this gospel that says.

[6 : 04] And so we look at this passage in verse 7, where he says, I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given to me.

Okay? When he says here this gift of grace that was given to him, he's not referring to salvation. What he's referring to is that he's been given a specific charge in ministry.

It's a ministry that was given to him. And he says this was a grace. Okay? What was that gift of grace? To preach to non-Jews.

To take the gospel to the entire world. He says this was a grace that was given to him. So he's referring to the very thing that has landed him in prison.

This thing he's in that's like under house arrest, and it's kind of keeping him from doing what he feels like he's called to do in some ways. He's in prison.

[7 : 10] Some suffering. He's suffering on their behalf, he says. And he says, this is a gift of grace. It's not a burden. It's not a burden that I'm in prison.

It's actually a gift of grace. Okay? How can he say this? How can he say that this very thing that's landed him in prison is a gift of grace and not a burden?

Church planting in a hard place could sometimes maybe be seen as a burden. When people aren't receptive to the gospel, when people maybe want to keep you at arm's length, but when they hear you're a Christian or whatever, how is that not a burden to bear?

He calls it a gift of grace. How can he say this? Well, he says in verse 8, although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, one way that he can see that this is a grace and not a burden is that he believes deep down to his core that he does not deserve all that God has given him.

He does not deserve all the riches of Christ. He doesn't deserve what he's been given. I mean, he's blown away by the fact that the Lord has forgiven him for all the terrible things that he's done, how he even persecuted and killed Christians, that God not only forgave him, but brought him into his family.

[8 : 47] He's a part of God's family, and that he could be used to spread the most beautiful message on the planet. Paul understands what God's grace means.

So he says, I'm less than all the least of God's people. He really believed that. Do we really understand how we don't deserve God's grace?

Do we really understand what grace is for us? Or is it kind of like we lose sight of it? Maybe it's one of those things that we feel kind of limited by our finite human nature that we can't understand the depths of how much we've been forgiven and how big of a deal it is that we've been brought into God's family.

But he says, it's a gift of grace. Although I'm the least of all the Lord's people, he says, this grace, again, was given to me to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ.

He says that the grace that was given to him was to preach or to proclaim. So this word is the word that literally means to evangelize, to be a messenger of good news.

[10:06] So for him, he sees that I get to carry this message of good news even though it might lead to suffering. This is not a burden. It's a gift of grace that I get to tell people of the boundless riches of Christ.

If you think about it, when we're talking about this word evangelism means to carry good news or a good message, it's not a burden because the news is so good.

We probably all have someone that we know in our life that has maybe cancer or a disease that's debilitating and I'll be honest, I've got several people in my life that one of my good friends growing up, his son who was 12, got cancer, leukemia really bad.

Another kind of mutual friend, I'm an acquaintance of this guy, but we have a really good friend in common so I know this guy and his son is currently battling leukemia. It's like, I've got this list of people on my prayer list that are just, what I would call my urgent prayer list that are just dealing with cancer.

I hate cancer. Like, I hate it. It makes me angry inside for what it does. So imagine I find the cure to cancer. Would it be a burden to share with everyone that I found the cure to cancer?

[11:31] And at this point, after all the research that's been done in cancer research, all the money, all the years that's been put into it, they might hear me say that I found the cure to cancer and what are they going to say?

Really? That we've heard this one before. They might even scoff at me for saying that I found the cure to cancer. But if I found the cure to cancer, it didn't matter how much ridicule I get for telling people that.

I'm going to spread that good news, right? We've been given the answer to everyone on the planet their deepest need.

We've been given the answer to the problem that is their biggest problem, which is the sin problem that separates them from God. Paul knows this and he says, it is a blessing, it is a grace to get to tell people this good news.

How could it be such good news? Because he understands that it's, I'm telling people about the boundless riches of Christ. Now, even as I say this, even as I preach this, I can just, like, the unsearchable or boundless riches of Christ, I just still feel that limit.

[12:49] Like, like, I could get really bored thinking about this. How? Because my flesh wants to think of and do things that are just easy and that I don't have to try so hard or that I can see, taste, and touch that's a little bit more tangible than to just meditate on God's word.

My flesh is weak even though my spirit might be willing. But we're talking about the boundless or unsearchable riches of Christ. That word boundless literally means that you can't track it down to get to the end of it.

It's unsearchable. It is boundless. There are no limits to it. And when he talks about riches, listen, riches are only riches if they have value. Okay?

Like, there are some things that we think are valuable. But if other people don't think they're valuable when you try to sell that thing, you might be even a little discouraged by how little value other people place on that thing.

Before moving over here, we were, we sold our house, we sold our cars, we like, just, we're selling all these things. And there were, there was this collector's item that I had been given when I was like 16 years old and told, hang on to this, one day, this will be worth a lot.

[14:09] It was a collector's item of a John Deere tractor, you know, John Deere, the green tractors in the U.S. and it was, you know, the way it was made and all this stuff.

And so, I kept it in the box. I didn't, I just, wherever I moved, I carried it with me. It stayed with me.

This collector's item, I'm like, you know what? This thing is now 25 years old, which in the U.S. is considered vintage, right? We don't, we don't have a lot of old things in the U.S. because we're kind of young as a country and stuff. But, this vintage thing of like, all right, now's the time.

I'm going to sell it on eBay. Turns out, I value this thing a lot more than other people do, right? Like, something is only considered riches if people value it.

So, how could Paul call this the unsearchable riches of Christ? Like, what is it about Jesus that would make him valuable?

[15:10] Well, anytime we say something like that, it's going to go to who he is and what he has done. So, when we think about the riches of Christ, if we just stayed in the first two chapters of Ephesians, we would hear things like how he has chosen us and adopted us into his family.

that even though we were enemies of him, children of wrath, he's given us life and brought us in. That we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

That we, who were enemies, have been made one and reconciled to the creator and sustainer of the whole universe.

The one that knows the stars by name calls you his child. The Bible, these first two chapters, also tells us that we have a future inheritance.

I don't know if you guys kind of had this as well, but like growing up, there was always this like, what if I had this rich uncle I don't know about who left me a sum of riches or what if we won the lottery? [16:17] What if we all of a sudden, like the big thing in my family, my grandmother owned some land that they thought they had found some oil on at one time. It's like, what if there's oil on my grandmother's property and all of a sudden we're rich?

You think about those things of like, all of a sudden we have this inheritance given to us and for the Christian that is a literal thing and that doesn't mean wealth and possessions here on earth, but wealth and possessions that we can't even imagine in what we have in Jesus when we will be with him forever.

We have an inheritance. In chapter 2 it talks about how we have reconciliation with people who are different than us. So we talk a lot these days about racial and ethnic reconciliation.

Paul was writing about that in Christ he makes us one body. We not only have a one unity with God, we also have oneness with one another across all of these ethnic and racial lines.

We have peace with God, peace with God, peace with each other he says. So we have inner and outer peace. Also growing up we used to hear about peace in the Middle East. That was the big thing. Like if you want something big and massive like you want peace in the Middle East and Paul says this is the answer.

[17:39] If you want peace with other people, peace in the world, peace with God, it is found in Jesus Christ. Working with uni students, talking about what people value.

Sociologists today tell us that people, especially Gen Z, they're looking for identity, belonging, and purpose. Identity.

They're asking questions. Who am I? We know our society today is kind of obsessed with building and creating our own identity. I get to determine who I am and what I am.

But that's a big question people are asking. Who am I? Belonging. They're asking, where do I fit in? Where do I belong? wrong. They're asking, what am I doing here?

What's the purpose of all of this? And we know that in Jesus Christ, all of those things are answered. Who am I? You're made in the image of God, recreated for good works.

[18:34] That even would say, chapter 2, verse 10, a work of art. The words in the Greek is poema, where we get the word poem. You're a work of art created in Christ Jesus for good works.

That's your identity. A child of God. That's who we are. Belonging. You belong to this new family, this new community. One of the things that we're learning in doing ministry with uni students here is that they being, like feeling like they belong to people that care makes them feel like they matter.

And so it's been a big part of bringing them into St. Seas and helping them see that they can belong to a new family, a new community. Identity, belonging, and purpose. We literally have the greatest mission and purpose in the world as Christians where lives and eternities can be changed.

I mentioned earlier that I went into uni ministry because I felt like it was a way that our family could literally impact the world. One of the guys that I led to Christ and disciplined is currently serving as a missionary in Australia where he's led a couple of people to Christ.

And he told me a few months ago, he's like, man, if you don't ever hear anything else, just know that because of the work that God used you to do in my life, lives are now changed in Australia.

[20:00] God used me and the church here to bring people to himself in Australia. And it's like, we can literally impact the world just by spreading this good news.

What bigger purpose is that? And one of the things I would add to what sociologists would say about identity, belonging, and purpose, people also today are really looking for hope.

They're looking for something to say, hey, this is all worth it and will my troubles ever end? Will all the things that make me upset, will it ever end?

And we all know that one day Christ is going to come again and make all things new. We have hope, more hope than we could ever imagine.

And this is a part of what he has done for us that would say the boundless riches of Christ. But this is just scratching the surface.

[20 : 58] We could spend all day, every day, for the rest of our lives into eternity trying to go through how is Christ so valuable? What makes him valuable? This doesn't even touch on what Colossians 1 talks about where it says that he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. together, the very creation, atoms in our bodies are holding together and not splitting apart because of Jesus.

That's who he is. Hebrews says it like this, the sun is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

He upholds all things by the word of his power. That is who Jesus is. So when we think about telling our neighbors about Jesus, listen, I'm a professional Christian, right?

[22 : 18] Like I'm an ordained minister of the gospel. Like it's my job to tell people about Jesus and I still get scared. I still get like, oh, what am I going to say?

Are they going to hate me? Are they going to reject me? And Paul is saying what we're trying to share is the unsearchable riches of Christ. Just telling people how incredible Jesus is, who he is, and what he's done for us.

That's not a burden. Is it scary? Our flesh gets in the way, the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. All of those things are true. But what a privilege it is to get to tell people about the boundless riches of Christ.

And then as we start to wrap up, verse 12 is just another thing. In Jesus, and through faith in him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

One of the things that makes him so beautiful, that makes the riches of Christ so boundless, is to think that we can now approach God, the creator and sustainer of the world.

[23 : 30] And it says here, with freedom and confidence. This word freedom literally means like a freedom of speech. Okay? What does that mean? It means we can come to God unfiltered.

We don't have to like, oh, am I using the right words? Is he going to get mad because I'm not approaching him? Like in big enough, holy enough language. Like this is literally telling us we can come to God and approach him unfiltered.

He knows that we are but dust. He knows the weaknesses that we have. The riches of Christ means that we can come to the Father as a good heavenly Father who knows what we need even before we ask him.

We have access. I mean, I was thinking about this. Like, I haven't lived here long. I had a ton of respect for Queen Elizabeth. I don't know as much about King Charles because, you know, the things we'd hear growing up in the media and the U.S., I don't know as much about him.

But if anyone in the royal family invited me into their presence, I mean, what am I going to do? Ah, no thanks. I'm an American.

[24 : 46] Get somebody else. You know? No! Like, I'm going to, like, tell everybody I know about this invitation. I'm probably going to go out and buy new clothes and I'm going to prepare, like, okay, say this, don't say this.

How am I going to respond? Like, make sure I got the right posture. I'm going to research what is appropriate for approaching royalty. Like, I'm going to prepare and give my all for this one lifetime, chance of a lifetime meeting with royalty.

I'm going to change everything about that that I do that might not be appropriate. I'm going to prepare and it's going to be a big deal as I tell everybody about it. The creator of the world who shapes the hearts of kings and queens is inviting us into his presence through Jesus Christ. Unfiltered. You don't have to put on your best clothes. Come to him as you are. You don't have to present your best self. And we're changed in that process when we come to him and do that. because we don't have to change the way we're clothed because we're clothed in Christ. We don't have to put our best self forward because we're wrapped in Jesus' righteousness.

[25 : 59] That is the riches of Christ. So the original question was how can the apostle Paul see suffering as a grace and not a burden? It's because he understood that Jesus is worth it.

Do we meditate on this enough that Jesus is worth it? There's a song that we sang growing up a lot. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face.

And this line, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Do we look to Jesus in such a way that the things of this earth kind of grow dim in comparison?

Do we meditate on the riches of Christ? Who he is and what he has done for us? Paul says that telling others about the unsearchable riches of Christ is a privilege.

Jesus is worth it. Do we see telling the good news as a burden or an incredible gift of grace?

[27 : 09] are we affected by God's grace like Paul was? Do we meditate on the riches of Christ? We're invited to do that every day, moment by moment, even as we're walking around to meditate on scripture.

We can thank him in all things, meditating on what he has done for us and who he is. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have given us access to the Father because of what you did for us.

You lived a life that we couldn't live and you died the death that we deserve to die so that through you we could have life, that we could have a relationship with the Father, that we could be called your bride and your body and your church.

It is such a privilege and I pray that you would, starting today and tomorrow and the next day, let the riches of Christ sink down into our hearts.

I pray, God, that you would remove some of those limits that we have and we just can't quite see all that we want to see and we start feeling like there's a ceiling to how much we can know about you and experience that relationship with you and pray that we would just grow in that, Lord.

[28 : 34] Grow our capacity to know you and love you. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.