

GRACE: God's Riches at Christ's Expense

Part I: God's Riches

Ephesians 3:16-19

¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We interrupt your regularly scheduled sermon series to bring you this special report: GRACE: God's Riches at Christ's Expense, a two part series. Your regularly scheduled series will resume in two weeks when Pastor Dave returns from vacation.

Two days ago, July 17, Disneyland celebrated its 60th year. It opened on July 17, 1955. I am sure that there are many festivities and celebrations planned throughout the year. As I reflect on the excitement, it reminds me of when Disney World Orlando opened. For many young girls, it has launched dreams of being Cinderella, Snow White, Belle, or Elsa. I'm not as certain that boys dream of being Prince Charming, Aladdin, or the Beast. I think that boys dream of being superheros like Iron Man, Thor, or Captain America. Each of these dreams involves super powers or riches beyond our imaginations.

When we read in Scripture about God's Riches, do we imagine these childhood fantasies? Do we think in terms of material wealth or super powers?

When I think of God's Riches, I think about being the daughter of the King. I am a princess! You are princes and princesses too! (Or maybe superheros!) We are sons and daughters of the king! And as such we are heirs to the riches of the King.

Scripture describes these riches as unsearchable and incomparable. But what is our treasure chest or throne room filled with? Gold, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, who zits and what zits galore? (possible clip from National Treasure)

We are fascinated by, drawn to, sometimes obsessed with the riches the world has to offer. There are television shows dedicated to such: Antique Road Show where hidden treasures are uncovered; Treasure Hunters which follows teams traveling the globe in search of clues to the treasure; and I even found a website called TreasureNet.com, which offers tips for gold prospecting, metal detecting, treasure hunting, etc. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote a sermon, warning of the dangers of riches. He says that material wealth leads to self-centeredness, a perceived sense of moral superiority, and a distorted understanding of divine favor. This divine favor is what is meant by God's Riches. For as exciting as these earthly treasures might be, they cannot begin to compare to the incomparable riches of God.

In our scripture today, Paul is praying for the Ephesians. He prays for them to comprehend how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Other translations use the words “grasp” or “apprehend.” Both terms (comprehend and apprehend) mean “to grasp.” Warren Weirsbe says what Paul is really saying is “I want you to get your hands on your wealth, realize how vast it is and start to use it!” But what exactly is this “wealth” we are to grasp hold of?

In verse 16 Paul says “out of his glorious riches he (God) may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.” See, we really are super heros! But our power is not our own...it is by the power of God’s Spirit that we are given strength. That is just one of the many riches of God.

The wealth that we are to grasp and to get our hands on is ungraspable. It is bigger than our minds can conceive. It is God’s amazing grace! Grace is indescribable, unsearchable, incomparable to anything we could ever imagine. It is unlimited andits free! It is God’s free gift to us. We sing about grace and we talk about grace, but what is grace?

Grace has been defined as that which we receive that we do not deserve. It is a gift that we cannot earn. It is not dispensed as a salary or reward for the good things that we have done. Last week we learned from Pastor Dave that it is by faith, by grace that we are saved. He shared Ephesians 2:8-9 which says “for by

grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” So though we are called to do good works, it is by God’s grace that we are saved. Grace is the unmerited, undeserved, generous, gracious gift of our loving God.

I found another definition that really resonates with me: It is the active presence and transforming power of God in our lives (Wesley Study Bible, 112). God is present and working in our lives, not because we deserve it or have done anything to earn it, but because God loves us that much. “For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This is grace.

Paul says that God’s grace is sufficient for you (2 Cor 12:9). He will provide for all our needs according to his glorious riches (Phil 4:19). Paul was not talking about outer, material, or physical needs. He is speaking of the inner needs...the needs of our souls. “through His Spirit in your inner being.” Paul knew that if the inner being was what it ought to be, the outer being would take care of itself (Weirsbe). The Holy Spirit dwells within us; giving us what we need when we need it – strength, wisdom, comfort, peace. These are all things that come from God’s grace through the Holy Spirit. It is hard to define grace because it includes all of the goodness of God.

John Wesley is known for speaking of the three natures of grace –prevenient grace, the grace that comes before we know God; justifying grace, God’s saving grace; and sanctifying grace, the grace that helps us grow into the image of God. He compares them to a house; prevenient grace is the porch; justifying grace is the door; and sanctifying grace is the interior. However, it is important for us to acknowledge that it is all grace. Steve Harper puts it this way in his book *The Way to Heaven*: “Grace is grace. You don’t have one kind of grace for one situation and another kind for some other situation. By the same token God does not give his grace in bits and pieces. We define grace in different ways because of how we experience the grace on our end of the relationship. Grace comes to us at different stages in our spiritual pilgrimage and it accomplishes different effects and evokes different responses. But it is all grace.”

God’s grace draws us into a relationship with him. He invites us into the house, but sometimes we just stay on the porch, not sure if we want to go in. I bet you can look back on your life and recognize a time or place when you can say, “that was God working in my life.” This was probably before you knew him, but he was there working. For me, I can remember two ceramic angels that hung over my bed when I was a young girl. I talked to those angels every night. I didn’t know why, I just did. I now know that was prayer. God was using those little angels to help me enter into a relationship with him.

Out of his glorious riches, God gives us strength – not like Thor or Capt. America, but strength to get through a personal hardship or struggle; strength to stand in contrast to society and follow Christ rather than the world; strength to face our fears; strength to speak boldly about the reason for our hope.

But God also gives us wisdom in decision making; comfort in times of sorrow; compassion for those in need; patience in traffic; peace when all around us is chaos; joy in times of trial. These are examples of God's riches. Out of his grace, he provides exactly what we need when we need it. "My grace is sufficient for you."

We can never fully know how wide, long, high or deep is God's love for us. Scripture says in vs. 19 that it "surpasses knowledge." The Amplified Bible translates verse nineteen this way:" (That you may really come) to know (practically, through experience for yourselves) the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge (without experience); that you may be filled (through all your being) unto all the fullness of God (may have the richest measure of the divine presence, and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself)!

That is just mind blowing! Imagine our whole bodies being flooded with the presence of God! It is so hard to get a grasp on how much God loves us! He gives us his Son to die for our sins; he sends us the Holy Spirit so that His presence is

with us always; and he floods us with his limitless grace to provide all that our inner being needs – and all of this out of his great love for us! That is the glorious riches of God!

And we will never know how much He loves us. Many of us just cannot imagine that God could possibly love us that much. And if you think this is something that only we struggle with, think again. The disciples didn't get it either.

(Skit Guys)