

The Fulness of Christ

We do thank You, Lord Jesus for those glimpses of Your glory, glimpses of Your Person, glimpses of Your attributes of love and mercy. Lord, we thank You that You have opened our eyes. Our heart goes out to so many in this world this morning whose eyes are blinded and are without Christ in this world, without the Savior, without the Lord, without a future, without a hope. But Lord, we thank You we are the blessed ones. We come to You and want to give You thanksgiving as we begin this morning that we have had something of a glimpse of You, of Your glory, of Your greatness. We thank You for it; it sustains us and keeps us. Lord, we do have hope, and hope far greater than the hope the world tries to offer. So we ask this morning to bless us once again and give us that spirit of wisdom and revelation as we consider Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I am going to be sharing out of Ephesians once again. I have shared a number of messages concerning Ephesians since we are studying it, but I just want to remind us of Paul's heart in Ephesians 3:9: "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ."

"... that all men might see." What an amazing, glorious thing to have our eyes opened. I always think about that blind man who was blind from birth. The Lord Jesus touched his eyes, and he could see. The whole world opened up to this man, and it was all different. I think that is the way it is when we get a glimpse of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our world changes. May the Lord help us this morning and give us grace to hear what He is trying to speak to us.

There are a number of key words in this short book of Ephesians. As a matter of fact, It is full of key words. Love is mentioned thirteen times in this book. Doesn't that give you an indication of where this book comes from? Grace, twelve times; you will never enter into the mysteries of the purpose of God without grace. Glory, nine times; this is God's end game—what God is after, what pleases Him. The heavenlies, four times; we often think we are just here on this earth, but in Ephesians we find out that we can also be in the heavenlies with Christ. Together, six times; how important being together is! Fulness is shared six times in this book if you include fill up and filled. As I considered these words, fulness seemed to stand out at the time. Now I want to share a little, as best I can, on this letter of Paul's, particularly this word fulness.

In this letter you will find the fulness of times mentioned several times, and we are going to talk about that. Mainly, the fulness of time means that everything God intended and purposed for a particular point in time is coming to fruition. All the preparation work is done. It is the perfect time. It says that in the fulness of time Christ came the first time, and He was full of grace and truth. Our Lord Jesus came at the fulness of time, the right time, the perfect time. He had been preceded by the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He had been preceded by the age of the law and Judaism, and that brought in the age of grace when our Lord Jesus came. It was the perfect time. It is God's fulness, not what we would call fulness.

There is yet another fulness. When God is referring to fulness, He is really talking about Jesus Christ because all the fulness of the Godhead is in Jesus Christ. Part of our mission, part of our purpose in life is to come into all that fulness. But it is not only that we come into that fulness; we are also to express something of that fulness. That is what we are dealing with in this letter. It is a very short letter, but I call it a powerhouse letter. It is full of the power of the Holy Spirit. In it we have God's revelation to us of His Son, of His church, His body, of His will, of the mystery that He had kept hidden for the ages; it reveals His purpose. These are mighty things. These are not little things, but these are all encompassing items and issues. It says, "That we might know and experience, and ultimately express this fulness." That is our purpose. We must know it, but it is not enough to know it; we must experience it. And it is not enough just to experience it; we need to express that fulness. This is what we have been called to. It includes all the Person, the character, and nature of the Godhead, which is in Christ. All that He is, all of His attributes, all of His qualities have been included in this word fulness.

In Psalm 19:1 it says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament his handywork." We go out and look at the stars occasionally, and then we go in the house without seeing the glory of God. It says here that it reveals the glory of God, and in Romans 1 it says that man is without excuse because he ought to be able to observe the creation and realize that there is a God who has created it. And He is the all-powerful, Almighty God, and therefore men are without excuse, for it is evident. But this creation is only a small part of what He intends for the fulness to make manifest in this whole world.

Paul experienced so much of that fulness. He was actually caught up to the third heaven, and we know he went to Paradise where he saw and heard things unlawful to tell, things that were inexpressible. We think of all his experiences, especially during those eleven years when he was doing the gospel trips around the known world. We remember all of his sufferings for the sake of the gospel. He was beaten five times, he was shipwrecked, spent a day and a night in the ocean. At one time, he was stoned at Lystra, and people think that was when he was stoned to death, and he went to Paradise. He was an amazing man who had seen so much of Christ.

Now he is in prison and writing these prison letters, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, which are powerful letters. He did not know what his fate was going to be at that time, but I believe God set him aside in that prison so that he could really concentrate and try to express all that God had shown him that we might receive and be participants in it. He poured out his heart, and it is almost as if the Holy Spirit is compelling Paul to get this message out. Paul is almost overwhelmed in all of this as he is trying to share with us what he has seen of the immensity of Christ, His infinite glory, and His infinite Person.

Even at this point in that companion letter in Philippians 3:10 he says, "That I might know Him." He thought that he was at the end of his life, and this was his burden, this was his passion—"that I might know Him."

He stops and implores the Lord: "Lord, You are going to have to give the Spirit of wisdom and revelation because the human mind cannot take in what I am about to share. It has to come through revelation."

The First Mention of Fulness in Ephesians

We touched this word fulness in Ephesians 1:10: “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth even in him.”

This is the first mention in Ephesians of fulness. Other versions say, “to sum up all things in Christ.” This verse is preceded by verses 1-9. Did you get that? This is verse 10, and in the first eight verses Paul draws us to Christ. He focuses our heart upon Christ, and he says, “Grace and peace;” your grace and peace are from Jesus Christ. You are blessed with all spiritual blessings. Where? In Christ. You are chosen in love. Where? In Christ. You are predestined to adoption for sonship. Where? In Christ. You are accepted. Where? In Christ, the Beloved. You have forgiveness of sins in Christ. He focuses us right in on Jesus Christ. This is all that we have received of Him in Christ because we know Jesus Christ.

In verse 10 he says that in the fulness of times it is His intention to sum all things in Christ. In verse 9 he spoke of the mystery of God, and then in verse 10 he gives us a short summery of that mystery. He said that God wants to gather up, sum up all things in Jesus Christ in the fulness of times. Sometimes we can read through this Scripture and say, “Yes, He is going to do that. He is going to sum up everything in Christ.” But the truth of that verse does not quite hit us. It is an explosive earth-shattering truth, and we need to know it. It levels most of the Christianity that we see today. It brings reality into view, and it is the opening salvo of showing us this mystery. It is an all-encompassing Scripture; it is an all-encompassing truth which should gain the mastery of our hearts. If it does, if it captures our heart, it will revolutionize our lives. That is the importance of this Scripture. This truth embodies everything and all that follows in this letter, in the Colossian letter, and in the Philippian letter.

What does it mean “to sum up all things in Christ”? It means that God has determined that nothing shall remain which is not of Christ. *Nothing shall remain that is not of Christ.* God is working towards that end in your life, in the life of the church, in the fellowship here, and in the universe. Nothing shall remain that is not of Christ.

On the other hand, He is working to fill our hearts and our lives in this universe with Christ, with only that which is of Christ; that is God’s purpose and intention. It explains so much of God’s dealing in our lives, and in the life of this world, and in this universe. He wants to eliminate everything that is not of Christ and bring into fulness and full view all that is of Christ. This explains our lives, and this is the verse that puts us on the pathway to fulfilling God’s purpose in our lives, and to fulfilling God’s purpose for the ages which is to sum up all things in Christ.

There is a companion verse in Colossians 1:19: “For it pleased the Father that in him (Christ) should all fulness dwell.”

This is an eternal fact; this is something that is done. All the fulness from God’s point of view is in Christ. All the character, all the nature, all the abilities of the Godhead are in Christ. But God desires that this fulness be manifested and displayed in all of His creation. In order to achieve His purpose, out of eternity He created this time slot. He called it time. And it says in Genesis 1, “He restored the earth that had become so dark. His original creation was restored, and He made it

habitable for His special unique creation which is man—you and me. He was to use man to manifest the fulness of Christ.

Adam was created with natural life—soul, body, spirit—a natural spirit. At that point He did not actually have spiritual life, and it was to come to Him by eating of the tree of life. Adam disobeyed God and instead ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He disobeyed God and fell into sin, and man was no longer able to express Christ, to express any of the fulness of Christ. He did not have the life to do it.

God's Son Came in the Fulness of Time

According to Galatians 4:4-6 Paul said, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, to redeem us that we might receive the adoption of sons and receive the Spirit of His Son into our hearts." In other words, our human spirit received the Holy Spirit. It was quickened into life and was able to commune with God. It was able to express the life of God so that God's plan of redemption which was a remedial plan was accomplished by Jesus Christ in the fulness of time. And He did it that His eternal purpose might be achieved. It had been set aside by the failure of man, but through the victory of Christ on Calvary's cross it has been restored. The possibility of fulness is restored.

The Body of Christ Revealed in the Fulness of Time

When we come to verse 10, it talks about the fulness of time once again, "For in the fulness of time, He would gather together all things in Christ." When does that occur? This is a different fulness of time than when He came the first time. In the fulness of time He is going to sum up all things in Christ. So we have to go to the book of Revelation, and there we see the King of kings with the snowy white hair. We see the exalted Lord Jesus, full of wisdom, the flaming eyes, full of discernment, all seeing, all knowing. We see the two-edged sword coming out of His mouth, which is all discerning and able to divide soul and spirit and anything that is not of Christ. We see the girdle around His chest, full of love that captures our hearts. We see the linen white garment over Him which speaks of pure righteousness. This is the Head, but we also see in Revelation the glorious body in chapter 21 which is the New Jerusalem. So we have the glorious Head and the new Jerusalem.

This is the fulness of times we are talking about in Ephesians 1:10 in which we see the body of Christ. And when we see the body of Christ, we see a city of gold, precious stones, and pure crystal that light can shine through. Christ is the light of that city. We see the tree of life, the water of life; everything is life, and everything speaks of Christ. This is when we come to this fulness of Christ, the risen Lord Jesus Christ, indeed God's Lamb.

Remember when He said, "The lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed to open the book, but when we look at the Lion, we see the Lamb." He is still Lamb; He still has that Lamb nature, but He also has the nature of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. So how did this come about? How did Christ go from Calvary to the throne? How did He bring in this fulness and this glory? I think the wisdom of God is amazing. He did become a Lamb. When He came the first time, He did not come as deity. That may surprise you. He was deity at that time, but He did not come and present Himself as deity. As a matter of fact, we know from Philippians it says that He emptied

Himself; He did not grasp His position. He set aside all His glory as the Son of God. He set aside His rights, privilege and power that He experienced as the Son of God.

Philippians 2:7 says that He emptied Himself of all these and came in humiliation as a Lamb taking on the form of a man. In other words, He came not as the Son of God, although He was the Son of God. He came to present Himself as Son of Man that He might be the Lamb in order to save man.

The process was that He voluntarily did a self-emptying. There was no self-fulness here. He said, "I can do nothing of myself." Isn't that amazing!? He said, "I cannot do anything of myself. I depend totally on the Father; all My sufficiency comes from the Father. I have none within Myself. I will not use it." It was a voluntary self-weakness that He took.

II Corinthians 13:4 says, "He was crucified in weakness." He became weak, just like we are. He had to gain all of His strength from the Father; He had no self-strength. He voluntarily accepted shame and dishonor that He might glorify God. There was no self-glory. He was not seeking to make Himself something or to be somebody. There was no self-glory there, no self-esteem. All the glory in His heart was of God His Father. That is why He was always in prayer because He could not depend on Himself. He had to depend in everything upon God.

John 17:5 is His prayer before He went to Calvary. He said, "Father, glorify me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."

That was His prayer that He might be restored to the glory of the Son of God and return to the throne to the right hand of the Father. But now there was even more glory because He would return to the Father as the glory of the Son of Man as well as the Son of God. In other words, He overcame as a Man, He triumphed as a Man, He was victorious as a Man, He achieved God's will as a Man, and He gained the glory that He originally had before He left the throne. In other words, God reversed all that emptiness and filled Him when He returned.

I could not help but think of Psalm 133 which speaks of unity. "How good and pleasant it is for the brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head of Aaron that ran down upon his beard to the skirts of his garment."

When the Lord returned to the Father, His head was anointed, and it overflowed and came down as the oil of anointing. It overflowed the glory that was upon Him down to the skirts of His garment. Out of the overflowing of that anointing came Pentecost. Out of His return to glory and the receiving of all that fulness, it just overflowed, and out of it came Pentecost and the church, His body. He is now the glorified Christ. He is no longer in humiliation. He is the Lamb, but He is now the glorified One. He is no longer empty; He is full. God has filled Him with all the glory He had before.

In Philippians 4:19 Paul speaks of God's riches in glory by which He will supply all our needs. Where are they? In Jesus Christ.

We are Partakers of the Fulness of Christ

Ephesians 1:3: “We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ.” In other words, the fulness is in Him, and we have become partakers of that fulness. We are in possession of that fulness. He is no longer in weakness; He is the King of kings; He is the Lord of lords. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah; He is full of authority and power. He is no longer in shame or dishonor as He was on the cross. The reproach is gone. He is now crowned King, King of glory, and His name is above all names. Every knee shall bow even at the mention of His name. He is full of glory and honor.

The important thing for us to know today is that we can be partakers of that fulness. He desires to share all that fulness with us. No one saint can possibly contain all that is in Christ. That is why it takes all the saints.

John the apostle knew Christ as the Lamb of God, and he declared Him as full of grace and truth. But when God spoke to him in Revelation 1, He said, “You need to come up here; I have something to show you.” God showed John the exalted glorified Christ, and he just could not take it in. He fell breathless to the ground; there was no breath left in his body, and the Lord had to raise him up. He was overwhelmed by what he saw of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, full of glory and majesty. In other words, he experienced the life of the Lamb, but now he was experiencing the exalted Christ. Why is this important to us? Because we need as brothers and sisters not only to experience and express the qualities and life of the Lamb, but we need to learn, know and experience the qualities of the life of the King, of the Lord of lords and the King of kings, of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ. I think it is amazing that He wants us to be partakers in this, but He does.

In Ephesians 1:10 it says, “In the fulness of times he is to head up all things for the administration of the fulness of times,” which speaks of government.

In Revelation chapters 1-3, we see the Lord, but we also see the churches. His admonition to these churches was that they needed to overcome, and if they overcome, they will sit with Him on His throne, and they will have authority over the nations. What does this mean? It means that we are to be partakers of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ and be those who express His authority and power. All of the fulness of His attributes as the exalted Lord Jesus Christ is to be expressed as well as His Lamb nature. That is what we have been called to, and it is an amazing calling.

However, it is not enough to just know the Lord Jesus or to experience Him; we are called to express the Lord Jesus Christ, to be an expression of Him. I need to emphasize this. It is interesting that in Ephesians 3:10 it says: “To the intent that now unto the principalities in the heavenlies might be known by the church (through the church) the manifold wisdom of God according to His eternal purpose.” That is the challenge. It is to the principalities and powers in the ages to come to know through the church the manifold wisdom of God.

The Second Mention of Fulness in Ephesians

The second mention of fulness is in Ephesians 1:20-23: “The power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly

places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that fills all in all.”

In other words, when you come to this Scripture, we find God’s intended vessel that will be used to express His fulness not only in this age but in the age to come. That is the church’s responsibility, and that is the church’s eternal purpose.

I pray that the Lord will open our eyes to get a glimpse of what we have been brought into in the fulness of Christ as the Lamb and as the exalted King. We have an awesome responsibility in our lives personally and in our corporate life together, in the universal life and the universal church. It is our vocation.

Walking Worthy of Our Vocation

In Ephesians 4:1 Paul exhorts us to walk worthy of our vocation. I think there has been misunderstanding of what our vocation is. It is not the job we hold. Yes, we all have jobs and have earthly responsibilities, but our vocation, our spiritual, Christian vocation is to be an expression of Christ in all of His attributes. It says the fulness of Him that fills all and in all. What does that mean? That means it takes the entire church; it takes all the Christians. One day there is going to be a fulness of Christians manifested. In other words, the number—whatever that is, and I do not know what it is—will manifest the fulness of the entire church. It will take all the Christians. We do not come just as individual units, individual Christians before the Lord and say, “Okay, here is my little piece of Your glory that I am going to express.” It does not work that way. You are joined together as a body. You are members of His body joined together. You are part of a living organism.

I know you have heard this before, but I pray it will really hit you. You cannot be disjointed. Any of us who have ever lost a limb of any kind realize how disabling that can be. We need all; it is all. It is not that we just come to Him as myself and say, “Okay Lord, it is me and You now. I am going to really get on it and I am going to fulfill my vocation and express Christ.” It does not work that way. You are part of His body, and the members have to work together. If you are not sure if you are a member of His body, Ephesians 5:30 says, “You are members of His body, bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh.”

You are not Christian 1,250,261; you are bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh. We are of one another in that way; we are one unit. He is the Head, and we are the body. That is the glorious new man that will express all the fulness, Christ the Head, the church His body.

What is the purpose of our body? One thing that we use our body to do is to express who we are to others and to the world. We express what we desire and what our purposes are. We use our body to express our will, we use our body to carry out our desires and our purpose. We use our bodies to communicate with one another and with the world.

There is no such thing as an independent member. We cannot have the attitude, “Okay, it is just me and the Lord, and I am going to do the best I can with the Lord.” This is foreign to the

nature of the body of Christ. Fellowship is always connected with fulness. That is why there are local assemblies. Yes, we are all a part of the universal church, we contribute to it and are alive in it as an organism. But it is quite obvious that I cannot really be built together with somebody in Indonesia that I do not know and have no communication with. That is why there are local assemblies in which God can begin to draw out His fulness in the saints. In other words, it must be expressed in the life of His local assemblies. Our relationships with one another are through the Head. We do not have independent relationships with one another. That is where you get cults from and little special groups. It has to always be under the Headship of Christ.

The Holy Spirit in the body of Christ is like the nervous system of your body so that if any one member hurts, all the members feel it. Let me give you an example. I do some carpentry work occasionally, and most often because I am not skilled I hit my thumb with the hammer which is not uncommon. When I hit my thumb, a message is sent to my brain: "It hurts!" Through the nervous system the brain sends that message through my whole body, and as a result not only my thumb feels the pain, but my whole body feels it. You see what the body of Christ is? That is why it is so important. Our relationships are always through the Head, through our Lord Jesus Christ. In like manner, if you want to nourish your body you are going to have to feed your mouth. That is the way it works.

The Oneness of the Body

Ephesians 4:15-16 sums up this matter of the oneness of the body. "The head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and held together and connected by every joint of supply according to the working of its measure of each one part works for itself the increase of the body to its building up in love."

What does that mean? Paul packs so much in this little statement, but it means that we are all needed. It means you are included. It means you are important. It means you are necessary. It means you need to be actively engaged in fellowship in order that the body may mature. And what is the purpose of a matured body? To express the fulness of Christ. Not only that, but the word is also very clear that in Ephesians 4:10-13 we all have received a special gift that needs to be expressed to help one another in the building of the body. Brothers and sisters, we have been equipped.

In Ephesians 4:10-13 Paul tells us that gifts are "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; that we might become a mature man unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

That is quite a responsibility that we have. So we are all responsible in that way. Christ the Head, the church His body.

Ephesians 3:18 sums up so well the responsibility that we have together. "That you might be able to comprehend with all the saints (together) what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Brothers and sisters, fulness is going to require fellowship. You really cannot separate the two; they are married. We have to be careful not to isolate ourselves. If we do we are limiting the ability to know that fulness and to express it with all of our hearts. We have to be active in this matter. We have to repudiate any thoughts of isolation or independence and stand in the Lord. We have to do that; we have to be active. We cannot encourage those thoughts in our mind. At all times we should fight against these thoughts, our inclinations and our feelings that want to separate us and keep us apart. We need to stand in the Lord and say, "Lord, there is a positive aspect for being together. Even though being together often means that sometimes I am wounded, I am hurt in some way." But it is always that the Lord might increase in me and do something in me; it is the way of the cross. However, there is the positive aspect of the way of the cross. The cross is not just death; the cross is life. That is why we should repudiate, reject these thoughts of isolation and independence.

The Process of Knowing Fulness

How does this process of knowing fulness, seeing fulness, experiencing fulness, expressing fulness come about in our lives personally? It is the same way as it was in Christ. He attained fulness here as the Son of Man, and when He returned to the Father, it was both as the Son of God and Son of Man in fulness. Now we will never become deity, (I do not want to give anyone that impression) but there is something of the glory there that we are a part of. Christ is the exalted King with all authority in heaven and earth, and we can touch and taste of that authority. In the same way in which He came into that fulness, we will have to also, and that is the way of the cross. He emptied Himself of His self-glory, His self-power, His self-honor, His self-importance, and then He was filled with fulness. He became totally dependent on the Father, and we too must become totally dependent.

The Spirit today is working through our circumstances, our trials, our pressures, and our encounters to empty us that we might be filled. The emptying comes before the filling that the Father might be fully satisfied. There is much more of Christ than we have experienced or have known of His fulness. But I want to encourage us today that as we look into this book of Ephesians, that we will have our spiritual eyes opened to see the greatness of Christ and what we have been brought into. And also to see that we have a responsibility to seek Him, to know Him, to allow the cross to work that we might be filled. Oh! That we may know the Lord, not only as the Lamb but as the exalted King, the glorified King, the life of the King.

Let me give you a picture of what I am trying to get across, and it is was a picture that was on one of the books that we have. It was a picture of light, this bright, brilliant white light shining through a prism. It was a picture of what is happening and going on. That light shines through a prism, and you may have done it in a science class. You shine a white light through a prism, and it separates into all the colors. White light actually is the combination of all the colors, but you cannot see the colors unless somehow the light is broken down. Now that is the same thing that happens with the rainbow in the sky. In the brilliant sunlight usually in the afternoon, if there is a rain shower there are particles of rain in the air that are like crystals that are quite high in the air and may be frozen water. Anyway that bright light shines through that crystal water, and out comes the beautiful rainbow. When you look at the sun, you can see what God is doing? He wants us to see all the colors. He is glorious, and when His glory comes forth, it is like a brilliant bright

light. And when that glory shines through the church, we see all the colors. All of us project a special color, and I am not sure if any of them are exactly the same because colors have different shades. But it is all going to be beautiful! That is what we have been challenged with—all the fulness of Christ being expressed through His church.

Lord, we come today, but I feel as if I just scratched the surface of the greatness of who You are in Your fulness. Lord, I think we all feel that way when we get these glimpses of Your greatness. And it is not only glimpses of it but experiencing it. Your heart is so big; You love Your Son so much, and you desire the full expression that all could see this universe filled with all the glorious colors of Christ. What an amazing time! What an amazing day that will be! Lord, I pray that You will give us the mind and the heart to comprehend what You are doing. It is no small thing, and You have involved us, You have included us out of Your mercy and love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.