

## **“Unsearchable Riches of Christ”**

Eph 3:7-9

4.30.23

Years ago I read the book *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* by Robert Fulghum. Fulghum believed the lessons learned in kindergarten would help adults live more loving and peaceful lives and treat each other nicer. He listed and discussed the things he learned like:

1. Share everything.
2. Play fair.
3. Don't hit people.
4. Put things back where you found them.
5. CLEAN UP YOUR OWN MESS.
6. Don't take things that aren't yours.
7. Say you're SORRY when you HURT somebody.
8. Wash your hands before you eat.
9. Flush.
10. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
11. Live a balanced life - learn some and drink some and draw some and paint some and sing and dance and play and work everyday some.
12. Take a nap every afternoon.
13. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.
14. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.
15. Goldfish and hamster and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we.
16. And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned - the biggest word of all - LOOK.”

We have the opportunity to learn how to live as God's children from what Paul learned in his first year of conversion- his kindergarten year we might say. What he learned shaped how he saw and experienced life. What he learned is available for us to learn as well so that we can see and experience life as God intended.

Ephesians 3:7-9 (ESV), Page 977 in the Red Bibles. "Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things."

We can learn three helpful truths so that we can see and experiencing life as God intended. The first truth we see is:

**The gift of God's grace and power.**

Verse 7, "Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power."

Paul had previously explained in the first part of chapter 3, how he was entrusted to share the mystery that was revealed to Him. The mystery, for review, is God bringing Jews and Gentiles together- who were formerly estranged from one another, into one body, the Church.

Here he writes, "I was made a minister." The word minister is where we get the word "Deacon." A minister is a servant who works in the service of another.

Paul is saying I became a minister as a result of the gift of God's grace. Grace is a gift. Last week, I met my daughter's doubles tennis partner named Grace. I said, "Hello unmerited favor." She looked at me perplexed. I explained. "Grace is receiving something good, even though I didn't earn or merit it.

Paul didn't earn the opportunity to be a servant of Jesus. He lived a completely opposite life of a servant of Jesus. His life was lived to stamp out the very existence of the name Jesus. Paul recounts his life prior to Christ. He said, "And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. <sup>11</sup> And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and **in raging fury** against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities." Acts 26:10–11 (ESV)

It was the gift of grace that rescued Paul from his old life. It was the gift of grace that gave Paul a new trajectory and purpose in life. And it was the power of God that propelled him to serve the Lord. "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup> who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." 2 Corinthians 3:5–6 (ESV)

"For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."  
Colossians 1:29 (ESV)

Have you been walking in the opposite direction of God? Do you feel like you have done too many bad things to be used by God? Don't forget God's grace. God's grace is greater than all your sins. God's grace can make it possible to be "totally accepted" by your Heavenly Father. God's grace transforms so that you can be used for His good purposes. Do you believe that? Grace is life transforming.

And it is God's power that gives us the will and energy to powerfully work through us. "And what is the **immeasurable greatness of his power** toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might." Ephesians 1:19 (ESV)

Our power is measurable. It decreases as we age. God's power is immeasurable. And God's power is at work in you if you know Jesus Christ. "For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him." Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

God brings us into His forever family and then unleashes us into ministry. We are saved to serve God. "So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God." Romans 7:4 (NLT)

It is a privilege and gift of grace that God calls us and invites us to serve Him by His own power. What did God save you for? What ministry is He planning to do through you?

Paul didn't lose this fact that his ministry was result of a gift of grace. He demonstrated the second helpful truth to live the Christian life. Paul demonstrated:

### **The humility of God's servant.**

Verse 8, "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Paul is saying that if you were to judge people on a scale of 1-10 of worthiness to be a saint, with one being the lowest and 10 the highest, he would not only be a 1; he would be the lowest of all people in the 1 category.

Was Paul exhibiting false humility? Did he write this so that the readers would write back and tell him how great he is? Was he doing the "I don't look good in this outfit" to illicit praise from others on Facebook? Or "I look ugly" so that people can respond with encouragement on his instagram post?

No, Paul recognized his past mistakes and failures persecuting the church. He knew he was undeserving of the position God placed him in.

“For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” 1 Corinthians 15:9–10 (ESV)

“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” 1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)

Paul wrote Ephesians at the end of his ministry. He had planted many churches, led lots of people to Christ, spread the gospel to the remotest parts. And yet while in prison, he had the same perspective as he did when Jesus revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus and called him into ministry. He didn't deserve what he received. It was by grace and he was grateful that God would choose to use a sinner like him.

How many of us actually think like Paul? God rescues us from sin and darkness and into the marvelous light. He calls us as servants into ministry and we say, “No, I am too busy.”

That is pride when we say no to the ministry God has for us. God has designed you for ministry and when you say no, you are basically saying you are master of your life and he is not- even though His Son bought you with a price.

Or we say “Yes” and do ministry and act as if God owes us a tip for serving Him.

During college, and prior to starting graduate school, I worked as a waiter in two different restaurants. One was a fine dining restaurant in Oregon and the other an Italian restaurant in the Chicago suburbs. That restaurant had the best Focaccia bread and Tiramisu that I have ever tasted.

In many restaurants, waiters do not get minimum wage. They receive a lower wage. I was getting paid \$2.60 per hour at the Italian restaurant. The rest of my income was determined by how well I cared for the customers. My income was dependent on tips.

It used to be you tipped when someone did service that was above and beyond. Now people are asking for tips for doing their job. At most jobs now there is a tip jar or a computer screen recommending a tip percentage. You are asked to give a tip for doing the everyday normal responsibility- nothing extravagant, nothing exceptional. Everyone expects tips for doing what they were hired and paid to do.

In the back of the church is the offering basket. I am adding another basket that says "tips." After the service, please stop by the tip basket and make a contribution because I am preaching right now and I expect a tip for doing my job. :)

Jesus got to the heart of feeling owed by God for doing our job. He said, "When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, does his master say, 'Come in and eat with me'?"<sup>8</sup> No, he says, 'Prepare my meal, put on your apron, and serve me while I eat. Then you can eat later.'<sup>9</sup> And does the master thank the servant for doing what he was told to do? Of course not.<sup>10</sup> In the same way, when you obey me you should say, 'We are unworthy servants who have simply done our duty.' " Luke 17:7-10 (NLT)

A servant should not expect to be owed by his master. On our very best day, we are still unworthy servants and God owes us nothing. R. C. Sproul puts it this way, "Jesus' lesson is this: if we do do what he commands, that is not an occasion for boasting, for we have done no more than what was expected of us."

Do we have a tip jar attitude with God? Lord I did my job, now give me a tip as a thank you. That is not how it works. If you were to do EVERYTHING the Lord commanded, you would only be doing your duty.

God does not owe us anything. We owe God everything. That was how Paul lived his life. He was grateful and humble as a servant of God.

Humility is a key to longevity in ministry. Paul's ministry shined the light on Jesus. It never shined the light on his own ability. Because of Paul's humility, he didn't steal glory that was meant for God.

The common denominator to why ministry leaders and pastors fall from their positions is pride. They think too highly of themselves. Many leaders start out humble but as their influence increases they forget that God was behind the success. Soon they believe all the press clippings about how important they are to the church or ministry. The church or ministry owes its success to them. It is no longer- "Look what God has done through someone like me" to "Look what I have done for God." There is a big difference.

God is opposed to the proud for the proud steal His glory. God will humble the proud. And in time the proud will fall.

I know that it is only by grace that I am the pastor in this church. I know that I am not the source of any success or growth that we have. I know that any future growth and larger buildings is the result of God working. This is His Church and I am His servant.

There will be a day I will no longer be the Pastor of Cornerstone DWT. The Lord will bring someone else in to replace me. It is not the Pastor who leads this church; it is Jesus Christ and He is not going anywhere. He will never leave you!

Let us remember that **we have the privilege to be God's servants** who joyfully do our duty and give thanks to him for his abundant mercies that He daily showers on us. Any impact or fruit that results is because of the power of God working in us. The only credit we can take is that we chose to serve- but even that is the work of God moving us to say yes to serve.

The third helpful truth to live the Christian life is to understand and share

**The message of the unsearchable riches of Christ.**

Verse 8, “To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

Paul was tasked to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Here is how different translations translated the Greek words for “unsearchable riches.” Endless treasures (NLT)/ inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ (the Message)/ unfathomable riches of Christ (NASB)/ incalculable riches of the Messiah (HCSB)

The riches found in Christ are beyond our ability to comprehend or exhaust- they are limitless. “But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” 1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)

Paul uses the term “riches” in Ephesians seven times. He wants believers to realize the incredible provision of God for His children. To know the limitless outpouring of his grace he has lavished upon us in Christ.

**What are some riches of God’s grace in Christ?**

**Knowing Jesus-** knowing more of Jesus doesn’t take things away from you; it makes you richer. It blesses you. You never lose with Jesus; you always gain. If you know Jesus you are abundantly rich.

**Security in Christ-** Jesus promises to never leave or forsake us. He will always be with us.

**Acceptance in Christ-** we are totally accepted. Thanks to Jesus, He has made us acceptable to God.

**Fully pleasing in Christ.** Think about this statement, “I am fully pleasing to God.” I cannot say that with any other relationship I have. I am not fully pleasing as a son, as a brother, as a husband, as a father, as an employee, as a pastor, as a neighbor, as a citizen. I am not perfect so I am not fully pleasing to anyone- anyone except God.



Thanks to the riches in Christ, I am fully pleasing to God. He sees Christ in me. He sees the perfection of Christ in me. That is amazing. That is life transforming. To know you are fully pleasing to God drives you to live a godly life in Christ.

**Future in Christ-** our death is not a loss. It is a gain because we get to experience the riches of eternity in Christ. We get to experience the beauty and joy of heaven. Paul wrote in Eph 2:7, “So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:7 (ESV)

These are just a few of the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ.

These riches are to be shared not hoarded. We don't have to worry about the riches running out or becoming less when others hear about it. Christ's riches are unending; they have no limit.

God's children are to join Paul with our assigned task found in verse 9, “And to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things.” Eph 3:9

The Greek word, “bring to light” is where we get the English term “photo.” It means to “illuminate or cause to shine on something to make it visibly clear.” Whenever I take my dog [please show pic], Cascade, out at night to empty his tank, I shine a flashlight on the ground in front of him. I illuminate the grass so that he can see there are no bunnies or squirrels lurking in the grass. Otherwise, he thinks he sees them and sometimes takes off so fast that he yanks his chain out of the ground.



Unbelievers see darkness. They don't see the riches in Christ that God has prepared for them. They need us to shed light on the truth- to illuminate

the gospel for them to see and hear.

God is calling His “rich in grace” children to join Paul in being servants of the gospel- to share the good news in God’s power.

The church leaders are doing some strategic planning. We are seeking God for what to do in the next three years. The Elders have been meeting for a few months looking at our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as a church. And in the past month, the DWT leaders have also been discussing these areas specifically for DWT. There are some wonderful strengths in both campuses. We are welcoming. We preach and teach God’s Word. We have uplifting worship. We are intergenerational. We have growing children’s ministries. We experience grace and truth.

There are also similar weaknesses. The #1 weakness at both campuses is the lack of evangelism- not sharing the gospel with others and the lack of inviting people to church.

If you have come to either campus for a while, you get fed God’s Word regularly in Sunday School, children’s church, ABFs, sermons, Wed’s night Bible studies. We talk about reaching the next generation a lot. And yet few do it. Few share the riches in Christ that is available.

We planted churches in ELD and DWT to reach people for Christ in our surrounding communities. We give 25% of our budget to missions to reach people around the world for Christ.

Let’s take steps to make this a strength in 2023 and the years to come. Let’s support each other in sharing the wonderful news that we have already received. Let’s reach people who are headed for an eternity forever separated from God.

Let’s pray

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