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THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

Such a statement as is the title of this article to the average man of our generation is well-nigh meaningless. "The unsearchable riches of Christ", it is unintelligible abstract and vague. Just as a person who is stone deaf can never appreciate a work such as Handel's Messiah, or a blind person can never judge the masterpieces of Constable or Reynolds, so neither can the unconverted man or woman understand the statements of Holy Writ, for "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned". (1 COR. 3.V. 14.) But to us whose ears have been unstopped by the omnipotent touch of the Son of God, whose eyes have been opened by the power of His Holy Spirit, such a statement breathes with meaning and reality within us. It may be well to refresh our minds as to the one who under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost first coined this phrase; it was none other than the great apostle to the Gentiles who when writing to the Christians at Ephesus said in his letter to them - "Unto me, who am less than all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ". (EPH.3.V.8.)

If there is one characteristic which stands out more than another in the life of the Apostle Paul it is the very lowly estimate which he had of himself. Here writing is the man who under God, had been the means of founding many New Testament churches, the writer of thirteen or fourteen inspired epistles, the one who was "not behind the very chiefest apostles", "in labours more abundant, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft", the man who declared "to me to live is Christ" yet he says "I am less than the least of all saints", this is very strong language, for what a poor specimen the least saint must be, yet says Paul "I am less than that person". Nor are such expressions confined to the Ephesian letter, for to the Corinthians he says "I am the least of the Apostles which am not meet to be an Apostle", to the Romans he cries "Wretched man than I am", to Timothy he says "I am the chief of sinners". The plain truth about this great man of God is that the eyes of his understanding were so fully opened by the Holy Spirit of God that he had well-nigh perfect insight into the corruption of his own natural heart, hence he was clothed from head to foot in humility, and Christ was now all in all to him. Paul had learnt the great truth expressed by John the Baptist when he said that "He (that was Christ) must increase, but I must decrease" (John.3.V.30.)

The flesh had been so mortified in the experience of the Apostle Paul that he now saw himself as nothing, consequently Christ was magnified in him. The wonders of God's Sovereign Grace towards him was ever a cause of wonder and worship, even here in this verse he marvels that grace was given to him to preach, but he goes further than this, his language is always telling, his phraseology expressive and bums with meaning; so he amplifies his subject, he says "Grace was given to me to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ".

What grace was given to this man, - the young fellow who guarded the garments of the men who stoned the first New Testament martyr in ACTS.7. The tyrant who made havoc of the church in ACTS.8. The man who breathed out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord in ACTS.9. This is the same man, never did he forget the road to Damascus, the house of Judas in the street which was called "Straight", the visit of good Ananias, the scales falling from his sin darkened eyes and his marvellous passage from death into life, these things were ever fresh and green in his mind, the remembrance of his debt to God's mercy and grace was constantly before him, hence he never acted or spoke in a half-hearted manner, but always did he express himself intensely. One wonders here exactly what such a man as this was really trying to convey when he spoke of the unsearchable riches of Christ; no doubt it is far, far more than ever we can comprehend, for he saw in the Lord of Glory such a boundless provision for the needs of poor fallen man that no other phrase could convey his meaning. From whatever stand point he beheld the risen glorified. Saviour he saw in Him far more than mind could conceive or tongue could tell. There was the unsearchable riches of Christ's person as mediator, that miraculous union of perfect man and perfect God in the one person of our Lord Jesus Christ; great is this mystery, yet what comfort and consolation to all whose eyes have been enlightened, for here infinite power and the tenderest of sympathy are not only met together but combined in one Saviour. Had He been only man He could not have saved us, and with reverence one says that had He been only God He could not have been "Touched with the feeling of our infirmities", nor "Suffered Himself being tempted". (HEB.2.V.19. & 4.V.15.) As God He is mighty to save, as man He is our Head, our Representative our Surety and our Friend. Added to the unsearchable riches of His person is His work, and what depths are here, the work which the Father gave Him to do, and this He finished (JOHN.17.V.4.) The work of atonement, of reconciliation, of redemption, of substitution and satisfaction, how rich are all these terms to us, yea how

unsearchable, as He suffered and died "The Just for we the unjust, that He might bring us to God". But there is yet more to the unsearchable riches of Christ in the offices which He fills at this present moment as He lives for us at the right hand of God. He is our Mediator, our Advocate, our Great High Priest, our Intercessor, our Shepherd, our Captain, our King, our Master, our Head, our Forerunner, the Bridegroom of our hearts, the terms are legion, - meaningless to the unregenerate, but unto us who believe - all so precious. There is yet more; we might let our minds range through the Scriptures and set down the many titles and descriptions given to Immanuel, think of such a title as The Lamb of God, The Bread of Life, The Fountain of Living Waters, The Light of the World, The Door, The Way, The Truth, The Life, The Vine, The Rock, The Corner Stone, The Christians' Altar, The Christians' Robe, again these are empty descriptions to those whose minds are darkened, but to the true Christian, each title if hammered out and developed will be found to be such a well of truth that it can never be emptied.

Even now we have not exhausted the riches of Christ; think of His actions, His intentions, His dispositions towards sinners as revealed in the New Testament, the riches of His mercy, His love, His compassion for the lost, the riches of His power to cleanse, to pardon, to forgive, to save to the uttermost, the riches of His willingness to receive all who come to Him repenting and believing, the riches of His ability to change hard hearts, and sin stained souls, to lift from the kingdom of darkness, to translate into the kingdom of light, the riches of indescribable patience to bear with weak faltering believers, riches of sympathy and of understanding, riches of limitless strength for His people right through to the end, and last but not least, riches of glory for all eternity, and even then the riches of Christ will still be unsearchable for the very anthem of heaven, yea of the whole universe centres around the same theme, for ever creature says the Bible "IN HEAVEN, ON EARTH, UNDER THE EARTH, AND SUCH AS ARE IN THE SEA" will universally be taken up with Him, with a loud voice ALL will extol His power, His riches, His wisdom, His strength, His honour and His glory, and ascribe blessing and glory unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

With such a panorama before faith's vision, it is little wonder the Apostle Paul coined the phrase "The unsearchable riches of Christ". It is a mine though worked for all eternity yet will its gold never run out. It is a fountain from which

will draw ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, - a company which no man can ever number for ever and for ever, yet will its waters never be diminished. Brethren and sisters in North Road Chapel such is His grace to each one of us, that these riches though unsearchable are all ours in Christ Jesus, they are the "RICHES OF HIS GRACE" to us hell deserving sinners.

May we like the great apostle to the Gentiles never see ourselves other than this "That no flesh should glory in His presence, But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and Sanctification, and redemption; that according as it is written He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord" (1.COR.1.V.29-31). W.H.M.

(THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN "REFORMATION SOUTH WEST", AND IS REPRINTED BY KIND PERMISSION).

THE LOCAL CHURCH by J.K. Davies. (CAMBORNE)

The local Church is not an optional extra to personal Christian living. Membership of and faithful participation in the life of the local Church is commended and commanded in the New Testament.

The local Church is not simply the sum total of its members. It is the Body of Christ, it is God's Temple etc., and derives its life from Christ as its Head. It therefore has a life more than simply the collective life of its members. It is this that distinguishes the Church from a human club or society. Now while it is true that a couple of Christians meeting in fellowship do not properly constitute a New Testament Church, it is also true that a true Church need not have hundreds of members and can be a true Church with quite a small membership. Be it large or small however the true Church displays Christ's life in various marks or characteristics. Each member is responsible for the quality of that life displayed as he is responsible to Christ as his Head. This responsibility is not merely theoretical. In fact it is a most practical thing and is expressed in many areas of life and activity. Let us consider briefly some of the most important areas of responsibility which Church members bear for the Church.

First of all, and perhaps most obviously there is the responsibility of prayer. We need to pray for one another and the work of the Church, indeed we must pray for one another, and all the more so as we become familiar with one another's needs.

Secondly there is the responsibility for financial support of the Church. Money is necessary for the Church to function on a practical level. The work of outreach needs to be paid for. The servants of the Lord need sufficient to live in order to serve the Lord.

Thirdly, hospitality is commended in scripture and is to be a constant feature of the life of the members of the Church. An Englishman's home may well be his castle but a Christian's home should never have a "drawbridge". Hospitality is an evidence of loving concern for the Lord's people (and others). As the Lord blesses us with homes so those homes are to be used for Him with a spirit of openness. Do the other members of the Church know the inside of your home? Some need to be invited or they will never come, and they are usually the very people who need your love and fellowship.

Fourthly, the practical care of one another is a clear evidence of Christ's life among us. Burdens need to be borne by others if they are ever to be made lighter. Physical needs are to be attended to as much as spiritual needs. Babysitting, help in a crisis, visits, lifts in cars, shopping etc., are the kinds of things that readily come to mind but there are also other things which need the practical care of fellow believers. We must be alert to see the particular areas of need and also on the other hand when in need ourselves we must be humble enough to receive it. Not one of us is self-sufficient in the end.

In the fifth place, members of the Church are expected to be present at the services and meetings of the Church. "Loners" lose out, and so do "once-ers". If the Church members don't bother to come how can you expect non-Christians to come. We need to be present with one another if corporate worship is to have any reality. We need to meet with one another, to talk with one another and to support one another. The cure for loneliness is fellowship. Also, the regular faithful presence of the members of the Church encourages the preacher and all the more so if the members come in a prayerful attitude of mind.

Six - in the life of the Church there are many things that need doing. We should not be "backward in coming forward" otherwise a very small number of diligent folk are left doing everything. Our personal ministry or service in the Church is vital for its proper functioning. But when you volunteer for something - do it, and do it well for it is service for God. If you fail somebody else will have to do it for you!

The seventh area of responsibility is rather more tricky yet nevertheless as important as the others. Occasionally there are times when we see a brother or sister living a disorderly or disobedient life and we will perhaps be called upon to admonish them. This is a most difficult area of responsibility and it must always be done with love and humility, and never with superiority. We must seek always to encourage others in spiritual things, and we must avoid at all costs a spirit of criticism. Remember we may need to be admonished ourselves next time.

The eighth matter for our consideration is when we hear the Church being criticised - even justly. The member should defend it and his fellow believers against the criticism of unbelievers. This is not to be done at the expense of truth, but most certainly in humility so that the truth may be established. Most criticism from the world is based on misunderstanding and ignorance of the truth. The glory of the Lord and His honour is often bound up with the reputation of the Church.

In the ninth place we need to consider for a moment the unseemly subject of gossip. When we hear it especially about another member of the Church, we are to be silent! Do not pass it on. Gossip is only gossip when it is listened to and passed on!

Many things could be included in this list but one more matter will suffice. The member of the Church who is eager to worship the Lord with his fellow believers, who is eager to hear the Word of God, who is eager about the work of God, will be punctual in his attendance. Lateness can mean many things - some of them understandable and excusable, but to be perpetually late reveals a lack of zeal, a lack of concern and a lack of basic order in your life. God is a God of order and when you come to His house to worship Him - be on time!

So, as a member of a Church you have a responsibility to that Church. The Church needs you, your prayers, your presence and your participation. Loyalty to the Church is not to a human organisation. It is loyalty to Christ. Yet we are not blind to the deficiencies of the Church. The Church is not perfect yet - it will only be that in heaven. While here however we must always seek to reform it and improve it according to the Word of God, A true Church is Christ's Church not ours and so its life is Christ's not merely ours.

May the Lord abundantly bless the Churches as the members diligently fulfil the great responsibilities that are theirs.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INFORMATION

Reviewing the past quarter, we must return thanks to our Heavenly Father for all His goodness to us. At our Annual Church Meeting (which unfortunately through sickness some were unable to attend) we were made aware as the accounts were given of the goodness of God in providing for the material and financial needs of the Church, and Mr Bennett as he led us in prayer made especial mention of spiritual provision, giving thanks in the words of the Psalmist "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies", how true this has been of us at North Road, every time we come together our hungry souls are fed. How starved we should be, how we should languish did not God provide for us this "Means of Grace". May we always be grateful for this and like Mephibosheth ever be present to sit at the Kings table to partake of the good things provided for us. We look back to the visit of Mr Dix, to the encouraging report on the work of the T.B.S. How faithful and true has this society ever been to the Word of God and to the Truth. We should by all means within our power support and encourage this loyal band of men. We think too of the illustrated lecture, and the ministry on the Sunday, - surely "God was with us of a truth".

As is our practice during the winter months our pulpit will be served by more local brethren, we prayerfully look forward to their ministry.

To our brethren and sisters who are ill and shut in, we send our love and greetings, and assure you each one, that you are constantly in our thoughts and regularly remembered in our prayers. May His blessing be upon you and may you know much of His presence and His peace.

As will be seen in the Church Calendar the first Thursday in the New Year there will be no speaker but the whole evening will be spent in prayer in the main Chapel.

"TRY SOMETHING NEW" Says the Modern Christian.

"ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS" Says God. (Jer.6.v.16)