

“The Unfathomable Riches of Christ – Part 1”
Ephesians 3:8-9
(Preached at Trinity, July 13, 2014)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we've seen, **Chapter 3** begins with prayer but immediately digresses until we come to **Verses 14-21**.
So without the digression it would read:
"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name"
2. The digression, however, is really the primary matter of the chapter. It deals with Paul's special call as Apostle to the Gentiles. He began in **Verse 1** to describe his imprisonment on their behalf. It was because of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles that he was in prison. But he makes it clear, however, it was for the sake of Christ that he was imprisoned. Everything in Paul's life had an eye upon Christ. Everything focused upon Christ. Paul's life was lived for Christ.
3. In **Verse 2** Paul continues this digression. Paul makes it clear that he received his calling to evangelize the Gentile world by divine appointment. Paul took this calling very seriously. He saw it as a Divine mandate upon his life. He was careful to be a good steward of this calling.
4. As we continue with **Verses 3-6** Paul shares specifically about this calling. It was a particular stewardship that he refers to as "the mystery" which he had received by Divine revelation.
Verse 3 - " that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery"
5. The great mystery that had been hidden was that Jesus Christ would be a Light to the Gentiles. The mystery that had been kept secret from the beginning of the world was that true Israel would include even the Gentiles.
Ephesians 3:6 NAU - "*to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel"
6. But Paul is actually speaking of two profound mysteries that encapsulated his ministry.
The greatest mystery that Paul spent his life proclaiming was Christ Himself.
Paul adds the portion beginning at the end of **Verse 3** as a parenthesis which is given in the KJV –
Ephesians 3:3-4 NAU - "as I wrote before in brief. ⁴ By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ"
 - A. Paul is saying in essence, refer again to the earlier parts of this letter and you'll see the insights I have into the mysteries of Christ.

- B. In Chapter 1 Paul said we were chosen in Christ, adopted through Christ, redeemed by his blood. The grand purposes of God were accomplished through Christ. Having been raised in all power and authority all things have been put in subjection under Christ.
In Chapter 2 Paul reminds us that we have been raised with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly places. And in Christ both Jew and Gentile enjoy these marvelous blessings.
7. Paul is saying that by God's grace he had been called and set apart to preach what he referred to as "the unfathomable riches of Christ." Paul uses a word that is only used twice in the NT. It refers to something that is beyond our ability to comprehend. The ESV & KJV translate it "unsearchable."
Paul uses the word in **Romans 11** to describe our inability to fully understand the ways of God.
Romans 11:33 NAU - "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"
Here the KJV translates it as "past finding out."
8. For Paul, there was no greater subject, yet one which cannot be known apart from Divine revelation. This is the NT concept of "mystery." This was the core of Paul's preaching.
1 Corinthians 2:1-2 NAU - "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.
² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."
9. Paul's life was consumed with Christ. He told the Philippians,
Philippians 1:21 NAU - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
10. As he looked back on his life Paul couldn't believe that he once persecuted the one that he now passionately loved. This is what's behind his statements of self deprecation:
Ephesians 3:8 NAU - "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given"
1 Timothy 1:12-15 KJV - " And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; ¹³ Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."
11. To know Christ is to engage the most profound of mysteries, it is to obtain the greatest of riches. In a sense, however, it is buried treasure, a treasure that we search out with great passion. Paul writes in **Colossians 2**
Colossians 2:2-3 NAU - "*attaining* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
12. I'd like you to consider with me for a moment the amazing mystery of Christ. This will be the subject of my preaching this morning and next Lord's Day morning.
- I. Jesus is the grand fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose. In the infinite mind of God He was able to weigh every conceivable option for the salvation of man
- A. There are an infinite number of unworkable possibilities

1. It would be impossible for God to simply forgive – He would have to deny His own holy character, His perfect justice
 2. It would be impossible to find a suitable substitute to suffer in our stead
 - a. Perhaps an angel – but angels are not on the same order as man
 - b. Perhaps the blood of bulls and goats – but again, they are not on the same level as man, and they are amoral by nature
 - c. Perhaps another man, but all are guilty
- B. This is where the amazing mystery comes into view
1. In the infinite mind of God there could be only one way to satisfy His justice and bring guilty sinners into a renewed relationship with Himself
 2. It would require a Divine person to bear God’s infinite wrath
 3. It would require a perfect man to righteously fulfill the Law and serve as our substitute.
 4. Jesus Christ alone would be the perfect God-man able to bear our guilt and impart His perfect righteousness.
 5. As Jesus prayed in anguish the night before His Crucifixion His prayer implied this important question:
Matthew 26:39 NAU - "He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."
 A. Is it possible for there to be another way? The answer was silent but clear. There was no other possible way. God had determined to save His elect people from their sin and Jesus alone could drink the cup of God’s wrath.
 B. In Chapter 1 Paul stated that we were chosen “in Christ” and predestinated as sons “through Jesus Christ.”
 Jesus alone is the fullness of God’s purposes.
 6. But how is it that Jesus, the eternal Son of God could continue as God and yet become man? He would be born to a human mother. The One who had no beginning would have a beginning – this is the mystery of the incarnation. It is a mystery that is unfathomable and beyond our human understanding.
- II. Consider the amazing birth of Christ – great in mystery
- A. In many ways His birth was quite normal.
1. He was born a man. He was born as all other human beings, like the other 60 billion that scientists estimated have been born.
 - a. Mary carried Him 9 months
 - b. She delivered Him in the normal way
 The cries of a mother in labor, the cry of a new born child
 - c. He appeared as a normal, healthy, baby boy
 - d. In fact, He *was* a normal, healthy, human baby in every way
 2. But from the very beginning we know that He was far different from any other man
 - a. His conception was miraculous - He had no earthly father – Mary was a virgin. So amazing, many continue to doubt the possibility
 - b. Nature pointed to the momentous occasion of His birth
 A star appeared in the eastern sky announcing His birth

- c. A multitude of angels announced His birth
Luke 2:8-14 NAU - "In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² "This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."
- d. Wise men came from the east to bring Him gifts and worship Him for they knew He was the King of kings
Matthew 2:11 NAU - "After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."
- B. Contemplate with me the infinite mystery of the God-Man
1. On one hand we can understand the theological essence.
 - a. Jesus possessed two distinct natures. He was both God and man in one solitary person. His humanity did not change His deity and His deity did not take away from His full humanity.
 - b. Jesus was fully God and fully man.
 - That which pertained to God pertained to Christ. He was infinite, eternal and unchangeable. He was infinitely holy, infinitely powerful, all knowing. He created all things by the word of His power.
 - He was also fully man. Everything that pertains to us pertains to Christ. He experienced hunger, thirst, exhaustion, pain. The one thing that separated the humanity of Jesus from the rest of humanity was His lack of sin. He was perfect in every way.
Hebrews 7:26 NAU - "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens"
 2. On the other hand, the harmony of the two natures of Jesus has always been a great mystery—it is unsearchable. The very contemplation fills our minds with wonder.
 3. There were times that His humanity seemed to have dominance—so much so that some have doubted His deity.
 - a. He was born like every human baby. He nursed. He had to learn to crawl and then to walk. He would have taken his first steps like every other baby.
 He learned new words as His vocabulary developed.

- b. He prayed to the Father and was limited in His knowledge of the Divine prerogative
Mark 13:32 NAU - "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father *alone*."
 - c. As a human being He gave Himself to a life of obedience and faithfulness to the will of the Father
John 4:34 NAU - "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."
 - d. His obedience even led to his death – an act of His humanity.
4. There were other times that His divinity was displayed vividly
- a. The transfiguration was the best example
Matthew 17:1-2 NAU - "Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. ² And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light."
 - b. Even in His humanity Jesus always knew His life was unique. He was always consumed with the unique harmony of the Godhead. When His family found Him after three days in the Temple He told them, **Luke 2:49 KJV** - "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"
Lit – "The things of My Father."
 - c. There were times that Divine knowledge was overlaid upon Jesus' human mind.
John 2:23-25 NAU - " Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, ²⁵ and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man."
Matthew 9:2-4 NAU - "And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven." ³ And some of the scribes said to themselves, "This *fellow* blasphemes." ⁴ And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?"
 - d. On the night of His arrest the power of the Divine person of Christ overwhelmed the soldiers
John 18:3-6 NAU - " Judas then, having received the *Roman* cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵ They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am *He*." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. ⁶ So when He said to them, "I am *He*," they drew back and fell to the ground."
5. Who can fathom these things?

Conclusion –

1. There is no higher contemplation than the unsearchable riches of Christ. As Christians nothing brings us greater pleasure than the contemplation of the mysteries of Christ.
2. The greatest question is do you know Him – intimately. Is He your highest treasure? Is He your greatest source of happiness? Does He fill your heart with great joy?
3. The truth is, this infinitely glorious Christ invites you to know Him. It all has to do with the desire of your heart. Do you desire Him? Then pursue Him and never stop pursuing.