

Ephesians Chapter 2 v 2 - 21

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[0 : 00] The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever.

He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. Dear Lord, as we sang that song, we can only imagine what the glory of the Lord is like.

But we do know, Lord, that it would be hard to stand in that place and observe the awesome glory of our Lord. Lord, we know that even those prophets of old had to hide their faces when your glory went by.

And so, Lord, as we come into your presence this evening, we thank you and praise you that although we are still amazed by that thought of your glory, we needn't be fearful of it because of the fact that you promised that for those who trusted in you, for those who've acknowledged that you are their saviour, Lord, we can come with boldness into your presence.

[1 : 27] So we come this evening to worship you, to praise you, to thank you for all that you do for us. Not just now, but Lord, we acknowledge that all through our lives, and to the very ends of our lives, you continue to demonstrate your grace and love toward us.

And we pray that as we meet together this evening, we might once again, through your word, be turned to see our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, lifted up, and high above all authorities in this world.

One who is, as those words that we sang told us, awesome, and yet one who is so loving and caring that he comes to each one of us and speaks softly and gently to us to demonstrate his compassion and his grace toward us.

So, Lord, be with us now. May all our worship be acceptable in your sight, and may we give all the honour and all the glory to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. 103. 103. It says, For he knows how we are formed.

[2 : 44] He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower in the field. The wind blows over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children, with those who keep his covenant, and remember to obey his precepts.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the Lord, you, his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.

Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you, his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works, everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, all my soul.

And I'm going to read the whole chapter. It's fairly short. I'm going to start from verse 2 of chapter 3.

[4 : 00] Surely you've heard about the administration of God's grace that was given up to me for you. That is the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I've already written briefly.

In reading this, then, you'll be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to many other generations, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

This mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I'm less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this

mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose, which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[5 : 24] In him, and through faith in him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom this whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. Well, if you got that passage open in front of you that we read in Ephesians, that would be useful.

[6 : 46] It was good of Martin to thank me for doing the service tonight, but he hasn't heard what I got to say yet, so maybe it was a bit premature. In this passage that we read in Ephesians, the one little phrase which stood out to me, which if you like is the title, although there are three sub-headings for this evening, was this phrase, the manifold wisdom of God.

Now, manifold isn't a word that you see very commonly. As a mathematician, I've got one way of understanding it, but that's probably the wrong one. But if any of you understand what manifold means, it's not that thing which is on top of an engine in a car, although that is a manifold, but rather it means just a great variety, lots and lots, a multitude of different things.

And this is talking about the wisdom of God basically having all that knowledge and all that wisdom in so many different areas.

And so, when we look at this passage, I picked out three things which this wisdom of God is needed for, three mysteries which are mentioned in this passage.

But before I go to those mysteries, I want you to turn with me to Job chapter 11. So that's just before the Psalms. If you find the Psalms and go a little bit before, you'll find Job and chapter 11.

[8 : 21] And in there, we find these words. Job's being spoken to and this is what was said to him.

Verses 7 to 9. Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?

They are higher than the heavens. What can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave. What can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.

This was someone challenging Job in terms of his understanding of God and God's workings. And in a sense, in this passage in Ephesians, we find Paul doing a similar thing to these Ephesians who he's writing to.

He mentions three mysteries here. In verse 8, he talks about the unsearchable riches of Christ. In verse 19, he talks about the love that surpasses knowledge.

[9 : 36] And then in verse 20, he talks about the immeasurable work of Christ. Now, as many of you know, I was a teacher and I want you to imagine now a situation that you may have experienced yourself at school or it may be that your children have experienced this.

We certainly, Kath and I, experienced this on one occasion when one of our daughters came home with her homework. Now, I've invented some words for the teacher to say and for Julia to reply because it was Julia's homework which probably never happened but it must have been similar to this.

But just imagine this scenario. That you were asked or your child was asked by the teacher to do a project on a particular topic that you knew nothing about and so you asked the teacher some questions and this might have been the dialogue that took place.

What book or book should I read to find out about it, sir? There are no books on this subject or on the internet. What work that we've done do I need to do to help me with this?

Nothing. It's well beyond anything you've ever done. When will I know that I've done enough on this project? You won't because there's always going to be something more that you could write.

[11:02] Imagine being given that as a homework. Well, that would be very discouraging. And as we look at these three mysteries by the definition of what these mysteries are and the words that are given there these are things which people cannot know.

Why? The first one the unsearchable riches of Christ. there's no point looking for it because you'll never find it. It's unsearchable. What about this love that it's talking about?

The love of God. The love of Christ. Well, there's no point looking at that because it says it surpasses knowledge. However much you know you won't understand it.

And what about Christ's work in the church and in this world? Well, there's no point looking at it because there's no way of measuring it.

And Paul brings these three things. However, I want to draw your attention to one thing before we're totally discouraged. I missed out the first verse and you notice that he says this for this reason I, Paul and then he goes on to tell them these things.

[12:16] And the for this reason refers to what came before. And so tonight we're going to start at the end and go backwards because Paul has given them all the answers in the previous chapter.

Well, the fact is we're going to go through these three in the order that they occur in the passage.

Let's look at the unsearchable riches of Christ first of all.

Here's another scenario that will be very familiar. Two scenarios. I always thought that one of these I'll let you guess which one I would use in church at some time.

Perhaps in a children's address but I decided I'd do it tonight instead. Another discussion usually with a boy a young boy going up to a certain age.

I won't tell you which one Kath will tell you afterwards. And it goes like this. Mum where are my socks? They're in the drawer. Mum which drawer are they in?

[13:25] They're in the second drawer. Mum I can't find them. They're there. I put them there yesterday.

Mum I've looked all through the drawer and they're not there. They're there. I told you have another look. Mum I can't find them.

Can you come and find them for me? Mum comes up and goes there they are. And then usually the little boy says they weren't there when I looked.

As Kath will know that little boy is still me. And I tell that story because the other similar story is one of these immutable laws of science.

Science never records it. It will believe in Darwinianism. It will believe in evolution. It will believe all sorts of wonderful things that they can give you incredible information about and all the statistics.

[14:32] But the one law they've never been able to explain is the law of the vanishing teaspoon. Now we don't experience this at church anymore because we've now got a dishwasher.

But when we used to wash up in the sink that shows my age now. Right? You used to wash up all the pots and then at the end when the water was a bit dirty and cloudy so you couldn't see through.

Right? You went to feel just if there was anything else left in the bottom. And there was nothing.

There was never anything left in the bottom because you've carefully removed everything. And then you tip the water out and there's a clang and a tinkle as a teaspoon falls out.

There was always one teaspoon. Where it was when you were searching for it was unclear but it toppled out when you emptied the bowl.

But these although it's a silly story it's one that we're familiar with and these riches of Christ that he's referring to he says are unsearchable. You can't find them.

[15:38] No matter how hard you look like that sock drawer no matter how many times you look inside you couldn't find a sock. If you're looking as a person in the world for the riches of Christ you'll never find them.

If people did if it was so easy then people would turn to be Christians in droves wouldn't they?

Because they would be so wonderful. But you can't find them.

But Paul fortunately tells us what these riches are and he does it as I say in the previous chapter let's look at some of them. In Ephesians chapter 2 verses 4 and 5 one of these riches of God is that God made us alive with Christ.

God made us alive with Christ. What a glorious thing that is. How much is that worth compared with what this world can give? Made alive with Christ.

And then in verse 6 this amazing as it may seem it says God seated us with him that's Christ in their heavenly realms. One day we flawed humanity sinful men and women will one day be with Christ in

heaven.

[17 : 03] What a fantastic rich thing that is. and then in verse 13 in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near.

We were so far away from God when we didn't believe when we weren't even looking for God but he drew us to himself he brought us near he brought us into this heavenly realm he made us alive. Verse 14 he that is Jesus he says is our peace. I prayed for these people who are being persecuted at the moment in other lands but the fact is often you'll find Christians in whatever situation they find themselves however bad it might seem from the world's eyes you often find they can be at peace even in the midst of war even in the midst of persecution or whatever it might be and this isn't just a worldly peace this is a genuine peace because it's peace with God and then in verse 16 he says that we're reconciled to God through the cross what riches those are when you talk about these things it seems that I've been talking about them with a number of people recently you know we've already been to one funeral we're going to another one on Tuesday no doubt there'll be other situations like that and inevitably when you think about someone passing from this world into the next then the question arises you know what are they going to somebody mentioned to me that they get really annoyed when they're in a church service we won't say where or who was conducting it and somebody who has no

Christian profession has lived all her life without any thought to Christian things and the minister says isn't it wonderful that we can know that when they leave this earth they go to be with the father when the bible clearly says that will not happen if they don't have faith if they don't have a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ but this these riches these jewels these wonderful things that we're given by Christ tell us that we're reconciled to God through the cross when Jesus died on the cross and then when he rose again and defeated death it was so that we could be reconciled to God perhaps the one thing he missed out at least he didn't say it explicitly here I'm sure it's elsewhere in the bible is that the one thing people need to know is there is absolutely no way they can earn their way into heaven there's nothing that they can do that will reconcile them to God there's nothing that they can do that will earn themselves the peace of soul which comes from knowing Christ has accepted them into the kingdom there's nothing that they can do that can bring them near to God there's nothing that they can do to seat themselves in the heavenly realms with

Christ and they cannot be made alive either in this world but even less in the next Peter was talking about hell this morning and I couldn't help thinking about that story about the exodus from Egypt and just thinking just as Pharaoh had those people it's almost like the devil having his hand on people but people unlike the Israelites in those days who realised they were in subjection realised that they were slaves to Pharaoh people don't realise that they're slaves to the devil they don't realise that they're not going anywhere but to hell they need to be brought out and these riches of Christ tell us that Christ draws people to himself he draws people to God and he reconciles them to God through his death there's clearly something that as individual

[21 : 35] Christians we need to understand then about what is being said here by Paul so having said that you know this thing that he's talking about is unattainable he actually tells us how it was actually done through Christ and what we need clearly to understand is exactly what Christ has done for us and how we can live without fear because of the security that we have in Christ educationalists throughout the ages have concluded that you can't teach anyone who's afraid because all they can think about is fear and they can't learn in that situation but once we know something of the riches of Christ we can be free from fear because we know that the promises he made to us are true and then here's the point the people who take their whole lives and they claim that they know as much about this book as you and

I do maybe more because he studied it they might have even gone to university and studied it they might have listened to many learned men who studied it but they haven't come to the conclusion that Paul is stating here they haven't believed it but the point is we won't ever be able to learn from this book until we understand what Christ has done and that we cannot do it it's all his work absolutely nothing to do with us except in one small respect which we'll come to later let's move on to the next mystery the love that surpasses knowledge something that we don't understand I've got some illustrations for this as well Freddie my grandson one Christmas came to me with a transformer and see some light dimly in some people's eyes but a transformer is this robot which changes into something else which is why it's called a transformer he said grandad can you make this into a car you know I spent hours trying to make it into a car and I didn't succeed

I've never succeeded ever because I get it very close to looking like a car but there's always a bit sticking out that I can't actually get in place it is just totally beyond my knowledge I've got a degree in engineering got a degree in math I've got a master's degree but it didn't help me I just could not understand it and there are many stories that we have about people doing extraordinary things out of love for others but they don't really understand the love of Christ they can't understand it they have no knowledge of it it's alien to them you must have heard lots of stories about people who because they love a parent or a partner have done some amazing thing and it's often because it is so amazing it's on the news and if you're like me sometimes you'll be watching these things and it almost brings you to tears the fact that they have so much love for that person that they were willing to go to whatever length it was in order to either save them or bring them some sort of joy and they're very self-sacrificial but as much as we might think how wonderful that is and we might be moved by it the reality is that unless we've ever been in that situation experienced the depth of love that they've experienced you will never ever really understand the depth of love that they've experienced and that's why Paul is speaking in these terms and it's evidently true that a man in his own strength cannot know and understand the love of Christ we know it's true don't we because you only have to have a conversation with someone on the street about the fact that you're Christian and they say oh yeah but Jesus died all those years it was just a man and if you try to explain no he's alive now and he loves me they look at you as if you're stupid they can't understand it they have no concept of what is being spoken here but Paul again in chapter 2 tells us about this love that surpasses knowledge chapter 2 and verse 4 but because of his great love for us God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it's by grace that you have been saved and it goes on and there are many many verses in the Bible the most famous being John 3 16 for God so loved the world that he gave his only son the depth of love that God has for his people that Christ has being willing to go to the cross is there and it's just amazing it's been shown by people all over the world that when you have that sort of love what seemed impossible suddenly becomes possible if for example somebody's child has had an accident maybe they got knocked over by a car and they're trapped under the car I'm just going to read you a report of an incident in

Lawrenceville Georgia said in 1982 Tony Cavallo was repairing a 1964 Chevrolet Impala what that's going to be I've got an idea automobile from underneath the vehicle was propped up with jack but it fell Cavallo's mother Mrs.

[28 : 19] Angela Cavallo lifted the car high enough and long enough for two neighbours to replace the jacks and pull Tony from beneath the car I challenge you ladies go and pick up a car you won't be able to do it but there have been countless examples of women men as well but women who've lifted a car and they've done it afterwards they've got ripped tendons you know muscles torn all sorts of things but they lifted it why because of the love that they had for the one who was trapped think about the depth of love it would take to do that and for all of us forget ladies just think of all of us it was our child under a car even if you didn't believe you could do it you would try wouldn't you do anything to save them and this love that he's being talked about here this love that Christ has for us is something which has the potential if we understand it to allow us that strength that we need for the Christian life and all of us need to ask ourselves the question how am I demonstrating my love for the Lord Jesus

Christ because I wasn't under a car but I was at the very gates of hell and about to go in when Christ saved me you might say I'm being over dramatic but that's what the reality of life in this world is if you're not a Christian there will be a day at some point when you're at the gates of hell and no one can help you except the Lord Jesus Christ and surely we got to think of do we really want to wait until then surely we need to know this love of Christ now and then as the Bible says for eternity the third thing it mentions in this mystery is the immeasurable work of Christ immeasurable can't be measured you know last night

I don't know how many other people found the same but weeks ago it seems now Kath and I went on a meteor hunt we drove up onto the moors looking for the Orionid meteor shower well it might have been a shower but it was more like drizzle I didn't see a thing we didn't see a thing and the night was relatively clear but last night I don't know whether any of you were out last night I looked up in the sky you know and you think of a very flowery word the starry firmament but it really was the sky was just full of stars and they were bright and I don't know about you but whenever I see that I'm just stunned and I looked up at these stars and I'm thinking how many millions and millions

and millions and billions of miles away they are and I you know and then I remember that God made them God put them in place and you know one of the things that the scientists tell us is that even the universe and beyond is confined it's not infinite it might seem it but it's finite if they had enough time and enough computers it could count how many stars and planets there were they might be moving to other places some of them might be exploding but it's a finite number but it struck me that Christ and his work there is no number you could put to it because that universe is bounded and contained because Christ was the one who made it and that's a mere part of his work that's why I read

Psalms 103 because in verses 11 and 12 what did it say as high as the heavens are above the earth so great is his love for those who fear him as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us the whole point about that if you start travelling from east to west and if you keep on you know the equator let's say you just keep going because by the time you got to the east that's the west and you've got to keep carrying on to the east again which is now the west now I can't even comprehend that and in this passage in Ephesians chapter 2 if we just read towards the end of that verse 19 onwards look what he says consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone in him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit our church our group of Christians our people are a work in progress you know here's a thought to give you you know when

God was creating the heavens and the stars and all of the universe and he was looking at me saying it was good it was wonderful I sometimes wonder if he had a conversation with the other people in the Trinity and he said you know but this is easiest to us just wait till I start to get with those people on earth they're going to be a real problem that's going to last their whole lifetime and into eternity here's the question that of course we've got to ask ourselves I hesitate to ask this because Peter might have the same question this tells us that we're being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit this is the hardest question you're ever going to have in a church how can we create a church here in Whitby where God lives by his spirit if we did it would be packed wouldn't it people would be at the doors banging the doors down to get in but the fact is the whole point

[35 : 59] I think of what Paul is saying to these people he's saying look I'm telling you this I'm telling you of all the wonderful riches of Christ I'm telling you about his great love I'm telling you that he's still at work and he's still pleading at the right hand of God for everyone who trusts in him so that when we do stand before him eventually for the judgment though we will be found to be guilty he will say but my blood was shed for these people when we think about that then clearly we've got to ask you know how dimly we portray that sort of love in our own lives and in our love for Christ on this earth but this manifold wisdom that was if you remember the title of this talk at the start since all of us are those who constitute the church it's not the building is it it's the people within it then all of us have the joy and the responsibility to respond to what Paul is saying here and just in summary

I think maybe the things would be this first and foremost we must have experienced being born again because only then have we discovered some of the unsearchable riches of Christ in our own walk with God and we'll continue to find more and more of these riches as we go on in this life and only then can we proclaim to others who might be willing to hear the second thing is that having understood the depth of God's love for us and the fact that he died for our sins despite the fact that we hated him and opposed him then surely we can more easily demonstrate our love for others particularly as we build up the church and within the church and the third thing which it mentions is that this work that Christ is doing whether you consider it the creation of the heavens or the work he's done with us requires an almost inconceivable amount of power can we have that access to Christ's power and authority to know that there's no time limit to God's power in growing his church well the conclusion surely must be that just as Paul says for this reason

I Paul have spoken these things he's asking people to think about these things and he says that if we do seek the Lord which is the one thing that we need at least to be open to to look to him then he will reveal everything that's needful through Christ and through the Holy Spirit and they are the ones who reveal these things to our hearts you know it would be nice to think that when a preacher stood here and in all their eloquence though you've not heard any tonight maybe people would be

converted the biggest temptation for any minister I'm sure Peter would concur with this if anybody's converted the immediate reaction or part of it must be that's great I must have really preached well or I must have really no it was God it was Christ who did it and some of the most amazing conversions that are recorded in history were made when people who felt totally inadequate to preach preach what they thought was their worst sermon but the Lord worked through it and someone was saved

I'm just going to finish just by looking at four verses which I think sum up what I've been talking about tonight first one is Matthew chapter 7 verse 7 from the section on the Beatitudes ask and it will be given you seek and you will find knock and the door will be opened to you for everyone who asks receives he who seeks finds and to him who knocks the door will be opened then a similar passage in Matthew 6 verse 33 seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well first Timothy 3:16 beyond beyond all question the mystery of godliness is great he appeared in the body was vindicated by the spirit was seen by angels was preached among the nations was believed on in the world was taken up in glory and finally in Colossians chapter 2 verses 2 and 3 another of

Paul's letters you can imagine that he would write similar things but in a different way he says in that letter my purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding why in order that they may know the mystery of god namely christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and there it is the manifold wisdom of god where is it how can you find it what can you do with it it's in christ all of it is in christ and if you know christ all those things are accessible to you isn't that a wonderful thing to give us confidence for the christian life to know that whatever we need and however much understanding we need it's all in christ amen lord we do pray that you just help us to learn more of your love for us may we be empowered and lifted by it to serve you better oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of god how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out who has known the mind of the lord or who has been his counselor who has ever given to god that god should repay him for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be the glory forever amen out kingdom like them havetal a

[43 : 19] Queyou Pearl