

UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

Preached At Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on Wednesday evening, Sept. 27th 1922

by J. K. POPHAM

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Ephesians 3:8)

What a mercy it is to be really exercised about Christ; whether or not we have an interest in Him; whether He loved us and gave Himself for us; whether His substance is more to us than the whole world! What a mercy it is not to be satisfied with anything short of that which is promised in the gospel, namely the revelation of Him by the Holy Ghost. He is promised, the Spirit is promised; He is sent by the Father; He was given to Christ, and Christ therefore in His mediatorial character promised to pour the Spirit on the church, and to pour Him on the church for this purpose, namely to glorify Christ. *"He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you."* (John 16:14) Now that being a gospel promise, if we are in the spirit of the gospel at any time, it certainly will be an object of our desire and prayer that the Holy Spirit may do in us what the Lord Jesus promised He should do in the saints. Are you after that? Or is your religion made up perhaps of desire and you do hardly at times examine the nature of your desire; a religion that makes you feel sometimes that things are not quite right between you and God, but a religion that soon gets satisfied without this promise being fulfilled in you? It is a bad thing, a sore and sorry thing, to be satisfied without this promised revelation of Jesus Christ. The apostle was anointed a minister, and he gives the reason of this anointing in him, that he should preach, and that he should preach among the Gentiles; that he should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. This I think gives us at once an instruction in the nature of the ministry, in the kind of preaching that an anointed minister really is led into. That his chief business, his main concern in his ministry is, or should be, the preaching of the Lord Jesus as possessing unsearchable riches; riches doubtless suitable to poverty, the poverty that the saints feel; riches which though drawn upon since the Fall of Adam and the manifestation of the promise of Christ in Eden; and yet they are today what they were in eternity when God gave Christ grace to save the church. What an amazing Christ we have if we but know Him, and if we do know Him one thing is certain as a result of that knowledge, namely that we want to know Him more. A little of Christ creates an appetite, or increases a given appetite, for more of Him. If you know Him you certainly are after Him, you want to know Him better.

I do not purpose entering upon the call of any man to preach this evening. I have much exercise about my own case, but I think I may venture to make two remarks in this point, namely that every called and sent minister will have two evidences sooner or later cleared up to his own satisfaction from time to time. First, the inward call, resisted but irresistible. Resisted by a sense of the greatness of God, of the greatness of the subject of the ministry, and of the unfitness of the poor minister called. Yet there it is, the call came unsought, came and brought with it a trembling, an awe, a fear. Although in my own case there was the trembling and the fear, yet I

think in these days about it, and compare the little knowledge I now hope I have of the ministry and what it is or should be, with what I then felt. I think that if in those days I had felt as I feel nowadays, I should not have started. The second evidence is in the church. If a man is called to preach he will be made useful in some place and in some measure, and I am not without hope that I have these two evidences.

Now what I would wish to do this evening is, as enabled, to open a little before you the unsearchable riches of Christ; and as I do, going along, try to speak of the exceeding suitableness of those riches to the particular cases that are found in the church of God. And where shall a poor sinful man begin? What shall one say? In the first place about riches so wonderful as to be unsearchable, not only unworthy is the mouth of man, man in particular, to speak of these things, but how incapable, unless anointed to speak of that which the Lord God possesses. But I would first of all venture to say this, that the riches, the unsearchable riches of Christ, are to be looked for in the first place in his very Person. Not something that He possesses that can be separated from Himself, as the wealth of a man may be separated from him, may fly away from him and he become poor and yet be the same man; but the riches of Christ are not to be separated, cannot be separated from His very Person; and I will try to show this. First of all look at His eternal Deity, the wealth of Deity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, eternity as sufficient. Everything proper to God is in Jesus Christ, everything. There is no perfection of Deity that the Lord Jesus lacks; the whole essence of Deity and everything that that word means, the word the fullness of which, the extent of which we cannot understand. Everything that it means the Lord Jesus Christ has, for in Him, in the sacred Man Jesus Christ, dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and what relation has this to us? Are you weak, too weak to stand before God, too weak to maintain your profession, too weak to carry a cross, too weak to resist the devil, too weak to pray, to believe, to hope, to love? Yes, every child of God will say only, "Yes indeed, too weak for any good thing." O behold omnipotence! You can never search that fully; that is sufficient. Omnipotence in your own nature; how able is He to sustain us! God is able to make the weak believer stand: "He shall stand, for God is able to make him stand." *"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think."* (Eph. 3:20) All power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth. Christ in two senses has omnipotence. In the first sense He cannot communicate it. That is to say, He is the eternal God and there is that in God not communicable. But He has omnipotence as a gift; in His mediatorial character omnipotence is given to Him. He was crucified through weakness, He emptied Himself. He gave but little evidence, except here and there by miracles and so on, of being the Mighty God. He made Himself of no reputation. But after His word on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, then said He, *"All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth;"* and this power is for the use and the good and the security and the safe landing in glory, of all His dear children. Can you search out this? You soon find your weakness out when you are tried, don't you? You soon find you are but worms, soon find that you have no power to take up a cross, even when you feel a will; soon find that you cannot pray without the power of God. So when it pleases the Spirit to enable a poor minister to preach the unsearchable power of the Lord Jesus, that is for the edification of the body of Christ.

If you have faith, if I have not darkened counsel by words without knowledge, you may see the intimate relationship there is between our weakness and Christ's power. How suitable this power is to a feeble worm blessed by Mighty God! His name is the Mighty God. The Mighty God to work faith, to give power and strength, to strengthen with all might by His Spirit in the inner

man, unto all patience and longsuffering. Remember that He who upholds all things by the work of His power is He who is to uphold you, who alone can uphold you; and thus it is that "the weakest saint shall win the day, though death and hell obstruct the way;" must get there, because of this omnipotent One. O we worship a living, mighty, almighty God when we worship Christ crucified! When we look to Him who was crucified through weakness, we look to the Mighty God; and I have thought today that perhaps one of the greatest evidences and proofs that ever can be given of the omnipotence of Christ, was in His crucifixion when He was crucified through weakness. Think of what He had to do to remove the sin of a land in that day, to remove the curse from the election of grace in that day, to remove every disability from His children, all their unfitness through sin for the presence of God. He had to remove all that, and He did remove it all in that day. Then what can He not do for you, O weak believer! What can He not do? Is He not able to strengthen you, to hearten you, to encourage you, to say to you, "Fear not." It is not much for a man to say to another, "Now you need not be afraid;" but then the word may have no effect whatever, cannot have. The poor person addressed may say, "Well, but I have no end of reason for fear," and your saying to him, "Fear not" may only irritate him. But when this mighty God-Man says "Fear not, I will help thee, I will strengthen thee, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness," then the weak believer stands and says, "In the Lord have I strength, in the Lord is my power, in the Lord and by Him alone I shall get through. I can bear the cross, I can submit to the will of God, I can look to Christ, I can hope in His Name, I can maintain my confidence and not cast it away, believing that it has a recompense of reward awaiting it." The unsearchable riches of Christ. Paul's preaching demolished idols and broke idolatrous hearts; then he preached a Mighty God whom the people were brought to worship. Do you follow this one point? It is a great thing to know whom you have believed, as Paul says of himself, and to be persuaded as he was: "*And am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.*" (2 Tim. 1:12) Hang on His power, my friends; lean on His arm; look to Him to be supported, sustained, and brought out of trouble, and delivered out of snares, and snatched out of the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, and out of all affliction, and at last out of the grave to be with Him for ever! This is power; you will never get to the end of it. As you cannot imagine it all, so neither can you experience it all. As you cannot compass it in your thoughts, so neither can you hold it in your hearts. But a little of it, what a wonderful thing it is to know! The mighty power! "Jesus is a mighty Saviour, helpless souls have here a Friend," a Brother born for their adversities, One that will keep His love from first to last.

Look at His grace, for grace was given to Christ in all its fullness. Can you search it all out? Ye know the grace of Christ a little, ye know that this was given to Him before the world. "*Who has saved us,*" says Paul speaking of God the Father, "*and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*" (2 Tim. 1:9) What is this but the eternal love of Christ? He loved the church and gave Himself for it. All that the love of God means; all the kindness it has devised; all the goodness it has laid up in store for its objects; all the happiness it will eventually fill them with, Jesus Christ has. Some of us have tried it. Yes, some of us have tried it for many years, put it to severe tests. No creature could have borne with us in our waywardness and stiff-necked manners and unbelief and rebellion; but how mercifully has Christ borne with us and not taken away His love, though we have deserved that He should! Here you have unsearchable riches. The infinite love or grace of Christ, all that God devised, all that the Trinity could do in love, Jesus Christ possesses, and possesses in order to bestow upon His own. Hart says: "Christ

has blessings to impart," and this is true of His eternal love. My friends, it is a great thing to know this. What is it to know the love of Christ but to have it shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost? What is the effect of that? You love Him in return; you are little in your own eyes; you are willing to be nothing; your will is subjected to His will; your thoughts are brought into captivity to Him when this blessed, precious, all-bearing, exhaustless love is made known in any measure. "On such love my soul still ponder," you may often be saying, having had it shed abroad in your hearts. Never-ending love, bleeding love, suffering love, the love of a Substitute putting Himself in your place; the love of One who, to save you, must die; of One who, to save you, intercedes and is able in His intercession to save you; the love Of One who says, "*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.*" (Heb. 13:5) Now when this love is made known, it is only known in a small measure. "We know in part," says Paul; "Now we know in part." It is a part indeed, it is quite true. If you get a bucket full of water out of the sea, you have got all water, but you have not got all the water. It is true, if you get a little of the love of Christ you have got the whole love of Christ as to love, but you have not got all the love that He possesses; it is unsearchable. What will He let you suffer? What will He allow an enemy to do for you? Will He let you come to death? No, you may get near to death in your feelings, destruction may seem inevitable to you at times, truly may look unkind and seem unkindly sent to you; but the day will come when you will say, "He loved me, and I found He loved me too well to let me destroy myself; He loved me too well to let me starve, too well to let me stray too far, too well to let the enemy oppress me too much. He loved me notwithstanding all my departures, all my follies, all my unbelief, all my misjudgings of Him; He loved me through them all, chastened me for them, but did not give me over unto death." Love is unsearchable. Love in your heart to a creature will always be seeking the good of that creature; you will be devising things for the happiness of the object of your love. Now if that is true in you naturally, what will you say, what can you think or imagine, of this eternal love of the Lord Jesus? Why, He designed good when He designed trouble; He meant it in love when He laid on some severe stripes; love when He put your feet into stocks; love when He spoke severely to you; and you will prove it, every saint shall prove this. Losses, crosses, staffs, or rods, these all shall prove the love of Christ, and shall make it manifest that love is unsearchable, wealth unbounded, it knows no limit. The objects of it shall find it to be beyond all their capacity, richer than all their thoughts of it, sweeter than all their conceptions of it, deeper than all their thoughts about it, wider than all their wanderings and broader than all their strayings from Him. They shall prove it to be eternal love without beginning and without end.

Take wisdom which is proper to God, "God only wise," does not this belong to the Lord Jesus? Yes, for He says: "*I am that I am. I Wisdom dwell with prudence and find out knowledge of witty inventions.*" (Prov. 8:12) Do you limit Him? Do you say sometimes when you are tried, "This is not wise, there is nothing but evil here?" Are you disposed to limit the Holy One of Israel? Do you feel as if you must say of some trouble, "This is unmitigated evil?" O but we do speak foolishly when we so speak, and think wrongly of Him when we so think of Him! My brethren, He is wise, only wise; we are foolish, we are foolishness itself. Now does not He show His wisdom sometimes to us? Does not He guide us? Has not He sometimes made a very straight path for our feet by some crooked providence? Has not He called us to His heavenly throne by something that we have thought to be altogether calculated to turn us away from Him; a trouble that has irritated you, that has brought the worst out of your nature, to your own view; a trouble the nature of which you have thought must be your confusion? Has not the Lord by that made a

straight way for you to the throne of grace? For who comes so straight to the throne of grace as he who is helpless and forlorn and ignorant? Who has no arm of flesh to lean upon; who has no wisdom of his own, cannot dispose of his matters as he thought once he was able to do? And you will go right when you go that way, and you will say one day, "Well, that was a wonderful thing to me that I got so helpless and so nonplussed, and so burdened, and so utterly without reserves in myself, or in anyone else; that I had nothing before me but going straight to the throne of grace." And you may take a short cut sometimes of necessity: "Lord, help me; Lord help me. Make haste, O God, make haste; make no tarrying, O my God!" And this is not to be searched out. No, no providences exceed the wisdom of Christ. This way of need is mighty and wise direction. "*The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.*" (Prov. 16:33) He cures us of saying, "We will go and dwell in this city a year, and do this or that;" He cures us of it. The spirit is in us, but He wisely keeps us from time to time so that we are brought to say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and we will do this or we will do that." And is not this encouraging? What does Christ take such pains with us? Is He so particular in His care for us as to hedge our way up when He knows that if it were not so we should run away and find strange crooked paths for ourselves? The unsearchable riches of Christ! I would say to you who are foolish in your own sense, here is a wise One. If you are but led by the Holy Spirit to Him you will find He has knowledge of witty inventions; find what Peter says to be true: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver them that are godly." He not only has power to do it, but He knows how to apply that power, how to use His omnipotence in your behalf, and for your good. All that God has, that He has put into Christ, is for His people's good, and it is unsearchable.

But I would not dwell on that part any longer because I wish to speak of another part; I mean of the sacred manhood, the human nature of the Lord Jesus, and I would say that here are unsearchable riches. Unsearchable riches, and riches that are useful, that are to be applied to the church of the living God, to every poor, feeble, troubled believer. Why my dear friends, everything that the Man Christ Jesus has is for the election of grace. How do you view yourselves? You believe this don't you, that God will never be pleased with anything that is not perfect? That is written, is it not, in your hearts; right across your whole souls that is written in legible characters? God is pleased with nothing that is not perfect. Yes, and then look at home. What have you? Everything that is imperfect, everything; and the Lord Jesus Christ will meet all that imperfection, give His perfection to His imperfect people.

Take just for a moment or two that great faculty of ours, a stubborn perverse will. I call it a great faculty, for it, so to speak, spreads its influence all over us. Now what will the Lord do with a stubborn creature? "O but sometimes," you say, "my will is brought into subjection apparently, and soon the subjection flies away, and again I am troubled with a stubborn will; again I feel my heart is disposed to turn away; indeed I have turned away, I am always turning away!" O but the unsearchable riches of this, that the Lord Jesus Christ did, as the Man Christ Jesus, absolutely submit to the will of God and say in Gethsemane's garden, "Not My will, but Thine be done;" and that act of His is put down to the account of the church, put down to her credit and she shall stand before the Lord. Every human being whom Christ will save and take to heaven is viewed now, if I may so speak, as being there, in the Man Christ Jesus, in the perfection of human nature. The whole perfection of the entire Man Jesus Christ is put down to the church's account, and that grace of submission to His Father's will that is in Him, He will communicate to His people. Is not that the secret of their being enabled to say in respect of some affliction, "Not my

will, but Thine be done?" He who said to His Father, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God," (Ps. 40:8) He who in Gethsemane's garden said, "Thy will be done," communicates that grace to every child of His in some measure. What a fullness of submission is here for us! What a grace is here, my brethren! There is nothing that you can want in respect of being conformed to the will of God, that is not in Jesus Christ for you. You must receive it from Him, never can you work it in yourself. Paul says that God works in the saints "both to will and to do of His good pleasure." We shall say of self that only stubbornness is ours. We shall say of our gracious experience, submission came only from Him. None else gave it, none else could give it. He gave it and we have the blessed benefit of His grace in this one particular.

Take another grace that was in Christ. Take love; I mean love as it is in the hearts of the saints. What did He do? He said, "*I delight to do Thy will, O my God.*" "*Great peace have they that love Thy law and nothing shall offend them.*" (Ps. 119:165) Nothing offended Christ. The love of God was in His heart. I speak of Him in respect of His suffering case and character when He was sojourning here a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and when His human nature was put to those solemn and severe tests and strains, when the devil tempted Him, when sin burdened Him, when men contradicted Him, when in every way He was seen to be a poor, broken-hearted, weak man depending on His Father with a perfect faith and loving His Father with a perfect love. Now that same love that the Man Christ Jesus possessed in all its fullness, He gives to His people, and with it they love Him and please God. So is the very Person of the Lord Jesus full of unsearchable riches.

I would like to make Him very high before you, that there should be none to occupy your eye, to fill your heart or thoughts, save Himself. There is none like Him. When the church tried to extol Him it seems as if she must have thought: "Well, I have failed after all, my description of Him does not answer, it is not a perfect counterpart of Him, it is not a full image such as I would draw of Him, and so she says: "*He is altogether lovely; His mouth is most sweet. Thus if you can see Him, this is my Friend, this is my Beloved.*" (Songs 5:16) I am worse than the church; she extolled Him wonderfully. My words are very poor but I would say, if you can see the Man and the God in one Person of whom I have spoken so feebly, I would say: Now this is the Christ, the Christ of God, the mighty God, the holy pure Man Jesus Christ, and His Person is absolutely necessary for us in all the wealth of it, in all the suitability of it, in all the grace of it, in all the beauty and glory of it, in all its acceptableness with the Father. How necessary is this very Person! You cannot pray but through Him; you will never get near to God the Father but through Him; you will never see the grace of the Father, nor feel it, but through Him; never hear a word of forgiveness, never get a smile to humble you, never have a warm feeling in your heart without Jesus Christ. The whole that you must experience, you will find you receive from Him. Every good thing. "Every grace and every favour come to us through Jesus' blood."

In the next place let me hint just in a few words at the unsearchable riches of His work. His work consists of two parts, namely, first in His absolute obedience to His Father in the law; and secondly, His vicarious death. These two parts make up the work of Christ in redemption.

Take the first. O how straight is God's rule, how strict are His statutes! How just and holy and good is His law! And no man will ever be in heaven who is not just, put just quite straight with that law; and Christ is the end of it. He loved the law, He had the law in His heart, He came to

fulfil it. I came to fulfil, I came to honour it. It was of My giving; Almighty God I am. I gave the law, now I subject Myself to its demands and commandments. I recognize them as just. I, the Man Christ Jesus, am under this law, God sent Me, He made Me under it. I willingly came under it and now I obey it." That is just what we ought to have done; we ought always by nature to have done that; we ought to have delighted in it, to have put ourselves in absolute conformity to it; not to have rebelled against a single sentence of it; but we did not, we cannot now, O then what wealth of love and mercy and goodness and suffering patience Jesus Christ had and manifested when He said: "Thy law is within My heart, I delight to do Thy will, O My God. I came to do it. Thou didst send Me to do it, and here I am." Obeyed it. O friends, it is great to see the law, and great to see a Substitute under it, and greater still in our experience if we see that that Substitute was there for us! A Substitute for us, to fulfil for us the law, to make it honourable for us. To give the law all it asked, to be the end of the law for us; so the end of it that it can never turn to one for whom Christ is the end of it and say, "Now I want this at your hand;" never say, "Did the law so realize all its demands, all its perfection and its great end in Christ" that it can never say to a redeemed man, "You owe me something?" In respect of its commandments it realized its end in Christ.

But there is another part of the law, a part most solemn and terrible, a part that was awakened so to speak, and brought into awful activity by our sin; I mean its sanction, its curse. "*Cursed is the man that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*" (Gal. 3:10) That means hell. Hell is to be taken in two senses. First, as it is a state of punishment; second, as it is a place of punishment. What did Christ do? He endured its curse as if the Lord His Father banished Him for a moment, so to speak, when He hid His face from Him; as if God only now was punishing His Son when He said: "*Awake O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts! Smite the Shepherd, smite My Son incarnate, wound Him, bruise Him, chastise Him, lay stripes on Him;*" (Zech. 13:7) and our Lord endured it all. Life, eternal life is here, justification is here, sanctification is here, everything to fit a sinner for God is here. Everything to give a welcome to a sinner into heaven is here. Every soul born again seeks life here and forgiveness and mercy and help and sanctification and wisdom and guidance. The Holy Spirit's work is to turn the eyes of a wounded, empty sinner to this Lord Jesus and to this death of His. You will never be comfortable, you will never be cleared, you will never be justified in your conscience, until this Lord Jesus is revealed in you and formed in you, the hope of glory. Hundreds of helps you may get, sweet tokens you may receive for good, touches of the Lord's favour, sweet intimations of His goodness; but the thing that will clear your character, that will put you out of the pale of a cursing law, that will bring you into an innocent state before God and a standing with Him, the thing that will do this and purge your conscience from dead works, is the application to you of this precious Christ whose perfect work is everlasting riches, durable riches and righteousness. (Prov. 8:18) Solomon calls them "durable riches." That can never be said of any other riches; but this has the character of durability--durability not for a lifetime here below, but for eternity in the presence of a blessed God.

What more shall one say? Come to His intercession, His prevailing intercession. Guilty people are properly dumb people, dumb with respect to excuses. The natural work of the law is two-fold; it is either to excuse or accuse. The spiritual application of the law stops that first part excuse, and brings out the second. Only accusing is the work of the law in a quickened conscience. O that power is very wonderful, and now when your conscience only accuses you,

when you go back by the Lord's teaching and various things come up; when you say, "Now one day I was angry with somebody and hated him, therefore I was a murderer; another time I looked on something that somebody had and coveted it, and so I became a thief;" and you might run through your sins and do run through them--I do through mine often, in these my latter days I live much in the past, in painful, shameful, grievous meditations on the past. And now, what will satisfy? What can help you? What can do you good? Only the blood of Christ, and it does good in two ways. First, it keeps you from despair; it helps you to plead, teaches you to open your mouth, to open it wide, to come with large petitions; it tells you that even circumstances that seem to have a curse in them can have that curse taken out by the blood of Christ; it points out the way to the throne of God's heavenly grace; it affords a plea, it fills your mouth with arguments, it tells you that God was well pleased with Christ and that if you can only win His ear through faith and the power of the Holy Ghost, then He will be pleased with you; it will prove that He has been pleased with you through eternity.

And the other way that I would mention is, that that blood that affords a plea sends the answer, gives satisfaction; says to the sinner, "Your sins are covered; they are blotted out as a thick cloud." And can you get to the end of this? Will you ever be able to search fully these riches and count the wealth of Christ's atonement; ever be able to say "I have reckoned it up and it is so much?" Can you reckon up your own sins; can you count the sins of a day? What then? O what must that blood be that can wash out every stain and remove every sin from a sinner's conscience! Unsearchable riches of intercession that brings this precious blood, this sweet answer; intercession that makes a sinner acceptable, so to speak; that gives him access to his God. Intercession that has ability in it to save the sinner: "*Able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him.*" (Heb. 7:25) What an amazing wealth this is! As long as you live you will need the Intercessor to open His mouth for you when you are dumb.

And dear friends, is there any end to His light, any end to His life? No. What is His life, I mean as He is a Saviour? It is eternal: "*This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.*" (1 John 5:11) Therefore though we have fainted often, He has revived us. What is light? It is that light "that lighteth every man that cometh into the world;" that blessed light that shines in the soul and discovers God, after it has discovered sin; or rather it discovers God, and that discovery brings sin to light. But I must not continue. If these hints lead you to pray that these unsearchable riches may be more and more opened to you, they will not have been made in vain. The Lord bless you and bless each one of us with His precious mercy. Amen.