Ephesians 3:8b “to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Honestly, there is a lot in this section. Take for instance that line that eventually became a favorite hymn of many: **“Although I am less than the least of all God’s people.”** As far as I could quickly discern, Paul made this and similar statements somewhere around 4 times in his writings. It is clear this is not a passing try at humbleness, but rather a deep felt belief of Paul’s of his utter unworthiness not just for the ministry but even to be declared a child of God and an heir of eternal life. It is Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy, that he is **“the worst”** of sinners (translated in the KJV as **“of whom I am chief”**) that lead to that great hymn: Chief of Sinner Though I Be.

Paul had an honest reason to write those words. A zealous persecutor of Christ and his followers it is made very clear in Scripture that Paul saw to the destruction of many a Christian in Jerusalem. It is when Paul was being sent to Damascus that the Lord Jesus himself intervened and changed the course of Paul’s life. What a complete change it was. No longer a persecutor and destroyer of the Christian faith, Paul now became a preacher of God’s grace and was an instrument in the building of the Church. Again it was a complete change of heart and mind for this man.

And if I may say, Paul is a great example of the grace of God. God snatched him from the work of Satan to the work of salvation. God changed his life so much so that you would have to say he had a completely different outlook on God and the world. Paul now grasped the depth of sin, not only his but in every single human. Paul now understood the total wonder of what Jesus had done and how it was applied to all of mankind. Paul’s outlook was so different that he even became, by the command of Jesus, the preacher or evangelist to the Gentiles, a group in his former life he wouldn’t have thought worthy to even speak to! Now he works hard to preach to them and bring them into God’s love through the message of Jesus, the Christ, the Savior of God.

Or we could spend quite a bit of time on that little phrase that is found in this section that says, **“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.”** That is always the clear testimony of God’s Word that God has chosen to work through and in the Church. Say what you want about “organized religion” (seriously are you claiming you want “unorganized?’) or about the idea that you don’t need any one to tell you what to believe. God says this is the way He is going to work. The message of Jesus, the wisdom of God for the world is found in the Church! God’s kingdom comes through and in the Church! So don’t tell me you don’t need it!

Now, you need to make sure the church you belong to is a teacher of the truth of God. The Devil has been very active and he has led many a church body away from salvation by grace through faith to the horror of teaching “work-righteousness.” If your church doesn’t look or sound any different from all the other churches and religious organizations of the world, that’s what has happened. You are not learning about and hearing of the wisdom of God but the meanderings of men and the world. God works in the church and if you have the attitude that you don’t need church, that is the first sign that your faith is not God’s!

But do you know what I really want to focus on today? I want to get into that phrase of our section that says, **“to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”** This is the heart of the message. This is the purpose of the Church as given by God! This is what we need to grasp more than anything else in all the world…this marvel and wonder, this vast treasure, this hard to contemplate revelation of God’s love in Jesus who is the greatest treasure of all. Our theme will be: **THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST.** **1st: The Mystery revealed. 2nd. The Mystery given. 3rd. The Mystery’s purpose.**

I must say that I like that phrase **“the unsearchable riches of Christ.”** Another way to put that is to say, “the not able to track out, the untraceable” riches of Christ. Now, while I think we may grasp this awesome phrase, I also think that to be reminded of the depth of this phrase will be of benefit to all of us.

Now, if the riches of Christ, and they are many, are “unsearchable” then what is there to speak of? That’s why I like the translation of “not able to track out.” What does that mean? It means there are tracks, you can see them and you can follow them but you can never get to the end of them! That’s Jesus. He is there and we can follow but we can never get to the completeness, the total depth, the complete grasp of Him simple because He is the Lord God who is far above and beyond our ability to grasp. Yet please note that these riches are there. They are in front of us and around us. Those riches in many cases form what are called in this text **“the mystery of Christ.”**

Please grasp that this mystery of Christ is revealed. Just look in our whole text and you will see all the words that pertain to this: given, made known, revealed. Such is the state of God’s gift to us in Jesus. Although who and what Jesus is, is beyond us and why and how Jesus did what He did is hard to grasp, yet God has let us know that this mystery can be ours and is ours in Jesus. So in Jesus God’s love and grace is revealed. In Jesus the problem of sin and its cure is presented. In Jesus, the unknowable is made known, the invisible is made visible, the dark is made light, and the fear of what will be is soothed by peace and hope. All of this in Jesus.

Let me also point out just how different is the true message of Jesus. Name one other religion of this world that has the Lord God doing everything in every way in order that you might be with and a part of that God’s life. That’s why I have always maintained that there are only two religions in the world: Christianity or salvation by grace through faith and work righteousness. That’s part of what makes the mystery of Christ. No man devised this salvation. No man dreamed up a faith where basically mankind doesn’t count when it comes to salvation but only God and His works! No man put together the idea of God’s Son come into our world to pay for our sins by his death on the cross and declare the hope of salvation through his resurrection from the dead! No man ever dreamed up the Trinity or the other aspects of God that make God God! All of this in Jesus. He is a mystery revealed, the hope of salvation displayed for men to see and follow and yet that mystery we can’t track out!

There is more to say of this but for now we will move on. Because I also want to hammer at verse 6: **“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.”** Did you catch that string of words? All those words are there to hammer into us in every way that the promise of Christ Jesus belongs to us. Just look at the implications of these words.

We are **“heirs together.”** Yep, fellow sharers in the inheritance of God. This is telling us that God’s heavenly kingdom with its mansions and perfections, its streets of gold and white washed robes is something that is coming our way. Inheritors together! Again think of this term because this term does remind us that inheritance is something given by the owner. The owner is under no obligation to us, but has of his own will designated us heirs. What is of God and his kingdom will be ours! Isn’t that great?

We are **“members together of one body.”** That is a great translation. Think of all that makes up our human bodies and how it must all operate together for our good and well-being. Each part does its job and the body is all the better. We could go and look deeply into the Holy Spirit’s remarks on this found in 1 Corinthians 12:12ff. **“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.”** The body is Christ our Lord. That body is about Jesus, what he has done and accomplished for us. When we come to faith, we are incorporated into Him. We serve Him. We benefit from Him. We move and act, feel and sense, live and prosper, struggle and are tested in Him. And I always think that this term contains a subtle reminder that if you are diseased or infected so that you get surgically removed or if you cut yourself off from the body that is a real faith problem!! We are one with Christ.

We are **“sharers together.”** Yep, we cast our lot with, we are partners, sharers and participants with Jesus. This idea is really what is behind Jesus statement, **“Because I live, you also will live.”** What is of Jesus becomes our because of Jesus. And I like the term “partners.” Think of the implication there. If you are a partner with someone in a business and yet you work against the goals of the business or you have decided to have different goals than your partner is that really a partnership? Every Christian needs to ask, **“Am I being a partner or am I working against my partner.”** You can apply that to your marriage, family life, or, especially your church life. Here, obviously it applies to our church life and our faith in Christ.

Do you see why I like those terms? They really do cause us to grasp the wonder of what we have in Christ but they are also terms that cause us to look at and consider our role. Are we prodigal sons who squander our inheritance? Are we legs that refuse to walk, eyes that refuse to see? Are we partners and participants? Considering the great treasure, the unsearchable riches Jesus is why would your answer ever be in the negative?

Finally, what is the purpose of this mystery? Verse 12. **“In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”** Because of Jesus, through Jesus and his gift of forgiveness and eternal life we are blessed beyond our grasp. We can rely on God. We can hope in God. We can have total and absolute confidence that God is on our side and working for our good in all things. God is in our lives, exposing us to the means of grace, granting us life, building our strength, giving us hope, and motivating our hearts in peace. We are free to approach God. We do not have to fear he is not in or will not see us. And we can be sure of all of this because of Jesus and what He has done for us. In Jesus is forgiveness. In Jesus is our adoption as children. In Jesus we are heirs, members, partners of his promises.

Does all of this sink in? Do we grasp the marvel of what we have in Jesus? I think the writer of the hymn Amazing Grace got this idea of unsearchable when he wrote, *“When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise, than when we’d first begun.”* I like that line. 10,000 years and when you look ahead there’s another 10,000 coming in an endless stream of 10,000! As you dig into Jesus, no matter how deep, you can always go ten times deeper and still be 10 times away from the bottom. In other words, endless goodness and grace from Jesus. God bless us and cause all the more this grace of His to be in our lives. Amen.