

96-11-17b

Okay, we're ready now to resume, and what we want to look at here is the concept of God's glory, because that's what it is that he is revealing. That's why he is willing, with great patience, to put up with the vessels of wrath that are fitted for destruction. That's the reason he puts up with the unbelieving world.

That's the reason in the realm of believers that he doesn't just obliterate the wide gate and the broad way. We could develop a pattern in our life, and God would have the sin unto death for virtually every believer that doesn't experience growth and upward progress, but he doesn't. He endures with great patience, and why does he do that? So that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, pre-designated, designed ahead of time.

That's their purpose. That's their role. That's their function.

Even us whom he called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. Here Paul says, this is what's going on in this age. In this age it's not just the Jews, it's anyone, and the purpose is his glory.

So what exactly is it that we should be seeing? We already saw in our scripture reading this morning something of the description of God's glory. Sometimes it's kind of a nebulous, well, it's all to the glory of God, or glory to God. You hear a lot of people in the charismatic movement today, oh, glory to God.

Somebody will say something or sing something, oh, glory to God. What is the glory of God? Well, we've seen some of those things, a description of them in Ephesians chapter 1, but the conditions and the characteristics of perceiving the glory of God. This is apparently God's great purpose, is that vessels of mercy perceive his glory.

So it would be good to have some understanding, a little more definite idea of what that's all about. Let's go back to Ephesians again. We saw in Ephesians 1.18 the three things that Paul prayed for this church of believers, and he's going to pick that thread up again.

In fact, he's going to talk again about his prayer and the content of his prayer for the Ephesians over in chapter 3. He says in verse 13 of Ephesians 3, Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. Notice there's a family in heaven as well as a family in earth.

There are creatures in heaven that are part of a different creation that are a part of God's family. There is an economy. There is a whole separate set of issues between God and the heavenly family.

But the whole family in heaven and earth takes its name from the Father. That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory. We just kind of blow on past that and see the strength in the inner man and Christ dwelling in our hearts and so forth.

But the whole point is this is kata, according to the riches of his glory. This is the standard. This is the point.

This is why this is all taking place. Paul prays that we might be strengthened with might through his spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

That you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height. And to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. To know the unknowable.

To see the unseeable. To understand that which passes understanding. That you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Remember back in chapter one he said that Christ was, that the church is the fullness of him that fills everything, that fills all in all. It's God's purpose for us that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. And this is according to the riches of his glory.

If we want to partake, if we want to reflect, if we want to comprehend the glory of God, this is the how. There's nothing more frustrating than being told what the goal is and not being told how to get there. This happens in the Metroplex all the time.

Somebody says, you know, I'm trying to get over to point A here in Dallas. And someone says, well, okay, fine, that's where you need to be. And they don't tell you how to get there.

Well, should I take the tollway, should I take LBJ, should I take Central, should I take the back streets, which is probably lately the preferable way. How do I get there? It's not enough to know where I'm going, I want to know how to get there. Well, it's not enough to know that the glory of God is the objective, we need to understand how to get there.

Because that's our purpose and our calling is to comprehend his glory. And this is how. To be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man.

How does that take place? We've seen as recently as night before last that the voice of the Holy Spirit in guiding us and revealing the will of God and teaching us about God is the Word of God. It's the Word of God and the Spirit of God in combination in our souls. That's what strengthens us with might.

You go to 2 Timothy 3.16 and the Word of God being living and powerful. It pierces, it divides, it judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. All Scripture is inspired, it's theonoustos, breathed by God.

It's profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction, and righteousness so that the man of God may be approved and completely equipped for every good work. I don't know how in our age and throughout the history of this age we have managed to miss the point that if you want to be thoroughly equipped for every good work, you start with the Word of God. It's the Word of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit that transforms us, renews our mind, strengthens us in the inner man, and is the means by which Christ dwells in our hearts.

Notice Paul says that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. This is his prayer. This is not automatic at the point of salvation.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is automatic at salvation, but the indwelling of Christ is not. The indwelling of Christ takes place through faith. That's what he says right here, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And he's talking to believers here. This is his prayer for the Ephesian believers, through faith. How does faith happen? God the Holy Spirit is in our soul.

The Word of God is in our soul. God the Holy Spirit makes it understandable, because that's his function, that's his mission, to lead us into truth, to make it comprehensible. And when we see it, we respond to it.

We say, that's what I'm going to base my decisions and actions on. That's going to be my priority. That's what's important to me.

That's what I care about. We have to ask ourselves that question every so often. Why am I doing what I'm doing? Why do I live my days the way I live them? Why do I engage in the tasks that I engage in? What's important to me? What am I accomplishing? What am I trying to prove? What am I trying to gain? Why am I spending my time the way I spend it? If Christ is important to us as our Savior, if the purpose and the calling of God are important to us, we're going to wonder whether or not we're fulfilling that calling.

And it's going to be important enough that we will judge ourselves to see if we're in the faith. And we're going to see whether or not we're pursuing the presence of Christ in our soul by faith. And as we pursue that goal, being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to comprehend with all the saints the width and length and depth and height, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge and be filled with the fullness of God.

This accomplishes God's purpose. This is how we perceive His glory. It's a concrete thing.

God's glory is composed of real characteristics of His person, real actions that He has taken in eternity and in history, real things that He's going to do in the millennial kingdom and in the eternal future, in the kingdom of the Father. It's not a vague nebulous brightness shining somewhere in the universe. The astronomers made a big noise and a lot of Christians said, you

know, they found the throne of God off at some far off galaxy with our telescope.

We've found God. It's this bright spot way out there in the universe. And it probably is a nebula.

And that's not the glory of God. The glory of God is a concrete thing. If you talk about a human person in terms of fame or celebrity and you say, oh, he's a great statesman, well, why? What has he done that makes him a great statesman? Who is he that he's a great statesman? Why is Theodore Roosevelt a great president? Well, you've got to know things.

You've got to know the situation with the Panama Canal. You've got to know the kind of life that he lived and the physical handicaps he overcame. You have to know the priorities that he set and the qualities that he embodied and he perpetuated as president.

You've got to know something. You need to read a biography and find out about him and then you have an appreciation. You say, that's greatness.

That's character. That's moral fiber. That's what being an American is all about.

But if somebody walks up and says, hey, Teddy Roosevelt, greatest president, well, says you but what's the basis? Well, if someone says glory to God, what does it mean? There's substance to it. There are facts, principles, promises, doctrines, past, present and future to the glory of God and that's what we are to comprehend and it comes to us by living in the Word and living under the ministry of the Spirit as he reveals that and makes it real and then we do something about it. Something ought to be different.

Are we living any differently this week than we lived last week or the week before? Is our relationship with our spouse any different? Is our relationship with children or parents or co-workers or those that we rub elbows with, are we any different? Is our thinking and our attitudes, are we making any progress in our areas of failure? Are we making any progress in our exercise of our spiritual gifts? Is anything changing? You know, even in science they recognize that one of the principles of identifying something as a living thing, you know, you have respiration and so forth, you have carbon-based molecules and but growth is a characteristic of a living thing. It inhales, it exhales, it metabolizes and it grows. It takes nourishment and does something with it.

It becomes something it wasn't before. It reproduces. It shows signs of life.

Are we showing any signs of new life? Are we showing any signs that exposure to the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit is making any difference? We ought to be alarmed if it's not because that's our calling. We're called to grow. We're called to experience the indwelling of Christ.

We're called to comprehend the glory of God. If it's an abstract concept and if the presence of Christ and the indwelling of Christ is an abstract concept, we ought to be alarmed because the consequences of missing our calling are great and the opportunity of fulfilling our calling is

equally great. There is nothing more important in our life than understanding and fulfilling that calling and not missing it.

And yet we can live in a daze, we can live in a pseudo-world where other things are more important. Well, it's what happened at the office, it's what happened at the home, it's what happened in my bank account, it's what happened here and there and the other, and that's what we measure by. We run the same risk that Israel ran and we can fulfill the same fate that Israel fulfilled in being a vessel of wrath that reflects the glory of God as an object of wrath rather than as an object of mercy.

And we don't want to do that. What's the point of living life to be an object of wrath? What's the point in disappointing God, being ashamed at the coming of Christ instead of being on the positive side? There's just no point. Why do that? It makes no sense.

And yet through indifference and through apathy and through lack of attention, through misguided measures of ourselves and others, we can miss it. And we can't afford it. Life is too short and we only get to do it once.

And that's why Paul prays these things. It's a tremendous encouragement just to read that prayer in the last half of chapter one and to read the continuation of that. He actually digresses in chapter two and the first half of chapter three and he comes back to that same prayer here in Ephesians 3, 14 and following.

This is the reason I bow my knees to the Father. Why does he bow his knees? Read chapter two of Ephesians. We were apart from God.

Now we're near. We've got a great opportunity and a great calling. Let's not miss it.

That's his encouragement. That's the glory of God to which we are called. Turn with me to Colossians chapter one.

We did a study in Colossians not long ago. Colossians chapter one. Paul says in verse 24, I now rejoice in my sufferings for you.

We know that's almost a truism. Be glad when you fall into temptations and so forth. And we say, well, I know I'm supposed to rejoice in sufferings, but we really hardly ever do, do we? When we're really in pain and suffering, do we really rejoice? It hardly ever happens.

Why is that? Paul knew how to do it. It's a sign of divine enablement. It's a sign of the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ to rejoice in suffering.

If we can't rejoice in suffering, that ought to be a little wake-up call. Paul says, I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from

God, which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God. The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to his saints.

And verse 27 is the key verse. To them, to his saints, God willed, God purposed, to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles. What constitutes the riches of the glory of this mystery? Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Christ in you, Christ dwelling in your hearts by faith. That's what God wants to reveal. That's the point of righteousness by faith.

And that's why in Romans 9, Paul says, it's not focusing on the one who wills and the one who runs. It's focusing on God who shows mercy. Because when we pursue the life of righteousness by faith, an intermediate result is that we are declared righteous by God, like Abraham was.

It's credited to our account. But that's not the end result. We're not just pursuing it so that we can be declared righteous.

It's the means to an end. And this is the end. It's the fulfillment of God's purpose, which is the revealing of his glory.

It's Christ in us. Christ is the fullness of him who fills all in all. There at the beginning of Ephesians 1. And that's what we're talking about.

God's purpose, God's will in verse 27 is to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles. Christ in you, the hope of glory. Look at verse 28.

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ Jesus. Warning and teaching have a purpose, and it's to present us complete in Christ, to be presented. How are we going to be presented at the judgment seat of Christ? Are we going to be presented at all by Jesus Christ to the Father? If you deny me before men, I'll deny you before my Father.

It's not loss of salvation. You lose the presentation. You lose the honor.

You lose the privilege of that reward for faith. And it was important to Paul, to this end I labor, striving according to his working, which works in me mightily. Goes back to those five power words in Ephesians chapter 1, the working of the greatness of his power in us who believe.

So this is the purpose and this is the goal, and we often tend to get off into other things when we find ourselves in Romans chapter 9. And the purpose of God is to reveal the riches of his glory to the vessels of mercy. He's prepared us for that. He's called us to that.

He's constructed his plan to bring that about. That's our purpose. So the question we should ask ourselves this morning is, do I see the glory of God? Do I experience the indwelling of Jesus

Christ? Am I growing in grace and knowledge? Are there any signs of life? Am I a vessel of honor prepared beforehand for glory? People have made a big deal out of the search for identity.

Who am I? Why am I here? I love that. It was so funny to me back in the previous presidential election when Ross Perot was running as the independent candidate and he had Admiral James Stockdale as his running mate. At that time they did allow Perot to debate along with the other candidates, and they also had the vice presidential debate.

And when they had the vice presidential debate and they had Admiral Stockdale come up there when it was his turn to introduce and speak, this was his opening comment. He looked out at the assembled audience and all the cameras and the moderator and he said, Who am I? Why am I here? And then he proceeded to try to answer that question. But that's the question we should ask and answer for ourselves.

Who are we and why are we here? This gives us the answer. We don't have to engage in a search for who we are. We don't have to engage in some big identity crisis.

Scripture tells us who we are and why we're here, and this is it. To comprehend the glory of God, to reflect the glory of God, to be a part of it through the fulfillment of His plan. And in this age, that opportunity has been opened up.

It's no longer channeled through a single nation or through the law of Moses for Israel. It's been opened up. And that's what Paul says when he continues in verse 25.

He says this is God's purpose and this was God's purpose from before. God knew this ahead of time. God tells us in Isaiah that that's one of the ways we know He's God.

He tells us what's going to happen ahead of time. And He prepared this beforehand. We've seen that beforehand, beforehand, and all that predestination.

He says in Hosea, I will call them My people who were not My people, and I will call her beloved who was not beloved. God predicted this in the prophets. Israel should have seen it coming, that God was going to do a new thing.

That this opportunity for comprehending the glory of God would no longer be restricted to the nation of Israel. It was going to happen in a new and different way. It shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, you are not My people, there they shall be called the sons of the living God.

Now here's a little quiz question for you. Where is it said, you are not My people? In the Old Testament economy, in the days of worship under the law, where was it that God would say, you are not My people? What would be a geographical location? Let's say in Jerusalem. Let's say where the presence of God was located, in the temple.

There was a wall, wasn't there? And a court outside called the court of the Gentiles. And the Gentiles couldn't enter. There was a sign right up there on the wall.

The nations cannot enter. You have to be an Israelite. You have to be the seed of Abraham, in the physical sense, to enter into the inner court and to participate in the worship.

If you're not the people, you're outside. You're restricted to the court of the Gentiles and beyond. That's where it was said.

Well now, there's a prophecy in Hosea. It shall come to pass. In the place where it was said to them, you are not My people, there they shall be called the sons of the living God.

And isn't it interesting in Revelation chapter 2 and 3 that one of the promises to the overcomers in the church age is that they will be pillars in the temple of My God, Jesus says. One of the promises is that we will be in there where the Gentiles could never go before. It will be said, where it used to be said, you are not My people, they will be called the sons of the living God.

John 1.12, as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to be called the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name. It doesn't matter if they're Israelites or not. So it's a new thing.

It was foreordained. It was planned in the past. It was prepared ahead of time.

And it was prophesied in the prophets. God said, look, Israel, there's going to come a time where right there where the court of the Gentiles is, where it used to be said, you are not My people, you can't come in, people are going to be called the sons of the living God. Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel, even though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant.

And in terms of ideas, you can insert the word only. Even though there's all this multitude of physical descendants, it's only the remnant that's going to be delivered. He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.

As Isaiah said before, unless the Lord Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts, had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom and we would have been made like Gomorrah. There is a remnant within Israel that understands there is a subset of the people who are redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb that inherit, that are perpetuated. And it's for their sake that God deals with all of Israel.

It's for the sake of the remnant that the nation is not destroyed. It's for the sake of the remnant that for years and years and decades they did not go out under captivity. I have yet 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal and so forth.

God withheld discipline, withheld punishment, held His wrath in check so that He could make His

mercy and His grace and His power and His glory known to the remnant. That's why human history works the way it does. That's why God puts up with unbelievers in the broad sense.

And in our age, it's much as it was in the days of Israel. Why is it that God doesn't obliterate the United States, which is supposedly a Christian nation, yet is filled with believers who completely misunderstand, misrepresent and abuse the plan of God and the grace of God and the word of God, who misrepresent what the Christian life is, who bring shame on the name of Jesus Christ instead of glory. Why does God put up with that? Why do we continue forward? It's for the sake of the few.

It's for the sake of the remnant. It's for the sake of that collection of individuals that's on the narrow road seeking to enter through the narrow gate. That's why.

But God's patience will eventually run out and there is a window of opportunity and there will be a time when God will dispense that wrath on the vessels that are fitted for ruin because God is just and there is an opportunity. And that is a very powerful motivation or it ought to be for us as believers and it has been a very successful effort on the part of the enemy to neutralize and render apathetic vast portions of the body of Christ by obscuring and hiding the true state of things, that there is a great deal on the line, that there is going to be a judgment of wrath on believers, that Romans chapter 2 does apply to believers and it is explained away as referring to unbelievers and so forth. What shall we say then in verse 30? Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained to righteousness even the righteousness of faith.

The Gentiles never pursued trying to keep the law of Moses but Israel pursuing the law of righteousness has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith but as it were by the works of the law. They stumbled at that stumbling stone as it is written, Behold I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of a fence but whoever believes on him will not be put to shame.

Faith is the issue. Rather than evaluating ourselves or trying to evaluate others in terms of what is being done, what righteousness is, what righteous impact is being had and so forth, we need to be measuring ourselves by faith. Do we trust? Do we know something that we can trust? Do we know the promises? Do we claim them? Is it making a difference in our priorities, in our thinking, in our action? That is our calling and there is such a great opportunity to comprehend, to fulfill and to reflect the glory of God when we pursue that.

But it is not going to happen unless it matters to us. It is not going to matter unless we think about it, meditate on it and make it a part of the reality in our own soul. And that is our choice.

That is what Timothy tells us, Paul's words to Timothy. If we choose, we can be a vessel of honor in the household. That should be our goal.

That should be the measure with which we measure ourselves from day to day. Let's close in

prayer. Father, what a privilege it is to live in this age, to be the recipient of a better covenant that is founded on new and better promises.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will make these things real to us, will remind us and provoke us with them. We pray that we will recognize when we are making progress and when we are not, that we will be encouraged and motivated by the truth of the situation as it exists and as we stand in life with the opportunities that you give us, the gracious expressions of your compassion and your mercy and your provision for us to fulfill this purpose. We pray that all of those things will be real to us, that we will be motivated, that we will be strengthened with might in the inner man, that we will experience the indwelling of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and as a result, we will begin to comprehend the length and depth and height of your glory.

We ask these things in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.