

Indescribable Gift 11-26-00

I feel led of the Holy Spirit to depart from our series on lessons from Exodus to speak on a thankful heart. It is the same subject that we have encountered at the waters of Marah. There they had a choice to trust in the God they proclaimed in a song of praise – to continue to walk in a joyful spirit in spite of conditions. Or they could trust in their senses and complain again, forgetting just who it was that called them his children. The verse that has been on my heart all week is in 2Cor 9:13-15 (NIV).

¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Verse 15 alone was on my heart but I read 13 and 14 to give you some of the context. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! - surpassing grace!

Last week I didn't realize we dwelt on the song of Moses – a song of praise and thanks – coinciding with the beginning of the Thanksgiving week. It just happened to be where we were – by God's divine providence. I began to think about how good, how gracious God has been in leading us through the last year – how we have learned and grown together and this verse just kept coming up in my heart. We can become so dull – unfeeling – toward this indescribable gift for it is so constantly present with us we grow accustomed to it, taking something so wonderful for granted.

When we take communion it is suppose to all come back to us afresh, what He has done for us, the wonder of being made right with God. But I'm afraid that many times we only allow ourselves to go so deep and no further. This verse says the gift we have received is indescribable, or in KJV – unspeakable. The word in Greek is used only here in the Bible. It means unable to convey. Literally it means the negative of speaking or conveying something. A similar phrase today would be, "I can't tell you how much that gift means to me." But I want to convey it as much as I can and trust the Holy Spirit to add what is lacking. We will continue to see the depth and height and width of this gift through our lives and through eternity.

To get a taste of it we must first see what we are and what we deserve. We have inherited a rebellious nature that is opposed to God. Even though He is our Creator who only has good intentions for us, we refuse to acknowledge Him, and in fact ignore Him, doing whatever we please. That is normal for mankind because man has inherited Adam's nature. This self-seeking spirit really has no love for other's, only a desire to please self and if that costs others, we don't really care. Out of pride we make a pretense of caring because we want others to think highly of us. That is self love in disguise. Since we know that God is good we must understand every rebellion against his will is pure evil. It is the same pride that inspired Satan to desire to exalt himself as god. Our sin declares the same intention.

You may say that is not your heart – and it may not be if you have had a change wrought by the grace of God – but either that has happened or you are deceiving yourself. We all started with that nature. That nature will do anything to get what it wants. It has no intention whatsoever of surrendering to the will of the One to whom it owes everything. If it was possible, that old nature would dethrone God and try to take over in effort to find more gratification for itself.

Over and over the Scripture says sin leads to death. That is the fruit of sin, defiance of God. It destroys the things that God has made, shunning the value of those good things and seeking the destruction for any that would stand in the way. Self centered, self promoting, just plain selfishness is the heart of every son of Adam.

And that plainly and clearly deserves justice from a righteous God. The just sentence for sin is death. Sin kills and so we reap what we sow. Remember Jesus said whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and so when we hate another for not acting in a way that would please us, we sow death. The reaping of death is just. It is the right thing for God to do. But here is where that unspeakable gift comes in.

God set his love upon us. Why? I don't know. But I know He did. And so to redeem what He loves He took the form of his own weak and limited creation. Now that is indescribable. I don't understand how He did that either, but I know He did for you and me. He lived the law perfectly, the very spirit of the Law to the finest detail and all the while experiencing every pain and sorrow man can experience. Then He went to the cross to exchange all the righteousness of his life with all the sin and rebellion of mine. Some swap! Why would He do that? Because He decided to love you and me with a love I can't begin to fathom in its greatness.

You and I get his righteousness accredited to our account and He gets our sin and the death it deserves. He faces the wrath of God and hell for the rebellion that was in my life toward my Creator. All the ugliness of the crucifixion and hell are rightfully mine, but He went in my place. And in so doing He defeated death and hell – something I could never have done. Hallelujah – what a Savior! No wonder his name is Wonderful. That literally means – indescribable. Too great to put into words. The indescribable gift of God is the gift of himself to us. That is too amazing for me to grasp the depths of but it is the declaration of Scripture.

Yet I can still choose to walk away from an exchange like that (my sin for his righteousness) and live in my rebellion, my declaration of self as God. That is what I do every time I ignore his leading and refuse to obey. But if I accept the exchange – his peace and joy, and righteousness, are mine. I am made right- with the holy and just God who created me. But the problem is no man seeks God. John 6:44 (NIV)⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," So his grace steps in and causes my heart to hunger after Him and the work of transformation begins. Again and again He draws me to a place I would not go except his love desires more for me than I can imagine for myself.

You know what He's doing? He's refining me so I can know Him and love Him in a greater way, and then He uses me as an instrument. And then He rewards me – Oh it is reward enough to be loved so much and to have my mind renewed so that I am free from the garbage that used to pollute my mind and to be free of the destructive tendencies of sin. I have purposes with eternal consequences and a life of lasting meaning, what more could I ask? But then He lays up for me eternal reward I can lay at his feet.

As our eyes start to open day by day to all the goodness He has for us and all that He is working in and through our lives, we just stand back and marvel. As was talked of in the retreat, even the trials and refining fires are precious expressions of his love and so needed in our lives to work in us his own character.

Look where we started and look where we end in this passage: Eph 2:1-10 (NIV)
¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We start as God hating self-seeking ingrates – with the same nature as Hitler and all the potential for evil that he or Judas had. We end up in the image of the Son of God – transformed into his likeness. Romans 8:29 (NIV)²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 2 Cor 3:18 (NIV) ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

What an unspeakable gift, this abundant exceeding grace. In the Greek the word "surpassing" means to over shoot. I have a target I'm trying to hit but I overshoot it. ¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing (this overshooting, gone beyond the limits) grace God has given you.¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! 2 Cor 9:14-15(NIV) God gave you grace but it was above and beyond! He went overboard with his dispensing of this indescribable gift – manifested in his only Son. He brought you out of certain destruction like the Israelites at the Red Sea – through on dry ground, destroyed your enemy – death, and made you his own children. That means your God's heir. The Apostle Paul says since Jesus died, you get it all. He says in Ro 8 if God would not stop at giving his beloved Son up for you, is there any good thing He will not

give you? God is the executor and Jesus' will says, "my righteousness I'd like to be given to each of my children." And the Father says, "That's the plan, to make them all like you."

Oh and then we could go on and talk about heaven and ruling and reigning with Him, in his presence forever, unhindered by this body as we know it. And our new bodies, but that we would be another message. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. Lets be a thankful joyful people because of who our unchanging God is. Lets not let circumstances blur our vision as to his unchanging love and devotion to see you entirely his. Consider all that is yours in Christ Jesus and the love the Father is investing in you. Consider that the One who began the work will be faithful to complete it, and then thank God for his indescribable gift. Thank him everyday for all He is to you and all He's doing in you. I have wondered if when Jesus said, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup..." He may have meant whenever we eat or drink to think of his life and death for us, realize He himself is our spiritual sustenance.

I want to close with this prayer Paul prayed for the Ephesians and praying it for you this morning. Part of that wonderful overshooting grace to me is the Christ in you my brothers and sisters in Jesus. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift! Eph 3:14-21 (NIV)

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father,¹⁵ from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.²⁰ 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,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.