



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 9: 1-15

“Thanks Be Unto God for His Unspeakable Gift”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] For the Scripture reading today we're turning to 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and reading through the chapter of fifteen verses. The message will be based entirely on verse 15. You remember from the context that the apostle has written 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 in order to urge the Corinthians to bountifully give for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

And those in Macedonia have given; he uses them as an illustration and urges the Corinthians to do likewise. In the course of the two chapters he gives us probably, I assume every one would agree with this, probably the finest exposition of principles of giving in the New Testament. But, we are centering our attention on the last verse, but that's the context as we lead up to it. So, beginning in 2 Corinthians 9:1, he continues,

“For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them in Macedonia, that Achaia (That is of course where Corinth was located.) Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: (That is ready to give.) Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought

it necessary to exhort the brethren that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness. But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, as unto all men; and by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we give Thee thanks for the indescribable gift of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are so grateful as we reflect upon our lost condition, we are so thankful that Thou hast devised means by which we who are sinners may have forgiveness of sins and be installed in the family of God with a relationship to Thee which is eternal and also possessed of life everlasting. How marvelous Thou has dealt with us. We are grateful to Thee, we give Thee thanks Lord for that which is beyond our understanding. And nevertheless we thank Thee and we praise Thee and we ask that by

Thy marvelous grace and power Thou would work in our hearts to be effective servants of Thee in the day and in the society in which we live and are a part.

We ask Thy blessing upon the whole church of Christ today, upon every believer in the body of Christ. Oh God, continue the work of edification in their hearts. Increase the number of the church of Christ as it pleases Thee through the preaching of the word of God. Supply the needs of the saints and be with them in the trials and troubles of life. We pray for those who have requested our prayers who are passing through some difficult and trying times. We bring them all to Thee and especially those whose names are in our calendar of concern. Oh God, minister to them and we pray that Thou will bless them spiritually and physically as well in accordance with thy perfect will.

We thank Thee for the Chapel and its ministries and ask that Thou would bless the ministry of the word that goes forth over the radio, through the printed page, through the preaching of the word in our Sunday school and other activities, in the Bible classes that meet in homes, we remember them as well, all of them. Father we are so grateful to Thee that Thou hast brought us individually into the knowledge of Jesus Christ and brought us into the church of Jesus Christ composed of the true believers in him. And Lord if there should be some in this audience, who have not yet believed in Christ, may today be the day when they acknowledge in their own heart to Thee their need of Christ and turn to him through Thee. We commit our meeting to Thee; we pray Thy blessing upon us to that end for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We're taking our title from the last verse of 2 Corinthians chapter 9, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." This is the climactic text of Paul's teaching on Christian giving. And one notices as he reads through these chapters, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 that the apostle avoids human substitutes. He does not issue pressure appeals, he has no gimmicks, he does not say if you give then we'll give you back an apostolic letter or a book as is so frequently done today. He does not use any pledge

systems, there are no schemes what so ever. There are appeals and they are appeals that are grounded in the gifts that God has given to us. I occasionally have people who say to me, “You speak about voluntary giving and you do not espouse any kind of taking up of offerings as in your morning ministry of the word services, and you talk about grace giving but did not the apostle himself take up collections?” And of course it is true, the apostle did take up collection, but there is a vast difference between taking up a collection for others and urging giving to others and taking up a collection and urging giving to us. There is all the difference in the world between the two. And so what we have allowed to happen in Christianity today is that brief that small change, but oh so significant. The apostle appealed for money, and so we follow the apostle and we appeal for money too. We do not look carefully at the word of God and so we equate appealing for poor saints in Jerusalem, in fact, the apostle was so careful that no criticism could be made that when that money was sent to Jerusalem, he required more then one person to be present in the delivery of it lest there might be someone who would say that something has been pilfered along the way. So, the apostles did not follow the schemes that are characteristic today and for which some people even use biblical support.

What Paul does is appeal to the great appeal. And the great appeal is God’s unspeakable gift. He had the confidence that the individual who has come into the possession of the unspeakable gift of the Lord Jesus Christ will be moved by the Holy Spirit to give and to give in accordance to the will of God for him and he leaves it at that. To my mind, that’s the way that it should be done, and that’s why from the beginning the elders of Believers Chapel have followed that principle.

The popular church teaching on giving is largely legal. I mean by that Mosaic legal. Legally Mosaic based on the Old Testament tithe. I know that many of you have read appeals in which Scripture is supported. And the Scripture that is often supported is the Scripture from the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi chapter 3 and verse 8 through verse 10,

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

It's overlooked of course that the tithe was a kind of income tax. The tithe was not really a gift. As a matter of fact, Malachi speaks of tithes and offerings. Tithes are not offerings. Tithes were a kind of income tax. They had to be given to the priests in Jerusalem. And as a matter of fact, if a person should put himself under that system in principle, he puts himself under all the law. And who we are not justified in appealing to a tax like that to support Christian giving. I know that there are individuals who say, “If the Jewish people gave ten percent then Christians ought to give at least as much or more.” It's striking that that sentiment is not used in the New Testament. If you'll look up the term tithe in the New Testament, and it does not occur very many times, you will find it is historically used. It's not used of the present, it's used historically. The giving that the apostle talks about and all of the apostles so far as I can tell support is what we might call, grace giving, or giving voluntarily. It's expressed in this very verse that we read in the earlier part of chapter 9 in verse 7, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” The Lord Jesus expressed the essence of it when he said to the apostles, “Freely you have received, freely give.” That, so far as I can tell is Christian giving. And that's the way in which we can carry on our Lord's work, by Christian giving.

Now, the question that arises as we read this last verse is just who or what is the unspeakable gift? I would imagine that ninety-nine point nine percent of you in this

audience could answer that question very easily. Who or what is the unspeakable gift? Could there be any person that does not understand that the unspeakable gift is the gift of God in Christ, or the gift of Christ. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

Now the apostle has just given us some marvelous words concerning grace or bounty, and he means by grace, the generosity of the Corinthians. He refers to that, refers to the generosity of the Macedonians, appeals to the Corinthians for generosity. And the term that he uses is the term grace, kairos. In fact, in these two chapters, this term is used in several senses. In verse 14, “And by their pray for you which long after you for the exceeding kairos of God in you.” The grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God is literally, grace to you. For that term is used in the sense of thanks. So Paul in verse 15 after the lengthy two chapters, burst in to thanksgiving when he remembers all grace flows from Calvary, and Calvary’s cross. The gift is the grace mentioned in verse 14. But verse 14 and verse 15 are kind of summarizing verses and the grace of which he’s talking, the gift of God in Christ, goes all the way back to chapter 8 and verse 9. And you are familiar with the verse, but let me read it, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for you sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich.” That’s the indescribable gift, the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now if you’ll look at the various translations that are made of verse 15, of 2 Corinthians 9, one of the things that stands out is the different words that are used to translate this particular passage. “Thanks be unto for his unspeakable gift.” I’m reading in the Authorized Version that I read in the Scripture reading. The New American Standard Bible which many of you have in your hands has, “His indescribable gift.” Now that’s a very accurate translation because the root of that word is a root that does suggest the idea that is cannot be expounded in full. In fact the word itself is related to the word that we often use exegesis. And so it’s something that we cannot fully exegete, something that we cannot fully expound. And the New Revised Standard Version and the New International Version I believe have the same thing. The Revised Standard Version has

the rendering inexpressible and the New English Bible being a little bit freer but very excellently done has, “The gift that is beyond words.” And that surely catches the thought, the gift beyond words.

Isn't it interesting that this English word, unspeakable is used here and used also in some other places that might throw some light on the meaning of our passage here, at least on the surface? We have for example in chapter 12 and verse 4, this expression, Paul was talking about how he was caught up into paradise and he says, in chapter 12 and verse 4 of this book, “He heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” When we look at the original text we note it's a slightly different word. It's a word really that means beyond human powers to explain to you. It's as if the apostle were confessing that it would be impossible for him with the power of language that he possesses to explain to you what he actually saw and heard when he was caught up to the third Heaven.

There is one other place where unspeakable is used in the Authorized Version. There are three times, each time incidentally a different original word in the Greek text. In 1st Peter chapter 1 and verse 8, Peter talks about unspeakable joy and uses again a different word which means something very close to inexpressible, something that he cannot call out of himself to fully explain to individuals.

Now the apostles were individuals who were forced by what they had come to understand the spirit of what they'd come to understand to use these superlative expressions. I remember one particularly in Romans chapter 5 in which the apostle does not talk about abound, but even coins a word that many have thought in speaking of super abounding. And so it's as if he admitted in this matter he could not explain precisely what he was thinking about. And so it's not abounded when he talks about God's gift to us in the salvation of Christ, it's something that has super abounded to us. When he talks about the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, he goes on to say how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out. He

cannot in the language that is his explain the judgments of God, they are unsearchable judgments. In Ephesians chapter 3 in verse 8 he states with reference to the ministry of the word of God, “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.” Again he says tongue, language, thought fails us to express the riches that are found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, I want to say just a word about the indescribability of this gift. Now it seems strange to say something about the indescribability and then say a few moments later I want to talk about its describability. But I’m going to justify what I’m saying by the fact that in theology if you know anything about theology, we have a doctrine with reference to God called the knowability of God. That is that we can truly know God and we can know why we know him. And all orthodox theologians usually have something to say about knowability. Reformed theologians usually devote a considerable space to the question of the knowability of God. And then in a few moments you may find a considerable amount of space devoted to the incomprehensibility of God. It seems a contradiction but the point they’re making is that we can really know God but we cannot fully know him. So we can know him but not fully know him. And I’m going to suggest to you that we cannot really describe the gift and yet there is a sense in which we can say some things about the gift.

We might say this about the ocean. I grew up by the side of the Atlantic Ocean and as a result of growing up there, I can remember the day when I went out on Folly Island which is near Charleston and saw the ocean for the first time. I can still remember something of the expectation that I had, but when I stood on the sand dune, came up the last one and looked out over the ocean, that’s a thought that will never leave me as long as I live. Well, I take that back, as long as I have my mind. [Laughter] I remember the ocean, I remember the sense of the vastness of it looking here and there and there and not seeing anything but that vast mass of water. It made an indelible impression upon me

at age fourteen. The ocean, it is knowable, but incomprehensible. Our scientists, still even to this day discover things about the oceans of this particular creation.

So, how unspeakable then is this gift of God. Now if you think about speech for a moment, I'll be very simple because that's all I can be. Speech presupposes three things. It presupposes thought. That could be called the matter of our speech, the content of our speech. Now there are some people who speak without any content, but then we do not think to highly of them in fact, we behind their backs may laugh at them, “He went on and on and on and didn't say anything.” But most of us try to say something when we talk. We may not always succeed, but nevertheless, in fact I better not say too much about this, because I may fulfill my own prophecy, or comments.

The second thing about speech is language. Now it's possible to have great thoughts and not even be able to express any of them. If you travel to another land and you do not speak the language, you have great thoughts but the things that come out if they come out at all are usually like the things that a baby might say over here.

The third thing is voice, the organ of speech. That is the means by which we express the thoughts in the language that we would like to express it. Now I confess that when I come to God's indescribable gift in Jesus Christ, my thought is baffled. Because there are areas of the thought that I could not, I don't know, I could not express the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ that need expression. My language fails. At times I think I know some things that I want to say but I cannot find the words. And that's not simply because I'm old and cannot find the words about a lot of other things that I know. It's because of the content is so great my language is not prepared to express fully what I think that I have come to know.

If you look at a baby for example I think you can understand what I'm talking about. And if you are there when the baby is first born and brought out from delivery and you take a look at that baby and you reflect for a few moments over what it means for that baby to have been born, it does baffle your thinking apparatus, your mind and it

also limits your speech. Because who can look at this little infant and realize that here is a life that is endless, endless, endless existence characteristic of every baby brought into being. That's an astonishing fact, every one of those children whether they come to Christ or not, live forever. How important it is of course that they come to know Christ that they may live in eternal life in the knowledge of God, but every one of them living forever. This little seven pound or five pound or nine pound infant that cannot talk whose thoughts no doubt are very few, but a being living infinitely. It's astonishing, and to fully express that, we cannot do it. So if you face one of them your voice stutters.

There are times of course when we cannot express what we would like to express. I told the audience this morning there are experiences in life at which the inability to express though is very common. For example as a young person, a young man and you finally feel that you have met the one young lady that you would like to spend your life with and so when the time comes when you must make the question. And if at that point you are able to come forth with several fluent lines that she may wish she had written down because it so beautifully expressed in the finest kind of language, beware of that individual. [Laughter] So when the time comes well it's there that language fails you and you stutter and you stumble and I think of course that's exactly what the apostle almost is doing when he says, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift, his indescribable gift.”

I commented this morning about Joe Thiesmann who used to play quarterback for the Washington Redskins. He was noted all over the league for being an individual who constantly talked. And someone finally made the comment about him that has stuck with me, “Joe Thiesmann never has an unexpressed thought.” [Laughter] Well I can say from that I don't know anything about Mr. Theismann's spiritual condition but if he really reflected for a moment about Christ as his Savior if he should know him, he would have to say, “Yes, there is an unexpressed thought, it has to do with my Savior.”

Well, Paul is not a Joe Theismann, there comes a time with him when he cannot speak about the things that he saw in Heaven. I don't really think that he was necessarily hindered, it was unlawful for him to do it he says and maybe there was part of that too. But he never could really have expressed those things he said they were unspeakable things. That is they were beyond him, beyond his capacity of thought, but particularly beyond his capacity of language and voice to express them.

A few weeks ago I read from one of my favorite writers a story of a man in New Zealand. He was a man who had come out from Scotland to New Zealand a number of years ago as a missionary really. And there had established a church and had a very successful ministry for fifty years. And my friend whose works that I frequently read, attended the service at which he was retiring from the ministry after almost fifty years in the little place in New Zealand where he labored. He was a man who had come out on one of the first of the immigrant boats from the land of Great Brittan to minister in the land of New Zealand. He was truly one of the pioneers. He had gone into a little place and by God's grace he had been enabled of God to establish a church and build it up and after the fifty years now was ready to retire. He said that he could still see him as he stood up in that meeting which was designed to honor him. The church was filled with people after the fifty years of ministry he had many friends and many had found Christ through him.

He stood up as a very tall man with some grey hair and a deep Scottish brogue for he had come from Scotland. And they were honoring greatly beloved man, and men stepped forward and spoke about him in the community and then the elders of the church came forward and spoke about him and others spoke about the wonderful ministry that the man had had and finally there came time for the man to respond. And he stood up, around the rail in the place where the pulpit was and he looked out over the congregation and he saw those people and the words would not come. And finally he sat down, and sat down right by the man whose telling the story of him. And after a few

moments they went over to him and they urged him to try again and so he came up the second time, he looked out over the audience and he couldn't say a word. So he went over and sat down again and they had a little brief musical interlude and again they tried. And he came up again and he looked out over the audience and he still could not say anything, I know his throat must have been filled with all kinds of lumps. He couldn't say anything and he went down and as he went down he was heard to say, “It's no good, I can't do it.” My friend said in some respects it was the most eloquent and moving farewell that I have ever witnessed. He knew what he wanted to say, he knew the language in which he wished to say it, but in the critical hour his voice failed him. The apostle is talking about God's indescribable gift. It's something which we could never fully express in the fullness of the truth.

But now, let's turn it around for a minute and I want to talk about the describability of the unspeakable gift. The gospel is founded upon God's giving. The gospel is characterized by grace. The law is characterized by a different principle; a very important principle a very significant principle, a very necessary principle, for it's through the law of God that we are reminded of our sin. And in fact if we listen to the law we come to the full knowledge of our sin, it serves its purpose. But the gospel is not the law. Payment is demanded by the law. Under the gospel everything is the gift of God in grace. Now there is responsibility, but the principle is different. When we read, “The law came through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,” we have one of our apostle's significant statements about the difference of the law and the gospel. Could I describe the whole meaning of this indescribable gift? No, our imminent divines, our great theologians fall short always. Some of them talk about God's good will to the human race as the meaning of Christ's coming. Others talk about God's opposition to evil and it explains to us why God thinks that evil is bad, Christ has to come to die for it. Others talk about God's love, but they mean by that not that it is propitiatory love but

rather that it is love's magnificent self sacrifice designed to urge us to gain our own salvation by our self sacrifice.

And then there are others who talk about the general aspect of our Lord's coming as a result of his coming and as a result of his death on the cross as the mediator who dies for sin, the world now lives under a mediator. It's a magnificent truth, it's very true because if you reflect for a moment on the sin of man, if God had when Christ came and he was crucified by men, if God had destroyed the earth at that time, he would have been fully justified. And our Lord on Calvary's cross gives us the clue as to why we have these almost two thousand years of opportunity to be saved, when he said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Now forgive is a wretched translation in my mind. That word is a word that means to forgive, but it also in the New Testament in more than one place means to release or to let go. And if I reflect for a moment that ignorance is no excuse how can our Lord say, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do”? The great work of evangelization then would be to keep the gospel from everyone so that no one would know and then everyone would be forgiven. How foolish! No, what our Lord is praying for is a dispensation of the grace of God. That is a time in which men may be saved. And as Peter tells us in 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 8 and 9, those who are to be saved are those who are God's people. And the present nineteen hundred years is for the preaching of the gospel that God's people may be saved. Those who through their salvation make it very plain that they have been elected of God from the foundation of the world. So it's great to live under a mediator, but we speak of more than that.

We speak of that, but we also speak of his special work of dying as a substitute for sinners. And our Lord in dying as a substitute dies as an effectual substitute. Never anything but effectual substitution is set forth in the New Testament. It's not conditional substitution, it's not potential substitution it's effectual substitution. That's the language of the New Testament. And we talk about substitution because our salvation is bound up in

that. Substitution, the Greek liturgy has in it a phrase which is often been quoted, I've quoted it before myself, in fact I don't think I have in some years now. But the Greek liturgy, the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church has in it an expression, “His unknown sufferings.” And his unknown sufferings represent the fullness of the work of Jesus Christ and that is something of course we cannot express fully.

But we can talk about his substitution, we can talk about how he has satisfied the claims of God against us and therefore there has gone forth the offer of the gospel for men and women. And we proclaim that. And many of you maybe most of you in this auditorium have responded to that gospel. I hope so, and if there are here some who have not, the opportunity still exists as a result of Jesus' prayer on Calvary's cross. This age is the answer to the prayer, “Father release them for they know not what they do.” Their release is justified, the time of suspension of judgment is justified by ignorance, but ignorance does not ultimately excuse us. It does give us time to respond.

Now, I can therefore describe some of the meaning of our Lord's work, but not the whole meaning. But if I describe it as a substitutionary sacrifice, I have the essence of it, the most important thing and I have the reality of it. Can I describe the manner of this work? No, not fully. The Son, the gift of God and yet the giver himself, think of that. He's the giver as well as the gift, amazing. Only a Triune God could accomplish something so significant as be both gift and giver. So our Lord Jesus is the gift, but as the eternal Son with in the triune three persons who subsist as one God he also is part of the giving God. To understand how this individual from the throne of the Lord God in Heaven should come to be on the breast of the Virgin Mary is something that is indescribable. I cannot explain fully the manner of God's gift of the redeeming sacrifice. I can accept it; I can respond to it, I cannot explain it fully.

There is another point I think should be mentioned here. Theologians speak often of the impassability of God. That means his inability to suffer. If you just took that expression. But that is explained by theologians as meaning no one outside of God can

force him to suffer. Now in that sense, God is impassable, he cannot be forced by man or any other power to suffer, but he may suffer of himself. And that of course the eternal triune God has done in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when he cried out, “My God my God why has thou forsaken me?” And then uttered, “It is finished,” he is passed through the suffering. The sufferings of Christ the apostles speak of, the impassable God, but yet the suffering God as well. To describe the manner of it, that’s impossible, I couldn’t. He’s impassable, but he suffers in Christ.

When I think of the lavish generosity of the gift, think of the covenantal blessings. I’ll just mention them, no time to expound them; we’d need a week on each one of them. Forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, sonship, priesthood, hope, man’s gifts to men are measurable, but with him, arithmetic is baffled and calculus too. And the covenantal emotions that go along with the covenantal gifts, the more it is experienced the more we’re silenced in amazement.

This past week I was in Canada enjoying the cool weather, seventies, sixties late at night, seventies, I thought of you. [Laughter] And I especially thought of you as being there without me. And then I came home and I was almost disappointed to hear you’ve had all of this rain and it hasn’t been as hot as I was thinking you were there. And I knew you weren’t impassable, you were suffering but I wasn’t suffering. But anyway, I had five well actually I had seven opportunities to preach up there, and incidentally, I was so pleased, I went to a little place in Canada, Elmira, a relatively small church, maybe it would seat a hundred or two hundred people perhaps, maybe two hundred and fifty, and several people came up to me and said, “We listen to you every Saturday morning at nine thirty. And then I went over to near Toronto, and the same thing happened, people would come up. And one man came up and maybe his eyesight was not all that great, but he came up to me, he looked in my face and he said, “Are you the one that I listen to every Saturday morning?” And I was so thankful that God has enabled the Chapel to send to the Buffalo station, Buffalo, New York, the tapes each week, and they’re played

Saturday morning at nine thirty. And we have a significant listening audience up there in Canada.

But while I was there, after the Sunday ministry I spoke five times on the Davidic Covenant from 2 Samuel 7, and I was impressed again with David after this magnificent covenant is given to him we read,

“Then went King David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, who am I, O Lord GOD? What is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this (That is this Davidic Covenant) is the charter for all mankind. And what can David say more unto thee? For thou, Lord GOD, knowest thy servant. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them.”

“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,” David might have said, “I am the antitype of the king to come; my house is established forever my throne is established forever, my seed exists forever.” The gratitude provoked by this gift is expressed also here. Notice the play on words, “By their prayer for you which long after you for the exceeding thanks of God in you.” Grace of God in that sense but, “Grace be to God for his unspeakable gift.” So the generosity is the sense he speaks about the generosity of God in you and generosity be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Give freely, give voluntarily, give cheerfully, for God's great salvation began in the heart of God not because we sent up to him a request to give. No, it originated within him, out of his divine eternal love. It's not because we called upon him for money or a pledge system or anything like that. It's so totally different; it's a voluntarily unconditional giving from the heart of God himself. It all began there, and David would say that's

where I want your giving to begin. I want your giving to begin in that way, freely voluntarily and cheerfully.

Someone preached a sermon one time on the happy God. Well, I don't know how Scriptural this is, we never have our Lord laughing so far as I know. God laughs but the place where it refers to his laughing, it's in judgment. But nevertheless, the happy God, oh the blessedness of the God and it could be translated that way I guess, we know God in that sense is a happy giver, hilarious giver actually. And then so, the gratitude is expressed in giving. Everything about the Christian is to be that kind of giving. And then it's also this gratitude in holding a thankful creed, one that magnifies Christ as a complete savior. We do not say the Lord Jesus died on the cross in order that men may become savable, and then their salvation is dependent on whether they resist as some of our friends do say. If we don't resist then we're saved by what Christ did plus our non resistance. Nor do we say that Christ has made all men savable and then by the decision of our free will we have received the gift and thus the salvation comes from two sources, it comes from God and it comes from us. The decision of my will, or my refusal to resist and God's glory is diluted. And he has part of the glory, maybe the greater part, but I have some too, we don't say that. We do not believe that Christ died to make men savable, we believe that he died to save men.

No truth may be dwarfed and dwindled into the meaninglessness of a failure to sense all of the grace of God and the saving work of Christ. High as Heaven grace is needed for men who are deep as hell in sin. And that is what God has given us through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't stutter when we talk about grace. We do not stumble when we talk about grace. We underline grace and the salvation that comes through Christ.

I mentioned this morning, Mr. Spurgeon talks about preachers who dwarf and dwindle the doctrine of the grace of God so that there is not enough left for soup for a sick grasshopper. And that to my mind is exactly what we do if we preach the Arminian

gospel of salvation through human free will. And I have never yet seen an Arminian who believes in that kind of doctrine it's the doctrine of evangelicalism generally, fortunately not exclusively. It is the kind of doctrine that leads to a discounting of this very sense of thankfulness and gratitude for the immense, eternal infinite grace of God that saves a sinner like you and like me. I could never never get over that fact that his grace has reached down and saved one so corrupt as me.

How shall I accept this gift? I could ignore it. Many ignore it; many hear the gospel every Sunday morning and ignore it. I could decline it. I like them better than those who ignore it. There is such a thing as honest heresy, but there is no such thing as honest dishonesty. So the man who will at least decline I will respect, and I remember that only God saves sinners. I may formally accept it that is I may join a church and I may sit around the Lord's Table. I may be baptized and I've accepted it formally. That's one way in which we can do it, but there's no reality there. Or I may wholeheartedly accept it.

David Brainerd was the great missionary to the Indians. Brainerd said that for a long time he felt that God's call was something that he couldn't respond to. He said, “I thought I would gladly come to Jesus however difficult the path if I only knew how. But I found myself as it were with a great gulf between me and him and with no directions for getting through.” He eventually saw this was ridiculous. He says when a mother tells her child to come to her she doesn't tell him how to come. When you say to your children, your little children, “Johnny, come here.” Johnny doesn't turn around and say, “In what way father should I come?” That's something that comes implicitly, and so Johnny better come if he runs or crawls or flees or whatever, or even if he starts to run the other way you're going to take hold of him. He learns quickly. Brainerd used that as an excuse. Our author says he may come with a run or a jump or a skip or a bound. He may come laughing or crowing or shouting or singing so long as he comes. There is scope in the love of God for you to come in any way providing you come.

One of my great heroes in the faith was Robert Murray McCheyne who died at about twenty-nine years of age but left an indelible impression upon Scotland and as a matter of fact, the Christian world. Even as far as the land of Israel in his day. But he brought his spiritual concerns to a climax at the communion service. He took the bread upon his lips and he took the broken body of his Savior as his one hope of life eternal at that time. And in taking the cup he signifies his acceptance of the redeeming blood of Christ as his only ground for everlasting Salvation. That's a marvelous way to come to Christ, at the Lord's Supper. But that isn't the only way you can come, you can come now in this meeting. You can come right now, you can come without telling anyone for a time or two, sooner or later you'll have to talk, you cannot keep your self from talking. You may come in your automobile, you may come walking from this building to your car, you may come at home by the side of your bed, all of those things are insignificant, the way by which we come. The important thing of course is that we come. And in Robert Murray McCheyne's case that's the way he came, at the Lord's Table. But what he did essentially was what you do. You give thanks to God. That's the expression of faith. You hear about Christ, you hear what he's done for you, you read it in the word of God and you lift your heart to him and you say, "Thank you Lord for Jesus Christ who died for sinners, he died for me, and I therefore take him as my Savior. Thanks." That's the expression of faith. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. What a wonderful way to come to the Lord if you were to say, "Thanks Lord for your unspeakable, indescribable, inexpressible gift beyond words." Come to him, trust him, believe in him. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, how grateful we are for these magnificent words of Holy Scripture. Lord, who could ever ever describe the feeling of our heart that Thou has saved us, me, from my sin. Oh God, touch hearts in this auditorium. If there are some here who do not believe in our Lord, bring them to Christ. ...

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“Thanks Be Unto God for His Unspeakable Gift” by S. Lewis Johnson
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AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY