

CHRIST'S INFINITE FULNESS

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CHRIST'S INFINITE FULNESS

Each summer for the past 18 years our family has traveled from our home by car to the central Sierra Mountains to vacation at a Sierra lake. And nearly every year we also make a separate 1 ½ hour day trip to visit the Yosemite Valley. Coming from the south, we wind our way for more than an hour when (as we begin to tire with the endless turns) we come upon a three-quarters of a mile long tunnel burrowed through a mountain. This tunnel signals that Yosemite is near. As we come out of the darkness of the tunnel on the other side, we are suddenly ushered into the scenic beauty of the Yosemite Valley and are confronted with the glory of its natural splendor. Sheer faced granite cliffs that seem to be a mile high and luminous water falls are suddenly before our eyes. A large viewing area just off the highway accommodates the constant flow of people who stop and behold the beauty of Yosemite. It is one of those rare places where words and pictures won't do. It can't be described. You must see it and take it in. It has to be experienced for yourself.

I believe that what I've just described, in some ways, parallels the believer's conversion experience with the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul describes conversion in similar terms. He says that when a person is saved, they see Christ and behold His glory. Prior to our conversion our minds were blinded. We saw no beauty or glory in Christ. Paul says that, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4). When we are made alive in Christ, we are, as it were, brought into another world. Paul describes it this way; "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Here we see that conversion in its experiential aspect involves "see[ing] the light ... of the glory of Christ" (v. 4) as well as a divine shining in which God shows us "the Light of ... the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

True Christians are those who have been stunned and captivated by what they have seen. With God-given spiritual sight they have seen the majestic glory of Christ. The aim of this chapter is to show that a central feature of the glory of Christ blazoned before the Christian is the glory of His all-sufficiency. Christ is infinite in His perfections and being. He possesses a fulness, and an all-sufficiency that makes Him unspeakably glorious. The Christian sees this glory in conversion. They see that He, and no other, is their all-sufficient Savior-God. Therefore, with an instinctive spiritual response that is a result of the new birth, believers recognize in Christ a limitless source and supply for all their soul's needs. They see in Him a fulness which is, as it were, a vast reservoir or an ocean of supply for what ails those in great emotional and spiritual need. I acknowledge that I am out of my element. Who can adequately describe glory and beauty that is infinite and is therefore beyond description? There is no one like Christ in this regard. Spurgeon said it well:

Hope not, my brethren, that the preacher can grapple with such a subject. I am overcome by it. In my meditations I have felt lost in its lengths and breadths. My joy is great in my theme, and yet I am conscious of a pressure upon my brain and heart, for I am as a little child wandering ... among the stars. I stumble among sublimities, I sink amid glories. I can only point with my finger to that which I see, but cannot describe. May the Holy Spirit himself take of the things of Christ and show them unto you.¹

As we said, a new Christian instinctively sees in Christ a limitless supply for all their spiritual and emotional needs. In fact, the essence of saving faith is the spiritual sight of the infinite glories and excellencies of Christ. John Owen states it well:

Herein, then, is the Lord Christ exceedingly glorious. Those who cannot behold this glory of his ... know him not ... He that discerns not the representation of the glory of God in the person of Christ unto the souls of men, is an unbeliever ... The essence of faith consists in a due ascription of glory to God, Rom iv.20. This we cannot attain unto without the manifestation of those divine excellencies unto us wherein he is glorious. This is done in Christ alone ... He who discerns not the glory of divine wisdom, power, goodness, love, and grace, in the person and office of Christ ... is an unbeliever.²

So the Christian sees Christ's glory. However this sight of Christ can be lost. The Christian can be directed away from Christ. His glory can be obscured and, as it were, hidden. This becomes evident when we lose a sense of the awe and wonder of Christ. It is apparent when we are no longer captivated and spellbound by the beauty of Christ's person. Paul says this occurs unknowingly. That is, even when occupied with spiritual things such as Christian teaching and service, it is possible that someone "takes you captive through philosophy ... according to the ... principles of the world" (Colossians 2:8). In other words, while busy with Christian ministry, we can "not hold fast to the head" (Colossians 2:19).

This is, in fact, a central strategy of the devil as he opposes the church and the advancement of Christ's Kingdom in the world. Satan detests Christ, so he is relentless in his attempts to demean and diminish Christ's person. More than this, he knows that in the proportion that a Christian sees Christ's greatness and glory will be the degree they trust in Him. And the degree that they trust in Him will be the degree that the devil's opposition is defeated. Therefore, it has always been his primary focus to deface and diminish Christ. It has always been his objective to lessen people's conception of the greatness of Christ. Church history in many ways is a chronicling of Satan's efforts to diminish or to deny the person and work of Christ. Think of the great battles of the 4th and 5th centuries over the deity of Christ, or the battle over the gospel and the work of Christ in the 16th and 17th centuries. And it is no different today!

Therefore, it is vital that Christians understand the all-sufficiency of Christ. When Christ is seen in His fulness and beheld in His glory (in the revelation of Christ in the Word of God as it is illuminated by the Spirit of God) it produces an unshakeable confidence. It produces a confidence that Christ is a measureless resource for every need. This confidence in Christ is sadly lacking in the church. The church has unwittingly diminished the glory of Christ. There is an obscuring of Christ. He is lost amidst the man-centeredness that characterizes much of the modern evangelical church. Christ is seen, as it were, dimly. He is not denied, of course; He is simply pushed to the side. Therefore, we will set forth in this chapter the glory of Christ's all-sufficiency. Christ is infinite in His nature and being. According to the Apostles John and Paul, He possesses an infinite fulness (John 1:16; Colossians 1:19). He possesses the full scope of divine perfections and attributes, and He possesses each one to an infinite degree. Therefore, there is no limit to His power, to His wisdom, to His love, or to any of His other attributes. And there is no limit to His willingness to exercise them on behalf of those who humbly come to Him (Matthew 11:28-30). How can He not be all that one could need for the healing and restoring of the pains and miseries of their soul? Once again Owen's words are to the point:

That which is principally suited to give him [the Christian] rest, peace and satisfaction - and without which nothing else can so do - is the due consideration of, and the acting of faith upon, this infinite ... wisdom and goodness, in the...person of Christ. This at first view will reduce the mind unto that conclusion, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible.' For what end cannot be effected hereby? What end cannot be accomplished that was designed in it? Is any thing too hard for God? ... Against this no objection can arise. On this consideration of him, faith apprehends Christ to be - as he is indeed - the power of God, and the wisdom of God ... and therein doth it find rest with peace.³

Owen is right! What divine goal or purpose can't be accomplished by Christ? If God has designed the healing and transformation of His people, how can it not be accomplished by such an infinite person as Christ? We will now show from Scripture that the believer has in Christ a glorious all-sufficient Savior-Deliverer for his every need.

THE SUPREMACY OF THE GLORY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

We will begin by looking at Christ's glory in two broad aspects. First, we will consider the supremacy of His glory in general. Then we will look at the sufficiency and infinite fulness of His glory in particular. The central passage of Scripture is 2 Corinthians 2:14 - 4:6. In this passage, Paul asserts the glory of Christ's delivering and transforming power. Paul's focus is upon the new covenant, for the new covenant manifests both the supremacy and all-sufficiency of the glory of the person of Christ. The new covenant was a theme of Old Testament prophecy (Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 36:20-26). Its core element is the heart-renewing soul-transforming work of God by which a person is delivered from the bondage and miseries of sin and the fall. Speaking of the new covenant, Ezekiel says, "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). Here we see that through the new covenant, a person receives a great heart-renewing soul-healing change.

Paul's emphasis is that this great work is accomplished by the grace and power of Christ. In other words, though the Spirit is the agent, Christ is the author. Speaking of the Spirit's agency in the new covenant, Gordon Fee says, "... specifically mentioned only six times (vs. 3, 6, , 17 [2x], 18) the Spirit dominates Paul's thinking and argumentation."⁴

Granted this is true. But it must also be stated that, in Paul's thinking, Christ is even more dominate. Why? It is He who works and accomplishes His purpose in the believer through the Spirit. Notice Paul's references to Christ. He speaks of "the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him" (2 Corinthians 2:14), and of "a fragrance of Christ" (2:15). He refers to the new covenant change of heart as "a letter of Christ" a work of Christ "written ... on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3). I believe Matthew Henry is right when he says concerning this text "that Christ was the author of all that was good in them."⁵ So then the new covenant is the vehicle by which Christ, through the Spirit, undertakes His great delivering work.

It can't help but be noticed that Paul repeatedly makes mention of the glory associated with the new covenant. In fact, the term "glory" occurs twelve times in verses 7-18. Paul speaks of the exceeding glory of the new covenant compared with the old. He describes it as "more glory" (v. 8), it "much more ... abounds in glory" (v. 9), and it is "the glory that surpasses" (v. 10). The heart-changing soul-transforming work of Christ in the new covenant manifests glory, one that far exceeds the glory of the old covenant.

For Paul, the vital fact is that new covenant glory is in essence a manifestation of the supreme glory of the person of Christ. Notice how Paul indicates this in 2 Corinthians 3:18. In contrast to beholding Moses' face, which reflected the fading glory of the old covenant, we behold in the new covenant the glory of Christ. Paul says, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (v. 18). Notice, we are "beholding ... the glory of the Lord." In chapter 4, verse 4, he directly asserts that new covenant glory manifests Christ's glory. He says that the gospel involves "seeing the Light ... of the glory of Christ." Therefore, the supremacy of the glory of Christ, the "glory that surpasses" (3:10), is manifested in the heart renewing, soul-transforming work of the new covenant. In other words, Christ's glory is exhibited in His mercy and power as He changes and renews the human heart, and

delivers it from that which enslaves it and holds it in bondage. In keeping with this Christ-centered emphasis, Paul earlier said that Christ, through the new covenant gives forth “an aroma from life to life” (2:16). That is, Christ ushers in new life, a life now characterized by liberty (3:17). Herein lies Christ’s supremacy. Christ alone accomplishes such a mighty work. Paul says it this way: “And who is adequate for these things?” and then he says, “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God” (3:4-5). Notice it is a confidence through Christ toward God. So we see that Christ possesses a supreme glory, a glory that is exhibited in the accomplishing of a mighty, renewing, liberating work in the heart. He can change any heart. He can deliver from any bondage. His power and grace are exceedingly glorious.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE GLORY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

But Paul doesn’t stop there. He speaks not only of the supremacy of Christ’s glory, but of the sufficiency of it as well. The sufficiency of Christ’s glory is manifested in that He continues His initial renewing work with an ongoing transformation of the soul. The renewal and deliverance described in verses 1-5 and 17, therefore, is only the beginning. In verse 18, Paul describes Christ’s great mercy and power in carrying out a further work. He says, “We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed” (v. 18). Notice that all believers are beholding and all are being transformed. There are no exceptions. Clearly Christ possesses in Himself limitless grace and power to heal and transform any life. The term “transformed”⁶ speaks of a deep change, a change that reaches deep into the inner core of a person. This transformation is accomplished by the Spirit through the Word of God. The Spirit deeply transforms believers as they “all ... [are] beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.” Therefore, Christ’s glory consists in this: He is the all-sufficient Savior. He is more than able to accomplish in us all that is needed for the healing of the pain and misery of the soul.

So here is our initial conclusion: Growth, wholeness, maturity and soul-healing come from Christ alone, through Scripture alone, by the Spirit alone. The focal point—the central issue as it has been throughout church history—concerns the glory of Christ’s person. No diminishing, no detracting can be allowed. Spurgeon stated the matter this way:

What of God it is needful and beneficial for us to know he has revealed in Christ, and whatsoever is not there, we may rest assured it is unfit and unnecessary for us to know. Truly the revelation is by no means scant, for there is vastly more revealed in the person of Christ than we shall be likely to learn in this mortal life, and even eternity will not be too long for the discovery of all the glory of God which shines forth in the person of the word made flesh. Those who would supplement Christianity had better first add to the brilliance of the sun or the fulness of the sea. As for us, we are more than satisfied with the revelation of God in the person of our Lord Jesus.⁷

Spurgeon brings forward the real issue! Are we more than satisfied with the glorious Savior? Do we see in Him an infinite fulness? Are we convinced that all that is necessary for us to know is revealed in Christ in His word? Do we preach and teach such a Savior? Do we point our most needy, wounded, scarred, and broken people to Him? Are we confident that He is willing and more than able to restore their broken sin-ravaged lives?

THE "SIGHT" OF CHRIST'S GLORY IS THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS

We have seen that the spiritual sight of Christ's glory is the central element of a genuine conversion experience. We will now look in more detail at what it means to see and behold the glory of Christ. In particular, the glory of His sufficiency. The key passage is 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; we quote it in its entirety:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

We "See" The Light of the Gospel of the Glory of Christ

The first thing to notice is how Paul describes this 'spiritual sight' of Christ. The Greek term for 'see' in verse 4 is vivid and striking. It refers to a "radiant light," a "brightness." The KJV translates it 'shine upon them,' which gives a very good sense of the term. The word is translated 'daybreak' in Acts 20:11. One authority gives the meaning of the noun as "a bright light especially of the sun; so it is used of the rays and beams of the sun; or any gleam on the surface of a bright object."⁸ This describes the experience of Christians in their first 'sight' of Christ. They see a radiance, a brightness, as it were. They have a spiritual sight of glory. It is a glory comparable to the first sight of the sun by a person who is born blind. Jonathan Edwards, who perhaps in a way like no other, wrote on the saving view of Christ, says:

The change made by this spiritual opening of the eyes in conversion, would be much greater, and more remarkable every way, than if a man born blind should have the sense of seeing imparted to him at once, in the midst of the clear light of the sun, discovering a world of visible objects. For though sight be more noble than any of the other external senses, yet this spiritual sense is infinitely more noble, and the object infinitely more important.⁹

Such is the nature of the first sight of Christ in a genuine conversion. All true Christians have seen Christ's glory. And all to some degree have been captivated and taken up by what they see of His beauty and loveliness. It is important to realize that it is the glory of Christ's person which is the focal point of Satan's attacks. Paul says, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light ... of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Prior to conversion, Satan works to blind people to it. He works to demean and deny the glory of Christ's person. After conversion, he works to diminish Christ's glory, to detract and deface it. He will do all in his power to lessen people's conception of the greatness and infinite fulness of Christ. His aim is to direct God's people away from Christ as the all-sufficient source for the needs and troubles of their soul, and thereby rob Christ of the praise and adoration He rightly deserves.

God Has Shone in Our Hearts the Glory of God in the Face of Christ

Paul uses another vivid term in this passage to describe the sight of Christ in conversion. In verse 6 he says, “God ... has shone in our hearts to give the Light ... of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” The term ‘shone’ in its noun form refers to something that is “shining brilliant, clear or transparent, something splendid and magnificent.”¹⁰ The word is used in Matthew 17:2 where it says of Christ “And His face shone like the sun.” The noun is used of Christ when He says of Himself that He is “the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16). So we see that Christians have seen in Christ a majestic glory. They have beheld glory that is superlative—a glory that is life-changing and soul-transforming. It is this sight of Christ that characterizes and distinguishes true Christians from all those who merely profess Christ, and from outright unbelievers as well. Speaking of 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, Edwards says:

We are there abundantly taught, that the saints differ from the ungodly in this, that they have the knowledge of God, and a sight of God, and of Jesus Christ ... This plainly shows, that there is a discovery of the divine superlative glory and excellency of ... Christ, peculiar to the saints; and also, that it is as immediately from God, as light from the sun: ... For it is compared to God’s creating the light by his powerful word in the beginning of the creation.¹¹

The Sight of Christ’s Glory Captivates

Paul is not alone in describing the conversion experience as involving the sight of Christ. Christ Himself uses this descriptive language, as does the Apostle John. Christ says, “Everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40; also note John 12:45). Notice that Christ says that to believe in Him is to behold Him! The Greek word for ‘behold’ comes from the word ‘theoros.’ In its noun form it refers to “men who attended the games or the sacrifices as public deputies; it was used primarily not of an indifferent spectator, but of one who looks at a thing with interest and for a purpose; as of a general, officially reviewing an army, inspecting it with careful attention to details.”¹² It is connected to a related word which means ‘to gaze at,’ or ‘to watch with wonder.’ Therefore, a Christian is not someone who has had a passing glimpse or made a casual disinterested observation of Christ. A genuine Christian doesn’t simply have a theoretical knowledge of Christ. That is not what Scripture means by believing in Christ. A Christian is someone caught up and captivated by what has been seen. A good illustration in some ways would be a person’s first view of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center Towers in New York City. It was impossible to merely take a casual, disinterested look. The sheer magnitude of it commanded full attention. We beheld it, fixated on it, we were stunned nearly into disbelief by what our eyes were beholding. In a similar way saving faith beholds Christ. The term emphasizes seeing something which captures ones undivided attention. It stresses that the spiritual sight of Christ’s glory and majesty captivates and holds spellbound. A person’s gaze is paralyzed, as it were, by the greatness of what is seen.

John speaks in the same way though he uses a different word. He says, “no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him” (1 John 3:6). This is the same descriptive language used by Christ. To know Christ, John says, is to see Christ, to gaze upon Him, to have a spiritual sight of His glory. Paul, John and Christ, Himself, all speak of conversion in this manner. Their point is to emphasize the captivating nature of a saving sight of the glory and beauty of the all-sufficient Savior.

THE SIGHT OF CHRIST'S GLORY IS A SIGHT OF HIS INFINITE FULNESS

We are now at the vortex—the very heart and center, if you will—of the glory of Christ beheld by the Christian. It is what John and Paul call Christ's fulness. The central passage is John 1:14-17. It is here that the glory of Christ's all-sufficient fulness is set forth in explicit terms. John says, "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

John emphasizes his point by using a middle voice. The middle voice, which emphasizes the subject, in this case places the emphasis on the great privilege of beholding Christ. It is as if he says: "We, yes even we ourselves, beheld His glory, majestic glory." Then John adds a specific feature of the glory which he beheld—its fulness. He says, "We beheld glory ... full of grace and truth." His point is that a true spiritual sight of Christ beholds in Christ the divine perfections in an infinite and limitless degree. All the divine perfections are in Christ: power, wisdom, holiness, righteousness, goodness, love, truth, immutability, and so forth. And for John, the wonder is that He possesses each one to an infinite degree!

John, like Paul, began by declaring the supremacy of the glory of the person of Christ in general. Christ possesses the supreme glory of the preexistent, eternal God. Speaking of Christ he says, "The Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). The term 'dwelt' is significant. It is a direct allusion to the Old Testament references of Jehovah God dwelling among His people.¹³ God's "cloud of presence" (1 Kings 8:10-11) dwelt in the tabernacle and then in the temple. God said regarding the tabernacle, "I will dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). John then is declaring that Christ is the eternal God—the God of the Old Testament whose presence was in the tabernacle—who became flesh and dwelt among men. Therefore, the supremacy of the glory of the person of Christ is none other than the supremacy of the self-existent, all-glorious eternal God. This is John's emphatic point.

John then declares the glorious, all-sufficient fulness of Christ. He says, "We beheld His glory ... full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The term 'beheld' is the word from which we get our English word 'theatre.' It is used of a "spectator looking at a parade, or of august things and persons that are looked on with admiration."¹⁴ It is related to a word which means "to wonder at", or "to marvel." Clearly John was stunned by what he had observed and seen. He and the other disciples had marveled, as it were, at a wondrous spectacle. They marveled at the spectacle of an eternal person who possessed a glorious, infinite fulness.

The word "fulness" refers to a "plentiful abundance." It is used of the twelve baskets 'full' of loaves of bread and of a 'full reward.' It is used of Jesus who was 'full' of the Holy Spirit, a fulness that was without measure. (John 3:34; Luke 4:1)

Most significant is John's specific mention of two aspects of Christ's fulness: grace and truth. These are the two perfections of the divine nature most prominently displayed by Christ as He ministered in a fallen, sinful world. First, grace is prominent. Grace is God's disposition to be kind and favorable to people. It is His disposition to help people in need though they be greatly undeserving. It is God's provision for man's moral and spiritual pollution. It is His provision that delivers people out of the misery, bondage and destruction that they justly deserve. Second, truth is also prominent. This is God's provision for man's moral and spiritual blindness. It is God's provision for man's self-inflicted spiritual ignorance that causes misery and pain apart from God. These perfections are found in Christ to an infinite degree. John, in effect, is announcing that in Christ there is a boundless supply for those in great personal, spiritual and emotional need. Whatever the misery, whatever the bondage, He is a supply for that need. Edwards says it this way:

But Christ Jesus has true excellence and so great excellency, that when they come to see it they look no further, but the mind rests there. It sees a transcendent glory and an ineffable sweetness in him; it sees

that till now it has been pursuing shadows, but that now it has found the substance; that before it had been seeking happiness in the stream, but that now it has found the ocean. The excellency of Christ is an object adequate to the natural cravings of the soul, and is sufficient to fill the capacity. It is infinite excellency, such a one as the mind desires, in which it can find no bounds: and the more the mind is used to it, the more excellent it appears. Every new discovery makes this beauty appear more ravishing, and the mind sees no end; here is room enough for the mind to go deeper and deeper, and never come to the bottom. The soul is exceedingly ravished when it first looks on this beauty, and it is never weary of it. The mind never has any satiety, but Christ's excellency is always fresh and new, and tends as much to delight, after it has been seen a thousand or ten thousand years, as when it was seen the first moment ... The soul that comes to Christ, feeds upon this, and lives upon it; it is that bread which came down from heaven, of which he that eats shall not die: it is angels' food, it is that wine and milk that is given without money, and without price. This is that fatness in which the believing soul delights itself; here the longing soul may be satisfied, and the hungry soul may be filled with goodness. The delight and contentment that is to be found here, passeth understanding, and is unspeakable and full of glory. It is impossible for those who have tasted of this fountain, and know the sweetness of it, ever to forsake it. The soul has found the river of water of life, and it desires no other drink; it has found the tree of life, and it desires no other fruit.¹⁵

How foreign do Edwards' words sound in our day! He says, "The soul is exceedingly ravished when it first looks on this beauty!" He speaks of Christ as "adequate to the cravings of the soul and is sufficient to fill the capacity." He also declares that in Christ 'the longing soul may be satisfied and the hungry soul may be filled with goodness.' Should not such a Christ be heralded to the broken, empty and miserable of our day?

Moreover (and this is wonderful), John says this plentiful abundance is received and experienced by all true believers without exception. John says, "For of His fulness we have all received." All believers have at their disposal Christ's infinite fulness for the needs of their soul. Ryle says, "There is laid up in Him as in a treasury a boundless supply for all that any sinner can need in time or eternity."¹⁶

Tragically, as we said earlier, we can forget and lose sight of Christ's fulness. God's people "hew ... cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). They are "led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). They do "not hold fast to the head" (Colossians 2:19). They forget the exhortation, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him" (Colossians 2:6-7). The Scriptures are full of such reminders and admonitions about our need to remain unwavering in our faith toward Christ as the limitless provision for our spiritual and emotional needs.

Moreover, just as Scripture is full of exhortations to rest in Christ, so it also often warns of the tendency to forget God and to seek deliverance and healing elsewhere. For example it says, "They went far from me and walked after emptiness and became empty" (Jeremiah 2:5). Like Israel, the church wanders into strange pastures. Shepherds feed sheep strange food—food from the world; they provide hollow, empty food—food that doesn't nourish. Such is the case today, as the church has turned from Christ's fulness and has paid a great price. It has "walked after emptiness and became empty." As a whole, it doesn't believe Christ can restore and heal its most needy people, and therefore its needy many times aren't healed. Spurgeon, aware of this danger, exhorts:

I have only ... one object, namely, to address myself vehemently to the servants of God, that they may be exhorted to lay hold of the fulness of the power, and holiness, which dwell in their covenant Head ... There is a glorious fulness in Jesus. Brethren, if it be so, why are we so weak, unfurnished, and unhappy? There is an infinite fulness in Jesus, a fulness of all that any saint can ever want to enable him to rise to the highest degree of grace. If there be anything lacking for the attainment of the divine

image in us, it is not a deficiency Christward, it is occasioned by short-comings in ourselves. If sin is to be overcome, the conquering power dwells in him in its fulness; if virtue is to be attained, sanctifying energy resides in Christ to perfection ... In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead ... and they who dwell in him shall find things impossible with man become simple every-day facts with themselves if they will but have faith in the mediatorial fullness ... for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell for all his saints. If you have not these riches the fault lies with yourself. It is there, you might have it if you had but faith to take it. Too often we sit down like beggars on the dunghill, and groan and cry because of the poverty of our nature when we ought to be rejoicing in the Lord. I thank God that we can groan, for that is something; but there is a more excellent way, a better gift to be earnestly coveted. In Christ, ye are rich to the fulness of riches; get ye up, I pray you, to the high places, and realize for yourselves the fulness of God in Christ Jesus.¹⁷

How often do we hear this today? How often is it preached that, if we are in bondage or under the dominion of some habitual problem, “the fault lies with yourselves ... if there be any lacking ... in us, it is not a deficiency Christward, it is occasioned by shortcomings in ourselves?” Preaching of this sort is not politically correct in the church. Serious problems, we are told, are rooted in disorders—disorders defined and catalogued by the world—by those who know nothing of Christ! And from such we take our cue! So, we qualify and limit the infinite fulness of Christ and unwittingly diminish His glory! May God deliver us!

But John goes even further. Christ’s fulness is not only available to all; it is available to all continually. He says, “We have all received, and grace upon grace” (John 1:16b). The phrase ‘grace upon grace’ is John’s vivid way of describing the experience of Christ’s ongoing provision for the inevitable pains, brokenness and neediness of life. John is confident that, as believers experience emptiness, deficiency, and powerlessness, they will also experience Christ’s fulness. As believers cast themselves wholly on Christ, as they trust His character, and rely upon His Word, they will find Him to be an abundant supply for any soul-misery and any soul-need. Spurgeon’s words once more are to the point:

Sinner, saint, to you both alike these words, ‘all fullness,’ sound like a holy hymn ... ‘All fulness!’ You, sinner are all emptiness and death and you saint, would be so if it were not for the ‘all fulness’ of Christ of which you have received; therefore both to saint and sinner the words are full of hope. There is joy in these words to every soul conscious of its sad estate, and humbled before God ... ‘All fulness’ is a wide, far-reaching, all-comprehending term, and in its abundant store it offers another source of delight. What joy these words give to us when we remember that our vast necessities demand a fulness, yea, ‘all fulness’ before they can be supplied! A little help will be of no use to us for we are altogether without strength. A limited measure of mercy will only mock our misery ... But ‘all fulness,’ ay, that will suit us. Here is exactly what our desperate estate demands, for its recovery ... Thou wantest - but indeed, the catalogue were much too long for us to read it through at this present, yet be assured though thou pile up thy necessities till they rise like Alps before thee, yet the all-sufficient Saviour can remove all thy needs ... The words are both exclusive and inclusive, They deny that there is any fulness elsewhere, for they claim all for Christ. They shut out all others, ‘It pleased the Father that ‘in him’ should ‘all’ fulness dwell.¹⁸

With such an unbounded confidence in Christ’s glorious all-sufficiency, is it any wonder that God’s blessing was so abundant in Spurgeon’s ministry? May God give us such a faith to herald such a Savior in today’s needy world!

CONCLUSION

What I have attempted to set forth in this chapter underlies all that follows. I have tried to set forth that the Lord Jesus possesses infinite fulness. This fulness is available to all His people for all their needs. It is not a great storehouse or treasury to which only a select few have access. It's available to all His people. The gospels are pictorials, cataloguings if you will, of the types of people He restores and heals, not only in body but in soul. The degree of brokenness, pain and misery is not an issue to Him. I believe such a Savior, in great measure, is no longer preached in today's church. Therefore, my desire is to move us to consider afresh what Scripture says about the all-sufficiency of Christ for the healing of those in great emotional and spiritual need. The church must not take its cue from the world's assessment of people's problems – assessments that are made by men who have no conception of the greatness and glory of our Great Physician, and Soul-Healing Savior.

In the pages ahead, I will attempt to present the Biblical case for the all-sufficiency of Christ for the delivering and restoring of even the most needy people. I am not advocating a formalistic, mechanical approach. Restoring and healing is often messy. Twenty five years in pastoral ministry never lets me forget this. However, the Scriptures clearly teach that when Christ is working, true soul-healing and true restoration occur. It is a restoration and deliverance that is decisive, though in many cases it involves an ongoing process. Nonetheless, in the end it is a complete soul-restoring deliverance. This is the Christ we must preach! This is the Savior we must point our needy people to! I believe when the Savior is preached in His all-sufficient glory, many of our most needy people will, with Augustine, say:

*Oh, my God, let me, with thanksgiving, remember and confess to You Your mercies toward me. Let my bones be renewed with Your love, and let them say to You, 'who is like unto thee?' (Psalm 35:10). You have broken 'my bonds,' and 'I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving' (Psalm 116:16-17). I will declare how You have broken them, and when they hear this, all who worship You will say, 'Blessed be the Lord in heaven and in earth, great and wonderful is His name.'*¹⁹

ENDNOTES

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Pilgrim Publications
2. John Owen, The Works of John Owen, Vol I, Banner of Truth, p. 295
3. John Owen, Vol. I, p. 53
4. Gordon Fee, God's Empowering Presence, Hendrickson Publishers, p. 296
5. Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary, Vol VI, Hendrickson Pub., Inc., p. 494
6. See a more detail treatment of this word in the chapter 'Jesus Heals the Emotions,' p. 35
7. Charles H. Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol XXV, p. 506
8. Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon Abridged, American Book Co., p. 114
9. Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume I, Banner of Truth, p. 284
10. Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Zondervan Pub., p. 371
11. Jonathan Edwards, Volume II, p. 15
12. Thayer, p. 290
13. D.A. Carson, The Gospel of John, Eerdman's Publishing Co., pp. 127-128

D.A. Carson's comments on this are helpful. He says, "*For Greek-speaking Jews and other readers of the Greek Old Testament, the term would call to mind the **skene**, the tabernacle where God met with Israel before the temple was built. ... Whether the allusion in John 1:14 is to the tabernacle or to the tent of meeting, the result is the same: now, the Evangelist implies, God has chosen to dwell amongst His people in a yet more personal way, in the Word-become-flesh. ... The incarnate Word is the true, **skina**, the ultimate manifestation of the presence of God amongst human beings, for this Word became a man. ... The glory of God manifests in the incarnate Word as 'full of grace and truth.'*"

14. Thayer, p. 284
15. Jonathan Edwards, Volume II, p. 933
16. J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on John, Banner of Truth, p. 35
17. Spurgeon, Volume XX, pp. 231-232
18. Spurgeon, Volume XVII, pp. 122-123; 125-126
19. St. Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine, Whitaker House, p. 183

