

The Substantial Excellency of Spiritual Things

by Thomas Watson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual substance, which refers to the real and solid worth of spiritual things, including Christ, the grace of the Spirit, and salvation.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:21, Proverbs 8:17, Proverbs 8:21, Isaiah 55:2, Ezekiel 36:25, 1 Corinthians 1:24, 2 Corinthians 6:10, Colossians 1:12, Hebrews 10:34, 1 Peter 1:3, Revelation 3:18

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the substantial excellency of spiritual things, emphasizing the importance of seeking after true substance in Christ and grace. He delves into the qualifications of those who love Christ and the privileges of inheriting substance from God. Watson explains the threefold interpretation of substance as Christ, the grace of the Spirit, and salvation. He urges believers to labor diligently for spiritual substance, highlighting the incomparable worth of grace and the need to trade for it in holy ordinances and seek it from Christ. Watson encourages gratitude for the spiritual substance received and a continual pursuit of more grace to experience increased strength, joy, and glory.

Transcript

The Substantial Excellency of Spiritual Things

by Thomas Watson

"That I may cause those who love Me to inherit substance." Proverbs 8:21 those who

The proverbs of Solomon shine as so many stars in their orbit. They are as lights to guide us--and as pearls to adorn us! They are divinely inspired and may be called sacred oracles. Among other golden sayings in this Book, this is not the least, "That I may cause those who love Me to inherit substance."

In the beginning of the chapter, "does not wisdom cry?" verse 1. By wisdom, I understand Jesus Christ, who is called "the wisdom of His Father," 1 Corinthians 1:24; and so Junius expounds it. By a figure, Christ is represented here in the person of a woman crying out to her children. "Does not wisdom cry? She stands in the top of high places; she cries at the gates, unto you O men I call, and My voice is to the sons of men." And what does divine wisdom speak of to her sons? Not base things or fancies--but excellent things, verse 6. In the Septuagint it is, "grave things," such as have weight and worth; in the Hebrew, "princely things," fit for a prince to hear--and a God to speak.

What are these princely things? Verse 13 states. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." One of the most princely lessons we can learn is the fear of God; this is the apex of wisdom and the spirit of true religion. This fear of God is to hate evil. He is a man fearing God, who chooses suffering rather than sinning. In the text is an encouragement to piety, drawn from the incomparable benefit of it. "That I may cause those who love Me to inherit substance." They who love Me shall not be losers by Me; they shall not "inherit the wind," Proverbs 11:29--but they shall inherit substance. The muses, as the poets feign, were daughters to Jupiter--but they had no suitors because they lacked portions; but lo, here is a portion to those who love God: "I will cause them to inherit substance." The Hebrew word for substance signifies that which is firm and solid, "that I may cause those who love Me to inherit the true being."

QUESTION. What is meant here by substance?

ANSWER. This has a threefold interpretation:

1. By substance we may understand Christ. Jesus Christ is the most real substance; it is the name by which He is called, John 8:58. Therefore, He is compared to substantial things--the pearl of great price, the bread of life. He must be substance, who gives being and substance to everything.
2. By substance is meant the grace of the Spirit which, in Scripture, is termed substance. Proverbs 3:21, "Keep sound wisdom." In the Hebrew it is "keep substance." Hence it is that grace is called tried gold, and the true riches, and the holy anointing, John 2:27. That must be substance which partakes of the fullness of God, Ephesians 3:19.
3. By substance is meant salvation, expressly called substance. Hebrews 10:34, "You have in Him even a better and an enduring substance."

The words thus opened divide themselves into two general parts:

First, the qualification of the persons: "Those who love Me."

Second, the specification of the privilege: "I will cause them to inherit substance."

I. The qualification of the PERSONS: "those who love Me." Where observe,

(1) The affection: love;

(2) The object: Me, namely Christ; yet so as is inclusive of the whole Trinity.

1. The AFFECTION: love. Love is the princess of the affections. Love is to religion as the soul is to the body, as the sun to the world, which animates things with its life-giving beams. Love mellows and perfumes holy duties. Love is that which the Lord is most delighted with; therefore He asked Peter that question, "Do you love Me?"

2. The object of love: Christ. Jesus Christ is infinitely delicious. He is the wonder of heaven, "the desire of all nations," Haggai 2:7. Christ is all beauty, Song of Solomon 5:10, "White and ruddy." He is all sweetness, Song of Solomon 2:1, "The rose of Sharon." If men knew Christ, it would be impossible to keep them from loving Him.

II. The specification of the PRIVILEGES. "That I may cause them to inherit substance"; that which has a real zeal and intrinsic worth.

God causes those who love and serve Him, to inherit substance. The Lord does not put off His people with words, or feed them with air--but He gives them substance. He crowns them with grace and salvation which, in the Apostle's phrase, is "glory and virtue," 1 Peter 1:3; it has a solid existence.

QUESTION. Why is grace called substance?

ANSWER 1. Grace is substance, for its preciousness. Substance is a treasure made up of precious things. Proverbs 1:13, "We shall find all precious substance." A man's substance lies in his land, his money, and jewels. Thus grace is substance for its precious excellency. It is called rich knowledge, 1 Corinthians 1:5; precious faith, 2 Peter 1:1. It gives us union with Christ, and so a co-partnership with Him in all His unsearchable riches, Ephesians 3:8. If every flower were a ruby, every sand a diamond, every candle a star--they could not be named in the same day with grace.

ANSWER 2. Grace is substance, for its suitableness, because it alone can fill the soul. The soul is the more noble part of man, the glory of the creation, a blossom of eternity. It required the wisdom of God to make it--and the blood of God to redeem it! The soul is more substantial part; it is the man of the man. It is only grace can fill the heaven-born soul. Things of an earthly extract cannot reach the spiritual part. The soul may be starved at a full table and beggared in a golden mine. Such is properly substance, which is poured into the soul. Knowledge fills the head; holiness fills the heart. This is to be reckoned substance which the soul drinks in.

ANSWER 3. Grace is substance, for its needfulness. That is substance which a man so needs, that he cannot be without. A man may be happy, who lacks health or riches; but he cannot be happy that lacks grace. Grace is to the soul as light to the eye, as breath to the body. How necessary is faith, without which we cannot please God, Hebrews 11:6; and holiness, without which we cannot see God, Hebrews 12:14. So that grace is substance; we are undone without it. Other things may be had--grace must be had. Without grace, a man lives under God's hatred and dies under His curse! John 3:36.

ANSWER 4. Grace is substance for its satisfyingness. God never put a satisfying virtue into any creature, Isaiah 9:20; John 20:22, "In the fullness of His sufficiency, he shall be in straits." This is a riddle--to be full, and yet lack; to have a sufficiency, yet not have enough. The king of Spain, though he has the largest dominion of any prince--yet gives this as his motto, "The whole world does not suffice." The stars cannot make day without the sun, nor can anything give solid comfort without God. Heaven itself will not satisfy without God, much less will earth. The world is enough to busy us--but not to fill us. As in a pyramid, the higher you ascend--the lesser still is the range; so the higher any one climbs into the creature--the less is the satisfaction. Grace is the true substance; it is only this which can satisfy. Proverbs 14:14, "A good man shall be satisfied from himself." He has that within which gives solid contentment.

Grace quiets the mind, and ravishes the affections with delight. Romans 14:17, "The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." He who is invested with grace is not only an heir of heaven--but has heaven begun in him. He has the seeds of glory in his soul, therefore, he is satisfied from himself. He can say as Jacob, Genesis 33:11, "I have enough!" or as it is in the Hebrew, "I have all!" God is my portion--and heaven my heaven.

ANSWER 5. Grace is substance for its certainty. We can be sure of nothing here below; the world is slippery and full of disappointments, like that sea of glass, Revelation 4:6, which has no sure footing. But spiritual things are such as one may be sure of. Christ is a certainty, therefore called a sure foundation, Isaiah 28:16. And grace is a certainty. Hope is called a sure anchor, Hebrews 6:9. Cast this anchor

upwards, and it will never fail. Faith is sure, therefore called an evidence, Hebrews 11:1. When a man has his evidences, now he is sure of his land. Faith is a Christian's evidence, by which he lays a sure claim to heaven.

ANSWER 6. Grace is substance for its durability. "Substance," said one, "signifies something that runs parallel with eternity." Spiritual things are not subject to annihilation. Proverbs 8:18. "With Me are durable riches." In the original it is "durable substance. That is substance which cannot be made to consume. Earthly delights change; they are sick from decay. Worldly things are like a banquet, served with great pomp--but soon over. In the Library at Dublin, there is placed the globe of the world at one end and a death's head at the other. If we had the globe of the world in our hand--yet at last we must come to the death's head. Valerian, the emperor of Rome, being overthrown in battle by Sapor, king of Persia, and taken prisoner, was carried captive and had his eyes thrust out; and when Sapor mounted his horse, he made this emperor lie down on his hands and knees to be his footstool. Thus all earthly glory has its period. How can that have solid worth in it, which melts away as ice?

But grace is durable. When a Christian loses those comforts which he cannot keep--he keeps that treasure which he cannot lose! 1 John 2:27, "The anointing which you have received abides." Death cannot waste this substance. Proverbs 10:2, "The righteous has hope in his death." When his strength goes from him, when his estate goes from him--still his golden anchor is left--his hope in God abides. When a Christian parts with all, leaving his hay and corn--now he begins his harvest!

"It is high time," said aged Zanchius, "that I should hasten from earth to Christ, above the starry sky." Another holy man, lying at the point of death, said, "What brightness do I see?" They that stood by said that it was sunshine. "No," said he, "my Savior shines; now farewell world--welcome heaven! Whether in the body, I cannot tell; I see things unutterable!"

Thus, the anointing of God abides. Grace is a never-dying substance; it lasts as long as the soul and eternity lasts. This branch withers not, because it grows up on the tree of life.

That spiritual things must have a real being and substance in them appears by two convincing arguments:

1. Because God, who is the original and pattern of truth, has asserted it. He has told us that there is a solid quintessence in the things of heaven; that such as espouse godliness shall inherit substance; and is not God to be credited on His own Word? Whom should we believe, if not Truth itself? Where should we light the lamp of our faith, if not at this sun? The whole world hangs upon God's power, and shall not our faith hang upon His truth? To question God's veracity, is to pull down the first and main pillar of our Creed.

2. This is most consistent with the rational nature. Man, being a noble excellent creature, a little lower than the angels, must of necessity have that to feed on, which has a real substance and sweetness. He cannot be fed upon dreams, or live on mere air--but must have something which is substantial to refresh and comfort him. The sublime heaven-born soul, like the dove, can find no rest in earthly contentments--but flies to the ark of Scripture where it may find solid sustenance.

USE 1. It serves to confute atheists who esteem the profound and sacred mystery of true religion, but as a dreamy romance, at best but a severe policy to bound the lusts of men. They look upon grace but as a devout imposture; they esteem Christ and heaven but as sublime fictions. Foolish souls, who has bewitched you? Did God give you a being for this end, to deny Him? You are like the people who live in Cimmeria, who have never seen the sun--so will not believe there is a sun, or that others behold the light

of it.

Surely, there must be some supreme cause; the creature could not make itself. To create is proper to a Deity, Psalm 124:8. And as there is a God, so this God is a rewarder of those who seek Him, Hebrews 12:6. He will not allow any to be losers by His service--but will cause them to inherit substance. He will give them the spring flowers of grace--and the harvest of glory! But why do I spend my breath upon atheists? They have not as much faith as devils! James 2:19.

USE 2. Learn from hence the incomparable excellency of grace. "She is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold!" Proverbs 3:14. A soul crowned with grace may say, as Leah, Genesis 30:20, "God has presented me with a precious gift." Grace is like the topaz, which, as Jerome said, has the richest splendor and orieny of all the jewels. When God has given us His Son and Spirit, and dignified us with holiness--He has given us the finest of the flowers, and honey out of the rock. Here is substance. This fills the heaven-born soul; this beautifies and adorns. Smyrna was the poorest--but the best of the seven churches, Revelation 2:8. She had less gold--but more grace. Grace is such a solid blessing, that God cannot give in anger--as He may other things. By this the soul lives, Hebrew 10:38. This is substance.

Grace is profitable for all things, 1 Timothy 4:8. It gives both the nether springs and the upper springs. Grace makes bitter things sweet; it sweetens poverty and sickness; it turns losses into gains, crosses into blessings; it gives honey at the end of the rod. Grace grows by opposition and, like the vine, lives by bleeding. Grace is such a commodity that we shall never be weary of. The best delights on earth may prove burdens. Job 3:20, "Why is light given to one burdened with grief, and life to those whose existence is bitter?" Life is sweet--but to one who is in anguish of spirit, life itself may be a burden; but grace is so excellent a thing that the soul can never be weary of it. Grace is a treasure, and is any man weary of a treasure? To conclude, he who has this substance is so happy, that nothing can hurt him. Grace outlives death. This star shall shortly be above the sun.

See the difference between the things of God--and the things of the world. The things of God are substance; the things of the world are but a shadow. They serve only for a show. They are like fruit-trees drawn in a landscape which more delight the eye--than the taste; or like paintings which represents the ideas of things which are not.

All earthly comforts are only imaginary; they are not substance. Riches look like riches--but they are not true riches; our Savior calls them deceitful, Matthew 13:22. They promise to ease us of our cares--when they only multiply them. They promise to fulfill our desires--when they only increase them. Beauty looks like beauty--but it rather deludes than delights. Proverbs 31:30, "Beauty is vain." The finest features of the body, and the most lovely face--are nothing other than well-colored dirt! Honor seems to be honor--but it is but a fancy. Acts 25:30, "When Agrippa was come, and Bernice with a great pomp"; in the Greek it is "with a great fancy." There is nothing in the world which has reality, but sorrows and troubles. Solomon had made the most critical inspection into the creature of any man; for variety of delights, he exceeded all the kings who went before him, Ecclesiastes 2:9. Yet, in all this, he could find no substance, verse 11, "Behold, all was vanity!"

Earthly things are golden dreams which leave the soul empty when it awakens and comes to itself. All the sweet waters of pleasure cannot quench the soul's insatiable thirst; nor can the most ravishing music fill the clamors of conscience. Satan casts a mist before men's eyes and deceives them again with the apple, making them set real affections upon false delights. The Scripture deciphers the world to be a non-entity.

Proverbs 23:5, "Will you set your eye on that which is not?"

But he who has spiritual things, inherits substance. Christ and grace are substance. If you speak of true wisdom--it is to know God. If you speak of true honor--it is to be born of God. If you speak of true beauty--it is to have the image of God. If you speak of true riches--it is to be rich in faith. If you speak of true victory--it is to overcome the world. If you speak of true delight--it is to have joy in the Holy Spirit. If you speak of true happiness--it is to see God. Here is substance. This is that which will fill the soul eternally with wonder and delight!

See the detestable folly of those who mind things of less importance, but do not look after substance. Isaiah 55:2, "Why do you spend money on what is not food, and your wages on what does not satisfy?" Many desire husks more than manna; and would rather put gold in their bag than, with the wise virgins, have oil in their lamp. Instead of laying up their treasure in heaven, they lay up their heaven in treasure. Is not he unwise who is serious about trifles--and neglects the securing of the main thing? As if one should lay out all his money for ribbons or feathers--and forget to buy food. Many busy themselves about worldly merchandise--but do not mind substantial things of eternity. The earth is the basest element; men tread upon it--yet they make that their god which they tread upon every day. The earth lies most remote from the celestial globe--yet that which is farthest from heaven, lies nearest their hearts. Alas, how poor are these earthly things, that men so throw away their hearts on! What are silks--but the excrements of worms? What is a pearl--but the disease of the fish? What is gold--but the dregs of the earth? These things a man may have and go to hell. Luke 16:19, "There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, feasting lavishly every day. In hell, where he was in torment." A pack horse carries gold and silver all day, and at night lies down in the stable with a painful back. Just so, a man may be laden with worldly riches and, afterwards, lie down in hell with a painful conscience.

Not but that it is lawful to take pains for the world, and to take comfort in it. A man may neglect the world and seek God--but the sin is when we seek the world and neglect Christ and grace. Oh, how few trade for the pearl of great price!

QUESTION. But why do not men labor more after spiritual substance?

ANSWER 1. Ignorance. Let pearls and diamonds lie before a blind man, he does not discern them. 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them." Christ is a treasure--but a hidden treasure. Holiness is beautiful--but this beauty is spiritual which a natural man can no more discern, than a bodily eye can see a spirit. To this day, "the veil is upon the heart," 2 Corinthians 3:15.

ANSWER 2. Presumption. People fancy they are in a state of grace; they presume they have gotten this substance, and he who conceits he has a thing already will take no great pains for it. Revelation 3:17, "You say I am rich, and have need of nothing." A presumptuous person takes all his religion upon trust. He will not take his money on trust--but brings it to the touchstone and balance. He will not make his land on trust--but examines the title; but he takes his grace upon trust. Oh, presumption, you child of the devil, you great devourer of souls! How many have you flattered into damnation! Take heed of this precipice! That which has kept many from obtaining Christ, is the notion that they have had Him already.

Let us examine whether we have this substance; this is that which most nearly concerns us. Let men be ever so rich, if they do not have this spiritual substance, they are no better than bankrupt in God's account.

1. If we have this spiritual substance--then we can remember a time when we lacked it. Time was when we had not one shred of holiness, not one drop of the Spirit's oil. If we now blossom and bear almonds, we can remember when we were like Aaron's dry rod--not one blossom of grace growing. Faith sucked in with the mother's milk, is suspicious. He who always believed--never believed. If we have the seed of God in us, we can tell when it was otherwise. We were as far from sanctity as the wild forest is from fruit, and all of a sudden God broke up the fallow ground of our heart by contrition, and planted the blessed fruits of the Spirit in us. If now we are light in the Lord--we can remember when the veil was upon our heart.

2. If we have this spiritual substance--then we know how we came by it. Grace has not dropped as a ripe fig into our mouth when we were asleep. Though grace is a legacy given us without money and price--yet not without labor. If we have this spiritual substance, it has cost us many sighs and tears, many strong cries in prayer, many combats and agonies. In the sweat of our face, we have eaten this bread. Never did any man so bestir himself at his labor, as a Christian does in working out his salvation. Is it not strange that a man should have his cabinet full of rare gems--and he knows not how they came there? And is it not as great a wonder that a man should have a stock of grace in his heart, and he knows not how he came by it? He scarcely ever bestowed a serious thought about it, or put up a prayer for it.

3. He who has this spiritual substance--highly prizes it. He

esteems grace for the preciousness of it, above riches. Christian, is it thus with you? If God should stand as King Ahasuerus, with a golden scepter, and say, "Ask and it shall be given you to half of the kingdom," can your soul say, "Lord, let me inherit substance. Enrich me with the saving influences of the Holy Spirit. Let the upper springs be my portion. Rather, Lord, a heart full of grace--than an house full of gold!"

"Lord, bestow Christ upon me! Let me lose, yes, suffer anything--so I may get my Jesus," said holy Ignatius. This is a good evidence that you have this spiritual substance. None can rightly prize sacred treasure but those who have it.

What is it we thirst after most? Is it after this substance? David thirsted for the water of the well of Bethlehem, 2 Samuel 23:15. Sampson cried out, "I die for thirst," Judges 15:18. Such are our inflamed desires after spiritual things--that we are not satisfied with the fruit of the olive tree, or the wine of Lebanon. We do not look upon these as substance--but our desires run in a spiritual channel. We breathe after the grace of the Spirit, the blood of the cross, the light of God's countenance; other earthly necessities we are thankful for--but we desire Christ and grace as our portion. These desires are the smoking flax which God will not quench. This holy thirst evidences a great degree and proportion of goodness in the heart. Desire proceeds from love; if we did not love grace, we could not have such impatient desires after it.

If God has filled us with this substance--then He has first emptied us. He has emptied us of our unrighteousness. He has purged out the love of sin. The Word preached has been medicine--to kill the worm of pride. The fire of lust is quenched. The earth is dug out of the heart.

God has emptied us of our righteousness. He has shown us that our moral goodness is mixed with evil--and that our best religious duties are but shining sins. We are emptied of all reliance on these, and dare not build on this quicksand. If we are filled with substance, first we are emptied; the hand must be emptied of trash before it can be filled with gold. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away." Isaiah 64:6

4. If we have this rich substance--then we have the indwelling of God's Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:12, "We have received not the Spirit of the world--but the Spirit which is of God." What has the Spirit done in our souls? Has He made us of another spirit--meek and humble? Is He a transforming Spirit? Has He left His own likeness upon us? Has this magnet drawn our hearts up to heaven? Has the Spirit made us pliable and yielding to all God's commands? If we can say it is thus with us--then we carry Christ and all heavenly treasure with us! John 3:24, "This is how we know that He lives in us: We know it by the Spirit He gave us"

USE 3. Let us be persuaded to labor after this spiritual substance. As well may one expect a harvest without sowing--as the heavenly substance without labor, Proverbs 2:3, "If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasure." Our labor for this hidden treasure must be so great, that all labor about the world, compared with this, should be as it were no labor. John 6:27, "Do not labor for the food which perishes." Has not God said, "Six days shall you labor"? Yes--but it must be as if were no labor--when compared with that labor we must take for the Bread of Life. Just so, in that parallel Scripture, Matthew 6:19, "Lay not up your treasure upon earth." No? Are not parents bid to lay up treasure for their children? 2 Corinthians 12:14. It is granted--but the meaning is, the labor for earthly treasure must be nothing, in comparison of the pains we take for better and eternal things. What sweating even to an agony--should there be for that substance which endures forever. But before I press the exhortation, I must first remove an objection.

OBJECTION. What is all my labor--unless God helps me and gives me success?

ANSWER. It is true, we can do nothing of ourselves without the interposition of divine grace. But though, of ourselves, we cannot acquire spiritual things--yet we must use the means.

1. It is a duty that lies upon us. Luke 13:24, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." God, who made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves, Duty is ours--success is God's, Luke 5:5, "We have toiled all night, and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." So at Christ's word--we must let down the net of our endeavor.

2. In other cases we use means, though we cannot promise ourselves success. We plow and sow, though we are not sure we shall have showers and sunshine to ripen the seed. We use the means and leave the outcome to God. If we do thus in matters of this life--why should we not much more have the same wisdom for our souls--using prayer, reading, meditation--and waiting with hope for success?

3. It is very probable that God may give a blessing to our endeavor. Acts 8:22, "Turn from your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive your evil thoughts." You do not know but, upon your prayer, it may be forgiven you. It is God's usual way to meet those who seek Him. When we put on a holy boldness in prayer, and will not go away without an alms of free grace, we hope for success. The truth is, God's stirring up the heart to seek for grace, is a good sign He intends to bestow grace. Psalm 10:17, "You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear." When God stirred up King Solomon to ask wisdom, He immediately gave it to him, 1 Kings 3:9,12. Just so, God's inclining the heart to seek after spiritual blessings--is a hopeful sign that He intends to bestow them on us.

4. God has made a promise of mercy, to such as use the means. Proverbs 8:17, "Those who seek Me early, shall find Me." Though we have no power--yet we have a promise. God has made Himself a debtor to us, by His promise. Therefore, urge God with His truth. God had promised David that he should not lack a man of his seed, to sit upon his throne. Now, after David was dead, Solomon pleads this promise, 2 Chronicles 6:16. Put God in mind of His promise--and He will not deny. He will cause you to inherit

substance--and fill all your treasures. So, having taken this objection out of the way, let me reassume the exhortation: labor for spiritual substance.

This substance is worth laboring for. Grace is a substantial blessing; it is a ray and beam of the divine nature, 1 Peter 2:4. A soul filled with this precious substance has angel's riches. The angels may say as Peter, "Silver and gold have we none." But they have spiritual substance; their dowry is their sanctity. What if we lack the riches that reprobates have--if we possess the riches that angels have! Grace answers all things; it sanctifies all troubles; it supplies all wants; it crowns with the favor of God.

All the labor we can take, is little enough for procuring this enriching substance. 1 Peter 4:17, "If the righteous scarcely are saved." Grace and salvation may be had--but with difficulty. Though we wrestle as Jacob did with the angel, it is well if at last we are possessed of spiritual treasure. "I reach forward," said Paul, Philippians 3:13. This is a metaphor from racers, who stretch themselves forth and run with a winged swiftness to lay hold upon the prize. 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I beat down my body." What watchings and fastings have some of the saints endured! How have they, Hannibal-like, marched over the Alps and dug through spiritual rocks. for the achieving of true wisdom: "If the righteous scarcely are saved."

Be all the more inquisitive and active in searching after this spiritual substance, because Satan employs his utmost arts in hindering us from obtaining it. Satan, having fallen to beggary, envies to see us rich; his work is to obstruct our happiness. When the Lord asked him from whence he came, he replied, "from compassing the earth to and fro," Job 1:7. The earth is part of his diocese, and he is continually visiting in his diocese; his business is to be setting snares. When they rob the tiger of her young ones, the mother tiger runs after them and then they set mirrors in the way; and, while she is looking her face in those mirrors, they run away with the young tigers. In like manner, the devil sets mirrors in mens way--beauty and pleasure--and while they are looking in these mirrors, the devil runs away with their souls! Having, therefore, such a persevering and wicked enemy, it requires the more caution and industry in seeking after the things of heaven.

What pains do other people take to inherit folly--and shall not we take more pains to inherit substance? How eagerly men pursue their sins? The thief takes pains to satisfy his thievish lust. The drunkard takes pains to satisfy his drunkenness. Men take great effort for their sins. How active was Judas in betraying Christ! He runs to the high-priest and then back again to the garden; a slower pace would have served, to go to hell. Micah 7:3, "They do evil with both hands." To employ one hand in sin is enough--but they were so eager for it--that they would sin with both hands! Are men so industrious to damn their souls? Shall not we much more to save our souls? If they are so eager for poison, shall not we much more for food?

It is only this spiritual substance, which will stand us in good stead when we come to die. When the soul is ready to take its flight into the eternal world--now what is Christ and grace worth! Would not men willingly part with all their earthly possessions, for the anointing of God and the seal for the Spirit? A believer at death would not exchange his anchor of hope for a crown of gold!

He who inherits this substance--shall inherit a kingdom! James 2:5, "Rich in faith, heirs of a kingdom!" The saints are adopted into the same privileges with Jesus Christ. Romans 8:17, "Heirs with Christ." Christ partakes of the divine nature; so do the saints, 2 Peter 1:4. Christ partakes of His Father's love; so do the saints, John 16:27. Christ dwells in light; so do the saints, Colossians 1:12. The kingdom which believers shall possess, is a place of sanctity and dignity. It is described by transparent glass, Revelation 21:18, --there is the sanctity; and by gates of pearl, verse 21, --there is the dignity. In that paradise of God, are

cordials to drink and crowns to wear! There are treasures that can never be emptied--and pleasures that can never be ended! Behold, here a better and an enduring substance.

QUESTION. What shall we do to inherit substance?

ANSWER 1. Trade for this substance in holy ordinances. "Wait at the posts of wisdom's doors," Proverbs 8:3-4. It is good to lie in Christ's way; nor must we only come under the droppings of the Word--but labor with our own souls in private. When we have come to ordinances, as the bee to the flower--we must work the Word afterwards in the hive of our own hearts--that it may turn to substance.

ANSWER 2. Go to Christ for spiritual substance. Revelation 3:18, "I advise you to buy gold from Me--gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And also buy white garments so you will not be shamed by your nakedness. And buy ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see." Say, "Oh, Lord Jesus, look among Your rich treasury of heaven. Shall I lack--when You are so full? Oh, enrich me with spiritual substance! You are as sweet as the honeycomb; drop as the honeycomb and send forth Your sacred influences into my heart. Lord, You will be no loser by it. Your grace may be imparted--yet not impaired. You may enlighten me--yet have never the less light. You may enrich me--yet be never the poorer. Oh, blessed Jesus, open the breast of free grace--and fill me with Your fullness. O blessed Tree of Life, shake down some of Your precious fruits upon my soul."

Such as God has blessed with this spiritual substance, let me exhort to three things:

1. Be cheered in the loss of outward comforts. Perhaps the late fire has destroyed most of your earthly possessions--but be of good comfort, God has caused you to inherit true and eternal substance! When you have lost your temporal goods, you have something you cannot lose. Luke 10:43, "Mary has chosen that good part, which cannot be taken from her." Christian, have you the seed of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Here is substance: the Lord has taken away the lesser--and given you the greater. He has taken away your dying flowers--and given you eternal jewels. He has made you low in the world--and high in grace. He has emptied your coffer--and enriched your conscience. How happy and blessed are you! God has taken away the earth from you--and given you Christ and glory! As if a king should take away from his favorite, a picture--and bestow his daughter upon him!

Oh, Christian, look upon your spiritual substance; see how rich you are in Christ--and be comforted! 2 Corinthians 6:10, "As sorrowful--yet always rejoicing; as having nothing--yet possessing all things." To lack all--yet enjoy all, seems a paradox--yet it was a true aphorism. Because Paul inherited substance, he had heaven in his hope--and Christ in his heart! 2 Corinthians 4:18, Galatians 2:20. If the people of God took a survey of their spiritual blessings, and considered what Christ had wrought in them by His Spirit--it would silence their murmuring and turn the voice of their weeping into the rejoicing of praise.

2. Be thankful to free grace. If God has made you inherit substance, there is good reason that He should inherit your praises. Has the Lord filled you with the hidden treasures of His grace? He has done more for you, than if He had dignified you with crowns and scepters! Oh, you saints, be full of gratitude! Make heaven ring with your praises, Colossians 1:12. When God puts off others with feathery things, and gives them their portion in this life; that He should give you solid quintessence, that in your life He should sanctify you and at your death enthrone you, what sovereign love is this! How has God displayed the banner of free grace over you--and can you contemplate this and not be living organs of praise? God, in giving you the true substance, has, as the psalmist said, crowned you with loving-kindness! Psalm 103:4. He has broached His best vessel. He has given you His very heart! You have both the gift and the Giver!

When God had made a promise of clean water, He added, "and I will be your God," Ezekiel 36:25, 28. "Clean water," there is the stream; "I will be your God," there is the Fountain. Let this put another string in the lute--to make your praises sound louder!

3. Have you this spiritual substance? Labor to get more of

it. We should be thankful for the least grace, as this makes us partake of God's likeness. As a silver penny bears the king's image as well as a greater piece of coin--the least faith will justify. A man may be transported on the Thames River, as well in a rowboat--as in a great ship. A lesser degree of grace will row us to heaven; yet we should not content ourselves with a little--but still increase our stock of grace. We should get more of this spiritual substance--more knowledge, humility, sanctity. We should labor to have more of the oil of the Spirit drop into our lamp. It would be a good covetousness to covet more holiness.

The more grace--the more strength. There is as much difference between weak grace and strong grace--as between an infant and a mighty angel.

The more grace--the more joy. When grace grows in the root--joy flourishes in the branches. A Christian, for lack of increasing grace, though he may walk to heaven safely--yet he walks there sadly.

The more grace--the more glory. They who would have their crown more full of jewels, let their souls be more full of grace!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/thomas-watson/the-substantial-excellency-of-spiritual-things/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net