

The Church's Witness to the Watching World

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[0 : 0 0] Lord, we pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. Thank you for rejoining us. We're back for session two. Our retreat is obviously Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1, and so we're going to continue looking at that in more depth. But no, seriously, we'll say a little bit more about this later. I think we've decided that because there's a lot of content, a lot of richness, and we don't want Esau to feel rushed because it's such good content, and I feel like I'm just sort of absorbing as much as I can, that we are going to make a change so that actually instead of evening prayer, we're actually going to have a kind of session three. Okay? So, yeah. So, more on that later. I give you Esau.

My pastor used to say to the worship team, y'all can sing as long as y'all want. I'm still going to preach for an hour. So, it's up to you to decide when we leave, but I got my stuff I got to do. So, y'all were late too, so let's not be judgy. Okay? I mean, people, I have students, they really getting their feelings about their syllabus. Like, they do everything on time as they say they're going to do it. I was like, you didn't follow directions on the stuff I gave you. Anyways, just kidding. That part can't go in the video. I love Wheaton, and I love my students.

Please donate through the Wheaton Alumni Fund or wherever you are. So, those of you who were volunteering earlier, I was supposed to get through all of chapter two, but I made it through about ten verses. What we did is we made a claim in verses one to three that Paul gives this analysis of the human condition apart from Jesus Christ as being effectively linked to the Anglican baptismal liturgy as the world, the flesh, and the devil as being the things that influence us and take us in a certain direction. And then in the second half of that section, beginning at verse four, you have what I call the glorious conjunctions in Pauline theology, but God who is rich in his mercy. And then we talked a little bit about the alternative community that he begins to create amongst us. And particularly, we emphasize the ascension that Christ has raised us up with him. So that in places like Romans six, where you have the dying and the rising of Christ, and it focuses on a new life that actually Paul says that we ascend to heaven with Jesus.

And we now see the world from the perspective of the ascended and ruling Lord. So the things are never falling apart. That God always remains sovereign over human history. And that sovereign perspective allows us to function well in a society that sometimes can feel like it's going sideways.

So now we come to the second half of chapter two. And I'm going to do the same thing, hopefully a little bit more quickly. I'm going to read a little bit, talk a little bit, read a little bit, talk a little bit. Is that okay? Okay. Because you always got to hear the Bible. Okay. But God's word is important. Talking about it. It's a power. There's a power that gives you just hearing it. Okay.

[3 : 32] Anglican liturgy, read all the lessons. Okay, here we go. And put on investments. I'm sorry. Get a chastable. I'm sorry. I'll leave that alone, Tommy. Get a chastable. It's okay. We'll talk about it later. Verse 11. Therefore, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in flesh by hands. Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Once again, Paul starts with the wonderful news that things are horrible. But one of the things this, this, and this is actually important because Paul is saying a word, sorry, I am caught up on a word again. Paul, the word that Paul uses in verse 11 is remember. Remember. And what Paul is actually doing is he is calling for them to think of themselves differently than they would have thought of themselves. So when they were without hope and without God in the world, they didn't actually perceive of themselves that way. So there's one way of articulating the Christian gospel in which you say there's this God-shaped hole that we all walk around in and then sometime we encounter Jesus and that missing part is filled and you go, yay, the gospel. And for some people that is, that's true. They live these angsty, unfulfilled lives that like Jesus then fixes. But for some of us, maybe just me, I was completely fine not being a

Christian. Didn't bother me at all. And I was not walking around thinking that I was out without hope without God in the world. I just did the things the same reason we'll do at the time. Right? But when Paul says, you need to remember that you are actually messed up.

And so what Paul is doing is he's calling upon us to reflect theologically of our past as a part of God's story. Because one of the things that is easy to do, especially if you had a rough past or if you did something bad, you could say, no, no, no, I'm a Christian now and my story begins when I met Jesus and all of the things that happens after that. Like I'm this person, like, I mean, some of us are happy that we live in the pre-internet days when we were in high school.

Some of us would be unelectable. I mean, I would give you an example of my unelectability, but this is being recorded, right? If there was Instagram, like the amount of, you know, the amount of like things that I see, I don't know if you guys have how big this is, you may not have college students, but things like TikTok and Instagram, these videos, like, that's gonna be a problem when you run for office, right? Because you look like you're without hope without God in the world.

But the whole point, the whole point is that Paul wants them to engage in a theological reconstruction of their past as a part of God's story. So it's precisely because they were imperfect that now they are loved and longed for by God. I think that there tends to be within churches kind of two equal psychoses or, psychoses is probably the wrong word, two equal anxieties. One are for the people who are raised in the Christian church. And they go, I have no dramatic conversion story. I was never without hope and without God in the world. My parents who were rich in their mercy sent us to Christian school from the day we could walk and I went to Wheaton, right? And so you feel like, well, no, like, I don't have a story. I don't have this transformation. But even if that is the case, Paul is still asking you to engage in this theological reconstruction of your past as a manifestation of his glory. And so what he wants you to do is to look back on that time and see that even when you were, if you were already Christian, then praise God that you actually don't have to go through all of the crazy stuff that those of us who existed outside of the church did.

[7 : 50] And if you existed outside of the church, then it is also a manifestation of God's glory. Now, in this particular case, Paul is talking about Gentiles who are now coming into God's family because he says they were called circumcision by those who are circumcised with human hands. And so what he is saying is that before the coming of Jesus, there were the Jewish people who were seen as God's chosen people. And from the position of God's chosen people, there could be a tendency to look upon Gentiles simply as the unchosen.

But he's not talking about like all Jews everywhere criticizing Gentiles. He's referring to a particular form of Judaism as it was practiced, as it relates to these Gentiles. You were called the circumcision uncircumcised by those who had a circumcision that was made in human hands.

And when he talks about the circumcision that was made in human hands, he is drawing upon actually the Old Testament itself. He's talking about what Deuteronomy says real circumcision always is going to be.

This is Deuteronomy chapter 6, sorry, chapter 30, verse 6. The Lord will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love him with all of your heart and with all of your soul.

As he says, even though you were called the unchosen by those who were seen to be the chosen people, even within that context, it was possible to miss what God is doing. Paul's point is it was never actually about circumcision.

[9 : 28] And he doesn't make this argument on the basis of throwing away the Old Testament, saying the Old Testament God was bad, and now we have this new, better version of religion rooted in Jesus. That's not what Paul does. Paul says that Deuteronomy itself looks to a different form of circumcision in which the manifestation of being a part of God's family is a transformed heart.

He then goes on to further describe what does it mean to be a part from the people of God. You're without the Messiah. You're without the Messiah. You're without the wrong, the one true king.

We talked about this. When you're without the Messiah, you're without your proper ruler, and you're subject to the rulers of the day. So you're without proper leadership. You're excluded from citizenship in Israel.

You weren't in God's family. You were foreigners to the covenants of promise, the promises that God made to David and Abraham and the entire redemptive story you didn't know about.

So we live in this world where, like, we read the Old Testament, we say, sure, we're children of Abraham. Of course. We're like, you know, David, Jesus is our true king. And so we know the promises.

[10 : 38] But the Christian claim is that all of human history was at one point centered on this one person, Abraham, and the promises that God made to Abraham. And this extends out to the nation of Israel.

And then it focuses on the person of the king. And so you have this entire history, right? This is what we read our Bibles. It's the inspired word of God. All of human history is moving through this one family, right?

This one nation. You know who's excluded from that? Everybody else. So you weren't in the story. He said, this is what they were saying about you. This is what they were saying about you.

So without hope. So then if you live and you're not a part of the story, like, what exactly it is that we want? Like, what is the future? So if you're a Jewish person, there's this eschatological future.

One day God's going to come back. He's going to fulfill his promises. We're going to be in the new creation. There's going to be a king. So you're, like, looking to this. But if you're without this hope, then what are you heading towards?

[11 : 41] He's saying, as a Gentile. When you were a Gentile, like, what was your peak of existence? Maybe you get a plot of land. You have a, well, you'd have a wife and a mistress and some slaves. But that's another story. They did.

So, sorry. Let me. Actually, this is important. So this is your hope. You're sitting in Greco-Roman world in the first century. You have one woman who, if you're a man, and ladies, you can kind of see where your hope is.

You get to see the downside of this. You have one woman who you have children with. And for the most part, she's kind of off to the side. And she's mostly put away, very little political power.

That's her place. So if you're lucky, you had a good husband who isn't abusive and who kind of leaves you alone. And then if you're not one of the women who get married and you're part of the lower class, then you're at the sexual whims of the people who have power in society.

So you may be a mistress or you may be a slave because you didn't go to your wife for sexual pleasure. You went to the slaves and the prostitutes. And so if you are a successful man in particular, you had a lot of people working for you.

[12 : 41] You had a, you know, you had a nice house. You had your wife here. You had your slaves here and the people who you assaulted. And then maybe you had a great name and they built something for you and you died.

First of all, even for the people who win in that battle, right, if you win, if you become one of those landed gentry, what have you actually attained? You most likely cause real misery to most of the people around you.

And maybe you get a sign. I used to work at Dartmouth College. And this isn't a shot at Dartmouth. But I remember I'm walking across campus and I'm meeting some student at some building.

It's called like Johnson Hall or whatever. I don't know. But I remember walking to this building and seeing the name on it and thinking, you know what? I have no idea who that guy is. Completely dead. Right? No idea.

It's dead as a doornail. And no one knows who he is. But at one time, he was famous enough to have his name on the building of one of the top universities in the country and he's gone.

[13 : 45] So what has he accomplished? So when Paul speaks about people being without hope in the world, he's once again saying, what is it that you're chasing? You ultimately had nothing because you're without God.

So he's once again, he's not trying to be, you know, Paul gets the grumpy reputation, right? But he's not trying to say that like life without Jesus is like a conscious experience of misery.

Because the person who actually wanted that, their name on their building or the people who are currently engaging in it, like there's people who are right now who says, I want to be remembered.

And so the people who are wanting to be remembered aren't necessarily always experiencing the emptiness. What he is saying now, now as you look back on what you used to do, we can actually reasonably say that all of this stuff was nothing.

It's a theological reconstruction of your past. And it is important because you live amongst people who are still in a sense in your past, right? In the sense that they are still chasing these things.

[14 : 50] And every now and then you kind of lose your mind. And you go, you know, I kind of want that. I kind of want those things. I want to win.

But Paul goes, no, no, no, no. Remember what you were. Because it is only by remembering what you were that you can know who you are.

And we go forward. See, I did. I went through that faster. And once again, the gospel in conjunctions. Right. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off.

We were seemingly nowhere near the story that we're now a part of. You've been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Here's our peace. And he has made both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. By abolishing the commandments expressed in the ordinance.

[15 : 53] That he might make in himself one new man in place of the two. And so making peace. And that he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the Christ, through the cross.

Therefore, killing hostility. So now, instead of being these people who are in a unknowing kind of hostility to God, who are far from him.

They didn't know they were far from him. But God has brought them near. And when God asks to bring the Gentiles near, he brings them to the Jewish people who are already close to God.

And this is the part of the covenant. And he has acted to bring Jews and Gentiles together as the basis of our peace.

So the question that, and we talked about this, what is the basis of our community? We've talked, and Paul talks about it in different places, about the basis for the community built apart from Jesus.

[17 : 00] Right. Following the spirits of the air, the sons of the disobedience. This world constructed around these competing passions and desires that is inherently unstable. This is the basis by which our community is functioned.

Our mutual desires. All of marketing is rooted in the ability to get you to die at something and spend your money. So you go to work, you get paid, and then they convince you to give them the money back.

So it's in desires. Trust me, this is like, sorry. Back to desires. So I'm relatively happy with my life when I'm living in Rochester, New York.

We have this, like, little bitty yard that's about, like, you know, you live downtown. Like, you live in the city. You have, like, a tiny yard. And I had, like, one of those push moors. It didn't even have a motor. It's just, like, my one strip of grass.

I would go outside and I would, like, push it down. I could just let it roll to the end of the street. I'm done. So then I moved to the suburbs. And I've never in my life cared about a lawn.

[17 : 58] Ever. And next thing you know, I arrive. And they, I don't know if you guys, you may not, you've not seen this. There's grass in the rest of the world. It's not downtown D.C.

So they have it where you can do the thing sideways. Have you seen the people who can do this? It's super impressive. And I was like, ooh, how did you get one of those? How do you make it go sideways?

And so you may not know what I'm talking about. It's like when you kind of checkerboard your yard. So I'm not, like, I've been in this neighborhood for, like, two weeks. And all of a sudden, I'm, like, desiring checkerboard, like, yard.

And then, and then I say, well, they say, well, you need to get a lawnmower. I say, well, what lawnmower do you get? Well, the only proper lawnmower that you can get is the new, what do you call it, battery-powered eco-friendly lawnmower.

And so next thing you know, this happens. There's no redemptive story. This is me following all the way down. I find myself buying a \$300 battery-powered eco-friendly lawnmower in the suburbs.

[18 : 56] And then I wake up the next day, what has happened to me? Because they tricked me. And I was carving my desires. And I went back.

Paul, Paul, Paul says that we are far off. And that instead of being in this community, and this is how the community functions, right? There's a series of things that you always need that they're telling you to get.

That's the basis for the community, shared desire. Paul says that Jesus Christ becomes the basis of our peace. The Jews and Gentiles who lived in hostility to one another.

The Jews are hostile towards the Gentiles because the Gentiles oppressed them or were seen as people who colonized them, people who were seen as godless, immoral.

And so the Jews, rightfully in many cases, looked upon the Gentiles as godless heathens in deserving judgment, right? And then the Gentiles looked upon the Jews as these strange religious fanatics who didn't worship the gods of the empire.

[20 : 03] So there was this fundamental hostility. And he says that, no, no, no. Jesus Christ and his cross as the basis of their reconciliation is what creates community.

So we now have, because of the cross of Jesus Christ, two things happen at exactly the same time. We are reconciled to God.

That's probably the most important part. We're reconciled to God. So though the Gentiles didn't know they were enemies of God, they in fact were. And so at the very moment, sorry, this is the glorious thing about the gospel. At the very moment that you find out that you're an enemy of God, even though you might not have known it, you also find out that God wants to be your friend.

Like, he doesn't say, you're an enemy of God, come back next week and let me tell you what to do about it. He's like, you're an enemy of God, but don't worry, Jesus. And you say, we have peace.

But, he says, there's also a family that you're now a part of. A people who are very different from you, the Jews. And so at the very moment that you're reconciled to God, you're also become a part of this multi-ethnic community where you have to learn to live together.

[21 : 16] What does it mean then to become a Christian? It means to become a part of one new family.

One of the things that people ask me often, like, why don't you give up? Especially when you talk about, like, diversity in the Christian context and say, why don't you give up?

And I gave one reason for it, like, earlier when I talked about the resurrection and plausibility structures. The other one is, like, the union with Christ makes y'all inescapable in a sense, right?

We're literally one new man. Where am I going to go? Like, I can't leave Jesus. And Jesus has united me to my brothers and sisters. And so sometimes we feel like, well, I am so upset with, like, the church or whatever, and I'm going to leave the church.

You can't. We're stuck with one another in our brokenness. Sorry. And the other thing, and I'll say this. This is, like, the tricky part of this verse.

[22 : 16] And I always like to give this clarity to this particular section of Ephesians. When we talk about the Jew and Gentile reconciliation, and it is used, I think rightfully so, to talk about racial reconciliation more broadly.

But there's a dangerous way of talking about this that I think is fundamentally misunderstood. And this is the potential misunderstanding. The Jews in this scenario, in the American context, can easily become white people.

Right? And then the Gentiles become black people. So when you're in a white church and they say, we should go evangelize, just like Paul evangelized the Gentiles. No, no. That makes you the Jew. Right? That makes you God's chosen people.

That's not what you're like. Oh, yeah, it is. That's not it. So black people aren't Gentiles and you're not Jews. This is important. Why? Because we're both actually the Gentile.

We're both the people who've been grafted into the story. Paul actually has no category for, like, the American version of racism. Right? Because, like, he doesn't say, like, one Gentile is going to think another Gentile is better.

[23 : 18] It's like, that's a stupid thing. The Jews are better. Right? That's what he said. Right? And the Jews wouldn't be better because they have an inherent ethnic superiority. They would have been better, in this sense, because they had the laws and the promises.

Which then becomes even more amazing because Paul then goes on to say later in Romans, the Jews who are supposed to be better are actually not better at all because even though they have the law, they don't keep it. So everybody loses in Paul's theology.

And then everybody gets the win. Right? Why? I want to move forward. I want to move forward. Okay. He came.

I'll try to get through this and at least get into verse 3. He came by abolishing. Chapter 3. He came. He does this by abolishing the law of the commandments expressed in the orderliness.

He might make himself one new man in the place of two, thus making peace. He might reconcile us both in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. He came and preached peace to those who are far off.

[24 : 19] And listen, also peace to those who are near. So even the Jewish people needed to hear God's peace. For through him, we both have access in one spirit to the father.

This is Trinitarian theology, robustly articulated right in the middle of Ephesians. God the father sends the son to bring about our reconciliation with God.

And that reconciliation with God is access through the spirit. So what does it mean? This is what Paul's going to get to later. This is what Paul thinks this is hard for the Christian to grasp.

You are caught up in a Trinitarian narrative where the three persons of the Trinity are cooperating to end racial strife, reconcile you to God, and function as one body so that you might manifest his glory in the world.

Like, what? What? I thought I was just singing God of Wonders on a Tuesday afternoon, right? So I do want to say a quick thing here about the law.

[25 : 28] Because he says he, like, he talks about the nullification of the law and the dividing wall. And so one of the problems with this is that Paul extensively argues in other places, like in Romans 7, 7 to 25, that the law is holy, just, and good.

Right? So if Paul says the law is holy, just, and good, how is the wall, this dividing wall, and this creation of hostility? Why is this the case? Is Paul saying the law is bad? The reason this is important, at least to say in an Anglican context, is because one of the things that we tend to do in the church today is we say, like, religion are all the things that I don't like about God and relationships are the things that I do like about God.

And so anything that related to what people call religion is then added to ritual, right? So it's an implicit statement that the Old Testament was bad, and God kind of put up with it for a long time.

And now it's just you and Jesus and the end of ritual, which implicitly makes Anglicans heathens, right? Because we're, like, barely above the Old Testament because we have our rituals, laws, and rules.

You see the logic there? Because then we kind of reconstruct early Christianity. We don't say it. We kind of think, yeah, the early church, they sang five or six songs, then they preached, right? That's what they did, right?

[26 : 37] And then eventually the Catholic church came and gave us liturgy. That's what people think. And all of that's rooted in a certain understanding of what Paul says about the law as being bad, and then you link these things together.

But I don't think that Paul is saying that, like, law in and of itself is bad. I think he is saying that sin hijacks the law and uses what is good for evil and divided people.

So if you actually go back and read the law, Paul said, the Old Testament is passage after passage. We won't go to it. Where he says, like, you are going to be a kingdom of priests who serve the nations.

You're going to be a city set up on a hill. The idea was that the Jewish people's obedience to the law was supposed to reflect such a transformed life, the Gentiles would say, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.

This is what you see in Isaiah, right? Isaiah says, one day the people are going to go to Jerusalem and learn the law. And so the law was never meant to divide people. It was meant to transform people so that their lives can say, I want some of that.

[27 : 44] Paul's argument in other places are like, because this didn't happen, the opposite occurs. God's name is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles because of disobedience to the law. So when Paul gets rid of the hostility in the law, he's not saying because the Jews had a bad form of religion that has not been superseded by Christianity.

He's saying that the purpose of the law was to eventually, and it's a longer story, but he was saying the purpose, I will chase the long story really briefly.

I think Paul believes that God intended always to create one new people through Abraham's family. That begins in Genesis chapter 12, right?

Through you, all the nations of the world are going to be blessed. But the problem becomes, well, what happens when the people who are designed to be the blessing to the world themselves are sinful? And Israel, because of their corporate disobedience, finds themselves under God's judgment.

And God has two options. He only has one, but like rhetorically, because God's going to do what he's going to do. But in theory, God could say, okay, I'm going to abandon the Jewish people and then create a new people.

[28 : 55] Or God can say, I'm going to save the Jewish people and save the Gentiles. And so God's promise to Abraham, according to Paul, creates the beginning of this epic, right, in which the purpose of the law, which is to bring people together, is finally accomplished in Jesus Christ.

So that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, two things happen simultaneously. Jesus takes upon himself the curse of the law, they're bringing about Jewish forgiveness and allowing them to exist on the other side of the covenant curses.

While at the same time, opening up the path for Gentiles to be blessed as well. Both rooted in the cross of Jesus Christ. Out of two, making one. So that's what I think Paul is talking about there.

And all of that is accomplished through the Trinity. And I'm going to get down to the end of this section. For through him, through him, we both have access in one spirit to God the Father.

So then, what is our reality? We are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

[30 : 07] You go from, remember, you're part of the sons of disobedience, and you're now in a new family with new citizenship under a new king. And we all know how the change of leadership affects all of our lives.

He's saying that you had a very bad and wicked king who was leading you towards your doom. Who called himself your father, but who did not love you. And now he brought into a new family that is actually rooted in love and in reconciliation.

You are part of God's family. Built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the cornerstone. In whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a, now you're the holy temple of God.

In whom you're being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit. We talked about how there was a temple in Ephesus that was the basis of their identity.

The temple to Diana. They went there and they made their offerings there. There was also a temple to the divine Julius and the god Roma. They gave offerings to that empire. And he says you were an external aspect of that that you made offerings to.

[31 : 15] And that was how you participated in that temple that ultimately led to your doom because that king did not love you. But now you are an actual part of this building built by God. He's doing analogy upon analogy upon analogy.

This is bad homiletic practice, but this is an inspired word of God, right? You are a house, a family member, and a temple and a citizen all together. His whole thing is like, you know that like there's this meme by Oprah where Oprah, when she gave everybody a car.

You get a car, you get a car, you get a car. You're like, you're a temple, you're a house, you're a family, you're a citizen. Paul is like saying all things are yours. I'm the first person to use Oprah as Paul.

I'm going to copyright that like LeBron tried to copyright Taco Tuesday. Okay, okay. We're going to make some progress here. We're going to make some progress here. We're going to actually get into chapter three.

For this reason, for this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you've heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation as I've written briefly, when you read this, you can, when you read this, you can perceive my insight.

[32 : 29] It's the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men and other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and promised by the spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

A couple of things, and I have to be really brief here. I'm going to highlight a couple of things. Paul says that he is a prisoner for Christ on behalf of the Gentiles.

So the important part of that for us is that when Paul begins to come to grips with this gospel, and he begins to preach it, this reconciliation between Jew and Gentile, rooted in God's reconciliation of all things to himself through the Son.

And when Paul preaches this, it's not that everyone goes, this is great. Let's all love Paul and give him, you know, what do you call them? We live in the suburbs now.

I talk about this. And we move to the suburbs. This has never happened to me before, too. People just start giving you stuff. We get like, people that brought wine. They bought cookies. They bought cakes. Like, I've never been feted like I did when I kind of came into the suburbs.

[33 : 38] It's like, welcome to the middle class. It's like, here you go. There's cookies here, right? Like, oh, I didn't know. I didn't know you used to get cookies when you get rich. I mean, you would think you'd give cookies to the poor people, but no.

You get really nice wine when you already have money. Anyways, this is not what happens to Paul. Paul goes and he preaches the gospel, and he ends up in jail.

I think that this is an important part, right? Like, I wish I could say that when I stood up in front of people and said to Anglicans and people, like, hey, the Bible has this multi-ethnic vision for all things reconciled in Jesus Christ.

People go, Esau, you're amazing. I said, no, you're a cultural Marxist, right? And so the point of all of that, the point of all of that is that it always cost us something.

It always cost us something. And this part of it isn't bad. Like, we all have our preferences. For example, we have music that we like, things that we like. And, like, being with different people is tricky.

[34 : 43] It always is annoying. We have a nine-year-old boy, an 11-year-old girl, a five-year-old boy. Yeah, I'm trying to remember.

When you get past three, like, gendering and naming them is tricky. Like, I didn't plan this out. Like, I should have not given middle names. I'd, like, use some really good first names that are middle when I didn't realize we had that many kids.

But anyways, when you have four kids and they, like, when they go from three to 11, they're at the point now where they all have different television shows that they want to watch. And so, like, television time, maybe it's like an hour, hour and a half, or three.

I don't know. Don't judge me as a parent. Okay? When that happens, World War IV breaks out, because World War III was fought the last weekend, because each one of them wants their own thing.

And I say to them, look, you're in a family now. Yeah. Against your will. And you have to live together. And you have to live together for a really long time.

[35 : 43] And, like, the hardest thing to teach a kid is that being a part of a family involves suffering. And dying to self. And Paul thinks that, like, his ministry, as someone who is an apostle to the Gentiles, leads him to prison.

If Paul had chosen not to be an apostle to the Gentiles, it's the possibility he never would have ended up in prison. Right? I mean, Peter, it's possible to construct a version of Christianity that is socially acceptable, that ruffles no one's feathers, and it causes no one to change too much, and you don't suffer.

There's also a version that gets you in prison. And I think that the gospel articulated in chapter 2 leads to the suffering described in chapter 3, even if only briefly.

But Paul thinks that he is a steward of something. He actually thinks of this suffering as a gift.

Because he thinks that he was the least of all apostles. And God gave him this precious thing. Right? That no one knew about beforehand.

[37 : 02] So we have this. And, sorry, this is good. I think some of you. Has anyone seen the movie? Forgive me for my old person analogies. Remember the movie The Usual Suspects? Okay, thank you.

When I teach these undergrads, they know nothing. So, and The Usual Suspects, spoiler alert, right? Like, the guy Kaiser, so say, it's like working in the whole time.

So you get to the end of the movie, and then you see, you can kind of go back and re-watch the whole thing. The same thing happens with something like, is it The Sign? Or the seventh, what's it? With Bruce Willis. Six, same thing, right? And you go back, and you re-watch the movie, and you see all of the signs to it.

So it was like, it was always there. So when Paul here talks about the mystery that was not made known in previous generations, it is like no one read the Old Testament.

Nobody. Trust me. You can go through all of the texts at the time. Nobody read the Old Testament and said, you know what's going to happen? God's going to send his Messiah to suffer and die, thereby nullifying the law and enabling justification by faith, and Jews in the doubt creating one new community.

[38 : 02] Like, nobody did that, right? If you even read the Gospels, the people, when Jesus shows up, they're like, what are you doing? Like, John is like, well, the Messiah's come, but I'm in jail.

This isn't like, I've been reading my Bible. There's no part where, like, I go to jail. So he, like, sends people there and says, are you the one who should ask for another? The other thing you should do is, like, read the beginning of Luke's Gospel and read the song of Zechariah.

And Zechariah's like, we're going to be free to worship God without fear, and all of these going to, no. I mean, yes and no, right? When Zechariah is saying that song, he is not perceiving the passion.

No one is. No one sees it. But once Jesus comes and his life literally exegetes the Old Testament, Jesus' life is an exegesis of the Old Testament where all the strands are gathered up together and they form a new coherent whole.

And then you go, oh, Genesis 12. This is what we do naturally, right? Like, everybody was doing this. You know, Genesis 12, all the nations of the world are going to be blessed.

[39 : 15] Genesis 15, you're justified by faith. Oh, Isaiah 53, some mysterious suffering servant. Oh, here's Psalm 72 that says that the promises to David are somehow fulfilled through the person of the king.

Oh, here's all of these passages about justice and righteousness and hope for the oppressed. Oh, it's all there. But no one saw it until the word became flesh and exegeted it for us.

And Paul finds it amazing that he is the one who is now given this message. He's a steward of it.

I think this is also similar to what he says. We talked about this when he speaks to these people and acts. And he says, I may not see you again, but I deliver to you the whole counsel of God.

One of the things, like one of my goals has to communicate. I think this is what Tommy wants. We're stewards. Like, you deliver the mail. Wow. So our goal is to make you aware of this thing that we have that is precious.

[40 : 22] And so I could be wrong in my interpretations. I'm not infallible. I actually tell my students there are no perfect theologians apart from like Jesus. Everybody got something wrong. But I don't know what I'm wrong about.

If I knew what I was wrong about, I would change it. But I don't. So in some sense, I'm walking in reality, recognizing my human limitations. But as best as I can come to grips, as best as I can understand the gospel, as carefully as I can read it, these things remain true.

So it's my job or our job with those who preach like Paul talks about here is to deliver this to you and make it clear to you all that you all have something precious. And even when it is attacked on every side, it still remains precious.

Even when it'd be easier to say that the prison that I now exist in, for the sake of this kind of gospel, easy to accept, easy to reject, it still remains precious. And the mystery of all of this, the mystery, like the thing that he thinks that blows his mind, we're together.

The mystery, no one saw this before, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus.

[41 : 44] So this is the thing. Paul isn't just saying that it's great that like black people, white people, Latino people, Asian people, first-Nation people hang out together and just like sing songs. Like reconciliation just in general is a good idea, though it is good.

It is valuable in so much that it's in Christ Jesus because then that reconciliation is a manifestation of his glory, not just some sociopolitical construct that allows us to chase our desires free of conflict.

Of this gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me by the working of his power.

To me, though I'm the least of all of the saints, this grace was given to me to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery of the ages.

This is in God who created all things so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

[42 : 51] This was according to the purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus. The gospel is something that he stewards.

And I can't decide. This is in verse 8. He talks about the unsearchable riches of Christ. The word here is not exactly clear to my mind.

I've heard different translations of me articulate this a little bit differently. It could be unsearchable in the sense that it's like you can't come to the end of it. Someone who's super wealthy or something, you can't search to the end of it.

But I think the unsearchable doesn't really get to it because I don't understand unsearchable mysteries. The other one, unsearchable riches. So like I have so much money, you can't like comb the depths of it, calculate it all, put it in piles and kind of come to the end of it.

But also the other potential word that is used in some translations, it's inscrutable. It's like not it's incomprehensible how rich Jesus is.

[43 : 55] All right. And I think that the riches of Christ refers to all of the manifold things that all of the things that God has for us in Jesus.

And so what Paul is saying is the gospel is so good that I've just told you about that I can't even understand it.

And so this is the strange thing, right? He thinks of himself as a steward of a mystery. So I actually cannot and Tommy cannot and whoever your other pastors cannot actually explain to you all that you can receive in and through Jesus Christ.

We can't like if we just sat here and said, here are all the things that come into being a Christian and let me just list them for you. But no, what we want to do is we introduce you to a person. Right.

You meet Jesus and then your life is transformed in unimaginable ways. Paul talks about it later. It's like glory to God. He can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

[45 : 02] Like Jesus is literally can do stuff for you that you can't even think of. For example, have you preaching to people in West Virginia? Right. Like if you had said to me like 18 year old Esau, what are the things that are likely to happen to you?

I was telling Tommy, I'm sorry, I have one more minute, but I'm going to talk about Manifold Riches and I'm going to tell this story and then we'll be done. Okay. Yeah. So I was when I when I was thinking about doing graduate work, I initially wanted to be a missionary.

And so I said, well, I'll just go and go anywhere to get my Ph.D. It doesn't matter about prestige because, you know, I just wanted to have something cheap so I can have my degree so I could then go overseas. Right. I'm just like economical education.

And so one of my professors emails, I email him and say, hey, will you send this recommendation off to this school? And he goes, Esau, you shouldn't apply there.

You should apply somewhere better because I think you have some more talent. And I go, okay, like where would I apply? It doesn't really matter because, you know, I just want my degree. He said, if you go anywhere in the world, where would you go?

[46 : 05] And, you know, offhand, I'm an Anglican, right? So what would you have said if you were an Anglican in like 2013? I want to stay with N.T. Wright, right? And he says, okay, well, then apply.

And so, you know, it's almost like, you know, those movies just start with like, I'm going to just apply. And so I applied and I got accepted. I'm a black kid from Alabama who was raised in the primitive Baptist church who is now flying to Scotland to study with the greatest living theologian of our day.

Like, if she wouldn't have said to me, you sign up to be. I remember when he came to Gordon-Conwell and we were like, oh, my goodness, Thomas here. Oh. But, like, that's not something I can ask or imagine.

That was God's unsearchable riches in Christ towards me. And I could also give you the opposite version of that, right? Where things were really, really difficult in my life and I would be tempted to despair.

But you don't get to hear all of the worst parts of the story, right? But it was precisely in that despair that God's goodness manifested itself to me. So it's not that God gives you way better stuff than you can imagine, right?

[47 : 21] But that God's goodness towards us in Christ come to us in ways that are unimaginable. And what's the purpose of all of that? And this is the last thing I want to talk about.

He talks about in verse, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to bring to light for everyone the plan of mystery that was hidden for ages in God.

So that in the church, the manifold wisdom of God. So the word there for manifold, I looked this up when I was studying for you all. And I could be wrong about this. So my level of confidence is about 20 to 30 percent, but it preaches well.

So I'm going to say it as an idea. Okay? So don't, like, email me if this is wrong. But it'll make you feel good. This is probably a bad method. But it's plausibly true until I find out that it is false.

The language there for manifold, and it's one of those Bible terms, manifold means nothing. Because I never say manifold when I'm not saying manifold witness of God, right? So it's just like, it's one of those Bible words that just lose meaning.

[48 : 27] So I looked at manifold because I said, you know, I'm getting paid to do this. I should go beyond the English version. And I looked at the word there, and the word there for manifold actually comes from this multicolored.

It's actually the language that is used there. So when you had a multicolored cloth where they, like, wove the different pieces together so it shined as a fabric, manifold. And so you can see how, like, a multicolored cloth that, like, glistens differently or looks differently based upon the angle that you look at it becomes a metaphor for diversity.

But I'm going to say, just because I want to, that the translation, the multicolored wisdom of God is significant.

Especially in a context in which he's talking about Jews and Gentiles together. Could be wrong.

Could be wrong. But at least as I'm thinking about this section, he is saying that before we were in the darkness to the plan of God.

[49 : 39] He says, bring to light. So we're in darkness. We don't understand what God is doing in the world. And then the lights come on, and we see the multicolored wisdom of God manifested in the fact that the Jews and the Gentiles are co-heirs in the gospel.

And this is particularly true. He says this. So that through the church, the multicolored wisdom of God might, now you can actually say that, like, multicolored is what the word means.

The multicolored wisdom of God. He saw it. He looked in my lectionary. The multicolored wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Now, he is saying that the diverse wisdom of God or the manifold wisdom of God or the multicolored wisdom of God as seen in the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles together in one body is a testimony to spiritual powers.

Now, we talked about how the spiritual powers were at work in the sons of disobedience who failed to create the community they desired. They ultimately brought about the destruction of people.

[50 : 48] So he says that the church is a testimony to the powers of what God's wisdom can bring about. The church is God's counter witness to the world.

Because Paul contends in numerous places that the spiritual powers actually exercise influence on the earth. So he says the church isn't simply a testimony to these divine, not these semi-divine invisible beings.

The church is a witness to those beings and those who are influenced by them here. So what is the work then of the church as one people of God?

Yes, don't get me wrong. I believe that the church has a public voice in society. I think there's tons of stuff the church can and should do in the culture.

But merely the existence of the church as God's miracle is a manifestation of this glory. And before there was any political power in the church, in Paul's day, there may be 20, 30, 40,000 Christians totaling the entire world.

[52 : 03] They had no political power. They had no influence. They couldn't do anything but celebrate the Eucharist and sing songs to Jesus. We know they celebrate the Eucharist because it's in 1 Corinthians. And Acts.

But even as simply the Eucharistic community united across difference, worshipping the Savior, there are testimony to spiritual powers and the world of what God can do.

So what is your call then as the church of God in D.C.? Part of your job is to simply be stewards of the gospel.

The whole of it, whose very existence is a testimony to an alternative vision of what it means to be human, what it means to be the community. And I'm only going to say this.

Sorry, Tommy. I'm going to keep going because I've got to get to this part. But this, and once again, this story is too big. The Trinitarian work of God reconciles all things together in his son that creates a new people whose very existence testifies to an alternative vision of what it means to be human.

[53 : 13] That is a lot. And all I can do is just point to the very end of chapter 3 where he says, So that you may know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge.

So this is the prayer that Paul actually leaves the church in Ephesus with. And I'll leave you all with. This is that somehow you all come to grips with the expansive love of God as manifested in the gospel and take it upon yourselves in whatever ways is possible to actually begin to live it out.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you was a great to have been admitted to this world of God. Thank you.

Thanks.