

# Ephesians 3:1–13

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Again, the scripture text is Ephesians 3, 1-13. Please stand for the reading of God's word. For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have 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 have written briefly.

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets 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. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery, hidden for ages 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 authorities in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

[ 1 : 3 9 ] So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you. You may be seated.

Well, good morning. I just want to add my special welcome to those of you, especially among us who might be visiting. Welcome to Christ Church Chicago.

A couple things you need to know about us, and just let me give you three. We are, relatively speaking, a newly formed church. Although some of us have been around for quite some time, the church is still yet less than two years old.

It might be good for you to know that. Secondly, we will soon be entering more fully into a newly refurbished and renovated building.

And so that's on the horizon yet for us as we work our way from the bottom on up and out. Third, if you're new among us, you're probably going to be helped to know that you've arrived at a moment in our history when all of us feel like we could use a fresh understanding of our vision.

[ 3 : 0 6 ] It's actually the reason we found ourselves in the book of Ephesians, looking for a fresh articulation of our vision.

And certainly, by this point in the letter of Ephesians, Paul's words on God's plans and overarching purposes for Christ and the church have been put down.

And even in these opening five verses, he begins now to unfold what God's vision was for him in light of that and how he would go about it.

And I'm convinced that when you see God's vision for Paul's ministry and the means by which he was to carry it out, it will inform us in regard to our own vision.

Let me give it to you as cleanly as I can at this point in the letter. The vision of Christ Church Chicago cannot be less than becoming a local church whose membership is made up of men and women of multiple ethnicities who are presently residing in Wundlawn and our neighboring communities.

[ 4 : 37 ] If vision is what we hope to accomplish, then what I'm telling you is that from this text, this is central to it. What is central to it?

The vision of Christ Church Chicago cannot be anything less than becoming a local church whose membership is made up of multiple ethnicities among those who presently reside in Wundlawn and the neighboring communities.

Now, I know that that kind of a statement with all of its directness might raise questions. I'm sure questions in the minds of many. There might be some here who think, okay, I get it.

I'm already on with it. Just show me from this text how we demonstrate that. There might be others, though, who are rather uncertain about the clarity of that multi-ethnic membership.

and you're going to be asking, well, where are you getting that? And I'm sure there are many who, even that direct statement, would have concerns about it.

[ 5 : 47 ] Do you mean that no church can have a more homogeneity-like vision to it? Or you might be thinking, well, isn't that what the world is trying to accomplish and it's actually being detrimental to the gospel we hold regarding it?

All these things, and maybe you're even sitting there and saying, I didn't have any question about it, but I've got three more now that you didn't even raise in the opening. Let's take a look.

Where in the world are we getting that vision from? Multi-ethnic membership matters for us.

It's connected to what Ephesians has revealed about the gospel's ministry of reconciliation in Pastor Nee's language.

That is my first signpost. Our vision is connected to the ministry of reconciliation. Just think about where we were last week.

[ 7 : 02 ] Chapter 2, verses 15 and 16, the so that clause, the reasons for which God is doing something, clause, so that He might create in Himself one new man in the place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both, that is Jews and Gentiles, to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And notice, it's not merely being reconciled to God. According to Paul, that ministry of reconciliation, is that we are therefore in one body reconciled to one another.

That's where he landed last week in his sermon on verse 21, in whom the whole structure now being joined together. See, the so that of 15 and 16 last week met the so then of verse 19 last week, joined together in Him.

You, built together into a dwelling place for God. That is the ministry of reconciliation is already embedded with the multi-ethnic membership in Christ.

that the horizontal work of forgiveness is not all that He's doing. But the effect of it is the vertical work of forgiveness.

[ 8 : 38 ] It's not all that He's doing, but rather, the horizontal work of peacemaking is also what is in play. That is the stunning argument of Paul's Gospel.

If that is true, then why would our vision not require something likewise to be said?

Why would we possess any lesser hopes for the church that we become together than what God is doing in the Gospel?

Our vision, put it simply, for a multi-ethnic membership that reflects the multi-variegated life of Woodlawn and her surrounding communities is, signpost number one, connected to God's ministry of reconciliation.

And if you like that, then stay around. But there's more. It's not simply where we get that, but where does Paul get it from?

[ 9 : 58 ] Where does Paul get it from? And now you're really moving into this movement of Paul from the plans and purposes of God to the vision of his own life, chapter 3, verses 1-5.

Where do we get the ministry of reconciliation? Simply, Paul put it this way, it is consistent with the mystery that was given to Paul through revelation.

In other words, Paul said, I didn't come up with that view of the local church on my own. The ministry of reconciliation, namely that we are connected to God by peaceful means and therefore have peace with those who are unlike us, came to me as a mystery through revelation, revealed to me.

To me, he says. Look at chapter 3. Assuming, verse 2, that you've heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery, there's that word mystery, was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly, we'll come back to that in a minute.

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men and other generations, as it's now been revealed to his holy apostles and the prophets by the Spirit.

[ 11 : 13 ] This mystery, now the third time over, this mystery given to Paul by revelation is, notice, not that you can know God through Christ, is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

The ministry of reconciliation that our vision is connected to is consistent with the mystery given to Paul concerning or through the means of revelation.

Special revelation. Perhaps you're here at the university. And believe me, not all of us are. About half of us are.

The rest of us, we're just glad to graduate from something. I mean, we celebrated junior high, did we not? But from what I understand, those who seek to have conferred upon them a degree of higher learning such as a PhD, you actually need to come up with something original, an original contribution, which seems to me then is what accounts for moving into smaller and smaller details of information that have been overlooked or under-emphasized or somebody missed along the way.

And so therefore, there's an original contribution out of a particularity of sorts that is really coherent and tight. But for Paul, it's just the other way around.

[ 12 : 47 ] He had an original contribution. He had a mystery that was revealed to him and him alone that actually was the hinge point of human history.

That you get peace with God and in the gospel, we're supposed to have peace with one another. And he didn't decide to publish it in the sense of a dissertation. He decided to work it out by way of proclamation.

That's what he gave himself to. I mean, I think it was Bob Dylan whom you all should know well. who said, if there's an original thought out there, I could sure use one right now.

Well, evidently, you don't know Dylan. That is a great line. And if you're searching for a PhD thesis, that's probably your quest. If there's an original thought out there, I could sure use one right now.

Paul's original thought did not come to him from his own mind or from those around him. It came to him by way of revelation. God disclosed it to him. And he says here, as I have written briefly.

[ 13 : 54 ] What does this refer to? It could refer to what he just said in this letter already. Chapter 2, verse 19. You're no longer strangers and aliens. It could refer to chapter 1, verses 9 and 10 where he talks about the mystery in terms of the fullness of God's plan, summing up everything in Christ.

but undoubtedly he has written about this mystery and revelation given to him earlier in a letter by the name of Galatians. I don't know if you've ever looked at Galatians.

It's just a couple pages back in the Bible. You really ought to take a look at it. Chapter 1, let's do it together.

Chapter 1, verse 11 through 2.10. He actually begins to write briefly about this same subject matter. And he says in verse 11, For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

I didn't receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. And notice, the revelation that he hears from God in Galatians has great bearing on Jew-Gentile relationships.

[ 15 : 05 ] It isn't just the mystery of coming to know God. So that he says in verse 15 of Galatians 1, that when God set him apart before he was born, called him by his grace, he was pleased to reveal, there's that word again, reveal his son to me.

And then he says, I didn't consult anyone. And then in chapter 2, verse 2, I went up because of a revelation and set before them, that is those who were in charge of the church, the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles.

And then by verse 6, those who I set it forth before seemed influential, they added nothing to me. That what God gave me in Christ, at my conversion, and my subsequent one-on-one ministry with Jesus, laid out the mystery of peace with one another, is the consequence and plan of God in bringing peace with God.

So, what are we saying as I try to collect you back if you wandered for a moment? Our vision of a multi-ethnic membership is rooted in the ministry of reconciliation.

But not only that, our vision for a multi-ethnic membership is consistent with the mystery given to Paul by revelation. it's the vision God gave him for the world.

[ 16 : 33 ] And I just want to say from my vantage point then, I am happy for our church to stand with Paul in what he was trying to accomplish in the world.

He was hoping that other churches would follow him in this. Paul's example excites me. And I hope you would join us in it.

Another word on this mystery by way of revelation in verses one through five. It is that you and I are meant to live together in the same family.

Christ Church Chicago must give itself to the hard work of building a local church that brings together multiple ethnicities that do not see eye to eye on many things.

And believe me, only the gospel will hold us. Christ Church Chicago exists by way of vision to beat back the racial divide.

[ 18 : 03 ] It is central to our vision. And that is not only biblically driven, that is by way of being contextually informed.

Did you know that the 2020 census numbers are in? Woodlawn, Hyde Park, South Shore, Grand Boulevard, here they are, 13% white, 75% black, 5% Asian, 4% Hispanic or Latino, 2% others.

I've lived in Hyde Park for nearly 25 years, 24 about now. Hyde Park is now less white than it was 10 years ago. Chicago.

It's now 40% white down from 46% white. The Latino and Hispanic population of Hyde Park has increased up to 16% from what was 12%.

And then you take the University of Chicago that sits in the midst of this neighborhood dynamic, and the University of Chicago is comprised by way of undergrads and graduate students, 38% white, 14% Asian, 9% Hispanic, 4.5% black.

[ 19 : 20 ] That's us. Like it or not, the vision for Christ Church Chicago is to become a church whose membership is multi-ethnic.

Why? Why? It's connected to God's plan of redemption. Why?

It's consistent with Paul's own ministry that came to him by way of revelation. And so, peace with God is great and paramount, but the effect from all eternity past in Christ was to bring about peace with one another.

having been reconciled in one body, the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to be reconciled to one another. Having been made a member in his family, we are members of one another.

Christ Church Chicago will proudly stand in the footsteps of the apostolic ministry of Paul. We will never make an apology for it, and we are entirely influenced by his efforts toward it.

[ 20 : 49 ] Which is why your membership matters. It's difficult to be part of something without actually partaking of something.

it's impossible to partake in God's visible local church family without making vows that publicly and voluntarily join you to others who are part of this family.

Let me restate our vision. The vision of Christ Church Chicago cannot be anything less than becoming a local church whose membership is made up of the multiple ethnicities of those who presently reside in Woodlawn and her neighboring communities.

Where do we get it from? God's ministry of reconciliation. Consistent with the mystery given to Paul by way of revelation. Now the question is how do we go about attempting to accomplish it?

And for that you get through seven through twelve. How are we going to accomplish it? Through a ministry of proclamation.

[ 22 : 03 ] Get this right because this hits the concerns of some who feel then that we're chasing the vision of the world and will succumb to all the problems of multi-ethnic work at the cost of the gospel.

The means by which Paul accomplished the vision was the ministry of proclamation. Verse seven of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power to me though I'm the very least of the saints this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles.

The ministry the stewardship of proclamation. So this is what this is what we are to do or put simply this is how we go about accomplishing our vision.

By doing so we will continue Paul's ministry of proclamation. You know when people said to us why do you want to renovate a building in Woodlawn the answer was in one line to become a home for the proclamation of God's word.

That's it. To become a home for the proclamation of God's word. And that didn't mean simply the pulpit on Sunday. That meant that you proclaim the message of the gospel and it will be the means by which people are finding peace with God and brought into fellowship with one another.

[ 23 : 36 ] It means that when you go to Sunday school class you hear the gospel. That when children will one day be behind glass on these doors they're learning to proclaim the gospel.

It will mean that you have to be trained on what is the gospel. That you will have to tell his story through your story to your neighbor on the gospel.

It means that this is a home where every member knows the gospel communicates the gospel and never succumbs to a world in which we're trying to do church without the gospel.

That's the logic of this text. The ministry of reconciliation which was a mystery made known to Paul by revelation is going to be accomplished through proclamation.

Let me put it in shorthand. You want to get peace with God? You want to have peace with one another? It will depend on your ability to preach and teach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 24 : 38 ] That's it. And that's what the world misses. Because they're chasing our vision without our Lord. And churches churches are succumbing to the vision of the world without this word.

Look at the three-fold effects that preaching will provide our efforts to preach here it is verse 8 to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

That's first. By proclaiming the gospel you need to know it is the way Gentiles come to hear it. Your neighbors will not know the gospel if you don't speak it.

They're not going to get it simply by what you do. Because the whole world is busy doing things. only the church can say things about what God has done in Christ and how sins can be forgiven and therefore reconciliation comes.

Which is why the universal church is the answer rather than any political or international organization that thinks somehow we're going to put it all together.

[ 25 : 58 ] Read your history the world just never gets it done. The church is the great it is the way anyone comes to hear it. That's what he's saying. It is the way Gentiles came to hear it.

The unsearchable riches of Christ will require you to speak. Not only that it is the way that everyone is going to be enlightened to it.

Notice those words in 8 and following. To preach to the Gentiles verse 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

This is the only way the city of Chicago will know what God is doing. Is if members of his church Christian men and women say something about the gospel they will not be literally enlightened to it.

They will not be enlightened to it without you speaking. No wonder it's so hard to speak. So the Gentiles come to hear it.

[ 27 : 02 ] It's the way the world is actually enlightened to it. And notice this. It's the way that the unseen powers are going to come to know it. Verse 8 to bring to light to the Gentiles or preach to the Gentiles verse 9 to bring to light to everyone verse 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

unseen powers don't you? I know you're going to think I'm weird but unseen powers spiritual powers exist and they now know under the sound of my voice what God does in Christ what they do with it I have no idea.

this is the calling that God gives to his church. No wonder Paul's going to shut down this letter the way he does. Chapter 6 19 and 20 pray for me that words may be given to me to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains.

Pray that I can speak the way I ought to speak. I'm going to pray for you that you can greet your neighbor tomorrow the way you ought to greet them in Christ. that you can speak to your children about Christ.

That you can meet someone in a coffee shop and say something about Jesus. This is the calling of the church.

[ 28 : 38 ] No wonder Paul will tell the coming generations hey man it's not only my calling Timothy you've got to preach it too. It's not only your calling Timothy you better train up some other people to do it too.

It's consistent with my ministry but I'm commanding you that's the way it moves forward from my ministry says Paul. Even Jesus said on the prioritization of preaching wow I got to leave this place because I'm supposed to preach other places too.

It's the prioritization of the preaching of the gospel. Now I can hear some of you already won't a local church that prioritizes proclamation neglect demonstration isn't Christchurch Chicago then bound to become a word place and not a spirit place.

Are we really just going to do research on the Bible and never be relevant on the street? All that bifurcation that everybody tries to throw at us. No.

They had the same concern for Paul. I don't know if you know the letter of Galatians very well but when he started saying what his priority was to preach to the Gentiles they said to him I got nothing to add to you but make sure you give to the poor.

[ 29 : 48 ] Paul says well I was eager to do that very thing. In other words his proclamation did not neglect demonstration and it doesn't have to for you either and it doesn't have to for me but it does mean that I've got to find ways to demonstrate.

Ukraine. I'll put it to you simply. Ukraine. Ukraine. You can pray for people on the front line and you can find a way to get yourself to the front line by way of resources and they need both.

Moldova. Poorest country in the European situation there. Only 4 million people not part of the EU. People flooding over the borders. They've got no resources yet there are Christian organizations that believe the gospel you believe that are actually there today situating themselves to be of help.

You can get there. You don't have to neglect demonstration by way of prioritization of proclamation. In fact you must do both.

It must be the very thing you and I are eager to do. well I got so much I want to say but I'm not going to.

[ 31 : 14 ] let me just gather the centrality of what I wanted to say.

Our vision according to what I know thus far in Ephesians is to become a local church whose membership is made up of multiple ethnicities of those presently residing in Woodlawn and the neighboring communities.

Not every church has to do it. I believe in the black church. I believe in a homogenous Asian fellowship.

I believe you can be in a white church but that's not going to be this church. I'm not going to pick bones with those who decide they've been given a homogenous ministry.

God gave that to Peter. Gave that thing to Peter. You're going to go to the Jews but he gave something else to Paul. Well welcome to the church of Paul because we're going to the world.

[ 32 : 34 ] We're going to grab it all. It's connected to his ministry of redemption. It's consistent with the mystery that was made clear to him by way of revelation.

It will be carried on through the continuance of proclamation and it's going to mean some hard things for us with one another by way of conversation.

But be assured as we do this God will receive great praise.

Our Heavenly Father take take the centrality of this text namely that you gave something to Paul that was a mystery made known to him by revelation concerning multi-ethnic membership in your family and take the outworking of this text namely family.

That he accomplished the vision through proclamation and grow us into that kind of family.

[ 34 : 06 ] In Christ's name we pray. Amen.