

Ephesians 3:1-13 Truth Revealed

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Date: 19 January 2020

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[0 : 00] Let's turn in our Bibles please to Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 3, Ephesians chapter 3. We're going to read these first 13 verses, these first 13 verses of Ephesians chapter 3 and we'll consider them together in just a few moments time.

Ephesians chapter 3, I'm beginning to read at verse 1. This is the word of God. For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for 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 and 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.

[1 : 23] 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 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.

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word.

Turn our Bibles then please to the Old Testament this time, to the book of Deuteronomy, the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 29. It is of course the second giving of the law, Deuteronomy, chapter 29.

As we read Ephesians 3, the thing that Paul reminds us of is that the mystery is God's to reveal, that it is God who must show us the mystery.

[2 : 37] It is God who must reveal the gospel to us. And as we come to Genesis, Deuteronomy 29, we are reminded of something similar as we come to this chapter.

Deuteronomy 29, I'm beginning to read at verse 1. This is the word of God. These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb.

And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and those great wonders.

But to this day, the Lord has not given you a heart to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear. I have led you forty years in the wilderness.

Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn off your feet. You have not eaten bread, and you have not drunk wine or strong drink, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.

[3 : 52] And when you came to this place, Sihon, the king of Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan, came out against us to battle, but we defeated them. We took their land and gave it for an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites.

Therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your God, the heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord your God, which the Lord your God is making with you today, that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God, and with whoever is not here with us today. You know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed, and you have seen the detestable things, their idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, which were among them.

Beware. Lest there be among you a man, or a woman, or a clan, or tribe, whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations.

Beware. Lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.

[5 : 37] This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The Lord will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven, and the Lord will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this book of the law.

And the next generation, your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land will say, when they see the afflictions of that land, and the sicknesses with which the Lord has made it sick, the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, Adma and Zebion, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and his wrath, all the nations will say, why has the Lord done thus to this land?

What caused the heat of this great anger? Then the people will say, it is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, and went and served other gods and worshipped them, gods whom they had not known, and whom he had not allotted to them.

Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, and the Lord had uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as they are this day.

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us, and to our children forever. That we may do all the words of this law.

[7 : 32] Amen. This is indeed the reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let's turn please then to Ephesians chapter 3.

Ephesians chapter 3. And we're going to consider these first 13 verses together. Ephesians chapter 3 and verses 1 to 13. It would be helpful if you had Ephesians 3 open in front of you as we come to it this evening.

As I was preparing this sermon, Donald Trump was in the middle of his impeachment hearings in the United States. He had allegedly, I think that covers me for what I'm about to say, he had allegedly, asked Ukraine for information to investigate his great political rival, Joe Biden.

As with all of these things, there is claim and counterclaim. One side says, he did this, and the other side says, no I didn't. He did that. One side says, well Donald Trump asked for this favour, to which Donald Trump says, well, no I didn't.

Now there are a few people in the world who really know what went on. Trump himself, the Ukrainian diplomats whom he talked to, allegedly, they know the truth.

[8 : 50] They can reveal the truth if they choose to, or not. If they choose to keep it hidden, it's unlikely that the full truth, the whole truth, will ever come out.

They know the truth, and they can reveal it if they want to. And as we come to Ephesians 3 this evening, that's the position that we're in, according to Paul.

Not that Trump knows the truth, not that these unnamed Ukrainian officials know the truth, but that God knows the truth. And more than that, God has revealed this truth to us.

God has shown this truth to us. God has revealed this mystery to us, this mystery that has been kept secret for a long time. God knows the truth, and has chosen to reveal it.

Just as no one could tell, could force Donald Trump to tell the truth, if he chose not to. Just as no one could definitively work out what went on from all of the memos that were written.

[9 : 57] No one could force God to reveal this truth. No one could make God reveal this truth. No one could work it out for themselves. But according to Paul in Ephesians 3, God has graciously revealed this truth to us.

We want to see three things tonight. Think about three things tonight. Firstly, we want to think about the revelation, what it is that has been shown, what it is that God has revealed.

Secondly, we want to think about a reverend, how Paul was made a minister for this truth, how Paul was made a minister for this ministry.

And then thirdly and finally, we want to think about the reassurance, the reassurance that this truth brings, that this mystery revealed brings to them.

So firstly then, we want to think about the revelation, the revelation of truth, and we see that in verses 1 through 6. As we come to verse 1, we notice that Paul begins by saying to them, for this reason.

[11 : 04] Now the question in our minds needs to be, well, what reason is Paul talking about? What is it that Paul means when he says, for this reason I do something, when he doesn't actually tell us what it is?

Well the reason is the reason that he's just outlined in chapter 2. Because the Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ, because that middle wall of hostility has been broken down, because now there is no difference between Jew and Gentile in Christ, because they're being built together into this one house, Paul says, well, I act this way.

For that reason, because of this great truth, that I've just outlined, I, Paul, as a prisoner for Christ, act in this way. Now in this sermon, I need to be up front, and say to you that in this sermon, we're never actually going to get to the reason, that Paul acts the way that he does.

We're never going to get to what it is that Paul does. We get to that next week in verse 14. Paul's sort of so excited by what he's about to write. Paul's so taken up with the things of God, that he says, verse 1, for this reason.

And then he gets sidetracked a little bit by the majesty and the glory of God, and eventually he's going to come back to it, verse 14. See, just look ahead with me to verse 14. For this reason again, Paul says, chapter 3, verse 14.

[12 : 23] For this reason again, this is kind of him picking up where he's left off in verse 1, if you like. He intended to write that, but he got so taken up with the glory and the majesty of God, that he forgets almost that he started the sentence.

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Jesus Christ on behalf of the Gentiles. Now, what does he mean for the Gentiles?

What does he mean that he's a prisoner for the Gentiles? Have the Gentiles put him in prison? We remember the kind of chronology of the book of Acts, don't we?

That Paul went and preached, and as he preached, some people were converted. Some people weren't so happy. Some people mocked him. We remember the riot that erupted at Ephesus, don't we?

People chanted for two hours, great is Artemis of the Ephesians. None of this, of course, deterred Paul, did it? When he says that he's a prisoner on behalf of you Gentiles, he's a prisoner because he wants to take the gospel to them.

[13 : 36] He's a prisoner because he wants them to come to know Christ. He's put in prison because he's preaching the gospel. He's put in prison because he's turning the world upside down. He's put in prison because he's threatening the way of life.

He knew that he'd been set aside to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He knew that God had decreed he would suffer. He knew that he would be imprisoned so that the Gentiles might come to know God.

That's why he writes a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles. He was suffering so that they might know Christ.

He was suffering so that they might come to have faith in Christ. Elud Kipchoge recently wrote his name into the record books by becoming the first man to run a marathon in under two hours.

Now, I need to qualify that a little bit and say that it wasn't an official marathon. He used pacers and it was on a fairly flat course. But still, a marathon in under two hours is pretty impressive.

[14 : 46] But what's often forgot about that is that Kipchoge tried the year before and came in at a positively sedate two hours one minute. He tried and he'd fail. Now, what kept him going in the intervening year?

What kept him on course for the intervening year? Through all the training runs, through the early starts, through the early nights, through the high protein diet that he had to eat, what kept him going? It was having this purpose.

It was having this drive. That he was going to be the man who ran a marathon in under two hours. And Paul had that same drive. That same focus.

What was it that kept him going during the imprisonments? What was it that kept him going during the shipwrecks? What was it that kept him going during the lashings? Why didn't he just say, you know what? I've had enough of this.

Because he was set aside to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Because he knew the call of God on his life. And he knew that he would suffer for it.

[15 : 51] His mission was to preach Christ to the Gentiles. So he's a prisoner for their sake. He's a prisoner for the sake.

Of Christ Jesus. Then. This is where things kind of almost break off. If you like verse 2. Assuming that is Paul says. Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship.

Of God's grace that was given to me. For you. This is probably the point at which. Which we're going to pick up again in next week. On verse 14. This is the point at which it diverges.

If you like. Paul spent a long time ministering in Ephesus. So what does it mean. When he says in verse 2. Well assuming. That you've heard about me.

Assuming that you've heard about my mission. Assuming that you've heard. About the work that I've done. How could they not have heard. How could they not know him. As I read the commentaries on this.

[16 : 49] There are kind of two opinions. As to what Paul means. Paul's writing this letter. Obviously. After he's left the church at Ephesus. After he's left them behind. And he assumes that new people will come into the church.

And what he's saying here then. Is that assuming you've heard about me. Assuming that the other members of the church. The older members of the church. Have told you about my ministry. And my mission.

Or secondly. More probably in my. In my view. When Paul says assuming here. What he means. Is that it's definitely happened.

There's no conditionality about it. It has happened. Since you've heard about my stewardship. Since you know about my ministry.

Since you know about my passion. For reaching the Gentiles. Then this is what happens. This mystery.

[17 : 53] Verse 3. Was made known to me. What is the mystery? Paul gives us the answer in verse 6. Doesn't he? How the mystery was made known to me. Verse 6.

The mystery is. That the Gentiles are fellow heirs. Members of the same body. And partakers of the promise. In Christ Jesus. Through the gospel.

What's the mystery? It's the gospel. It's the good news of Jesus Christ. It's the good news. That he's just been preaching. It's the good news. That he's just told them about.

In chapter 2. That the Gentiles and the Jews. Are now one. In Christ Jesus. That the dividing wall of hostility. Is gone. That's the mystery.

And it's a mystery we still struggle with today. Isn't it? It's a mystery that's being worked out. In each of our lives. It's a mystery that's being worked out. In each of our churches.

[18 : 54] That the gospel brings together. Those who were formerly enemies. That the gospel brings together. Those who were formerly at war. The gospel unites. Those who have very little else. To unite them.

The gospel brings together. Different ethnic. And social mixes. And makes us one in Christ. I remember having a conversation. A few weeks ago. With a guy at the drop-in about church.

And he said. You know. I used to go to church. But I didn't feel that I belonged there. I said. All right. Well. Why not? He said. You know. I turn up in my track suit.

In my trainers. Everyone else turns up. In their suit. In their tie. Everyone else has their Bible. Tucked under their arm. That place. That place wasn't for me. If we're living out the gospel reality.

If we're living out the mystery. That Paul reminds us of here. Then the church should be exactly the place for him. Because it shouldn't matter what we wear. Because we're all one in Christ.

[20 : 00] It shouldn't matter what we wear. Because we wear the righteousness of Christ. It shouldn't matter how we speak. Because we speak of sins forgiven to one another. It shouldn't matter where we live.

Because we have this new citizenship. That is in heaven. That we're waiting for. If we're living out the reality of the mystery of Christ. Then it shouldn't matter.

That's the mystery Paul says. That people are being brought together in Christ. That people are being one in Christ. That the barriers of old are being broken down. That no longer will there be Jew and Gentile.

No longer will there be slave and free. But Christ is in all. And Christ through all. And notice what Paul says in verse 5.

He assures us that we're living actually in a new age. A new gospel age. Because what does he say? This was not made known to the sons of men in other generations.

[21 : 07] As it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets. By the spirit. It wasn't made known like this before. People didn't know this before.

And we see that as we read the Old Testament. Don't we? That the people of God. The Israelites very much kept themselves to themselves. They were the ethnic people of God.

But fair enough. Some people came in. Some people joined. But never in any great numbers. But now this mystery has been revealed.

Now we live in a new gospel age. Now it has been shown in a new way. That all are one. In Christ. But notice how it's revealed.

Verse 5. What does Paul say? It wasn't made known to the sons of men in other generations. As it has now been revealed. To his holy apostles and prophets.

[22 : 05] By the spirit. How was it revealed? Verse 5. By the spirit. It's a reminder to us isn't it?

That the gospel will never be grasped by mere academic knowledge. By merely knowing more facts about God. By merely knowing facts about the Bible.

It's something that has to be revealed. It's something that has to be applied to us by the spirit. When our friends reject the gospel. It isn't because they haven't understood it.

It isn't because they haven't academically understood what we've said to them. It's because the spirit hasn't applied it to their hearts. It isn't because our presentations weren't good enough.

Clever enough. Or clear enough. But it's because it hasn't been revealed to their hearts. Who Christ is. So this is the revelation of God then.

[23 : 08] This mystery that has been revealed. This secret that has been shared. This one new humanity being brought together in Christ Jesus. Where there is no difference.

That's the revelation. Secondly then. We want to think about the reverend. The reverend. And we see that in verses 7 through 10. Now I confess that this is a slight cheat.

If you like. In this heading. We see what Paul says in verse 7. Don't we have this gospel. I was made a minister. This good news of reconciliation. That God was made.

That Paul was made a minister by God. Paul was made a reverend. If you like. He was made a minister. What does he say?

Verse 7. According to the gift of God's grace. Which was given to me by the working of his power. Now you might be sitting here tonight.

[24 : 07] You might think to yourself. Well okay. But Paul had a pretty good dose of God's power. Didn't he? Paul had a pretty good dose of the Holy Spirit. He had a pretty good measure of the working of God's power.

Paul had a pretty unique ministry. And we say on the one hand. Well yeah. That's true. Paul was chosen for this ministry. Paul was uniquely gifted for this ministry that God had given him.

But we also say that God has given each of us here today gifts and ministry to use. It wasn't just Paul who was given the Holy Spirit. It wasn't just Paul who worked through the power of the Spirit.

It wasn't just Paul who was given the gift of God's grace. It was each of us. It might be that the ministry God has given to you is to be salt and light in this dark world.

To be a minister to your work colleagues. It might be that the ministry that God has given you is hospitality to the outcast and the stranger. It might be the gift, the ministry that God has given you is the ministry of administration.

[25 : 16] The ministry of child care. None of these ministries are any less important or valuable than Paul's was. People may not write books about us.

But your ministry is important. Because it has been empowered by the one and the same Holy Spirit who empowered Paul to preach to the Gentiles. It has been given to us by the one and the same God who set Paul apart for his ministry.

I think we can sometimes be jealous of others and their gifts. And we see it all the time with children, don't we? You buy them a toy.

And you buy their sibling a toy. And suddenly the toy that you brought them in the first place doesn't seem that interesting. Doesn't seem as appealing as their sibling's toy. And so they want that.

Rather than playing with the toy that you've given them. And often times we can look at the gifts of others. And say, well if only I had that gift. If only I had that ministry.

[26 : 29] If only I had that ability. Without realizing that God has given us each our ministry to do. That God gifts and empowers us.

For the ministry that he's given us to do. Not someone else's ministry. And how does Paul describe himself? Verse 8. What does he say about himself?

That this ministry, this gifting. Was given to him. Though he was the very least of all the saints. This isn't false modesty. This isn't Paul looking for someone to say to him.

You know what Paul? Don't be silly. You know what Paul? You're great. What are you talking about? You're the least of all the saints. Rather this is a realization for Paul of who he was.

That he was the persecutor of the church. That he was the man who stood approving of Stephen's stoning. That he was the man on the way to Damascus.

[27 : 30] On the way to arrest Christians when Christ met him on the road to Damascus. And he realizes that this grace has been shown to him.

This grace has reached even him. And turned him into a preacher to the Gentiles. Again we see that description of Paul in Acts don't we?

They had never met Paul face to face. But they had only heard it said that what? That he who once tried to destroy the faith is now proclaiming it.

The grace of God had found him. Had changed him. And set him apart to be a preacher. That's why he described himself as the least of all the saints.

And notice what he preaches to them. The unsearchable verse 8. The unsearchable riches of Christ.

[28 : 43] To bring to light for everyone. What is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God. Who created all things. So that verse 10.

Through the church the manifold wisdom of God. Might now be made known to the rulers and authorities. In the heavenly places. Paul preaches Christ to them.

Paul preaches this light to them. Paul brings. Uses the gospel to bring the light to everyone. What is the plan. The mystery hidden for ages in God. Paul preaches Christ.

This message of unity. This message that there is no longer Jew nor Gentile. Verse 10. So that through the church. The manifold wisdom of God.

Is made known to the rulers. And authorities in the heavenly places. Now this is simply. Simply breathtaking.

[29 : 51] When we realize. And drill down into what Paul is saying here. In verse 10. Through the church.

The mystery of God is being made known. Through the church. The gospel is going forward. Through the church. The mystery.

Is being shown. Now look around tonight. We don't look like a great body.

To be honest. We're small in number. We're people whom. The rest of the world. Probably wouldn't bother with. And I include myself in that. So.

Don't think I'm being down on anyone. But as we gather here tonight. We declare the mystery of God. To a watching world.

[30 : 48] As we gather here tonight. We declare. That we are one in Jesus Christ. As we gather here tonight. We declare. That there is now no condemnation. For those who are in Christ.

As we gather here tonight. We declare. That Jesus Christ. Is coming back again. As we gather here tonight. We show a watching world. The truth about God. And the truth about Christianity.

When we see that. What are our excuses like. For not gathering together. Why do we forsake the meeting together.

As Hebrews 12 puts it I think. But it's an encouragement isn't it? It's an encouragement for us.

To continue gathering together. Even when it seems to be doing. No earthly good. Even those weeks. When the preaching is ropey. Even with those weeks. When the building is cold. Even those weeks. When the tea is weak.

[31 : 55] Even those weeks. When there's only six of us there. Even those weeks. We're declaring to a watching world. That Christ is coming back. Even in those weeks.

We're declaring to a watching world. That the gospel is true. That Jesus Christ is God's son. That we're one in Christ.

Thirdly. Finally tonight. We move on to the. The reassurance. That Paul gives them. The reassurance. That he gives them. And we see that. In verses 11 through 13. 11 through 13.

We want to think about. Finally then. The reassurance. That Paul offers. We see two things. Two things. That he reassures them of. In verses 12. And 13. What's the first thing.

He reassures them of. Verse 12. Well. What does he say. Through Christ. Verse 12. In whom. We have boldness. And access with confidence. Through our faith.

[32 : 57] In him. What's he reassuring them of. What's he reminding them of. That in Christ. They have access to God. That in Christ. They have access to the Father.

That they do not need to come. Fearfully as a servant. Before a master. But can come to God. In Jesus Christ. As children. To a father. And know that he delights.

To hear them. The only way they can do it. Is in Christ. Their Lord. In their selves.

They couldn't do it. But they have boldness. And access with confidence. In Christ. To God the Father. So that's the first thing.

He reassures them of. Secondly then. We see that he reassures them. In verse 13. Not to lose heart. Don't lose heart.

[33 : 54] He says. Because of my suffering. Don't lose heart. Because I'm in prison. Don't lose heart. Because of the things. That are befalling me. Because ultimately. It's for your glory. As we think of all the things.

That happened to Paul. As we think about the life. That he led. I think there are two reasons. Why they might have become discouraged. Because first of all. They might have saw Paul in prison.

They might have saw. The beatings that he received. They might have saw the reaction. That he had from the crowd. And they might have said. Well if you know what. If that's what Christianity is about. I don't want anything to do with it.

If that's where following Jesus Christ gets you. Then you know what. I'm not sure that I want that. And Paul says. Look. Don't lose heart. Secondly though.

They might have looked at Paul in prison. And said. Well here's the great apostle to the Gentiles. Here is the one whose preaching ministry. Is being so used. Here is the one who is so faithful to God.

[34 : 56] Why isn't God freeing him? Why isn't God saving him? Is God not powerful? And Paul says. Well no.

Don't lose heart on my account. Don't lose heart because of my suffering. Don't lose heart over what's happening to me. Because ultimately. It's for your glory. And it's so easy to lose heart today.

Isn't it? The church seems to be in a terrible state. The world seems to be in a terrible state. The gospel seems to be making little inroads into the darkness.

And Paul says to us ultimately. Look. Don't lose heart tonight. Because all of these things are at God's command. Don't lose heart. Because all of these things.

Will ultimately lead to glory. Or as he puts it in Romans 8. Don't lose heart. Why? Because all things work together for the good of those who love God.

[36 : 03] For those who have been called according to his purpose. Because all things work together for our good. So don't lose heart tonight. Because God is at work.

Don't lose heart tonight. Because all is done. To his glory. Amen.