

Plan The Work; Work The Plan

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Date: 10 September 2023

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[0 : 0 0] I don't know if you saw either in the weekly update that was sent out or if it was projected up here or if you have the hard copy of the order of service in front of you this message is entitled plan the work work the plan plan the work work the plan that's a pithy statement meant to inspire us to work better that is if we put a goal before us and we think about all the issues involved in achieving that goal then we make a plan we make a plan that we believe will get us to that goal and the next thing to do is to put that plan into motion right plan the work work the plan one of the more amusing ways I heard that being used was by my very capable MBA Masters of Business Administration nephew and his MBA wife as they were putting their children to bed I said okay kids it's time to go to bed that's the goal plan the work work the plan and indeed they got their kids to bed but one of the challenges that works against such a pithy statement is that try as one might we can't anticipate everything that might pop up that will upset or derail our plan now I suppose a good plan will have factored in some of those contingencies to create a plan B if you will but then even then the goal might just not be attainable or we might have to adjust the goal given the reality of the circumstances for instance

I mean if one of my nephew's children's threw up on the way to their bedroom that would certainly change the plan let alone having to clean it up for a while now planning the work and working the plan is not a bad thing it has biblical precedent we can think about how it was when Israel was told to conquer Jericho they were supposed to march around six times and on the seventh time they were supposed to march around seven times and then they were going to blow a trumpet and everybody was going to shout and the wall collapsed and indeed that's what happened or we can think about Gideon how his plan the plan given to him was that he would whittle away his army down to just a few and that they would go again with trumpets and with pots and they would shout in the middle of the night crash them to the ground and the Midianites went crazy so it has biblical precedent planning the work and working the plan is a good thing and this is not to say that there isn't some merit in those kind of spur of the moment sort of things shooting from the hip you know making it up as we go along

I'm too guilty of that but there's a kind of romance about that but it doesn't always work out as a rule planning the work working the plan is a more reliable way of going about things and believe me I'm preaching to myself as much as to you all and you know those people who know how to plan who know how to strategize what are good at developing plan A's and plan B's they are prized as consultants business leaders and the generals of armies well what I'm hoping to do is that we will find out God's plan and understand how that reveals to us his wisdom because this is important because two things that our plans lack no matter how well they are contrived or conceived two things that they lack are complete knowledge and complete power you see study as we might making a plan we cannot know everything there is to know and as willing and as empowered as we might be to carry out our plan it can be the case that there are obstacles in obtaining that plan of fulfilling that plan obtaining the goal that cannot be overcome and that is just a lot of we creatures we are beings who do not know the end from the beginning who possess all power but there is one there is one being in all of the universe only one who has both comprehensive knowledge and unfettered power to plan and to work and to work the plan and that being is God

God alone the God of the Bible the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob the one revealed and the things that he has made the things that he has said and the human existence that he has assumed and one thing that Paul makes abundantly clear in his letter to the Ephesians is that God has a plan and he is working that plan so I want us to consider that under three headings God's plan God's mystery and then God's wisdom God's plan God's mystery God's wisdom let's pray though first gracious God I pray you help me to communicate truthfully about your word what you have revealed

in it so that we might again know you better know ourselves better what it is that you have given us to do out of your grace and what you have done for us so again we just commit this time give us ears to hear hearts that are fertile ground to receive your word in Jesus name amen so plan the work work the plan before we look at our passage in Ephesians we're working our way through Ephesians before we look at that passage I want to briefly remind us of what has led up to this passage to note the language that explicitly says plan or implies a plan at the very beginning Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God later in verse 1 4 through 5 he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him in love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will Paul goes on to say in him we have redemption through his blood in all wisdom he lavished upon us excuse me let me start again in him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us listen in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him things in heaven and things on earth in him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will he prays that you would know what is the hope to which we have been called what are the riches of his glorious inheritance of the saints to what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places and when he talks about how it is that we're dead in our trespasses and sins he says but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together there's God acting on his plan by grace you have been saved raised up with him seated with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ and he said this is not your own doing it's the gift of God not a result of work so that no one may boast we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared for him that we should walk in and then he talks about the bringing of the Gentiles but now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two so making peace and might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross and then

[7 : 53] Ephesians 2.22 in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit what I'm trying to show through rehearsing those verses that Paul teaches that God had a plan that was formed in eternity before anything else existed other than his triune self and he had worked that plan up to this present moment that Paul is writing and I think the most significant of these statements is back in 1, 9 and 10 listen again making known to us the mystery of his will and by mystery he means here it refers to a revelation of something that previously was not known undisclosed something now given with more light more detail than it used to be making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite in him things in heaven and things on earth grand plan that God has that he formed before the foundation of the world that he would in Christ unite all things in heaven and on earth and the mystery he alludes to is something he's going to speak about more fully the mystery revealed regarding the uniting of the Gentiles of Jews and Gentiles and I think it's that mystery or perhaps that the the mystery is that mystery of the Gentiles and the Jews being united is a part perhaps the leading edge the most visible demonstration of that goal that he stated there of unite all things in him things in heaven and things on earth

Leon Morris says the plan is aimed at moving into the fullness of times or the consummation of the promise the summing up of all things in Christ looks to creation heaven and earth coming together in a harmonized whole all this to say because God is omniscient all knowing and omnipotent all power there is no plan B with God no plan B he has a goal he has planned the work and continues to work the plan even today as we worship before him God has a plan let's talk a bit about God's mystery back to our main passage here in Ephesians chapter 3 Paul speaks of a mystery that has been revealed to him it's a mystery that was certainly hinted at before in the law in the prophets but now in this post-resurrection post-pentecost age it has been disclosed to Paul and others in a way that is no longer in the shadows when you read this he says 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 in the spirit and what is the mystery he says 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 now I suspect that for us that disclosure of that mystery is not as radical and as revolutionary as it was in the first century let me take a poll is there anybody here that knowingly knows that they have in some way shape or form within their lineage Jewish descent not one I didn't think there would be see we're so used to the radical nature the revolutionary it's been so accomplished that we don't even think of it it's normal to us but not so not so the revelation of Gentiles being equal heirs of the promises made to Abraham and his descendants has been so normalized we don't even hear the radical nature what Paul is saying I mean we remember right what God said to Abraham he says through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed it was there as Paul says it was there before but that part of the plan had been drowned out by generations of Abraham's physical descendants claiming primacy of place and the receiving and mishandling of the law through Moses so that the Jews could not hear the strains of post-Pentecost music being quietly hummed in the law and the prophets the music had always been there but it was background music and now it was turned up to full volume and many of the Jews including Jewish believers in Jesus had a hard time listening to it they couldn't get accustomed to the tune it struck a dissonant chord it took visions councils confrontations Pentecostal like outpourings of the Holy Spirit all these things were necessary to persuade the Jews that Gentiles were full-fledged members of the covenant despite their not being circumcised or obeying the food laws but even after that there were those who could not accept this altogether new revelation but it was true a true a revolution it happened it was radical Gentiles and Jews were brought together to make one new man and in this letter Paul was making sure that his audience made up primarily of Gentile believers but also some Jews as well they heard that music loud and clear Gentiles Gentiles have been brought near they were fellow inheritors they were partakers of the promises they were joined with their fellow Jewish believers by which God created one new society of his people who were being built by God to be a dwelling place of God in the spirit this is radical revolutionary stuff and as I suggested it is the visible sign that God is working his plan to unite all things in him things in heaven and things on earth listen again to what Paul says in chapter 2 he himself is our peace who has made us both one who has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two so making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross thereby killing the hostility and Paul was participating in this plan he had been entrusted to him as a master entrusted his servant a stewardship and to faithfully fulfill his stewardship he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles and it cost him his freedom as he acknowledged at the very beginning of this letter he was imprisoned and that's not a metaphor like he's somehow held captive by Jesus he was in prison but he's not discouraged by it nor does he want his readers to fret over it Paul had counted the cost of participating in God's plan was worth every penny every pence that it would cost him so God had a plan and that plan involved the revealing of a mystery that Gentiles and Jews would be brought together into one what is exposed by the controversies of Gentiles becoming full members of the covenant people of God is the reality that God plans and works very differently than we do and that's why we want to talk about God's wisdom Paul says this in chapter 3 6 this mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs members of the same body partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel listen again of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which is given to 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 heavenly places the manifold wisdom

[16 : 09] I don't think we use that term a lot in our everyday speech it was a manifold delight when I went over to your house last night you know I think manifold means right that it's various it's multifaceted or as one person translates it the wisdom of God in its many different forms the wisdom of God in its many different forms and what Paul is saying is that the manifold wisdom of God reveals that he plans and works very differently than we do and how is that so well let's think about how we plan how do we plan let's say you want to go to a particular university so you study hard for the grades you search out and you participate in other activities that will enhance your application you make the application with the goal of being admitted to the school you want a particular job so you do the research take some internships to develop your CV you get the references you apply for the job with the goal of landing the job there's something that you want to

buy so as I said earlier you take the money that you've earned from the job go to the store look for it online with the goal that you will be able to buy it there's nothing inherently immoral about that kind of planning and working and as we said there's biblical precedent for making a plan and working the plan but this kind of plan involves equivalence equivalence now I'm in danger of interjecting a concept that we've never discussed before and losing you entirely but I hope not let me try to explain what I mean by equivalence it's the condition of being equal or equivalent in value worth or function it is the condition of being equal or equivalent in value worth or function so for instance you're not going to be able to walk out of the store with the item you wanted without paying what it's worth and you're not going to be hired for a job if you don't have the requisite skills or experience that makes you a good hire and you don't have a hope of getting into the university of your choice if you snored your way through high school classes and partied on the weekends a bit of autobiographical relationship there see there's an equivalence there's an equivalence in this way of planning that is that you do something you expect something because this is worth what you're paying for this job lines up with what it is that you put the time in for and the university that you studied the hard to get into well you deserve to be there there's an equivalence to them the goal and the means to the goal agree they line up with each other and there's a kind of justice that we associate with that

I mean if someone lands a job just because they know somebody but they don't have the requisite skills it strikes us as unfair if someone gets to go to the university of their choice just because their parents went there or they have a certain title attached to their name it strikes us as unfair if someone gets away with stealing the item that you worked hard to purchase it strikes us as very unfair see again there's nothing inherently immoral in planning and working out to achieve and working in that plan to achieve a goal and given that that's how things work then it would be wise to study apply and earn to achieve your goal but when equivalency as a mindset comes into religion we have a problem see people believe that if they behave well they have a right to expect that God will let them into heaven and the criteria for deciding just how good you need to be is completely malleable and personal so in one way or the other use people everybody thinks they deserve to get into heaven it's the equivalency mindset

I did this now I get this or I didn't do this and now I get this but it can happen in the church as well when the equivalency mindset bleeds into the church we end up with legalism or worse than that works righteousness see like the wisdom of the world around us we believe we believe we believe that God operates on an equivalency system salvation is obtained just like a job or university placement we be good work hard and God will let you in but Paul has already taught us in this letter God's plan involves a wisdom that is not like our wisdom there is no equivalency between what we do and what we get we're not saved by works we're saved by grace in fact there are manifold ways in which God's plan does not function as our plans do and they all signal that God does not deal in equivalency he deals in abundance it's here that I want us to begin to kind of unpack what Paul means by the manifold wisdom of God first of all it begins that it was planned in eternity planned before you and I existed planned before you and I uttered one breath thought one thought planned one planned it is already in place there's no equivalency here he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him in love he predestined us to adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will and yet we are the ones who are dead in our trespasses and sins and this plan is set forth in Christ Paul says see we're taught that our being found blameless and holy is due to what he set forth in Christ that is that the second person of the trinity descended from heaven leaving behind all of its privileges all of its advantages to freely take up our plight namely that we were dead in our trespasses and sins and he acts to save us despite our waywardness our rebellion we who are like sheep the prophet says who have gone astray we're all like sheep who have gone astray we've turned everyone to his own way yet the

Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all there's no equivalency in this relationship there is no I do this and God you have to do that we were lost helpless out of an abundance of love and mercy and grace God worked the plan he had planned from before the foundation of the world and what does that laying on him the iniquity of us all look like it looks like the cross here is God's wisdom on display in a plan that runs completely contrary to all notions of human wisdom and planning having your king humiliated and executed on an instrument of torture does not connote victory having him be rejected by the very people he came to save is not a way to prove that he was their Messiah for

the king to reject all manners of worldly fame is not the way to gain adherence to one's cause and to openly antagonize those who are in power is anything but wisdom especially if it's Rome now the cross to human wisdom would say that the plan had miserably failed but there's more to the plan more to the manifold wisdom of

[23 : 23] God on the third day after Jesus had been placed in a tomb the Jews having executed their plan to persuade Rome that the wise thing for them to do was to put him to death and Rome on their plan thought it was wise to work what they had always did to would-be kings that is that you execute them he rose again from the dead and in the resurrection the manifold wisdom of God is once again included is once again includes this display of God's abundance in fact it is a plan that involves no equivalency only one would have to die yet many will rise there's no equivalency in the resurrection one man dies we all rise and then there's the preaching of the cross in God's wisdom God's manifold wisdom God's plans included the folly of preaching the gospel the message of the incomprehensible wisdom of the cross Paul calls it foolishness to the Greeks a stumbling block to the Jews but the foolishness of God is wiser than man and the weakness of God is stronger than men see the gospel would be a story of a rejected despised crucified king that God would use to draw people to himself that they might be reconciled to him and obtain citizenship in his kingdom and in the manifold wisdom of God he would include those not of the lineage of

Abraham Gentiles who heard and believed would receive all the benefits promised to God's people and in the manifold wisdom of God he would use a zealous pharisaical Jewish persecutor of the church to be the very one who would be the chief proclaimer of the plan of God and especially to proclaim it of all people to the Gentiles see there's no equivalency here in God's plane there is nothing but an abundance of unmerited grace of love emanating in our direction and in a world where everything is calculated by what do I gain or what will it cost me Jesus yields his hands to his feet to the executioner's nails an abundance an abundance of grace and love in God's plan his manifold multifaceted wisdom and Mary and his very different forms of wisdom that runs so contrary to our wisdom is on display now this is an important concept for us it's so important I feel that we understand that we are people of a product of

God's abundance that is that he is his was overflowing out of who he was in order that he might come to us not based upon what we have done not because we earned it not because of equivalence but solely out of his love and grace because Paul says that God is making known the manifold wisdom of God through the church in what way how does the church continue to make the manifold wisdom of God known but we've already considered how the manifold wisdom of God could be known in the cross in the resurrection preaching of the gospel calling of the Gentiles setting apart this very Jewish Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles all of which reveal the God's plan does not involve equivalency at any stage the condition of being equal or in value worth or function cannot be said in any aspect of God's plan and in this regard I say perhaps that I've already answered the question of how the church continues to make the wisdom of God known but I think there's something more to consider we do want to preserve and proclaim the gospel and all that it reveals but there is something more

God's wisdom is made known by the way his plan runs contrary to the law of equivalence that shapes so much of what human beings do and it's here it's here that we understanding abundance can act I'm going to take the liberty of reading several scriptures from the gospels and a little bit from the epistles I've had more I've pared them down because I know I just talk too much so I just want to read some of them but as I do I want us to be listening I want us to listen if and see if we can't hear the wisdom of God displayed or encouraged by walking in non equivalent living and so if you're a note taker you might just want to write these references down so you can revisit them later but listen to these verses again non equivalent Matthew 25 38 through 40 10 you have heard that it was said an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth equivalency but I say to you do not resist the one who is evil but if anyone slaps you on the right cheek turn to him and the other also and if anyone would sue you and take your tunic let him have your cloak as well and if anyone forces you to go one mile go with him two miles give to the one who begs from you do not refuse the one who would borrow from you 43 to 45

Matthew 5 you've heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor hate your enemy but I say to you love your enemies pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven that abundant father who is in heaven for he makes his son rise on the evil and on the good sends rain on the just and the unjust do you remember of course the famous parable of

the good Samaritan where the man's beaten up left for dead on the side of the road along comes a Samaritan and he gives out of his pocket and out of his time to help the man and at the end of that telling of that parable the man who asked Jesus to question Jesus asked him a question back which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers he said the one who showed him mercy and Jesus said you go and do likewise Matthew 20 14 to 15 this is the parable about how it is that a man hires people at the beginning of the day the middle of the day and the end of the day and they all get the same pay at the end of the day and people were complaining about it and the man in the parable says take what belongs to you and go I choose to give this last work or as I give to you am I not allowed to do what I choose what belongs to me and you begrudge me my generosity see there's two other guys they're operating on equivalence wait a minute wait a minute wait a minute I know I agreed to work for X amount of money for the day and you gave that same amount to a guy who didn't work as long as I did wait a minute this breaks the mold this works against the framework but God's generosity works that way his abundance works that way Jesus talks about it explicitly in Matthew 20 25 through 28 you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them and their great ones exercise authority over them it shall not be so among you but whoever would be great among you must be your servant whoever would be first among you must be your slave even as a son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many portrayed lived out in

[30 : 33] John chapter 13 when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and at the end of it he says you call me teacher and Lord and you are right for so I am if I then your Lord and teacher have washed your feet you also ought to wash one another's feet see they didn't expect the one who was Lord or master would be washed he'd be acting as a slave that's that's that's breaking the mold Jesus you don't you don't clothe yourself as a slave and wash my dirty feet you're my Lord you're my master but Jesus operates out of abundance he's the God incarnate the God of abundance in the flesh Paul writes Romans 12 bless those who persecute you bless and do not curse them rejoice with those who rejoice weep with those who weep live in harmony with one another do not be haughty but associate with the lowly never be wise in your own sight repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in sight of all if possible so far as depends on you live peaceably with all Paul is reflecting the kind of living the abundant living the abundance of love and grace and mercy kind of living that Jesus did Paul says that now applies to you and me this is how we need to live we need to be people that give that are generous that are abundant in our time and our material goods in our hearts in our emotions and lastly lastly I know I've been reading a lot but this we've heard this recently here do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit this is

Philippians 2 3 through 8 do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interest of others have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of man and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on the cross he was equal with God and yet that equivalency right that that's where he dwelt that was his reality that's who he was he was willing to put that aside in order that he might come and be obedient to the point of death death on a cross so that we might benefit from that abundance of love and grace and mercy and that was a lot of verses I know and my intention reciting them was to show how God calls us to live lives that are not based on equivalence lives that reflect his manifold wisdom is what he's looking for lives that run contrary to the wisdom of the world and the uniting of Gentiles and Jews in Christ is a visible demonstration of God's plan to unite all things and his grace his abundance of love has reconciled us to himself so with his help we can step into his plan of reconciling all things to himself of uniting all things by demonstrating in real time the manifold wisdom of God that manifold wisdom of God that reveals a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him things in heaven and things on earth God had a plan that he set up before the world was even formed and in the middle of that plan comes this revelation of a mystery that Jews and Gentiles are actually both covenant members of God's promises to Abraham and in so doing he he is beginning to show how it is that he's going to unite all things and what we find is that in such an act as that and many others that I tried to show

God's manifold wisdom the way he thinks the way he plans the way he goes about his work is so different than ours there's no equivalence here when it comes to salvation it's nothing but

abundance and it's out of that that we ourselves are meant to minister out of that same kind of abundance to the people on the street to the people that live next door to us to our unsaved neighbors our unsaved unsaved relatives we are to live a life of abundance of generosity towards them taking time to listen to them sitting down enjoying conversation with them if they need it out of our material possessions to help them that is God's way of fulfilling his plan to make his wisdom known in the world and he says he's doing it through the church that's you that's me let's pray gracious God we thank you for the abundance of mercy and grace showered upon us through the gift of Jesus and Lord we want to learn how to live like that we want to learn how to be the kind of people that you call us to be that is indeed to be those who know this God who is overflowing with grace and mercy and we ask God that we would keep in mind the necessity of that love and that mercy the necessity of the cross the necessity of the resurrection because that's true for us but it's also true for everybody else around us and that represents the cross resurrection all of these ways your abundance toward us and may we communicate both in word and indeed the God that we know who is abundant in mercy grace and love in Jesus name I pray God Jesus for all the same in the same way that we take his name in the same way