

Displaying God's Grace and Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Let me ask you to turn your Bible to Ephesians chapter 3. And this morning we'll be considering verses 7-11.

! And we saw how God revealed this mystery to his holy apostles and prophets, the Apostle Paul being one of them.

So why did God give this revelation of his plan to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body to his servants?

Did he do so so that the apostles and the prophets could feel special, that God let them in on a divine secret? Well, no, that's not the reason he did it.

God had far more in mind when he revealed this mystery to his servants. And we see that in the verses we have come to this morning.

[1 : 34] So please follow along as I read from Ephesians chapter 3, beginning in verse 7. But I will, for continuity, I want to start in verse 6.

We'll focus on 7 through 13, but let's, for continuity, start in verse 6. 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.

[3 : 14] So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. Let's pray together. Father, we bow our hearts this morning and we cry out to you that you would speak to us from the pages of Holy Scripture.

Lord, speak to us corporately, speak to us individually. Would you grant to us in this moment the focus of mind to hear from you?

God, I once again ask that you would grant me grace to serve these who are gathered here, these who I love, but who you love even more.

And so, Lord, speak now through your word, for your glory, we pray in Christ's name. Amen. In this passage, the Apostle Paul tells us that the way this amazing uniting of Jews and Gentiles into one body takes place is through the gospel.

And it's this gospel that God made him a preacher of. But that's not all that he says. As a matter of fact, that's not the main point of what he says.

[4 : 38] Paul's main point is that in the preaching of the gospel, God displays his amazing grace through mere men and his manifold wisdom to satanic powers.

And so, Paul is telling us that through the preaching of the gospel, God displays his amazing grace and he displays his manifold wisdom.

And so, let's consider how Paul makes these two claims beginning with the first claim, God's amazing grace. In verses 7 through 9, Paul tells us that in the preaching of the gospel, God displays his amazing grace through mere men.

And what we see is that he does this in two particular ways. first he does it through the messengers he chooses.

Paul tells us in verse 7 that he was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given to him by the working of God's power.

[5 : 59] And immediately we see from these words of Paul that being a minister of the gospel is not something a person takes unto himself. It's something that God initiates.

And we see that it's not natural gifts that qualifies a man to be a minister of the gospel. God must grace them and empower them to do so.

The apostle Paul had the best education of his day. We learn in Acts 22 verse 3 that Paul was educated at the feet of a man by the name of Gamaliel a member of the Sanhedrin council.

And if you want to see Paul's full resume you can look at it in Philippians chapter 3. He had impressive credentials but his credentials did not qualify him to be a minister of the gospel.

We see in verse 7 that he needed and was given the gift of God's grace to enable him and empower him to be a minister of the gospel.

[7 : 13] And notice how in verse 8 Paul is especially aware of his unworthiness. He's acutely aware that he is unworthy to preach the gospel.

He refers to himself as the very least of all the saints. And he marveled that God would call him as a minister and gift him to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

And no doubt what Paul has here in view is the fact that he persecuted the church. and he is considering himself unworthy because now he is preaching the gospel he tried to suppress to build the church that he sought to destroy.

But the truth is that every minister even those who don't have a checkered past like the apostle Paul if they're thinking rightly about the fact that the God of the universe has called them and gifted them as a minister to preach the gospel they should be humbled and they should not think more highly of themselves than they ought.

They should all be humbled before God and before those to whom he sent them to preach. I don't know who said it but the saying is true that the best of men at the end of the day are mere men.

[8 : 54] And that's who God chooses. God chooses and uses as his ministers to preach the gospel mere men.

And these mere men are called to do what is impossible to do in their own abilities and strengths. According to verses 8 and 9 the apostle Paul says they are called to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to bring to light the plan of the mystery which God hid in himself for ages.

This is a display of grace. Mere men call to this task that God must equip them for and gift them for.

something outside of themselves to proclaim the unsearchable mysteries of Christ. This term unsearchable mysteries of Christ speaks to the vastness of our salvation that is beyond human ability to fully explore and to fully understand it is unsearchable it is inexhaustible and it's only by the grace of God and the power of God that mere men can preach this message.

And I trust when we talk about preaching that we understand that in its basic and in its truest form it is preaching the gospel.

[10 : 30] It's not just loud and emotional speech. It is the proclamation of the unsearchable riches of Christ. His saving work in a time space world.

And he is called mere men to proclaim. But not only does God display his grace in the preaching of the gospel through the messengers that he uses, the second way is in the message itself.

In the message of the gospel itself, God displays his amazing grace. The message of the gospel is a gracious call to reconciliation.

It is a call to sinners to be reconciled to God and to one another. Paul is making the point that this reference to Jews and Gentiles is the primary point that he is making.

They were hostile towards each other, but in the gospel there is a call to all people because all people in their sinful state are separated from God and they are separated from one another within their racial and ethnic groups.

[11 : 56] Among unbelieving Jews, there are hostilities and divisions, and among unbelieving Gentiles and all their stripes and all their divisions, there are divisions and hostilities among them.

And just a brief awareness of human history will tell us that. As a matter of fact, we can look within our own nation, look among ourselves, and we can see all sorts of racial and ethnic and social divisions and hostilities between us.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes this reality in his letter to Titus, who is pastoring in the Gentile city of Crete, in Titus 3, verses 3 to 5.

He writes, for we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others, and hating one another.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

[13 : 25] Passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others, and hating one another. Brothers and sisters, this is true of all of us, all of us who come to Christ.

This is true of all people. Paul is not just capturing one segment of humanity, he is capturing all of humanity, that this is our natural fallen state.

We hate one another and we are hated by one another. And that doesn't change until the loving kindness of God appears to us in the gospel.

And so the gospel is a call to be reconciled to God and to be reconciled to one another and that's a display of God's grace. The grace of the gospel is also displayed by the fact that it is preached by the undeserving to the undeserving.

It's an invitation from the undeserving to the undeserving telling them to come and dine. to dine at the table of salvation where there's a menu that's available that is impossible to fully describe.

[14 : 37] It is unsearchable. The message is a call in the words of Isaiah to everyone who is thirsty to come to the waters and drink and to the one who has no money to buy and eat wine and milk without money and without price.

I've heard it said that sharing the gospel is one beggar telling another beggar where to find food. The proclamation of the gospel is a display of God's grace.

grace. But the grace of God is also displayed in the gospel through the question that the gospel poses. The message of the gospel challenges people to consider why they spend money for that which is not true food and why they labor for that which does not satisfy.

And they are called instead to come and eat true food and to delight in rich food which truly satisfied.

And so we see that God's amazing grace is on display in the preaching of the gospel by the mere men that he uses and in the message of the gospel itself, the unsearchable riches of Christ.

[16 : 07] Now God doesn't call everyone to preach the gospel in calling them to an office but all who belong to Christ have this responsibility to share the gospel with others as God gives them opportunity.

And in that sense we are all in God's service. In that sense we all can be a part of this amazing display of the grace of God of undeserving sinners who receive the gospel offering it to undeserving sinners who need the gospel who need to be reconciled to God and need to be reconciled to one another.

And may God help us all to be engaged in this amazing service. grace. For which an office is not required but the grace of God is.

And he gives us his grace not just for ourselves but that we might extend it to others. But in this passage not only do we see how God's amazing grace is on display through the preaching of the gospel but we also see how in the preaching of the gospel God's manifold wisdom is displayed to satanic powers which is my second and final point.

God's manifold wisdom. So how does God display his manifold wisdom to satanic powers through the preaching of the gospel?

[17 : 49] Well I think the first thing that needs to be seen is that in verse 10 Paul is referring to satanic powers. He's referring to spiritual beings who are in opposition to God and his people.

And he uses the terms the rulers and authorities to refer to these satanic powers. Now we know this because later on in Ephesians chapter 6 in verses 11 and 12 Paul writes these words.

Put on the whole arm of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Notice how Paul uses these same terms, rulers and authorities, in both passages in verse 10 that we're looking at in chapter 3 and also in verse 12 of chapter 6 which we will look at in about two months from now.

And he uses them in the exact same sequence as well. Rulers and authorities. And God's people wrestle against these rulers and authorities because they are in opposition to us.

[19 : 15] so satanic powers now see God's manifold wisdom because God revealed it through his holy apostles and prophets and it is preached through his ministers and it produced the church, God's new society of a new people, Jews and Gentiles, whom he reconciled to himself and also reconciled to one another through the death of Christ on the cross.

And in doing so, what God did was he unfolded his eternal purpose which he determined before the foundation of the world and brought to pass in the fullness of time in a time-space world.

And God's wisdom is seen in the fact that he even placed this plan in his word in the Old Testament. But satanic powers still didn't understand and still did not comprehend this plan that God had determined before the foundation of the world that he worked out in a time-space world and that he placed in the Old Testament and satanic powers didn't know it.

A reminder to us that they're not omniscient. Satanic powers are not omniscient. Satan doesn't know everything. His demons do not know everything. Only God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit know everything.

Now there's some people who have an unbiblical understanding of the creation of the heavens and the earth. They kind of think like this.

[21 : 01] They think that one day God decided that he was going to create the heavens and then Satan rebelled and he had a crisis and God had created the earth and then Satan enticed man to sin and then man sinned and then God had this big crisis on his hand and he said we have to do something and he decides to send Jesus as the great rescue plan.

That's not what the Bible teaches us. What the Bible teaches us is that God ordains all that comes to pass.

But he does it in such a way that he can never be charged with sin because it is impossible for God to sin. And I know this is sometimes a difficult truth to accept but the alternative is harder to accept.

The alternative is to believe in a world where things happen outside of God's sovereignty.

But God would not be God if anything happens outside of his sovereign ordination. salvation. Now there are two scriptures that I think will help us to grasp this because it is only as we see this we're going to see the manifold wisdom of God and how he worked it out in human history.

[22 : 35] The first is Ephesians 1 verses 7 through 10. We looked at this earlier when we commenced our sermon series in Ephesians but I think it's helpful for us to consider it again because it will help us to see God's manifold wisdom.

How he hid it and how he revealed it. Starting in verse 7 of chapter 1. 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 in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will.

Now interesting to follow Paul's thinking here is Paul at this particular point is speaking about us knowing God's will broadly.

He's not talking about the special revelation that he received. He talks about that later on. He goes on 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.

Notice that Paul is saying that the redemption of God through Christ was wrapped up in the mystery of his will which he has now made known through the death of Christ and it was according to his purpose to unite all things in heaven making it very clear that there was disruption in heaven and all things in earth which we also know in the history of the fall and Adam's sin.

[24 : 29] So Christ came to do this full reconciliation of all things. The rebellion in heaven, Satan's rebellion in heaven and man's rebellion in the earth. But this was God's plan before he created anything.

And before God created anything, all that existed was our triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The second scripture is Ephesians 3, 11, and Paul is referring to the unsearchable riches of Christ and God's manifold wisdom that is now on display to the church.

And this is what he says. This was according to the eternal purpose, back in the eternal past, that he has realized in Christ our Lord.

Eternal purpose now realized in Christ our Lord. Paul is pointing to the fact that, again, before God created anything, this is what his plan was.

His purpose was in the eternal past, he realized that in Christ, his life, and his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and now his rule.

[25 : 54] And it will all be finally conserved when Christ returns. He judges the world, and he ushers in a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. But again, please see the point.

He purposed all of this from eternity past, and the rulers and the authorities in heavenly places missed it.

Remember the account in Luke 24 with Jesus encountering the man on the road to Emmaus? That's what Luke writes about it in verse 25 to 27.

It says, Jesus said to them, O foolish ones, and slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

[27 : 07] Jesus did a tour from Genesis to Malachi and interpreted to these men on the road to Emmaus the things pertaining to himself.

And I imagine at this particular point, the rulers and the authorities were going, wow, we didn't know that, we didn't see that. It is absolutely fascinating through our enlightened eyes so that God has revealed to us to go through the pages of the Old Testament and see how God was working all this out.

But the powers, the rulers and the authorities, the satanic powers didn't know this. And so I imagine, you know that between Malachi and the New Testament was 400 years where there was no revelation from God, there was just utter silence.

And you can imagine that Satan is thinking with all the rebellion on the earth and even the people that God chose for himself who were worshipping idols and even the ones who had some semblance of following God were adding their own rules and laws and their lips were near to God but their hearts were far from him.

You can imagine the rejoicing of satanic powers over this state of affairs. 400 years and there's nothing from God.

[28 : 37] But then you begin to read the New Testament and God begins to speak. And curiously he comes to this old man Zachariah and he tells him he's going to answer a prayer that he and his wife had been praying for virtually all their married life.

He's going to give him a son. And he says this son is going to go before the Lord in the spirit of Elijah.

And interestingly when you go to the end of Malachi that's the last promise in the book of Malachi. And I think that's the point at which the satanic powers began to see this unfolding that would take place.

And Jesus is born and rest assured that Herod's trying to kill Jesus was motivated by Satan himself and then ultimately they crucify the Lord Jesus Christ.

But even all of that was yet working of God's plan. Listen to what Peter says on the day of Pentecost when the church is being birthed.

[29 : 59] This is what Peter writes in Acts chapter 2 verse 22. He says men of Israel hear these words Jesus of Nazareth a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst as you yourselves know.

This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up loosing him from the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. God's plan that he hid and his manifold wisdom and all of that is seen in the fact that the satanic powers did not understand what God was doing.

The mystery of God's will was hidden in plain sight. It's in the scriptures. Jesus opens the scriptures and he says here it is.

the Christ must suffer and yet to the satanic powers they couldn't see it. And why couldn't they see it? Look at what Paul says in verse 9.

[31 : 26] The reason they couldn't see it is because it was hidden in God. God's God's God's God's wisdom.

Now this not only shows God's manifold wisdom, it also shows again the manifold folly of Satan and his forces.

This was God's plan all along. Hidden in plain sight but now revealed in Jesus Christ. God's wisdom and that's how God's manifold wisdom is now seen through the church comprised of Jews and Gentiles who were formerly hostile to one another and now reconciled to God and each other and it's all a part of God's eternal plan which he hid in himself but made it plain in the sight of satanic powers and they couldn't see it.

This term manifold wisdom speaks about the many and varied aspects of God's wisdom. Some call it his multicolored wisdom.

God's wisdom is in all kinds of different directions. It's not just one tunneled way that we try to think about God. No, his wisdom is manifold. And the faithful preaching of the gospel and his message of reconciliation calling people to be reconciled to God and to one another is one of the ways he displays his manifold wisdom and it's seen among his people.

[33 : 11] Paul tells us also in verse 12 that part of the display of God's manifold wisdom is that formerly estranged people who were at hostility with God and with one another now have equal and confident access into the presence of God.

And think about the journey to this. Think about the journey to this. A gracious God created us. We rebelled against him and we deserved his wrath and his judgment.

And he reconciles us to himself. And he reconciles us one another and gives us all access into his presence. His manifold wisdom is seen in all of this and how he brought it about.

How he brought it into being. And we should never cease to marvel about this, brothers and sisters. We should never cease to marvel at the wisdom of God, the manifold wisdom of God shown in the church.

Not just in this church, but the churches from all around. That God's church is of every kindred and tongue and tribe and nation.

[34 : 29] And we all have equal access before this God with whom we were at odds.

Another aspect of God's manifold wisdom displayed through the church to satanic powers is seen in the willingness of his servants to suffer in the outworking of his eternal plan.

Paul tells the Ephesians that they should not lose heart over his sufferings. As he was preaching the gospel to them, he wrote this letter to them from prison and he says to them, it's all for your glory.

And this is what God calls his ministers to, this is what God's ministers commit to, and it is a display of his manifold wisdom to powers and principalities.

Remember how Satan accused Job before God? He says, Job only serves you because you give him things. If you bring suffering Job's way, Job will curse you to your face.

[35 : 44] And God's manifold wisdom is seen in this. Brother Shambi touched on it as he prayed that we would say in our suffering, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

And that's what we see the apostle Paul doing, enduring the sufferings for the gospel, for the sake of God's people.

God's And brothers and sisters, we should not read these words of the apostle Paul saying, don't lose heart over my suffering without realizing that in different ways and to different degrees, we're all called to suffer in our service to the Lord.

And we should gladly embrace that suffering in our service to the Lord.

This is the outworking of God's plan that he had hidden in himself for ages. God's plan and then he revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets and he commissioned messengers to go out and proclaim it.

[37 : 09] And the end result is the building of a church. And in that church, God is displaying his manifold wisdom in an ultimate sense.

it's on display to satanic powers, the rulers and the authorities. Brothers and sisters, this is a glorious, a glorious truth.

And I pray that even as we think of our own lives, we can appreciate the manifold wisdom of God that's working in our lives, that sometimes we don't see, sometimes we don't understand, but he is at work in multicolored wisdom.

But many times we can only see as we look back. As we see it retrospectively, we don't see it prospectively, we don't see it looking ahead. But this is our wise God, our multi manifold wise God.

And so we can entrust ourselves to him, the one who is building his church, the one who is working history out according to his eternal plan.

[38 : 31] I want to close by saying to us that we can rest assured that if God has purposed in himself this plan for his church, we can be assured that he's done that for us as well, for each one of us individually.

God is working out in a time space world his manifold wisdom, both in his church and in all of our lives. And so I do pray that all of us would be engaged in this ministry of sharing the good news, of the grace of God through the gospel, and then be part of putting his manifold wisdom on display, the satanic powers.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your manifold wisdom.

wisdom. We thank you for your amazing grace. Lord, you use mere men to proclaim the gospel, and you build unto yourself a people who proclaim to satanic powers how wise you are, that you hid your wisdom in yourself, a plan that you had all along, not a reactive plan, but a proactive plan.

And as you work it out, oh Lord, may we all continue to rejoice in our manifoldly wise God. We ask these things now in Jesus' name.

[40 : 20] Amen. Let's sign for closing song.