

# Ephesians 3:1-13

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, this is an encouraging time in the life of our church.!

I pray in these quiet moments that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts might be acceptable in your sin, O Lord, our rock and our region. Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, chained to a wall.

If you were falsely accused of a crime and you were locked up awaiting trial, what letters would you send? Would you send letters to your attorney trying to strategize your defense?

A letter to your spouse telling them you love them? A letter to your friends and extended family assuring them that you were wrongfully accused? Would you write your boss and say, I'll be back to work soon, I promise?

I bet I'd send all those letters. But would you send a letter to a church that you visited a couple years back and tell them, I ask you not to lose heart over my false imprisonment?

[ 1 : 41 ] Not at the top of your list? Not at the top of my list either, but that's what Paul says in this passage, the last verse of this passage. That's what he says. And so, I think the question to ask is, how did he get to the point where he could say that in the midst of his situation?

Because I feel like we can figure that out. We can figure out a lot of other things in our lives. Stresses, insecurities, losses, and the like. We can approach them with a very different mindset than we normally do.

So, how did Paul come to that point? Let's take a look. Verse 1. For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ, for Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles.

Now, it's interesting. He starts with, for this reason. Well, for what reason? He's referencing now what we've been talking about the last few weeks. The power of God that raised Christ from the dead at the end of chapter 1.

That is at work in us, having raised us from the dead in the first half of chapter 2, and reconciled people who were apart from each other around Christ in the second half of chapter 2.

[ 2 : 50 ] That's what he's saying for this reason. But then, he does something interesting. He cuts himself off.

If you look at the end of verse 1, most translations have like a dash, or something like that. Where he seems to have a break in his thought. He says, for this reason. Then he breaks off, and he doesn't pick that up again.

Here's verse 14. Where he says, again, for this reason. So, this entire passage today, he's interrupting himself. He's interjecting something.

What is that? What is he waiting for? Verse 2. Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you. Paul basically stops here and says, first things first. He wants to make sure that all of what we've just talked about in these preceding chapters, that all of that has set in our hearts before he moves into his ministry.

[ 3 : 53 ] He has to make sure that we understand the stewardship of God's grace that was entrusted to him. So, God's grace, the gospel of God's love for the world. Is Paul right to assume that we know that message?

That we call it to mind? That it influences our lives each day? I mean, each of you can examine your heart and know the answer to those questions.

But I think it asks another question. Are we right to assume that other people know the grace that was entrusted to him?

His message. Or do they think they know? I think so often what people react to when they say, the church isn't for me, Christianity isn't for me, is a completely false notion of what the church is, about what Christianity is, about what the message of Christ actually is.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone? And they're just, they're like, oh, I hate those Christian bigots and blah, blah, blah. Like that. Things that have nothing to do with the message of Christ.

[ 5 : 06 ] How sad is it that people reject the gospel? And they reject God because they think he's a monster when the Bible shows us a loving father.

That's why the theologian A.W. Tozer wrote, what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. If I think God is distant and uncaring, then I'm not going to, it's not going to even occur to me to seek out a relationship with him.

If I think God is a monster, I won't, I can't love him. So when we have conversations, let's say along with Paul, first things first.

When we talk with other Christians, let's remember first that we're both alive in Christ, adopted into his family, and we will reign with him. Let's talk under the shade of that tree.

Let that influence our fellowship time before church and our phone calls during the week when we sit down for coffee. And when we talk with those outside of Christ, let's get first things first to two.

[ 6 : 19 ] Let's not assume that they really know who God is. Let's not assume that they understand what Christianity is all about. Most of the world thinks Christianity is following the same set of rules that of all the other world religions with a couple different symbols on it.

And we know that the grace of God that distinguishes the Christian religion from all others is so unique. And it is so lacking in how the world views the church.

When you invite someone to church and they decline, ask them why they're not interested. My guess is they probably won't say, I don't like the message that Jesus died in my place to break death on my behalf and adopt me into his family and prepare me for it.

My guess is that's not their reason for not coming. Who wouldn't be drawn to that message? Who says no to that? If someone's repelled away from God, it's because they haven't been shown an accurate picture of God.

So let's get first things first. Paul continues in verse 3 saying, How the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

[ 7 : 38 ] 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.

something mysterious about God's plan, which in Jesus has now been revealed, the topic of Paul's discussion now.

So what does he mean when he says now revealed? Before we get to the mystery itself, what does he mean now revealed? Well, this is probably written during Paul's Roman captivity, and so that probably anywhere between 60 and 62 AD is when we're looking here.

And so when he says now, he's thinking first century. He's thinking right in respect to the risen Christ. He's saying now in Christ, not now, today, 2015. He's saying in Christ, it's revealed.

[ 8 : 51 ] So, what kind of mystery, though, is he talking about? We don't have some hidden religion. We don't have one of the mystery religions where you get progressive understanding of what the teaching is, the ancient mystery religions of Osiris and et cetera.

No, this is a mystery that's revealed publicly, very openly. It's something that was hidden, but is now very, very open to the world. And because it's proclaimed, because it's for the whole world, it must be proclaimed to the whole world.

That's Paul's point here. God wants to reconcile people from every tongue, tribe, and nation to himself. He wants you, and me, and your friends, and your co-workers, and your family.

He wants everyone for himself. And he wants to reveal in us, as we'll see today, the unsearchable riches of Jesus.

And further, next week, as we'll see, he wants to show to us a love that surpasses knowledge. So is this really a mystery?

[ 10 : 04 ] That God's love is for the whole world? I mean, at first it doesn't seem that way, because from the very beginning of God's plan, even all the way back to Abraham, when he institutes the nation of Israel, he says, I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name

great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And that theme actually runs through the entire Old Testament.

God would draw the nations to himself. The whole world would seek out God at his temple. That he would be glorified everywhere and from all races.

So, that God would offer reconciliation to people outside of Israel didn't really surprise us. What is surprising, what is the mystery that is now revealed in Christ is the way he did it.

See, he didn't just allow outsiders into Israel. He didn't allow them just to participate in the food and cleanliness laws of the Old Testament.

[11:15] He gave them something greater. He gave them the holiness those laws pointed to. He didn't allow them entrance into the temple they were once excluded from.

He gave them something greater. He built them, along with believing Jews, into his dwelling place. That's what we'll see in Ephesians. He didn't allow them to participate in the sacrifices year after year.

He gave them something greater. He came to the world that he created and sacrificed his own life. An enduring sacrifice on their behalf.

They didn't get invited into the religion of Israel. They were gathered into the fullness of what Israel's religion pointed to. So the surprise of the mystery wasn't just that the rest of the world would be brought to God.

It was how they were brought to him. Through Jesus. Paul continues in verse 8 saying, We see in these three verses that Paul has three components to his mission.

[12:48] And so ours will too as we follow him. First, in verse 8, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Second, in verse 9, to bring to light God's plan of salvation to everyone.

And third, verse 10, so that God might be glorified everywhere because of the church. So his first point, to me, though, in the very least of the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

What are the unsearchable riches of Christ? Well, in fact, Paul has been explaining that to us all along since the verse 1 of chapter 1 in Ephesians.

If you look back, here are just a few highlights. In chapter 1, we see in verse 3, we see the riches of his generosity when he blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

In verse 4, we see the riches of his mercy when he chose us that we would be holy and blameless before him. In verse 5, we see the riches of his love when he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.

[13:59] Verse 7, we see the riches of his mercy when he gave us forgiveness of our trespasses. In verse 11, we see the riches of his generosity where in him we have obtained an inheritance.

In verse 13, we see the riches of his love as we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Verse 14, so that we have a guarantee of our inheritance. We can go on and on and on.

We see through chapters 1, 2, and now 3, we see the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. And this is just a taste of still more riches to come in the inheritance that God will give us on the last day.

The blessing that Paul has words for, he's written down for us in chapters 1, 2, and 3. But the riches of Christ are unsearchable.

they go on forever just as he goes on forever and he gladly gives them to those who love. Is it any wonder then that Paul will conclude this chapter next week?

[15:11] Verses 20 to 21, saying, now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask to think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, forever and ever.

The appropriate response to the unsearchable riches of Christ is worship. The renowned Puritan pastor Thomas Brooks wrote an entire book on verse 8 here, and it's appropriately titled The Unsearchable Riches of Christ.

In it, he actually tries to search out those unsearchable riches. I didn't read the entire book this week, but I did read a lot of it, and I really was blessed by it. And he breaks Christ's blessings into ten major categories.

First, he gives us light, and we're going to talk about that shortly in verse 9. He grants us hearts that are able to turn away from ourselves and towards him. He gives us his spirit.

He gives us his blood, which he says, one little drop of which is more precious than heaven and earth combined. Christ gives us pardon of sin, gives us precious promises.

[16:32] The Lord gives us peace. He gives us grace. He gives us glory. Burke spends a lot of time on glory. He says, when he seats us with Christ, God gives us a real, soul-filling, incomparable, unmovable, well-suited, never-fading glory.

And ten, he gives last, best, and most spectacularly, himself. That's what we see in verse 12. We have bold, direct access to God. Why is it such a big deal that he gives us himself? At one time or another, we've all come to a point, at least for a moment, that the allure of this world, wealth, security, power, prestige, the toys of this world, all the things this world promise us, dim. And a relationship has been our hearts is. Now, that could be a friendship, we wish we're closer, it could be a romance, it could be a child in whom our heart is wrapped. we all know what it is to long for a person more than anything else. Either a relationship that we do have, or one that we wish we had.

[18:01] If that's true for other people, how much more true is that of one? The one who made all the people.

what about the person who made all the people you've ever yearned for, that we've ever yearned for? Wouldn't that be a relationship worth more than all others?

And that's what Brooks is getting at when he lists the tenth and greatest aspect of the unsearchable riches of Christ as God gave us himself. Jesus himself is not only the one who gives blessings, but is the greatest blessing.

Life with him is what offers us infinite joy. And so I plead with you, don't be satisfied with anything other than the one who made you for himself.

The one who loved you while you were running away from him. The one who died for you and broke death on your heart. Don't be satisfied anywhere else with anything other than the unsearchable riches of Christ in whom the universe, a mighty expanse to us, but a speck of dust to him, holds together.

[19:19] That's what we read earlier today in Psalm 48. As your name, O God, so your praises reach to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness.

This is both the message we preach to the world. That's the message we preach to ourselves. We tell our friends, family, co-workers, that there are unsearchable riches in Jesus Christ, so that they might turn from themselves, run to Jesus, and find life in him.

We tell ourselves that there are unsearchable riches in Christ, so we remember to pursue him. so we remember not to be pleased, finally, with riches that this world finds in work and sex and ambition.

We invest ourselves in joy that being yours. Paul continues in verse 9 saying, to bring to life for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

this is the second of Paul's pieces to his mission, and he says, if the mystery is about the whole world, it must be preached to the whole world.

[20:43] Now, this seems almost redundant to us, but there's a shift in his language. He's moved from saying, to preach, in verse 8. And now he says, to bring to light, in verse 9.

some translations will say, to make all see, or to enlighten. Is that important? I think it is.

Paul's not interested only with accurately conveying the information of the Bible, the information about the gospel. He's concerned with bringing to light, as he says, the beauty of the gospel.

Let me give you an example. We can recite the truths of the apostles' creed with a dead spirit that gets the information right, but doesn't have the light of the gospel in it, or we can do it with joy.

Here we go. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, or an imaginary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

[21:56] Or, the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From there, he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Which of those brings to light God's plan? Which of those captures your heart? Which of those shows your heart has been captured?

What are the results of that? Bringing to light the glory of the gospel. What happens when the gospel is preached and the beauty of God is brought to light in the hearts of men?

Verse 10. So that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

[ 23 : 00 ] Paul here is going to answer two important questions. What is the church? And what is the church for? What is the church? Is it a civic organization?

Is it a counseling center? Is it a social club? What is it for? For? Correspondingly, is it for changing the world?

Is it for ministering to its members? Is it a great place to hang out? Now, we want to affirm all those good, the good that's found in those things.

The church is, in a way, a civic organization that transforms the world. It is, in a way, a counseling center that ministers to its members. It is, in a way, a social club that is a great place to hang out. We enjoy fellowship together, you and I. But all those things, they function to serve something else, something greater. What is the church, verse 10?

[ 24 : 00 ] It is a worship factory. And what is it for? It exists, it exists to express God's glory. In his great love, he has made his enemies his family.

In his great power, he has made spiritually dead, you and me alive, so that we might live to Christ. In his great love, he has made people from every tongue, sports team, tribe, industry, nation, political affiliation, one body.

Why? What is the purpose of that? Verse 10, so that, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known.

If we're going to faithfully preach the gospel, verse 8, and bring to light just how beautiful it is, verse 9, the church is a living example to the world, and to the spiritual realm that God is.

God. The church exists to proclaim his glory, to extol his name, to praise his majesty, and that has huge impacts for how we live as the church.

[ 25 : 16 ] When I think that Christianity is really just about me and Jesus, before I decide I don't need to invest in the church, I need to ask myself, what should I do towards the church, to best communicate the manifold wisdom of God?

When I come to church and I prefer a different style of music, before I decide to send that angry email, or to check out the church down the street, I need to ask myself, what should I do here in the church that best communicates the manifold wisdom of God?

When I know that guy, or that girl, is going to be at church again, before I decide to skip out on church, or find a seat as far away as possible, I need to ask myself, what should I do here that best communicates the manifold wisdom of God?

When I'm frustrated with people at church, when I'm tempted with a shiny new gadget that would prevent me from investing in church, when I'm feeling down and don't want to leave my house, when I'm sinned against, when I see a need in the church, all these things, before I make a decision based on my preferences, and what I'm doing, I need to ask myself, what should I do here in the church that best communicates the manifold wisdom of God?

Because the church isn't primarily about me, it's not primarily about you and our preferences. us. It's about magnifying God. It's not about our ministry, it's not about our growth, first, either spiritual or numerically, it's not ultimately about us, it's about him.

[ 27 : 09 ] How important is the church to Jesus? He died for the church, he's the head of the church, as we saw in chapter 1, verse 22, and the church is his body, verse 23.

When we look at Ephesians 5, we'll see that Jesus thinks of the church as his bride. So how important is the church to Jesus? Deathly serious.

So serious it's like his body, so serious it's like his bride. Think of that the next time you're tempted to downplay the importance of the church, by our words, by our actions, or by not thinking.

one writer put it this way about this passage, he says, how can we take lightly what God takes so seriously? How dare we push to the outside what God has placed in the middle?

You know, we will seek to become responsible church members active in some local part of the universal church. If, like Paul, we keep before us the vision of God's new society as his family, his dwelling place, and his instrument in the world, then we will constantly be seeking to make our church's worship more authentic, its fellowship more caring, and its outreach more compassionate.

[ 28 : 32 ] In other words, just like Paul again, we'll be ready to pray, to work, and if necessary, to suffer in order to turn the vision into reality.

And I think that's the link, finally, between Paul's message and being able to say, don't lose heart over being chained to a wall.

Verse 11, he says, 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.

Paul returns to the highest riches, the riches that are found in Christ, the highest of those is Christ himself. And we can boldly access that throne of grace.

God has made himself available to us. So we don't serve God chiefly so we get the right rule. We don't serve him chiefly so that we have smooth lives.

[ 29 : 40 ] Paul's being chained to a wall is proof of that. We don't serve God chiefly so that people will think well of us, but we'll think well of ourselves. We serve God chiefly because we love him and love having access to him.

And so how does that change our lives? It changes our perspective on absolutely ever. Paul wrote this letter in prison that said, don't lose heart over what I'm suffering.

Why? Thomas Brooks helps us one more time. Now when our hearts are focused on the soul ennobling, soul greatening, soul raising, and soul cheering love of Jesus, a Christian tramples the world under his feet.

And now heavy afflictions are light, and long afflictions short, and bitter afflictions sweet. And that's why Paul can say in verse 13 that his suffering in prison wasn't something to lose heart over.

Why? He had something greater than his freedom. He knew the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. will you pray with me?

[ 31 : 07 ] Lord, we are so blessed to be your people. Father, I pray that like Paul, in heavy afflictions, in long afflictions, in bitter afflictions, we would have our eyes set on the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ.

And that would shape the way we walk down the street each day. And Father, we pray that each day we would remember that you have chosen to make your glory known first in the church. church. We orient our lives accordingly. That we would invest our time and our passions and our energies to that end.

So that you might be made famous in the way that you designed it. Lord, we thank you that you have been a church in us. We're all to many people.

Pray, Father, that we would value it as you do, to the glory of your name. Pray these things in Christ's name and for his sake. Amen. Amen.