

# Ephesians 3:1-13

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[0:00] Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, according to the riches of your glory, may you grant us to have strength! to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth! and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we may all be filled with all! the fullness of the fullness of the love of Christ.

In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. You can take a seat. Thank you, Jordan, for that introduction. I'm Chris the wino.

I'm already planning my next kid's talk and how I can get back to him. Be helpful if you had your Bible open in front of you to page 977 again. That's Ephesians chapter 3.

You may notice every paragraph of Ephesians begins with a word like, for this reason, or therefore, which always points back to the passage that came right before it. Ours does the same.

Ephesians builds on itself. So to understand our text, we need to look back at the previous texts.

We'll do a bit of that this morning. The Christian faith asserts that God is at work in the world.

[1:25] Christianity tells us that God has a plan. And that plan is being realized today. And I wonder, if you're honest, do you believe that?

Because it's really easy to look at your newsfeed, to read the paper, to look out at the world, and to question, what is God up to? To ask, why, Lord?

Why do you allow such suffering and such evil to seemingly dominate? The title of our series, you may have noticed, is God's Good Plan and God's New Humanity.

Ephesians tells us that God has a plan. There is an order, a purpose, a trajectory for the world. And this morning, we're invited into that plan.

So what is God's plan? It's right at the very beginning of Ephesians. If you look at chapter 1, verse 2, Paul writes to his audience, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2:41] Did you catch the plan? Grace and peace. Peace by grace. God's plan is to bring about peace.

A peace that's completely undeserved, by the way. A peace that comes to us by grace. It is a gift of God. Ephesians 2 tells us that God has made peace in two directions.

First, he offers peace between humanity and God. It says that we who are dead in sin have now been made alive in Christ.

We who are far from God have now been brought near by the blood of Christ. And then Paul tells us in the second half of Ephesians 2 that Jesus has also made peace between people.

So peace with God and peace with one another. Peace that comes through grace. That is God's good plan. And now in Ephesians 3, Paul shows us how God's plan has unfolded in his own life.

[3:54] Paul's own story helps us to see what the gospel is and how we are now invited to participate in God's plan.

Ephesians 3 shows us the trajectory of God's grace. It shows us that first, the gospel is given to us by God. It is not discovered or invented by man.

Once the gospel is given by God and received, then it's shared. And lastly, once the gospel is given and shared, it is now displayed for all to see. So the gospel is given.

The gospel is shared. The gospel is displayed. And in this movement from heaven to earth to the ends of the earth and back to heaven, we see God's great plan to unite all things.

And we will also discover the church's great purpose. So first, look at how the gospel is given. This is in verses 1 to 5. The Christian faith speaks of God giving good news and extending grace to people who don't deserve it.

[5:01] The Christian faith is not the story of godly people pleasing God through their own goodness and effort. It's about peace through grace.

It's about God saving sinners. Look at verse 2 of Ephesians 3. Paul writes, God's grace was given to me for you.

And then in verse 3, The mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. Paul didn't invent the Christian faith. The gospel message was given to Paul, revealed to Paul, by God, all by grace.

Now we know a bit about Paul. We know that he was an expert in the Hebrew scriptures. Paul thought he knew the God of Israel. But Paul did not understand who Jesus is and what God is doing through him until God revealed it to Paul.

Paul wasn't alone in receiving this special revelation. God revealed this mystery by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets as well. And Paul tells us in verse 6 what God revealed.

[6:13] Look together. The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Back in chapter 1, Paul told us that God's eternal purpose is to unite all things in Christ. Things in heaven and things on the earth. And now in chapter 3, he tells us what that plan looks like on the ground.

Jews and Gentiles, people who were separated from one another, are now being brought together into one body, one people, one new humanity in Christ.

God is bringing peace through grace. The dividing walls of hostility have been broken down by Christ.

The Jerusalem temple that doesn't exist anymore but 2,000 years ago dominated the Jerusalem skyline. Had concentric courts. And you got holier the closer you went to the middle.

[7:15] The very middle was the Holy of Holies. This is the sacred room where God's presence was, where God dwelt with his people. And the courts went out and out and out. And the outermost court was called the court of Gentiles.

And at the end of the court of Gentiles, there were steps to a wall. An archaeologist recently discovered a plaque on the bottom of these steps. And what it said is, any Gentile who takes a step past this sign has only themselves to blame for their immediate death.

And then there's a wall, a wall of division, a wall of hostility. So Jews and Gentiles separated. Gentiles prevented from coming into the presence of God.

So imagine when Paul writes in Ephesians 2 verse 14, he says, Christ himself is our peace. And he's made us Jews and Gentiles, both one.

And he's broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. So making peace. It's amazing. Peace with God.

[8:23] Peace with one another. Grace by peace. Once the gospel is given by God, next the gospel is shared. This is in verses 7 to 9.

Paul writes, Of this gospel I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me by the working of his power. To me, though, I'm 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. Why does God give the gospel to Paul? He calls himself the least of the saints. He wasn't worthy of it. So why does God choose Paul? The answer is in verse 7.

To make Paul a minister. The word here literally is servant, deacon. This grace, this gospel, is given to Paul to change Paul's allegiance.

[9:27] Paul has a new master now. His Lord is now Jesus. He is now a servant of Jesus. And then, in verse 8, See, the gospel is not some top secret classified information that only super Christians and people like the great Saint Paul are given and are supposed to keep to themselves.

God reveals the gospel to Paul so that he might share it, and specifically so that he might share it with Gentiles. This is astounding, because Paul was a devout Jewish man.

He was a Pharisee, deeply committed to Israel's scriptures and God's covenant people. And God, in his infinite wisdom, takes this man, this kind of poster boy of Judaism, and makes him the apostle to the Gentiles.

The man who once persecuted Christians is now imprisoned on behalf of Gentiles. Paul's been given a new purpose, and it's to share the good news of the gospel to the Gentiles, to share the

mystery that God himself has revealed to him in Christ.

The gospel is so precious to Paul. It is so much more valuable than anything else that Paul is willing to suffer to share it, to tell people the unsearchable riches of Christ.

[11:11] Notice how Paul describes himself at the beginning of chapter 3, verse 1. He says, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles.

And at the end of our passage, verse 13, he returns to his suffering, writing, So I ask you not to lose heart over what I'm suffering for you, which is your glory. Paul is in prison for sharing the gospel. The message that God has given him, the message that he's been commissioned to share, has come at an unbelievable personal cost. And yet Paul does not see his imprisonment as evidence that God's plan has gone wrong.

He sees it in the light of what God is accomplishing through his ministry. The Gentiles, who were once far off, are now fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of God's promise in Christ. And Paul is suffering for their sake. But he wants them to understand that the glory of what they have received, the glory of what Christ is doing in them, far outweighs the suffering that he is enduring.

[12:25] The unsearchable riches of Christ, the power and preciousness of the gospel, make Paul's physical suffering and imprisonment seem to him light and momentary in comparison.

To bring the gospel that has the power to birth a new humanity in Christ, to bring peace through grace to the world, is incomparably, unsearchably precious to Paul.

And it is worth his life to share. God's great plan is not always going to look impressive or successful by the world's standards. But look at what God is doing through this gospel.

Starting with the apostles, generation after generation, Christians have received the gospel and shared it, often at great personal cost, in order to bring the light of God's good plan to unite all things in Christ.

So first, the gospel is given by God. Then the gospel is shared. And lastly, the gospel is displayed.

[13:34] This is where Paul really takes off. So seatbelts on. Look at 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.

Here we receive the great purpose of the church. Here is the pinnacle of God's good plan. The church, the community of Jesus, is to be the place where God's great plan is made visible to all. The church is to be the tangible display of the gospel's truth and power. The place where peace through grace is known and experienced and seen.

This is the place where peace with God and peace amongst people is to be enjoyed. People should walk into church, walk into a gathering of Christians and see something completely different from what they see everywhere else.

They should see people from every background together as one. Former enemies now become family, displaying Christ and his gospel.

[14:55] I remember when I was in university, there was a house party, because I'm a real wino. There was a house party with our university group at the church. And so we had this huge gathering at someone's house.

Their parents were out of town. And before you jump to the conclusion what you think this party was, it was a group of people from church enjoying one another and just having fellowship and fun together.

And we invited non-Christian friends to come into the community and to show up. And they think, house party, university, we know what this is going to be. And they show up and they're struck that, one, no alcohol.

But two, they see a community of people utterly different from one another who clearly love each other, love being together, whose love and fellowship is infectious.

I remember one of my sister's friends said to her the next day, she said, that was the best party I've ever been to in my life. There's no alcohol. There was nothing inappropriate.

[16:03] It was so wholesome. And yet I saw in this community something I have never experienced before. That's what we're talking about. Look again at verse 10.

Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. If you can imagine, imagine before the throne of God in heaven.

Before all rulers and authorities, God holds up his church and he points at it and he says, here, look at what my grace has done. Look at what Christ has accomplished.

Look at Jews and Gentiles who are once divided, now reconciled and made one in Christ. Here is the display of my gospel's power. Here is the display of my wisdom.

Here is the display of my son's victory and his sacrifice and his glory. Verse 10 tells us, God holds the church up before rulers and authorities in the heavenly places to show the wisdom of his great plan to unite all things in Christ.

[17:13] It is astoundingly lofty. And I will excuse you if you are thinking right now, really?

The church? The visible manifestation of God's plan? Grace made visible here? We're not that impressive.

People point at the church and they scoff. Many people ignore the church exists. People criticize the church, demean the church, demonize the church, and unfortunately, sometimes for good reason.

Churches have made mistakes. Some churches and church leaders have failed to live into the calling of Ephesians 3. They've severed themselves from Christ and his gospel.

They've wandered away. Some churches have committed unthinkable evil in God's name. This week in Canada, we observed the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation as we remember the evils perpetrated by our government and by some churches against indigenous communities and their children.

[18:27] So how can we say that the church is displaying the wisdom of God? Well, the church doesn't display God's wisdom by pretending that our failures never happened or by defending the indefensible.

We display the gospel when we tell the truth, repent of our sins, seek reconciliation, and constantly point people not to ourselves but to God, showing that we depend on the grace of Christ to make us more faithfully reflect him.

And despite all human sinfulness, and there's a lot in this room, this remains our calling. We can only embody the gospel in our church if we first receive the gospel, repent of our sin, seek to live in love and charity with God and our neighbors, and are constantly dependent on the grace of God and the work of his spirit as we abide in Christ.

The church, we are told, is the visible sign that God's plan is working. Not because we're impressive or because we've always been faithful, but because Christ is at work in this place, gathering people who were once divided and making them one body, bringing peace through grace.

God has a plan. It's bigger than any of us can see. The gospel is given by grace to each of us, and then it's shared with the world.

[20:03] And through the church, God is making his wisdom known. On earth, yes, but even in the heavenly places. So when we look out at the world and we wonder, what is God doing?

Well, look at what he has done in Christ. Look at the people he has brought near. Look at the new humanity that he is creating.

God is at work. His plan is being realized in Christ. And by his grace, we are a part of it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.