

Mystery Revealed II

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[0 : 01] Well, we're looking at Ephesians 3, 7-13. We're continuing our series on this marvelous book. And this passage that I'm looking at is a continuation of Jim Saladin's sermon from last week.

It's part two, as you see in the sermon title that's before you. That's because the two sections that we're looking at are so closely related to each other.

Last week we talked about the mystery revealed. The secret of God's saving plan was revealed to Paul. And the content of that mystery is in verse 6.

The Gentiles are fellow heirs and members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. So you see the gospel, it is revealed to Paul, is something that is so powerful that it makes one body of believers out of that which was fractured and broken.

And it brings growth and a new creation that God is bringing to heaven. And this has extraordinary relevance to us today. Because we live in a time in the history of the church when we read about divisions and brokenness every day.

[1 : 20] And so years from now in church history textbooks, I think that we will have more than our fair share of chapters. And a lot of those chapters will have to do with realignment and upheaval in the church.

But it's very clear that all of the trouble that we experience that has to do with that division is rooted in the rejection of the authority of Jesus and the authority of God's word.

That is something that has developed over the past 150 years. And seminaries and many of the leaders of mainline churches as a result have held doggedly to this thinking.

And this has led the church to make decisions that actually reject Jesus and his transforming gospel. And that gospel is what creates the church.

And therefore when it is rejected or reinterpreted, the church fractures and it begins to crumble. And we do see evidence of this today. That is why this passage from Ephesians is something that we should be very thankful for.

[2 : 28] Because it reminds us that Jesus is not only Lord of the church. He is Lord of all things. Ephesians 1.10 tells us that history is moving towards this great event.

When God will unite all things in Jesus. Things in heaven and things in earth. When we see the divisions in the church. It is right for us to be saddened and angry at the rejection of the gospel.

But at the same time that we witness the destruction of unbelief. Ephesians is very clear that through the preaching and teaching and the receiving of the gospel by people.

God's saving plan is unfolding in the church. Even now as we experience these fractures.

And our Anglican experience reflects this. In our time of Anglican division. We see this week a very powerful conference. A Gafcon. This conference in Jerusalem.

- [3 : 32] Where David Short and others are there. There's a thousand representatives of an extraordinary and powerful work of the gospel. Of God bringing many people throughout the world into the body of Christ.
- It is an extraordinary and explosive growth. New creation that we see happening. And if we were to come closer to home. We heard a report at church committee from the leadership of St. John's Richmond.
- And I wish all of you were there. It was tremendously encouraging to hear what God has been doing in the life of that church over the past year and a half. Every day that church is being strengthened in the work of the gospel.
- It was very exciting to hear all the different ways these people are seeing God work. And the way that ministries are growing. And that people are being changed as well.
- There is a health in that church. And there is a direction forward that is very, very exciting for them. And in our own church you don't have to go very far to see this creative work of God through his gospel.
- [4 : 44] Andrew talked about it last week when he was talking about stewardship. About how ministries are flourishing and growing at St. John's. And there are many things outside St. John's that we are about as well.
- The interest in the mission of the church overseas and in Vancouver is growing substantially in this church. We have a renewed interest at St. John's and the work of the gospel and how our church can take its place in being a light to the world.
- There are many unseen things happening in this church as well. People who are caring for one another in the name of the Lord Jesus. People who are finding their lives transformed inwardly and therefore outwardly in their relationships as well.
- Many, many testimonies are really represented here in this congregation and the other congregations of St. John's. And so this is something that we must be aware of.
- This is what Ephesians 3, 7-13 is telling us. That the gospel is actually unfolding in the church. And so I want to look at Ephesians 3, 7-13 because Paul encourages us.
- [6 : 02] The point of what he's telling us is that he wants us to have a renewed confidence in the gospel. A renewed confidence in God's work in this church throughout the world and in St. John's as well.
- And interestingly, Paul begins with his own life. He says in verse 7, Of this gospel, I was made a minister. I was made a servant according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me by the working of his power.
- And Paul is going to talk about the power and the riches of the gospel in the next verse. He sees he's amazed by God's grace and power.
- And in verse 8 he says, To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, the grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus.
- And literally he's saying, I was the least of the least. I was less than the least of all saints. And Paul isn't trying to be modest here.
- [7 : 06] He is sincere. He is telling it like it is. He is the one, as you know, who rejected Jesus, who attacked the church. He lived to tear it down.
- He approved of Stephen's execution, threw Christians into jail, threw the church into chaos, and threatened them with murder. And that's why he said about himself in Corinthians, I am the least of the apostles.
- I'm not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. That's what Paul is thinking about in verse 8. But God's powerful work completely turns Paul's life upside down.

So that Paul used to physically tear down the church, God is now creating the church through him and through his ministry. Paul says, God's given me grace to preach, literally proclaim good news, the unsearchable riches in Christ.

You know, what a transformation. Paul used to blaspheme Christ and despise Gentiles. Now he proclaims the riches of Christ, that it will take us an eternity to explore.

[8 : 20] There is this great power. Real lives are transformed. And that's the power of the gospel. That's what God does in the life of the church.

And you see it magnificently displayed in Paul's life. Well, there's power. And now the value of the gospel, Paul says, is too wonderful to wrap our minds around.

He says, unsearchable riches of Jesus. And you know, he's been trying to describe that in the last two chapters, chapters 1 and 2. And it's good for us to remind ourselves, what is in our spiritual bank account?

What are those riches that are ours in Christ Jesus? Well, we have heard that you were dead, and God raised you with Christ. You have peace with God.

You are reconciled to Him. You are chosen to be a child of God. It is a plan from before the beginning of time. God has never forgotten us, as Jim said.

[9 : 18] You are redeemed by the blood of Jesus, set free by that death on the cross. You have the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of Jesus, Paul said.

You are incorporated with Jewish believers into a new society. It means you're members of His kingdom and His family. You have the end of hostility and the beginning of peace in your relationships with God and with one another.

And finally, and we're going to hear about this more in this little passage, you have access to the Father through Jesus Christ and by His Spirit. Well, that's the lavish grace that Paul has experienced in his own life.

And he's saying, this is the gospel that I'm preaching to you and to the world. When Paul speaks about Jesus to the Gentiles, men and women receive that grace and they come into relationship to God through Jesus.

And as they're being brought to God, they are brought together into fellowship with people they would normally have nothing to do with. People who normally they would have division with.

[10 : 27] And they become one body. In other words, when people hear of the riches of Jesus, a God forms the church. And that's how we have been formed as well.

And I think it's something for us to think about, to go away from this passage and think, how has God's grace been poured into your life? How have you experienced the grace of God?

How has God changed you and the way that you live and what is important in your life? How has he brought you into his church and into fellowship with other Christians?

It is very good to be aware of God's powerful working in your life. Now there's a second part of God's grace in Paul's life.

Not only does he preach the gospel and build the church, he also says he makes all people see the plan of mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

[11 : 27] It's an amazing verse, verse 9. He's saying he is making all men see. And what Paul is saying is that when he preaches and when he plants churches and these churches come into being, everyone is seeing God's plan being put into effect.

It becomes an open secret, which is what Christianity is. There's nothing secret about our faith. God brings people throughout the world into one body, under one Lord Jesus, through one true gospel of Jesus.

And the world watches God creating a new people for himself, the church. And it's an amazing thing because we are a shabby lot.

We are sinful. We aren't impressive people necessarily. Our organizations are not that great. But in it all, God is creating a new people for himself.

In a sense, this has to do with the image I had was of a stadium. One of the things that was announced recently is that there is going to be a reconstruction of BC Place Stadium.

[12 : 34] And the big plan is, in the next three years, to put a retractable roof on it. And this will be an engineering marvel, we are told. And as a result, many people will come to that stadium.

Attendance will rise dramatically because they will be as interested in the building itself as the game on the field. It will be a draw to see what's happening in this field.

Or in the stadium itself. Now think of the world as a giant stadium. And the church is the team on the field. Now the world might be far more interested in what's going on in the stadium itself and the marvels of the world that they maybe think they're creating.

But if they were to pay attention to the sometimes odd-looking team on the field, the church, they would see people reconciled to God and coming into a new family relationship with one another.

So they are a new kind of people. And that's what God is doing. It is the central work in the world. It is what is actually happening on the field that God is about.

[13 : 44] And God's plan, which was hidden for so long, is being demonstrated every day in the church that God creates through the same preaching, the same gospel that Paul preached.

And when people in the stadium of the world sit up and notice what God is doing, they are seeing God's plan unfolding before them. Now the amazing thing is, if you look at verse 10, you see that it's more than just the world, more than just all people that are in the stadium.

Because it says there in verse 10 that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

Now that's an amazing, it's an unexpected verse. It is saying, that principalities and powers in the heavenlies, which are both good and evil, they are angels and demons.

To them, God's wisdom was hidden as well as to all people. It shows that demons and angels are not omniscient. They don't see everything that God is doing. Paul says, now God's wisdom is being revealed to them through the church.

[14 : 59] It's something that angels, Peter said, long to see. They long to see the gospel and what God's plan would be. And we hear in Mark 1 that demons ask Jesus if he is coming to destroy them.

Evil spirits dread God's plans because they know in the end it will result in this destruction of their world. It will result in the world's salvation.

And so you have these two conflicting responses responses of these spiritual beings to what God is doing through the church. Amazingly, God chooses the church.

Clearly it's not something that we are doing. It's not because of how good we are at doing pastoral care or evangelism or preaching or teaching or being a good organization.

It is the fact of the church. It is simply because we exist. Simply because God has created this new people has saved them together in Jesus that his powerful grace is displayed.

[16 : 04] And he has united them to Jesus and to one another when Jesus freed them by his blood and forgave their sins. God is healing relationships that were first fractured in the Garden of Eden.

He's making a new creation. And in that way God's plan unfolds and is made clear to principalities and powers.

So you see these healed relationships in verse 11 and 12 as we continue down. It says, This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him.

This is a beautiful picture of the power of the gospel because by Jesus who is our grace we as a body come into God's living presence with boldness and with confidence through our faith in him.

It's something that is happening together. This is what makes demons tremble and angels rejoice. I have two sons.

[17:10] One is two and the other one has just turned six this week. And once in a while they come here to the church to my office to make usually an unexpected visit.

one that's unannounced. And I must say it's always a joyous occasion. If my door is open if they notice I'm not with somebody they will burst through the door shouting Daddy!

And I suspect it's partly because I have a chair that swivels and they want to go on a ride in my desk chair. But I think also they are genuinely happy for the visit.

And I love it when they come to visit as well. It really makes my day. Now the rest of the staff are probably very happy that my boys don't have that kind of access to their offices.

Because you see it's a boldness and a confidence that is unique only because I am their dad. And this is exactly what Paul is talking about in verse 12.

[18:15] Through Jesus' sacrifice we call God Father literally our Daddy. And the Holy Spirit assures us by God's word that he longs for us to be in his presence.

And there is this reminder in this verse that the door is open to God. That we constantly know his welcome. This is the faith that comes through the gospel. That is why the gospel is powerful and precious.

And as we close this time in this passage this is why we contend for the gospel and we stand for it as well. Because you see the principalities and powers of evil see God's plan through the church.

He is bringing people under his loving rule safely into his presence as a body and they don't like it. God is creating a new people with new relationships through it.

They don't like this. They hate it because it reveals that their authority and their rule has been broken by Jesus Christ the true ruler.

[19:20] And the faithful church is a constant reminder to them that all things will come under the lordship of Jesus one day. Their days are numbers and therefore they will do everything in their power to compromise the gospel that creates the church.

To try to reinterpret it to deny the gospel's power and to be ashamed of it as well. These are the tactics of the evil one. They will try to disrupt and erect barriers between God's faithful people.

And so we should not be surprised by a spiritual struggle. We should not hide from it but instead be bold and confident in seeking God and his glory. That's what Paul is encouraging us today.

Paul says stand firm in chapter 6. Be strong in the Lord in the strength of his might. Know the power of the gospel. Realize the surpassing value of that gospel. That everything is loss in comparison.

And that's why Paul ends by saying I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you which is your glory. He says that because Paul is presently suffering in jail only because he preached the gospel.

[20 : 33] Only because he was clear about it and it caused division and he was accused of rioting causing a riot in Jerusalem. But this is the gospel that brings people into glory.

It brings people into the glory of the church and one day will result in their glorification with Jesus one day in heaven. So Paul's legacy is their glory and any suffering he makes any suffering that we make for the sake of the gospel will cause glory for other people.

And in our own church we can know that generations that will follow at St. John's will know this gospel that has transformed us and brought us to be a new creation.

This is what it means to stand firm and to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Paul says don't be discouraged. Be confident in that gospel. Let us continue to speak of it. Let us have the legacy of the glory of those who follow us because we stood firm because of the fact that we were strong in the Lord and the strength of his might.

Amen. Amen. Today we'll use page 35 common prayer and we're at the bottom of the page and let us kneel together for a prayer of supplication.

[22 : 19] Page 35 in the maroon colored small book that's in your pews. And as we pray these prayers let us be thinking about those in our parish who are in need of healing and strength and hope.

Let us pray for our church. We pray also for the Gathcon conference in Jerusalem. Pray especially for David Short as he leads the teaching aspect of that important conference.

Let us pray. O Lord arise help us and deliver us for thy name's sake. O God we have heard with our ears and our fathers have declared unto us the noble works that thou didst in their days and in the old time before them.

O Lord arise help us and deliver us for thy name's sake. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end.

Amen. O Lord arise help us and deliver us for thy name's sake. From our enemies defend us O Christ graciously look upon our afflictions.

[23 : 46] Pitifully behold the sorrows of our hearts mercifully forgive the sins of thy people. Favorably with mercy hear our prayers. O Son of David have mercy upon us both now and ever vouchsafe to hear us O Christ graciously hear us O Christ graciously hear us O Lord Christ.

O Lord let thy mercy be shown upon us as we put our trust in thee. we humbly beseech thee O Father mercifully to look upon our infirmities and for the glory of thy name turn from us all those evils that we most justly have deserved and grant that in all our troubles we may put our whole trust and confidence in thy mercy and evermore serve thee in holiness and pureness of living to thy honor and glory through our only mediator and advocate Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. O Lord deal not with us according to our sins neither reward us according to our iniquities. And then we conclude together O God merciful Father that despises not the sighing of a contrite heart nor the desires of such as be sorrowful mercifully assist our prayers that we make before thee in all our troubles and adversities whensoever they oppress us and graciously hear us that those evils which the craft and subtlety of the devil or man worketh against us be brought to naught and by the providence of thy goodness they may be dispersed that we thy servants being hurt by no persecutions may evermore give thanks unto thee in thy holy church through Jesus Christ our Lord amen toph