

The Apostle Paul

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[0 : 00] I'd like to turn back to look at that part of chapter 3 from verse 1 down to verse 13 that we read together. And I'm going to ask you that it might be helpful for you to keep your Bibles open in front of you.

You don't always have to do that in every Sunday, but this Sunday I think because we're looking at a passage, it probably will be helpful because I'll be referring to the various words that arise that give understanding as to what this passage is all about.

How do you get to know the Apostle Paul? The only way that we can do that is by studying what he says.

And this is one of those passages that give us a window into the way in which he thinks and what he thinks of himself.

It's kind of like when you look at a mirror and you see the reflection in the mirror, you see what you look like. And you get to know about yourself, at least from the outside, by looking at a mirror.

[1 : 11] How would Paul do that? What does Paul think of himself? What would the mirror say to Paul? There was a day in which, if I can use the analogy of a famous fairy story, there was a day when Saul of Tarshish would wake up every morning and he would say to the mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the best person in the whole world?

And the mirror would say, you are. That's what he wanted. Saul of Tarshish thrived on us and he aspired to be the best Jewish person in the whole world.

Until the day that he met with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. And then everything changed. Everything he had lived for up until that moment collapsed before his very eyes.

And he had to start again. All his thinking disappeared. It was destroyed. All his hopes and his aspirations and his dreams of being the best person in the world.

And if anyone could possibly work their way into God's kingdom, it was Saul of Tarshish. Until he realized that not even he could ever hope to do so.

[2 : 20] And from that moment onwards, his thinking about himself completely changed. He no longer thought about himself as the best person in the world.

In actual fact, he thought about himself as the worst person in the world. And we'll see that even in this very passage itself. And then he became, of course, from that day onwards, God not only changed his thinking and changed his heart, but gave him a work to do.

And he would be involved in that work every single day to the rest of his life. And so tonight, this passage gives us an insight into how he carries that work through.

And what kind of person lies at the heart of the greatest preacher that ever walked the face of the earth. The most influential single Christian person that ever walked the face of the earth, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, of course, who is the Christian faith in embodiment.

And Paul, the apostle, was the greatest Christian that ever lived and certainly the most influential. How does he think? What lies at his heart? What motivates him?

[3 : 30] What are his strengths and what are his weaknesses? How do you get to know this person? I suppose that the other apostles who lived at the same time, they would all very quickly have got to know him.

He was one of them. But we're not able to do because we live 2,000 years into the future. We're not able to. We don't know what he looked like. We don't know much about him, apart from what we have in his writings.

But I believe that tonight we can learn much about what motivated him. And what motivated Paul should motivate us because the gospel doesn't change.

God's purpose and his plan for this world has not changed one little bit in the world. And so, by looking at the kind of person that Paul was and what drove him, I hope that we are inspired this evening to know more about the gospel and to be energized in the gospel to drive us on and to drive us to live for the Lord Jesus Christ more and more.

Now, he thinks about himself in two particular ways. First of all, he thinks of himself always, every moment, in connection with Jesus Christ.

[4 : 39] The moment he came to know Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he met with him, he became attached to him. And we saw this, actually, in chapter 2, how every Christian is attached to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's in union with him. And Paul's favorite expression when he talks about the relationship that we have with Jesus is, in Christ. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

So, Paul, for Paul, he couldn't think of himself as an independent lone ranger. He couldn't think of himself as a person on his own. Everywhere he went, Jesus went with him.

He never went anywhere on his own. And he didn't think on his own. So, that's the first thing he thinks about when he thinks of himself. He is in Jesus Christ. In verse 12, he tells us that.

In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. But the second way in which he thinks of himself was in terms of his connection with his fellow Christians.

[5 : 46] His fellow Christians. They were everything to him. They were his brothers. They were his sisters. They were his fellow workers. And when things went wrong, when they were hurting, he was hurting.

And when they were growing, when they were spreading the gospel to various places, he was on his knees praying for them continually. Praying for the success of the gospel. And when he heard that more had been added to their number, he was praying for their growth.

And praying for their development as Christians. So, that they would become more like Jesus and more effective in the world. And this whole passage arises out of his concern for the Christians that he was writing to in Ephesus.

And I'll tell you why. Because they knew that he was a prisoner in Rome. And they were concerned about him. They were worried about him. They were worried, perhaps, about why he had been taken prisoner.

And why, as the most influential, as the most famous, the most well-known of all the apostles. The person who was the apostle to the Gentiles.

[6 : 52] And he had taken the gospel to towns and villages and cities all over the Roman Empire. Why, then, would God allow him to be taken to prison and for his movements to be restricted in such a way that he was not able to do the kind of things that he wanted to do.

And he wasn't able to make the kind of contact with them that they wanted him to make. But what he's saying is this. I ask you, verse 13. I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

And that's the first thing I want us to notice this evening. How he thinks of himself as a prisoner. A prisoner. He opens the chapter.

He says this. For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you.

Now, what you have to do here is you have to, and we've broken off from the second chapter maybe for perhaps too long for us to remember. But to be fresh in our minds what he's been saying.

[7 : 57] Particularly how he's closed the second chapter. You remember how the second chapter is all about what they once were. They were dead in trespasses and sins. And how, by salvation, God had rescued them.

And had coupled them with Jesus Christ. And had made them alive with Christ. And had seated them in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. At the same time, God was working away, building up his church.

And we saw that great picture of the building in which they were fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

In other words, Paul is announcing to the Ephesians that they are part of a worldwide movement. In which God is building up his kingdom and adding to it continually all the time.

By taking people like themselves, forgiving them their sins, opening their hearts, changing their lives. Making them see things that they never saw before. Bringing them into his kingdom and

slowly building his kingdom.

[8 : 59] As a builder puts one block on another. And one day the building will be complete. Now, if he is part and parcel of, if he's taking a leading part in that process.

The people of Ephesus would expect him to continue to take a leading leadership figure in that process. They would expect him to be in a place of prominence and authority within that process. They would expect him to have support, a support mechanism and an organization and a framework in order to make his traveling available and easy and all the rest of it.

And he was the king. They thought about him as the kingpin in the building of God. Instead of that, he's a prisoner. He's not able to move at all.

He's in Rome. He wanted to be in Rome. But not as a prisoner, as a preacher. But there he is. And he's tied. He's restricted.

[10 : 02] He's confined. He's not able to do what he wanted to do. He's not able to do what the rest of the church wanted him to do. And what they expected him to do. And what's more, how can this great building that is described in chapter 2, how can it possibly make adequate progress when a person like Paul, who is so key to the process, is actually in prison?

But Paul doesn't flinch. He says, this is exactly where God wants me to be. I know that God could open these doors of the prison.

He could loose my chains. He could set me free. He had done it before. Remember the Philippian jailer? When Paul was in prison at Philippi? And when they were singing during the night, when God shook the very foundations of the prison and opened the doors.

And the jailer was so horrified he was going to kill himself. Until Paul told him, he shouted to him, don't do yourself any harm. And the jailer said, what must I do to be saved?

And Paul said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And everything was changed. God could do the same thing again. Or if you take that chapter in Acts chapter 12 where Peter was released from prison.

[11 : 20] An angel came to him and opened the doors of the prison. Took him out onto the street. Set him free. God could do the same thing again. At any moment in time. And the fact that it's not happening means that God wants him there.

Because he's got a job for him to do. And it's not as if God's working despite his being in prison. It's not as if he's saying this is a real nuisance.

And this is holding up God's work. It's not that at all. He's saying this is God's work. This is the way that God has chosen to progress his work.

First of all, he doesn't depend on me. I'm not indispensable. If I die tomorrow, that work will continue. Nothing will bring it to a halt. The gates of hell will not prevail against it.

And God's timing is absolutely right. Nothing's going to hold that work up. The gospel will continue to develop. More and more people will be saved. And eventually the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

[12 : 26] As the waters cover the sea. Do you believe that this evening? Do we believe that this evening? Now that doesn't give us an excuse for laziness. It doesn't give us an excuse. Well, if God's going to do that work, then I don't need to worry about it.

I don't need to pray about it. I don't need to be involved in it. I don't need to be supported at all.

That's not what Paul is saying at all. And none of us should ever. But anyone who's truly a believer and a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, what he wants more than anything else is for that kingdom to continue.

And his prayer more than anything else is, Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And anybody who prays that is better be very sure that they're in the right place so that if God calls them and they're willing to go wherever he sends them and to do whatever he tells them to do, we have to be willing to do that just as the apostle Paul was.

So Paul is saying this from the outside. He's saying to the Ephesians, I know your concern for me. For the outside, it looks to you as if I'm a prisoner of Rome under the authority of the giant Roman Empire against whom no one can stand.

It looks for all the world to you as if they're in control and I am subject to them. But the reality is that I am here because of Jesus.

[13 : 44] Jesus has in his providence led me here because he's got a work for me to do. He could set me free in a moment, but he wants me to be in this place, even although from the outside, it

looks as if my movements are restricted.

I'm not able to do what I want to do or what you want me to do. But here I am in the Lord's service. Now, you know this? I can't think of a more comforting and reassuring truth for the believing person this evening because many as a believer is in prison tonight.

I'm not talking about the kind of prison, a literal prison. I'm talking about something that is restricting you, something that's keeping you where you are, and something that's stopping you doing what you actually in yourself would love to do, but you're not able to because of something that's restraining you.

And it must have been incredibly frustrating on one level for the Apostle Paul to do this because he was capable of so much. He wanted to do so much. And that's true in our lives as well very often. We want to do so much. We get all these intentions. And yet sometimes God steps in and says, Well, whatever intentions you've got, I've got something else for you. And you're not going to like it. [15:05] You're going to be so frustrated. You're going to be heartbroken. Because your dreams are not going to be fulfilled. But the important thing is not to do what you think you want to do, but to do what I want you to do.

And to live the life that I have for you. If anyone of you, I'm sure most of us have read Joni Erickson's book, or witnessed her testimony in the book *Joni*, if ever there was an example of somebody who could have done so much in her own terms, in her own ambitions and intentions and what she wanted to do, and yet she became a quadriplegic, wasn't able to move a muscle. And yet there are few Christians in the world today that haven't heard of her and haven't read that book and haven't been so impressed how many people have actually come to know the Lord through her witness.

That was the life that the Lord had for her to do. And that was the prison in which she had to spend the rest of her life. What's important is to be where God wants us to be.

That's what's important. That's the first thing then, that the Apostle Paul thinks of himself as a prisoner. And he is content to do so. The second thing he thinks about himself is that he is a steward.

[16:33] Verse 2, Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery. There's that word mystery again. We'll talk about this in a few moments time. Which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it had now been revealed to his holy apostles and his prophets by the Spirit.

The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. What is a steward? Well, a steward, if you ever want to find out what a steward is, read the life of Joseph in Genesis.

We know the story, how he was sold by his brothers, and how the Midianites took him, and they sold him to a man called Potiphar. And Potiphar soon saw, he spotted the qualities that were in Joseph, his honesty, his hard work, his sense of responsibility.

And the time came where he just was able to leave everything in the charge of Joseph. And Joseph did what we 21st century Western people called, he took ownership over the work that was given him to do.

[17:44] In other words, he didn't just follow the letter of the law, but he became responsible for what his master gave him to do. Until, of course, his master's wife tried to seduce him, and he was thrown into prison.

There again, the prison officer saw the qualities in Joseph, and he realized very quickly, he shouldn't be in this prison. This man hasn't done anything wrong, but I can't do anything about him being here, but I'm going to put him in charge of the prison, because I can see he's a man of responsibility, a man who is concerned about whatever he puts his hand to do.

That's the way that Paul looked at himself. In other words, he saw himself always as a servant.

No matter how, what his place was in the church, even in that day, he always saw himself in terms of the one who had authority over him, which was Jesus Christ.

In other words, whatever he put his hand to, it was like one eye was in heaven. One eye was pointed towards heaven, knowing that Jesus was watching him every step he took.

[18:59] And in other words, whatever his hand found to do, he did it with all his skill and ability and the gifts that God gave him to use it for. And that's the way we should be.

We are stewards of whatever God has given us to do. We are not to be irresponsible and lazy Christians. We are to be wholehearted in everything that the Lord has told us to do and to do it not to please others or to please ourselves, but to please the Lord.

That's what he goes on to tell us about slaves. Slaves were to obey their masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by way of eye service, as people pleaser, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

In other words, these servants were inclined to say, well, this life that I have is so boring and it's so menial and so I go through it every single day.

The routine is the same. How can this be God's will for me? I'm not even a free person. And Paul is saying, that's where God wants you to be. And you're working not for your master, your earthly master, but you're actually working for your heavenly master.

[20 : 18] And as soon as you begin to work for your heavenly master, your quality of work will change, your sense of responsibility will change, your wholeheartedness will change, your joy will change, your enthusiasm will change.

You'll become a different person when you work for the Lord. Are we working for the Lord? Are we living for the Lord? Are we conscious of what the Lord means to us? Or have we separated our lives into the spiritual that takes place at a communion or a prayer meeting or a Sunday and the secular that takes place at every other time?

And when I'm in here, I live for the Lord. But when I'm out, when I'm out in the office or in the workforce or in the workplace, well, that's just a necessary evil. No, it's not a necessary evil.

It is the place where God has placed you and you are there for him. But you're also there as part of God's kingdom and as a support mechanism for God's kingdom.

You're part of this kingdom that Jesus promised that the gates of hell would never prevail against it. You're part of that kingdom. Now, what he says is this. He is a steward to the Gentiles.

[21 : 29] Verse 2. He was a steward. This was the work that God gave him to do. Cast your mind back to the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarshish, meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory on the road to Damascus.

His life has changed. He no longer is Saul of Tarshish. He's now got a new life and a new heart and his sins have been forgiven and he now has discovered that there is only one way to the Lord and that is through faith in Jesus Christ.

His whole thinking is different. But when God changed his life on the road, he also gave him a mission, a work to do, and a plan for the apostle.

He was now going to be a servant of Jesus Christ. It wasn't just a random convert. God doesn't just randomly convert people and then leave them without anything to do.

He has given each one of us a work to do, a life to live, a mission to accomplish in this world. Now, sometimes that mission is a little bit difficult to determine and to work out, but every one of us has a mission in this world to accomplish, a work that God has given him to do.

[22 : 39] Now, the work that God gave the apostle Paul to do, it means nothing to us, by the way, because we're all Gentiles. I don't suppose there are any of us here this evening who are Jewish by birth. If there are, then I hope I'm not offending you.

But we're all Gentiles. If it wasn't for the gospel going to the Gentiles, we wouldn't be here tonight because in the Old Testament, God's word went to his own people, the Jews, and that was it.

It was exclusively directed to the Jews. But tonight, the gospel has gone to the Gentiles, which is the reason why in the Western world we have heard the gospel and why we're rejoicing in the Lord tonight.

And it was all because people like the apostle Paul, do you have any idea what it cost the apostle Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles? I don't think we really appreciate this. how incredibly unpopular he would have been.

You see, we have to appreciate the way in which he was brought up. He was brought up as a Pharisee. And at the very least, he knew his Old Testament, Genesis to Malachi, backwards.

[23 : 42] And the Jewish religion was an exclusive religion. And they separated themselves from Gentiles. Gentiles. And they despised Gentiles.

The Gentiles had nothing to do with them. And they had nothing to do with the Gentiles. It was unnecessary evil for them to live amongst the Gentiles. And as far as their religion was concerned, they would have absolutely nothing to do with them whatsoever.

And it's because it was rumored that Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple courts that he was arrested in the first place. So we can well see, we can well understand why he says, I'm here on behalf of you Gentiles.

Gentiles is just basically someone who isn't a Jew. But in those days if you were a Jew, you looked down on the Gentiles. You saw them as on the outside without any hope of coming to the truth. God was yours. You were a Jew. Abraham was your father. And you were proud of it. Now can you imagine what his fellow Jews would have said to him when all of a sudden this change took place in Saul of Tarsus.

[24 : 48] And he became Paul, the apostle. And he was going around telling him, well God has given me a mission. And they would say, well what's the mission? First of all, I now know that only Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth is the way to God.

He is the ultimate sacrifice, the one and only sacrifice. And we can stop circumcision and we can stop sacrificing and we can stop relying and depending upon keeping the law of Moses in order to get to God.

We have to trust in Jesus now. And they would have just, that would have been enough for them to just leave him there and then and just to count him as a complete fool. But it was worse than that because he would have said to them, well my mission also is to show that the Gentiles, to bring them in, to preach this Jesus to them and to tell them that they are welcome to take part in the kingdom of God.

Let me tell you, that would have made Paul a complete leper as far as they were concerned. They wouldn't have, many of them wouldn't have talked to him again.

He would have been thrown out completely from their fellowship and from their friendship. Some of them tried to kill him because he was now saying that the Gentiles were part of the kingdom of God.

[26 : 05] I think it's important for us to appreciate what people had cost our forefathers to bring us into the kingdom. And it's also important for us to, by their example, put God first and not to live as other people want us to live but to live as God wants us to live and to formulate our opinions and our convictions according to what God has said in his Bible.

Not according to what we're told by other people because of course there was a big community spirit amongst the Jews in those places and if you broke ranks then you were an outcast and that's what Paul was prepared to pay.

That's the cost, that's the price he had to pay in order for him to bring the Gentiles into the kingdom of God.

So this is the work that God has given him to do but it's also that was given me verse 2 how the mystery was made known for you. And I want us to stop just for a few moments and to talk about this word mystery because that's one of the titles that Paul gives to the gospel to the good news the message of Jesus Christ.

It was a mystery. It was a mystery. Now, what does that mean? Well, a mystery is something that is unknown but we have to try and try and not to think about it in terms of the kind of mysteries that we're that we're used to.

[27 : 32] You read a novel for example a crime novel and it's all about a mystery how a crime has been committed and the whole idea of the novel is to work out you're reading the novel page after page and you're trying to work out in your own mind who committed this crime and at the end of the book of course it tells you the whole thing's been worked out by some clever detective.

That's what we think as a mystery but that's not the way the Bible talks about a mystery. The way we think about a mystery is something that we can work out by ourselves.

When the Bible talks about a mystery it's something that's been hidden and is now revealed. And it could have been hidden for years and years and years in the case of the gospel it was hidden for centuries all the way through the Old Testament the gospel was hidden.

God gave glimmers he gave little windows he gave little hints as to what the gospel might be and the sacrifices and in the promises but it was hidden until Jesus came and when he came it was revealed for all the world to see in the person of Jesus Christ.

That was the mystery revealed. It was a bit like when I was a wee boy I used to live near a car showroom in Paisley and I still remember every so often the company who produced the cars they would have a brand new model just about to be revealed and they would they would have one of these cars in the showroom with a huge massive sheet on it a massive great blanket all over the car and of course the date say the 6th of June for example they would say on the shop window they

would say this car is going to be revealed on the 6th of June and nobody was allowed to see it until then on the 6th of June and of course you were trying you were walking past and the one thing you were asking yourself all the time was what does that car look like I'm absolutely dying to see what that car looks like but it didn't matter how much you guessed you weren't able to see it until the moment now that's the way that the Bible talks about the mystery it's something that was hidden until a certain time and all through the Old Testament the Old Testament is about Christ but he's hidden until the moment that Jesus came into Bethlehem and that he was baptized at the age of 30 and then was the revelation of God the baptism we saw this a couple of weeks ago the baptism heaven was opened heaven was opened in order for God to reveal and make known his son [30 : 09] Jesus Christ to the world and now Paul is saying do you realize how privileged you are in living at the time that you're living you're living now at the time when we're no longer we don't we no longer have to speak about Jesus as the one to come about whom we know very little but the one who has come about whom we know everything do you realize how privileged you are tonight how privileged I am tonight to be able to read my Bible and to know Jesus Christ from birth to death to resurrection to ascension we know about him and God to whom much has been given much will be required thirdly I know the time is passing Paul thinks of himself as a nobody thinks of himself as a steward and as a prisoner but he also thinks of himself as a nobody verse 8 when he says this to me he says though I am the very least of the saints this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ he thinks of himself as a nobody now this is not false humility this is not someone who is just trying to create a good impression by you know how you get people and you know by the very way they talk that they don't actually mean what they say about them being humble and how they you know that nobody could possibly be as humble as that but Paul can this is no pretense with the apostle

Paul what he says he actually means and the reason he can say with all certainty and with every conviction that he is the least of all the saints is because of what happened to him on the road to Damascus you see anyone who has received God's grace has been made to see how undeserving he or she is none of us today deserve in any possible way the grace of God and if being a Christian does one thing and ought to do one thing it should make us see ourselves as we really truly are I am the least he says less than the least the av says less than the least now you can't get less than the least but actually if you go back to the Greek word that's actually what it says you can you can you can translate it the leastest there's no such word as leastest but it does give you the impression of what the apostle is saying he genuinely believes as he looks around him and he sees the church in Corinth and Ephesus and Rome and Philippi he says all these believers

I know them I fellowship with them and when I look at them and I compare them myself to them I honestly with my hand and heart I believe that I'm the least of the Lord and less than the least of all of them now that's a tall order isn't it and it's a real challenge to us when we compare ourselves to other people as we naturally do and I don't believe there's anyone that doesn't and as we tend as we're inclined to think of ourselves as being less than some and better than others no none of us grace means the undeserved favor of God you might be asking yourself this evening well what is there here for me an unbeliever I want to say that the word that you want to look for today tonight is found here in this passage the grace of God because if you're an unbeliever tonight that's what you need more than anything else the grace of God verse 2 the stewardship of God's grace verse 7 the gift of God's grace verse 8 this grace was given by God and at every turn

Paul never loses sight of the grace of God chapter 2 he says it is by grace that you are saved not of works lest any man should boast it is the grace of God and this grace of God is the key to everything that Paul was and it was because he never lost sight of the greatness of this grace that he was able genuinely and sincerely to say that as he looked in the mirror of what he really was I am the least less than the least of all the saints and it is because we lose sight of that that place that ought to be in everyone's heart that there are so many squabbles and so much contention it is because we lose sight of who we are and what God has done for us and how utterly undeserving we are what does grace mean what does grace mean well there are two senses in which grace is used in the Bible there's the sense that we call that we call common grace or restraining grace it's because of God's restraint

I want to stress this you'll give me a wee minute because this ties in with what we've seen this week in Cumbria it's the most one of the most frightening thoughts lots of people have been asking as we always happens when someone goes on the ramp and some of us have seen it several times

some of the younger ones will never have seen it before but other ones will have lived through Dunblane and Hungerford and other places it's happened before and every time something like this happens the question is always the same why and on this occasion and indeed on other occasions not able to find out the answer now that's frightening because if there were some kind of genetic defect then doctors would be able to fix it in people but there is no genetic defect there's not even any evidence of a psychological defect or a psychiatric defect this man was perfectly normal which makes it even more frightening because if a perfectly normal man is able to do such a thing my question is not why did he do it but why do we not all do it it's logical isn't it if one man is capable of doing it then we're capable of doing it he was a perfectly normal individual

[37 : 15] I hope that we are too then we're capable of doing what a perfectly normal individual was capable of doing so why don't we all do it the bible's answer is this because god in his mercy has placed within this world a restraint he's kept us on hold and I believe that every so often every so often this kind of thing happens in order to remind us of what we really are and in what chaos this world would be if it wasn't for god my how patient god is have you any idea how patient god is all it would take is just a release of god's patience just a little bit and the world would be in turmoil and there would be white havens all over the place how we need god tonight that's not the only kind of grace the bible talks about the bible talks about saving grace and that's where god in his mercy and his inexplicable mercy you try and understand god's grace and you've lost sight of it because god's grace always results in the question why why are you so good why are you so loving why is your like we like we like we sang in that psalm his mercy endures forever why should god's mercy endure forever i don't understand why it doesn't make any sense to me we're a bunch of rebels people who don't want god they don't want him anywhere near them and yet his mercy endures forever and god's grace extends it reaches down into this world in the person of jesus christ and goes after the lost sheep and when he finds it even though that sheep has done nothing to deserve the mercy and the love that god shows him he raises it up and brings it home on his shoulders and say rejoice with me because i have found my sheep that was lost and it was like the prodigal son if you ever want to know what grace is you read the story of the prodigal son he went away and left his father and squandered all his father's money on wasted the whole thing blew the whole thing was left with nothing and all he had was pig food and in despair he he thought about his father's home and the servants even how well off the servants were that they had a meal in front of them every day so he said i will go back and i will say to my father i will say to my father father forgive me for i have sinned against heaven and against against you now that's logic he's taking a bit of a chance i think but it's logic it's a bit of a nerve isn't it even thinking that his father's going to take him out and employ him but he's willing he's willing to clean the toilets he's willing to do anything just to have a meal on the table and if if he's fortunate enough maybe he can be let by what do we read we read that when he was still afar off his father saw him and he ran to where he was why did he run he ran to where he was he put his arms around him and he said to his servants quick bring the robe take his rags off him take his clothes off him and clothe him with with the best robe and kill the fatted calf and we'll feast and eat and drink and be merry for this son was dead and is now alive again he's lost and is now found that's grace and that's the grace that

Paul discovered on the road to Damascus even although he wasn't a prodigal son his problem was not that he had wasted his father's living his problem was that he had become so proud of believing that he could reach God by his own efforts that he had lost he had become blind to the real truth of what he was himself and the truth is tonight that the apostle Paul and the prodigal son are both together in heaven and they're both saying exactly the same thing by grace we have been saved through faith it is the gift of God you notice how he says this here it's the gift of God it's not something we can work up it's not something we can earn it's something that God has to give us it's for Gentiles it's for everyone it's even for angels I don't even have time to go into that this evening I was hoping to to go into that verse where he talks about that the that the plan of God may be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places how can the plan of God be made known to angels do they not know everything I actually don't think they do but anyway that's for another time maybe some some other time the important thing for us tonight is God's grace do you have it have you asked for it have you discovered have you taken it to be your own have you come as you are in all your emptiness to the Lord and asked Lord be merciful to me a sinner let's pray gracious and eternal God we ask that once again as we think about how unique your love is towards lost sinners like ourselves we pray not to neglect it we pray not to ignore it but

we pray to come to that love and that you will open up our hearts and draw us to that love to experience it for ourselves by asking and we will receive by knocking and the door will be open to us by seeking and we will find Lord bless your word to us in Jesus name amen