

Proclaiming the Unsearchable Riches of Christ

The Ministry of the Gospel

Ephesians 3:7-13

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Scripture

Today I am continuing my sermon series on Ephesians 3 that I am calling, “Proclaiming the Unsearchable Riches of Christ.”

In the second part of Ephesians 2 the Apostle Paul talked about our new identity in Christ (2:11-22). When Paul began chapter 3, he took up the report of his prayer for the Gentile churches (1:15-2:10). However, having introduced himself as the subject of the sentence, Paul broke off into yet another digression even before he got to the main verb! In the first part of Ephesians 3 (verses 1-6), Paul explained the mystery of the gospel when he said in verse 6, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6). Then he continued discussing in verses 7-13 the ministry of the gospel to which he had been called.

Let’s read about Paul’s ministry of the gospel in Ephesians 3:7-13:

⁷ 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. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 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. ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that

he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. (Ephesians 3:7-13)

Introduction

One of the key themes of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians is that God is building a new society of people from all nations. In ancient times, God set his love upon the Jews and chose them to be his special people. All non-Jews—Gentiles—were not chosen to be God's special people. Over time, the division between Jews and Gentiles grew deeper and deeper. John Stott says that Paul's letter to the Ephesians...

...focuses on what God did through the historical work of Jesus Christ and does through his Spirit today, in order to build his new society in the midst of the old.

It tells how Jesus Christ shed his blood in a sacrificial death for sin, was then raised from death by the power of God and has been exalted above all competitors to the supreme place in both the universe and the church. More than that, we who are "in Christ," organically united to him by faith, have ourselves shared in these great events. We have been raised from spiritual death, exalted to heaven and seated with him there. We have also been reconciled to God and to each other. As a result, through Christ and in Christ, we are nothing less than God's new society, the single new humanity which he is creating and which includes Jews and Gentiles on equal terms.¹

¹ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 24–25.

I love the way John Piper recently stated this in his inimitable way of expressing biblical truth, “God is calling all people to move from the alienated bloodlines of race and ethnicity in to the one bloodline of Jesus Christ.”²

Lesson

Ephesians 3:7-13 shows Paul’s ministry of proclaiming God’s marvelous plan of uniting both Jews and Gentiles together in Christ.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Ministry of the Gospel Is for the Gentiles (3:7-8)
2. The Ministry of the Gospel Is for the Church (3:9)
3. The Ministry of the Gospel Is for the Cosmic Powers (3:10-13)

I. **The Ministry of the Gospel Is for the Gentiles (3:7-8)**

First, the Apostle Paul teaches that the ministry of the gospel is for the Gentiles.

In the first part of Ephesians 3, the Apostle Paul explained the mystery of the gospel when he said in verse 6, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Then he went on to say in verse 7, **“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.”** God first revealed the “mystery” to Paul (verses 2-3), namely, that he was creating one new society of people, that

² See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/word-of-the-week/from-bloodlines-to-bloodline/>.

eventually came to be known as “Christians.” Then, God called Paul to communicate this mystery to others through the ministry of the gospel. He had received this calling as a **gift of God’s grace**, and he would exercise this calling **by the working of God’s power**.

The Apostle Paul regarded the ministry of the gospel that God had entrusted to him as an enormous privilege. He knew that at one time he was a blasphemer and a persecutor of the Church, and yet, he says, **“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles...”** (3:8a). Paul never got over God’s grace that was given to him. He deserved God’s wrath. He deserved to be sentenced to hell. He deserved nothing from God. And yet, by his amazing grace, God not only called Paul to himself in salvation, but he also called Paul **to preach to the Gentiles**.

And what was Paul to preach to the Gentiles? He was to preach **“the unsearchable riches of Christ”** (3:8b). The Greek word for **“unsearchable”** (*anexichniastos*) literally means “impossible to be traced out.”³ John Stott writes, “Translators and commentators compete with one another in their attempt to find a dynamic equivalent in English. The riches of Christ, they say, are ‘unsearchable,’ ‘inexplorable,’ ‘untraceable,’ ‘unfathomable,’ ‘inexhaustible,’ ‘illimitable,’ ‘inscrutable’ and ‘incalculable.’”⁴

God called the Apostle Paul to preach to the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ**. What an incredible statement! What an amazing message! To preach **the unsearchable riches of Christ!** And what the Apostle Paul was called to preach is the same message that all faithful ministers of the

³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 120.

gospel are to preach today too.

So, we must rightly ask: what is involved in preaching **the unsearchable riches of Christ**? Let me answer this, first of all, negatively. *Preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ is not to preach about current events.* Some people want preaching about current events. They want preaching about politics, or economics, or taxes, or immigration, and so on. They say that preaching today is irrelevant because it does not address current events. But what is the business of a minister of the gospel? Is it his business to address what the government should or should not have done? Is it the business of the Church to offer opinions on what should or should not be done regarding current events? Of course, I have my opinion regarding current events, as does every other church member. But, I say that it is not the business of the Church, nor is it the task of the minister to preach about current events. No, the minister is to preach **the unsearchable riches of Christ**.

Further, preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ is not to preach so as to accommodate the culture. Many ministers and churches have capitulated to the standards of the culture, and preach a message that satisfies the culture. The culture now seems to accept—and even promote—certain views, and there are those who say that ministers and churches must modernize and preach what the culture wants it to preach. No, the minister is to preach **the unsearchable riches of Christ**.

And finally, preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ is not to preach religion. Not even religion! There are ministers and churches that stress the importance of religion. They say that people must pray and adhere to certain standards of discipline. Frankly, Islam does this. They preach a rigorous discipline. They preach the necessity of saying daily prayers. But, that is not the gospel. No, the minister is to preach **the unsearchable**

riches of Christ.

What, then, is involved in preaching **the unsearchable riches of Christ**? Let me now answer this positively. *Preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ is, primarily and essentially, to preach the Lord Jesus Christ himself.* The essence of the gospel is Jesus Christ. The gospel is the good news about who Jesus Christ is and what he came to do. The gospel is not about what we do. The gospel is not about what Jesus Christ asks us to do. That comes later. The Apostle Paul, according to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “says in effect: I was given this great privilege of coming to you, and I have given you the good news, the marvelous and thrilling good news concerning the riches of Christ, what Christ has given to you, and what he can, and what he will give to you, ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ.’”⁵

Preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ is to preach the saving riches of Christ. It is to proclaim how God has taken the initiative and done everything necessary to save sinners such as ourselves. He sent Christ into this sin-stained world to live and die and rise again so that sinners might be saved.

Preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ is to preach the sanctifying riches of Christ. Sinners saved by Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. And they are then indwelt by the Holy Spirit. His work is to enable us to die to sin and to become more and more like Christ each day.

Preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ is to preach the glorifying riches of Christ. Because salvation is all of God, Christ wants all his elect, for whom he died, to know that he will bring each one of them safely to glory. Not one of those for whom he died will be lost. They will be with him in glory forever!

⁵ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 59.

This is just a glimpse of the tip of the iceberg of **the unsearchable riches of Christ**. This was the message that thrilled the Apostle Paul. He gladly took it to the Gentiles so that they might come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their own Lord and Savior.

II. The Ministry of the Gospel Is for the Church (3:9)

Second, the Apostle Paul teaches that the ministry of the gospel is for the Church.

The Apostle Paul went on to say that his ministry was **“to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things”** (3:9). Paul’s ministry was also to preach to **everyone**, and it was so that everyone in the Church would understand **the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God**. This plan, of course, was to make out of Jew and Gentile a new humanity, a third race. And so, he proclaimed to all in the Church all that God was doing to bring this new race into existence.

III. The Ministry of the Gospel Is for the Cosmic Powers (3:10-13)

And finally, the Apostle Paul teaches that the ministry of the gospel is for the cosmic powers.

The purpose of the ministry of the gospel, Paul wrote in verses 10-11, was **“so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** This really is also an astonishing statement.

The gospel is first proclaimed so that men and women,

boys and girls, from every people group on earth may come to know the unsearchable riches in Christ. Then Paul wanted everyone, especially those in the Church, to know that God's plan was to bring saved Jews and saved Gentiles—all kinds of people—together into this one new race called the Church. Finally, this glorious drama of redemption was so that God's wisdom in his plan of salvation might be made known to the angels.

The angels had been with God before the creation of the world. They had seen his marvelous handiwork in creating a perfect, beautiful, unblemished world. And then God filled it with all kinds of amazing and incredible creatures: animals, and sea creatures, and birds. Finally, they were astounded when God created a man out of the dust of the earth, and a woman from the side of man. They watched God's acts of creation with breathtaking astonishment.

But, then one day, to the dismay of God's angels they saw one of their own, Satan, now a leader of the fallen and rebellious angels called demons tempt man to sin against God. And to the horror of the angels, man sinned against God and fell into sin! All God's beautiful creation was marred by that one sin. God banished man from the Garden of Eden, and the man and the woman were spiritually cut off from God, all because of their sin. The angels saw that as mankind multiplied the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

But the angels continued to see the manifold wisdom of God when he called a man whose name was Abram. He lived in a pagan country among a pagan people, and they wondered why God called him. Then they saw how God made a covenant with Abram, and changed his name to Abraham, and promised that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

The angels saw the wisdom of God as he advanced his

covenant purpose not through Ishmael but through Isaac, and then through Jacob and not Esau. They realized that God's ways are not their ways, and that his wisdom is manifold.

The angels saw how the children of Israel went down to Egypt and eventually became miserable slaves there. Then they saw the wisdom of God as he led his people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. They saw how God defeated his enemies all along the way. They also saw how God allowed a king to arise from among his chosen people. And then they saw the division of that people, and how they were taken into captivity. But they also saw the wisdom of God as he preserved a remnant who were faithful to him.

And then the angels saw the wisdom of God in solving the problem of sin in the world. How could God ever save fallen men and women who were captured in the grip of sin? Surely the angels were completely astounded by the manifold wisdom of God when he said, "I will send my very own Son, Jesus Christ, into the world of sin and shame. He will be born of a virgin and take humanity on to himself. He will live under the law and obey my every commandment. He will then pay the penalty for the sin of my elect by dying on the cross. But in three days I will raise him back to life again. He will then ascend into heaven and sit at my right hand until I send him back to earth again to wrap up all of human history."

And the angels marveled at the wisdom of God as he sent preachers into the world to proclaim the good news that all people—not just Jews only—may receive forgiveness from God when they believe in Jesus Christ and repent of their sins.

And their marvel continues to grow as they see people from all over the world being saved by God and included in the Church.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the ministry of the gospel in Ephesians 3:7-12, let us affirm the centrality of the Church.

The Church is central the ministry of the gospel. John Stott suggests that this passage teaches us three truths about the centrality of the Church.⁶

First, the Church is central to history. The Church may at times be weak, it may at times fail, it may at times seem to be in disarray, but the fact is that the Church is the only institution that will survive into eternity. The Church will continue to grow and expand. The Church will continue to embrace people from all nations until the full number of the elect have been saved.

Second, the Church is central to the gospel. The good news of the unsearchable riches of Christ is not only that he lived and died and rose again to save sinners (which he did), but that he did so in order to create one new humanity, which is the Church! As John Stott said, “The gospel is good news of a new society as well as of a new life.”⁷

And third, the Church is central to Christian living. Paul ended this section with verse 13, where he alluded to his suffering. He wrote, “So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.” He was willing to pay any price to see the Church established and growing. The Church is not an option for believers. The Church is where Christians live out their calling in the world. The Church is where we worship God, serve one another, and tell the world about the unsearchable riches of Christ. Amen.

⁶ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 126–130.

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 129.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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