

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3

3 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. 8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”

“Paul: The Prisoner of Christ Jesus”

We did not spend a great deal of time in this text which we read last week because I thought it was important to first consider the excitement that comes through as the Apostle reflects on the mystery of the Gospel and the impact that it had on his own life.

- **I would remind all of us that we should never tire of recounting the wonders of God’s work in our lives!**

Our text is actually one long sentence in the original and almost like a parenthetical remark:

The Apostle begins chapter three with “for this reason” or for this cause in the King James, and then repeats that opening in verse 14 as he again prays for these Saints. So, Lord willing here is how we will study this third chapter: This week I want to focus on why the Apostle refers to himself as the prisoner of Christ, and next week see him as the minister of Grace! And finally, we will study the prayer that he lifts up on behalf of these Saints before the Apostle begins to show all the glorious applications of the Gospel to the Church and our lives in the remaining chapters.

Now the text we will unpack this week and next speaks of mystery which we spent a good deal of time on in chapter one, so I will only make a few brief comments this morning and you can refer back to the earlier sermon for more details. I would remind us that the word mystery as used by the Apostle Paul is not used as some sort of mystic secret known only by a select few, like many of the so-called mystery religions of that day. In other words, we can and should understand things that God has revealed, remembering that we can only do so because He has revealed them through His Word and Spirit.

- **Here in Ephesians we will see Paul telling us how the entire world has been given access to the mystery of God’s grand plan of salvation!**

The mystery was there in the Old Testament just as any good novel has many hints and clues in the early chapters about the story line:

- **But now the entire novel, the story of God’s grand plan of redemption, has been made known to all the nations!**

We see this clearly with Paul’s instructions to young Timothy:

I Timothy 3:14 “16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.”

- **That is truly a summary statement of the mystery that has now been fully revealed!**

Now I am sure some may be asking at this point why was the Apostle not more straightforward in the way he presented the important truths we will study this week and next...

- **So, before we dig into our text, this might be a good place to remember something the Apostle Peter left us with writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:**

II Peter 3: “14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; 15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. 17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”

Turning back to our text verse 3 reads, “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—” His reference to prisoner can be seen on several levels: Paul is a prisoner of Rome, under arrest for something like three years at this point. But he also says he is the prisoner of Christ Jesus, because as we saw last week, his conversion has revealed to him that he was purchased with a great price: The blood of Jesus!

We enjoy thinking of ourselves as children of God or Saints in His Kingdom, which we certainly are. BUT, there are just as many references to us being the servants of Christ or those possessed or purchased by Christ.

- **And for Paul at this point that service meant being a physical prisoner of the Roman Empire!**

And that is why he also says he is a prisoner of Christ Jesus FOR you gentiles. Remember that Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and accused of bringing Gentiles into the Temple! Paul’s calling or commission was to be the Apostle to the Gentiles and while some might see his imprisonment as a set back for the Kingdom, Paul wants them to understand that it confirms his very calling, and thus this parenthetical comment... He goes on to explain why they must properly remember the importance of his being a prisoner, 2 “if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”

The Apostle then goes on to speak about how he is the minister of Grace which we will study at length next week, but here we already see Grace appearing.

His comment ‘if indeed you have heard’ is a way to remind them of what he taught them with regard to the Gospel. That is what was revealed clearly to Paul on the road to Damascus.

Paul then had three years of instruction from Jesus in Tarsus. Saul of Tarsus went from being the proud Jew who persecuted anyone who would not tow the company line, to one who understood the glory of God’s plan to take salvation to all the earth, or as he proclaims here...

“that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.”

Paul makes mention of things he had written and we don’t know exactly what that might have been.

This is likely not the only letter written to those Saints and he might even have left them some writings after his time in Ephesus. We know from our study of Acts that Paul made several trips to this Roman city. His time there included a major riot over Diana and he made a point of visiting with the elders of that city before he returned to Jerusalem and was arrested.

The Apostle Paul is now leading up to another passionate prayer for these Saints and says that it is important that they “understand [his] knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.”

- **The Church, the Body of Christ, is built on that revelation given to the Apostles and prophets:**
- **The story has been completed and is there for all to read and understand.**

But Paul wants them, and us, to understand that he: “became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.” So just what was this “effective working of His power” in the life of Paul: Well obviously you have that power demonstrated in his conversion and the revelations that were given to him as the Apostle to the Gentiles. He went on at least three missionary journeys and wrote much of the New Testament...

But we also have this from his personal testimony that he gave the Saints at Corinth in his final letter to them: “25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”

- **So yes, the Apostle rejoiced in being the prisoner of Christ Jesus and knew well what all that entailed.**

And of course, there are some important applications for those of us who are disciples of Jesus today...

So yes, this is a difficult passage, but Peter says that we should be diligent to study the writings of Paul and to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus... There are two points that come through very clearly in this admittedly complicated passage:

- **Paul was the prisoner of Christ Jesus and he was a minister of Grace!**

Now being a minister of Grace sounds much better, but there are lessons to learn from both: First, we know that the Apostle Paul was made a literal prisoner of Rome as part of his mission:

- **And that mission was to take the Gospel, the Good News, to the Gentiles so it is a great blessing for us today!**
- **We must never take such a blessing for granted, nor forget the importance of that history.**

Now I think it is OK for us to pray that we not be those who face literal imprisonment, but as servants of Jesus we should always be prepared for such service if it is what God plans for us. In addition, the Apostle Paul said he was a prisoner FOR those Saints there at Ephesus. His life’s ministry was to bring the Good News and IF we take the Great Commission seriously, we must see a similar calling for our lives today.

Does this mean that some of us will be called to the mission field like the Apostle Paul was? Perhaps!

- **Something we should not be afraid to pray about.**

Does this mean that some of us will be called on to serve as Deacons or Elders in Christ's Church? Perhaps!

- And again something we should certainly pray about.

Does this mean that some of us will become great communicators or writers like the Apostle was? Perhaps!

It is with this last point that we see the daily applications for ALL of us... You see we are always speaking and writing about the Kingdom of Jesus! The officers here at Church of the King do that directly as the overseers or shepherds of the flock. The members of our families do that directly with each other, whether it is husbands and wives studying together and growing in their relationship, learning in family devotions or even siblings teaching each other. And of course we all hope and pray for opportunities in the public square and with those God brings into our lives.

- As those baptized into Jesus we are His servants and we are called upon to serve Him well in all these areas.

We do not get to do whatever we want in these areas, but rather are to be godly in ALL our words and deeds because we are His Body.

As the Apostle reminded the Saints at Corinth, "1 Corinthians 3:16

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

Something he repeats even more strongly in his second letter to them:

II Corinthians 6:17 "For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

We need to remember that the Apostle got side-tracked here in the text, I say respectfully, when he stated: "for this cause" or for this reason, which he comes back to in verse 14...

- So it is important to remember just what the cause or reason was that he had in mind:

Of course it is what he had just shared at the end of chapter two, an important concept that we studied when last we visited this Epistle:

Ephesians 2: "19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Yes we are the dwelling place of God which should be reflected in ALL of our words and actions as the Apostle will go on to teach us in this important Epistle!

Communion Meditation: Ephesians 3

"8 To me... this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that ow the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him."