

Two weeks ago, we saw Ephesians 1 speaks of
redemption predestined (in Christ) by the Father
redemption accomplished (in Christ) by the Son
and redemption applied (in Christ) by the Spirit.

Last week we turned to Paul’s discussion of who you are in Christ.
You were dead, but God has made you alive with Christ.
You were strangers, but Christ has brought you near.

Tonight we see that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews,
partakers of the same promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

In other words last time we saw how the “you” and the “us” come together in Christ,
but tonight we focus on the “us” in Christ.

Paul has just said in verses 11-22 of chapter two
that Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in Jesus.
Jesus has abolished “the law of commandments and ordinances [the Mosaic Covenant],
that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,
and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross,
thereby killing the hostility.”

So God has established a new temple – a holy temple in the Lord –
built together by the Spirit into a holy dwelling place for God.

1. The Mystery of Christ: Gentiles are Fellow Heirs (3:1-6)

In verses 1-6 of chapter 3, Paul explains the mystery of Christ.

A “mystery,” in biblical terms, is not something strange or difficult to understand.
A mystery is something that is hidden.
Paul’s point here in verses 1-6 is that the mystery – the hidden thing –
has now been revealed.

*For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—
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 of Christ,
which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations
as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.
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.*

For generations this truth was hidden (that’s why it is called the “mystery” of Christ).
Because only in the revelation of Jesus Christ

do we discover the hidden secret
that God's purpose was to bring the Gentiles into one body with the Jews.
Moses didn't understand this.
It was not revealed (not clearly and openly) even to Isaiah.
Certainly from the standpoint of the NT
you can see how the law and the prophets were pointing this direction,
but even so,
Gentiles were only made *actual* partakers of the promise
in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

It may be worth while to remind us here of what "the gospel" means for Paul.
Gentiles become partakers of the promise in the Messiah (Jesus) through the good news.
And the good news is the message of what Jesus has done –
the gospel is the message of the cross, the resurrection –
the work of Jesus.

Because of this good news – because of the gospel –
Gentiles now partake of the promise.

So the mystery could only be made known once Jesus actually *did* what he did!
This hidden secret could only be revealed in the resurrection of Jesus.

2. Through the Church This Mystery Is Made Known (3:7-13)

But then in verses 7-13 Paul turns to the *way* in which God has made known this mystery.

*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.*

Paul says that he was made a "minister" of the gospel.

This is the word "diakonos" – from which we get our word deacon.

A deacon is one who serves on behalf of another.

That's why the translation "minister" works so well for most of its uses.

What is a minister?

Perhaps you are so used to calling a pastor a minister
that you don't think about what it means!

But take a secular usage:

the foreign minister of England (like our secretary of state),

or the prime minister of Canada (the first minister – the first servant).

A minister is not a slave.

A minister is not really even a "servant"

in the sense of a lackey or a person of low social standing.

(In fact, the word diakonos is rarely used of people of low social standing)

Rather, a diakonos is one who speaks or acts on behalf of another.
An ambassador is a diakonos.
Think of our phrase “public servant.”
We use it of mayors and other dignitaries.

So when Paul says that he was made a *diakonos* of the gospel,
he is saying that he was made an ambassador, an agent, an emissary,
“according to the gift of God’s grace,
which was given me by the working of his power.”

If a diakonos was a lowly title, he would not have needed verse 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,*

Yes, Paul is a minister of the gospel – which is a glorious calling! –
but he acknowledges that he is but the very least of all the saints.
After all, he had persecuted the saints before,
but now God has given him grace
to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (remember 1:18-19, 2:7
the immeasurable riches of his kindness)

*and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery
hidden for ages in God who created all things, (v9)*

But what is the purpose of the revelation of this mystery?
What is the purpose of the revelation of the union of Jew and Gentile in one new man?

Paul says in 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.*

We saw in 1:22-23 that God put all things under Christ’s feet
and gave him as head over all things to the church,
which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

We saw in chapter 2 that God has brought us together in one new man,
one holy temple, one new family.

And through the church, the manifold wisdom of God is now made known to the powers.

What are we talking about here?

“rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”

In Jewish thought at that time, “rulers and authorities” (principalities and powers) were names of angelic powers – angelic hosts.

Paul does not think of these angelic powers in very positive terms.

In chapter 6 he will say that these are the very rulers and authorities which *we fight*. Our spiritual warfare is against these very rulers and authorities.

Indeed, it is very easy to see that Paul associates these principalities and powers with the “prince of the power of the air” in 2:2 – the one who *used to be* our master.

So what is the point here?

God’s purpose – the God who created all things – in case you forgot!

God’s purpose is that his manifold wisdom might be made known to the powers – to the rulers and authorities which had usurped authority over his creation.

AND his purpose is that his wisdom might be made known *through the church*.

The church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The church, which knits together Jew and Gentile in one new man.

The church, which is a new temple, a holy dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

God’s purpose in *you* (plural – the church) is to demonstrate his wisdom as he overthrows the powers of this age.

Why is the church so important to this?

Because without the church, God’s wisdom would be foolishness.

Without the church, God sends his Son to die – for nothing.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

Paul once again returns to his opening theme:

that our redemption was predestined in Christ,
and our redemption was accomplished [realized] in Christ,
and our redemption now is applied to us by his Spirit.

God’s eternal purpose has been realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And so therefore we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

This is temple language.

We have access into the very presence of God.
Jesus has brought us near, as our great high priest,
so that we might come boldly before the throne of grace.

You, my brothers and sisters,
may come boldly before God.

How?

By faith.

We do not stand before God because of our own works.
Paul has already made this clear!
It is by grace you have been saved – through faith,
and all this is the gift of God.

The way that you come into the Holy Place –
the way that you come to the Father –
is through the work of Jesus (through the gospel –
the good news that Jesus has done on our behalf what we could not do:
he has passed through suffering to glory – through death to life –
and he has promised that those who believe in him will live).

And so Paul says:

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Paul's own sufferings are said to be on their behalf:

“I am suffering for you.”

Our suffering – my suffering – can never be a propitiatory suffering (an atoning suffering).

But it can be (and must be) a participatory suffering – a sharing in the sufferings of Christ

To understand this better, listen to Paul's prayer:

3. So I Pray... (3:14-21)

For this reason

(Because of the whole previous paragraph)

I bow my knees before the Father,

*from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,
that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you
to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—
that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
may 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 you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

This is an incredible sentence!

I need to say up front that the ESV did a *great* job translating this.
I usually only point out the translation when I disagree with it,
but here I am impressed with how they put this together.

Because Paul prays three things:

- 1) that he may grant you (v16-17)
- 2) that you may have strength (v18-19a)
- 3) and that you may be filled (v19b)

Paul's prayer for you is not that you will do a lot of stuff
(though I daresay that if these three things are true of you,
there is no telling what you might do!).

Paul's prayer for you is that God would radically reorient you to himself.

And let me just remind you that all of the "yous" here are plural.
Paul prays this for the church – that it might be true of *you*.

That God would grant "according to the riches of his glory"
(the glory that he has revealed in the resurrection of Jesus)
that you might be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner man.

And with the power of the Holy Spirit at work in your inner man,
Paul prays also that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

The first thing that Paul prays is for the work of Christ – the work of the Holy Spirit –
in the hearts and lives of church.

But then Paul turns from the passive to the active.

This shouldn't surprise us.

In Ephesians 2 he said that we were saved by grace through faith,
and this was not our own doing, but the gift of God.

And then the very next thing he said was that we were saved *unto good works*,
which God created us for in Christ Jesus!

Even so, here, after emphasizing our need for God to empower us by the Spirit
and for Christ to dwell (to inhabit) our hearts by faith,
then Paul says "in order that you might have strength to comprehend."

If you are rooted and grounded in love
through the indwelling of Christ and the empowering of his Spirit,

then you will have strength to comprehend – to understand – to realize
with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.

What does that mean?

Remember what Paul has just been talking about at the end of chapter 2?

A holy temple.

The measurements of the church are the measurements of this new and glorious temple –
this holy dwelling place for God.

And Christ is already dwelling in his church (inhabiting his holy temple),
then by this love we are enabled to comprehend this spiritual dwelling place.

But Paul prays that you would have strength to comprehend two things:

- 1) not just that you are part of this holy temple,
- 2) but also that you might know the surpassing-knowledge love of Christ.

The word there is *huperballo* – literally, to throw beyond.

Perhaps we should translate that ‘the mind-blowing love of Christ’!

Brothers and sisters, if we ever take this for granted,
then we are in big trouble!

If we ever think that the love of Christ is obvious,
then we are oblivious!

If we ever think, “of course he loves me! After all, look at me, what’s not to love?!”

Then we need to go back to Ephesians 1-2!

We were dead in our sins.

We were strangers, aliens.

We were without God, without hope.

And yet God loved us!

Jesus Christ loved us, died for us, came to dwell with us by his Spirit.

And all of this for the final thing that Paul prays for:

In order that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.

This is the goal of that predestination to adoption in Christ.

This is the purpose of the redemption wrought by Christ.

This is the end of the sealing work of the promised Holy Spirit.

Redemption predestined, redemption accomplished, redemption applied –
all this is so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Talk about mind blowing.

I can handle the part about redemption.

I can see the whole Jesus died in my place as my substitute.

I got that.

Adoption.

That works.

God adopts me as his heir.

Great.

But that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

What?

It was not enough for God to love me.

It was not enough for God to give me a place at his table.

It was not enough for God to send his only Son to die that I might live.

But he also says that I am to be filled with all his fullness.

How can I, who am mortal, receive the fullness of the immortal one?

How can I, who was born in sin, receive into myself the Holy One?

How...

The eternal Son of God became all that we are by nature,

so that we might become all that he is by grace.

Indeed, so astounded is Paul at what he has just said,

that he pauses to give glory to God:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,

according to the power at work within us,

to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations,

forever and ever. Amen.

Again, notice how Paul connects Christ and his church.

“to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus has united his church to himself.

We share in the fullness of God which dwelt bodily in Jesus Christ.