

The Epistle to the Ephesians

“United by a Moment”

Our Purpose in Christ

Eph. 3:1-13

Paul’s ministry was the stewardship of a mystery. Broadly speaking, the mystery was about Christ, and about the salvation which He would accomplish on the cross of Calvary for both Jews and Gentiles. These things were spoken of in the Old Testament in shadows, even though they were not fully understood. What was utterly new and unexpected (a complete mystery) was that Jews and Gentiles would be reconciled to God as “one new man” in the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul wants them to glory in what they are and what they have in Jesus Christ, and he wants what they are and what they have in Jesus Christ to color the way that they approach his tribulation and their own. That makes this a very practical passage for you and me, because Paul wants us to glory in what we are and have in Christ Jesus. Paul brings out four things to remember when tempted to be discouraged so that we do not lose heart (v. 13).

Four realities that color Paul’s perspective:

A. the prisoner of Christ (v. 1)

First of all, notice he says “For this reason...” If you and I were together in Ephesus, my guess is there would be at least one person brave enough to say, ‘You know, the last time I checked, Paul was a prisoner of Caesar. It wasn’t Jesus who put him in prison; it was Caesar! He’s under house arrest. It’s Nero, for crying out loud, to whom he is a prisoner.’

The Apostle Paul knows that, and yet what does he want to emphasize to the Ephesians? ‘I’m the prisoner of Christ. Nobody puts me here unless Jesus wants me here. No man has power to prevent my service to the gospel unless Jesus decides that that’s going to happen.’ Isn’t that a gloriously comforting truth? He’s already pointing to the rule and overrule of our sovereign God in every affair of life.

Paul was delighted to have the privilege of being imprisoned for proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. (i.e. for the advance of Jesus’ mission – the building of the church). Was that not in God's will that he should be in prison to write a book such as this? Of course it was! Paul was God's instrument to getting you the Gospel here in the 21st century 'He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name unto the Gentiles'. Hallelujah! What a God we have - that way back there on the road to Damascus He was thinking of us, over here, 2000 years away, He was thinking of you and me!

B. A Gospel Stewardship (v. 2, 7-10)

The new temple will be built only through the gospel going forth. Jesus uses messy, ordinary people who have seen the unsearchable riches of Christ to take these riches to the nations.

C. Mystery revealed (v. 3-6)

A mystery at its most basic level in the New Testament is something that was once concealed and has now been revealed. The Gentiles are **fellow recipients** or **fellow partakers** of the promises; the promises that God gave to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, and to the children of Israel. Those promises belong to the Gentile believers as well as the Jewish believers in Jesus Christ.

A revelation of God was given to the apostle Paul, and he was to make it known internationally! We have a title deed to the true promised land – heirs to the new heavens and new earth – sharing together in the promise of fellowship with God under Christ.

God has revealed himself and his purpose in actual words and teaching. This truth was revealed not to us directly but to the apostles and prophets and through them to us (John 17:20). The apostles and prophets would be given the Spirit of truth and he would lead them into all truth. God told them what was to be put on record. In other words, as well as revealing himself in the great redemptive deeds and acts of history God has given his explanation and his exposition of those deeds in the Bible.

The bedrock of gospel salvation is revelation. If God had not spoken we would know nothing, and any man could think what he liked, and do what was right in his own eyes.

John the Baptist once said, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." If you know some of the least things about God, and grace, and gospel, and glory in Jesus Christ, it is only because God has revealed it and God has spoken about himself, his Son and his salvation. If you know anything about this it is not your discovery, but as our Savior said to Peter, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." From where does the least grain of gospel truth, the least bit of gospel comfort, solace, and salvation, the least knowledge of the whole scheme and plan of redemption come, but from God's initiative in revealing Himself?

The gospel of God's grace in Christ "humbles" – "the least ..." and brings about a deep consciousness of our own unworthiness.

There are two reasons, I believe, Paul mentioned that he was the least of all the saints. One is because he was a hater and persecutor of the church and of Christ. He never got over that God had chosen him in spite of his horrible past. The other reason is to remind you today that he can do the same for you.

God's business is making churches. This is God's goal. He created the world, and he redeemed a people through the death of his Son (see Ephesians 2:12-19), and He sends missionaries and gathers his church by the preaching of the riches of Christ "so that that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." The ingathering of God's elect exists, and the church exists so that angels would stand in awe of the wisdom of God. God displays his wisdom in history so that the worship of heaven would be white hot with admiration and wonder. (1 Peter 1:12)

The demons also (Ephesians 6:12)—the evil principalities and powers—must look at this masterpiece and watch the wisdom by which they were defeated in the very moment they thought they had triumphed—in the death and resurrection of Christ, and in the blood of the martyrs.

D. An Eternal Purpose (v. 11-13)

God had very difficult material to work with! Yet, look what God can do in grace. When Christ moves in – it is a dilapidated abode – but Christ makes it an abode fitting for Himself. You will hardly recognize that it is the same household! The church was a part of the eternal purpose of God!