

# Ephesians 3:1-13 - July 3rd, 2022

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[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. God is good, and all the time, He is good.

If you have your Bibles, if you would please turn with me to the letter, to the Ephesians, chapter 3. We're going to be continuing our verse-by-verse study. So I do hope that you bring your Bibles as we go through this wonderful epistle from the Apostle Paul.

Last week, our passage, in that passage, Paul began directing his words to the Gentile members of the church in Ephesus. And boy, he had some wonderful things to say, didn't he?

He really did. Even though they were formally separated from Jesus Christ, and they had nothing to do with God's promises, nothing to do with God's covenants, they now have been brought near to God by the blood of Jesus Christ.

But even more, he went on to talk about how that wall of hostility that existed between believing Jews and believing Gentiles was now broken down.

[1:20] And of course, both groups now, he says, have been reconciled to God himself. And not only that, they both have access to him.

They both together are fellow citizens and together are members of God's household. Now, I'll tell you what, as a Gentile myself, that seems too good to be true.

It does. How can we know that Paul's words are true? Well, in our passage this morning, Paul's going to be explaining his calling and his ministry to the Gentiles.

And to basically assure them, and I believe us today, that all of this is true because of from where it comes. It's true because of the source.

It all comes from God himself. Friends, this is a very fascinating passage of scripture. And it's a very difficult one. I think for one thing, verses 2 to 13 is just one long sentence in the Greek language.

[2:26] And so let's go ahead and read chapters, beginning in verse 1 of chapter 3 in Ephesians. He says, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles, Verse 2, Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you.

That is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

Verse 6, This mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace, given to me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all of God's people, this grace was given to me, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, for which ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose, which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[4:22] In him and through faith in him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are for your glory.

Oh, heavenly Father, it is so wonderful to be able to just bathe in your word to us. Lord, may these words come alive to us as we seek to understand all the things that you said here through your servant Paul.

May we walk away, Lord, as changed people, people that have been deeply affected as your spirit moves within us, Lord, and shows us the purpose of the church, shows us the purpose of why we are alive today and the time we live in, how we may be useful to you.

Lord, we ask for these graces in the name of Jesus. Amen. I want to ask you this morning, maybe a show of hands, are any of you skeptics?

Yeah, there's quite a few of you. Maybe you will relate to some of these statements here, just to check and see. Maybe you are a skeptic and you don't know it.

[5:40] Here's one. Here's a statement. Money talks. Mine always says goodbye. I went to see the doctor about my short-term memory problems and the first thing he did was make me pay in advance.

Most people are, you've got to listen to this, most people are shocked when they find out how bad I am as an electrician. I find it ironic.

Here's one for this holiday here. I find it ironic that the colors red, white, and blue stand for freedom until they're flashing behind you. Yeah.

I accidentally handed my wife a glue stick instead of chapstick. She still isn't talking to me. Just a couple more here.

These are pretty good. Smoking will kill you. Bacon will kill you. And yet, smoking bacon will cure you. Where there's a will, there's a relative.

[6:50] I'm skeptical of anyone who tells me they do yoga every day. That's a bit of a stretch. I looked up my family tree and found out I was a sap.

When everything is coming your way, you're in the wrong lane. Just a couple more. I failed math so many times in school, I can't even count.

I went to buy camouflaged trousers, and I couldn't find any. One more here. When my boss asked me who was stupid, me or him, I told him he doesn't hire stupid people.

Maybe you can relate to some of those statements here as a skeptic. That's the last one.

I wouldn't say that to my boss here. Let's go ahead and see how does Paul support these wonderful claims that he has made to the Gentile members of the Church of Ephesus.

[7:59] I'm going to begin in verse 2 here. Look with me if you have your Bibles. He's basically saying, Surely you have heard about the stewardship of God's grace given to me for you.

I want to ask, Why would Paul ask such a thing? Even though Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years, several years have passed by now, and maybe there's some new people in the congregation.

Some that have not heard about Paul and what he went through. There's another possibility, though, and that's that some scholars actually believe that this letter was intended to be a circular letter for all the churches in Asia Minor, not just the Ephesians.

In other words, it's very similar to the book of Revelation. You know, Revelation is an epistle sent to seven different churches in Asia Minor.

Why would some people think that? Did you know that in chapter 1, verse 1, the phrase, At Ephesus, is missing in several reliable ancient manuscripts?

[9:10] Instead, in those manuscripts, there's a blank space as if the name of a church could be inserted. Now, I'll tell you, friends, this is highly debated.

But regardless if this letter was not originally sent to Ephesus or regardless if there's new people, I suppose it's possible that there are some people in Asia Minor, which is present-day Turkey, who did not know about Paul.

I think if we talk to many people on the street or maybe some of friends or family members, do you know about the Apostle Paul, what he went through, how God changed him, how he went from a persecutor of Christians to the Apostle to the Gentiles?

I think there's a lot of people that wouldn't know that. Well, just in case, Paul is going to give his account of his life. And in it, we're going to see three reasons why the Gentiles can know these

statements that he said about them are true.

It's not fake news. It's true. The first one is this. God revealed his plan. Very simple. He did. Notice verse 3.

[10:26] By revelation, there was made known to me, he says, the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. Now, here's a word that really jumps out, doesn't it?

That word mystery. Paul mentioned it back in chapter 1, verse 9, but it occurs some six times in this letter, three of those in our passage this morning.

I want to ask you, what is a mystery? Is it something that you, like something that's mysterious or something that's spooky? Well, a biblical understanding of a mystery, he gives in verse 5.

Notice here. It's something which he says, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the spirit.

Now, that's quite a mouthful here, but I want you to notice three things here. First of all, a mystery is a truth that was hidden in the past, but it was unveiled at a much later time.

[11:32] He refers to it. Generations later. He's talking here about the New Testament. The mysteries were revealed in the New Testament.

Secondly, he says that these truths were revealed, look at this, to the holy apostles and prophets.

Now, who are the apostles that he's referring? It's the original 12 men that Jesus picked. Now, we have to remember, Judas was replaced by Matthias.

In the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter 13, Jesus was speaking to his apostles, and he said this, to you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them, and he's referring to unbelieving Jews, it has not been granted.

That's all the way back in Matthew, chapter 13. Here, Jesus is speaking to his apostles, and he's referring to a future time when these mysteries, plural, these mysteries, will be made known to them.

And so, for the original 12 apostles, this happened at Pentecost, in Acts, chapter 2. For Paul, this occurred while he was on the road to Damascus, and we're going to see, he's going to talk about that later, verses 7 and 8.

[12:56] Here's the third thing that we see. These mysteries were revealed by who? By the Holy Spirit. Now, some have promoted the idea that these mysteries were given only to Paul, and that he revealed them to others.

No, friends, Paul says otherwise, right here. Who are the prophets? Well, these are the preachers and teachers who preach truths that have already been revealed.

Paul would say to his first letter to the Corinthians, one who prophesies speaks to men for edification, exhortation, and consolation.

If you want to write that down, that's 1 Corinthians 14, verse 3. Notice here that he talked about mysteries. There's a number of mysteries that we're familiar with.

For example, in the New Testament, in his epistles, Paul mentions the mystery of the gospel. It's in Romans 16. The mystery of the incarnation of Christ himself.

[14:05] That's in Colossians. The mystery of God's wisdom. That's in 1 Corinthians chapter 2. The mystery of godliness. That's in 1 Timothy chapter 3.

The mystery of lawlessness. That lawlessness, he says, is already at work in 2 Thessalonians. How about the mystery of Israel's unbelief?

Yeah, we talked about that when we went through Romans chapter 11. How about the mystery of the resurrection of our bodies? That's in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

Well, in this section here in Ephesians, Paul's going to be, he's referring to the mystery involving the Gentiles. Look with me, verse 6. He says, to be specific that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

So what does Paul mean here? Well, notice he gives us three descriptions and they all begin with the word fellow. First thing, they're fellow heirs of the riches that God bestows on all his people.

[15:18] I want to ask you, friends, does God have any riches? Oh, yeah. You bet he has. How about this second one?

Jewish and Gentile believers together are fellow partakers of God's promises. Does God have any promises for us? Yeah, we come here every Sunday and we bathe in them.

We talk about them. We relish them. We look forward to God's promises. What a wonderful thing that is. Thirdly, notice Jewish and Gentile believers are fellow members of the body.

Ah, the body. This is a metaphor. It's a metaphor for the church. The church is called the body of Christ.

And that's because in a body you have what? You have many parts. And all these parts are relating to one another. The mystery is not that the Gentiles would eventually be saved.

[16:26] saved. No, there's many Old Testament passages that talk about Gentile salvation. No, the main point here is God has joined believing Jews and Gentiles as equals.

Equals together in this one new body which is the church. There's nothing in the Old Testament that puts Jews and Gentiles together in a single organism.

Writing his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul will say this, for by one spirit we are all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we were all made to drink of one spirit. Boy, friends, what a blessing it is to be counted in as a fellow heir, a fellow member of God's family, a fellow partaker.

I think for us believers here, when's the last time you've just sat down and pondered that? What a great thing to ponder our place in this time in history.

[17:36] What a great thing it is. If you ever get down in the dumps about something, think about that. Think about, you know, God is still on the throne. He is still active in our lives.

He is still, He has still made promises to you. And God is still, He's not going to leave us. And those promises will be fulfilled.

What a thing to ponder. If you're ever down in the dumps, just think about that. With all of that, Paul's now going to connect all of this to his ministry.

Here's the second reason Gentiles can know these things are true. It's because God showed Paul what his part in the plan was.

Look with me, verse 7. God made known to me a minister, God made me a minister of all of this according to his grace and power.

[18:36] In other words, God appointed Paul to proclaim God's marvelous plan of uniting both Jews and Gentiles together in Christ.

And friends, this is a very personal matter for him. I want you to notice a couple things here. First, he talks about grace. It was by grace. And he's going to talk about that a little bit later here.

But notice, secondly, that this ministry was given to him through the working of God's power. It took God's power. And that's because this idea about the unity between believing Jews and Gentiles sure brought him a lot of pain and trouble.

this past week. I was sitting at the car dealership dealing with a bad tire and a tire wasn't in stock. So I had to wait a while.

But I had a chance to read Paul's account in Acts 21 all the way to chapter 28. If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn to Acts 21 with me.

[19:45] Acts 21. It's a very interesting thing talking about Paul's pain and trouble. You see, when Paul left Ephesus, he eventually arrives in Jerusalem.

And this is chapter 21 verses 28 to 29. And he's asked by James and some of the other apostles to assist these four guys to fulfill what's called a Nazarite vow in the temple.

Well, Paul did that. He took these guys, paid their way, and they fulfilled the Nazarite vow. Verse 27 says that when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, and I ask you to look at that, they're from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple began to stir up all the multitude and they laid hands on him.

Verse 28, here's what, they're crying out, men of Israel, come to our aid. This is a man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the law and this place.

And besides, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place. And verse 29 is a key verse. For they had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, in the city with him.

[21:08] And they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. What a misunderstanding. They're accusing Paul of bringing this Gentile into this holy temple for the Jews.

And this misunderstanding as we read on, it leads to this huge riot. And it actually takes the Roman soldiers to just break up everything and settle everybody down before Paul is able to address the crowd.

What does he tell them? He tells them his story. He tells them how he was a faithful Jew. Even trying to exterminate these followers of Jesus, which at that time was called the way.

But then while on his road to Damascus, he said that Jesus revealed himself. So Paul's telling his story here. But here's the main point.

When Paul gets to the part about when Jesus commissioned him to go to the Gentiles, the Jews lost it. They lost it.

[22:18] Look with me, chapter 22, verse 22. They listened to him up to this statement. And then they raised their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live.

What a ruckus. And eventually now, Paul's in prison, writing these prison epistles. This is why Paul says in verse 1, For this reason, I, Paul, am a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake of you Gentiles. You see, the main point here is he was a prisoner because he's doing what the Lord told him to do, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

He was honored to do it. He called it by God's grace He has me doing it. If you turn back with Ephesians chapter 3 with me, he says in verse 8, To me, me, I'm the very least of all the saints. This grace was given to me, the least of all the saints. Boy, that tells me Paul was never amazed, never ceased to be amazed that he was chosen by God for such a vital task.

[23:34] Paul was convinced to do two things. If you look with me here, chapter 3, verse 8. Here's his first purpose that God wanted Paul to do, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable, unfathomable riches of Christ.

That's no surprise here, is it? Don't we expect to learn of Paul that he's a preacher to the Gentiles? When Paul refers to the unfathomable riches of Christ, he actually uses a word that's found nowhere else in Greek literature.

You might think of it as incalculable, unsearchable, incomprehensible, literally riches that cannot be tracked. It can't be traced.

Have you ever thought of God's riches like that? And we get them? What an amazing thing here. I don't think any of us are going to repeat what Paul did.

No, but consider if you're a believer, God has equipped you, he has placed within you something to say to people. He has placed his treasure in you.

[24:55] And no doubt, this past week, you have encountered situations with people where you could have said something that God placed in you. I'm not trying to put a guilt trip on anyone, but if we think about that, that maybe God wants us to do that, that he wants us to speak to the darkness.

He wants us to be his representative, his ambassador. And that's because, friends, we live in a dark world. We live in a world that's desperate.

It's a desperate need for truth. So the first thing, no surprise, God wants Paul to preach to the Gentiles. Secondly, look with me. He wants him to explain, verse 9, the new dispensation that we are in right now.

Notice with me. To bring to light what is the administration of this mystery. Wow. In other words, the second part of Paul's ministry was to shed light, he says it, on the administration of this mystery. Paul's talking about the timing of God's plan. That bringing, believing Jews and Gentiles together would bring about a new era.

[26:16] era. A new dispensation. The church age is a new dispensation. It's commonly called the age of grace.

It's great. It's because God deals with us on the basis of grace. Not on the basis of our sins. Not on the basis of the law and what we can do.

But he deals with us on the basis of grace. I was looking at our membership class and in the past we taught that there's five purposes for the church.

To worship God, to teach God's people, to enjoy fellowship, fourth, to minister to one another, fifth, to evangelize.

What great purposes there are for God's church. You want to know another one? Look with me.

Verse 10. It's to magnify God's wisdom to the angelic world.

[27:21] I'm not kidding. Look with me. Verse 10. That the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places.

That phrase there, rulers and authorities in heavenly places, that's referring to the angelic world.

We see that in other places in the New Testament. The main point here is that angels are going to marvel at God's wisdom as they observe Jews and Gentiles united together in one body.

Notice here, they're going to see manifold wisdom. That means it's talking about how many facets of wisdom, many applications of wisdom, like a diamond, or maybe like the beauty of an embroidered pattern on a piece of cloth.

It was God's wisdom that he sent his son to pay the price of our sins. And all of us who have placed our faith in Christ are reconciled.

We're reconciled to him. We're reconciled to each other. Think about that. How would you like to have that task placed on you?

[28:43] Pretty impossible, huh? Yeah, starting with me. We are reconciled to him and reconciled to each other. God did what was humanly impossible.

God reconciled the irreconcilable. God did it. And the angels are watching it. Peter says in 1 Peter 1, let me read this.

He's talking about that the things which now have been announced to you through those who preach the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. And then he adds this. Things into which angels long to look into.

You might write that down. 1 Peter 1, verse 12. In other words, the mysteries of the gospel are so glorious that the angels honestly desire to look into them.

They're curious. They're watching us. What a thought. They're watching us as a church. We are being watched by angels.

[29:53] angels. And the more the church lives in harmony with its high calling, the more the angels will be able to see God's marvelous wisdom.

And what this means is that the church doesn't exist for itself. It exists for God's glory. Can I hear an amen? Yeah. It exists for God and exists for His glory.

And that brings up a question. If that's the case, why are there so many churches going woke? Why are there so many churches promoting things that are contrary to God's word?

Why are there so many people who are still thinking that salvation is by works? When the scripture clearly teaches us that it is through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone, why is that?

When the angels behold the wisdom of God at work in the church, their knowledge and worship of God will increase.

[31:05] Did you know that in Luke 15 it says that there's joy before the angels of God even when one sinner repents? Friends, we need to have a high view of God's church.

He bought it. He paid for it. For us. He paid for it. And this new humanity Paul's talking about will one day rule in the universe with Christ.

Friends, that's us. If you are a believer, I'm talking about you. All of these words that Paul has spoken to the Gentiles are true because, first, God revealed his plan.

Secondly, Paul had a part in it and God revealed it to him. Third, the reason Gentiles can know these statements are true is that all of God's plans and purposes will one day be accomplished. Look with me, verse 11. All of this happened according to God's eternal purpose and plan carried out through Jesus Christ. This is referring to Christ's headship over the church which is in preparation for his ultimate assumption of authority over the entire universe.

[32:29] Paul said this earlier in this letter. If you look with me, chapter 1, verse 9, speaking of God, he says, God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his kind attention which he purposed in

