

Ephesians 3:1-13

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[0 : 00] in Ephesians chapter 3. So this morning we will be in Ephesians chapter 3 verses 1 through 13. Ephesians chapter 3 verses 1 through 13. If you remember the book of Ephesians is one of the most theologically rich books of the writings of Paul. Paul is very clearly defined this book. It's in six chapters. The first three chapters deal with theology and the last three chapters deal with practice. So he tells us what we need to know and then he tells us how we should behave based on what we know. All right we need to know what we know first. So we need to know what we believe and then we need to believe what we know. So when we get the knowledge right and we really hold on to those things which are true then it would dictate how we live our life and that's exactly what Paul is doing in the book of Ephesians. He gives three chapters of rich theology and it is very rich. It is so deep and he gets sometimes we can't scratch our heads saying what is he even talking about and then he gets into practice in the last three chapters of okay now that these things are established and you understand them and you get a grasp of them then this is what it looks like to live it out. And I'm so thankful that the Bible doesn't just give us abstract truths. It gives us definite truths and then gives us the application of those truths right. How they should affect our life and what our life should look like because the truth of scripture should absolutely change the practice of our life. And we'll see that even in this morning's passage. Up to this point Paul has been talking about the individual. He has been talking about I know some of you weren't here some of you were here but if you were it's been some weeks right. Up to this point he's been talking about the glories of our salvation. How we were predestined before the foundations of the world were laid and God called us to himself. That he called us to himself for good works. He created us in Christ Jesus for good works which he had predestined before everything was formed. That he had a reason for a calling. We've been adopted as children of God and we are joint heirs with Christ and it's it's so glorious when we understand our salvation and we see that it's not really a decision that we made. The decision we made is in response to a work he had already done. Right. It wasn't that we chose God among all these other choices that were there. It's that God so loved us that he gave his only begotten son so that whosoever will and then he moved in the will of man and I know we don't have time to really get into it but he drew us to himself because no man comes to the father lest he be drawn by the father. Right. And the spirit blows and we understand all these great concepts but that before God laid the foundations of the world he looked throughout the portals of history because he transcends time and he saw you and he saw me and he said that's my child and he did what it took to redeem us and then he showed us that his great love for us had redeemed us and he called us to himself and we responded to the love he was pouring out upon us. That's salvation and it's so glorious when we stand in the reality of that because it wasn't that we just one day decided God was better than everything else we chose because the danger in that is maybe there'll be a day where something else seems better to you than what you have found in God. That's not what salvation is. Salvation is that God showed you that even when you were unlovable he loved you. Even when sin had wrecked havoc upon your life and you were in the depths of the pit and we were all in our ugliness and we were enemies with God that he loved us still and he died for us that we are his children and he's redeemed us and that should excite us and then Paul transitions into the third chapter because this is biblical. He moves from the individual to the corporate body called the church and he starts looking at the church and looking at the importance of it and there'll be some wording here that will kind of scratch your head saying what is he talking about?

Hopefully we'll understand that in just a moment. So if you're physically able and desire to do so, would you join with me as we stand together and we read the word of God in Ephesians chapter 3 starting in verse 1 and we'll go down to verse 13, okay?

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you, that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery as I wrote before in brief.

By referring to this, when you read, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ 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. 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 of which I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of his power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in him. Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart in my tribulations on your behalf for they are for your glory. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this day. God, we thank you that we have the opportunity as brothers and sisters in Christ to gather together to sing songs of praise.

[5 : 51] Lord, what a great privilege it is to read the word of God. Lord, as we have read it and heard it, Lord, now we pray that by the power and presence of your spirit you would speak it into our hearts and minds.

Lord, may it not stay in the mind but may it move to the heart and move throughout our whole lives for your glory and honor and we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated.

Paul moves from the individual to the corporate body. One thing that we realize in just a casual reading of scripture is scripture often focuses on the corporate body of believers rather than just the individual believer. In the Old Testament, we see that God was dealing with his people on a national level.

God called an individual, Abram, out of the land of the Ur of the Chaldeans so that he may raise up a nation, Israel, out of him and that he dealt with an individual for the sake of the nation and he called the nation to himself so that he could deal with those individuals in their connection to that nation so that that nation could be a billboard to a watching world. He dealt with them on a national level.

We see that in the sins of individuals in the Old Testament. Achan's sin affected a multitude of people. Saul's sin affected a multitude of people. David's sin, as we'll see as we end 2 Samuel very soon, will affect a multitude of people because God deals with the individuals on a national level. The nation had a part. It was a corporate body of God's display to the world. When we transition into the New Testament, God is still dealing with individuals, but he's dealing with them on a corporate scale. He's calling individuals to himself and uniting them with other individuals and building them up into what he refers to as a spiritual household, or we would call it a church. And he deals with the corporate body of the church. The sins of the individual often affect the corporate body of the church. This is why Paul was so stringent in his dealing with sin of individual members is because that he knew an individual sin could affect the corporate body called the church.

[8 : 04] And he dealt with them very specifically for the sake of the body. We have seen that every promise in the New Testament has its connection to a church, not just to an individual. It is bad theology to name it and claim it anytime, but it is also bad theology to pull the promises of scripture apart from the church or the bride of Christ and to apply them to ourselves if we are not connected to a church.

Someone once said that if we are a believer and we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, then that which is important to him will be important to us. And you do not have to dig very far in scripture to find that the church. It is his bride. He is preparing a wedding supper for his bride. It is rampant all throughout scripture. Paul here introduces those individuals that have been saved through the application and the theology of the corporate body of the church. And he uses a word in which we think strange and that is the word mystery. I want you to see this morning what it looks like to be stewards of the mystery. Stewards of the mystery. Many movies and Hollywood has made fortunes on such themes of keepers of the mystery and people who would hold secrets and people who would pass them on through the ages. But I don't know if you realize it or not, but I believe as a believer in Jesus

Christ, you have the greatest mystery that has ever been revealed. You know the greatest truth that has ever been known. You know the greatest thoughts that have ever been presented. And that's exactly what Paul is pointing out. And that mystery is not something that is spooky or scary, but it was something that was previously unknown and as he says, unrevealed. As a matter of fact, when we read throughout the Old Testament, we see no such mentioning in all of the history of God's dealing with his people from in the beginning God created to the book of Malachi where God says, I will send a forerunner. We see no mentioning through all those ages of the church. None. Now we can read back into it on this side of the cross and we can see where the church fits in the prophetic ages. I was explaining this to someone not too long ago, Isaiah, the prophet of the soon coming king. He is prophesying of the king that would be there and he is looking down through the portals of history and he sees the coming of the king. And if you see this prophecy where he speaks of the government resting upon his shoulders and you see that he's looking at that and that's the hope and anticipation of the Jewish people. He's looking at mountain peaks, but he doesn't see the valley, which we refer to as the church age. We see it displayed in the New

Testament when Jesus goes into the temple and he takes the scroll of Isaiah and he opens up the scroll of Isaiah and he began to read from the scroll of Isaiah. And he says, it has been given to me to preach the gospel, to give sight to the blind, healing to the lame and to raise the dead. Right? You remember that and it says, and then he closed the scroll. Now, if you go back to Isaiah, you'll see that he stopped midway through the prophecy and stopped short and closed the scroll and handed it back. He left off the part about the government resting upon his shoulders, the rod of iron never departing from his hand. He didn't bring the rest of that to light because that was not yet the time. That's the gap, which we call the church. This is the mystery that was unknown to the people of God and even to all of creation until now, until the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We open up the book of Acts and we see the birth of something that was before unknown and unrealized. We see the birth of the church. Paul is so excited about this thing called the church. He's so moved by it that he, he gets on a tangent here because if you read verse one, Paul says, for this reason, if you go down to verse 14, you'll see

Paul says again, for this reason, many Bible scholars believe, and I agree with them that Paul got so carried away. He stopped short of what he was about to say. And what he's about to say is this is why I pray for you. But before he could tell them why he prayed for them, he got carried away in describing his current situation. He says, for this reason, the prisoner, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles. And if you want to finish to that, I pray for you in this way. But then he stopped short and said, well, let me tell them while I'm in the position I am in. He wanted to tell them that he is a prisoner. But why is he a prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles? Why is he a prisoner of Christ Jesus? It is because of his stewardship of the mystery that has been revealed of which we too are stewards. The first thing I want you to see that comes with this stewardship is a responsibility. Paul says, for this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you

[13 : 11] Gentiles. And then he stopped and said, well, maybe they'll get discouraged and said, well, if he is praying for us, what good are prayers from a man that's imprisoned? What good are prayers from a man that sits in the jail cell and the Roman guard over him? What good are prayers? Maybe God failed him.

He says, well, wait a minute. Let me define for you why I'm here. Because you remember the account, right? You read the book of Acts. At any moment, Paul could have been free from Roman imprisonment.

At any moment, Paul could have recanted his faith and been free. At any moment, Paul could have been set free. At any moment when Paul was caught captive by a mass crowd, an angry crowd at the temple, and they carried him away, and they were beating him, and the Roman centurion came in and led him up the staircase, and Paul stopped and started speaking to them in their own language, and the crowd was quiet, and the crowd was calm, and Paul could have got away with it, but he said one word. He said the word Gentiles, and as soon as he said the word Gentiles, they said, kill him, kill him, kill him. Get away with him. At any moment, Paul could have been of all of his trials and all of his, if he had appealed to Caesar, Paul could have been free from imprisonment, but he decided to stay imprisoned. Why? Because the mystery was so great. The truth which he knows is worth the price that he's paying.

And it's the truth that has been passed on to us. Look at what it says. If indeed you have heard of the stewardship, now I want you to pay attention to this word stewardship. Some translations have dispensation. It literally means something that you are entrusted with, a dispensation.

This word stewardship in verse 2, hold on to that. If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace, which was given to me for you. Here we begin to see the responsibility that comes with this. Have you ever thought about this matter? That the grace of God, while it is freely given to you, also comes with a responsibility of you. That God's grace, while it is free, also carries with it a vast responsibility of personal measure. That is, God doesn't just extend his grace so that you can take his grace, and as Paul would say elsewhere, use it as a crutch to sin. Grace is given to you free of charge so that you can carry forth faithfully and finally the responsibility he's entrusted to you.

[15 : 38] Chapter 2 says that God called you to himself, and he created you in Christ Jesus. That's grace, right? He created you in Christ Jesus for good works. That is, the grace that God bestows upon us is the very thing that makes us responsible to do the good works which he created.

See, we weren't created in Christ Jesus to go live our life. We weren't created in Christ Jesus to go live however we want to live. We weren't created new in Christ Jesus to pick and choose what we want to do. We were created in Christ Jesus for good works which he prepared for us to do. That's the responsibility. Friend, listen to me. God is not just trying to fill the courtroom of heaven.

He has, we sing about it this morning, right? Angels and seraphim and cherubim that are already falling on their face before him. He has multitudes and multitudes and multitudes of angelic beings around him that are worshiping him. John saw it in the book of Revelations. They're constantly praising him, saying, holy, holy, holy is the lamb that was slain, right? There are multitudes upon multitudes that are there. God doesn't need us to fill space in heaven. God doesn't need us to fill a void in his life. God doesn't need us. God loves us in spite of us and his love is displayed to us through grace, but that grace makes us responsible to do what he's called us to do. He says he's created us in Christ Jesus for good works. Paul says that responsibility came to him. He says that he has a stewardship of God's grace, which was given to me for you, that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. We'll get to that in just a moment. Paul says that when I accepted Jesus Christ, all of a sudden this grace flood upon my soul. New insight was given into my life. I began to understand things I could not understand before, and I knew that my understanding of those things made me responsible for those things. I've told you this before, and I encourage you to do it when you read the word of God, and God begins to reveal the word of God to you. That is, you open up the word, you go, oh look there, there's something I've never seen. Don't say it's something new, it's something as old as God himself, but say there's something I've never seen. And you say, oh I've never noticed that before.

And all of a sudden this new insight, or we would say this new revelation comes to you. You're coming to a fuller understanding of the Lord God Almighty, and you're seeing something for the first time. You know what's connected with that revelation? Responsibility. Because one thing that I have found in scripture is that God does not reveal himself for nothing. God reveals himself for a purpose. Moses on the backside of the wilderness, right? Remember Moses, right? He was something in Egypt, and then he spent 40 years becoming something, and he went 40 years so that he can become nothing, and he's on the backside of the wilderness tending his sheep, and all of a sudden this bush is burning over here, and he wanted to see why the bush was burning. God didn't set the bush on fire, though the bush wasn't consumed, just so Moses could say that was something cool, right? He didn't walk over there and go, oh look at this revelation of God, and God called him by name, said the place on which you're standing is holy ground. And Moses could have went back home and told his wife and kids about all this cool stuff he saw on the backside of the wilderness, and everything would have been hunky-dory from then on. He could have stayed in the wilderness tending his sheep. Jethro, his father-in-law, would have been there. Everything's fine. There would have been no trial. There would have been no heartbreak over all these people that are rebelling against God. There would have been no striking the rock twice and getting in trouble. All the griefs and the sorrows. Sure, there's joy, but all of that wouldn't have happened if he just said, that's a pretty cool burning bush over there. No, God revealed himself to Moses in a burning bush because he had something for Moses to do. Friend, listen to me. Read scripture.

Everybody God reveals a truth to. It's because he has something for them to do, and they have a responsibility to do it. Why would we think that would change today? Why would we think that we could come and we could sit with the people of God and listen to the word of God and hopefully get a greater revelation of God and then go and live our lives the rest of the way we want to? No, grace comes with responsibility. And Paul says, the responsibility I had was to you Gentiles, and there I'm imprisoned.

[19 : 46] Why did Paul not recant? Why did Paul not deny? Why did Paul choose to stay imprisoned in a Roman cell? Because it was his responsibility to declare the truth of the gospel to the Gentiles. Friend, what are you willing to do with the responsibility you have been given? Because see, God calls each and every one of us to himself for good works, which he prepared for us. God has something good for you.

Oh, I'll just be honest with you. There are many Sunday evenings and Monday evenings and Mondays and Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays where I say, oh, I don't think I want to be a preacher anymore. He said, there's no way. I said, well, the thought of preaching sounds great.

The thought of pastoring is very difficult. I said, well, maybe it'd be good. Evangelists sound great. I can be an evangelist and go in and make everybody mad and then leave, right? That sounds awesome. I can be that. I could be that guy and nobody really got upset him. I'm not getting invited back again, but maybe I would. Who knows? And I've thought about that and God says, no, I've called you to pastor.

That's my responsibility. And you're saying, well, I'm glad that's your responsibility. I'm glad you don't have it. Well, you know what? I'm glad I don't have your responsibility because this one's mine, but each and every one of us have one and I can't carry yours and you can't carry mine. Now I'm accountable for how I respond and how, because the grace that was given to me, this is what God chose for me, but the grace given to you, God's got something for you too.

Paul said, I'm imprisoned for it. Recently, we as a church decided this year, this 2024, we're going to start supporting Voice of the Martyrs, right? Dealing with a persecuted church around the world. You open up the Voice of the Martyrs magazines and you see these pastors that have been beaten and imprisoned and persecuted the wives. And you read the one most recently, it was just a recap, but just 10 years later, right? Or 15 years later, the church bombing that went on, it killed the pastor's wife and his two, or killed his two children and injured his wife.

[21 : 55] And yet he's still preaching. He's still there and he's still got joy. Why? Because he knows that God called him to preach, right? You see these widows that continue to minister even after their husbands are martyred for the faith. Why? Because that's their responsibility. That's today.

That's not, you know, back when Paul was in prison. That's today. It's our responsibility. And we see that this grace comes to us with this. And Paul says, and when I became known, he said, well, that was Paul's. Well, look at verse nine. I told you to hold on to the word stewardship, right? Look at verse nine.

And to bring the light, what is the administration? The New American Standard says, what is the administration of the mystery? The word administration is the same word as stewardship. Both of them literally mean dispensation. They both mean something that you have been entrusted with to do.

You have been given the responsibility. So Paul says, my job is to bring the light. What is the stewardship of everybody else? So when he's calling these churches to himself and, and he's calling these churches to Christ and he's raising up leaders and elders in the church and he's, he's growing churches. He's telling them, you're responsible. I knew a mystery. I told you the mystery. Now you go tell somebody else the mystery. This is church history, by the way, just passed down through the ages. That every new age of believers given the same responsibility, the same stewardship of this mystery. And we'll get to it in just a moment. So here we see the responsibility. Number two, we see the reality. What exactly is this mystery? What is the reality of it? Look at what it says. The word of God says in verse four, by referring to this, when you read, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men. And it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the spirit. That is, nobody knew about this before.

You think about it, Isaiah, Jeremiah, none of those guys knew about it. Daniel, they didn't know about it, right? You go through every one of the prophets, major prophets, minor prophets from beginning to end, none of them knew about it. We're told that Noah and Moses and all those, when we started getting into the Hebrews 11, the heroes of the faith chapter there, that they're looking forward to a city whose builders and foundations were laid by someone other than man, but by God, that we are looking for and anticipating. We see those things that they're, they have this hope, but they don't know what this hope is. It's a mystery. It is something there that is just waiting. And he tells us exactly what it is in verse six, to be specific. Here it is. Here's the mystery in case you ever wonder this great mystery, 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. Did you see that? See, we get lost in the wonder of it because all we've ever known is the church age. But here's the wonderful thing.

[24 : 44] When you open up the Old Testament, you see God's making a promise to a nation, to a nation, to a nation, to a nation, to a specific nation, right? There are covenants made with that nation, the nation of Israel. Those covenants aren't null and void. We're not here to get into that, but I want you to see this. We can get into this. Every promise is connected to that nation, to that nation, to that nation, to that nation. There's the light to the Gentiles that they unite to that nation, right? We see it. Every one of them. So there's hope for the Gentiles. There's hope for the rest of the world. By the way, Gentiles means everybody else, right? If you're not Jewish, you're Gentiles. It's everybody else. So there's hope for the rest of the world because they go to that nation. They ask that nation, I want your God. You notice that, right? When you read Zechariah, by the way, some of you just finished reading Zechariah that says in those latter times that they would cling to the garments of the Jewish people saying, I want to know your God, right?

So the prophets are always speaking of the nation of that, that God's, the God of that nation. Remember Naaman went and washed in the river, dipped in the river seven times, and he wanted to take some of the dirt from Israel with him back to his hometown. Why? Because he thought God was confined to that land. So he wanted to take that dirt, spread that dirt out so he could stand on some of the land of Israel and he could worship Israel's God. So the mystery was, is everything's connected to that nation, to that nation, that nation. We get into the New Testament and all of a sudden we meet a Savior and the Savior is Jesus Christ, right? It's joy to the world, right? It's not joy just to the Jewish people. He came into his own and his own received him not. We know, we read all the accounts, right? And we meet a Messiah and he's not the Messiah. He is the Messiah who's lowly and meek and mild riding on the coat of a donkey. We see that on Palm Sunday, but he's not there to set, free a nation. He is there to set free a people. I mean, wow. It's not just about the Jewish nation, right? It's about the gospel message going into all the world. And it's in the fullness of time when Rome had paved all these roads and, and God can empower the emissaries or the missionaries to go out through all the world, right? So that they could travel. They didn't have airplanes. They weren't like Hunter who, who got on a plane yesterday and is now sitting in London, getting ready to go tell some kids about the gospel in London. They weren't like that, but they had cobblestone streets called

Roman roads and all the King's highways. It's a wonder. I love that. By the way, the road that the missionaries use the most refer to as the King's highway. I like that because the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords took his message through that. Anyway, that's just a side note for me, but, but they're so excited because all these roads are there and now they can travel about freely.

God used an empire, the Roman empire to make it accessible, to go to all the known world for all of the wickedness and all the darkness they did. It also opened the door so that the gospel could spread. And it wasn't just about this small people in one small segment of the world.

It was a gospel message to all the world. And we see this. Here's the mystery. Nobody saw this coming, right? When the church is born, you have 120 gathered in the upper room. The Holy Spirit falls upon them. Peter preaches his Pentecost message, Acts chapter two. Who are there? Jewish people, right? All the Jewish people are coming to faith and, you know, we see multitudes, multitudes being had. And so Peter preaches the message and Jewish people come to faith. Remember, Peter was given keys to unlock the door, right? He was given keys to unlock the door of the gospel. Never lose that.

[27 : 51] Not to unlock the door of salvation. Peter was not given keys to unlock salvation in heaven to people. That's, that's a whole nother denomination, a whole nother faith. He was given the keys to unlock the door of the gospel. And so he preaches to the Jewish people at Pentecost. I know I'm lengthy, but stay with me. And then Peter gets his vision. He goes to Cornelius's house. He goes, Acts chapter 10, he goes into the household of Cornelius, who is a Roman centurion who is friendly to the Jewish people. That's, that's halfway there. So, you know, now he unlocks the door to the, to the Romans and to the Gentiles. And then all of a sudden Peter goes into Samaria and that's where nobody likes the people in Samaria. And then Peter goes up to Antioch and Antioch, there's no Jewish people there. So Peter starts going to all these places and all of a sudden they come to this realization, have this church council in Acts chapter 15, by the way, instrumental church chapter in all of scripture, Acts chapter 15. And the question is, is the gospel really for everybody?

That's all they ask in Acts 15. Or is this just for the Jews? And the Jewish people go, no, it's for us. That's our savior. That's our savior. And you have Paul and Peter and all the people that actually been on the field. They say, no, God is saving everybody just like he saved us. The Holy Spirit falls on them the same way he fell on us. They're speaking in tongues just like we spoke in tongues.

By the way, sign gifts, right? Stay with me here. I know it's lengthy, but here's the mystery. Jesus is the savior of the world. And everybody's welcome into the kingdom of God. And look at what it says to be specific. We're fellow heirs. So now go back. Why do you need to read the Old Testament?

Because you don't know what your inheritance is. We are fellow heirs with the Jewish people. Paul says in the book of Romans, we've been grafted in, right? We're the wild olive branch. Some of us are like a little bit more wild than others. But we're the wild olive branch that have been grafted into the calm olive branch. But we are now bearing the fruit of those promises, right? We are fellow heirs. I want to know what I inherited. Not so I can say, oh, that's mine. Just so I can see how much God loves me, how much he cares for me. And we are fellow members of the same body. So we're grafted into them. We need to know what they mean. And it says that we are fellow partakers of the promise. Do you see that singular? It's not promises of the promise in Christ Jesus. Wow. What a reality.

Everything God has promised is ours in Christ. And it's for all people of all races and all demographics in all ages. And it was radical during the time of Paul. Because people are saying, wait a minute.

[30 : 28] I'll go ahead and tell you something right now. It's almost just as radical in our day and time. Because you want to know some of the, and I mean this with all sincerity and truth.

Some of the most spirit-empowered, spirit-filled services I've ever been a part of are services where nobody in the room looks alike. And you really come to this reality that the gospel is for all. I mean, it's amazing. Some of you know the story. The first time I ever preached in Utah, I about stepped on the offering table and had communion up there. And I got real carried away because the table was flush with it. And I was really excited. It's because there were Haitians and Chinese and Americans and African Americans. And everybody was in one small building. And everybody was praising. And I was preaching. And I was getting amens and all these different dialects. And I got carried away because I'm like, this is what it's supposed to look like. Because the gospel is for everyone. Guess what? That's our responsibility.

The gospel is for the people that don't live like us, look like us, act like us, and sometimes even think like us. And it's our responsibility to share it with them. We're not supposed to huddle in some corner and make sure that everything looks the same and everybody's. The reality is, is that we ought to be bringing in people that look so different from us that we have to have a church council about it. We have to have an Acts 15, right? Like, are we sure they're supposed to be here? And we should be like, yes, they're supposed to be here, right? And that's just the way when you read the gospel, that's what it looks like. That they were expanding and reaching so many different people that they had to have a meeting about it. I'd love that, by the way. I'd love for someone to say, Pastor, we've got to have a meeting about all these people coming. Oh, great. Let's do it, right? Then we could just see this is it. This is the reality. That's the mystery, right? That's the wonder of it all. Number three, look at the riches that come from that. Look at the riches. Paul says he was made a minister of this according to the gift of God's grace. Again, this reminder that that gift of God's grace came with a responsibility. It made him something. And it says that he was given, this grace was given to him in verse 7, which was given to me according to the working of his power. So grace and responsibility is not our power. It's empowered from God's power.

Look at verse 8. To me, the very least. I have this habit, not in this Bible that I preach out of on Sunday mornings, but in my daily reading Bible, is I underline what Paul says about himself. I've told you that before, how Paul refers to himself just because you see how his view of himself degrades over time. Verse 8 is one of those. To me, he refers to himself as the very least of all the saints.

The wording there is, I'm less than the smallest of all the saints. That's how Paul refers to himself. He says, you know the smallest saint you know? Well, I'm below them.

[33 : 37] And probably the smallest saints that we would know would be the saints which are at Corinth. Right? He says, I'm below them. I'm the less, I'm smaller than the smallest of saints. That's who I am.

He says, but this was given to me. To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given. Why? To preach to the Gentiles. Look at this. The unfathomable riches of Christ.

You know what the church is? The church is the reality that all people have the opportunity to experience the unfathomable riches of Christ. That word, which is so hard for my southern dialect to say unfathomable. And I really do think about how I preach, by the way, and how I talk. And I have to, because the natural tongue is really not conducive to some of these things.

It just means that which is beyond our concept. The riches of Christ, which are so much greater, and really just beyond we can perceive and understand, it's incomprehensible the riches we have in Christ.

And that's for all people. This is why I'm so excited we have another member of our church on the mission field.

[35 : 03] 2023 was a great year missions-wise for church. And we don't want to boast in things, but we want to raise up Abenezers, right? And I'm excited. The missions you did here locally, the missions you've done in your own life, the missions that others have done on different mission fields, two on the foreign mission field, one on the domestic mission field, one nationally.

Those missions are great. But you know what I've noticed? Is that didn't belittle the riches we have in Christ in any way. It's not like they took a little bit of what Christ had for us and put it over there and we missed out.

Because the riches of Christ are unfathomable. It is so much more, and being a part of the church is to inherit that.

We may never, some of us may, some of us may not ever experience the riches of this world, but we are absolutely full heirs of the riches of Christ for all eternity.

And that's the glorious, mysterious, is listen, it's not confined to one people group. It's for all the world.

[36 : 11] It's the good news. It's the gospel that we've been entrusted with, right? And we see this reminded. Now, one more thing, fourth and finally.

Look at the reflection of the church. This is probably the grandest of it all. Look at the reflection. This is why the church is important. He says, verse 9, And to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things.

By the way, though in the Old Testament when we open it up we see nothing of the church, we know the church is God's creation because he's the creator of all things. God hid it within himself.

Now, I want you to just see how this unfolds, right? He kept it to himself. There are some things God keeps to himself. We are told in the Old Testament that we are to rejoice in that which has been revealed and we are just to let be that which has been disclosed.

There are some things we'll never know about the Lord God Almighty because he is incomprehensible. We cannot understand him. So he hid this mystery called the church in himself.

[37 : 18] He created it. But we also understand in verse 11 that what he was hiding was in accordance with the eternal purpose. So that was according to it was his plan all along.

Right. So this mystery which he has hidden and then all of a sudden he made known was in accordance with his eternal purpose. God didn't change plans when Malachi ended. Because these were before the foundation of the world were laid.

The church is the purpose of God. The eternal purpose of God. According to the eternal purpose of God which is revealed to us and he carried them out in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But look at what it tells us here in verse 10. So that the manifold wisdom of God. The manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church.

The glory of the gospel. And the wonder of the reality that God has entrusted the church with the gospel message.

[38 : 23] Is that when the church is faithful in proclaiming the gospel message. And people respond to that message. The manifold wisdom of God is being known through the church.

That is the world notices God had a great plan. When you look at the church. There is no other force in the world.

There is no other factor in the world that could ever make peaceable mankind which was at war with one another. There is nothing else that could ever reconcile such great differences.

There is nothing that has ever united divisions among racial lines. Political lines. Or even geographical lines. There is nothing in the world that has ever been so uniting.

In equalizing of mankind. Of men and women. In bringing them together. The world can have as many conferences as it wants. I read somewhere one time. And I forget the number of them.

[39 : 28] You would be astounded. How many eternal peace agreements mankind signed with one another. And how many eternal. We will be peaceable from now forever.

And how none of them lasted more than 10 years. Because man cannot reconcile their own differences. We have seen that man may plot and plan and twist and connive and scheme and all these other things.

But yet we cannot overcome our problems. The reason we have so much disunity and division and discord among us is because that's who we are. But when you walk into the church.

And you begin to see reflected in church what seems to be at odds with one another in community. All of a sudden you say God's got this thing figured out. When you realize that we wouldn't get along with one another without the same Savior.

You realize God really does know what he's doing. I mean if we're going to be honest. Even though we all look alike. We can say that. Naturally.

[40 : 31] I mean it's okay to admit this right. This is not a sin to admit. Naturally. Many of us wouldn't even be in the same room with one another if it wasn't for Jesus Christ. I mean you look around the room and you're like.

Well I don't really know if I would hang out with that person or that person or that person. If it wasn't for Jesus Christ. Why? Because this shows the manifold wisdom of God.

And that's not wrong. That's just who we are naturally. God is so wise and so good. He can unite what the world seems to divide. And he does it in the church.

When the church reaches people that don't look like them. The wisdom of God is put on display. But it's not just put on display. Let's finish the sentence. It's not just put on display for the world to see.

Look at what it says. It is the church's responsibility to put on display the manifold wisdom of God. It says in verse 10. So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church.

[41 : 32] To the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. That is angels as many translators and scholars will tell you. Both good and bad.

Are astounded in the reality that the gospel can unite all mankind. I mean none of the angels knew about it. It tells us that the redemption and salvation of man is something in which the angels long to look into.

We are told in the book of Revelations when John tries to bow down to the angel. The angel says don't do that. I'm one of your servants. Don't worship me. I'm amazed at what God can do through you. See the church displays the wisdom of God to all of the angels.

Because let's go back to what I said. The reason many of us wouldn't get along is because each one of us have an enemy of our souls. Who is a divider, a schemer, and a plotter. And Satan thought when he could divide man and segregate man and segment man.

And he could create all these problems among mankind. And he is the author of evil. And thought if he could do these things. Then maybe if God could just get the Jewish people he could do everybody else.

[42 : 45] And all of a sudden you open up the New Testament. And God is called a Messiah out of the Jewish people for all people. And he didn't see that coming. He spent all these ages saying well as long as I get all this and all this.

And all of a sudden you say well wait a minute. God is reaching them all. See you want to show the wisdom of God? To proclaim the gospel through the church.

And it shows even the heavenly beings how wonderful he is. It says in verse 11 we're wrapping up. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in him. Therefore he says. I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulation on your behalf. For therefore your glory.

See Paul wants to pray for him. He'll do that in a minute. He kind of got on a little aside. Because he wanted them to know that even though he was in prison. Don't worry. The price of prison is worth what he's gaining in the knowledge of the mystery.

[43 : 49] Friend we are stewards of the mystery. We know the wonders of church. You say oh well the only thing I know about church is all its problems. Well that's okay because we all have problems.

And the moment I step into the church the church has problems. I don't know about you. But since I have problems the moment I show up the church has problems. That's just how it happens. As long as the church is full of men and women and the church is going to have problems.

But the wonderful thing is is that we have a savior who's called us to himself and united us as one body. And not just us. But all of the world. All of the world for his glory and his honor.

Let's pray. Lord thank you so much for this day. Thank you oh God that we have the opportunity to come together with brothers and sisters in Christ. Lord to proclaim the wisdom of God in redeeming and saving our souls.

Lord if there be one here today who does not know you as Lord and Savior. Oh Lord would you draw them to yourself through the power of the gospel. Help them to understand the riches that are found in Christ Jesus.

[44 : 55] We ask that it would be for your name's sake and yours alone. And we ask it all in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.