

## **Sermon 11: Seeing Our Trials in God's Eternal Purposes: Ephesians 3:1-13**

**Text: Ephesians 3:1-13** "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory..."

### **Introduction:**

- The following section of Ephesians was a break in Paul's progression from doctrine to practice addressing an issue that weighed heavily on his heart.
- He had expounded and marveled over some of the most remarkable concepts in scripture.
- He was concerned that the church was stumbling as they processed his suffering.
- Trials and suffering are an inescapable part of our human experience.
- When we suffer, we often stumble over God's goodness and purpose.
- When we witness others suffering, we often do the same.
- This section was meant to put his unique life into perspective.

**Summary:** God's plans are often much bigger than we realize in our limited perspectives.

**Proposition:** He wants us to consider our circumstances in His big picture.

**Interrogative:** How can we do this?

**Part 1: Paul's concern for the church: 3:1, 13** "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles...desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory..."

- **He wrote from prison: 3:1** "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles..."
- **He did not want his current situation to cause them to stumble: 3:13** "I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you..."
  - **This suffering served a purpose: 3:1** "For you Gentiles..."
  - **The purpose was for their good: 3:13** "Which is your glory..."
- **Simple truth:** God often uses struggle and suffering for our good.
  - **2 Corinthians 4:17** "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory..."
  - **2 Corinthians 1:4-6** "Blessed be God...Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation..."
  - **2 Corinthians 4:8-12** "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body...that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you..."

**Part 2: Paul's message to the church: 3:2-6** "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel..."

- **First: His message was a mystery: 3:3** "He made known unto me the mystery..."
  - **A mystery is a spiritual reality not fully revealed before that time: 3:5** "In other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit..."
    - God's revelation in Scripture is progressive.
    - New revelation does not contradict the old.
    - New revelation expands or more fully explains what was partially veiled.
    - Much of Paul's preaching centered on this concept.

- **This mystery described the way God will administrate His Eternal Kingdom: 3:2** "Dispensation of the grace of God which is given me..."
  - **The word "dispensation" describes the nature of an administration.**
  - **God will give Jewish and Gentile believers equal status in His eternal Kingdom: 3:6** "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel..."
    - Fellow-heirs
    - Same Body
    - Partakers of his promise in Christ
- **Second: God uniquely fit Paul to expound this wonderful reality: 3:3** "By revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words..."
  - God hand selected Paul to be a unique individual for this role.
  - He was a rising leader amongst the Pharisees.
  - His zeal for the Law, traditions, and standards of first-century Rabbinical Judaism was well established.
  - He was the last person anyone would think could embrace Christianity and become its most outspoken evangelist.
  - His conversion and appointment are a powerful testimony to the power of the gospel.

**Part 3: Paul's testimony before the church: 3:7-12** "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him..."

- **Paul's ministry had three distinct marks:**
  - **First: It demonstrated the greatness of God's grace: 3:7-8** "I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God..."
    - **1 Corinthians 15:8-10** "Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace

of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain..."

- **1 Timothy 1:15, 13** "This is a faithful saying...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief...Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy..."
- **Second: It demonstrated the power of the gospel: 3:7-8** "Given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given..."
  - **1 Thessalonians 1:5** "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance..."
- **Third: It demonstrated a special irony: 3:8** "That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ..."
  - **The one who once imposed man-made traditions now goes to the ones he most disdained: 1 Corinthians 9:19-22** "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some..."
  - **The one who once viciously persecuted the church, now is persecuted for the church: 1 Corinthians 4:10-13** "We are fools for Christ's sake...we are weak...we are despised...Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled...being persecuted...Being defamed...made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day..."
  - **The one who once viewed the cross as weakness and foolishness now glories in the cross: 1 Corinthians 1:23-25** "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men..."

- **This message through Paul, provided an undeniably powerful validation: Acts 26:4-12** "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers...I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities..."
  - **God's plans are complete from beginning to end: 3:9** "To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ..."
  - **His wisdom known in the heavenly realm is now revealed in the earthly: 3:10** "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God..."
  - **His eternal plan is fulfilled in Christ: 3:11-12** "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him..."
- **Summary:** Do not fret about my sufferings, because God has used these circumstances to further His kingdom.

#### **Part 4: Application:**

- **Submission:** Choose to think Biblically about how God uses hardship for His glory and our good:
  - God has uniquely fitted each of us to fill a role in His work to build His Kingdom.
  - He can use our story if we will surrender to His purposes.
  - When we struggle and suffer, He has a plan and He is doing a work.
  - We need to step back and see our lives through the lens of eternity and His purposes for our lives.
- **Worship:** Think deeply about these great gospel themes:
  - He chose to set His love on a world in rebellion against Him.
  - He purposed in Himself from eternity past the only way to be both just and the justifier.

- He has redeemed us by the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross.
- He has removed the enmity that stood between us.
- He has united people groups who were not a people.
- Through His sacrifice, those who were excluded from the Temple are now the Temple of God.
- He used the radical conversion and suffering of a first-century Pharisee to undeniably testify to the power of the gospel.
- He uses all things in our lives for our good and His glory.