

Ephesians 3 1-8

Good morning and thank you for joining us! Would you please turn in your bibles to Ephesians chapter 3?

Remember, the first 3 chapters of Ephesians tell us who we are in Christ. Then, the last 3 chapters explain now that we know who we are, how are we to act as Christians?

In the last couple of weeks, we've seen the scriptures repeat over and over again that Jesus has torn down the walls of separation between Jew and Gentile. And chapter 3 continues to build upon this glorious truth that we're all one in the body of Christ! And this unity we have isn't a result of anything we've done or accomplished, it's all because of Jesus!

At first glance when we read this section of Ephesians, we can kinda let our eyes gloss over, because there's some deep and challenging theology in this section of scripture. Chapter 3 contains another long run-on sentence, but make no mistake, these are not the idle ramblings of an author who has lost their thoughts. Rather it reminds us of the incredible truths that each of us can hold onto, especially during those tumultuous times in our lives.

Now remember when this letter was written 2,000 years ago there were no verse or chapter assignments. So to make sure we don't take any of this out of context let's read chapter 2:19-22, then move to the first 8 verses of chapter 3 to make sure we understand the context of what's being said.

Chapter 2 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Let's read verses 1-8

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

We're only gonna study verses 1-8 of chapter 3, and the title of this mornings message is Enjoying the Riches

Let's pray

In 1924, a newspaper predicted what life would be like 100 years in the future-the year 2024. It's pretty interesting.

SHOW PIC One prediction foresaw apartment buildings that were 100 stories tall. Pretty accurate.

SHOW PIC It was predicted there is going to be a movie in every home. Spot on!

SHOW PIC one forecaster mentioned. “Trains, which will be traveling twice or three times as fast as they do now, will have film theaters on board and families will make their albums in motion pictures.” Again spot on!

Finally, **SHOW PIC** “Motion pictures 100 years from now will be so nearly like the living person or the existing object pictured that you will be unable, sitting in your orchestra seat, to determine whether they are pictures or the real thing,” A quick glance at any well-done CGI-enhanced film proves they nailed that one. **CLOSE PIC**

But not every prediction was right.

-World peace via cinema – One clipping reads “In the year 2024, the most important single thing which the cinema will have helped in a large way to accomplish will be that of eliminating from the face of the civilized world all armed conflict.”

-Child-flinging beds – Instead of alarm clocks, kids would be thrown out of bed (wearing their one-piece asbestos suit) to ensure they get to school on time. That same prediction saw a school environment where teachers could send shocks to student seats, passing currents through them if they weren't paying attention.

It's fascinating how often we try to predict the future. It's really a result of the fact that we like to figure everything out, and avoid surprises. Have you noticed as a follower of God that He likes to surprise us sometimes?

And there is no bigger surprise than when a person realizes God's grace, His free, unearned, unmerited favor, can be had. Let's begin our study...

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—Remember when Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians he's in Rome, in prison, but he didn't see himself as a Roman prisoner. He sees himself as the prisoner of Christ.

Notice what Paul does not say. He doesn't describe himself as a prisoner because of Jesus. He doesn't even say I'm the prisoner of Rome. He says I am the prisoner of Christ himself. Paul's so close to Jesus it's like he's shackled to the Lord.

And because of that, you know what happens? Rome actually becomes Paul's prisoner.

Paul has the quaternion of soldiers, 4 soldiers chained to Paul. And Paul's thinking, 'I get to witness to all these soldiers every day and they can't get away.' Paul literally has a captive audience.

In fact, while in prison Paul also wrote the book of Philippians, and look at **Philippians 4:21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.**

Obviously there was a significant impact for the Lord in the household of Caesar due to Paul's imprisonment!

Read verse 1 again **1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—**

But we need to remember, why was Paul in Roman custody in the first place?

Well look at the end of verse 1-for you Gentiles. Paul had gone to Jerusalem and a riot started there because they accused him of bringing a gentile, a man named Trophimus, into the inner court and defiling the temple. **Acts 21 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.**
27 Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." 29 (For they had previously^[fn] seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)
30 And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

Paul was in prison for sharing the gospel with gentiles. But by the glorious content of this letter you'd never know Paul's grim circumstances!

Think about it-Paul writes of his freedom in Christ while chains dangle from his wrists...

He's wearing prison stripes as he writes about the righteousness he wears...

A string of Roman numerals are stitched across his shirt, while he records the innumerable blessings that are his in Christ Jesus...

You get the point. Rather than see himself in prison, Paul chooses to see himself in Christ.

And this brings up a good question for all of us this morning. When times are tough do we dwell on the problems before us, or do we focus upon the fact that as Christians we are in Christ?

You know, and I know, there are times where we face the most brutal of circumstances, where no words can describe the agony of the heart, we must remember this world is not our home!

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written:

**"For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."[fn]**

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the reality for every Christian, no matter what our circumstances may be. No matter what hardship you may be facing, there is a reality we have yet to experience, that of being face to face with our Lord.

2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

The word dispensation used here is describing that of a steward, it's of a house manager, of somebody who's in charge of distribution and an estate.

Paul says that's what I am in regards to the grace of God towards the Gentiles. He's a distributor of God's grace, God was the one that put him in that position.

Paul understood God's grace. Remember Paul used to be the unbelievably wicked Saul of Tarsus. He gives his testimony in Acts 26:10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

Before Christ, his mission was to slaughter the church. He was destroying Christian families. He hauled men and women that were believers to prison. He caused Christians to blaspheme the name of Jesus at the point of a sword.

Paul was even responsible for the death of Christians, until the day he met Jesus. **Acts 9 3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.[fn] It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**" That's when Paul met the living Lord, and changed his life forever. And from then on, Paul became a distributor of the good news of God's grace!

And this is our story too isn't it? Think of who we were, and the wickedness we had done before Christ. Haven't we all been radically transformed by God's grace?

We must never forget what God's grace has done for us. And when we remember how God's grace has so changed our lives, then we'll be much more willing to share that grace with others.

It's wisely been said "There's enough Bread of Life to supply the whole world, but are there enough volunteers to distribute it?"

Now this grace of God was a huge stumbling block for Jews. Remember, the church in Jerusalem thought that if you accept the

Jewish Messiah, then you have to become Jewish. They taught that to be part of God's plan of salvation, you had to keep the dietary laws, you had to be circumcised, you had to keep Sabbath.

So imagine the religious Jews seeing these Gentiles freely accepting Jesus and God's grace. The Jews are standing around thinking, wait a minute, my whole life I kept the dietary law, circumcised our sons, we kept the Sabbath. We keep the feasts. And you think you Gentiles are just going to come in here and enjoy everything we're enjoying?

The Gentiles are going, yay, praise the Lord, and the Jews are saying, you see that guy come in here? He sits in church with a tie dyed shirt on.

See the struggle was the accepting of God's grace. We come to God through faith in Christ just as we are! We don't have to try and clean ourselves up for God-we can't! We come to Him, and He transforms us from the inside out.

3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, **SHOW PIC** When we hear the word "mystery" we think of a Sherlock Holmes movie...or a suspense-filled, smoking gun, who-done-it type of thriller. But that's not what Paul means when he uses this term. **CLOSE PIC**

A biblical mystery is a truth that was known only to God - call it a sacred secret. A mystery in the Bible is a truth that mankind would

have never grasped had God not chosen to reveal it to us. We talked about this back in chapter 1.

4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), notice the beginning of verse 4, the oh so important words-when you read. Paul is giving incredible credence to the written word of God.

Folks the primary way God speaks to us is through His word. Tragically our nation is being conditioned to not even be able to sit still and read. Think about it- lots of folks can't even make it through youtube videos, now everything is tiktok and instagram b/c the videos are only a few seconds long.

We're being fed repeated bite sized bits of entertainment because we're being conditioned that our minds must constantly be entertained. Perhaps we should heed **Psalm 119:37 Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way.**^[fn]

Listen, don't let Satan deceive you. This is the word of God. He has given us His word to not only navigate through life, but to draw near to Him by knowing Him more.

It's tragic when people neglect the word of God, yet try to hear from God through other means. 'We ordered 5 hot dogs and one was darker than all the rest of them. What do you think that means?' I don't know. Don't buy hotdogs there?

Or those who say I had a dream and a crow had a red string in his mouth, what's God telling me? I don't know, don't eat pizza late at night?

We have the instruction book of life right here. When you read, you can understand the mystery of Christ that's written. When you read this, it's been put down so that we can embrace it.

5-6

5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,

So what exactly is this mystery that Paul describes? Here in verse 6 the mystery is summarized in 3 ways

First, Gentiles and Jews are "fellow heirs" of God's riches.

Galatians 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. You and I receive the same privileges and blessings as the Jews did in their relationship to God because of Christ.

Second, gentiles are "fellow members of the body" of Christ, which is the church **Col. 1:18** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

The third part of the mystery is that gentiles are "fellow partakers of the promise" concerning Christ in the gospel **John 3:16** "For

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

What confounded the religious folks is that God has joined Jews and Gentiles as equals in one new body, which is the church **1 Cor. 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into[fn] one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.**

Since salvation isn't based on our own achievements, the categories that used to define us are abolished - we're all one in Christ. All that distinguishes us now is whether we're in Christ or apart from Christ **Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. Paul didn't seek the job description of being this minister, nor was it given to him on the basis of an earned degree or merit. God called him to do it, and not only that, look at the end of verse 7-by the effective working of His power.

Folks whatever it is that God calls us to do, He will equip us to do it. We'll end our study in verse 8 this morning

8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the

unsearchable riches of Christ, Paul describes himself as the least of all the saints. And the original Greek is even more emphatic than that. It describes last one anybody would ever expect

Imagine if Paul put in his resume here. There was no one worse than him. Blasphemer, murderer, destroyer of the church. But God's grace changed all that.

And here's the challenge we all face-we can't fully grasp God's grace. This is why in verse 8 he describes it as the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The Greek word translated "unsearchable" describes something that cannot be fully comprehended or explored. In other words, there is no limit to the riches of Christ; they are past finding out. Try as we might, we can never plumb the depths of Christ's worth.

See our world today desires riches. Our entire economy is based upon consumerism. I just saw a report where economists are astounded that we aren't in a recession, with one saying "We've underestimated American's willingness to spend money they don't have". All day long we're pressured to accumulate this and get more of that. Get the nicer phone, bigger car, all these things. But the problem is, none of those satisfy the God shaped holes in our hearts.

No the riches Christ provides are eternal- we studied some of these riches back in chapter 1- redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, the knowledge of the mystery of His will, the message of truth, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, and the guarantee

of our inheritance. These are spiritual riches with eternal benefits, and we cannot fully comprehend them. We just enjoy them

The challenge we face is everything we do in our society and culture is performance related. Sometimes even the love we get from others is based on our performance. But not so with God.

See a right relationship with God is found not on what we do, but in who we trust. **Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**

See it's not how many times you come to church, or how much good you do, or how much money you give away. No. It's all Jesus. When we try and say 'well God will really love me when i do such and such' you know what we're doing? We're saying the cross of Christ wasn't enough.

God's grace poured out on us. His unsearchable riches-we can't find the end of them. Just enjoy them!