

A Masterpiece for the Cosmos
EPHESIANS || Eph 3:1-13
North Center || April 14, 2024
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Today, we enter the 3rd chapter of Paul's letter to the local churches in Ephesus. You may remember that **the major theme** at the end of chapter 2 is how Jesus preached came and preached **peace** between believers – because He made peace for believers by purchasing peace with His blood on the cross.

*For He Himself is our **peace**, who has made both one,
and has broken down the middle wall of separation,
having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances,
so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,
and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross,
thereby putting to death the enmity.*
~ Ephesians 2:14-16

Paul concludes chapter 2 by telling us **HOW** Jesus purchased **peace** between believers – **HOW** He made a way for **unity** within the church. All of the walls that had once separated people (e.g., *laws, sacrificial rituals, cultic commandments, religious ordinances*) were broken down in Christ – because He fulfilled (*accomplished, completed*) everything that they represented. Christ took every division, every offense, every sin, every reason for enmity (*anger, hostility*) upon Himself and then put it to death on the cross.

- **HOW** can we have peace with one another?
- **BECAUSE** Christ is now what stands between us, and He is not a wall; He is a door (*John 10:9*).

Here in **chapter 3**, Paul begins by telling us **WHY** Jesus purchased peace within the church. For what glorious **PURPOSE** did Jesus make a way for peace within His people? We see the answer in **verse 10** (*which is the climax of this section*).

Everything that God the Father has done through Christ Jesus is
“**to the intent** that *now* the manifold **wisdom of God** might be made known **by the church**
to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.”
~ Ephesians 3:10

That sentence is loaded with glory.

Main Point: God works through His Church **to** reveal His **wisdom** to the Cosmos.

Our passage this morning is about the **purpose** of God and the **wisdom** of God in all that He does. And we can divide it into two sections...

1. **ALL EARTHLY PEOPLES** || As Paul begins this chapter, he says that the purpose of everything that has ever happened in his life (*the grace that saved him & the suffering that afflicted him*) was **for the sake of gathering the nations into the church** (i.e., *the great commission*) || **3:1-8, 13**
2. **ALL HEAVENLY POWERS** || Paul reveals that God's purpose in gathering the nations into the church **for the sake of displaying His wisdom for the entire spiritual universe to see** || **3:9-12**

1. Everything that happened in Paul's life was for the sake of gathering the nations into the church

- The **grace** of God to save Paul and to ordain him as a missionary was for this purpose (**3:2, 8**).
- The **suffering** that Paul was enduring as a prisoner was for this purpose (**3:1, 13**).

God made this purpose known at the very beginning of Paul's ministry...

He is a **chosen** vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.
For I will show him how many things he must **suffer** for My name's sake.
~ Acts 9:15–16; c.f., 13:47

Now, years later, after Paul has lived in this grace and walked through this suffering, he looks to the churches in Ephesus and says, "All of this is for you" (13:1–2, 13). **His life wasn't about him**; it was about God, and it was about others. The grace that God had given him was *for the sake of others*. The sufferings that he endured (*like being imprisoned in Philippi and being imprisoned in Rome*) was *for the sake of the bringing the gospel to the nations*. His faith wasn't something that was just between Paul and God; it was for all peoples.

We live in a society that believes faith should be a private thing. "You can have your faith; just keep it out of the classroom and the workplace and the government buildings. Faith is fine; just keep it to yourself." Paul would say, "No, that's absolutely backwards!" God gives faith, not only for your sake, but also for the sake of others." **Adam Heim** reminds me often that *you are blessed to be a blessing*.¹

Paul says, I was...

- Given grace – *for you*. Chosen by God – *for you*.
- In prison – *for you*. Suffering – *for you*.

For who? "For you Gentiles" (3:1) ... *for you nations*.



Now, remember that before Jesus came, the *nations* were **outsiders** when it came to God's covenant people (2:12). In the OT, the Jews were God's chosen people. Now, God had always intended to bring the nations in, but this intention wasn't as clear in the first part of the story. So, when Paul talks about the work of God being *for the nations* – *for people who are not Jewish*, it was as if he was revealing a **mystery** that had been hidden since the beginning of the world. The fact that God would open the door of His kingdom to all peoples (without exception) was something that the Jews did not see coming, and it took them years to come to terms with it.

So, Paul describes this wide-open invitation as a **MYSTERY** that had been "hidden in God" "from the beginning of the ages" (3:9) but that had now been **revealed** through the church.

- "the **mystery** of His will" (1:9)
- "He made known to me the **mystery**" (3:3)
- "the **mystery** of Christ" (3:4)
- "the fellowship of the **mystery**" (3:9)

The MYSTERY that Paul reveals is that the good news of Jesus is available to all peoples – without exception. **In Christ**, the outsiders are made insiders (2:13). **In Christ**, foreigners are made family (2:19). **In Christ**, strangers are made "*fellow heirs of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel*" (3:6).

- The **message** that God had first given *to the children of Israel* is now given to the whole world. The **promises** that God made *to the children of Israel* are now available to anyone who puts their faith in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). Every inheritance that belongs to the children of God is yours in Christ Jesus (1:11) ... **regardless** of who you are, what you have done, the choices you've made, the lifestyle you have embraced up to this point...
- Absolutely **nobody** is excluded from the invitation of Jesus Christ...

¹ Gen 12:3; 22:18.

The Gospel of Jesus is *just as true* for...

- The president as it is for the prisoner...
- The African as it is for the Asian, American, Somalian, Laotian, Hispanic...
- The popular as it is for the outcast...
- Billionaire. Homeless.
- Single. Married. Widowed. Divorced. Remarried.
- Grandparent. Grandchild.
- Republican. Democrat.
- Male. Female.
- Pharisee. Prostitute.
- Murderer. Pedophile. Kidnapper. Rapist.
- Heterosexual. Homosexual. Transsexual. Bisexual.
- Buddhist. Muslim. Jehovah's Witness. Mormon. Atheist.
- Jew. Gentile.

- The stunning revelation of the gospel is that Jesus came to save anyone and everyone who puts their faith in Him. If you are thirsty, the invitation is for you, "*Come and drink living waters that will satisfy you for all eternity*" (**John 7:37**). If you are weary from the burden of sin that you are carrying, the invitation is for you, "*Come all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (**Matt 11:28**). The good news isn't just for the Jews – or the religious – or those who seem to have everything together; it is also for those who are sick (**Mark 2:17**). What does it mean to be sick? It means that your life is not as it should be. It means that you are not whole. It means that something is wrong. Jesus said, "*I came for those people.*"

Does that make you a little bit uncomfortable? Does it make you uncomfortable to watch the news of the **serial killer** who's going away to prison for life and to think that the gospel is for him – *if God were to grant him the gift of repentance*?² Does it make you uncomfortable to walk through the checkout line of Cub Foods where a **drag queen** is working the register and to think that the gospel is for him – *if God were to grant him the gift of repentance*? Does it make you uncomfortable to drive by the **abortion clinic** on Brooklyn Boulevard and think that the gospel is for them – *if God were to grant them the gift of repentance*? If it does ... then you have an idea of how it made the Jews feel to know that the gospel was open to the Gentiles. It blew their mind when they finally realized that everyone was welcome to come!³

But now we need to be clear on what we mean when we say that everyone is welcome.ⁱ What we mean is that **ALL** are welcome to come and be changed by Jesus.

All are welcome to come to Jesus...and put their sin to death (**Col 3:5**).

All are welcome to come to Jesus...and find forgiveness in Him (**Eph 1:7**).

All are welcome to come to Jesus...and walk in newness of life (**Rom 6:4**).

All are welcome to come to Jesus...and leave their old ways behind (**Luke 14:33**).

All are welcome to come to Jesus...and be transformed (**Rom 12:2**).

This is the **MYSTERY** of the gospel...ⁱⁱ

Whoever you are, whatever you've done, wherever you've been...
you are welcome to come and find new life in Christ.

² God grants repentance (e.g., Acts 11:18; 13:48; 2 Tim 2:25).

³ E.g., Acts 11:1–3.

2. God's divine purpose for gathering the nations into the church was *to put His wisdom on display for all the heavenly powers to see* || 3:9–12

Let's start in verse 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, and **to make all** see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; **to the intent** that now the manifold **wisdom of God** might **be made known by the church** to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...
~ *Ephesians 3:8–11*

Q. What are the principalities and powers in the heavenly places?

A. It's the language the Bible uses to describe the spiritual enemy of God and of God's people.

When **we** think of enemies, our minds almost always go to physical, human enemies (e.g., *ISIS, Boko Haram, Taliban, Al-Qa'ida, Hamas, political parties*), but the Bible says that our real enemy is not flesh and blood; it's principalities and powers...

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against **principalities**, against **powers**, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the **heavenly places**.
~ *Ephesians 6:12*

In **Colossians 2**, when Paul is describing the victory of Jesus on the cross, what enemy did He conquer?

He disarmed **principalities and powers**, and He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.⁴
~ *Colossians 2:15*

Our physical eyes are limited to physical realities, and so many people in our culture rarely (if ever) stop to consider that our world is filled with spiritual beings that are (at this very moment) waging war over your soul. *Light and darkness. Angels and demons. Life and death. Good and evil. The Father of Lights and the father of lies.*⁵ This isn't a sermon on angelology. The point I'm simply making is that when Paul talks about principalities and powers, he's not talking about political governments or nation states; he's talking about the spiritual realm of darkness that has been seeking to destroy the work of God since the beginning.

- In the Garden of **Eden**, the powers of darkness came with lies and deception...
- When Joseph was sold into slavery in **Egypt**, the powers of darkness were at work...
- When Jesus was in the **wilderness**, the powers of darkness came with lies and deception...
- When Jesus was **betrayed** by a friend, the powers of darkness were at work...
- When Jesus was **nailed** to the **cross** like a condemned criminal, the powers of darkness were at work...
- When Paul was **persecuting** the church & putting Christians to death, the powers of darkness were at work...

⁴ See also Romans 8:38.

⁵ We've become so enamored with our intellect that we think there can't possibly be something in this world that is beyond our understanding or experience. If we can't analyze it through a telescope or study it in a lab or observe it with our senses, it isn't real.

But, in all of it, God was working out His perfect plan of redemption:

- In **Eden**, the enemy thought it was destroying God's good plan, but he was just making the way for God's eternal plan to redeem a people.
- In **Egypt**, the enemy thought it was destroying God's people, but he was just making a way for God to reveal His sovereign power and His ability to bring salvation to His people.
- In the **wilderness**, the enemy came seeking to tempt Jesus, but all he did was highlight Jesus as the new and better Adam who would not give into temptation.
- On the **cross**, Satan thought he was destroying Jesus, but he was only sealing his own demise – because this sacrificial death was God's appointed means of our eternal salvation.
- When **Paul** was **persecuting the church**, the enemy thought it was destroying God's people, when (in fact) the result of this persecution was to spread God's people all across the globe.⁶

Here's the point: every moment of history (*culminating in a global church that is comprised of all the nations*) has been orchestrated to show the powers of darkness that everything our God does is wise. That's what **manifold wisdom** means – wisdom that is breathtakingly colorful, infinitely complex, and glorious in its scope.

When the cosmic powers (*that sought to destroy the work of God*) look at the church all across the globe and see people from every tongue and tribe and nation united together – living in peace with one another – and worshipping the God who is sovereign over their salvation and over their suffering, they cannot help but say, “*God is wise in all He has done.*”

The world looks at the church and sees only foolishness.

The spiritual powers look at the church and they know that God is wise.

The question we'll close with is: what about you?

- When you look at your life, do you believe that God is infinitely wise and wisely good in all He does?
- When you look at your church, do you believe that God is infinitely wise and wisely good in all He does?

¹ Here's a **QUESTION** that I've been asked that I think would be appropriate to address here...

If it is true that Jesus came for the lost and for the sinners...

If it is true that the church is a hospital for the sick and the broken...

If it is true that the good news of Jesus is given freely to all people without exception...

If it is true that all are welcome to come to Jesus...

...then why not put a colored sign out in front of our building that says, “*All are Welcome Here*”?

That's a fair and honest question. You've almost certainly seen signs like this in front of businesses, institutions, and even religious establishments.

To be wise in a culture like ours, you need to discern (not only what a sign like this says) but also what it is intended to communicate. The religious and secular institutions that put a sign like this in the front of their building establishment are intending to communicate something totally different than what we mean when we say that all are welcome here.

The six-colored rainbow was adopted as the banner for the sexual revolution of our day. And the institutions that put a rainbow welcome sign in front of their building are intending to communicate that you are welcome to come just as you are AND that you are welcome to stay just as you are. Masquerading under the banner of love, these establishments believe that to truly be a

⁶ When my grandma died, the enemy surely thought that it had gained a victory in the Knoop house because the prayer warrior was dead, but what he didn't realize was that her death would be the means of my dad's salvation.

welcoming community, a church must tolerate the lifestyle choices of those around you regardless of what the Bible has to say about it. To be welcoming, you must value tolerance above truth. The message they are intentionally communicating is “Come and be affirmed in whatever you feel is right for you.”

That’s not what we mean when we say that “all are welcome here.”

There is a song we have been singing at North Center somewhat recently called, Come to the Table, and I love the way it describes this gospel invitation:

“Come meet this motley crew of misfits, these liars and these thieves, there’s no one unwelcome here.
(But) that sin and shame that you brought with you, you can leave it at the door...”
~ Sidewalk Prophets

When we say, “You are welcome here”, we mean it in the same way that Jesus means it. We mean to say, “You are welcome to come just as you are and be transformed and renewed by the power of Jesus Christ.”

If you don’t address the disease of sin and the need for repentance,
you’re not a church; you’re a morgue.

Yes, “All Are Welcome.”
This is gloriously, theologically true for every church on the planet.

The question is, “What does it mean that all are welcome?”

Well, here’s what Paul meant.
Paul meant to communicate that...

All are welcome to come to Jesus...
and put their sin to death (Col 3:5).

All are welcome to come to Jesus...
and find forgiveness in Him (Eph 1:7).

All are welcome to come to Jesus...
and walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).

All are welcome to come to Jesus...
and leave their old ways behind (Luke 14:33).

All are welcome to come to Jesus...
and be transformed (Rom 12:2).

Love does not rejoice in your lifestyle choices...
it rejoices in the truth (1 Cor 13:6).

The good news is not only that God loves you just as you are (John 3:16),
but that He also loves you too much to leave you just as you are (Eph 2:4–5).

ⁱⁱ And this is just PART of the **MYSTERY** revealed in our salvation.

The whole story of redemption was hidden in mystery... that the Rescuer of the world would be the Son of God... that His family tree would include murders, prostitutes, cowards, shepherds, foreigners... that God would redeem His people by shedding His own blood... that the Spirit of God would indwell His people... that all the nations would be brought in.

One of the things that makes the Bible so beautiful is that it tells a story that we would have never written. This is not how we would have written the story of the world or the story of salvation – ever. And this isn’t how we would have written the story of our lives. We wouldn’t have written cancer into our story. We wouldn’t have written divorce into our story. We wouldn’t have written global hunger, civil war, wayward children, broken bones, missed opportunities, absent fathers, financial crises, miscarriage, natural disasters, loneliness, depression, or another of the other 10 million heartbreaks into this story.

It all just feels so random. So pointless. So contrary to divine wisdom.

Yet, every so often, God pulls back the curtain (as it were) and gives a glimpse as to what He is doing, and what we see (when God does that) is that everything happens according to God's design for God's good purpose. Nothing is random. Nothing is accidental or incidental. Nothing is wasted. God is working everything according to the council of His will for His glory and for our good.

My grandma died unexpectedly on Christmas Eve when my dad was just 17 years old. What the world might have looked at as a senseless tragedy, her death was the means of my dad's salvation. That evening, my dad gave his life to Jesus. That was almost 50 years ago. Only God knows how many lives have been changed through my dad's ministry. My dad was instrumental in bringing me to Jesus, and now I am seeking to raise my children to know Jesus and to help my church family see the love of Jesus – and this all started with an event that the world would have called a senseless tragedy.

Just as God used my grandma's death to bring my dad into the family of Jesus, so He used Paul's life (both his salvation & his suffering) to bring the nations into the family of Jesus – and God means to do the same thing with your life. You do not exist for yourself; you exist for God.

And this brings us to our second and final point in this passage.