

EPHESIANS 3:1-13

How to face persecution

I. Introduction



Last week

- profound racism & hostility between the Jews and Gentiles
- profound hostility between God and man
- God reconciles man to himself through Christ
- God reconciles Jew and Gentile (and all social, class, economic, national, cultural, racial tensions) through Christ
- God creates for himself one new man out of the two
- God builds diverse humanity into one holy temple, a dwelling place for God.



This week

- Because Paul is God's agent for much of this, he suffers persecution
- He explains why he is being persecuted
- He glories in his assignment despite that fact that he is persecuted because of it
- He encourages us and the Ephesians to do the same

II. Paul suffers persecution

✿ Ephesians 3:1--*For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—*



What does Paul mean by “prisoner for Christ Jesus?”

- ✿ Acts 21:17-21--The apostles love what Paul is doing, but they warn him that the Jewish community...not so much
- ✿ Acts 21:28-33--the Jewish community assumes the worst of him, riots against him, beats him,
- ✿ Acts 22:1-16--Paul says, “I am Jew just like you! Jesus revealed to me that he is the messiah we have been waiting for and was saved, baptized, and called to be a witness.” (paraphrase)
- ✿ Acts 22:17-24--Paul says “God wants me to witness to the Gentiles” (paraphrase again). The Jews are thrown into a frenzy calling for his death, throwing off their cloaks, throwing dirt in the air all while Paul is carted off to be flogged.

III. Understanding the reason for this persecution

1. Paul is persecuted because of the mystery of God:

- ✿ Ephesians 3:2-6--*assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. 6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*



Paul uses the term Mystery 4 times in this passage 3 times in verses 3-6. He speaks of it in...

- ✿ Ephesians 1:9-10--*making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth*

EPHESIANS 3:1-13

How to face persecution



What Paul doesn't mean by mystery:

- spooky ghost story
- beyond human ability to understand. i.e. If hotdogs come in packages of 10, why do hotdog buns come in packages of 8? Such things are truly beyond human comprehension



What Paul does mean by mystery is that this truth, which has existed from all eternity, has been hidden or concealed in the mind of God. It's not spooky, it's not impossible to understand, it simply had not yet been revealed until this point.



What is the mystery?

- ♣ Ephesians 3:9--...*the mystery hidden for ages in God...*
- ♣ Ephesians 3:6--*the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*

2. The Jewish response to this mystery being revealed



♣ Acts 22:21--*And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles 22 Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live." 23 And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air*



I liken the Jewish response to what happens when a new baby is born into a house with other children. Sometimes a child can become convinced that their parents exist for them and for them alone. Their siblings exist for them and for them alone. They are firmly entrenched in this worldview until you violently destroy this worldview by having the audacity to have another child. This may have been your plan all along but the kid never saw it coming and now they feel angry. They are jealous toward the new child and don't treat him/her very well and they act out.



This is what happened to the Jewish people. They were the chosen people, they had been given the law, they had been given the prophets, they alone were the covenant people of God and now Paul comes into town saying God is granting to the gentiles all that the Jews believe is rightfully theirs alone.



Theological Implication: Covenantal vs. Dispensational



♣ Ephesians 3:6--*the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*



Covenantal--all the promises of the Old Covenant are fulfilled in Christ and belong to us Jew and Gentile believer equally in Christ. This is our view.



Dispensational--some of the Old Covenant promises to the Jewish people have not been fulfilled in Christ and though salvation is made available to Jew and Gentile alike, many Old Covenant promises are only for the Jewish people and they are still awaiting the fulfillment of these promises to be fulfilled. This view is not true!

IV. Paul glories in his call despite the persecution

1. Paul feels unworthy of his call







♣ Ephesians 3:7-8--*Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given...*

EPHESIANS 3:1-13



How to face persecution

- ❖ Acts 22:19-20--*...I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. 20 And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him*

2. The Glorious Call

- ❖ Ephesians 3:8-9--*...to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things*
- ❖ Ephesians 1:7-10--*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth*
-  This is one of those moments where we have to crawl into the skin of the author. We simply won't understand what is being said without doing so. We take it for granted that God's plan is to save people from all over the world. Paul is living in a time and in a culture that believes something very different about God's plan. Paul understood depravity, the law had tutored him well. Paul understands that God is not obligated to save anybody, he would be completely righteous if he were to judge the world as it stands. Paul understands that God has mercifully chosen to a people for himself. He never dreamed how deep that mercy was that it would save those farthest from God (Gentiles). He never dreamed that it would save so many. Paul is receiving a fresh understanding of just how great God's mercy is and it's overwhelming to him.
- ❖ Ephesians 2:10--*so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*
-  Before this time, even the angels weren't aware of how deep the love and mercy of God went. They are beholding the heart of God being revealed to all creation through the church. This mercy is so captivating that the angels themselves desire a deeper experience with it.
-  1 Peter 1:12--*...the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look*
- ❖ Ephesians 3:11-12--*This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord*
-  This is a repeated theme of Paul's. That this was no plan b but rather the revealing of God's eternal plan.

V. Paul encourages the Ephesians, as well as us

- ❖ Ephesians 3:12-13--*in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory*
-  I sort of hear Paul saying, "I am captive right now, so you don't have access to me. However, you still have full access to almighty God. So keep the faith baby!"
-  In the face of trials and persecution, keep on believing, keep on meeting together to grow in the word, keep on meeting together to proclaim the excellencies of Christ, keep on preaching the gospel to those who are far off. Your access to God is not diminished. He still has you in the palm of his hand.