

Ephesians 3:1-13
Week 5
4/18/21

Introduction

Cole. Ephesians 3.

As we continue with the book of Ephesians today we are going to focus on the idea of grace. If you have been around the Christian church in any capacity, then you have heard the word grace. Grace as it is often defined is “receiving something we do not deserve”. Often when we speak about grace in the church we use it in the context of we have received grace from God. As we spoke about on Easter we were dead, at the bottom of the ocean, unable to revive ourselves, unable to do anything, and God being rich in mercy, saved us. He provided us grace, he took the punishment of our sin and offered us grace, to be adopted into his family and be made right with Him.

Today Paul is going to introduce the idea of Grace going **to and through** you. Paul wants us to understand that Grace is not something we only receive, it's also something we give. As Believers part of our calling is to be conduits of grace, in other words Grace should be going to us and then through us to the people around us. We are called to be grace to the people we interact with day to day.

Ephesians 3:1-5

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—

Paul did multiple things in that phrase that should matter to us.

For this reason

He starts out by saying “For this reason” Paul is referring back to what Tim preached on last week, Paul has just explained that the Gentiles and Jews have been brought together by the blood of Christ. They are according to Ephesians 2:21-22 being joined together and built together into a dwelling place for Christ Jesus. In other words Paul is saying I am in prison for the sake of the unification of the church.

A Prisoner of Christ Jesus

The next phrase, “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” again has many implications. So most historians agree that during this time period Paul is on house arrest awaiting trial from Caesar, specifically Nero. But Paul does not say he is a prisoner of Caesar, or Nero, or Rome. Paul says he is a Prisoner of Christ. In that phrase Paul is affirming the sovereignty of God. He is saying I know that Christ is in control, and I know that Christ has me here.

On behalf of Gentiles

Finally Paul says, part of the reason I am in jail is for the Gentiles. God in his sovereignty has ordained that I be in prison for:

- The unification of Church
- For the good of the Gentiles

Paul's ministry, specifically is to the Gentiles and it is here that Paul breaks off onto a tangent for the rest of our verses today.

2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,

Paul says something here that is very easy to miss, "God's grace was given to me **for you**"

Grace is meant to flow to us and through us.

Grace is not only meant to be received. **So Grace should be less of an all you can eat buffet and more of a neighborhood cookout.** What I mean is if the only way we interact with grace is me, me, me then we are missing a large part of the purpose. Grace is something that should be received yes, but it should also be shared, it should also be given

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.

Paul tells us this mystery was made known to him by revelation, in other words God told him, revealed it to him. It is worth mentioning that when Paul uses the word mystery he is not using it how we would:

He is not talking about the making a murder type of mystery where we try and guess what happened or the wanda vision type of mystery where we are trying to figure out who's who and what is going on

He is talking more like a Lamelo Ball mystery. Let me explain what I mean. So in sports every year professional leagues have drafts, so every year all of the professional teams get a pick and then everyone chooses a player, worst teams get better picks. I am a big draft guy, NFL draft April 29th, my house, oreos and coke you are all welcome. Just to clarify the oreos and coke are for me so you should bring your own snacks. So last year the NBA had a draft and the Charlotte Hornets had the third pick. So everyone is arguing who should we pick, who should go first etc. And they are basing their arguments on what we have seen so far, none of these players have played in the NBA. This is all just guesses and projections. Well the Charlotte Hornets with the third pick took Lamelo Ball, I know a polarizing prospect, I was a big fan, bought a jersey, believed in him. But a lot of people didn't. You see there was a mystery, it was not widely known if Lamelo ball would be good in the NBA, again I want to clarify that I like Paul in the passage, have known the mystery all along.

But now everyone who watches basketball knows Lamelo Ball is good. He was a good basketball player the whole time, but it was not widely known So that is how Paul is using the word mystery.

There is this truth, that Paul knows, that is not widely known, so what is this truth?

Ephesians 3:6-9

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.

This is the mystery that Paul is referring to, that the gospel, that our sin has been paid for by God himself, is not exclusive to the Jews. Gentiles are also welcomed into the family of God.

And although this is common knowledge now, when Paul is writing this it is a heavily debated topic. Like we taught in our Acts series, the Apostles have had to correct this doctrine in the church because many of the Jews feel as though they are the only ones to whom the gospel is offered.

But Paul, like the other apostles, is explaining that the Gospel, God's grace was not meant only for the Jews, from Genesis the plan was always that God's **Grace was meant to flow to the Israelites and through the Israelites to the rest of the world.**

We see this throughout the Old Testament, In Genesis 12 God tells Abraham that he will bless Abraham and his descendants, and through his descendants he will bless the world.

Psalm 22:27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

Isaiah 60:3 And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Grace cannot and should not stop with us. God's intention has always been for His grace to go to people and through people.

7 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, 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,

Again let's focus on Paul's use of the word grace:

" I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace", "this grace was given"

Paul is continuing to build onto this framework that grace is not merely something that you receive. He is saying that it is God's grace to him, God's favor, God's love, God's mercy that He gets to be a minister to the Gentiles.

And the reason that this is such a grace gift to Paul, being a minister to the Gentiles, is evident if we take a step back and see who Paul was before Christ, before the road of Damascus.

Paul was Saul, He was a man that openly opposed the progress of Christianity, He was responsible for the murder of Christians, the persecution of the church. He was in every way opposed to the will and desires of God and now, now he is the primary missionary to the Gentiles. God took a man that hated Christ, and hated the Gentiles, and used that man to be responsible for the spreading of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

This is the God we serve, this is the power of our God, that he would take his greatest enemy and change him into the greatest missionary of Christianity. this is the equivalent of:

- Members of Isis being missionaries in America
- White supremacist fighting for racial equality
- Nazi's, risking their lives to save Jews

This is a miraculous transformation. God uses the man who hated the gentiles, who hated Christians, to save them. That is the Grace Paul has received, that is the power of the God we serve.

And Paul is fully aware of the miracle that God did in him, that is why he refers to himself as the the least of the saints, he is pointing out the power and grace of God, that God would use someone like Paul to be his hands and feet.

Ephesians 3:10-13

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.

The world Paul uses here manifold, is more accurately translated multi colored. Paul is again hitting what Tim talked about last week. The people of God, the family of God has always been intended to be made up of every people, tribe, tongue, on this earth. The division amongst the church was different when Paul was writing this but the truth universal. For the Jews this was controversial because Paul is saying both Jew and Gentile are equally welcomed into the family of God, and if you cannot accept that then you do not understand the family of God.

11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, **12** in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

This is all a result of the death and resurrection of Christ. The cross puts to death the division between believers. The cross reveals that I am no different than the person next to me, regardless of our appearance, cultural upbringing, stage of life, and political ideology we are both sinners in need of a savior and we have been invited into the family of God. We now both have access to confidence and boldness in Christ and our able to live in peace with one another, loving the other more than we love ourself.

Now let's take a step back and consider what this passage means for us as followers of Jesus and how it should play out in our lives. Our goal as believers, as the church, is for what we learn in this room to affect our lives outside of this room. As Paul has been showing us in the passage, The Gospel being preached, passages being explained is God's grace going to us and how we apply them to our lives is God's grace going through us. Just like Paul was given grace for the Jews, Sundays are tangible ways we are being given grace for the people in our lives. So every week as we sit under the teaching of God's word our primary goal should be how can I apply this truth to my life. This will happen different ways, sometimes we will learn new things, sometimes we will be reminded of truths we have forgotten, and sometimes we just be reminded of things we know. But **Isaiah 55:10** tells us God's word will not return void, in other words we can always apply the word of God to our lives.

I want to end today with four ways God's grace moves to us and through us.

1. Grace produces servants

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.

In v7 when Paul uses the word minister it literally translates to servant.

In God's Grace to Paul he makes him a servant of Christ. Through the Grace of Jesus the holy spirit changes us into a servant of others. One of the ways we can check how we are doing spiritually is to see how we respond to the opportunity to serve those around us.

So when someone needs help moving, again.... Are we quick to have a posture of excuses? To come up with reasons why you are unable to serve this person in this way? And if you do serve them do you do it with a negative attitude or just do the minimum in order to check the box?

Or is our response one of willingness. Are we quick to remind ourselves that Jesus served us when we had nothing to offer. Our desire to serve is a good indicator of our understanding of grace. As we submit more and more to King Jesus, our priorities and desires matter less, the less we are bothered by the needs of the people around us and as a result we serve more. **Grace produces servants.**

2. Grace produces missionaries

In v8 Paul says "this grace was given me—to preach, to the Gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ."

In God's Grace to Paul he makes him a missionary. As Believers we believe by God's grace he has saved us from damnation and death and when he changes us we are both given the desire and responsibility to share that grace with the people around us.

Do you see the gospel as a burden or a blessing? Here is what I mean, functionally if we are Christians then we agree that in Christ live and salvation is found and apart from him is death and damnation. Do we care about the souls of the people around us? Do we talk about Jesus, do we invite people into our lives, are we willing to be awkward to talk about the gospel? Or are we quick to create excuses?

Something that I see and discuss often is we make this much more complicated than it has to be, we think in order to share the gospel with people we must understand apologetics, and be able to cite all the verses, but sharing the gospel is simply sharing your story. Do you believe Jesus saved you? Why? How does following Jesus impact your life, talk about that. Apologetics and the understanding of scriptures are good tools, but do not disqualify yourself so quickly. We have all been made missionaries, we should all be talking to the people in our lives about Jesus, praying for the people in our lives to come to know Jesus. Is that a marker in your life? If not repent. **Grace produces missionaries.**

3. Grace produces humility

In v8 Paul says he is the least of the saints. This is not the only time he refers to himself in this way. In 1 Corinthians he calls himself the least of the apostles and in 1 Timothy he calls himself the worst of sinners.

Paul is very aware of his sin and very aware of God's goodness and grace.

See Paul understands that he was dead in his sin, and the only reason he is alive is the grace of Jesus Christ. In understanding his sin and his depravity clearly **Paul is very skeptical of himself and very confident in God.**

When we understand our need for Jesus, how we were children of wrath, enemies of God, didn't know what was good and what was evil it produces humility in us.

Adam example

The more we understand our sin and the holiness of God the quicker we are to doubt ourselves. We know that our motives and thoughts are not pure but are tainted by our sinful nature. Instead of focusing on the sin of the people around us we are quick to see how we are off, we are quick to listen to community when they push into us, we are quick to step back in arguments or situations with our spouse, friends, and remember that we are sinners and that we have blind spots and most likely even if we are right in a situation the way that we handled it is sinful. **Grace produces Humility.** It produces self suspicion. it produces confidence in God not self

4. Grace prepares us for suffering

Something that you will notice about Paul in all the books he writes in the Bible is Paul never gives theological truth without pastoral intent. What does that mean? It means Paul is not just throwing out truth. He is not just giving us good information, although there is plenty of good information. No he is writing to a people. He is pastoring them, he is presenting the gospel to them to remind them and to change and guide them. He is trying to practically help the Ephesians. So a question we should ask ourselves is what is the pastoral intent of what Paul is saying.

13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

This is why Paul, while he is sitting in a Roman prison awaiting his execution can focus on what God is accomplishing in the Ephesians, can write a letter encouraging and challenging them. Not because his suffering is not real but because he understands that his hope is not and will not ever be on this side of heaven. That we are living for a future hope in Christ, a hope we can have confidence in as believers.

Paul is giving us an eternal perspective.

Every year I read a book by C.S. Lewis called a grief observed. It is a short 70-80 page book. Lewis rights this journal after his wife dies of cancer, and he is wrestling with God and trying to understand how God can be who he says he is in a world where bone cancer exists.

And the last line of the book is "*Poi si torno all' eternal fontana*"

Which means And then she returned to the eternal fountain. What Lewis and Paul are saying is that Grace shifts are perspective. As painful and terrible as our suffering is in this life, we are able to look at God, the fountain of life, and remember that he used the cross, the most terrible act to ever occur, to accomplish the most beautiful family.

God's grace moves through us not to us.

His Grace makes us servants.

His Grace makes us missionaries.

His Grace gives us humility,

His Grace prepares us for suffering.

These are markers of Grace on the Christian, not an exhaustive list, but ways that Paul in this passage tells us God's Spirit should be working in us as believers. So how does this look in our lives? Has God's grace produced a desire in you to serve others? Has it given you a heart for the lost, a desire for your neighbors and friends to come to know Christ? Has it made you quick to see your sin and slow to blame the sins of others? Has it created a hope in you, a steadfastness that allows you to run to God in the midst of your suffering?

Those are signs of grace flowing through you not just to you. So I want us to ask, is this true of us? Is this true of me? If so praise Jesus, how great that he could use and change sinners like us. If not, I pray that you experience Grace in its fullness tonight and this week. **Lets pray.**

Communion

The Church is God's plan to spread the gospel not just on earth but "made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places"

- This was always the plan.

God does not change. The God of the Old testament was not an angry God and the God of the New Testament is cool and loving. God always planned for the gospel to spread to all people of all nations.

- We have direct access to God, this is not merely to change the world but to change us.

God uses his mission for the sanctification of the saints. We both go out so God can work in the people around us and so he can work in us to make us look more like himself.

Application:

1. The Gospel is for all people

- Focus on people different than us
- Hit race quickly because Tim spent time on it last week

2. Abide in Jesus

- We have direct access

This is a big deal. As a Christian you have direct access to God. The God of the universe cares about your life and all the intricacies of it. He is there and he cares.

3. Mission is necessary for Christian maturity

- God does not need you he chooses to use you
- Sanctification and mission go hand and hand

Today we have no issue with Jew and Gentile, but this truth applies

- To Black and white
- Young and old
- Republican and democrat

The people of God are unified across every people group, every demographic, and every political leaning and the reason why this matters is because this, the unity in the church, is supposed to show off the wisdom of God to the world. Because we in the church are unified in a way that those outside of the faith

cannot understand. This matters because it puts on display the wisdom and the beauty of the Gospel to the watching world.

The fact that these different races, demographics, and ideologies could learn to be family with one another shows off the power of our God.

Lots of sports references today. This past weekend I was changing channels and I came across the movie 42. 42 is about a baseball player named Jackie Robinson, and Jackie Robinson was the first african american to play in the MLB. And the movie chronicles how difficult this transition is for him, he is hit intentionally by multiple pitchers when he is at bat, he gets death threats regularly, and his own team does not accept him. And as the movie goes on we slowly start to see the teammates of Robinson rally around him and start to accept him. And there is one specific scene where Jackie and all the other players run onto the field to play a game, and the crowd is harassing Robinson, telling him to go home and that he doesn't belong. And a teammate of Robinson, his name is Pee Wee, enters the frame. You see Pee Wee before Robinson was one of the best players in the league, white southern country boy, grew up in an atmosphere that would not have accepted African Americans, especially African Americans who think they were as good as white people. And Pee Wee walks up to Robinson and puts his arm around him in an act of solidarity.

This is a quote from a man named Joe Black who spoke at Pee Wee's funeral

Pee Wee helped make my boyhood dream come true to play in the majors, the World Series. When Pee Wee reached out to Jackie, all of us in the Negro League smiled and said it was the first time that a white guy had accepted us. When I finally got up to Brooklyn, I went to Pee Wee and said, 'Black people love you. When you touched Jackie, you touched all of us.'

Here's my point: this scene is incredibly touching. This story about baseball players learning to look past each other's differences. This moment touched multiple people's lives, a statue was made to commemorate this moment. All from a white man merely accepting and being friends with a black man. Imagine how much more the wisdom of God is put on display when people from different contexts, experiences, and backgrounds learn to be family in the context of the church. I believe this is one of the primary ways that the church can and should show off the wisdom of God to the outside world, and So does Paul.

From POA:

It is a grace gift for Paul to get to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Do we view the mission of God as a gift or as a burden? The gospel doesn't just come to us, it's meant to go through us. *Special emphasis on 3:10 - God uses the church in a unique way to make His manifold wisdom known, not just on the earth, but to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.