

## EPHESIANS 3:7-13

### INTRODUCTION

I said last time that Paul speaks about himself in these verses. He does so in order to magnify God's great plan in saving Paul and commissioning him to be an Apostle to the Gentiles. His task was to reveal the mystery that both Jews and Gentiles are equal before God they come to God and are accepted by God on equal terms. Jews and Gentiles are heirs' together, fellow members of one body and sharers together in God's promise in Christ Jesus (v 6).

No one would have thought of that. Jews and Gentiles were so opposed to one another that no one thought it was possible to unite them. But this just shows the wonderful power of God to accomplish his purposes within our world. Now in these verses that we are looking at today Paul continues to speak about himself but he only does so in order to show the manifold wisdom of God.

### 1. PAUL'S VIEW OF HIS MINISTRY (vs. 7-8)

a) **Servant OF The Gospel** - Paul describes himself as a servant of this gospel (v 7). This gospel that unites enemies to God and to one another is the gospel that Paul is a 'table waiter' off. That is what the word 'servant' means; Christians took this word and used it for the role of Deacons within the Church. Now when it comes to the gospel Paul does not consider himself as occupying any important place; his place is that of a lowly servant. He speaks of himself in verse 8 as the 'less of the least of all God's people.' Now was this a case of false humility, after all in a day when we talk about self-esteem and self-assertiveness is Paul not just drawing attention to himself by displaying false humility. Paul does **not want** to draw attention to himself but this is genuinely how he saw himself.

He considered himself to be less significant than any other of the followers of Jesus. You see if you read through the letters of Paul you get the impression that as he remembers his past and what he did to God's church; he cannot but see himself as the lowest of all. Elsewhere he calls himself the 'least of the apostles' and explains that he is not worthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

This is how Paul genuinely views himself in God's scheme of things. He could never forget that he had been a persecutor of God's people and that it seems was what kept him humble. But if Paul could not forget his past he could also not forget that God's grace prevails over every human situation. He keeps coming back to the thought of grace, and grace certainly had worked wonders in and through the life of Paul. It was God's grace that made him a servant of the gospel (v 7). It's not that one day Paul decided wouldn't it be good to be a humble servant of the gospel and take the gospel to the Gentiles. No being a servant was a gift of God's grace to Paul (v 7). It was by the grace of God that God gave Paul the gift to preach this gospel to Gentiles. He gave him the gift of eternal life, his sins had been forgiven, and the gift of being a servant by being commissioned to be an Apostle to the Gentiles.

Being a servant of the gospel was God's grace gift to Paul. It had nothing to do with Paul's natural abilities and gifting although we could say Paul was a gifted man, but that does not make anyone a servant of the gospel. It takes God's power in one's life to make a sinner into a servant of the gospel. For Paul to be a servant of the gospel was God's gracious gift to him. I don't know about you but perhaps we need to see the ministry as God's gift to us.

Not only does he grant to us the necessary gifts but the actual task of being a servant of the gospel is God's gift to us personally and we also know from later on in this book that it is God's gift to the church (4:11-13).

This naturally applies to those of us who are ministers of the gospel; both full time and part time. It is God's gift to us to be able and enabled by God to preach the wonderful gospel to others. You know sometimes the ministry of the church can be seen as a burden and sometimes if I am honest it can feel burdensome, but we need to view it as God's gracious gift to us, the fact that he allows us to preach God's word and enables us to do so is a very gracious gift from God. Of course in another sense we are all servants of the gospel, God has graciously saved us by his power, he has brought us to the truth and he allows us to share the gospel with others.

The gospel that we share is a gospel that brings reconciliation between people and God and between people in general. So instead of seeing the sharing the good news of Jesus as a chore that we feel we must do; see it as a gift from God to us, a real privilege to be able to tell people good news about Jesus

So the next time we have a door to door day or evening don't view it as something that you could not do or something that you do reluctantly because that is what is expected of you but see it as God's gracious gift to you and then go in his power and share the good news of Jesus with others.

For Paul his motivation for preaching was not that God had called him or that God had chosen him but his motivation was the grace of God (v 8). This grace of God that had made him a servant of the gospel had a purpose behind it; it was that Paul would preach to the Gentiles. That was Paul's particular piece of service; he was to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Others had their own task for God but Paul's task was to preach to the Gentiles.

Would Paul have chosen this task for himself? I very much doubt it. He loved his own people greatly he agonised over the spiritual plight of his own nation (Romans 10:1) but God had called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles and God gave him a love for those who he once considered his enemies and so Paul took his task very seriously. His message to the Gentiles was simple he was to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ (v 8). The word 'unsearchable' means something like footprints that cannot be traced or followed.

The mark of the footprints of Christ goes in all sorts of directions that no one can follow them all. The idea is simple enough preaching the riches of Christ cannot be exhausted. It's like a reservoir that you cannot get to the bottom off. Christ cannot be totally fathomed he is rich beyond all human need and beyond all telling.

**b) Making God's Mystery Plain (v 9)** – Paul saw his ministry as one of servanthood particularly servanthood for the sake of the Gentiles. But now he sees his ministry as revealing God's mystery to the world. The mystery we looked at last time is found in verse 6. It is the mystery that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ Jesus that God does not make a distinction between them, they share the same blessings and are accepted by God with equal status before him. The word that is translated 'make plain' here literally means to 'enlighten.' Paul sees his ministry as one of enlightenment. He knows that people live in darkness their lives are full of darkness because of sin and their understanding is darkness.

They need the light of the gospel, they need their lives enlighten by the truth of God's word. God's commission of Paul as an Apostle to the Gentiles was revealed to Paul as one of turning the Gentiles from darkness to light (Acts 26:17-18). Paul understood that men and women are held in darkness by the devil himself it is only divine enlightenment that will open the eyes of sinners so that they can see the mystery.

That is our task as well as Paul's task isn't it? We must have a biblical view of people. Every person who is an unbeliever is in darkness they are blind to the truth. They might be good

nice moral people but they are in darkness and will continue to be in darkness until God enlightens them. That is why when we speak of Christ to unbelievers it is like a foreign language to them. They cannot understand what we are talking about and they certainly fail to see the attraction of the message we are proclaiming.

But how will people's eyes be opened and brought from darkness to light? It's through the proclaiming of the unsearchable riches of Christ. That is our task that was Paul's task and it is God's task to bring enlightenment to make plain his mystery. We must be faithful to do our part and we must pray that God will do his part. Well when someone is enlighten by God what is this mystery that is made plain to them?

Well verse 6 has already told us it is that both Jews and Gentiles are incorporated on equal terms into his church and that this unity comes in and through Christ himself. Now once enlightened we come to see what was once hidden from us. In fact this truth was hidden in the past, no Old Testament saint understood this idea, and they just could not see Gentiles and Jews being accepted together into one body.

For them Gentiles who came to know God became Jews and were in that sense part of God's community but no one dreamed that God would bring Jew and Gentile together on equal terms to make one body the church. It was hidden in God so that no one could possible discover it but now God has revealed it to those who have been enlightened and when we discover this truth we are dumbfounded. We simply cannot believe that everyone who is in Christ is equal.

Our society is based on inequality, even though we talk about equality we are so use to being treated with inequality so when we come to Christ and find that in the church there is true equality in Christ we are simply amazed and overcome by the grace of God to sinners like us.

**c) Displaying The Wisdom of God (v 10)** – The third way that Paul views his ministry to the Gentiles is one of displaying the manifold wisdom of God. But who is God's wisdom displayed too here? It is displayed to the angels for that is who is referred to here when Paul talks about rulers and authorities in heavenly realms. How does this work in practice? Well surely the expected results of the preaching of Christ to the world would be the birth and then the growth of the church, which included both Jews and Gentiles.

This is indeed what has already happened for Paul is writing to mainly a Gentile church. Now in this multi racial universal church the wisdom of God is being displayed. The church of Jesus Christ is a demonstration of God's power and of his grace but it is God's wisdom that concerns Paul here. The word translated 'manifold' means many coloured or many sided and the word was used to describe flowers or embroidered cloth or something like that.

Therefore Paul says that the church as a multicultural and a multi racial universal community is like a beautiful tapestry, its members come from a wide range of colourful backgrounds and cultures. The church's diversity and harmony is unique and the church's colourful fellowship is a reflection of God's many coloured or as one writer put it 'many splendoured' wisdom of God.

So as the gospel spreads throughout the world and as sinners from all types of backgrounds and nations are saved by the grace of God and are brought into God's church then the angels stand and watch as God demonstrates and displays his manifold (multi-coloured) wisdom of God. If we see life like a play then God has written the play, history is the theatre and the world is the stage and believers in Christ in every land are the actors.

God is directing and producing his play, act by act it is being revealed. The story is still being revealed today and as all this is going on the angels are the audience as they watch the drama of salvation unfold before their very eyes. God is revealing his plan for this world to the

angels and he is doing it through the church, the church is at the centre of all that God is doing in our world.

The angels watch with great fascination as they see Gentiles and Jews throughout the world being brought into God's church and treated as equals. It's like watching a good drama of television waiting for the story to unfold and then being amazed as the story takes a twist and something unexpected happens. That's how it must be for the angels as they watch as God works through the Jewish nation and then suddenly God converts and saves Gentiles and brings them not into the nation of Israel but into a new community the community of the church.

They are amazed at the wisdom of God, who could have thought of such a thing? Who else has such wisdom but God alone? But God is not making it up as he goes along he is not thinking about the next scene as this one is being played out. No! This multicultural and multi-racial church was God's purpose from the beginning (v 11). It is God's eternal purpose that is being worked out today in our world and that purpose is centred upon Christ Jesus our Lord and his church (v 11).

It is through Jesus Christ that God's purposes are accomplished and it is through his death and resurrection that this universal multicultural and multi-racial church comes about and grows. Those who are enlightened are able to approach God with great freedom or boldness might be better and with absolute confidence (v 12). But they do not come on their own they come to God in Christ. Christ it is who introduces us to God so that we come with freedom and confidence. So the church comes into being because of Christ; being a member in his church means that we approach God with freedom and confidence that we will be accepted in Christ. Today God's drama of salvation is being worked out before the angels in the heavenly realms because of Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is no wonder that as Paul concludes his argument in verse 13 he tells the church not to be discouraged because of Paul's imprisonment. This is just another scene in God's drama, it might seem a total disaster for Paul and the church but nothing could be further from the truth. This is God's eternal purpose being worked out in the history of the world. In fact Paul's sufferings were the church's glory. This is because they were part of God's great eternal plan and purpose for the world.

God is working his purposes out in this world through the church of Jesus Christ. The church only exists and functions because of Jesus and what he has done on that cross and through his resurrection.

Now let me give one more application before I finish. The church is seen today as an ill relevance no one really wants to know what the church thinks anymore. The church is seen as made up of weak willed people mainly in the eyes of the world little old ladies who need some sort of support in life. But God says that the church is the central player in the world's history. I don't know about you but when I was at school I found history boring with lots of dates to learn etc. But History is really **His Story** and I don't find that boring. God is at work in our world bringing his plan to fulfilment in Christ.

He thought of it in eternity and he works his plan out throughout the generations of the world and brings it to a conclusion with the return of Christ and finally takes his people to live in the new heaven and new earth where righteousness reigns. At the centre of History is God's Son the Lord Jesus and his church. So never ever despise the church. Never seek to put the church down, never speak lightly of the church of Jesus Christ and never be ashamed of being in the church.

Our Prime Minister thinks he is history making, President Bush might think he is central to the world's history but little do they know that insignificant men and woman and boys and girls who make up God's church are in fact the central players in the world's history. All that God is doing today is for the church's sake.

We also need to open our eyes to what God is doing in our world. Because things are hard in Britain and the West in general spiritually speaking does not mean that God is not working out his purposes for the church. Look at what God is doing in Eastern Europe and South America and Asia and be astonished at the manifold wisdom of God as he calls men and woman and children from all different countries and cultures and unites them together in Christ in the church.

Open our eyes and see the manifold wisdom of God being displayed in our world. The angels are amazed at God's wisdom are we? I trust we are.

Amen