



08 Ephesians 3:1-7 – “It’ll all be Okay”

3 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—² if indeed you have heard of the administration of God’s grace which was given to me for you;³ that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before briefly. ⁴ By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which in other generations was not made known

to mankind, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; ⁶ to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, ⁷ of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to enlighten all people as to what the plan of the mystery is which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; ¹⁰ so that the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. ¹³ Therefore I ask you not to become discouraged about my tribulations in your behalf, since they are your glory.

Both last Sunday and last Wednesday, we have looked at God’s plan for bringing the gentiles into the “spiritual tent” so to speak. In chapter three, Paul is writing the church in Ephesus basically telling them like my momma used to say, “It’s all gonna be alright”. Paul was imprisoned and he was going through tribulations and they were no doubt distressed about it.

Think about how you all would feel here at Union Grove if I had helped you come to the Lord and grow in the Lord and then you saw me taken into captivity where I was held prisoner. You would be wondering, “Can we really trust the things that he told us?” “I wonder if he really did something wrong?” You might be tempted to say, “I know what I felt when he led me to Christ, but was it all for naught?” In these few verses we see that God was totally in charge of Paul’s life. This raises the question: Who is in charge of your life?

Verse 1

Paul begins this chapter telling us that he is a prisoner OF Jesus Christ for the sake of the gentiles. That is a little odd for us to hear. What made him say such an odd thing. I think Paul is telling us that once he came to Jesus he was NEVER a free man. He was subject to whatever God would have for his life. Paul didn’t feel like he was a victim of circumstances. He knew

that whenever he followed the leading of the Holy Spirit, he was directly in the middle of God's will for his life.

Paul wrote this letter as a prisoner of Rome, but Paul knew that Rome wasn't in charge of his life. He knew instead that he was a prisoner of whatever God had for him to do. When we are in the midst of troubles in our own lives it is easy for us to believe that our problems are somehow in control of our lives. But, they are not! The things that happen to us are not in control of our lives. We forget that truth. God is in control of our lives. I just want to remind all of us today that when troubles come our way, God is still in control of our lives. Lately, I've continued to struggle with some of the symptoms of Covid. I have a fatigue that I just can't seem to overcome. It is easy to feel like I'm controlled by the fatigue, but I am not. I am controlled by the King of the Universe who isn't done with me. When I have to take a little nap I just remind myself that He wants me to just take a little break.

Paul then tells the readers that he became a prisoner of Jesus for the "sake of the gentiles". His ministry to the gentiles got him arrested many times. But, God called him specifically to bring salvation to the gentiles. He took that mystery of God's grace that only the Jews had known, and God called him out of all men to extend God's grace to the gentiles. We only have one Jewish person affiliated with our church, but he isn't here today. It is through Paul and what God did through Paul that all of us sitting in this sanctuary came to know Jesus. Paul brought the gospel message to Europe. I remember going to Greece with Kat and Sandy, and we actually visited the place where Paul led a gentile woman named Lydia to Jesus. She was the first European that we have record of accepting Jesus as her Savior. Let's look at the account.



¹¹ So after setting sail from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the following day to Neapolis; ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were spending some days in this city. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were thinking that there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

First Convert in Europe

¹⁴ A woman named Lydia was listening; she was a seller of purple fabrics from the city of Thyatira, and a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵ Now when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:11-15 NASB)

Verse 2

Paul uses the word “mystery” four times in this passage. In Greek the word *mysterion* translated “mystery” does not mean what it means in English. It’s not like a murder mystery with clues and everything. It’s not something that nobody can figure out. Paul is talking about something that was previously unrevealed that it is now made known. In verse 4 he says that you “*when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which in other generations was not made known to mankind, as it has now been revealed*”. The mystery is that the gentiles were always in God’s plan for humanity but nobody knew anything about it. Mankind wasn’t privy to what God was doing.

Jesus was the promised Messiah and He came through the Jews to minister to the Jews. He repeatedly told his disciples that His ministry was to the house of Israel. After Jesus presented Himself to the Jewish people, they basically rejected Him as the Messiah, and God set aside Israel for a time period and God began working through the church. It is important to realize that the Bible does not say that the Church replaced Israel. That is an idea called “replacement theology” and it isn’t biblical. Israel is still Israel and the Church is the Church. The Church does though now consist of a blending of Jew and gentile. This inclusion makes gentiles “fellow heirs” with the Jews. This time period is what dispensationalists call the “Church Age”. The Church wasn’t in the Old Testament. That is why Paul is calling this a “mystery. The Church Age began at Pentecost and the Church Age will come to an end at the time of the rapture, when the Church will be removed from the earth. At that time, the “stop watch” so to speak will start up again for Israel. Israel will again be the focus of God’s calendar. Nothing about the Church was revealed in the Old Testament.

This has sometimes been explained by what biblical scholars call the “mountain peaks of prophecy”.



The drawing on the left shows what I’m talking about. It is easy for us to see the big events as time marches on, but we don’t really see what is going on in the times of the valleys.

The Old Testament prophets couldn’t see in the middle of those valleys. They only describe the mountain tops.

Paul tells the Ephesians that God revealed to him the mystery of the bringing of the gentiles into the fold. He is calling himself a “servant” (that the Greek word used for a deacon - *diakonos*) to the gentiles. Paul is saying he was called and he was given power. We have gotten away from leaders who have a calling and then are given power. When God calls you to do something, He will EMPOWER you to do it. I remember the spiritual hunger that I had to lead me to getting a seminary degree, but that was not a “calling”. The calling I received to be a pastor happened at about 10 am on January 1, 2004. It happened while I sat in my car at a property on County Road 325. THAT is a calling. I remember the excitement I felt 12 years later

when several of you at Union Grove invited me to speak one Sunday. I had spoken at Union Grove several time before, but this was different.

I knew that I was called, but I wondered if I had the stuff it takes to be a pastor. While praying through it, I realized that seminary preparation is not a calling. Bible knowledge is not a calling. Being good friends with people in a congregation is not a calling. A calling is a calling. And if God calls you to something, He will equip you to perform it. He will empower you to do it!

This plan for the gentiles that Paul speaks about had always been God's plan. The mystery to me is why God didn't do this sooner. But God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9). Our salvation was embedded or you might think of as enveloped within the Abrahamic Covenant. You might remember last week I read the part of the covenant that included each of us. God promised Abraham that through his seed all the peoples of the earth would be blessed.

And the "nations of the earth" refers to the gentiles. Through Abraham's seed all of the nations of the earth would be blessed and they were. It is through Jesus who descended from Abraham that we are blessed and we are offered the opportunity to come to salvation by faith. I will remind you that even during Old Testament times, faith was the key to please God. God counted Abraham's belief as righteousness to him and God does the same thing with us.

God made that promise to Abraham saying, *"and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."* (Genesis 22:18 NIV). And the Bible tells us that Abraham believed God and God counted that to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6). In that same way today all who believe in God's Son are justified apart from the Law. So, Abraham has become the Father to all of us who believe (Romans 4:11-17) and if we belong to Christ then we have become Abraham's heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:29). This applies to every believer from every ethnicity and every nation. This is one of the reasons that being a racist of any color is incongruous with faith in Christ. We are all one, and as I've said many times before, the ground is equal at the foot of the cross. I just say all this so that we can stop and take stock of the marvelous grace of God and so that we can understand just how precious our salvation is. We are joint-heirs with Jesus.

So as joint-heirs, what do we inherit? Peter tells us that we have been born again "into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you." So this inheritance includes four important qualities:

Our inheritance in Christ is imperishable. That means that it is not diminishing. It is eternal.

Our inheritance in Christ is unspoiled. What we have in Christ is free from defect. It makes me think of those lambs that were sacrificed that were without spot and blemish.

Our inheritance in Christ is unfading. What we have in Christ never lessens. It is an enduring possession.

Our inheritance in Christ is reserved. What we have in Christ is being "kept" in heaven for us. It will be there and it will never fade, and it is set aside for you and me in heaven.

I think for me the inheritance that most comforts me is knowing that I have eternal life in Him. If I don't have eternal life then this is it. Life is just one hard thing to overcome after another with little glimpses of joy now and then. As part of our inheritance we have the love, peace, and joy that we are promised right here and now if we will avail ourselves of it. But, the big thing is that we will have it forever and ever and ever.

As part of our inheritance, we are now eternal beings. We will indeed share in His glory (Romans 8:17). The beauty of it all is that we can receive the promise of our inheritance by hearing the word of truth and believing in Messiah. (Ephesians 1:13). I know that life is hard. In spite of the tremendous highs I have experienced in my own life, it has had its own hard and difficult turns. I have lived through great dissappointments. Although I experience peace, love, and joy in my present life, it is just a shadow of the good things to come. Life is hard. We work hard. We have pain. We have sorrow. My dad used to talk about the "foot sore weariness of life". I am beginning to understand that. I wake up in the night (writing this at 3:53 am) because my veins in my legs cause swelling and pain which awakens me. But, I stop and count it joy that I wake up at all and I focus on the fact that the King of the Universe loves me, sees me, and is helping me get through my challenges here. He is cheering me on as I make my way to my eternal inheritance.

When I can understand and comprehend just a little bit of what glory awaits me, I'm able to better endure whatever comes my way. Paul tells us, *"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us and eternal weight of glory."* (2 Cor 4:17). The sufferings of this life are just for a moment. He will wipe away every tear and there will be no more death, dying, crying, and pain. We will dwell with God in a New Heaven and a New Earth forever and ever and ever. King David said it well. *"⁵ O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot.⁶ The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance. (Psalm 16:4-5).* In knowing this we can *"fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."* (2 Cor 4:18)

Let us pray.

Oh Lord, help us today to accept your calling for our lives. Let us trust in you to empower us to do what you would have us do. Lord, we know and accept that sometimes your calling calls for great tears and suffering. May we pass through those momentary troubles knowing that your inheritance for us is an eternal weight of glory. We pray this in the blessed name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.