

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## ***The Power of God in The Weakness of Man*** ***Ephesians 3:1-13***

**Keywords:** Gospel, Mystery, Revelation, Plan of God, Weakness, Power of God

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** NONE

**SermonAudio Blurb:**

### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Read 3:1-13
- B. This is a challenging passage to preach and we need to settle our minds and hearts to study this together. The best way for me to approach it is to give you a sense of how the passage fits into the whole of the book.
- C. Note first vs 1 with vs 14.
  - 1. Paul begins to pray again on behalf of these people in Asia Minor when it is almost like he senses that he has not driven home how vast the gift of grace is by God toward the Gentiles.
  - 2. And so he picks back up the theme and speaks to the grand mystery unveiled and invites them to marvel with him about the abundant mercy and grace shown to them.
- D. Next notice the following phrases in the text:
  - 1. 3:1 "the prisoner"
  - 2. 3:8 "to me, the very least of all saints."
  - 3. 3:13 "not to lose heart at my tribulations"
- E. Now notice the following points:
  - 1. Vs 7 "according to the working of His power"
  - 2. Vs 9 "has been hidden in God who created all things"
  - 3. Vs 10 whole thing.
  - 4. Vs 12 "in whom we have boldness and confident access"
- F. The big picture:

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1. Remember when I began to introduce this book to you that I said it was not really a letter but more like a sermon and that it took the form of a drama that is unfolding.
  - a. The purpose is to unveil the ultimate, glorious purposes of God in triumphing over our enemies found in sin, Satan, and death.
  - b. Remember how we talked much about real reality and how the world that is unseen by us is just as real as what we see.
  - c. In chapter two he laid out for us the grand plan of the Lord to create a new humanity in Jesus Christ. One that was not Gentile nor Jew but one that was wholly new in His beloved Son.
  - d. As a result both groups of people are now brought together and both share fully in the grace and blessings of God.
2. But there is a real challenge because of the gap (if you will) between 1:18-21 with 6:12.
  - a. It is nice to talk of the triumph of Christ over these powers.
  - b. But it is also a real reality that we still wrestle against them.
  - c. Paul uses himself as an example of how these two ideas work themselves out.
3. Illustration:
  - a. First century Rome would be very straight-forward in their interpretation of Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ. He was a failure and so was Jesus.
  - b. Where was Paul? [prison]
  - c. So who was more powerful, the God who Paul serves or the gods of Rome? [the latter]
  - d. What is the proof? Paul is a prisoner of the very powers that Paul claims are vanquished under the foot of Jesus.
  - e. What Paul does in this section is speak to how the readers were to understand him and his imprisonment. This is what he means in 3:13.
4. Basic explanation:

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- a. Paul says to them and he says to us that there is nothing to see and certainly not anything to fret over in his imprisonment. And they should not interpret his sufferings as failure in the message.
  - b. And it is not just that he is trying to put a brave face on a bad picture.
  - c. Rather he continues the grand drama that we see throughout the Scripture.
    - (1) God taking the least of people and using them to accomplish His good pleasure.
      - (a) Abram.
      - (b) The manipulative liar Jacob.
      - (c) The nation of Israel.
      - (d) The judges like Gideon.
      - (e) People like the shepherd boy David.
    - (2) But the greatest is Jesus Christ Himself.
      - (a) Philippians 2:5-11.
      - (b) The true God-man who took on Himself our sin.
      - (c) Remember that the cross was the highest, fullest expression of rejection and humiliation in the Roman world. And God used it to become to vehicle for His power and glory to shine forth.
      - (d) 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.
    - (3) And so Paul is showing the people, including us, that he is right where he needs to be.
      - (a) It is not a mistake, rather it is part of God's sovereign plan to display God's victory.
      - (b) While he is in this position of humiliation and shame he is also sovereignly placed by God in the perfect position to fulfill his calling to be an administrator of God's grace.
- G. Beloved, if we can get this point then we will be in an amazing place as we all live out our lives before God and man.

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1. There are a lot of complexities in this passage and each of them present us a chance to miss the point of the passage and I have no doubt this will be a scheme of Satan to divert our minds.
  2. Let us all pray against that scheme even as we look at the passage together.
- H. The flow of the passage:
1. 1-7 Paul speaks of how he was given the task of revealing a grand mystery.
  2. 8-13 shows how proclaiming this mystery is part of God's plan on His demonstration of victory over these powers and authorities.
  3. In doing so Paul show us that through the Cross of Christ God has destroyed the powers of this age and that it is utterly contrary to the way this broken world operates. And in doing that it shows us how we can walk in this broken world that seeks us harm

## **II. The Power of God in The Weakness of Man(3:1-13).**

- A. The unveiling of God's plan (1-7).
1. Paul describes first the incredible privilege by being chosen by God to reveal what Paul calls the "mystery."
    - a. I found myself at times taken aback at the way this is worded in this section.
    - b. If you don't keep it in its context and you don't understand what is going on then you could take this as the ravings a madman.
  2. It is called the "stewardship of God's grace" in vs 2.
    - a. This speaks of Paul's activity as the steward of the message God had given him to preach.
    - b. Notice it is called the stewardship of God's "grace."
      - (1) It is the giving of this responsibility that is the grace of when Paul speaks.
      - (2) He was not worthy of this revelation but it was given nonetheless
      - (3) It was a grace that put him in prison as he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ
      - (4) Just a side note, not only pleasant things are expressions of God's grace.

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- (5) Paul says that it was God's grace that gave him both the revelation of this mystery and the stewardship to preach it. You and I would say, but it put you in prison. And Paul would say, "Yes." And move on.
3. This stewardship happened by revelation.
  - a. Revelation means unveiling or disclosing something that has been previously unknown. Which fits with the idea of mystery.
  - b. Notice though that this was not originated in Paul. It wasn't his unique doctrine but it was made known to him. The originator is God Himself.
  - c. He made mention of this mystery already in 2:11-22, now he is explaining how it fits into God's plan.
  - d. As they go back and reread that section (3:4) they can begin to grasp how well he understands this mystery that was revealed to him.
4. What is the mystery? (6)
  - a. It is exactly what we spent three weeks going over—that in Christ through the gospel Gentiles enjoy the full inclusion and privileges as the people of God.
  - b. Again, it is important for you to understand that this mystery is something that simply was unknown in the Old Testament. There are many who try to say otherwise but that makes no sense in light of 5a and vs 9.
  - c. The Old Testament never portrays the people of God as a new humanity in the Messiah. Everything was oriented around Israel. Essentially a Gentile had to become a Jew to enjoy the blessings.
5. But now, through the gospel preached by the apostles and prophets the message is not to come to Israel, but come to Jesus the Christ and in Him find full forgiveness and blessing.
  - a. It is worth noting that though Paul was uniquely set aside for this unveiling that the other apostles and even the New Testament prophets had the task of proclaiming it.
  - b. This also helps us see the content of the message of the prophets in the New Testament. It was not vague prophecies about what God

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was going to do in some person's life, it was the preaching and enlarging upon the gospel message.

6. Notice also how Paul says in vs 7 that this gift of grace was given according to the working of God's power. Remember that in Ephesians mentions of God's power come in critical places.
  - a. 1:19-23 God raised up Jesus through His power and in that power seated Him above all other powers.
  - b. 3:16-23 God grows the church through His power to comprehend the fullness and vastness of love of Christ.
  - c. 6:10 in God's power the Church engages the powers and authorities and seek to wage war against us.
  - d. So too, God's power is evidenced in revealing to Paul this message of reconciliation in Christ. But realize that from human eyes it looks to be foolish and weak, but through it God's power is made known.
7. Let me try to make this clear.
  - a. Paul is NOT saying that even though he is prison that God can still use him. That misses the point completely. However it is often how we spin our situations. God can still use me even though I am crippled with pain or fear or fill-in-the-blank.
  - b. Rather, Paul is exulting in his imprisonment for he grasps that it is exactly where God would have him so as to display God's victorious power in Jesus Christ.
  - c. Oh if that will make sense to you and I.
- B. The proclamation of victory (8-13).
  1. In vss 8-9 there are two things, two purposes for Paul—to preach to the **Gentile** and to enlighten/bring to light **everyone** [NASB leaves "everyone" out] what God is doing.
  2. These are two distinct activities with the second building off of the first.
  3. Paul, as the least of the least, is given the job to preach to the Gentiles the gospel of Jesus Christ
    - a. Now what happens as Paul preaches to the Gentiles? These people that God has ordained he be their apostle? They are saved and the Church comes into being where it did not exist. The body of Jesus Christ appears.

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- b. Who is watching this happen? The powers and authorities are according to vs 10.
- c. What have the powers done to Paul the apostle? They imprisoned him, and yet in the prison the power of God continues to go forth in spite of all their efforts.
- d. This is partly why Paul mentions in vs 9 "God who created all things."
  - (1) Only God creates. And in Ephesians we are already, as the church, called a creation of God in 2:10.
  - (2) The powers and authorities create nothing. They only seek to destroy and pervert and oppress.
  - (3) Meanwhile God displays His sovereign power in creating the church through Paul's preaching even while imprisoned.
  - (4) It is almost like God is casually walking through enemy territory and creating His people and then causing them in weakness to flourish in His power.
- 4. Then in vs 9, this enlightening work is that as the gospel is preached and the church comes into existence that all people and beings both seen and unseen sees God's glory and power.
  - a. This is bluntly said in vs 10.
  - b. And then we see in vs 11 that this mystery, hidden from all time, was hidden (9b) in God but was also His eternal plan to be carried out in Jesus Christ.
  - c. And it is here that I had to stop and just shake my head as I tried to get my mind wrapped around it all.
- 5. Paul is following the path laid down by his Lord and Savior. What looks to be victory by the enemy is really their defeat.
- C. So Paul doesn't shy from his status as a prisoner; rather he exults in it as he puts it into the context not of this age but in the plan of God.
  - 1. He knows that as he preaches it is God's power working through that preaching.
  - 2. So he tells the people in vs 13, don't lose heart. I am where I am because it is where I am to be. It is for your glory as the church is brought out of nothing by the power of God.

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### III. Conclusion.

- A. Our problem too often is that we want to be strong when God wants us weak.
- B. We too often seek to resolve our struggles and problems in the way of this age and then wonder why it doesn't work out for us.
- C. Remember again that God is our divine warrior. We are not the source of victory, God is.
  - 1. David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17.
  - 2. When Goliath was presented to Israel on the battlefield one thing was obvious, Israel needed an incredibly skilled fighter to go to battle.
    - a. No one would step up to do battle for no one could do so and win.
    - b. Instead they cower in fear.
  - 3. When David comes into the picture it is not in glory and pomp but shock. They needed a man and got a boy.
  - 4. The entire text emphasizes David's unfitness to the task.
  - 5. But when David confronted Goliath he says, ""You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, **but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts**, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day **the LORD will deliver you up** into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly **may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear**; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands." (1 Samuel 17:45-47)
  - 6. And the end of the story is well known as the stone strikes Goliath and the victory is won. But what is often lost is that this was not just a battle on the earth. It was God, the divine warrior once again showing His supremacy over the gods of the nations, what Paul calls the powers and authorities.
- D. Paul is like David, inadequate to the task and in a position of weakness in the eyes of this world.
- E. But like David Paul sees things far more clearly than many of us. It is not his power that is the issue but the power of God that is found in our weakness.
- F. Beloved, the bible is true and clear. Because we are in Jesus Christ we truly are more than conquerors.



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1.      The problem is not that this is not true.
  2.      The problem is that we do not believe it.
- G.      May today become the beginning of faith and joy in the midst of our weakness so that the glory of God's power through Christ would shine forth.

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## Community Group Questions

- **Start out by simply asking each person what stood out to them and why?**
- **How can the group encourage you to see better the sufficiency of God in the midst of your weakness rather than you overcoming that weakness so that you could be strong? What are the roadblocks?**
- **Triumphalism is a real problem in the church of America. We want to take back America. We seek to grab control of power if we can, believing that in the forces of this age we can effect change. What is wrong with this?**
- **How does this affect your prayers for yourself and others? Give examples.**