

Ephesians 3:1 – 21

^{3:1} For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – ² if indeed you have heard of the stewardship 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 in brief. 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 the sons of men, 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 bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that the manifold 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 lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

^{3:14} For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Temple Language in Ephesians:* Christ's individual body took the place of the Temple (2:13 – 16). Christ, as the New Temple, took down 'the dividing wall of hostility' separating humanity from God and Jews from Gentiles. Christ now brings Jews and Gentiles into himself by the Spirit to make them part of the New Temple in him. In order to experience God, people no longer are to go to the physical building in Jerusalem, but to the Christian community to see our corporate life in Christ.

Questions

1. Do you feel like Paul talks about himself a lot? Or is defensive?
2. Why might he sound like that?
3. What would you feel if your pastor were in prison? Especially if you're a pastor's kid!
4. In an honor and shame culture, how might the Ephesians (and others in Asia Minor) felt about Paul being in prison?
 - a. Shaming! Like they would need to explain to a bunch of other people why their hero was in jail. Did he do something wrong?
 - b. Also, given Greco-Roman cosmology, if you were defeated, it probably meant your god was defeated by another god. So for Paul to be in a Roman jail might have made people feel like the Roman gods were defeating the Christian god.
5. State: I think Paul is trying to help the Ephesians interpret this as being not shameful, but glorious. How?
 - a. This episode shows that a Jewish Christian like Paul would lay his life down for Gentiles, to share with them the most important thing he had: Jesus.
 - b. This emulates and echoes the sacrifice of Jesus on behalf of all.
 - c. Illus: Ming's story. She missed one on the LSAT and got into Harvard Law School. She turned it down.
 - d. Worth going across cultures for
 - e. Worth going to distant lands for
 - f. Worth going to jail for
6. In what sense was this a mystery? What is the mystery?
 - a. That Gentile believers in Messiah Jesus would be equal in status and honor to Jewish believers in Jesus. The prophets in the Old Testament did foresee some Gentiles across the world pledging faith to the Messiah one day. But it was not clear that God loved the Gentiles equally as He did Israel. That was revolutionary.
 - b. It was a mystery in the sense that it was now revealed. It wasn't something that remained hidden.
 - c. Why was Paul certain that the Gentiles are 'fellow' heirs, members, and partakers (3:6) with Jewish believers?
 - i. Because Jesus' humanity was not just 'Jewish' humanity and NOT Gentile humanity. Jewish humanity represented all humanity. So Jesus' humanity was for all humanity precisely because he was Jewish. Jewishness was not an ethnicity, in the OT. It was already a multi-ethnic faith.
 - ii. Because Paul had seen the Holy Spirit come upon the Gentiles as they believed in Jesus. This is evident in Acts 13 – 15. Peter had also experienced it earlier in Acts 10 – 11.
 - iii. We know that there were Jewish Christians who were of the opinion that Gentile Christians should become circumcised. That is, they should become Jewish in addition to being Christian, and perhaps until they did were to be treated as second class citizens. Paul and the rest of the NT is against this, though. For this would have made the church not Jew and Gentile, but only Jewish, fundamentally. Paul said in Galatians 2 that there were certain 'men from James' that followed him around and taught circumcision. But I suspect that he meant it sarcastically, as he used sarcasm often in 1 Corinthians. In other words, I don't think James was really behind it. These men just claimed the authority of James.
 - d. Paul is even saying that his imprisonment is a witness to the 'rulers and authorities' in spiritual places. It is not a sign that the Roman gods have won over the Christian God. Actually, it's a sign of the manifold wisdom of God, that a Jew like Paul would suffer for Gentile strangers like the Ephesians.
7. So when Paul moves into praying for the Ephesians in 3:14 – 21, what strikes you about his prayer?
 - a. He uses language of construction and building. Or perhaps like a tree (rooted). But if we see this as Temple language, a lot comes together...
 - b. When do you think he is speaking on an individual level and on a community level?
 - i. If you take phrases that begin with the word 'that,' you get 4 distinct thoughts
 1. that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self (3:16). EACH INDIVIDUAL
 2. that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (3:17a). EACH INDIVIDUAL

3. that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (3:17b – 19a) WHOLE COMMUNITY
4. that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God (3:19b) WHOLE COMMUNITY
 - ii. It seems to me that Paul wants each of us individually to be a dwelling place (i.e. house, temple) for Jesus. Like the story of *My Heart, Christ's Home* by Robert Boyd Munger
 - iii. Then, Paul wants us to corporately be the dwelling place for God
8. Why does Paul pray for us to have strength to hold the presence of God? Because our weaknesses could get in the way.
 - a. Illus: In his book, *Strength to Love*, King writes about coming to Montgomery to lead the bus boycott. Right after the protest, King and his wife got all kinds of phone calls and letters threatening their lives. After one such phone call, King says, 'I hung up, but I could not sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point. I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing to be a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had almost gone, I determined to take my problem to [Jesus]. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud, '...The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left...' At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.' ...Three nights later, our home was bombed. Strangely enough, I accepted the word of the bombing calmly. My experience with [Jesus] had given me a new strength and trust. I knew now that [Jesus] is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of this life.'
 - b. Application: In the U.S., we might be headed for another one of those moments where the church, and Jesus' vision for the church as a force of reconciliation, will be vitally important. I hope I'm wrong. But the issues we're facing with police brutality and city corruption and the erosion of civil rights is stirring up a lot of feeling.
 - c. Illus: Jim and Harriet, releasing us with their blessing to invite members of our house church to check out Rescued Church Boston.