

Don't Lose Heart – Eph 3:8-13

Eph 3:8-13. Paul has just been talking about the mystery of the Gospel in the previous verses, and I'd like to start in v7 to pick up his train of thought.

[7] *Of this gospel* [the Good News of Jesus – who he is, what he's done, and what it means] *I was made a minister* [a servant] *according to the gift of God's grace* [God's favor to choose him and use him], *which was given me by the working of his power* [God's power to supernaturally confront him on the road to Damascus, bring him to the end of himself, and commission him as an Apostle]. That's the context.

And then he says: [8] *To me, though I am the very least of all the saints* [that was Paul's view of himself because of his persecution of the church before his conversion], *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*, [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*.

[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*. [13] *So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory*. And therein lies his point. Don't lose heart.

➤ If that's not a message we need to hear these days, I don't know what is. With all the unrest, riots, and destruction; all the graffiti, hatred, and unbiblical ideologies; the disagreement over Covid restrictions and school openings; governmental overreach in some states; *abdication* of responsibility in others; all the election uncertainty – with everything that going on, “don't lose heart” is a message we need to hear. I know I do.

And the reasons Paul gives, are just as pertinent now as they were then. Not only because the Roman Empire had their *own* chronic issues of unrest, but because the reasons take our eyes off the temporal, and put them on the eternal. Off the uncertain, and on the certain. Off the things of this world, and on the things above. 6 of them. 6 reasons.

Starting with this. Don't lose heart because as believers . . .

We're blessed beyond belief. (v8)

Y8 – 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. Unsearchable, as in impossible to understand and fully know. (Merkle, Expository Commentary, 59). Because they're infinite and endless. Impossible to plumb the depths of. Unable to wrap your mind around.

Like some of the animals found in the unsearchable depths of our oceans. Biological riches. Take **Tube Worms** for instance. Found near heat vents on the ocean floor. They look like plants, and don't have a digestive system, but they're animals. 6 feet long.

Or how about the **Ultra Black Fish** that was recently discovered in the ocean depths. Absorbing 99.95% of all light. Which makes it basically invisible in the ocean depths.

Unsearchable riches. At least to *marine* biologists. But they pale in comparison to *the unsearchable riches of Christ*.*****

➤ And Paul preached about them, because that's what we have at our disposal. We're the recipients of all the saving riches, sanctifying riches, relational riches, spiritual riches, and eternal riches that Jesus has to offer. (Hughes, Ephesians, Preaching the Word, 106). All the riches that really *matter* in life. All the riches that will last.

They're ours. Making us blessed beyond belief *despite* the difficulties of our times.

➤ Take grace for instance – God's unmerited favor. We ought not lose heart, because we have at our disposal an ocean of God's favor. Or how about mercy. Toward our sin. Withholding punishment and extending compassion. Talk about unsearchable and endless.

And don't forget the riches of his love, joy, peace, virtue, comfort, protection, provision; you name it. We're rich. Blessed beyond belief.

So no matter what's going on or what happens in your life, don't lose heart.

Second, don't lose heart because . . .

We know the Truth. (v9)

Capital T. The truth of God's plan to save us and unite us. *Y9*. This grace was given to me Paul says, to preach *and to bring to light for everyone* [including us] *what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God*.

Part of Paul's mission in life, was to reveal the truth of **God's plan**. His desire and design to save our souls and make us whole. That's *the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God*. His desire and design to forgive us and make us one. Redeem us and unite us.

➤ What it's not, is a social plan. God didn't design a social plan to save us. Digging wells, building community centers, or starting programs. Those might be good things, but they're not God's plan to save the world.

Nor is it a government plan – to make our lives better through fair trade, better business, and lower taxes. Or a religious plan – to work our way toward God. Hoping he'll approve.

The truth of God's plan is **the Gospel**. The good news that Jesus, God in the flesh, came to earth, lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and rose again for our life. So that by believing in him, and repenting of our sins to follow him, we too can have life. Life to the full and life forever.

That's the truth. And knowing it ought to encourage us. No matter what's going on.

➤ Especially so, because we know the one who *embodies* the truth. **The Lord**. Who said, “*I am* the Truth. The way, the truth, and the life. (Jn 14:6).

We don't just know the truth mentally, we know the truth personally. Truth that was *hidden for ages* (9b). Truth that remained in heaven until the fullness of time. (Gal 4:4-5)

So that we have what Old Testament believers only dreamed of. We have what the Gentiles in Paul's day thought was impossible. We have what false religions try to imagine. We have what philosophers try to envision. We have what unreached people groups don't know they're missing. We have what the prophets of old only longed for.

Talk about encouragement. We know the truth of God's plan, the truth of the Gospel, and the Truth himself. Don't lose heart.

➤ And while you're at it, one more thing here, don't fail **to worship**. That's the idea of the last phrase in v9. This grace was given to me Paul says, *to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things*.

I asked myself for several days this week, why Paul added that. Is it a throwaway phrase that he just stuck in there to sound good? No. Because *all Scripture is breathed out by God* the Bible says, and is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and righteousness. (2 Tim 3:16). So it can't be a throwaway phrase, or some flowery expression meant to impress.

At the very least, it's a reminder that God created the Gospel plan just like he created everything else.

But it wasn't until our Elders meeting Wednesday night that the primary reason became clear. We were reading Rev 4 for our time in the Word, reflecting on the throne of God, when this same phrase showed up as an expression of *worship*. **Rev 4:11**.

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

God's creation of the universe is cause for worship. Including his plan to redeem it as Paul says here in v9. That's the reason for the phrase "who created all things."*****

So whatever you do, don't fail to worship these days. It's one of the best ways to *affirm* the truth we know, and not lose heart.

Third, don't lose heart because . . .

We've been chosen. (v10)

Not in the sense of chapter 1, where it says God *chose us* and *predestined us for adoption* (Eph 1:4-5). But in the sense that he chose us to reveal his wisdom. V10. Paul preaches and reveals the Gospel plan, *so that through the church* [the community of believers; us] *the manifold wisdom of God, might now be made known, to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places*.

God has chosen us, the church, to reveal his mind, his way, and his work. Or as Paul says it, his *manifold wisdom*. His perfect omniscience to bring light to the darkness. His supernatural method to establish his kingdom. His perfect divine forethought to start the church. We've been chosen, **to reveal God's wisdom** in those things. We have.

➤ And not just to the world, to those around us, but *to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places* it says. The spiritual realm. V10b. That's the *audience* for this divine unveiling.

Referring first, **to angels**. *The rulers and authorities in the heavenly places* refer to angels.

A. Because they're in heaven. A heavenly place for sure.

B. They're rulers and authorities in that they oversee us and carry out God's will.

C. They're watching. The ways and means of God are *things into which angels long to look* it says in 1 Pet 1:12.

And God has chosen us to reveal those ways. To reveal his wisdom. So that the angels have confirmation of what they already know of him, cause for praise in what they see, and cause for hope that it will continue.

Of all the possibilities, we've been chosen to reveal God's wisdom to the angels.

➤ On the other hand, it's likely that Paul also has demons in view here. **Angels and demons**. Because he refers to them in chapter 6 as *rulers and authorities*, who are spiritual forces of evil *in the heavenly places* (Eph 6:12). Same verbiage.

In which case the display of God's wisdom would serve to prove them wrong in their rebellion and deception. And remove all doubt that they deserve condemnation.

➤ The bottom line is this: the life we live isn't just about us. Not only is the rest of the *world* looking on, but so is the spiritual realm. **A cosmic audience**. We've been chosen to reveal God's wisdom to a cosmic audience. A spiritual audience in the heavenlies.

Even though that audience is far more knowledgeable than we are. Think about it. They watched as God spoke the *world* into existence (Job 38:4-7). They were present when the stars were formed. They looked on as God called Abraham, raised up Moses, and parted the Red Sea. They witnessed the glory of Mt Sinai, the shekinah glory in the tabernacle, and the glory cloud in the temple.

They saw the miraculous return of the exiles from Babylon and participated in the miraculous announcement of Jesus' birth. They were there when he died, when he rose, and when he ascended. And they're still there in heaven singing and worshipping around the throne.

And yet it's us, the church, who God has chosen to reveal his wisdom and plan. It's us he's chosen to fill with his Spirit. It's us he's chosen to embody his fullness (Eph 1:22-23). It's us he's chosen to display his power. And magnify his glory. And demonstrate his love. Us.

So whatever you do, don't lose heart. We've been chosen for the lead role on the biggest stage in the universe. And Covid or no Covid, it's sold out.

Fourth, and moving quicker, don't lose heart because . . .

We're part of something eternal. (v11)

Not just something big, but something forever. V11. *This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord*. *This*, referring to God's plan in the Gospel, and the display of his wisdom in us. It was all according to his *eternal purpose*.

In other words, the Gospel and the church have always been God's plan, and always will be. Far from an afterthought, they originated before time began, and will continue long after it doesn't matter. God's plan for the Gospel and the church is eternal.

And it was realized, or accomplished, in Christ. In and through him. In and through his life, death, and resurrection. And just like he lives on, so will we. Just like he remains, so will we. It's an *eternal purpose*.

So take heart. Be encouraged. We're not part of some flash in the pan, one-hit wonder. We're part of something eternal. Something that will never end, and never fail.

5th, don't lose heart because . . .

We have access to God. (v12)

V11-12. *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.*

In Christ, because of our union with him and relationship with him, we have access to God. We can personally approach him in prayer. We can talk to him freely. We can draw near to him. We can abide in him. We can *rest* in his presence. We can dance. We can petition. We can sing. We can worship. And we can *live*. Coram Deo.

We have a backstage pass. Backdoor privileges. *Access with confidence* as Paul says it. To boldly go where no man has gone before. Or more accurately, to boldly go where the God-man has gone before. Jesus. *Through our faith in him*, end of v12, we have access to *God* in him.

Short of that our life and circumstances would *warrant* discouragement. *We would* lose heart. Like so many around us. Because short of access to God, we got nothin'. Nothing of any substance and nothing of any value. Just futility and hopelessness.

But *with* access, we have everything we need *All things that pertain to life and godliness* (2 Pet 1:3). **(Heb 4:16)**

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Time of unrest.

Don't lose heart. We have access to God.*****

Last, don't lose heart because . . .

Our suffering has a purpose (v13)

Look at v13, the point of all this. *So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.*

Paul started his thought, in v1, by saying that he was a *prisoner* on their behalf, obviously suffering; and ends his thought by saying don't lose heart over what I'm suffering for you. And the final *reason* he gives, is that his suffering is their *glory* (13). Let's break it down.

The reason Paul is suffering, is the Gospel. His belief in it, his adherence to it, and his proclamation of it. And that suffering for the Gospel, is the glory of the Ephesians. Because it's what makes them look good – saving them, and healing them, and bringing them joy. It's what makes their chest swell. It's what makes them stand tall in the midst of unrest and uncertainty. So Paul's suffering had a purpose.

It's like a sibling who donates a kidney to someone in her family. Does she suffer the testing and surgery and recovery for nothing? No. She suffers first to save that family member, then to heal them, then to bring everyone joy. Making the family proud, and elevating their name. Her suffering is their glory. It has a purpose.

➤ And so does ours. Our suffering for the Gospel. Our suffering for the saints, one another. Our suffering for the truth. Whether it's physical, emotional, or financial suffering – it encourages and elevates the church. Making it their glory. The thing that makes them shine.

So whatever you do, don't lose heart. Your stand for the Lord has a purpose. Your adherence to the truth has a purpose. Your difficulty in trials has a purpose. **(Summary)**

➤ 6 reasons. To take our eyes off the temporal in times like these, and put them on the eternal. Off the *uncertain*, and on the certain. And not lose heart.

Prayer – Lord, encourage our hearts with these truths. Etch them on our memory so that we apply them in our life. For your glory and our joy.