

MESSAGE FOR OCTOBER 2, 2022, FROM EPHESIANS 3:8-13

Good morning, it's a joy to be here and to have been with the men of the Landing this weekend. Brent told me that I could preach a message I had already preached. In Menominee, we're going through Ephesians and so I want to preach a text from that book that I preached a while ago. It's been a great experience because in my study this time, the Lord has given me insights that I simply did not have last time. So, you could say this is the "new and improved" version of this message which is good news for the two of you that occasionally watch me on our You Tube channel.

The text, as you heard, is from the third chapter of Ephesians and for the sake of time, we will be limiting our treatment to verses nine through 12. However, because these verses land right in the middle of a rather detailed section, some context for these verses will be needed. The word "mystery" is important in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Just before our text in 3:6 as well as back in chapter one, Paul refers to this mystery. A "mystery" in the New Testament is not something perplexing or something that Agatha Christie could have authored. A mystery is the truth about something related to God's plans for his people. Though this truth was established by God ages ago, he had not made it known and it remained hidden until he revealed it to the apostles.

The amazing thing about these mysteries is that, even though they had been kept secret by God, they are always about something very important. For instance, the mystery that marriage was given by God for the purpose of modelling the gospel—that's a central truth about marriage, but God didn't make it known until he revealed it to Paul 4000 years *after* he instituted marriage in the garden. The mystery that is revealed here in Ephesians is an absolutely enormous development in the history of God's salvation, but God sovereignly chose not to reveal until after he had commissioned Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles.

This mystery is, according to verse six, that "...the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." The status of the Gentiles—all non-Jewish ethnic peoples, as fellow heirs along with the Jews is the content of the mystery.

But not only have the gentiles been made “fellow heirs,” they have been united with the Jews as members of the same spiritual body, the church. The believing gentiles, these Johnny-come-latelies on the stage of salvation history, have not only been made by God the spiritual equals of Jewish followers of Jesus, he has placed them into a profound spiritual union together. This union of Jews and gentiles is established when anyone savingly trusts in Christ. Paul elaborates on this truth in our passage this morning. Let’s read it again.

Paul says, “⁸ 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, 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.”

Our text divides into three sections. Verse nine is **Paul’s mission to reveal God’s hidden mystery** as apostle to the gentiles. Verses 10-11 reveal **the purpose** of Paul’s mission and verses 12-13 discuss **two of the consequences** for the church of God’s work **for the church** through Paul. Paul’s mission has two prongs and the first one, which we will not look at today is “...to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Here in verse nine, we see the second half of ***Paul’s mission as apostle to the gentiles***.

Paul says that he has also been sent “to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things.” What does that mean? “To bring to light” means that Paul would be bringing something out in the open—into the light—that had for ages been kept hidden, this “mystery.” But what does he mean by “the plan of the mystery?” The word translated “plan” means “administration” or “strategy.” So, we know from what we read earlier in verse six that it was Paul’s unique

responsibility, through this revelation that Jesus had given him, to communicate to the Gentiles God's previously hidden strategy in bringing the Jews and Gentiles together into one people.

This mystery had been hidden "for ages"—a very long time, but with the death and resurrection of Christ and the gospel going to the Gentiles, Paul says that NOW is God's pre-ordained time for the unveiling of this mystery of **this spiritual union of the Jews and Gentiles into one people**. Paul ends verse nine by stating that God is the one "who created all things." Whenever you get a reference to God as Creator in a verse, it's not just arbitrarily thrown in. There is a connection of some kind between this God who reveals mysteries to all people, and God as Creator of all things.

Paul is emphasizing here the absolutely epic scale of this unifying work of God between Jew and Gentile. Remember, we've seen that this uniting of believing Jews and Gentiles was far more than simply reconciling two ethnic groups. There are plenty of Old Testament prophecies that predict that Jew and Gentile will one day worship God together on Mt. Zion. That part was no secret. The amazing revelation here is that Christ has created (according to 2:15) "in himself one new man in place of the two..."

That's an astonishing statement because Paul is saying that Christ had created a new man or a NEW HUMANITY—A NEW HUMAN RACE comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles. One reason this is so amazing is that Paul is implying that God's creation of this new humanity of believing Jews and gentiles is **absolutely to be compared with God's initial creation of humanity in Adam**. Now, as the "God who created all things" he has created a new human race not with Adam as its head, but with Christ as its Head.

In verse 10, Paul reveals ***the purpose of his mission to the gentiles***, and it is not one that anyone could have predicted. God's purpose in revealing this Jew/Gentile union within the church—this mystery is "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the

rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” If this sounds like a big deal, it’s because it IS a big deal! When Paul reveals that God, through his church, makes known “the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” he is revealing a truth that most of us probably don’t think much about, especially in the west. That is—this well-established biblical truth that **there exists, in addition to our earthly reality, a heavenly reality where supernatural, angelic beings dwell and are active and their activity can have profound effects on what happens to humanity on earth.**

The bible—Old and New Testaments--teach this *cosmic or extraterrestrial element of God’s creation*, but we in the west may find ourselves a bit uncomfortable with this. To many of us, this feels a bit too much like the Twilight Zone. But this element of God’s creation—these angelic “rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” also appears later in Ephesians chapter six, where Paul says in verse 12, “¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against *the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*”

These spiritual powers here in chapter three probably refers to **both** the good angelic beings and the bad or demonic ones who live in the heavenly realm. A specific example of how these heavenly, angelic powers relate to what is going on here on earth, is found in the Old Testament book of Daniel. There God temporarily peels back the veil on this unseen heavenly realm and allows us to peer into this heavenly spiritual world. This passage in Daniel is helpful to us because it reveals the kind of angelic activity that can occur there and what impact it can have, particularly on God’s people here on earth.

In Daniel chapter nine, Daniel prays a powerful prayer of repentance near the end of Israel’s 70-year exile in Babylon. Daniel pleads for God’s forgiveness for Israel’s sin, and he also asks that God would end their exile in what was then, Persia—who had conquered Babylon. In response to that single prayer, the angelic, heavenly realm, lights up with angelic activity and the author reveals what transpired in the heavenlies. Three weeks after

praying his prayer, Daniel sees a vision of a glorious messenger angel who comes to him and tells him that he had come to Daniel in response to his prayer. But he says in verse 13, “¹³ The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia,”

In other words, in response to Daniel’s prayer, this angel he was sent from the heavenly realms to earth to announce to Daniel God’s plans for the future of Israel. But this good angel is intercepted by an evil angel, who is revealed as “the prince of the kingdom of Persia.” This dark angel fights with this messenger and detains him from completing his mission for 21 days until Michael, one of the higher ranking, chief angelic princes, came and warred against this evil prince of Persia liberating this angelic messenger to come to Daniel. So, this is a picture of angelic conflict in this unseen heavenly realm that is related to, and powerfully impacts, God’s work on earth.

With that as background, what Paul is saying here in verse 10 is that **it is for the enlightenment and astonishment of these heavenly rulers and authorities that God puts on display his manifold wisdom as they watch what is going on down here on earth.** By “manifold wisdom” Paul means—*the richly diverse nature* of God’s wisdom.¹ As we saw in Daniel chapter 10, these angels—with God in absolute control of all of them, are obviously interested and actively involved in helping shape the course of human history, and God’s people, in particular. Paul is saying that the working out of this mystery—this spiritual union of Jews and Gentiles is for the benefit and amazement of these watching angelic rulers. God seeks to be glorified, NOT only on earth, but also before these heavenly rulers and authorities. And Paul reveals here that he is glorified as he displays his manifold wisdom on earth.

But Paul also reveals that the theatre, the “stage” where God on earth displays his manifold wisdom to these angelic creatures is ...**the church of**

¹ P.T. Obrien. This is his phrase from his commentary.

Jesus Christ. It's in Christ's church where God reveals to them the glory of his manifold wisdom. Paul is saying that this union of Jews and Gentiles into one new humanity—God's creation of this new human race, THAT is what displays the manifold wisdom of God to these angelic beings.

The question now is: **What is it about this joining of the Jews and Gentiles into the church that would display the wisdom of God in such a way that the angelic powers would sit up and be amazed?** One short answer is that Satan was obviously very much interested in the *initial creation of humanity—this race that he would attempt to conquer and defile*, and would therefore also be interested in this new human race as well. As it relates to the original human race under Adam, let's face it, under God's Providence, Satan had seen great success in defiling and dividing Adam and his race.

We can see much more clearly how the union of believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ into the church displays God's wisdom from ages past when we see it in the larger context of the unfolding of this plan over the ages as its revealed in the bible and culminating in this Jew/Gentile union in Christ.

Paul tells us back in chapter one that this plan actually began well before Abraham lived or this world was created when God, "in love predestined us [Jews and Gentiles] for adoption as sons of God through Jesus Christ" [1:5]. That's where God's plan or strategy began—in eternity past. But the next stage of his redemptive plan for humanity was **the creation of humanity**. Adam was the beginning and head of the human race of people who, it was supposed, would be this unified, sinless human race bearing God's image and existing for the glory of God as one people under Adam.

But, in the plan of God, Adam fell and this glorious, united race of people—quickly divided with the entrance of sin. Sin divided Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel and that was only the beginning. It became clear that humanity under Adam was a bust as a unified people. So, we know that, after the flood, God starts over with Noah, but sin also divided **Noah's family**, and this newly reconstituted human race after the flood was also a bust. Adam failed as the first head of humanity and Noah failed as his successor.

Noah's descendants *did reunite* with a desire to be one, unified people in Genesis chapter 11, but the wicked purpose for their unity was to build a tower that, in their foolish minds, would elevate them to the same level as God.

God shattered that blasphemous unity by assigning them different languages. But he began a new chapter when he formed a new, never-before-seen race of people, the Jews. This could be another *new humanity with God as their King* as his chosen people acting as priests to the rest of the nations—that was the revealed intention. But it became clear that the idolatrous Jews also failed as a “new humanity” when they ended up looking just like all the pagan countries around them serving their satanic idols. They completely failed and God was forced to judge and exile them. At this point, if you're Satan and you've been working for millennia to prevent the creation of a new, united, God-glorifying humanity, you're batting 1000. Up to this point, Adam, Noah and Israel had all failed.

But, “in the fullness of time,” God sent this promised Seed of Abraham and Jesus of Nazareth is born, lived a perfect life as the promised Messiah and died on a cross. In so doing, he defeated Satan and all his minions and with his victory, Jesus became the Head of a new humanity. And back in Matthew 16, Jesus had put Satan on notice about this new humanity that he would create. He says to Peter, “¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

So, after Jesus defeats Satan at Calvary, the risen, triumphant Christ tells the disciples to “go and make disciples of ALL nations/gentiles.” Soon after that, Pentecost comes and the church is created and, by the Spirit of God, believers are given new hearts with God's law written on them. But initially, it was comprised only of Jewish believers.

But God's hidden strategy plan—this mystery decisively unfolds when, in Acts in chapter 10, Peter, the rock, in obedience to God, opens the gospel to the Gentiles and God pours his Holy Spirit out on gentiles! The presence

of the Spirit meant that **the Gentiles are spiritually in the exact same place with God as the Jewish believers in Jesus**. There is no difference between a Spirit-indwelt Jew and a Spirit-indwelt gentile

Paul explicitly reveals this here in Ephesians chapter three. That is—the **church is** the genuine, in-eternity-past-planned-for, new humanity that was always intended to be GOD’S fulfillment of his strategy with his Son, Jesus as the exalted Head of this multi-ethnic, new human race that had been kept hidden until Paul. It’s through the blood of Jesus that God has united these disparate races of people. They both share the exact same promises and blessings and, through the Holy Spirit, they are absolutely equal before God. And even though the Gentiles have none of the history or theological preparation of the Jews, the gospel (mostly through Paul) was multiplying among the Gentiles and there were now these local churches that have BOTH Jews and Gentiles together in them.

So, part of the amazement this plan garnered from the perspective of these angelic powers is that it looked like humanity, as a united whole, had been completely destroyed. Adam failed, Noah failed, Israel failed. But in God’s eternal plan, it was through the saving work of his Son that this multi-ethnic, multi-racial church would become God’s new creation as his new humanity.

That is at least part of why Paul could say triumphantly in verse 11 of this display of God’s wisdom to the heavenlies, “This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God doesn’t make up history as he goes along. Every detail is preplanned and every detail, every predestined believer, Jew or Gentile of any ethnicity, WILL be saved and made a part of this glorious spiritual union of the new humanity—no exceptions. In Job 42:2 Job says to God, “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.” All of God’s eternal purposes including this one of creating a new humanity in Christ are invulnerable to being thwarted or frustrated. Everything from eternity past will be worked out precisely as God intended it and that includes the church where his manifold wisdom is displayed before the heavenly rulers and authorities.

Beginning in verse 12, Paul shifts gears. He's been revealing what God has done through this union of the Jews and Gentiles and the wisdom that union communicates to the angelic rulers. Now, he leaves the other-worldly, cosmic elements behind and moves into some practical consequences this unification in Christ has for believers. In these two verses, Paul reveals ***the consequences for the work of Christ church***. This unification is, according to verse 11, "in Christ Jesus our Lord." Verse 12 continues, "¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him."

This unifying work of joining Jews and Gentiles in the church had profound and practical consequences for all believers. One of those consequences is that believers will be able to stand before the Lord and Creator of the universe in "boldness and access with confidence." The question is—**how does this boldness and confidence relate to Jews and Gentiles being one in Christ?**

Paul here makes that connection with these two little words, "in whom." This boldness is rooted in our union with Christ and our mutual union with Christ brings all of God's people—Jew and Gentile into union with one another—we are ONE in Christ. Here's how that works. If a person is in Christ—is a believer, then they are literally joined to him so that, spiritually speaking, where Jesus is, they are. That profoundly impacts our relationship with God as it relates to boldness and access to him. Our union with Christ means that many of the privileges that Jesus enjoys as the Son of God, the adopted sons of God in Christ's church also enjoy.

This gives unfathomable "boldness and access with confidence" to believers in Jesus because that means that the only way a believer in union with him could ever hear from God, "*I reject you,*" or "*I've changed my mind about you,*" or "*Get out of my presence,*" **is if the Father kicked his Son out from his presence** because where Jesus goes, we inseparably go; and where he stays, we inseparably stay. And he is at the place of highest favor with the Father and that is precisely where we are as well... The point is--because JESUS has perfect confidence and boldness to stand before his Father,

those who are in union with Jesus, enjoy that exact, same boldness and access with confidence that Jesus enjoys.

So, if you have had a bad day or week or month or whatever and are feeling like living in confidence before God is a pipe dream that has vanished in the mist of your sin, you **MUST** spend some time meditating on your union with Christ and the boldness and confidence that gives you before him in prayer as you relate to him as your heavenly Father. Even in your worst moment, as a believer in union with Jesus, you enjoy the same boldness before God as his perfect Son. Do you believe that? That's the gospel!

Now, let's close with two broad points of application from these encouraging truths. First, ***God is not only a personal God relating to believers on earth, he is a cosmic God who glorifies himself before a heavenly audience.*** This text, with this cosmic element of God using the church as his stage to communicate something of his glory to angelic rulers, reminds us of something very important for us to never forget about God. That is—even though we know very little about this, there does exist in the heavenly realms, elements of God's creation that are nonetheless **VERY** important to carrying out God's sovereign, predetermined plans.

God is not only in control of all earthly realities, but heavenly ones as well. We don't know what God is doing in the unseen heavenly realms right now. But we know one thing from this text in Ephesians three and Daniel 10. That is --**God is sovereignly active in that realm also and what he does in that cosmic realm in some way impacts this earthly reality.**

In other words, **God is far bigger and has many more dimensions to him than most of us generally think about AND... *we know almost nothing about them*** because even the bible doesn't have much to say about them. There are doubtless more mysteries of God that have yet to be revealed to God's people! It's easy for us to be cocooned in our little worlds where we're mostly concerned about God working in MY life and MY family and MY future and the future of those I love.

It's incredibly easy to forget that God is totally, intimately, comprehensively active, not only in my life, but in the lives of the eight billion other people on

the planet—all at the same time. Eight billion beings to be sovereign over knowing their thoughts and controlling even the smallest details of every single one of their lives. Yet, even with how inconceivably immense a God he must be to do all that in this earthly realm of humanity—that’s clearly *not enough* responsibility for our God.

No, he is also sovereign over the angelic realms in the heavenlies that, from what we see here and Daniel 10, is also teeming with profound, history shaping activity but about which we know very little about. This “cosmic element” of God is NOT one we often think about, but if we really want to love and worship God appropriately, this element of his divine Person—his supernatural activity must also be factored into how we think about God. He is SO much bigger and active in other realms than this one time-and-space reality on planet earth. That truth should fill our hearts with wonder and worship for God.

Second, ***the church of Christ is at the center of both God’s earthly AND heavenly purposes and is a main source of his glory.*** It’s so easy to see the church through only earthly eyes. When we look at it from only a human perspective, we see the problems and the difficult relationships—the ever-present challenges—the hurts we’ve all experienced in the church, our disagreements with the youth pastor, the impossibility of the task we’ve been given. It’s easy to get lost in that. But we must always strive to see the church through **God’s** eyes and the picture we’ve seen of it today is **a big part of how he sees it.**

To God, the church is first, absolutely central and essential to BOTH his earthly AND his heavenly plans and glory. We know very little about what is happening in the heavenly realms amid all the awesome, terrifying supernatural beings. But this much we DO know—we know that it is his church that in some way brings together these two realms of God’s creation. We know this because Paul reveals here that God communicates his manifold wisdom to the heavenly beings *through us*.

He could have done that in 1000 different ways without using us. He could have inspired another book of the bible that would propositionally revealed his cosmic wisdom. He could have written it in the constellations for the

angelic rulers to see. He could do this any way he wants to, but we in the church must never forget that **his chosen vehicle through which he reveals to these heavenly rulers an important aspect of his manifold wisdom is... his church.** His church, with all the sinful, troubled, stubborn people in it.

Let me challenge you as we close--**If we are to be biblically faithful people, must adopt this stratospherically high understanding of his church revealed in Scripture.** And when we do that, we will be far less inclined to engage in attitudes or behaviors that would, in any way, bring dishonor or harm to this sacred oracle or revelation. Having this cosmic perspective of the church can help us see the local church for what it is—the glorious and miraculous body of Christ through which God reveals his manifold wisdom to the heavenly realms.

Beyond that, another implication of our union with Christ is--**If we in the church are in union with Christ, then our attitude toward the church MUST be shaped by our attitude to Christ.** This helps explain truths like 1 John 3:14, “¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.” Proof that you are born again—which also means proof that you are united to Christ is that you love others who are united to Christ, *the brothers*. First John 4:20. “²⁰ If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

In spite of what we might say or think, the Scriptures are clear and that is—if you love Jesus, you will love his bride, the church. People who claim to love Christ but have very little connection to his church, know nothing about our union with Christ, are horribly deceived, and we should love those people enough to tell them that, if they are believers, they absolutely belong in his church.

May God give us the grace to see his church through his eyes and love his people as he does for his glory and our joy.

