

God's Purpose for His Community

Ephesians 3:7-13

Ephesians 3:7-13 ⁷ *Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 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.*

When we think of the most powerful institutions in a nation, or a city, we think of places of power and influence, such as the media empires that sway our society's views, opinions, and educational institutions. E.g. the universities that shape the worldview of each successive generation, political lobby groups that influence politicians and their policies, and big businesses and corporations that shape the economy. The last place we think of as a place of power and influence whose significance is city wide, nationwide, and global is the church, which is this group right here. **In fact, Paul tells us in this passage that the church, i.e. God's people gathered, God's family of believers, and the redeemed people of God, has significance for the universe.**

In fact, the Scriptures remind us time and time again that into eternity, the church, God's people gathered, God's family of believers, and the redeemed people of God will be the only group, the only city, the only society, the only nation, and the only people standing around the throne (Revelation 4-5). The ageing winds of time and death will sweep away everything, but the church will continue forever. The powers of hell will tear down every institution but never the church; it will never fall. (Luke 16:15)

Too many of us have a small, weak, low, and ho-hum view of the church, our weekly gatherings, and our community groups. For some it's a burden and an intrusion into their lives. Look and see with clarity here people. You belong to a city, a society, a community, a people gathered, and a church that will be the only thing standing into eternity. What we do now as a church shakes the heavens; it has significance for the universe. The songs we sing reverberate across the cosmos; when we do life together it is felt in the heavens, and when we meet the universe watches.

So what I want to do with you is unpack the universal and cosmic significance of the church **so that you will begin to see the greatness of the gospel in the church as the display of God's wisdom to the universe**, to His praise and our joy forever, which is ambitious; no words can capture it but Paul is asking us to grasp this and see it with clarity.

When you come to ch.3 you'll see that Paul speaks of the gospel, the saving work of Jesus, as a mystery (*the mystery of Christ* in v.3). A mystery is not something that cannot be known but is a truth that's hidden. It is a truth that's covered and waiting to be uncovered. So what's happening in vv.1-6 is that Paul speaks of the gospel, the saving work of Jesus, as a mystery that is now revealed. What has been revealed? V.6, *This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

This is a repeat of ch.2:18-22 which says that those without hope and God, and those living in darkness and under wrath and judgment are saved into God's family; i.e. all outsiders, orphans, the enslaved, rebels, lost sons and daughters, and those under wrath. **In Jesus you are all saved, forgiven, cleansed, adopted, and gathered and brought into God's family, which is the church where God dwells to His praise and your joy forever.** You are now sharing all the privileges as His sons and daughters.

This is where the death of Jesus leads; this is what redemption secures, which is the forgiveness of sin and being brought into God's family. This is what the gospel creates: the church, this new community, this new humanity, and this gathered people where God now lives. God's purpose in saving you into His family, His purpose in gathering us together, and His purpose in making us part of this new community, is then spelt out in universal shaking proportions.

Read with me and see the cosmic, universal, and heaven shaking significance of the church in v.10. Paul says that he has preached this mystery and gospel, this gospel that creates the church, *¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*

Let the significance of those words sink in. Hear it, see it, and grasp it. We live our lives as believers that are blind to the significance that God has called us to, and what we can do in shaking the universe as a church.

1) We don't see the incredible significance of the church in God's purposes, and 2) we don't spend enough time thinking about how our work, studies, money, children, and lives fit into the universal significance of the church, and in the purposes of God. It is only one of the many boxes in our life rather than the main box. So it's no surprise that we live spiritually dull lives, church is a burden, we make no sacrifices, and the aroma of Jesus is not evident in our lives; our senses are dulled to eternity.

So here is the only point I want you to grasp that I hope and pray will lift your eyes beyond our mediocrity.

God has saved and gathered a people to Himself to display His manifold wisdom before a heavenly theatre.

God has saved and gathered a people to Himself to display His manifold wisdom before a heavenly theatre. Now here is a truth about the church you might never have realized: God's purpose in redeeming us, making us His people, and coming to dwell in our community, is so that it might lead to His manifold wisdom being displayed to an invisible audience of angelic hosts in the heavens, both good and evil. Here in Ephesians 3, God's manifold wisdom is being displayed to the armies of hell, the dominion of evil in the heavenly realms.

The church is gathered and is brought to existence to display the supremacy of God's wisdom to a watching universe of supernatural beings! The eyes of the armies of heaven and hell are watching the church and seeing the manifold wisdom of God on display. We think only of the mission of the church in terms of reaching the nations don't we? Has it every occurred to you that the mission of the church is to display the supremacy of God's wisdom to angelic beings in heavenly places? Our doing life together, our relationships lived out, our meeting together, our singing together, our evangelism together, our love for each other, our gifts and

service, our discipleship, our teaching of Sunday school, our praying together, and our meetings here at GracePoint are all a mirror reflecting the manifold wisdom of God to watching angelic beings, both good and evil.

To understand what this means there are two things you and I must be clear about, and they are framed in two questions.

Firstly, what is the manifold wisdom of God? The church is to make known the manifold wisdom of God, so what is it that we are to make known? Let me say that you can't make known what you don't know. You can't display what has not been shown to you. What is the manifold wisdom of God that we are to display? It is nothing less than Jesus and His saving work; it is nothing less than God's grace in Jesus. Notice what Paul says in v.8. The preaching of the gospel, described as the unsearchable riches of Jesus, is what has brought into being the church. Notice the sequence in v.10 to v.11, *that this was according to the eternal purposes that he has realized in Jesus.*

The manifold wisdom of God is nothing less than the unsearchable riches of the gospel, the never ending and ever expanding riches of God's saving grace in Jesus. They are riches that are poured out on sinful and enslaved men and women, freeing them by the power of God; they are the riches of the forgiveness of sin, by the death of Jesus for their sins where He dies as a substitute for their sin and God's wrath; they are the riches of being clothed in Jesus and His righteousness so that they can stand and not be destroyed by God's holiness and glory, and they are the riches of being brought into God's new community where He now dwells with us to His praise and our joy. (Ephesians 2:7)

God's wisdom on display, in the life of His gathered people in the church, is none other than the gospel in its every expanding riches and every promise realized in Jesus. God's wisdom on display in the life of His gathered people, and in the church, is none other than Jesus and His saving work. We hear the gospel, receive the gospel, are saved into God's church by the gospel, and are to display the gospel in His church to a watching universe. Jesus saves us and gathers us into His church, and we are to display Jesus and His saving work as a church to a watching universe.

We are to display it in its **manifold** wisdom. We are to display Jesus and His saving work in our church in all its colours (the word 'manifold' means multi-colored) and in all its beauty. The church is like a tapestry or painting weaved with many colours, saturated in diverse shades and hues. Before the gospel the canvas was empty. There was nothing in our lives. We were an empty canvas and an empty tapestry. Then the riches of Jesus and His saving work is proclaimed and the brushstrokes and threads appear on the canvas. We appear on the canvas. The church is the completion of that painting and tapestry, displaying the manifold wisdom of God, and displaying Jesus and the riches of saving grace in all its colours, you and I brought together by the saving work of Jesus.

A church that displays the manifold wisdom of God in Jesus, and the riches of His saving grace, is nothing less than a community where the grace of God is proclaimed and magnified. Jesus and His saving work is supreme and is what unites us, what we love, what binds us together, and what we treasure. That church is a community where the grace of God in Jesus is lived out and no longer enslaved to the devil, world, or flesh, and no longer living under judgment and trying to win God's favour. The desires of our hearts have changed. It is a community where the grace of God is practiced in our relationships, where my enemy is now

my friend, and where we are mutually loving and forgiving each other because of Jesus. It is a community where the walls of hostility are being torn down and put on display, and where people are seeing and relating to each other no longer on the basis of their differences, culture, race, wealth, or background, but on Christ alone, who saves them.

A church that displays the manifold wisdom of God, in the riches of God's grace in Jesus, is a church that is saturated and overflowing in saving grace. To display God's manifold wisdom is to be a community where Jesus and His saving work is permeating everything, where everything smells of Jesus and His saving work through my praise, my forgiveness, my leadership, my friendship, my love, my ministry, my giving, my family, my speaking, and my thinking. To display God's manifold wisdom is to be a community where Jesus and His saving grace touches every aspect of our lives as a church, where the hues and shades of the colours of God's grace saturates the canvas, and where the church produces a masterpiece for the heavens to see.

That is what every application of the gospel is. It is what happens everytime you read the Bible and you apply the Scriptures. 2 Tim.3:15-17 reminds us that every application in the Christian life is an expression of the gospel in our lives, an expression of being made wise for salvation through faith in Jesus! Every time we apply the Bible, God's work of saving grace in Jesus is being expressed in our lives. It's a brushstroke and another colour on the canvas called the church, saving grace played out in our lives together for the heavens to see.

Secondly, who are the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places? Who are the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places witnessing and watching us even right now? Who are these rulers and authorities in the heavenly places? They are spiritual beings or angelic beings.

When you get to ch.6 you are reminded that the world operates on two levels: the seen and the unseen, and the spiritual and the physical. We are reminded that demonic and spiritual forces are at work in the present. In ch.6:12 we meet the same words '*rulers and authorities ... in the heavenly places*'. Can you see what we're being told? **God's purpose for the church is to display to the demonic, spiritual forces, and fallen angelic realm, the manifold wisdom of God is in Jesus and His saving work.**

As we church, gather, do life together, and serve, there is an audience watching us as we do it. The rulers and authorities in the heavenly places are observing us, the armies of hell are watching, and the principalities and powers are seeing and witnessing the display of God's manifold wisdom. **They are seeing their defeat and destruction**, they are being reminded of their impending doom, they are looking at this canvas called the church in all its colors marked by saving grace, **they are seeing the saving work of Jesus brought to a climax in the church as the dwelling place of God**, and they are seeing themselves defeated in the manifold wisdom of God.

Because they are seeing the triumph of the gospel, i.e. the riches of Jesus in saving sinners from the clutches of the devil, they see the greatness of the wisdom of God at the cross where they are crushed. In Colossians 2:15 we read that in dying for us, saving us, and bringing us to Him, Jesus made a spectacle of them; He disarmed the rulers and the authorities and ended their hold on us at the cross. **The existence of the people of God gathered around Him is the climax of that triumph and victory because it is the climax of the gospel**, which is the church where God dwells with His people to His praise and our joy forever. What you see

and experience now of the church is supposed to be a foretaste and an anticipation of what is to come, which is the church finally gathered in Revelation 4-5.

The demons, fallen angels, and armies of hell, in looking at the church, are seeing the infinite power of the gospel in freeing, forgiving, and delivering lost men and women that were once in their grip and now freed and adopted into God's family. Every time someone is added into the church they are seeing all things on earth being summed up and being subjected to Jesus (You read in Ephesians 1:9, 10 that this is the purpose of the gospel, with all things brought under the rule of Jesus and summed up in Him things on earth and in heaven). **And they are reminded that the summing up of all things in heaven is about to take place, that they are doomed and Christ is victorious.**

Every soul walking in darkness, who is freed, forgiven, and brought into God's family, .i.e. the church, is another spiritual stone to God's temple, another member to His Body, and another adopted son and daughter in God's house. It brings us another step closer to the close of history under the rule of Jesus. With every addition to this family we move one step closer to the end, and the angels in heaven rejoice while the demons shake and tremble because the end is one step closer.

The armies of hell look at what's happening and despise what they see; with clenched teeth and fist they are filled with rage and despair as they see the wretched, hopeless, and enslaved men and women being delivered, brought home into the Father's family, and made a son and a daughter: that rebel in darkness, walking in the opposite direction, is being delivered, brought to light, forgiven, and adopted into God's family. They see the manifold wisdom of God in the gospel and they rage and tremble. (You read in Revelation 12 that it is precisely because of the triumph of Jesus in the gospel, in his saving work that Satan rages against the church. He rages against the church because he has been defeated.) It is God's triumph and their doom, God's power and their weakness, and God's greatness and their futility

The church in displaying Jesus and His saving work, and in God's manifold wisdom, as a place where God dwells, where Jesus reigns, where He is being proclaimed, and where His people are living by His grace, **is a tangible and visible reminder everywhere, in every city and every suburb, and wherever believers are saved and gathered. It is a reminder to the armies of hell that Christ is victorious.** Their power has been broken; all things even now are being brought into submission to Jesus, and their time is coming to an end.

It's also a reminder to them that they cannot stop the advance of the gospel in bringing men and women from every tribe, nation, and language to Jesus. They cannot stop the breaking of the chains of enslavement to Satan, the world, and the flesh in people's lives. They cannot stop the gospel saving men and women into the body of Christ.

We are the tangible evidence that all things are being summed up in Jesus; every meeting of God's people is a celebration of this reality. E.g. through the Lord's Supper we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes! The church here today is the token and the first down payment of what is to come, which is all things being brought under the rule of Jesus, in earth and in heaven.

That was the response of the demons in the gospels at the sight and presence of Jesus. He comes proclaiming the kingdom of God and the breaking in of God's kingdom: *have you come to destroy us, has the time come, don't destroy us, why have you come.* It's imminent,

it's final, and it's coming. With the cross, and the gathering of men and women to Jesus in the church, it has come; the end has begun!

In the Gospels that is how Jesus speaks of Himself and His ministry. E.g. in Matthews 12 and Mark 3 Jesus is casting out demons and is accused of doing so by the power of Satan. In response he tells them that a house divided against itself cannot stand. And he tells them that if someone wanted to plunder a strong man's house, he first binds the strong man first and then plunders his house. What they are seeing in Jesus casting out demons is the stronger man, who has come and has bound the strong man. He has bound Satan and in casting out demons is plundering Satan's house, releasing the captives, freeing those enslaved to the devil, breaking the chains of those who are held in the devils grip. In the ministry of Jesus that is what we are seeing – the stronger man has come and has bound Satan. That's what Jesus announced in his ministry that the kingdom of God had come. He has come and is storming Satan's stronghold.

What you see in the ministry of Jesus is the plundering of Satan's kingdom because Jesus is the stronger man. Jesus is plundering Satan's kingdom, and at the cross He decisively frees the captives, saves the lost, and gathers them to Himself and into the church. Satan is bound, and the plundering of his kingdom has begun; the beginning of the end has begun and the rule of Jesus has begun. The church is the display of that triumph. Do you see him? The stronger man has come!

Like the song, Stronger - "You are stronger, You are stronger / Sin is broken, I am saved / Christ is risen / He's Lord of all!"

We exist to display the manifold wisdom of God in the gospel, to display the triumph of God and the supremacy of God over all. We are a display to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places, reminding them of God's triumph in Jesus and His saving work over every power and authority.

Implications

In everything we do, and every time we meet, we are on display. In our community groups, in our weekly meetings, in our one on one meetings, in our mothers groups, when we eat together after church, when we serve together, and when we speak to each other, we are on display. The question you and I need to ask is whether we are displaying the manifold wisdom of God, whether we are displaying Jesus and the riches of His grace, and whether we are displaying the aroma of His saving work and magnifying His work in our lives as supreme.

Is the canvas here in our church displaying the hues, shades, and colours of God's grace in our lives as we meet? Each one of you is a brushstroke. We are either adding colour to the canvas by making it a masterpiece on display or we're an aberration that is staining and ruining the masterpiece. **Does our praise reflect the many possible tones and notes that give sound to God's grace in our lives as we meet?** Each one of you is a note; you're either adding a sweet sound to the composition on display or a noise that is ruining the composition.

Do the ruler and authorities tremble as they see the saving work of Jesus expressed in our church, or do they laugh at our impotence as a church? It all depends on you, and you, and you. It depends on how I choose to love or not love you, how I choose to give or not give, how I choose to serve or not serve, how I choose to forgive or not forgive, how I use my gifts or not use my gifts, and how I do or not do life together with others.

Everything I do, think, and decide in my life, family, work, finances, and studies, as it relates to the church, is on display and is either a display of the manifold wisdom of God in Jesus, or is a display of my foolishness. Or it could possibly be a warning to me that I am still in the grip of the rulers and authorities and not Christ.

From my conversation with one of the mum's from church this morning, just pausing to think about the implications can be staggering. It is staggering to think that when we reach out and love each other, read the Bible with each other, pray together, sing, forgive each other, serve together, and are united around Jesus, we are displaying the triumph and victory of God in the gospel to the armies of hell in the universe. They rage and tremble because we are reminding them of the greatness and supremacy of God in His saving work. The rule of Jesus has come; it is here and is bringing things to a close!

When we fail to love each other, when we fail to see ourselves and each other through the cross of Jesus, i.e. sinners saved by grace, and when we fail to make Christ our supreme treasure in our lives and in our church, when we are not united around Jesus, and when our lives are not overflowing with His grace, we are saying to the universe that God is not worthy and He is not wise. We are not just light to the world, but also the light to the universe.

We are the display of God's manifold wisdom in Jesus and His saving grace, in all His perfections: His mercy, grace, forgiveness, life, love, kindness, unity, oneness, hope, freedom, redemption, adoption, and peace. It's all on display right now.

The church is not an added extra in the Christian life; it is the Christian life you have been saved into. The church is not the thing you do on Sundays if you're free or if it doesn't clash with your social life. It's much more than that. Your community group is not something you attend if you're not too tired. It's so much more. The church is God's masterpiece and composition where He is making known His manifold wisdom, not just in our world but also to the heavenly realm.

This week, remember that the rulers and authorities are watching. Will we as a church display the manifold wisdom of God in Jesus and His saving grace? What we do this week as a church shakes the heavens; it has significance for the universe. The songs we sing reverberate across the cosmos; when we do life together it is felt in the heavens, and when we meet, the universe watches to see if we will display the manifold wisdom of God in Jesus and His saving grace!