

# Ambassador to a Great Audience

*Ephesians*

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 3:8-10

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It is one of the marks of the inspiration of Scripture that it can take us to our innermost desires and deal with our innermost guilt and yet also take our minds beyond the realm of earth and into realms unknown, unseen by us and meet us at both of those locations, as it were, and instruct us in the things of God, convince us of the truth of the word of God and minister to the soul that is most burdened by its guilt and also lift the saints of God and true Christians into realms of glory and aspiration and worship that earth is not sufficient to fill the heights of the wonder that we're brought to. Our passage this morning is one of those remarkable places. It's so full of wonder that we're actually going to take 2 weeks to preach it fully today and next week. But I want you to turn to Ephesians 3:8 with a sense of anticipation that the Lord has something for you in this passage here this morning in ways that might go beyond what you would ask or think. We are dealing with the true grandeur of the Gospel as we look at verses 8 through 10 in Ephesians 3.

Let me read that passage to start as we continue in our exposition. Ephesians 3:8-10. The Apostle Paul writes,

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.

Paul's mind is so full as he is writing this passage here this morning but there are just, there are waves upon waves and before the first wave can even crash onto the shore, another wave is crashing on top of it. If you look at this passage, I just want to give you an overall sense of its grandeur. You see there in verse 8, that he is very focused on Christ and on the glory of God as he writes this. He speaks in verse 8 of the "unfathomable riches of Christ." He speaks in verse 9 of "a mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." So he has the span of eternity past in front of his mind as he is writing. He speaks of the Lord God as the one who created all things, both seen and unseen, the spiritual and the physical realms, both authored by the God of the Bible. Then he goes on and speaks of "the manifold wisdom of God," in verse 10, the

multiple aspects of the glory of God that is made known through the proclamation of the Gospel.

So he is very full of the grandeur of God as he writes. He is an ambassador for this great God and for this great Christ as he speaks in 2 Corinthians 5, we are ambassadors for Christ. And yet, at the same time, as he is articulating those great themes which are the themes that we'll look at next week, he's also mindful of the human audience and the audience that goes beyond the human, as he speaks. Notice in verse 8 he starts with himself, as it were, and then builds out in ever growing circles of who the audience is to whom he is an ambassador; this is just an overview. He says in verse 8, "To me, the very least of all saints." So he's mindful of his solitary position as an apostle to the Gentiles. But then he expands out and he says, "To me was given the grace to preach to the Gentiles." Then in verse 9 he expands beyond that to "all of creation," Jews and Gentiles alike. And in verse 10, he goes even beyond the human realm and into the spiritual realm which we'll see in a little while. So he's got this majestic picture of the Triune God that is dominating his thinking. He feels it deeply inside his own soul and he's mindful of the created order, the created audience to whom he speaks. This passage is just bursting with a kaleidoscope of colors, of themes and beings that are in mind as Paul speaks. I want you to see that there are many aspects that are intersecting. The glory of Christ is intersecting with men and with angels to bear witness to the manifold greatness and wisdom of God in these 3 verses.

So as we come to this passage, as we always try to come to the Scriptures but in a particular way this morning, we are just humbled before what we have in front of us to engage our thoughts and minds in the hour that is ahead. Scripture humbles us by the grandeur of its themes. Scripture humbles us by its ability to speak on such eternal riches in such a concise manner. You know, if men were to write on these things, they would write out volumes. The Spirit of God is so wise and such an eternal genius that it is able to condense all of these things in a power-packed passage that takes only moments to read but it covers the span of eternity in the realms seen and unseen alike. We, you and I, when we start to see this, we marvel not only at the grandeur of the themes but we should come again to be humbled before the word of God and to appreciate its majesty and to humble ourselves before us. This presents not the mere mind of man and what is written. Only the greatness of God could be expressed through what it is and this is a word inspired by God and the Apostle Paul here, this morning, with Spirit-inspired power, pulls back the veil, as it were, so that we can see the gates of splendor to which his ministry points and it's the same themes that we speak on and the same stream of thought and ministry that we enter into 2,000 years later.

Today we're going to see this the majesty of this passage from the perspective of the created order. Next week we will see it from the uncreated God's viewpoint and we have some wonderful time ahead of us as we consider these things. First of all, I want to look at it from the perspective of Paul, the ambassador for the Gospel. That's your first point if you're going to take notes today. The ambassador for the Gospel. Now, in speaking about the Apostle Paul as we write this and those of you who are here today, perhaps particularly burdened by the sin that seems to entangle you, you need to pay particular

attention to how Paul speaks of himself and of the power of grace in his life in what is said because this has direct application to you as Paul speaks.

You will remember that Paul has been addressing and discussing his ministry to the Gentiles here in chapter 3. He is uniquely the apostle to the Gentiles, to non-Jewish people, and he has been describing his ministry and his call and his message to them. And as we come to verse 8, after Paul has been expounding on this for the first 7 verses of this chapter, Paul is mindful of the fact that he is utterly unworthy of the opportunity that he has to do this with his life. He is unworthy of the great position that he has in redemptive history. Look at verse 8 with me as Paul says, "To me, the very least of all saints." Notice in verse 7 just to tie it in with what we looked at last week, he said, "I was made a minister of the Gospel, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power, To me," he expands on the thought here, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given."

It's obvious for those of you that pay any attention to what passes for Christian media, Christian ministry, I should say, in popular circles, it's obvious that we live in a culture of Christian rock stars, so to speak, and men who love the prominence that ministry can give to them and they have marketers that are out working for them and branding them and giving them a special, unique message so that they stand out among the crowd. Look, we're accustomed to that and we see these men on television and we hear them in other realms and we see their books plastered wherever we look for Christian materials and all of that and whatever we think of that and the popularity and the attention that that brings to people, men and women that pursue that, I want you to see that the biblical model of a true apostle was something completely different and in the way that Paul speaks of himself is so opposed to those who put themselves forward as, you know, the shining lights of Christianity here in our age today. We need to realize the distinction between the biblical pattern of a godly man and what we're accustomed to through the marketers of today's age.

Look at how Paul describes himself in verse 8. His position did not lead him to boasting, it led him to the utter depths of complete humility and we need to appreciate what it is to be a true man of God as we see it through the Apostle Paul's self-assessment. Paul says, "To me, the very least of all saints." He calls himself the very least of all the saints and he's stretching the limits of language to diminish the standing that he has in his own merit. It's as if he said, "I want you to picture the lowest and most unworthy Christian that could ever be. Take the absolute lowest Christian and then understand that at that person and at that point, I am less than that. I am less than the least of all the saints," he says. It's as if he said, "I am lower than even the lowest of them all." This was the Apostle Paul's repeated self-assessment. Rather the one who boasted in his position, he says, "The last thing that you should do is look at me because I'm the least of all the saints."

As you read about the Apostle Paul and as you read what he says about himself in other places of Scripture, you can see that this is no false humility on his part. This is not a feigned modesty that he is projecting so that he gives the right appearance while he actually is congratulating himself inside. Quite to the contrary. What Paul is speaking is

that which fills his heart and what fills his heart is the memory of what he used to be. You can see this as you look at other passages of Scripture. And let me encourage you to look at 1 Corinthians 15:9 to see what it is that Paul has in mind when he speaks this way. It's very telling and it is so contrary to the spirit of our age. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:7, he's speaking about the post-resurrection appearances of the Lord. The Lord appeared to the 12 and then he appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time in verse 6. Verse 7, "He appeared to James, then to all the apostles," and watch what he says here in verse 8, this is very interesting. He says, "and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also," which gives us some measure of thought about whether the Lord is appearing to people now today in visions and really appearing to them, the answer is no. Paul says, "Last of all, he appeared to me."

Verse 9, notice how he describes himself, he says, "I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle." Why? "Because I persecuted the church of God." He remembers that before his conversion, turn back to the book of Acts, we need to see this and just remember what it is that Paul has in his mind, what it is that still pains him in his self-assessment as an apostle of Jesus Christ. You remember the martyrdom of Stephen at the end of Acts 7 and there is this glancing reference at the end of Stephen's great speech to the Jews and they stone him, there is this glancing reference to the man known then as Saul. In Acts 7:58, "When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul," the name by which Paul was known before his conversion. So Paul is present as an approving participant in the execution of the first Christian martyr.

Look at verse 59, and these are things that Paul would have seen with his own eyes. In his hateful spirit at the moment when Stephen was dying, he saw this, verse 59, "They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' Then falling on his knees," as the stones, no doubt, took his physical strength away, "He fell on his knees and he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' Having said this, he fell asleep." His earthly life expired and Stephen was promoted to glory and as Paul is there, he's a witness to the rocks hitting Stephen on his head. Hitting him in his trunk. Hitting him on his legs. And Stephen, no doubt, responding physically to the assault on his physical body and yet he has the presence of mind under the power of the Holy Spirit to pray for those who were executing him, saying, "Lord, don't hold this sin against them." The spiritual power of that moment manifested to Paul which did not have an immediate impact upon him but no doubt was still impressed upon his memory as time went on.

Look at chapter 8, verse 1. It says, "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death." As he was there on that occasion, he approved of what was happening. He liked what he saw. He joined in the blood-lust of the moment. "And on that day," look again at verse 1 there in Acts 8, "a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."

So Paul, when he says, "I persecuted the church. I'm not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church," has this memory of his prior life where he gladly, joyfully, eagerly, lustfully participated in the persecution of innocent believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. And as Stephen was being stoned, he loved it. He joined in the moment emotionally. He was in hearty agreement with it. Then he went out and using the authority that he had in his position as a Jewish man, taking the opportunity to persecute innocent, simple believers in Christ and making life miserable for them and imprisoning them and silencing them with every means at his disposal. This is what Paul is remembering.

Look over at 1 Timothy 1 and for a redeemed heart, as Christians who have our own past in sin that we remember, we can enter in sympathetically with Paul's memory of his prior life. Aren't there things in your past that you recall as well? Weren't there times when you cursed the name of Christ? That you mocked those who brought you the Gospel? Where you ridiculed Scripture and where your life itself was a living profanity against God? And don't you remember that and say, "Oh, it pains me to remember that that's who I used to be"? This is what Paul is describing. Those of us who are Christians now can enter sympathetically and not diminish his words where he diminishes his present position. Look at chapter 1 of 1 Timothy, verse 12 where he says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor." He says, "There was nothing in my prior life that warranted having this kind of favor shown to me by God. Everything in my life before was a contradiction that I would enjoy his favor. By human measure, there is no way that I should be in this privileged position that I now enjoy. My life before was a living contradiction in body, soul and spirit. From the depth of my being, I opposed this God who has now been so good and gracious to me."

This is a picture, brothers and sisters in Christ, of a soul that has been broken before the grace of God. This is a picture of someone who's pride has been shattered, who carries forward now into his Christian life and into his Christian ministry, carries forward not a sense of entitlement but a sense of dis-entitlement, "I have all manner of blessing that I do not deserve." This is what Paul is describing and one of the ways that you and I can measure the depth of our own spiritual maturity and even the reality of whether we're a Christian or not is whether we see ourselves in that kind of black and white, former and now, kind of distinction to realize that it's in my life and I'm speaking first person, not on your behalf, it's in my life where that darkness reigns. It was on my lips where the blasphemies were spoken. It was in my heart where the rebellion against God was so great. It was in my heart where there was pride and every manner of sin.

So we see that to become a Christian is to be broken over that prior sin and not to carry a sense of, "I deserve what I have," and here by the grace of God, by very nature of grace you are saying it is undeserved. Well, to Paul, that was not a theoretical, abstract statement when he actually treasured different thoughts about himself in his heart. Paul cherished no loving thoughts about his former way of life and the former man that he used to be. He disowned it. And somewhere, beloved, in the heart of a true Christian is

that sense of separation from your prior life. There should be a sense of discontinuity that says, "I used to be that way in my former man, in my old self. It is someone that I now hate. I deny myself. I deny what I used to be. I condemn it along with the condemnation that it was taken upon Christ in my stead at the cross. I condemn it because I don't want anything else to do with that." Paul is saying, "I reject my former life as an aggressor and as a persecutor." The true Christian today has that same sense, "I reject that former man that I used to be, that former woman that I used to be." Not just, beloved, not just the individual sins that we committed that makes us cringe, that's enough but the very totality. Jesus says, "If any man wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow after me." There is a self-denial that says, "That person I reject. I condemn along with God what I used to be." Well, this is what Paul is describing. Paul is describing here as he speaks in his role as an ambassador of the Gospel, he is speaking of the very vibrant heartbeat of true Christian witness, true Christians self-assessment. So believing people, true Christians don't come to God saying, "You owe me this, this or that," a true Christian comes saying, "I have no deserving whatsoever. Please be gracious to me in Christ." We must see that distinction and let it shape the way that we view our present spiritual condition.

Now, let me speak a word to you because Paul takes this further. Paul says that his life was an example and let me take this example a little bit further as a word of deep, profound hope to those of you who are here under the weight of sin and knowing the guilt that your life represents. What Paul is saying here is a word of great hope for you and he makes that clear as we look at what follows in 1 Timothy at verse 15. What Paul has described and when you remember the violence of Paul's life in his prior persecution of Christ and his persecution of the disciples, the fact, here's the thing, I'll say this and then we'll look at the verses that supports it: the fact that Paul could be saved is a manifestation of how deep the grace of God is toward sinners and the fact that a man like Paul could be saved is hope for you that God will save you also, that God will have mercy on you because look at what it says in 1 Timothy 1:15. Paul is talking about the love which is found in Christ Jesus. Somehow the incalculable grace and favor that God shows to unworthy sinners is expressed through the life of the Apostle Paul. He says in verse 15, "It is a trustworthy statement," take this one to the bank, let there be no doubt about this assertion which I'm about to make, it "deserves full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."

Are you convicted of sin? Is your conscience bearing weight against you and accusing you night and day because of what you have done or who you have become? Is there a dark past? Are there dark secrets that you wouldn't dare breathe before men because of the shame that it would bring and the embarrassment and the guilt that it would manifest before others if they only knew? So you bear it in the sanctum of your private heart wondering if there's any release from this darkness? Here it is, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners just like you and that he extends grace to guilty people just like you. You say, "How could I know that it was that way? How could I know? How could I know? You know, you don't know how black it is." I don't need to know because wherever you're at, you're not the chief of sinners. You're not the foremost sinner of all time. It may feel that way but that's not true.

Look at what Paul says in verse 16. He says, "Yet for this reason I found mercy." I'm the foremost of them all, he says. I'm the foremost of sinners. I persecuted the church of God and he says, and yet in that condition, "for this reason I found mercy so that in me as the foremost," me as the worst of sinners, "Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." Paul turns his guilt and the mercy that Christ showed to him into an example that sinners throughout all of the ages until the end of time would be able to look at and say, "Yes, Christ will receive me favorably as well." Paul, by his own Spirit-inspired testimony, was the worst of them all and he said, "And Christ received even me. Christ had mercy even on me. Christ arrested me, as it were, on the road to Damascus and made me an apostle, gave me grace, forgave my sins, gave me new life and set ministry in front of me," so that now you here today sitting as a guilty sinner could look at Christ and say, "If he did it for Paul, he'll surely do it for me as well."

Paul is an example to you that says, "A greater sinner than you was saved by the mercy of Christ, therefore you come to Christ and ask him for mercy that he might show the same mercy to you that he showed to Paul, that Christ Jesus receives sinners, therefore you should take heart." And I want to press this point home to you this morning: sinner, wrestling with guilt, the bloody death of Christ on the cross is sufficient for your sins too. The fountain that began flowing there from his veins will wash away your sin as well and so you need to move beyond remorse. You need to move beyond the guilt to the full response of repentance and trusting in Christ and it's not enough to just feel bad, it's to say, "I turn from it and I turn from that to Christ and embrace him," and in that act of repentance and faith, Christ will forgive you just like he forgave Paul. There is hope for the worst of sinners in the world today that mercy can be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

How great was Christ's mercy? How do we understand the depths of grace? How do we measure that which cannot be counted? Well, go back to Ephesians 3. Paul sees the contrast between his former guilt and the present grace that's in his life and he says, notice the contrast, he says, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given." Christ mercy was so great that not only did he forgive Paul of all of his prior persecutions, the mercy and the grace was so abundant that he gave him a prominent place in Gospel ministry and in Gospel history. That's what Paul is talking about. God not only forgave his sins, he assigned him a prominent role as an apostle to the Gentiles.

Look at verse 8 with me again so that you can see this. "To me, the very least of all saints," I'm less than the least of the saints, "this grace was given." How abundant is God's grace? He gave grace to me and then note the parallel verb forms here, "he gave grace to me to preach to the Gentiles," verse 8, and verse 9, "and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God." Paul is saying, "God has been so gracious to me even though I didn't deserve it. It would have been incredible, unspeakable grace simply to forgive me and let me sit on the corner of God's kingdom throughout all of eternity. For me to be stuck in a closet in the halls of heaven in light of my prior guilt, would have been such wonderful abundant grace given to me that if only that had happened, it would have been magnificent and beyond description." But

what he's saying is, he's saying, "God didn't just clear my slate and let me enter into the kingdom, he gave me a role of responsibility to preach to Gentiles." That's where the emphasis is. "That I could carry the message of the Gospel to Gentiles and proclaim to them the unfathomable riches of Christ. I have a privilege. I have an opportunity that God has given me that is so completely diametrically opposed to my prior guilt and hostility to the name of Christ that now I get to preach forgiveness to Gentiles. I get to preach light to those who are in darkness. I get to preach forgiveness to those who are in guilt. I get to preach heaven to those who are plunging toward eternal hell. What a privilege," he says. "What a grace has been given to me. What an undeserved favor has been showered on my life. This grace is really great."

So what he's saying is that the Lord took him from his prior life of opposition and bestowed upon him a teaching ministry to Paul that would benefit Gentiles and eventually all of mankind. The grace that God showed to Paul, we're living in the wake of it here this morning. We're reading words that God gave to this apostle and we're learning about our own spiritual life and opportunity and having a sense of our own forgiveness and God gave that grace to Paul and that the words that he spoke through Paul would continue to resound 2,000 years later and will stand after time has come to an end.

Do you see it, beloved? Do you see how high and how deep and how broad the grace of God is to this man who did everything in his power to silence the testimony of the Gospel when it was first coming to light? Who would have murdered Christ again with his own hands only given the opportunity as shown by the fact that he gladly participated in the execution and persecution of the saints? To a man like that was given forgiveness, new life and an opportunity to preach the faith that he once tried to destroy. In a microscopic sliver of sense, those of us who have opportunity to teach about Christ from the perspective of a forgiven sinner when before we ourselves were the ones who profaned his name with our own lips, we can identify a little bit with the sense that Paul is describing here, the wonder of it.

Oh, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, there should be a sense of wonder in your mind that you stand in grace when what you deserved was uttered judgment. That's what Paul is expressing and he felt it deep inside. It wasn't simply an academic abstract matter to him. This wasn't a mathematical equation. This wasn't an algebraic construction to him. This was living reality that he had been forgiven personally by Jesus Christ and sent into ministry. "This grace was given to me. It's not just that my sins were forgiven," he says, "it's that I was also given the privilege of proclaiming the riches of Christ." He valued the Gospel that highly that it humbled him. Charles Spurgeon said about this passage, "Paul blesses God, this great grace was given to him that he might preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. He looked upon it not as toil but as a grace." And it's remarkable, it's utterly remarkable that Paul sees it this way. This is absolutely contrary to human expectation and human understanding.

I want to take you to 2 Corinthians 11 and just remind you of what the Gospel cost the Apostle Paul. What it cost the Apostle Paul because this was not the life of ease that people are now demanding from the modern-day Gospel and which charlatans are all too



happy to promise to them. What Paul received was not rose petals on a warm spring path, what he received was instead suffering and difficulty that attended his apostolic ministry. And yet in the midst of all of it, he is grateful, he is thankful, he is realizing and he sees that he has more than he deserves. In 2 Corinthians 11, he says as he's defending his ministry against false teachers and the fact that the Corinthians were more receptive to false teachers than they were to him, he contrasts himself with these false teachers. In verse 23 he says, "Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane." He says, "Of course they're not but if they want to claim to be servants of Christ, let me show you what service of Christ has meant to me because my service, when you understand what I have been through, you understand that my service did not come from human motives." He says, verse 23, "I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches." Verse 30, "If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying."

So Paul being one who, so to speak, had been beating the church now finds himself beaten for the sake of the Gospel and he glories in the fact that the Lord has put him in a position to do so. You see, as we contemplate the way Paul understood his ministry and his role as an ambassador of the Gospel, there is just so much for us to see. We see that to be a Christian and to be in any manner of service to Christ is a humbling thing because it's so much better than what we deserved. We're able to serve and glorify the one whom we formerly cursed and degraded. We see that Paul went through hardship in his ministry and willingly embraced that and rejoiced in it and preferred that to his prior privileged life as a Jew advanced among the Pharisees. We see in Paul the fact that even our worst of sins can be gladly forgiven by Christ, that he came to cleanse us and to forgive us and to wash away even that.

So as we look at the life of the Apostle Paul and see him saying, "I am the least of the saints, to me was given this grace," we see a pattern of our own human existence as Christians and we should have, beloved, the point of all of this is that you should have welling in your heart the same sense of humility, the same sense of gratitude, the same willingness to sacrifice yourself for the name of this one who gave himself for you. This utterly shapes the way that we view our existence.

And there is one more aspect to it. On Tuesday nights, we've been speaking on leadership from the book of Joshua. Those messages are done but they're probably out on the back table. But we've been making a point of speaking to young men in their teens and 20s and early 30s contemplating the future of spiritual leadership. To you men, to you ladies who desire to serve in the realm of ministry, biblically permitted ministry to you as well,

Charles Spurgeon takes it and applies it in that light as well. He takes this very passage and applies it to you in the same way that we have been speaking to you. I want you to understand that other voices in church history have said the exact same thing. I'm never trying to say anything new to you that hasn't been said before by someone else in some other country or situation or whatever. Charles Spurgeon appeals to young men in light of Paul's example and he says this and listen closely. Listen closely, we are deliberately trying to shape your aspirations for life here. In light of the great call of Christ and the great person of Christ, this is not trivial. This is not something we diminish and cast aside so that we can get on with the day's events. This arrests us. This stops us as plainly as it did Paul on the road to Damascus. This glory of what Christ did for Paul and what he does for sinners today stops us on the road of life and makes us reconsider the reason that we exist. Spurgeon appeals to young men with these words and I quote, "Aspire to this office, young men whose souls are full of love to Jesus. Fired with sacred enthusiasm, covet earnestly the best gifts and out of love to Jesus, try, whether you cannot in your measure tell your fellow men the story of the cross." Continuing in the quote, "Men of zeal and ability, if you love Jesus, exercise your souls toward it and may God, the Holy Spirit, call you to it that you also may preach the word of reconciliation to the dying thousands. The laborers still are few. May the Lord of the harvest thrust you into the work."

You know, it just makes you burn with desire, doesn't it? It just makes you want to participate in the ministry of the Gospel. Whether as a leader or those who support leaders, we just realize the great worth of the Gospel, the great worth of Christ, the great favor that has been shown to us who deserve judgment so that we realize that love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all. That's what this does for us. That's what Paul was expressing in Ephesians 3 as he contemplated the ministry that had been given to him. Paul saw it as a gift of grace that he could be an ambassador for Christ and in whatever sphere the Lord gives us today to represent him, in the same way it's a gift of grace to us. Not a toil, not an irksome duty, not something that we have to do, not something that we are entitled to, a gift of grace to participate in the ministry of the Gospel.

Well, who was listening to Paul? Who was paying attention to this ministry? This is incredible. What we're about to see are things that are expressed in Scripture but we have not had opportunity until now in our church to be able to see them and to discuss them. Who was listening in? The full answer will surprise you. Let's look at point number 2. We saw the ambassador of the Gospel, point number 2, now we're going to look at the audience of the Gospel. The audience of the Gospel. Paul repeats his privilege of taking the Gospel beyond the Jews. Look at verse 8 with me. He says, "this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." The Gentiles. Paul said, "Those who formerly were excluded, I had the privilege of flinging open the doors and telling them that Christ would receive them too even though they weren't Jews." He brought good news to Gentiles that God would show them mercy in Christ. We won't belabor that point because it's what we've been talking about from the beginning of chapter 2, verse 11. He's just re-emphasizing it once more here, "Grace was given to me to preach to the Gentiles." Christ's sacrifice on the cross, though he came as the Jewish Messiah, he came

to save those beyond the Jewish race as well. "Wonderful," Paul says, "I'm just so privileged to say this, to go to people in chains and say, 'I have the key that will release you from bondage.'" And so he he went and it was a joy for him to say.

He goes on and there are these, you know, when you throw our rock into a lake and it hits and then there's just these ever expanding circles, this is what's happening in this passage as Paul speaks. He throws in the rock and grace hits the water of human existence and Paul says, "To me this grace was given." Then it expands out to Gentiles this grace was given. And in verse 9, it expands out to embrace all men that would come under the sound of the Gospel. Look at verse 9 with me, he says, "and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." The English text here, if you have an English Standard Version, it reads a little bit differently than the verse that I just read. In the English Standard, this verse reads, "to bring to light for everyone," while the NASB here leaves it out and simply leaves it unstated, "to bring to light." The reason for that is that there is a little bit of difference in the way that the original manuscripts in the Greek read. Some of them have the word for "all" there, to bring the light to all. Some of them leave that word out. The NASB follows the manuscripts that leave it out. The ESV follows the ones that leave it in. At the end of the day, it's not a big point. It doesn't change the doctrine of what's being taught here because Paul, we know for certain, he was sent primarily to the Gentiles; he had a unique focus in his ministry to the Gentiles but this was for all men everywhere. The Jews were included in the focus of his ministry as well.

Look back at Acts 9 and I just want you to just follow along with me here for just a moment. Acts 9:15. The Lord told Ananias about Paul, he said, "He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and Kings and the sons of Israel." As you read through the book of Acts, you see that that's what Paul did. He would go to the synagogue, he would teach Jews until they didn't want to hear him anymore and then he went on to Gentiles. In the later chapters, he's speaking to the political leaders of the day. It is though he was in the White House Oval Office speaking to the president as the nature of how broad his ministry was. So he spoke to everyone, as the ESV rightly points out. There was no class of men to whom this message did not apply. Jesus Christ said, "Go and preach the Gospel to all the nations," and so we see the rock of grace, as it were, hitting the pond of human existence. Paul says, "To me, this grace was given and then I preach it to Gentiles and to all men this word goes out as well." Paul's letters are a significant part of what we preach. There is no one in the scope of humanity that is omitted from the sound of the Gospel and from what Paul is saying here in this passage. The audience was all of mankind. No one was excluded by national affiliation, geography, class. It could go to kings. It could go to peasants. Incredible. That's the audience for the Gospel. It's the whole world should hear and no one is excluded from the offer of the Gospel presented in Jesus Christ.

So you would say, "Well, that pretty well covers it. We must be at the end. It's time for him to close and give his prayer now at the end of his message. Paul must be done because we've covered everyone, right? He's covered all of humanity, what other audience could there be?" Ha, fasten on your seatbelt because Paul is not done yet. Look

at chapter 3, verse 10. The Gospel, beloved, this glorious Gospel of which we've been speaking here today, testified even beyond the realm of humanity. Verse 10, God gave me grace to preach and to bring to light, verse 10, what's the purpose? What's the ultimate final purpose here? Verse 10, "so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known," so that God could make known to something, to someone, the greatness of his wisdom and he does it "through the church," through redeemed people. What's left to talk about? Oh, this is majestic. Paul says in verse 10, "that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." This verse expands our understanding of the purpose of the church. Paul has already exhausted all of humanity in what he is saying and yet he's talking about a yet further audience of the Gospel and when he says that the wisdom of God would be made known to the rulers and to the authorities, he is not speaking about political leaders on earth. That can't be what he's talking about because whoever these beings are of which he speaks, they are in the heavenly places. They are not on earth. In some manner, beloved, Paul is saying that the angelic realm sees the advance of the Gospel and when they do, that advance of the Gospel testifies to them of the wisdom and the power of God. These spiritual beings who are not omniscient, somehow observe and see and wonder and marvel as the Gospel is played out in the realm of human history and unseen to us, the spiritual realm observes and gives glory to God as a result. It's incredible to contemplate.

Luke 15:10 says, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Somehow angels witness that. There are both elect, that is good, and evil angels in this spiritual realm. Look over at Ephesians 6:12 where, again, you see that we're not talking about human flesh and blood as witnesses here. Ephesians 6:12, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." And my point in showing you this is to simply show clearly that these heavenly places, this realm of which Paul speaks is not a realm of flesh and blood. We see from other Scriptures that there are good angels who see this and rejoice as the Gospel advances; we see that somehow it bears testimony to those fallen angels and they are forced to acknowledge against their wills the wisdom and the glory of God as the church leads people to salvation. God has not revealed all that our curiosity might like us to know here but he has given us enough to put us on notice that there is a spiritual realm that witnesses the advance of the Gospel.

Look at 1 Corinthians 4:9. I want you to see this from a couple of places and we're not going to go into a full-blown study of angels; we'll save that perhaps for another time. But in 1 Corinthians 4:9, Paul says, "I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." The spectacle of the apostles was a spectacle not only to the human realm but somehow to angels as well. Look at 1 Peter 1, going the other direction in your Bible toward the back, after the book of Hebrews and the book of James. 1 Peter 1:10, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves," in other words,

this message was not for them in their generation, "but for you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven," look at this at end, look at the end of verse 12 here, "things into which angels long to look."

I can't tell you what all that means. The Scriptures speak about how sometimes we entertain angels unawares. There's a knowledge of it and yet there is a lack of awareness of all that it means and all that happens there but Scripture teaches us that somehow the angelic realm is a witness to the progress of the Gospel, to the unfolding of God's purposes in the church universal and somehow they see it and the good angels rejoice and give glory to God as his wisdom is put on display to them. Charles Spurgeon, again, puts it in vivid terms as he pictures the elect angels responding and he says and I quote, "As the spirits walk along the corridors full of divine workmanship, they stand, they gaze, they admire and wonder. Then they speed their way back to heaven and sing more loudly than before, 'Hallelujah!' to the God whose manifold wisdom they have beheld in the church of God below."

You know, honestly, words fail me. All I can do is present these basic things to you in this feeble human voice and the human mind behind it and have you look and marvel at how great the Gospel is. How great the Gospel is that would save a man like Paul and put him into ministry. How great the Gospel is that would go beyond Jews to Gentiles and to all humanity at every stage and at every strata of life. How great the Gospel is that it saved even a sinner like you and purchased for you at Calvary an eternal weight of glory that we cannot begin to think or imagine, an unending glory and bliss in the full presence of Shekinah glory where we will see the face of Christ and live and worship and love. And how great the Gospel is that somehow the spiritual realm of which Scripture testifies, angels look on and marvel at the wisdom of God being put on display through the human actions of his church as they proclaim the Gospel and make it known and Jews and Gentiles are brought into harmony with one another and sinners who once cursed God now praise him. Somehow they see that and they respond in giving glory to God.

You know, you ask yourself, "What happens in our Christian life? What happens as we proclaim the word of God Sunday by Sunday? What happens Tuesday by Tuesday in our church and in other churches throughout the land that are true to the Gospel?" What happens? What happens? Whatever it is, it's something supernatural and it has repercussions not only in this life and in the life to come but it has repercussions in the spiritual realm which we cannot even see. The greatness of all of that should make us fear God, love God, fear his word, love his word, fear the Gospel, love the Gospel and never trivialize it, never diminish it, never try to adorn it with human entertainment to somehow make it more palatable to goats who have no interest in it anyway.

You see, when we honor the Gospel, not only are we making it known to men somehow in a way that I don't profess to understand, somehow, however, we make known even to angels the glory of God. What a privilege that is for us in our fallen humanity, our redeemed humanity now, to participate in that, to share in that, to have the privilege of this Christ who loved us so, who laid down his life, a bloody sacrifice and identified with

us in our sin so that we would be rescued from our sin by his righteousness and by his mercy. Those of us who have received such great wealth from Christ, not only receive the wealth but somehow we get to participate in proclaiming that, not only in this world but in the world that is outside the realm of our perception. It echoes there too and angels give glory to God as a result. Who is adequate for something like that? Not me. Not you. This, to share in that manner of truth, that manner of grace, that manner of glory from all of our ordinary backgrounds even on earth, for us to share in that, that is grace that we should love God and respond to him for.

So as a church, as individuals, what do we say? Let's be true to Scripture. Let's be true to the Gospel. Let's love one another and through those means teach even angels well. Shall we?

Let's pray.

*Father, we could never guess at such things, we could only respond to your word. Thank you for the grace shown to Paul, the chief of sinners. Thank you for the grace that you have shown to us. If Paul is the foremost, Father, we feel like we must be second or third in line just immediately behind him because you have shown grace to us in our sin as well. Thank you for that. Thank you that individually and collectively we share in the privilege now of making that Gospel known to ever-expanding circles of humanity, in our own realm of our family, at our work, in our neighborhood and wherever life takes us and gives us influence, Father, this defines why we exist. And yet beyond that, Father, that through the church, somehow you use our most feeble, inadequate, pathetic efforts and you somehow bless that message that the world considers foolishness and that we knowing our own weaknesses would never aspire after in our own merit, that somehow you take all of that and you manifests and make known to angels your wisdom through an earthly ministry like what you gave to Paul and what you now give to your universal church and its local manifestations. O God, we are humbled. In a sense, we are undone by it all, by the majesty and the glory of it all. But Father, if you have saved us and given this grace to us, we acknowledge, we see it could never be something that we deserved. It had to be undeserved favor that entrusted to us a message like this that gave new life like this to us in our sin. If you're going to give that kind of grace to us and you have and we thank you for it, then, Father, now, take it and advance it. Drive out our sin. Drive out our lusts. Drive out bitterness. Drive out sin and disharmony. Drive it all out, Father, that we might be pure vessels, as best as we can by your grace to be pure vessels for testimony to such wondrous grace as this. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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