

Readings

Scripture

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.

Ephesians 3:7-13 (*English Standard Version*)

Reflection

The church of Jesus Christ is the most important institution in the world. The assembly of the redeemed, the company of the saints, the children of God are more significant in world history than any other group, organization, or nation. The United States of America compares to the church of Jesus Christ like a speck of dust compares to the sun. The drama of international relations compares to the mission of the church like a kindergarten riddle compares to Hamlet or King Lear. And all pomp of May Day in Red Square and the pageantry of New Year's in Pasadena fade into a formless grey against the splendor of the bride of Christ. Take heed how you judge. Things are not what they seem. "All flesh is like grass. And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord (and all his family) abides forever" (1 Peter 1:24-25). The media and all the powers, and authorities, and rulers, and stars that they present are a mirage. "For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). The gates of Hades, the powers of death, will prevail against every institution but one, the church.

"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God... because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the liberty of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:19, 21)

Lift up your eyes, O Christians! You belong to a society that will never cease, to the apple of God's eye, to the eternal and cosmic church of our Lord, Jesus Christ.
- John Piper. Sermon: *The Cosmic Church* (Ephesians 3:10)

Sermon Outline

The Church: God's Wisdom Revealed
Ephesians 3:7-13

The Theology of Tears
Brad Anderson

God has revealed His wisdom to the heavenly realm through the church... (Ephesians 3:10)

How does the church reveal the wisdom of God?

The church reveals the wisdom of God when unworthy people receive grace... (Ephesians 3:7-8a)

- Grace meeting us in lifelong weakness...
- Grace meeting us in lifelong temptation...
- Grace meeting us in lifelong failure...

The church reveals the wisdom of God when the gospel is preached...

(Ephesians 3:8b-9)

- Good news for the Gentiles...
- Good news for a recreated humanity...

The church reveals the wisdom of God when suffering results in glory...

(Ephesians 3:11-13)

- God's eternal plan included suffering...
- Jesus' suffering resulted in our confidence to approach God...
- Our suffering in Jesus will contribute to the glory of the church...

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)

- Describe how you have experienced the church as depicting the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). What does the word church mean to you? To your neighbors? To our community?
- Pick out all the things that Paul says about his ministry in Ephesians 3:7-13. In what way are these relevant to your Christian life and experience?
- From Ephesians 3:6 and 10, what is the role of the church in God's plan?
- In Ephesians 3:10, what does Paul mean by "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places"? How and why is the "manifold wisdom of God" to be made known to them?
- The major lesson taught by this first half of Ephesians 3 is the biblical centrality of the church. Spend some time discussing and praying over your own attitudes to the church in light of Ephesians 3:7-13.
- From Ephesians 2:18 and 3:12, how would you explain to someone how they can come to know God?
- How do you respond to your friend who questions, "Who needs the church? Why do you go, anyway?" How would Paul respond to such questions?