

Confident

Eph. 3:1-13

If you check commentaries you will find out that this passage of scripture is often overlooked ...

In today's text Paul states three things that are absolutely true for the Christian ...

... Paul is being very honest about these three truths because

... He wants us to be confident in Christ and not lose heart.

There is Hardness in Life

There is Wonder in God's Grace

There is Unrealized Power in the Church

1. There is Hardness in Life

You can see in the very first verse that Paul is writing from prison ...

... and as Paul is writing he suddenly stops ...

... notice the dash in verse 1 after the word Gentile?

While writing Paul is suddenly thinks of something And we know what that something is because of the first word in verse 13.

... "SO" ... this is the Greek conjunction "dia" which is often translated "therefore."

... Paul writes verses 2-12 and says SO, or THEREFORE, or IN LIGHT OF WHAT I JUST WROTE...

Paul is writing from prison and he suddenly remembers that his imprisonment is a discouragement to his friends ...

... so, he breaks off from what he is writing and he addresses it.

Whether you realize it or not this is important.

There is no book more realistic and honest about the reality of discouragement and suffering

... no book is as honest about the hardness of life than the Word of God.

Paul doesn't tell his friends to "shake it off" or "suck it up" ... Paul encourages them.

Now one of the reasons the Bible is so honest about suffering is because God knows that suffering ... the hardness of life ...

... it can shake your faith.

Example: *In Matthew 11 we find out that John the Baptist had been arrested.*

*... by the way **John the Baptist** was the cousin of Jesus ...*

... John the Baptist, baptized Jesus

... John the Baptist was the one who paved the way for Jesus to start his ministry

But John the Baptist, the hero, the champion is in prison ...

... and he sends a messenger to Jesus to ask Jesus

"Are you really the messiah, or should we look for somebody else?"

Why is John asking this question ... because he's suffering ... he's discouraged and his faith has been shaken?

In the book of King's, the **Prophet Elijah** calls fire from heaven one day and the next day he's asking God to kill him ...

... why, suffering can shake your faith.

In the book of Job, **Job's wife** tells him to curse God and die ...

I believe Job's wife was a good woman ... but she was hurting ... the hardness of life was pressing down on her

... she had lost her children and it looked like she was going to lose her husband as well.

Paul's friends in Ephesus feel the same way.

So, Paul tells them something to encourage them in their faith ... and this is point 2.

2. There is Wonder in God's Grace

You'll notice that Paul uses a particular word four times in verses 3-9 and he uses it again in 5:36 and 6:19 ...

... it's the word mystery.

... Paul uses this word more than 15 times in the Bible.

Now this word *musterion* ... means something different than what we think.

When we think of "mystery" we think of something that is hidden ...

... it's hidden and it's our job to discover it.

When I was a boy, I loved to read Hardee Boy Mysteries; Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators ... Encyclopedia Brown ...

... and the fun of the books was trying to figure out the mystery ... and if you couldn't the book would reveal the mystery at the end

... and when you read the solution to the mystery ... you'd say, "Oh, I see" "I should have figured it out" ... "it was so obvious."

That's what we think a mystery is ... Paul means something different.

When Paul uses the word "mysterion" he means something that is revealed by God because otherwise you would have never discovered it.

This mystery of the gospel/grace/Christ/fait h ... we would never have discovered it on our own ... because it is too counter-intuitive!

... you and I would have never discovered it through logic and reason.

This **mystery of grace** is an astonishing counter-intuitive revelation.

This **mystery of the gospel** goes against anything we would have ever guessed.

Let me explain:

Consider the 10 Commandments ... the golden rule ... doing good to others ...

These things are never called a mystery ... EVER!

Why? Because they make sense to us.

We understand why we shouldn't steal ... even if we do steal ... we understand why people shouldn't steal from us ...

... even though we may lie ... we don't want people to lie to us.

It makes sense.

Now the gospel is not “if you obey the 10 commandments and keep the golden rule then God will love you, he will hear your prayers, and one day he will take you to heaven to be with Him.

... That is not the mystery of the gospel

... Doing good to earn God’s favor is logical, it makes sense to the carnal mind

... This is why every other religion is telling you do to all these things to appease some god.

This is not a mystery; this is not the gospel.

The gospel is the OPPOSITE of this.

The gospel is that the Son of God came to earth and triumphed through weakness and suffering

... He won by losing

... He gained everything by losing everything

... He overcame our sin and guilt, by taking it upon himself

Salvation is the free gift of God given to us ... sinners.

AND ... when you become a Christian, you are in that moment simultaneously a sinner and righteous ...

In verse 8 Paul calls himself the “very least” that means sinner, wicked,

... But he also says in verse 8 “... of all the saints...” that means righteous.

When you become a Christian, you are simultaneously a sinner ... and yet loved, affirmed, pardoned, accepted, delighted in by a Holy God ... **that’s a mystery.**

... It’s a mystery because it is not what you would ever think ... it goes against the natural mind

... it goes against our instincts to think that no matter how bad you are you are, or can be, absolutely saved by sheer grace

... made a saint.

There is hardness in life ... It's enough to shake your faith ... but be encouraged ... not matter how weak you are ...

... not matter how much you have failed God.

... You are supremely loved, cherished, and treasured by God

... God the Father is not ashamed to call you His child ...

... Jesus is not ashamed to call you His brother and sister.

3. The Unrealized Power of the Church (read vv. 7-11)

Paul says that he is a minister of this mystery of the gospel.

... He, the least of all, is called to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ

... Paul is called to bring to light the mystery so that THROUGH the church the manifold blessings of God would be made known

... and that this is and has been the eternal purpose of God.

Let's look at the text backwards...

Look at verse 11 ... what is God's purpose?

Paul told us God's purpose in 1:7, 10.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him (Eph 1:7-10)

God's purpose is to bring together (or sum up) everything in the world that is falling apart.

There is one thing you quickly learn about life ... everything is falling apart

- Society falls apart with wars
- Relationships fall apart
- Plans fall apart
- Our bodies fall apart with disease and death

.... Because of SIN!

But it wasn't supposed to be this way and one day "God in Christ Jesus" is going to make everything right and put everything back together ...

Now, **how can the world see that God is going to be making everything right??**

It's in verse 10.

"through the church the manifold wisdom of God is made known"

Listen to what Paul is saying ...

... It is in the community of faith (not the individual) where the world can most readily see ...

- ... people loving one another and being brought together regardless of race or culture.
- ... broken lives restored
- ... the incredible future that God is preparing for His people

F.F. Bruce (writing of this verse) says:

“The church here (3:10) appears as God’s pilot plan for the reconciled universe of the future.”

The church NOT ... in this PRESENT world ...

... the church is to be a new society in which the world can see what family life, business and economic practices, race relations, forgiveness ...

... what these things look like under the healing kingship of Jesus Christ!

The polling people say that 81% of all Americans say that you can be a good Christian and not be part of a church ...

... The Apostle Paul has no idea what they are talking about.

Paul is not lecturing theological students ... Paul is pastoring hurting people

He admits there is hardness in life and that is why we need to know and remember the wonder of God’s grace and the power of God’s church.

Paul says, “I am a prisoner” ... but notice he doesn’t say a Prisoner of Rome, He says a prisoner of Christ Jesus ...

... and he adds, “on behalf of you Gentiles.”

Paul says to these Ephesians, “I am suffering, but I am suffering for you.” ... WHAT does that mean?

Here Paul is teaching us three things:

- No suffering is for nothing
- No suffering can really hurt you
- All suffering is for glory

Paul says, I'm suffering for you ...

... in prison I am able to write this letter and when you get it (verse 4) you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ

Paul says, No suffering can really hurt you ...

Paul says I am in prison ... but I'm not Rome's prisoner ... I am the prisoner of Christ Jesus

... I am free (he says in verse 12) because of God's grace to boldly with confidence approach God

... because my treasure is that in Jesus Christ, I have boldness and access to the Father with confidence ... and nobody can touch it

... this is the treasure of my heart

... this doesn't mean that I don't weep or have pain—but I will never be devastated by those things outside of me.

... Paul says, Christ is the treasure of my heart ... and as MC Hammer used to say, "You can't touch this."

I heard the story of two men in the same church who both auditioned for the same role in a movie. Both had regular jobs, both prepared well for the audition, both had spent years training ... both got turned down. ... one was devastated, the other went about his business as usual. What was the difference?

Where your treasure is, that is where your heart is.

The rejection didn't affect one man because "acting" wasn't his treasure.

Paul's treasure is this, "In Christ, I can approach God."

Have you made that move?

In Christ Jesus you can approach God with confidence and boldness.

Is that your treasure ... or is it something else?

Jesus is the only one who has earned boldness and confidence to approach God because Jesus is the only one who has lived a perfect life ...

... and how did Jesus live on this earth?

Jesus was **shut out** so that we could **have access** ...

... **bound nailed to a cross** ... **be free**

... **cast out** **Could approach**

Jesus suffered tremendous hardship ... for you

... so now all the suffering you experience powerfully identifies you with Christ.

Jesus suffered so that when we suffered, we would be like Him.

This is what Paul is saying ...

Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory. (Eph 3:13)

You see ...

- No suffering is for nothing
- No suffering can really hurt you when you belong to Christ
- All suffering is for glory

I ask you today ... Do not be discouraged by the suffering in and around you, because glory is coming.

... and if you know that glory is coming you can endure the suffering.