

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3

3 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. 8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”

"The Unsearchable Riches of Christ"

It has been some time, but this week we return to our study of the Book of Ephesians. We now move on into chapter three and it is timely with our challenge last week to be ready to boldly present the Gospel in our age. In this Epistle the Apostle Paul declares the amazing Grace of God and shows the practical results that such salvation should bring in our lives. *[remind them to read whole Epistle]*

- Chapter three begins with what might seem like a bit of rambling until we remember who the Apostle Paul was and his mission as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

In the early church people were coming to Christ from two very different camps or groups: The Saints there at Ephesus had come out of the rank paganism of the Roman Empire, which makes its message more and more relevant for our day as America drifts further and further from her Christian heritage.

The other groups were the Jewish converts, like the disciples of Christ, those who came to faith by the thousands in Jerusalem and then other cities...

- And yes even the Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the Apostle.

So here in chapter three as Paul is about to expand on the wonders of God's Grace, he cannot help but remind them, and even himself of the amazing impact the Gospel has had on his own life.

We will unpack this passage in the coming weeks, but for this morning to help us understand his excitement at this point, I want to turn again to the message we have from Paul to that pagan world in chapter 17 of Luke's orderly account:

Paul's address on Mars Hill!

We studied this message at length in our journey through the Book of Acts, but here we should remember it is the same type of message that Paul would have first given in Ephesus as well.

Acts 17: "22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' 29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

Here we find the same themes we read in our text from Ephesians about God as Creator and redeemer. And as many of you know, this is a portion of the Scriptures that is especially dear to me!

Thinking about that short sermon often has me do what the Apostle has done here in chapter three!

It was Paul's sermon here in Athens that laid the foundation of my conversion so you can see why it is special to me... [tell the story]

When the Apostle finished his sermon, he did not see thousands converted as happened in Jerusalem nor even the many that are hinted at in other cities where Paul visits... Only a few converts.

It should remind us again that we are NOT to despise small beginnings...

Paul in his flesh may have come away from this day thinking, wow, that did not work out very well!"

- And yet, here we have an apologetic that has encouraged Christians for thousands of years and brought many including myself to the Lord...

From a human standpoint, without this sermon on Mars Hill, my six children would not have been raised in a solid Christian home, if our home had survived at all. We would not have been blessed with 25 grandchildren,

I would not have been able to be a voice for Biblical wisdom in our state's civil affairs for twenty plus years nor serve here at Church of the King!

- And that is just the impact in one small life almost two thousand years after Paul spoke.

When we study how Paul presents the Gospel, the Good News to these citizens of Athens it helps us as we face the same challenge today. We must be prepared to share the same message to the same type of culture:

- Paul presents God as the Creator and sustainer of all there is.
- Paul presents God as the judge of all men.
- And finally Paul is faithful to his Lord's calling as he is a witness to the resurrection of Jesus!

Now it is important to remember that Paul was NOT troubled by all these idols because he thought God would be threatened. The Apostle knew the Scriptures well and knew that idols were worthless and foolish:

NONE of the idols that filled Athens could speak or hear or even move and the Prophet Isaiah shows us just how foolish it is to give them worship...

As Jesus often did with His parables, the prophet uses a very common sense challenge to foolish actions...

Isaiah 44:14 “[a man] cuts down cedars for himself, And takes the cypress and the oak; He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it. 15 Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself; *[so far so good...]* Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships it; He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. 16 “He burns half of it in the fire; With this half he eats meat; He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire." 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, Prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" "

- This surely gives us a stunning picture of why Paul would be provoked by what he saw and was moved to share the Good News that can deliver those in Athens from their foolishness and despair.

But what we need to understand is that it is no different today:

- God used craftsmen to build His Temple and to serve Him down through the years. Their talents brought glory to God and fulfillment in their hearts.
- Without God here in Isaiah, these same skills lead them to create false gods that were of no help and an abomination to Jehovah, the one true God they should have served.

We need to understand that it is much the same with science and technology in our world today:

When Christians used their minds to discover, to explore, & to master the mysteries of God’s creation it brought glory to God and many amazing advances & great blessings for man. Today we have not only turned our back on God in these areas, but have now demanded that He have NO role to play whatsoever in science or education or even history. Just like Isaiah’s sad craftsman who warmed himself with some of the wood he cut, we now have all of our creature comforts coming from the material world through the wonders of our science and technologies.

- At the same time we have taken those very same discoveries and declared them to be our gods:

There is no longer any need for God because science and technology give us all we need, or so the world would argue...

- But you see when it comes to the real issues of life, they are as silent as the half of the tree the craftsman fashioned into an idol.

Man claims to have conquered nature and now bows to mother nature to give her thanks The result however, is what C.S. Lewis rightly calls the abolition of man.

-- Science can tell us more and more about how the unborn child develops in a mother’s womb but cannot tell us why they have value. So sadly a third of our children are lost to the violence of abortion.

-- Science can tell us more and more about how our sexual organs work, but cannot tell us why marriage is of value. So sadly half of our marriages end in divorce and many people now choose to never marry in the first place.

-- Science can show us how to work more productively and produce more and more material goods, but they cannot tell us how to be content with these abundant goods. So sadly, we see record growth in visits to psychiatrists and drug use in the midst of all these creature comforts.

-- Science can tell us more and more about how the universe works, but they cannot give us a clue about how or why it came into being. Sadly this growing knowledge only seems to bring growing despair and loneliness.

And finally, science can certainly tell us when a man or woman has died, but they cannot tell us where their soul has gone or even if they really had one.

So I hope you can see that while it might be easy for us to chuckle at the example of that poor wood-cutter or all of the idols and gods that the Greeks and Romans looked to, the world is really no better off today. They no longer believe that man is made in the image of God...

- Men & Women are now seen as just part of the machine with no ultimate purpose or value.

Yes, there are few idols adorning the streets of our state, and yet if we have a heart and really care we should be just as provoked by what we see around us! We as Christians have an obligation to see and understand the despair that surrounds us today: To be provoked as Paul was and to be ready to be those beautiful feet that bring Good News.

- The Apostle Paul gives us a great example of how we are to confront those who are lost!

I also want to leave us this morning with some wise words that Paul shared with the Saints in Colossi, another pagan Gentile city where he preached the Good News: The Apostle Paul understood well that all of this is not just a philosophical debate or discussion:

- We are talking about the great story of God's salvation.

Paul wants us to know who we are and to always be growing in our knowledge of Jesus, ready to confront the false religions of the world. Paul also gives us a warning about the dangers of vanity in the world...

- We should carefully heed both messages!

Colossians 2:1 “1 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. 5 For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order & the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. 6 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

- Jesus said He came to give us life and life abundant!
- Our salvation is not just a ticket to get into heaven, it is an entrance into a new life here & now that will be full of joy and contentment IF we are rooted and built up in Jesus!

And as we properly confront the world we must remember that we can never allow them to take away that trust and foundation that we have in Jesus, & so the Apostle Paul continues at verse 8” “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

The Spirit knows His job and He knows where history is going... Our job is to believe and serve!

- In our study of Ephesians we will learn about what we are to believe and how we are to serve and that is why the Apostle was so excited!

And at the end of chapter three we will again see him praying for those Saints as we should for each other today...

Ephesians 3: “14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55:

“ "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David.”