

Ambassador for a Great God

Ephesians

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Bible Text: Ephesians 3:8-10

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As we go through the books of the Bible verse-by-verse, there is something that you should be observing happening in your life over time. You can tell if it's connecting and if you're understanding by the certain results that it produces in your heart. Verse-by-verse Bible study has a way of humbling us by exposing ourselves to the inerrant, flawless word of God and having that expose the glory of God to us and by contrast showing us our sin and the ways in which we fall short of God's glory even as Christians. It humbles us by letting us see how we fall short of the glory of God and it has that impact of letting us realize in a way that our human pride would not naturally do, it teaches us to humble ourselves and to think of ourselves rightly rather than the inflated way that a world that is consumed with the concept of self-esteem and respect would teach us to do. The Bible brings us back to reality as we study it verse-by-verse and we're grateful for that. You know, we want to live in a realm of reality of what is true and what is right and what is honorable and what is pure and lovely and of good repute and so since we're going to one day have to at the end of the age, we're going to stand before this holy God, it's better for us to deal with reality of who we are and what our sin is like so that we could come to Christ and be reconciled to God through Christ before that day comes rather than living with a false sense of our goodness that makes us think that everything is fine only to find at the end that we never knew God to begin with and he sends us away like the many that are described at the end of the book of Matthew, chapter 7, when he says, "Depart from me, I never knew you."

So verse-by-verse study is a protection for our souls. It instructs us in the true reality of who God is and who we are and it humbles us because we realize that we need a Savior, we need this Redeemer of whom we've been singing here this morning. You and I fall short of the glory of God even as Christians and the sooner that we accept that and bow before it and respond to it, the better. Verse-by-verse Bible study helps us in that way. But there is another way that verse-by-verse Bible study humbles us and this is a little bit different direction. It humbles us, you might say, in a more noble way. Not that what we said before wasn't noble, anything that the Spirit of God does through his word is noble but there is another way that it humbles us. Not just in seeing our sin but verse-by-verse Bible study has a unique way of elevating our thoughts and seeing the glory of God for who he is quite a part from anything that it has to do with us. It lifts us away from our earthly lives, lifts us away from our earthly cares and focuses our attention on the wisdom

and the greatness and the grace and the love and the mercy and the perfection of God. As our minds are lifted up and, as it were, the rocket force of verse-by-verse Bible study lifts us up from the gravity of our earthbound perspective, it takes us into realms that we would never attain on our own, in the realm of thought and worship as we see the wisdom and greatness of God on display.

Well, that's the effect that this passage that we have before us this morning has and I'd invite you to turn to Ephesians 3 as we continue our verse-by-verse study of the book of Ephesians. There are so many passages in Scripture that are just so theo-centric, that are so Christo-centric, that just take us beyond ourselves and bring us into the realm of who God is and the worship of which he is worthy and you just bow before the utter majesty of the truth that Scripture reveals to us. This passage here today is one of those passages, Ephesians 3, verses 8 through 10. Let me read it to set it in your mind as we begin here this morning. The Apostle Paul says,

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.

This is one of those passages that for those of us and for a church like ours that is committed to verse-by-verse exposition, we get to enjoy the glories of it. We get to enter into this and love the wonder of what it displays. Other places which simply want to focus on day-to-day life and the felt needs of their audience would never go to a passage like this because it is so much putting us aside and putting God on display. This passage puts God on display in a magnificent, magnificent way.

Last week as we looked at this passage, we looked at these verses last week from a preliminary perspective, you might say. We looked at these passages from what they say about the created order and Paul is discussing his ministry to Gentiles and talking about how he is an ambassador and an apostle to Gentiles and as such, he has a great audience that is hearing what he has to say and observing what he has to say. We won't bother to review all that we said last time but it humbled Paul to be a part of it. He said, "I have this message to Gentiles that extends to all of the earth and not only that," he says, "the angelic realm itself observes what happens and wants to enter into the truth of what is said and what happens through the church puts the manifold wisdom of God on display before angels themselves." And what God does through the church, what God does through the apostolic message in saving sinners and reconciling them to himself and to each other has a testimony and has repercussions even in the spirit world which we cannot see. Paul was an ambassador of Christ and Paul was an ambassador of Christ to a great audience, you might say.

Well, here today, we're going to see a different perspective on it and we're going to see that Paul was an ambassador for a great God and an ambassador has, in a sense, 2 sides

that he is working for: he's an ambassador, he's a representative for the one who sent him and he's an ambassador to the audience that receives him and to the country or the place to whom he represents the one who sends him so you can view it from 2 different perspectives. That's what we have going on in this particular passage. Last week and it's kind of woven together like strands of DNA, just tightly wound together, we took the opportunity to kind of separate it so that we could look at these things separately. Part of the reason that I wanted to handle the passage that way was so that we could have a clear focus, if only for 40 or 50 minutes, on what Paul says about the greatness of God in these theologically rich verses that are before us.

You see in this passage as you walk through it, just how great and how marvelous and how unspeakably, incalculably magnificent our God and our Christ is. We want to separate this out. We want to leave behind our earthly problems, perhaps that we were thinking about when we came in here today. We want to leave behind what faces us today and in the week to come. We want to set all of that aside and with a clarity of mind and with a receptivity of spirit say, "God, put yourself on display to us in this coming hour as we go through this passage." And as we do that, we're going to see God lifted high through his own word and we're just going to wonder and worship in response.

What can we see, what can we say about how Paul was an ambassador for a great God? Well, first of all, if you're taking notes here's your first point for this morning, Paul was an ambassador who spoke about: 1. The great wealth of Christ. The great wealth of Christ. Paul was an ambassador preaching the great wonder and the great worth of Jesus Christ and as we have gone through over the past few months the first 2 1/2 chapters now of the book of Ephesians, we have seen him unfolding untold riches about the greatness of salvation. By the way, let me just call a time out. Just kind of pull off to the side and park here at the side and say something that needs to be said. True Christian preaching, true Bible preaching, a true church that truly belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ is preaching far more and is preaching a totally different message than simply exhorting people to be better human beings in this life. True Bible preaching is in a whole different realm. It's a whole different category than simply ethical exhortations and telling people what they should or should not do in their lives. True Bible preaching is putting God on display. It is telling you that your moral reformation is not sufficient, that you cannot save yourself, that you are not a good person and you cannot make yourself better by your own human effort. It is a whole different realm of thought and while there may be people who want us to preach on social or political issues as a church, we don't care about that. We realize that that is earthbound and it is not why God has sent us, it is not what we are to do as a church. We have a whole different focus in what we do.

So that's why there is a qualitative difference in verse-by-verse Bible teaching. It puts God on display. It proclaims Christ to sinners. It calls men to repent rather than telling them simply to make incremental changes on a particular aspect of their lives. This is what you would expect if the Bible as a word, as a book that comes from a holy, omniscient, eternal God, it would be something that was distinctly different from anything you would hear in the fallen world and this passage helps us to see that. We're preaching so much more than how you can live a little bit better day-by-day. This is in a

whole different realm and you can see this by the way that Paul talks about the great wealth of Christ.

Look at verse 8 with me again. You see, true biblical exposition is going to take your mind into realms that ultimately you cannot exhaust and you cannot fully understand. You can see that they are true, you can affirm them as true but you realize that it goes beyond that which you have the capacity to grasp completely and exhaustively in your own mind. And Paul makes this clear as he writes in verse 8, look at it with me. Ephesians 3:8, he says, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." One of the things that you should look for in Bible teaching whether you're looking for a church, maybe you're a visitor here and you're just passing through town, whether you're looking for other teachers to read or to follow, you look for somebody who gives you a sense of transcendence about the greatness of God and the greatness of Christ that goes beyond your earthly needs and takes you into realms of thought that you would never achieve on your own.

That's the kind of thing that Paul is speaking about here in verse 8 when he says, "I have the privilege of preaching to Gentiles," look at it with me there, put your finger on the text, "the unfathomable riches of Christ." That word "unfathomable" is what we want to focus on here for just a moment. It has the idea that this is a subject, the greatness of Christ, the work of Christ, the intrinsic wonder of his being is something that cannot be tracked out. You cannot follow all of the different paths and the different streams of thought that this would lead you into. Christ is too great. He is too infinite. He is too wonderful. His work is too eternal, if you can say it that way. It is too great and massive and wonderful for a human mind to go everywhere that it would take us. We just see little strands from time-to-time as we gather together but the whole unit of the greatness of Christ is infinite and unfathomable. You can't follow everywhere that it goes because you're not smart enough, your mind is not broad enough, you don't have enough time in this lifetime to trace it all out.

To say that the riches of Christ are unfathomable is to say that ultimately they are inscrutable, that they are incomprehensible in the sense that we can never know them all. When we gather together and we worship Christ and when we study his word and we put the great, eternal Son of God on display as we gather together in worship, we are putting in front of people, we are doing our best to display one who is high and lofty and above us and that we cannot wrap our minds fully around. Whether we want to contemplate as we did before as we were singing, how great is this love that our God should die for us, you can't plumb the depths of that. If you wanted to talk about, you know, how it is that Christ could be pre-existent, that he existed before time began, that he was the eternal Son of God when there was nothing else but the Triune God in existence? We can't go back there. We can't get our minds beyond the realm of time and contemplate what that must have been like. There are aspects of it that are just beyond us and when we contemplate going forward the eternal future glory of Christ and how it is that he will reign and what unfolding ages of perfect bliss and the Shekinah glory on full display, we can't exhaust that. You see, just in little snippets of biblical truth, you realize that we are

in a realm that exceeds us, that surpasses us in a way that we could never fully comprehend. Just one strand of it, let alone to put it all together in a unit, you know, we're just humbled before it and we just, as it were, put our heads down in worship and say, "Yes. O God, O Christ, you are so much greater than my mind can conceive." That's what it means, "the unfathomable riches of Christ." It denies exhaustive, it defies I should say, exhaustive human understanding.

This word "unfathomable" is a fairly rare term in Scripture but it is used often enough to give us a sense of grandeur and wonder of the greatness of God and of his Christ and I want to take you to a couple of places where it's used just so you would get a sense of what this word means. Turn back to the book of Job, if you would, Job 5. Just before the Psalms in your Bible. Job 5 and we're just looking at this to see the word that we're contemplating here, this adjective that describes the great riches of Christ that are unfathomable. They are unsearchable. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it uses this word to describe God's work in creation. Look at Job 5:8 where it says, "As for me, I would seek God, And I would place my cause before God," then it goes on and describes who this God is, "Who does great and unsearchable things," there is our word, "Wonders without number. He gives rain on the earth And sends water on the fields, So that He sets on high those who are lowly, And those who mourn are lifted to safety." Simply seeing here in this passage that the unsearchable greatness of God cannot be numbered. You can't count it out. He does things that go beyond human calculation, wonders without number. So great is his work in creation that you couldn't begin to list it. There isn't enough paper and pen, there aren't enough gigabytes of memory in a computer to tabulate them all, to list them all out. You could exhaust all of that and you would still have an infinite amount yet to go. That's how great the wonders of God are, they cannot be counted even in the most exponential use of human calculation. Wonders without number.

Look over at Job 9:10 where this is repeated. We'll start in verse 6, you have to start someplace. Verse 6 says that God, "shakes the earth out of its place, And its pillars tremble; He commands the sun not to shine, And sets a seal upon the stars; He alone stretches out the heavens And tramples down the waves of the sea; Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades, And the chambers of the south; Who does great things," here is our word, "unfathomable, And wondrous works without number." He stretches out constellations and holds them in orbit. He suspends the earth in space without pillars, without strings to support it and it stays there. Who can do this? Who can comprehend this? I've often thought that, obviously we take these things for granted and we don't dwell on them but picture this, picture this: God sustains the orbit of constellations with such precision that we can calculate it mathematically in terms of where a planet is going to be at any given time. We know where they are going to be and the only reason we can know that is that there is an unseen, uncreated God who is holding those things in their orbit, who set them there and has them in their orbit. Imagine a completely impossible scenario, to give you the sense of how great that is and how small and infinitesimal we are by comparison: suppose that somehow you were in the courtroom, the throne room of God knowing these things about the universe and God looked at you and said, "Now it's your responsibility to keep the orbits going." You would melt at the thought of that.

Now obviously that's never going to happen. God is not going to hand his sovereign rule of the universe over to any of us but I'm just trying to give us some kind of picture to realize how vast and how massive the wealth of the riches of Christ must be. What God does and what God has done from the beginning of time and which he carries out with such perfect measure, it does not exhaust his omnipotence to sustain the orbit of constellations and it's something that you couldn't do for a moment. You wouldn't know where to begin. "I can't do that," you would say. "I have no clue." By contrast, what I want you to see by contrast is that God has every clue. Not only does he know how to do it, he's been doing it for millennia and he'll continue to do it until he wraps it up at the end of time and brings in a new heavens and a new earth.

He's great by comparison. We are small and humbled before him in a way that shows by way of contrast how unfathomable and how unsearchable his ways are. And, beloved, you and I as Christians need to come back to that place again and again where we are overwhelmed by the grandeur and majesty of God and humble before him and our minds are set clear and set straight again and saying, "Yes Lord, you are the sovereign. You are the supreme. You are the one I worship. You are great, I am not. You can do this, I cannot." And only then can we begin to get our lives in the order which they should be in.

That's Old Testament. There is more. Turn to Romans 11. Turn to Romans 11 where Paul uses this same term to bring to a climax his comprehensive exposition of the doctrine of salvation in Romans 1-11. He opens up Romans talking about the sin of man. He goes into the doctrine of justification and sanctification. Shows how that applies to the nation of Israel in Romans 9 through 11. As he comes to the end of that great sweep of the doctrine of salvation, he comes to this verse in Romans 11:33. Justification, sanctification, glorification. What God has done for sinners. What God will yet do in the future. It's so rich and it's so broad and there is so much. Paul says in verse 33 at the end of all of that, he says, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." The weight of that glory, the wonder of that truth when we start to poke into it and it starts to bleed out into our collective consciousness, the weight of that brings silence to the room, doesn't it? It brings silence to your heart, doesn't it?

You realize why the prophet Habakkuk in chapter 2, verse 20 could say, "The LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him." Why silence? Because there just comes a point where human words need to stop and just out of reverence, out of worship for an unspeakable glory that is so much greater than us, we just realize it's time to put our hand over our mouth and just fall silent in recognition, in silent adoration, in quiet worship, recognizing how great and unfathomable it is and you start to realize that anything that I could say out of my own mind would only diminish it. If my mouth is going in an unthinking way, sometimes we just need to fall silent before the unfathomable riches of God and in Christ. And as we have studied Ephesians 1 through

3, remember that there is a whole context to this, that leading up to this Paul has been expounding on things in Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 2 and Ephesians 3 when he gets to this statement about the unfathomable riches of Christ.

Go back to Ephesians 3 with me just to get us back into our text this morning and have that in front of you. Even if we hadn't gone to other Scripture, gone into other aspects of God's revelation even in the created order, there would have been enough in Ephesians 1 and 2 for us to recognize that this goes beyond what human minds can understand. John Stott summarizes it in this way, "Something of the unsearchable riches that Paul has in mind," and I quote, he says, "they are riches freely available because of the cross. They include resurrection from the death of sin, victorious enthronement with Christ in the heavenlies, reconciliation with God, incorporation with Jewish believers in his new society, the end of hostility and the beginning of peace, access to the Father through Christ and by the Spirit, membership of his kingdom and household, being an integral part of his dwelling place among men and all this only a foretaste of yet more riches to come, namely the riches of the glory of the inheritance which God will give to his people on the last day."

The whole sweep of the glory of salvation displayed in the book of Ephesians, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Adopted into his family. Redeemed by the blood. Sealed by the Spirit. Raised from spiritual death. And identified with Christ in the heavenly places. Saved by grace. His workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. We are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. This is like having a massive, perfect diamond displayed and the ray of the light of God's glory hits that diamond and then the spectrum shatters into multiple colors and just displaying aspect after aspect after aspect of the glory of God in Christ and just dazzled by the wonder all that entails. Sparkling, majestic greatness and if the truth be told, our eyes have not seen and our ears have not yet heard the true beginning of the depths of the greatness of Christ in his goodness to us. We see enough to worship, to rejoice, to be confident in our salvation, to be confident of God's good purposes for us to know that he loves us, that he intends good for us, that he will always bless us and he will see us through faithfully to the end but we've only scratched the surface. With all of that, we've only scratched the surface. There are depths that we have not yet attained to. There are depths yet to be known that will be displayed only in the eternal halls of glory.

You can see why in other places that Paul says, "Who is adequate for these things?" Paul says, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach this" Paul says, "What kind of privilege has been given to me, a man who used to persecute the church to be able to make these things known and to a human and an angelic realm and to represent this Christ whom I once tried to persecute, whom I used to persecute?" He didn't just try, he did it. Who is adequate for this? In light of the residual, sinful nature of our lives, the ingratitude that we carry toward our God, the doubts that we sometimes raise in his direction. We question whether he's actually being good to us. We question whether he can actually be trusted or not. In light of the fact that at our best, our best is mingled with

sin and imperfection. By what right do we speak of these things? Certainly not the merit of our own lips. Not the merit of our own tongue is worthy to proclaim such great things.

That's why you see that Paul says, "This grace was given to me. Undeserved favor." And we stand in similar shoes to the Apostle Paul, we as Christians, to be on the receiving end of this great, majestic gift of salvation. To be on the receiving end of the mercy and grace of a holy God. To have for us laid up and stored up for us riches in heaven beyond compare, we don't deserve that. Angels long to look into it and we don't deserve it. Our minds can't comprehend the greatness of it and yet here we are in this position of grace that God has given to us and all of these riches of salvation bestowed on us through faith in Christ, won by his selfless love at the cross.

Do you see, here's another little tangent, look, you'll forgive me for not being particularly structured in this message, right? I mean, the text says that it is unfathomable so you've got to give the preacher a little bit of room to operate. To be in this position of grace that you and I share, it's so completely opposite of human merit. Do you see why we're approaching it from a different angle perhaps than we normally come to this point at, do you see why salvation could never be by human merit? That it must be by divine grace? It has to be by divine grace and not human merit. You could never earn this by works because it is too great a prize. There is no way that anyone could deserve this as though it were an entitlement in reward for a good life that they had lived. That is an utter impossibility and anyone who thinks that they can go to heaven and enter into this great wealth of Christ based on because their good somehow outweighs their bad is such a total folly. It could never be. No wonder Paul says that, "It is by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." If you have any kind of glimpse of the greatness of the wealth of Christ, you immediately forsake any sense of saying, "I deserve this." We don't. You don't. That's the glory of it. It's a gift. It's a grace. It's unmerited favor that is being given to unworthy sinners. Paul speaks of his apostleship and says, "To me, the very least of the saints, this grace has been given, this undeserved gift has been planted at my feet," as it were. Well, in no less measure, those of us who are Christians here today say in response, those of us who have truly been born again, we say, "Of course this is grace. Of course God is being good to me when I didn't deserve it because nobody, collective humanity, could never deserve such great wealth as this. You can't even calculate what all it means, how could you ever possibly earn that by being good to your fellow man?"

You see, as we start to explore the great wealth of Christ, do you see what it does, beloved? It drives out human pride like we were saying. It drives out any concept of human merit. It drives out any sense that I could have earned this on my own. If you are in Christ, rejoice. Be humbled by the fact that riches beyond understanding have been given to you and respond in joy and worship to this God. "Oh, the great wealth of the riches of Christ. How I honor him. How I know that it was not through anything that I did to be in this position." As we contemplate the great wealth of Christ, it sanctifies us by helping us deny even more ourselves, deny any sense of our own goodness and purifying our hearts for a vertical focus that says, "That great unfathomable wealth is the sole object of my earthly affections."

Paul was an ambassador for a great God of unfathomable riches but there is more. Point 2: he speaks of the great work of God. The great work of God. He says that he is bringing to light something that God has done, something that God has revealed. Look at verse 9 with me, the great wealth of Christ, now the great work of God. Verse 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." Not only and Paul is speaking about here the act of making known in his time, in his day there in the first century, declaring that which God had planned before the beginning of time that he had kept hidden until the time was pleasing to him to make it known. All men are lost in the darkness of sin and ignorance. This was especially true for Gentiles in the first century. And by preaching the Gospel to them, Paul was shining spiritual light into their darkness. He was bringing to light that which would save them from sin, that which would bring them out of darkness. He was making known things which had never before in the course of human history been known, even by the highest Old Testament prophets. Paul says, "What I am preaching when I preach the unfathomable riches of Christ," and in the more slightly expanded context, the fact that Gentiles would be equal heirs with Jews in the body of Christ, that particular point, Paul says, "as I am doing this, as I am explaining this, as I am expounded it, as I am writing about it," he says in verse 9, "I'm bringing to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things."

These things were hidden in God in the spiritual realm that he had not made known. What Paul was speaking about were things that had not been understood, that had never been seen by human eyes or the human mind before. As he spoke about the incorporation on equal terms of Gentiles into the body of Christ, it was hidden in God who created all things and which for ages had been hidden. So Paul says, "I am bringing to light the administration of this mystery." Paul's Gospel ministry opened up to Gentiles the reality that they could be reconciled to God through faith in Christ on equal footing with the Jews and they could go directly to Christ and be reconciled to him without first becoming a Jew, without having to go to a Jewish Rabbi. The Jews had nothing to do with it. The Jews had nothing to do with the fact that you and I are now saved in the sense that we didn't have to check in at a synagogue first before we could be brought to Christ. Christ has made himself available directly to Gentiles and the Jews are not the gatekeepers any longer.

That wasn't made known in the Old Testament and so Paul says, "As I'm making this known, as I'm showing, as I am declaring now what God has made known now which he hadn't made known before, I am bringing to light. I am unveiling something that God had planned before the beginning of time but he had kept hidden until now." It's a great work. Think about it, think about what this means for the Gospel: God planned this before Genesis 1:1. He chose us before the beginning of time. He sees the end from the beginning. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and ending letters of the Greek alphabet. It is comprehensive, in other words. His knowledge, his plan was perfect and certain of its execution because he knew it all before it began and he has the power to execute it in time and he created all things. So there is this whole mass of the greatness of God bound up and it pleased God to say, "I am going to unfold this in stages. I'll reveal a

little bit in the early parts of time in the Scriptures. I'll unveil a little bit more later on. But now when it comes and Christ has appeared and is resurrected and ascended and the apostles begin their ministry, now I will make clear what all of this means. It's that when I promise to Abraham that through him all the nations would be blessed, what I ultimately had in mind is that I would bring Gentiles in on equal footing directly through Christ in a way that I only hinted at in general terms when I promised blessing to the nations through Abraham."

Now, think about it this way: who was it that suggested this idea to God? Who did he talk it over with? What Bible scholar did he go to and say, "Tell me how I could work out a really good plan, please." What I want you to understand, what I want you to see, what Paul is alluding to here is that God conceived of all of this great truth and planned this great outworking of salvation to undeserving sinners, he planned it all out by himself. He didn't have to go to a book like you and I do and pull a book down from a library shelf and open it up and say, "What does this mean?" He already knew. He didn't need to consult with an architect or a contractor about how he would build his church, he already knew. Nobody contributed to the knowledge of God. Nobody participated in the plan but him. He conceived of this. He executed it. He is carrying it out. He will perfect it all on his own wisdom and all on his own power. It was hidden in him where men could not get to it and where men could not contribute to it. We weren't on the front end of the process and as he's carrying it out, he's able to do it on his own.

This is a great work. Paul in his ministry was making known something of eternal weight that God had planned and now executed. The unfolding of the Gospel is a display of his great work. The marvel of this, for us to be able to talk about this as believing Christian people in a place like this, understand that on the macro level that's true, on a micro level, somehow God saw fit to include you and me in the process. This great unspeakable work, this great macro event that he would carry out through millennia of time, that Paul made known to the Gentiles, somehow in an unfathomable, unsearchable, incomprehensible, inscrutable way, God saw fit to include little yokels like you and me to be part of the manifestation of his eternal glory, that in time now his work through Christian people like us, including us, would be a testimony before the angelic realm of his wisdom. Paul says, "This grace was given to me that I could speak of a great work of God like that."

You know, where do you go? What do you say? You know, there is an aspect to this passage where you just realize you've kind of come to the end. You realize that you haven't begun to explain it and to exhaust it and yet you've come to the end humanly speaking of what you can do to explain it, you know, to magnify the glory of it. You just reach the outer limits of human inability to speak and to explain and to appreciate and understand and then you realize that you tiptoe up to the edge and you realize that there are vast realms yet to be known. You see, if there's anything that we should take away from a passage like this, is that we would be awestruck by how great the Gospel is, by how great Christ is, by how great the wonder and the knowledge and the power of God must be for him to plan this before time by himself, create a world and then execute it with perfect outworking. How great must God be to do that? How great must he be to conceive of such a thing. We are lost in wonder, awe and praise.

So when we say it's great, I realize that that word has been greatly devalued over time. "That's a great hamburger. Wasn't that a great game? Yeah, you look great." No, you see, when we say that this is all great, we mean that it's truly great. Unsearchably, unimaginably, incomprehensibly great! And we humble ourselves and bow before it and just add to the worship and realize that when we are worshiping this God, we are worshiping one who is infinitely higher, greater, more majestic than our minds can conceive and we step back and reflect on that and say, "Wow, I belong in that realm. What great grace has been given to me, an unworthy sinner."

So the great wealth of Christ, the great work of Christ, one more aspect of it: the great wisdom of God. The great wisdom of God. Paul says, "I preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ," verse 8, "I bring to light the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God that displays a great work of God." You see the ultimate purpose of all of this being pulled together in this purpose clause in verse 10, "so that." This grace has been given to me. I preach to Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ. I make known this ministry of the ages, "so that," here's the purpose. We looked at this last time, "so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church," notice that, notice the high and lofty purpose that God places on the church. The church is really the center of human history, not nations, because it's the eternal work that God does through the church that will echo throughout all of eternity. It's the work of the church, it's God's progress through the church that testifies to the angelic realm, not what happens in sports, entertainment or politics. All that stuff is irrelevant, beloved. It's ultimately irrelevant to the purposes of God in terms of what he's actually aiming to do. That which actually has the testimony is not that of kings and presidents, it's not that of the actors and actresses, it's not that of sports figures, what manifests the wisdom of God is that which is done through the church. Verse 10, "so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church," to that angelic realm that we spoke of last time. That's the purpose of it. All of this is designed to put the great wisdom of God on display so that he would be recognized and acknowledged and worshiped as the wonderful God that he is by us and by angels in heaven.

Now, watch what this means. Let's work out what this means as we wind this to a close. As Paul is making known the glories of Christ in the plan of God, he is putting the vast wisdom of God on display, the manifold wisdom of God it says. That word "manifold" is a word that means, that has the idea of multiple colors. A multicolored wisdom. It was used in other literature to describe flowers or crowns or embroidered cloth and so it was a word that was used to describe a beauty that had multiple aspects to it. So what does that mean? What is Paul saying here using that as an adjective about God's wisdom? He's saying that through the church, God is showing multiple aspects of his knowledge and wisdom. He planned all of these things without getting counsel from anyone or anything. Just think about it, these things, you know, and just realizing that God does these things through the church and his purpose is worked out through the church. Not just our local church, he's talking about the universal church, all true believers throughout the New Testament age. But think about what that means. You cannot find the things that we have been privileged to contemplate here today, you cannot find them in the media. You

cannot find them in Hollywood. You cannot find them anywhere in the world. The world does not offer this. The world does not make these things known. The world tries to cover it up and silence it. This is only made known through the true people of God. That's the only place where you find this so that, in part, that God alone gets the glory for it. It's foolishness to the world, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. The world views this all as nonsense, foolishness. Why pay attention to it? What Scripture says is that from God's perspective, the church, the people of God is where the action is. It's a complete reversal of any understanding that the man on the street has about what is significant.

So watch this, think about what this means. Here we are, a local manifestation of the universal church of God. Scripture says there are not many noble, not many wise. You and I, we must be, we are completely ordinary people. There is nothing distinguished about us. There is not going to be a cloud of paparazzi waiting to take our picture when we leave. There is no one calling us to interview us about the things of the world. We are not going to be in the headlines. We're completely ordinary and yet, and yet it's through ordinary people like us, saved by the grace of God through which God accomplishes his eternal purpose, that puts his great purpose and wisdom and love and mercy and grace on display. We are forgettable in the course of human time and yet in that completely overlooked, ordinary realm in which you and I live, God is displaying for all of time and to the angelic realm, an object lesson about his reconciling, wisdom and love.

Do you see what a lofty claim God has placed on the church? How lofty the purposes of God are through his people? This transcends us. It could never be about us. We're so ordinary. We're so plain. We are so without earthly influence and yet in people like us around the world in the true body of true believers, God accomplishes eternal purposes that redound to his glory and will so redound throughout the ages of time. He displays the riches of Christ to men and angels. He works out an eternal design which he alone established. In this great unfolding plan, he displays his wisdom and his grace ultimately perfecting a bride that he will give to his Son who will adore his Son throughout all of eternity. His was the glory. His was the plan. His was the power. His was the grace. And yet somehow in incomprehensible condescension he, as it were, lowered himself to us to bring us in. You and I are a part of all of that. We're a stone in the great spiritual temple of God. We have a place without which by God's design the work would be incomplete.

Beloved, that is more magnificent than you and I can conceive. What God does in the realm of the church has eternal significance and everything else, Jesus said, "heaven and earth will pass away but my word will not pass away." This turns our view of the world and the church upside down. It doesn't matter that the world doesn't notice us. It doesn't matter that there are no media reports. That's utterly irrelevant because do you know what? Do you know what? The things that captivate the attention of the world, I'm just using these illustratively, the politics, the sports, Hollywood, all that junk, do you know what? Angels aren't paying a bit of attention to it. What they want to see, what the spirit world wants to see is what's happening in the church.

So as we grow in our understanding of God's purpose for his church universal, we start to see what a privilege it is to be a part of a church local and what should start to well up in

us is a spontaneous desire to share in the commitment, to share in the work of what God does through his people. We want to be here. We want to be a part of it. I don't want to be left out of that action. And there are some things that you just have to say, how can I say it? This makes it so that, let's put it this way: this makes it so that you see how impossible it is to just sit on the fence of indifference toward the people of God, the true church of God. You are either in or you're not but to just be indifferent, to dabble in it is to declare that you don't get it, that you don't understand it because if this is where God is displaying his work, this is where...God doing his work in the universal church, you want to be in the local manifestation of that. The people of God want to be a part of the work of God and if you understand that the work of God is taking place in the church of God, then ergo, you find yourself there with God's people participating in, sharing in the life of that local body that God gives to you. And we are faithful to the church not for what we get out of it but because that's where God is working out his eternal purpose, in the church where his word is being proclaimed, where Christ is being proclaimed to sinners, where the people of God love and support each other. As Christians, we are drawn to that like a magnet because that's where God is doing his work. You can't be a true Christian and indifferent to the church. Let's just leave it at that.

And having said all of that, let me bring it to a close by saying this: it is such a joy, it is so wonderful to be together in life with people like you who see these things, who value them and devote your life in commitment to them. Beloved, what we're doing is not in vain whether anyone on earth sees or not. So let us press on to know our unknowable God and to serve him and to love the people of God in this realm that he has given us and further the eternal purposes which he established before time began as long as he gives us breath.

Let's pray together.

Father, we praise you for your great wisdom. We praise you for the wealth of Christ. We praise you for your great work that ordinary people like us could share in something of eternal significance. Thank you, Lord. Help us to understand still more. And Father, I would just pray for those who are on the outside looking in, that maybe something like this exposes to them their own separation from you. If so, Father, may they come fleeing, running to Christ in order to be reconciled to you through the great infinite merit of Christ and to be brought into the family of God. We honor you with our silence, now we honor you with our songs. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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