

# **“Where angels go to school? The Importance of Ministry”**

**The Mystery of the Church Part 5 Eph.3:8b-13 Tape 224a 1-4-2004**

## **Excerpt 1:**

**Ephesians 3:10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

God said to those great rulers, “Watch this – I’m going to show you My wisdom...” And then He spent several thousand years setting the stage... And then, finally, He unveils this great demonstration of His infinite wisdom and it’s...you. He opens the curtain, and there you are, standing there, right now, on the stage. God says, “See, there’s my wisdom!” And the Holy Spirit is whispering from behind you, “*You’re on. Do something!*”

## **Excerpt 2:**

Rev.5:13 is the verse where absolutely every last thing in creation worships God with exuberant praise. And how is God going to bring that about? He’s got one plan. It’s all going to happen...through the Church. That’s why you see Jesus making statements like “Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven.” What God is doing on earth He is doing through the Church. If you want to be around what God is doing, be around what the Church is doing. If you want to be involved what God is doing, be involved in what the Church is doing. If you want to be close to God and close to Christ, be close to His Church. If you wish you could see God and touch God and experience the emotions of love for God, and feel His love for you... - all that takes place in the Church.

## **Excerpt 3:**

The value you place on something determines the amount you will be willing to suffer for that thing.

## **What’s so great about ministry?**

### **It Dispenses the Riches of Christ**

**8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery,**

### **It Displays the Wisdom of God**

**which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.**

### **It Decorates the Church with Glory**

**13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.**

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## Introduction: The Importance of the Church

The church of Jesus Christ is the most important institution in the world...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. 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.

Most of us live our lives with far too little awareness of the staggering realities around us. Most of us go through day after day and seldom feel the impact of the magnitude of what we are caught up in by belonging to the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both the Creator and the Ruler of the universe. And we don't take enough time to meditate on how our jobs, our home life, our leisure, our church involvement -- how each of these fits into the cosmic significance of the church. And consequently our lives often lack the flavor of eternity and the aroma of something ultimate.

We're not like Jesus, who was just a walking announcement of eternity with every word out of His mouth and every decision He made. If we walked around with an adequate understanding of the truth of today's text, that's what our lives would be like. Our culture despises the Church -- not so much through persecution as much as through disregard.

The Church is a fine place for people to go to carry out their traditions and express their religious opinions. We are allowed to do that. But they want us playing no role whatsoever in anything that they think really matters. If the media want expert counsel on spiritual things they will get a psychologist or a scientist or a politician or a movie actor before they will have a Bible believing pastor on their show. Before making big decisions they concern themselves with the opinions of the UN, allied countries, various world leaders...

The newspapers will print as gospel truth any information that comes to them from any organization with a fax machine and some letterhead... Anyone who claims to be an expert is an expert. They listen to the NEA, the NRA, the ACLU, the NARP, the NAACP... But the only thing they want from us is separation. Their cardinal doctrine and first commandment is "Thou shalt maintain the strict separation of the Church from anything of any importance."

In Lafayette, the city government thinks so little of the Church that they don't want any church to exist in any building that could otherwise generate tax revenue. Louisville is even worse. What a contrast between the way God views the Church and the way the world views the church.

Jesus said **what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God** (Lk.16:15).

Jesus promised that the gates of Hades will not prevail against the Church. That's a striking statement, because the gates of Hades *will* prevail against everything else. The gates of Hades (or the gates of the grave) is a figure of speech that means "to die." Someday the gates of Hades will catch up to the United States of America. Eventually the grave will swallow up every group, every organization, every institution... - Even marriage doesn't survive into the next life. The gates of death will prevail against every institution but one, the Church. And that's why Paul was beside himself with joy over his role in that organization.

I would like to talk to you this morning about what it means to serve in ministry in the Church. I've told you many times that you don't do a ministry just so you can "get involved" or help out like you might volunteer at your kid's school to do your fair share of work. Ministry in the church is not just some little job we give you to make you feel like you are important. I want to show you from this text three reasons why serving in ministry in the Church should be way up there on your priority list as a life goal. You should struggle and strive and labor and push to get into ministry in the Church, because ministry in the Church does three things.

The first is in v.8.

## 1. Dispenses the Riches of Christ

**8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ**

When you are involved in a ministry in the Church, you are involved in dispensing the riches of Christ. And the riches of Christ are none other than the treasury of the knowledge of God. They are the truth about God applied favorably to you. There are two parts to that. First, the riches of God are doctrines – truths about God. Attributes of God

Ro.2:4 **the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience**

Ro.9:23 **the riches of his glory**

Ro.11:33 **the riches of his wisdom and knowledge**

Eph. 1:7 **the riches of his grace**

All the truth about the attributes of God is the first part of the riches.

Col.2:2

**My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,**

Secondly, the riches of Christ are all those truths about God applied favorably to you. In other words, the riches are blessings from God.

Ro.11:12

(Speaking of Israel) **if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!**

That's talking about salvation.

Eph.1:18

**the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints**

Eph. 2:7

**the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.**

Eph.3:16 **I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power**

Php.4:19

**my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**

The best summary of all of what the riches of Christ are is in Col.1:27 **To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

## Grace

As we have seen, the term **grace**, in this context, refers to a ministry – the task God gives you in life in His Church. In ch.4 we find that every one of us has been given some grace in the Church – some calling, or ministry with

which we serve the body of Christ. In Paul's case, his grace was **to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ**. This verse is very dear to my heart, because God has given me that same grace. And I have to say, it's never more obvious that your calling is a **grace** (and undeserved gift from God) than when you are a pastor. I look at the sin in my heart, my laziness, my unfaithfulness, my wrong attitudes, my considerable mental limitations, my lack of reading skill, and people skills... I see the areas where I lack love, lack discernment, lack wisdom. I look at all those weaknesses and failings and then I stand up here on Sunday and realize, "*I am serving as a mouthpiece for God!*" The Holy Spirit is using what's coming out of my mouth to build His Church and accomplish His eternal purposes! On a constant basis, through this ministry, the lost are getting saved, marriages are being healed, people are overcoming various sins, and the Church is being equipped for the tasks to which they are called... And this incalculable treasure is being dispensed from this inadequate, leaky, bent, piece of junk clay pot! What grace!

## Riches

I know exactly how Paul feels when he chooses the word **riches** to describe the Gospel. Being a preacher is like being a miner in a diamond mine. There are a few diamonds right up on the surface. But if you just dig a little bit, then you start to really find the riches. Then you dig down to the next level of the mine, and you get into 10 times the number. And at the next level there's 100 times as many. And sooner or later you have to stop digging and just start gathering, because it's Friday and you have to hand some of those diamonds out on Sunday. That's one great thing about expository preaching – you don't ever have to worry about running out of material.

The word **unsearchable** comes from the root word "to track." It refers to something that cannot be tracked back to its source or an area that is trackless (impossible to fully explore). It's unsearchable not in the sense that we can't search it or examine it or learn about it at all. It's unsearchable in that no matter how much searching we do, a human intellect could never fully understand it. The riches are limitless. There is no bottom.

You would think with the thousands and thousands who have taught Eph.3 over the last 2000 years, by now there would be a standard sermon. You would think by this time, after 10,000 weeks, all the scholars and pastors and teachers would have been able to compile a book that has all the truths and applications of Eph.3:9, 10. They haven't. On my desk right now I have about 30 commentaries on Ephesians. And every one of those has a bibliography of all the resources they used – sometimes well over 100. And I'll read all those 30 commentaries who have drawn from hundreds of others... - and then I'll listen to someone preach on that text, and he has a completely new insight that wasn't in any of them. That gives you an idea of the depth of the riches in Scripture. And that's just Eph.3:10. Multiply that times the 31,000 verses in the Bible and you start to get an idea of what **unsearchable** means.

It's like I'm standing at the foot of the Rocky Mountains and God gives me a pickup truck and says, "Here you go. I want you to deliver these mountains to the people. You've got about 50 years." I load up the truck the best I can each week, but if you think you're getting the whole mountain, you haven't seen the Rockies. So that's the churches job: to proclaim the riches of Christ.

When I preach, my job is not to browbeat you and tell you about your spiritual poverty and inadequacy. My job is to tell you how rich you are. Negative preaching is also important. Preaching should convict you of the sin in your life, and break your heart over that. But that's only for the purpose of pointing you to the riches that can be yours if you repent.

The Gospel only *enriches* life. But don't interpret that in a shallow, materialistic way. It's not that it gives you earthly wealth. The gospel only enriches your life, but it does so by impoverishing you of what the world considers wealth... The Gospel enriches you by stripping away all the earthly garbage that we mistake for riches. And once all that is cleared out, there is room for us to receive true riches.

Paul goes on in v.9. Not only is his task to proclaim the riches, but also...

**9 to make plain to everyone<sup>1</sup> the administration of this mystery,**

**make plain** means “to enlighten”

The task was not only to proclaim it outwardly, but to see to it that it is understood inwardly. He proclaims the riches, and enlightens them as to the outworking and **administration of the mystery**.

**Administration** refers to God’s management and outworking of His plan. He doesn’t just proclaim a lot of theological generalities. He explains the details of how it all works out in real life. This is the task of the Church – to dispense the riches of Christ. And every member has a role in it. For some it’s like Paul – we are to proclaim and teach it. For others your role is more indirect.

You support that proclamation and teaching by...

- providing the finances
- watching kids in the nursery so parents can come listen to the proclamation
- serving in some capacity that enhances fellowship, so the fruits of the proclamation and teaching can be passed along between individuals through the spiritual gifts, etc.

Whatever your role is – anything you do that supports the ministry of the church in any way means that you are part of the distribution of the very riches of Christ! Do you realize that’s what you are doing when you serve in ministry? “But can’t I distribute the riches of Christ in other ways – apart from the Church?” Sure. And you should. You should seek to do that in every part of your life. But the institution through which the Lord has promised success in that work is the Church. The Church is where there is the supernatural blessing of God through the use of your spiritual gifts. It’s in the Body of Christ where the functioning as a part of the Body has its effect. You should be committed to ministry in the Church because in doing so you are distributing the riches of Christ. Secondly, you should do whatever it takes to get into ministry in the Church because of what is in v.10.

## **2. It Displays the Wisdom of God (vv.9b-10)**

But to appreciate the truth of v.10, we need to make sure we don’t skip over the end of v.9.

**9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.**

There is a reason Paul throws in that remark about God having created all things. Paul says, “The reason this has been a mystery is because it has been hidden. And the one who hid it and who is now revealing it is none other than the Creator.” Paul wants to remind you that the hider and revealer of the mystery is also the Creator – the one who made this world in the first place. The reason that’s important is because whoever made this world made it for a purpose. Nobody creates something for no reason. - At least nobody who is sane. And the more sane you are, the greater the reasons you have for what you create. The remark about God being Creator reminds us that everything exists for a reason and is moving toward the fulfillment of its purpose.

In ancient near east religions the creator god was kind of a bumbler who created a mess. And then other gods stepped in and fixed things up the best they could. And that thinking persisted in the pagan world of Jesus’ day. The Gnostics believed that one god was the creator, and a different god was the redeemer. In both cases redemption is necessary because there was something wrong with the creation. People look at the evil in the world and assume it must have been created that way. And that kind of thinking remains prevalent even in our day. Most people in our world (both in the church and in the secular world) are theistic evolutionists. They believe God

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<sup>1</sup> **Everyone** everyone without distinction (rather than everyone without exception)

created the world by means of evolution. That is, God created the world by means of a long process of suffering, decay, disease, hostility, pain and death. In that model, death doesn't come through sin. It comes from God, and it's the very means God uses to create.

It's the natural tendency of fallen man to look around at all the evil in the world, and say, "This world was created bad, and needs fixing." The people in Moses' time believed that, the people in Jesus' time believed that, and the people of our time believe that. But here we are reminded that the God who is Redeemer is also the Creator. God created everything good, and despite man's rebellion and the introduction and proliferation of evil not by God but by the creation itself...

In spite of that, God remains undaunted in the carrying out of His initial plan that He had when He created the world in the first place. He's not trying to fix up a poorly created world. He's not laboring to repair a messed up plan. He is taking the next step in an eternal plan authored by Him, begun by Him and which has never missed a beat. As we see down in v.11. It's all **according to his eternal purpose**

God's plan is not flopping and vacillating with the events of history like everyone else's plans are. His are eternal and unchanging.

So what is that big plan? One major component of it was that He wanted to reveal his wisdom to the great rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. So He created the earth to serve as a stage on which He would one day unveil the grand display of His wisdom through... - guess what institution.

**10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms**

This is the final stage of the revelatory process. First it was revealed to Paul. Then Paul revealed it to the Church. And then the Church reveals it to the heavenly rulers.

## Who are these Rulers?

Now, let's talk about who these rulers are. Ten times these terms (**rulers and authorities**) appear together in this order. Four times just in Ephesians. When it's just these two terms by themselves they seem to be a generic way of referring to all the various leaders at all levels.<sup>2</sup> In the spiritual world, there are a lot of other beings out there. Most people believe there are only two kinds of beings – humans and angels. That's not true.

Scripture speaks of many other kinds of spiritual beings that are not angels. All angels are messengers sent to earth to serve men (Heb.1:14). But there are also other beings, such as seraphs, cherubs, archangels, and who knows how many others. And there must be a lot of them, judging from how many rulers there are over them. Scripture speaks of a whole bunch of varying ranks of rulers who govern the spiritual beings.

We did a fuller study of them back in ch.1. I'm not going to go back over all that now. You can listen to that on tape 188a if you like. For now I'll just remind you: One group is known as the rulers, and they distinguished from angels in Ro.8:38.

Another level is the group know as the authorities. They are distinguished from angels in 1 Pe.3:22. A third group is a category of beings often mentioned in the OT known as the powers. These are the beings that Israel was repeatedly forbidden to worship in the OT (2 Ki.17:16, 21:3, 5, 23:4ff) And in Eph.6:12 all three groups are mentioned together, and we find that these beings have declared war on us.

**For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**

In Col.1:16 we read of two other groups known as the dominions and the thrones. So as you can see there is a complex hierarchy of positions of authority in the spirit world just like in the human world. And just as good and evil people coexist here on earth, so good and evil spiritual rulers coexist in the heavenly realms. So even the highest spiritual rulers in the heavenlies have to participate in God's unfolding of His plan in the two ages – this present age and the age to come. God said to those great rulers, "Watch this – I'm going to show you My wisdom..." And then He spent several thousand years setting the stage... And then, finally, He unveils this great demonstration of His infinite wisdom and it's...you. He opens the curtain, and there you are, standing there, right now, on the stage. God says, "See, there's my wisdom!" And the Holy Spirit is whispering from behind you, "You're on. Do something!"

In chapter 4 we will talk about how to determine which ministry is best, and how to do it. But for now, this is pretty good advice: "Do something!" You're on display. The Cosmos is watching. And they are watching to see the wisdom of God. They've seen the Universe burst into being at the Creation; they heard all the angels shout for joy... They've watched the covenants unfold, the creation of a people of God's own... They watched the thousands of blood-soaked sacrifices. They've seen the Scriptures. They saw the incarnation, the life of Jesus, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension... They saw the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and the Church was begun... And now they have seen the New Testament, and watched the Church grow for 2000 years, but they haven't tuned out yet. They are still watching. They want to see what happens next. And that's where you come in. Their watching, not because they are bored and there's nothing on TV. They are watching to see the **manifold wisdom of God.**

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Lk.12:11 "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say  
It's not that they had an official office called "authority." It's just a generic way of referring to whomever is in charge.

When the heavenly beings study the wisdom of God, graduate school for them is Church history. Does that blow your mind? If you can't think of any other reason to be faithful and zealous and passionate, and pure in your ministry in the Church, how about that?

The rulers and authorities in the heavenlies saw...

- the power of God in the Creation
- the righteousness of God at Mt. Sinai
- the love of God at Calvary

But to see the manifold wisdom of God they had to wait to see you in action. **Manifold** literally means "multicolored" The root word was used to describe Joseph's coat of many colors in the Greek OT. It could be translated "multifaceted" or "many-sided" I like O'Brien's term: "Many-splendored" They are watching you to learn about the multi-colored, many-splendored wisdom of God. How richly diversified is God's wisdom? How many shades and hues and facets are there to the wisdom of God? Well, as we have seen it's unsearchable. Almost every major doctrine in the Gospel, if you pursue it far enough, ends in a paradox that defies human comprehension. We are commanded to choose Christ, and when we do so, and make a real choice out of our own free will, we discover that He first chose us. We are commanded to labor and strive and put forth arduous effort to follow Christ. And when we do so we learn that it is not that striving that generates our godliness, but it is Christ in us who is the ultimate source.

The free gift of salvation costs us everything we have, and yet if we think we can purchase it, we are disqualified from having it. He who seeks to save his life will lose it, but he who loses his life will save it. The greatest among us is the servant of all. Everything about the way God has chosen to save us is a display of wisdom that is so far above the wisest of men that it could have no other source but God.

A small child can understand and accept the Gospel, but its doctrines confound the most brilliant scholars. The Lord's tool for bringing life was death. His path to honor was dishonor. Redemption was accomplished through man's sin of crucifying Jesus. Blessing came through the curse, and the greatest power through the greatest weakness.

Grace abounds in proportion to sin. In the human mind mercy and justice seem to be polar opposites that are not compatible. But in the Church it is revealed that not only are God's justice and His mercy compatible... - but God carried out His greatest act of mercy and saving love through His most brutal execution of justice... And He achieved His most perfect execution of justice by means of His most tender act of mercy. Divine wisdom. The invisible God was manifested in human flesh, the Creator entering His own creation. And He became our Redeemer by being both the purchaser and the price.

Ro.11:33-36

**Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!**

**34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord?**

**Or who has been his counselor?" ...To him be the glory forever!**

All the attention of the Cosmos – all of God's creation is dialed in on the Church.

Ro.8:19, 21

**For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God (that's us)... because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay**

All the great purposes of the Creator in the unfolding of human history are brought to fruition through the Church. If you are apathetic about the Church, wake up! You belong to a society that will never cease, to the apple of God's eye, to the eternal and beautiful church of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The cosmic mission of the church is to display



before the hosts of heaven the manifold wisdom of God. "You are the light of the world." But not merely that. You are the light of the cosmos, with the spectacular mission of revealing the wisdom of God to supernatural beings.

## How is it Revealed?

How is this wisdom revealed in the Church? Just by these beings reading the NT? No doubt they do that. But beyond that, God's wisdom is revealed to them in the fact that among those rulers and authorities, the evil ones are being defeated by the Church. Whether you realize it or not, if you are part of the Church, all eyes of the universe are on you.

Have you ever been in a situation where everyone was watching you and you didn't know it? Well, you're in that situation right now. We are on stage before a vast, cosmic audience. They are watching and learning. Much like Satan learned about God's worthiness to be trusted through Job. 1 Pe.1:12 says the angels are stooping down to look in to the outworking of the Gospel in you. In I Cor.11:10 we see that there are certain procedures we do in our corporate worship that we do **because of the angels**. They are all watching. And what they see teaches them the manifold wisdom of God.

In this context, a major part of what they learn comes from the unity of Jews and Gentiles. If the division between Jews and Gentiles was wide from the human perspective, from the perspective of these beings it must have been exponentially wider. It wasn't like a feud between the Hatfield's and McCoy's or something. It was a theological division generated by the very Law of God. The theological division was authored and commanded by God Himself. And the animosity and hatred and hostility was, very likely, the handiwork of many of these rulers and authorities. They knew the vast chasm that separated Jew and Gentile more than anyone, and so the unity in the Church is a deafening statement to them about the unsearchable wisdom of God.

It's kind of interesting that in our day, it's appropriate to take this tem in a very literal way. God's wisdom, which is shown in the unity of the Church, really is multi-colored. In those days people didn't really divide up according to skin color. It was more along cultural and religious lines. But in our world people are mostly hung up about skin color. We have become so superficial that even when someone speaks the same language, was born in the same country, has the same citizenship, and grew up in the same culture... If he has a different skin color we divide up and separate ourselves. That's how superficial our culture has become. It's not theological divisions that alienate us. It's not even cultural things or language differences. It's skin(!)

And so in our culture, the variety of skin colors in the church is a display of the multi-colored wisdom of God. So if you are black or white or Asian or Latin or African or European or Mexican or Sri-Lankan, or Eskimo, or whatever... That has zero relevance when it comes to how we accept you. I don't care if you're from Mars. You come in here and you love the Lord? We love you. I found out last week we even have a Kansas City Chiefs fan in this church!

So what are the implications for you? How are we, the church, to make this wisdom known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places? Just by being the Church. By being what Christ died to make us. By being what the Church is designed to be. The wisdom of a plan is seen by the fact that it works. We show the wisdom of God by showing in the church that it is working.

The death of Christ was not in vain:

- it *has* reconciled us to God,
- it *has* broken down the wall of hostility between men,
- it has produced one new body and
- it has given us the hope of his immeasurable kindness forever.

We show the wisdom of God to the cosmic powers by living this way, by being the church Christ died to create. And when we fail to live in hope and to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace we send this signal through the galaxies: *God's purpose is failing; he was not wise, he was foolish.* What's at stake is not merely being the light of the world but the light of the cosmos. The church is the cosmic showcase of God's mercy and if we fail to live as joyful beneficiaries of his mercy and fail to maintain the unity of the Spirit, we bring a cosmic reproach upon the wisdom of God. But while we do that in various instances, ultimately that is not what the Church will do. Rather it will be what God designed it to be...

### **11 according to his eternal purpose**

In the Church all the strands of human history come together to reveal the ultimate purpose of the creation.

### **which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

He accomplished it in that He did all that is required for it, and set it in motion. Now there is astounding unity already, and it's just a matter of time before we get to Rev.5:13. Rev.5:13 is not only my favorite verse in the Bible, but I think I can say objectively that it's simply the best verse in the Bible. I really believe it must be God's favorite verse. It's the final goal of everything. It's the absolute climax of everything God has done in redemptive history. Rev.5:13 is the verse where absolutely every last thing in creation worships God with exuberant praise.

And how is God going to bring that about? He's got one plan. It's all going to happen...through the Church. That's why you see Jesus making statements like "Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven." What God is doing on earth He is doing through the Church. If you want to be around what God is doing, be around what the Church is doing. If you want to be involved what God is doing, be involved in what the Church is doing. If you want to be close to God and close to Christ, be close to His Church. If you wish you could see God and touch God and experience the emotions of love for God, and feel His love for you... - all that takes place in the Church. The Church has been started now, and it's growing. And it's going to keep growing and keep growing and God's plan will keep unfolding until we reach Rev.5:13.

### **in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

### **Lit. in Christ Jesus the Lord of us.**

This is the most exalted title for Jesus Christ. **Jesus** is His name, identifying Him as the actually historical human figure, Jesus. **Christ** is his title. It means Messiah. **Lord** refers to His office and exalted status above all things as the owner of all people and all things. And the **our** or **of us** shows His relationship to us.

### **12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.<sup>3</sup>**

That's just a restatement of the mystery. Approaching God period was unheard of in OT times. But now, only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can approach Him boldly and speak freely.

Why bother with ministry in the Church? Because in doing so you are dispensing the riches of Christ, and displaying the wisdom of God in the heavenlies. And if you're still not convinced it's important, let me show you one more reason. You should insist on being in some kind of ministry in the Church at all times not only because in doing so you are dispensing the riches of Christ and displaying the wisdom of God, but also because of what is in v.13.

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<sup>3</sup> Lit. **in whom we have boldness and confident access through the faith of Christ.**

**Boldness** (NIV **Freedom**) is a word that usually refers to being able to speak freely. It's a fearlessness in the presence of someone of higher rank. **Confidence** is more related to access. So the idea is that we have freedom of speech and freedom of access in approaching God.

### 3. It Decorates the Church with Glory

In v.13 Paul finally finishes what he started to say way back in v.1. He mentioned that he is a prisoner. He has been unjustly imprisoned for years now. We don't think much of that, because we used to thinking of Paul as being in prison. But just imagine being innocent thrown in prison for years for a crime you didn't commit. And no matter how much you prayed and cried out to God, He wouldn't deliver you from prison. For most of us that would be pretty discouraging. But not only is Paul not discouraged. He wants to make sure that those who love him aren't discouraged.

#### **13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you**

The word **discouraged** refers to a loss of motivation in moving toward some goal. Our word for that is depression. We are always so tempted to interpret hardship as a "closed door" or as some kind of signal from God that we are on the wrong path. And we tend to be so easily disheartened and discouraged. We face a little opposition, or someone we love faces a little opposition, and we just lose our motivation and our will to keep fighting on. He tells them not to get depressed or discouraged over his suffering, and look at his reason for why:

#### **my sufferings...which are your glory.**

To suffer, or to have a loved one suffer for the sake of the Church, is a high honor. Paul's suffering was nothing to get discouraged about. It was something to get excited about, because it was the very means by which the Church was adorned with glory.

The third reason why you should break your back to find a way to get into a ministry in the Church is because not only does it...

- Dispense the riches of Christ
- Display the wisdom of God

But it also decorates the Church with glory. When you serve in ministry and function as a part of the Body of Christ – whichever body part you are, it's going to result in suffering. For some of us the suffering is very minor. In some cases the only real suffering is when you have to get up out of bed an hour earlier in order to have time to carry out your ministry. - Or give up some extra hours you could be doing something else. - Or putting up with ungrateful people who don't appreciate what you are doing for them. For others it means being beaten and imprisoned and tortured and killed. But wherever you are on that spectrum, don't lose heart. That suffering is resulting in the glorification of the Bride of Christ. Because of your suffering she is reaching that point of becoming spotless and pure – washed, **a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless** as we read in ch.5.

It's through the suffering of the Church that God's purposes are accomplished. And any suffering that results from your faith is this kind of suffering. If you serve faithfully in ministry and people in the church misunderstand you and mistreat you, that is suffering for Christ. If your ministry requires spending money on resources for that ministry rather than some things you really wanted to buy for yourself, that is suffering for Christ. If it requires a certain amount of time and effort in training, and you could have spent that time and effort on recreation and leisure, that is suffering for Christ. If it means saying no to your flesh, no to your desires, no to your plans, and dying to self... That is suffering for Christ. Any pain you suffer as a result of your commitment to Christ is suffering for Christ, and all that does is decorate the Church with glory and make us more beautiful to our Bridegroom. You will have to suffer something.

Recently Alan Stanton announced that the Lord has called him into vocational pastoral ministry. Alan is established in his career, has a wonderful home in Rock Creek, his three kids are flourishing in all the various

things they are doing. Now he's going to quit his job and go to seminary. Why? He's not doing that because he just really wants to get rid of his house, pull his kids out of everything they are doing, move to Missouri, where they don't know anyone and get into debt... - just so he can enjoy sitting in classes all day and staying up late every night memorizing rules of Hebrew grammar and endless Greek verb endings. He's doing it because when God gives you a grace and calls you to do it, you just do it. And whatever it costs, it costs. God has appointed him to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ and serve as a mouthpiece for God – what's he going to do? Say no?

For most of us it's not so dramatic. For most of us most of the time it's more along the lines of just having to wake up a little earlier or endure some difficult people – rather than going away to prison for years like Paul. But not even unjust imprisonment bothered him, because he knew it was for the glory of the Church. The value you place on something determines the amount you will be willing to suffer for that thing.

Paul would pay any price to proclaim the Gospel, because for him the Gospel was:

- nothing but spiritual riches as far as the eye can see,
- the God-exalted display of His manifold wisdom put into action, and
- the glorification of the beautiful, breathtaking Bride of Christ.

Benediction: 2 Tim 2:15 **Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.**

Review Questions:

1. What are some reasons from this text why ministry in the Church is so important?
2. How does the Church teach the wisdom of God to the rulers?