




THE COMMUNITY

The Gospel Isn't Simply For Us | BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ephesians 3:1-13

In this section of Scripture, the Apostle Paul is explaining the special mission to which God called him, in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Often Paul writes with several purposes in mind. While he explains this amazing new turn in God's plan to include both Jew and Gentile in one body, the church, he has an eye on a current division in the Ephesian church that is taking place along Jewish and Gentile lines. In highlighting God's salvation plan to join Jew and Gentile in Christ, and therefore, the church, Paul is also underscoring the need for both groups within the church to get along.

Ephesians 3:1-2

The study highlights one point in this section, and that is Paul's attitude toward the ministry. He sees this ministry as God's "grace" to him. In Ephesians 3:8, Paul again refers to this ministry as God's "grace" to him, and states how unworthy he feels for the task.

The great missionary, David Livingstone, models this attitude in a speech that he gave at Cambridge in 1857. He said:

For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, ... peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view, and with it such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege.

God wants us to minister, like Paul and David Livingstone, with a sense of gratitude for the opportunity, and our own unworthiness so that we'd rely on God for the completion of such a great task.

Ephesians 3:3-6

Paul here discusses that God's plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles was a mystery. By this he means it was not revealed in the Old Testament. What was revealed in the Old Testament is that somehow God would use Israel as a means to bring salvation to the Gentiles. How that would happen was not disclosed. In Genesis 12:1-3, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, which was fulfilled in Israel.

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What's the Big Idea?

Paul was willing to persevere and sacrifice so the gentiles could know Christ. The compelling reason as to why is found in the phrase, "God's grace that was given to me for you." Though Paul was "less than the least of God's people," he was the chosen recipient of God's grace. He understood that we are "blessed in order to be a blessing." We are not merely the objects of God's grace but the channels of it to others. That is why he was engaged in taking the gospel to the Gentiles, and why Jews and Gentiles should seek to love and serve one another in the body of Christ.

What's the Problem?

We have the same tendencies that Israel did. They failed to fulfill the mandate of Genesis 12:1-3 to bless the world with the knowledge of God. We need the grace of God to help us overcome our selfishness, prejudice, and aversion to suffer so that we can be conduits of the gospel to a lost world.

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He further stated that all of the nations would be blessed through Israel. They were blessed to be a blessing. So were we.

As we saw in last week's study, however, Israel's heart went bad and they failed in their mission to bless the nations. When Jesus came Israel rejected Him, was herself judged for her unbelief, and the gospel message was sent forth to all the nations.

God's salvation plan took an unexpected turn, a mystery that was not revealed in the Old Testament. Now God's plan for salvation is through the church – which is a new “body” made up of believing Jews, as well as believers from gentile nations. The church is a multi-ethnic kingdom whose only qualification for membership is faith in Christ.

Again, Paul's other motivation for mentioning all of this, is to spur the Jewish and Gentile believers in the Ephesian church to function together lovingly as one unified body. Paul anticipated that showing them God's amazing plan in putting Jew together with Gentile, would help.

It is interesting to note that God chose Paul, a devout Jew, who had actually, in his zeal, persecuted Christians to be the bearer of this message to the Gentiles. Paul's fanatical Judaism made him, once converted, a perfect ambassador: one who understood, better than anyone, the Jewish law and Jewish prejudice against the Gentiles.

Ephesians 3:8-12

The main purpose of this section is to demonstrate how the church reflects the wisdom of God in fulfilling His purposes. In Ephesians 1:9-10, Paul says that God's great plan has always been to bring “all things on earth” under the kingdom of His Son. With the less than impressive spiritual life of the tiny nation of Israel, God's plans for global worship must have seemed to the world, as well as the heavenly host, as floundering. Worse still, when Jesus the messiah did come, Israel actually rejected her savior.

Then, in a stunning turn of events, the Lord was resurrected and the gospel was propelled out to the nations, bringing worship to the true God from points all over the globe. This was a mystery, something that no one foresaw, which displays the manifold wisdom of God.

Ephesians 3:13

As this section of Scripture began with Paul stating he was a prisoner for Christ (verse 3:1), it closes with Paul returning once again to the subject of his suffering as an apostle. Suffering that among other things, included imprisonment.

Jesus says in John 12:24, “that unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” Obviously, the major referent for the Lord's words was Himself. But, it was clear to Paul that these words had implications for all those who were willing to be apostles (sent ones) reaching new groups of people with the gospel. Suffering and sacrifice serve as fertilizer for the new life that springs up wherever the gospel goes. Paul gladly embraced this part of his missionary task, and found joy in participating in the sufferings of Christ.

All those who have a heart to be used as “sent ones” of the gospel must see it as an enormous privilege, for which they are completely unworthy. They must also embrace the hardship that accompanies the mission “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering for the Name” (Acts 5:41).

What's Our Response?

You want to see the members of your Bible study choose to be ambassadors to the world around them.

To do this, help them:

1. Internalize the concept that they have been blessed to be a blessing.
2. Identify a group of people to whom they can be ambassadors for Christ.
3. Reckon with the personal sacrifices this may require.
4. Discuss what initial steps they could take in order to act as apostles to this group. They might begin by praying for them, or by pairing up with another Christian in the study to put up posters for a Bible study in that area, or plan a specific outreach targeted at a peeling to this group. Brainstorm ideas and see who might be interested in following through.

Ephesians 3:1-13

The Questions

Launch Question: Tell the group about a time when you either gave or received a huge gift. We want the group to begin processing the joy that comes when someone gives or receives a great gift.

Q: As you read through this passage, what jumps out as significant to you?

A: Allow your group to discuss. Keep an open ear to what they saw in the passage.

Q: In verses 1, 7, & 8 Paul says that his ministry is a result of God's grace. Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16 as well. Why did Jesus save Paul and appoint him as an ambassador?

A: Paul gives the answer clearly in 1 Tim 1:16. Although he was "a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent," one reason God had mercy on him was so that Jesus could display his perfect patience through Paul. That means God saved Paul so he could show the world, through Paul, his wonderful grace and mercy. He is blessed to be a blessing.

Q: It is easy to see reaching out to others as an obligation, but Paul sees it as a great privilege. What are some of the benefits you've experienced knowing Christ that would make stepping into the spiritual journey of others more joyful?

A: You want your group to stop for a second and begin to adopt the mindset like Paul had in Eph 3:8. If students can begin to see themselves as recipients of a great gift that can change the life of others, they will grow in their eagerness to step into the spiritual journeys of others.

Q: God's plan has always been for his people to receive his blessing and share it with the world around them. Have your group read Gen 12:1-3. This promise to Abram was first to Jews only, but they never did fulfill their roll to make God famous in the nations. Paul tells us in Eph 3:6 that the same promise is now for all people through the gospel. Now anyone who comes to know God is "blessed to be a blessing." When do you most feel like being Christ's ambassador? When are you least excited?

A: We want students to see that there are things in their life that take away their fire to make Christ famous. Often, sin, self-focus, lack of a devotional life, stress/anxiety gnaw away their desire to be Christ's ambassador. Also, we want them to see that there are things they CAN do to stoke their fire to be an ambassador. Fellowship, a healthy devotional life, practice of spiritual breathing, etc. all build that fire.

Q: As you reflect on your background – interests, athletics, major, and even the lifestyle from which God rescued you – to what group on campus do you feel God might want you to be an ambassador? What are some steps you might take? What might it cost you?

A: Here's the place we want students to be specific. Help them think through the different groups they are a part of. Help them think of how to gently broach the topic of spiritual things with people. Also, help them be aware that there is risk involved. Help them see it is worth it!

Memory Verse:

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...

Ephesians 3:8