

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EVFree
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Light of the Universe
Ephesians 3:1-13

There is mystery in all of life. We human beings are fascinated by mystery. We enjoy books or movies that have suspense and mystery and surprises. A book that you know from chapter one exactly where it is going, unless it is an educational book, we find boring, predictable. There is something about us that causes us to enjoy the hidden, the secret that needs to be explored and revealed. I love exploring new places. I remember huckleberry picking as a kid up in the mountains and after I had picked my gallon of berries I went off in the hills to explore and “mountain climb” discovered an old mine shaft. I couldn’t explore all the way in because I didn’t have a flashlight, but I thought about it all year, dreaming of what I might find, skeletons and treasures. I went back next season with a couple of friends and lanterns to explore and it dead ended only a 50 fifty feet in. but what a hope of an adventure and continued wonder of why one would spend all that time digging a mine shaft up there. What were they after?

There are mysteries of life. Some things we know and may be very common to it, but there is always some element to it we don’t fully understand. We don’t fully understand love and joy and sadness even though they are essential parts of who we are. A couple of my boys have been very interested in the atoms and how they work. We checked out 5 books from the library on atoms. I tried to explain how we are all made up of atoms, but atoms are mostly empty space comprised of a nucleus, or center, of neutrons and protons with a swirl of electrons speeding around them. Einstein comes along with a formula to describe the incredible amount of energy packed into an atom based on the amount of mass it has $energy = mass \times the \text{ speed of light squared}$. That

unleashes a whole realm of nuclear fission to try and harness that energy for good, but it gets perverted into damage and destruction. Inside the atom physicists looked to the quantum theory to explain some of the mysteries but that doesn't fully do it. In fact if you try to measure the subatomic particles you can't because they simply won't stay put. Every quantum bit has the potential to be here and there , now and then so words like uncertainty, indeterminism, randomness all show up in the theories of quantum mechanics. Brian Greene popularized the super string theory to try and explain God's order of creation as vibrating rubber band like particles. If one could look into a microscope, you would have to look past the molecules, past the atoms, past the electrons, neutrons and protons, past the Muons, Gluons, Leptons and Quarks to get to the vibrating strings. No scientist for 1000 of years dreamed they were there, but they were always there. It seems the further in they dig the more mysteries and questions. The further in they get the more they discover and the less things make sense in fitting in our common knowledge of physics. The more we know the more we realize we don't know. That's a mystery.

We have been studying a great mystery that was never known in the Old Testament. Certainly they knew that God was going to send a Messiah a deliverer who would save people from their sins. The Old Testament prophets told us that all the peoples of the earth would be saved via the Jews, but the mystery, they never saw coming is the creation of the church. That Jesus would come and break down the walls that divided the Gentiles and Jews from relationship and create something entirely new, a church body. We take that as obvious Hohum of course. But they didn't see this one coming. The church that brought the Jews and Gentiles together in one new body was a great mystery revealed.

This mystery was revealed to Paul and to other apostles and prophets, but Paul writing to the Ephesians explained how this truth of

the church for gentiles and Jews burned into his heart. He so valued the incredible wisdom and treasure of the united church that he was willing to suffer whatever to the point of death to get the message out. In Ephesians 3 v.1 Paul begins to write a prayer for them. For this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles....” Then he gets so caught up in the beauty of this mystery revealed that he spends the next 12 verses talking about it as if in one breath. In fact, in the Greek language verses 2 – 12 are all one sentence. I am struck as I read this passage how dedicated Paul is to the gospel message and how valuable he views it. I’m convicted because I think we have taken God’s plan and the gospel for granted. We have failed to value it and because we have valued it so little it has no impact in our lives and people around us. I think we have forgotten that there are those who are watching, those who are witnesses, watching the church, watching us whether we like that or not. Paul reminds us that the church body is a witness not only to be light to the world but even a light to the universe. Now that is truly an amazing thought.

Read with me Ephesians 3:1-13 (READ) V.1 “For this reason...”what reason? He has just explained that Jesus has broken down the walls of hostility that existed between Jew and Gentile and granted equal access and is growing together into a whole new temple, living and moving a righteous body of believers. This is a mystery that no one saw coming in the Old Testament, but Paul is dedicated to getting that message out of unity and reconciliation. For Jesus in our peace who has broken down every wall.

Paul so believes in the importance of getting out this message that he was willing to go to prison for it. In fact that is where he is when he wrote this letter. In prison awaiting a trial before Caesar in Rome. Interesting that he didn’t write, Paul, the prisoner of Caesar in Rome. No. He writes Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus. He saw that if it was not Nero who was ultimately in control of His destiny, Jesus was. The length of

His prison time was not determined by Caesar, but it was set by Jesus. Paul knew that Jesus was the one that set the events of history. Caesar was not the one in control...even though it looked like it....even though it appeared that the gospel was being shut up...it wasn't. Jesus is in control.

Why was Paul in prison? Remember how he got arrested in the first place. Back in our study in Acts, Paul was speaking the to the Jews in Jerusalem. They listened quietly while he told them all about his testimony and how God had stopped and changed him, but when he mentioned the Gentiles, that they could be received by God on an equal basis. Then they went ballistic and would have beaten him to death if guards had not stepped in to rescue him. So in a very real sense Paul was in prison for preaching the message of Jews and Gentiles coming together in unity in one body in Christ. He wanted them to know that He was a prisoner for their sake, for their benefit.

If you read Paul's prayer without the long sentence interlude vs 2-13. It begins Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...(down to v.13)I therefore ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory." He wrote this part of Ephesians because the Gentile believers in Ephesus were troubled by his suffering. It wasn't so much that they felt sorry for him, but Paul's imprisonment threatened their own faith. That the great apostle should be held behind the bars of Nero looking like an impotent victim seriously challenged their faith. Paul write telling them. "No, don't be troubled about me. You have got it all wrong. You don't understand what suffering is all about. Suffering for Christ isn't a mark of defeat, it's the way of glory, of victory. Paul had discovered that the way of the cross was actually the way of the crown. Paul wrote to assure them that everything was alright and God was still in control despite the appearance of weakness.

In fact, Paul never got over his own weakness. V.8 “To me, the very least of all saints this grace was given.” There seems to be a progression of Paul’s view of himself as he grows older and matures. In one of his earlier letters to the Corinthians (I Cor 15:9) he wrote, “I am the least of all apostles. So he is the last...but in the list 13 apostles. Then here in Ephesians 3:8 he writes that he is the least of all the saints. He even invents his own word here that comes through in the Greek language literally , “I am less then the least of all the saints.” Paulus in Latin means “little”. Tradition tells us that Paul was a little man in stature. Paul here invents a word that indicates he is litter then the littlest. That has Paul putting his rank even lower. Then in one of the last books he wrote Timothy he wrote “I am the chief of all sinners. (I Tim 1:15). Paul wasn’t trying to pull out the false humility card to gain sympathy. He truly saw more and more how weak he was in light of Christ’s strength. As one becomes more aware of ones own sinfulness and weakness and more and more aware of God’s total perfection and holiness, the closer to the light reveals the glaring sin and weakness and inability. If you are being increasingly aware of your own sinfulness, inability and weakness.....then be encouraged, for you must be drawing closer to the light, you must be maturing and God must be doing His work of masterpiece in your life. Even in all the incredible success, amazing giftedness and talent of Paul, he never got over his own personal weakness and Jesus incredible manifold strength and riches.

Paul knew he was weak and unable, but he knew that there was one far greater on his side, far greater then Nero. And if suffering in weakness was part of God’s plan, then so be it. That would be a point of timeless truth. View hardship through God’s eyes. Paul could see God’s purpose working even in the midst of suffering. Paul had preached to the church of Ephesus many times, but prison restricted him from that face presence and verbal communication with them. But it did slow Paul down enough to write down those God-inspired thoughts...and much to

our benefits as well. I am so glad that Paul was captured to sit in one place long enough to write down the truth that God had poured into him. It makes me think of Dietrich Boenhoeffer and Alexander Solzinetzen and other brothers in Christ whose faith was forged in a crucible of imprisonment and they were able to write it down for us to read and be blessed by.

God uses suffering for His greater glory. Join with his plan. View suffering through God's eyes. Paul believed that even the worst of circumstances could be used by the Lord for His glory. No suffering can overcome and overwhelm us if we remember that we can enter His presence and ask Him for help. V.12 reminds us of the access we have and invites us to come into his presence with boldness and confidence through faith in Him. Thank God for your weakness and anticipate how God will use that for His glory.

As a point of application; perhaps God has given you some great insights into the Word. Have you written them down so that others can be blessed? Perhaps you should not wait for something as drastic as imprisonment to write an encouraging, spiritual note to a friend.

Not only do I see Paul view hardship through God's eyes, I see Paul value the treasure that has been entrusted to him. V.2 Paul sees the grace that not only brings salvation from sin, but in v.2 it is grace that brings the gift of mystery. The gospel and unifying of people together. Grace never brings privilege without responsibility. Paul saw himself as a steward or manger of God's mystery. He so valued the treasure of the mystery of the gospel of grace it compelled him to act and speak and move even at the risk of suffering. For the believer identification with the cross is not optional and it is always costly. V. 8 t me to preach to the gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ and to bring the mystery to light.

One did not have to look far into the life of Paul to discover what it was he valued. The value we place on something will determine the

hardship and suffering we are willing to endure for is. We are willing to expend an enormous amount of energy and money to provide for someone or something we value a great deal. Paul treasured the gospel. He valued highly the message of restoration of people between sinner and a holy God and between cultures of conflict and people fighting with each other especially in the church.

Application. Do you want to have impact? Do you want to make a difference? We all will make an impact on those around us to a certain degree good or bad whether we like it or not. Parents you will have an impact on your children for good or bad whether you like it or not. Teens you will have an impact on your friends, good or bad. Teachers you will have an impact on your students. You will have an impact on your fellow believers here at church. Whether you realize it or not. Our degree of impact will be based on the extent of our commitment to what we value. Commitment not to what we “say” we value, but by what we truly value. How do you discover what it is you truly value? Just take a look at what consumes thoughts, your money, your time. What do you think a lot about? That is what you value. After paying for your basic needs, what do you spend your money on? What do you spend your time doing after work? After sleep? That is what you value. We will all make an impact and the impact will be based on the extent of our commitment to what we value. So we had best be very careful to choose what we value. Paul decided. His commitment level was high. His impact was huge. Ask yourself...do I truly treasure the gospel and value the mystery that puts a premium on the unity of relationship in the church? Paul did and so should we. Commitment to the right values produces righteous impact.

Pauls' goal was to let the entire world know about Gods restoration plan. He wanted to be a good steward of the gospel entrusted to him. Paul saw the church loving each other in unity as a witness to the world. Jesus challenged his followers in Matt 5 to be the light to the world. Here Paul is saying that not only is the church to be a light to the world, we

are also to be a witness to the universe, a showcase as it were to the unseen but very real spiritual world as to the wisdom of God.

Lets pick it up in v.8 “To me....grace was given...to preach to the gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ and to bring to light that which was hidden in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” Wow! The church is to make known, or showcase, the manifold or multicolored, multifaceted like a bright diamond, reveal the wisdom of God. We are to do that by bringing the mystery to light. i.e. by living out the truth of the mystery. We are to showcase the wisdom of God, by living out His plan to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. Now that comes as a surprise. We are putting on a drama and the audience is the spiritual unseen beings. Who are these beings? Well Ephesians 6:12 talks about “the forces of the rulers against the power and forces of darkness in the heavenly places.” Our unity in the church is actually a witness to the unseen spiritual beings. Both evil and righteous angels. This isn't the only place in the Bible that talks about this concept. I Peter 1:10-12 says, “even angels long to look into these things (literally “stoop over to look” to understand the teachings and actions of God's people. Then there is that difficult to understand line in I Corinthians 11 that says “because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.” We have a huge audience observing our actions...more then we ever imagined. Not only are people in our neighborhoods watching, the spiritual beings around us are watching. Just as God has not revealed his entire plan to those in the Old Testament, he has not revealed his plan to the angels and they are watching to see God's wisdom in the plan that is unfolding here on earth.

How are we as a church supposed to make the wisdom of God known to the principalities and rulers in heavenly places? I don't think that they need to know about the salvation plan of sending Christ to die for our sins. They know well that is what God is about in salvation and

they oppose him fiercely. What we as a church need to do is to show the wisdom of God plan, by showing that it works. We need to live out the love and unity and show that the church works. We need to show that the work Christ did not the cross was worthwhile and not a waste of his time. That Jesus did restore us to relationship with God and broke down the walls of hostility that kept us apart and that we truly were created into one new body... the church of Jesus. We showcase the wisdom of God for the entire universe, by living out the church as God designed.

Too often it doesn't seem like the church is putting on a very good demonstration of the wisdom of God. We know division, not unity. We know arrogance and not humility. We know spiritual elitism and not brokenness. We know bitterness and not forgiveness. We know judgementalism and not love. We let personalities and egos and culture and even worship to divide when Jesus has paid dearly for us to be one in the spirit.

Too often we sound like an orchestra that is trying to tune up. If you have ever been to a symphony, there is a discordant noise that happens just a few minutes before the conductor takes his stand where the individual instruments are trying to tune up on their own. Its sounds very out of sorts, but without that noise, the music of composition would never be as beautiful as it could be. So to the church is a diverse body, yet we are meant to produce beautiful sound of the gospel message of grace and love and unity. Too often we are out of tune with each other. Why? Because we have never taken the time to restore our relationship with each other. We are not at peace. We allow divisive attitudes and bitterness to flow on in our lives unchecked.

Do you need to tune up some of your relationships? Is there someone here in this church you need to sit down and talk with either to ask for forgiveness or being honest with how he or she has hurt you? We have a much higher goal and motivation for unity. God's purpose puts a huge premium on unity. Because of that what will be your goal when you

approach this person? Knowing that your goal is not vindication or pain but your goal is restoration, how will you talk to this person? what then will be the tone in your voice? What will you say?

We are to be a light not only to the world, but a light to the universe. This mornings passage present even a new motivation for building unity in our church body. We as the church are to be about showcasing the wisdom of God, but if we fail to live as joy filled, mercy giving benefactor of His grace. If we fail to maintain the unity of the spirit in our church then we bring reproach upon the wisdom of God before the unseen spirit being world in heavenly places. May those spiritual beings who will be watching us this week to see if we the church live as if God is wise and not foolish. Folks lets show them by the way we live in unity that God's plan for mysterious unity in the church is incredibly wise. May the angels this week look down at Yacolt and say, "Wow! Did you see those two women restore and forgive each other. Now that was a restoration that looked impossible. Did you see how that husband and wife stopped blaming each other and began to see themselves not as right but in need of forgiveness and filled with God's grace. Did you see how that teenage boy restored his broken relationship with his parents and has come in humility asking for forgiveness. Did you see how those two friends who haven't spoken in months are now united. May Gods wisdom be magnified as our church grows unified. Let me quote just the first couple verses of chapter 4 "I entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling which you have been called with al humility and gentleness with patience showing forbearance to one another in love being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.