

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Grace Unleashed

PART

11

TITLE

We Are Members Of One Body

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 3:1-13



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Hello Providence, it's great to see you. It's great to worship with you. I hope you had a great Thanksgiving. I'm just hadn't really planned to say this but after three services I'm just so grateful for all of our worship team at Providence to lead and stuff. Thank you guys. Thank you Emily for singing. It's was once again fantastic. I am so grateful for you. I'm grateful for your faith, I'm grateful for your encouragement, I'm grateful for your prayers. On a week where we give thanks, it's so important for us to look past our blessings and to see the one who gave all these things. It's one thing to recognize generosity and blessing that we receive, it's a whole different thing to know who gave it.

I hope that you know if you're a guest here with us, what the Bible says is that every good gift comes from God the Father. That everything that we have enjoyed, that all of the protection and all of the freedoms and all of the peace and the relationships and the people in our life, that these are gifts that God gave to us because he loves us. I just want you to know Providence I'm super grateful for you and if you're a guest with us this morning, welcome. We're really glad that you have joined us. We love the Bible and we love to work through books of the Bible verse by verse.

I want to ask you if you brought one, if you would turn with me to the third chapter of Ephesians. We're up to chapter 3, verses 1 through 13. If you don't have a Bible, that's fine. There's lots of Bibles near you in those chairs. There at the bottom there's some racks and you can find one there. I believe in that Bible, these 13 verses are on page 977. If you don't have one at home, please take that Bible home as a gift. We would love for you to have your own copy.

This passage that is written by Paul was written in affliction. He's sitting in prison. The fact is, that even as we go through week like Thanksgiving, there's a lot of us right now that are overwhelmed by the stress, the pain, the suffering, the loss of the year and perhaps loneliness in our life. I'm praying that God uses this text to teach us how God's good purposes is even in our pain can magnify His grace and to bring good to us. But for that to take place and for us to believe it, we need His help. So I want to ask you if you would, let's bow and let's pray together.

Father in Heaven, thank you that you love us. Thank you that you care for us and thank you that you have given us your word. All the blessings in our life, we know that they come from you, we're grateful. Even the blessings to us that come through people we know that they're just vehicles from your hand or your generosity and so we're thankful for them but we're also thankful for you. We pray God now that you would open up our eyes and help to see amazing things within your word. God I pray that you would help us to believe. Would you give us the courage to apply this to our life?

For those who right now are demoralized because of suffering, maybe tempted and prone to lose heart, I pray God that whether they're in this room, some other venue, perhaps even at home listening, perhaps just the suffering of their life even keeps them at home. I pray God that you would use this passage to encourage each one of us with the reality of suffering in the world and in our life. And so we look to you our teacher and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.

About 14 years ago, actually 14 and a half years ago our son, his name is Seth. Seth was born with a big tumor on his back and it went up into his spinal cord and he was going to have surgery. He was two months old. Admittedly, we were anxious. We felt afflicted. We were nervous about what was taking place. We were nervous if he was going to walk. We were nervous if certainly, if he would live. There was a lot of things that were threatening in his life at that time. We felt threatened. We felt afflicted in our life.

There was a friend of ours, here at Providence, who had a gift for us. They went over to house and they came and they gave a framed copy of a poem by a man named William Cooper. You need to understand something and that is that poetry really isn't my thing. I appreciate it and if you're into it, that's fantastic. But it's not necessarily me, it's not what I do, I don't write it, I don't read it. But for whatever reason, whether it that season in our life, this poem which really deals with his affirmation of faith in God and in God's purposes when he was going through a significant time of affliction in his own life. It just struck a chord. It hit and I want to read it to you. This is what it says.

It's says, "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides on the storm. Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill, He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work in vain: God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain."

Certainly, this came to us at a time when we were anxious but what was so comforting was the words came out of a pen that was held by a hand that was connected to a heart that for his entire life this man suffered true lifelong severe deep depression. So deep that he really despaired life itself many times and so many times darkness crept in and it crowded his motivation to get up. It crowded his zeal to help or to love or serve or to really do anything in his life as darkness tends to do. And yet, isn't it interesting that it was his certainty in God's good purposes that picked him up and moved his hand to write words that would fortify us over 230 years later.

Do you know who inspired William Copper? It was the apostle Paul. It was the guy who wrote Ephesians. You see, Paul was in prison. He didn't enjoy being in prison. It was a real affliction. He was chained to the ground. He was misunderstood. He was condemned. His crime was that he believed in Jesus and he sought to help other people to know who Jesus was. He was scarred from head to toe. He was cold in the winter. He was hot in summer. He was uncomfortable and yet Paul's certainty in God's good purposes, even in his life, led him to write a letter to these young Christians in Ephesus. A letter that would be preserved and that would fortify literally generations of believers now for over 2,000 years. This is what Paul says in Chapter 3.

He says, "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power."

"To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory."

What I want to show you in hopefully do is I want to move backwards through the text. I want to start at the end or almost the end and I want to move to the front. Why I want to do that is I want to start what he says is God's chief end. His primary eternal purpose. What is so deep, what's the deepest part of His heart? What is He trying to actually accomplish? And then we're going to eventually land the plane looking at God's purposes in our pain that He allows, sometimes even orchestrates as something that's going to contribute to His eternal chief end. His purpose in life.

Three things I want to show you. First is this, is that God desires to display His wisdom through the church. You notice in verse 10, it starts with the words so that. That's a purpose statement. What he's saying is this, is that for nine verses he's saying, this is what God is doing. This is what God is doing. And this is what God is doing. You see Paul had a lawyer's mind. He started with one thought that would build upon another thought, that would build and build and to finally make his point and this is exactly what he does here. He stacks up evidence of what God is doing in order to tell us what God is truly doing. What all these things are actually pointed at. And that is He wants to be known. Specifically he says, he says, "So that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might be made known." Let's make sure that we know what manifold means.

Manifold is two Greek words put together and what it means is this. Many diversified colors. Think of a color wheel with all the spectrum of color. Reds and yellows and blues and what he's saying is this, is that God deeply wants to be known. But He is invisible to us. We can't see Him with our eyes. And so He's like an artist and He takes up these colors, these paints, and what He does is He creates artistic expressions continuously in order to help people know who He is, what He's like, what He loves. And so He paints or He sculpts, He's using all these colors in order to help us know who He is and what He's accomplished. And if you really have eyes to see, you can see that God has dropped His fingerprints everywhere.

In fact, once you see His fingerprints, you can't unsee them. This week you've seen amazing things if you've really have looked. We've seen sunsets and sunrises. Some of us went to the mountains. Some of us went to farms. Some of us went to beaches. Some of us saw sand. Some of us saw amazing color. Some of us saw warmth. Some of us saw snow. We all looked in the face and we saw someone with eyeballs or hand or a brain. You actually take time to look and to think about the DNA or for all the systems of your body or how you're created in the image of God with the capacity to grow up, make sounds with your mouth that other people can understand that you can communicate with them. See all these things are fingerprints of God and once you see them you can't unsee them.

What Paul is saying here is this, he's saying that God has literally planted his fingerprints all over the world just like an artist. He's painted literally thousands, millions of paintings. Different things that would help our eyes to look at that and in looking in that we would see that God is that wise or God is that loving or He's that powerful or creative. But then this is what he says. He says, but if you want to see His masterpiece the one thing literally that's in the middle of art gallery that all the spotlights have been focused in so that all the lights focus on this one thing. If you want to see what He's after, if you want to see what He's building, if you want to see He loves, what He's thought about and indeed what it says here in verse 11, what is His eternal purposes? Meaning before we were here, what was God planning and what is He orchestrating to actually occur?

This is what he says, if you want to see the most colorful, vivid concentrated display of the colors of God's wisdom, you have to look at the church. Not a church building but the people of God. The people in the church who've been redeemed and rescued. You see, you look at this picture and this doesn't look like much of a church does it? And yet if you actually understand what's taking place here, that these individuals in Africa have literally walked miles to come under a tree, to gather together, to worship Jesus Christ together, you can actually see that this is more amazing than a sunset. It's more amazing than a mountain range. That this took more wisdom, more complexity and this is why.

That we've looked at, and in fact, if you look at verse 1, it say, "For this reason." In other words, he is saying okay, I've written two chapters to you, we've studied these chapters, this is what they are and this is what they say. In chapter 1, he came to us and he said, "This is what I really want you to know, that God has blessed of you all of the spiritual blessings, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." And then he finished up chapter 1 by saying this, that, "I'm praying that God would open up your eyes and your hearts so that you would really be able to know what those are and that you would be able to apply them and enjoy them in your life."

And then he gets to chapter 2 and he wants to explain to us how amazing it is that we're here. He says, "This is the reality of where we were at before Christ intervened in our life." He says, "We were all dead in the transgressions of our sin." He says that, "We were all following the prince of the power of the air, Satan, with his temptation. We were all in a prison of our passions, the appetites of our flesh and sin." He says, "We were all objects of His wrath." He says that, "We were on the other side of a wall of hostility between us and God," and he says, "Then we had built up walls of hostility between each other. Between races, between ethnicities, between genders, between friends, between moms and kids and husbands and wives and siblings and we had all of these walls. We were separated from God." This is why the church is such a dramatic picture of the wisdom of God.

He says that, "It's these people who've come together, that they have been made alive. That no longer the objects of God's wrath, they're now the objects of His kindness. They're the targets of His kindness. That they're now no longer slaves but they're now free to choose righteousness, to enjoy righteousness, to pursue purity. To pursue God. That we who were far from God have been brought near God and all the walls of hostility between us and God and us and each other, Jesus Christ came and He tore them all down." When people come together, I hope you can see this, that what you see in this room, there are believers in this room and the most amazing thing that's He's done is He has saved you. You are a sinful person and so am I and He's a holy God and yet He has made a way for us to be reconciled to Him and to each other. That is more amazing, that is more mysterious.

That takes more power and wisdom than God creating a mountain. God can say, "Let there be a mountain." And there's a mountain. But for us to actually be brought into a relationship with Him, it actually took such wisdom because it took the death of His own son. And so you and I we look at all kinds of amazing things in the world. His fingerprints are everywhere but I hope you see here is this, is that He wants you to be absolutely amazed and enthralled. That when you look at a church you can go, that, that's where all the spotlights in heaven are pointed. That is the most amazing display of His wisdom on this earth. A redeemed people who once didn't like each other, now love each other. Who once had nothing to do with God now are His sons and daughters.

It's a remarkable thing and what the Bible says here is this in verse 10, he actually says that all of this takes place and he wants it to be known not only on the earth, but he wants this to be known other places. In Philippians chapter 2 verse 10 says, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." What he's talking about there is of course, we get earth, above the earth is heaven, under the earth is hell. What he's saying here is this, is that the church becomes the trophy of Jesus Christ, not only to display His wisdom here on the earth but also in heaven and in hell.

You see most of us we watched a little bit of football maybe yesterday. And if you watch football, what you see in the stands is that oftentimes they're separated by colors. Fans wear different shades. What he's saying here is this, is that just as the football fans, they all look down on the team and they're cheering for different things, for different reasons. What he's saying is this, on one side of the stadium of life the church is right down here on the field and what he's saying here is that this was made to known to the rulers and authorities of the heavenly places and so in heaven what that means it's the angels, the angels literally, they look down upon the field, they see the church on the earth and they marvel in celebration that God has actually created saints out of sinners.

But then on the other side of the stadium you have the authorities and the rulers in hell under the earth. These are the demons and they look at the church on the playing field of earth and they look at the church and they convulse at the certainty of their eternal doom. In other words, God has literally planted the church to remind hell that it is lost. It's planted the church on the earth to remind all of heaven that He is victorious.

I realize that you got a lot of stuff going on in your life. I realize that we can spend our life in all kinds of different pursuits. But I want you to see is this. Is that the day is coming in your life when you are going to see with perfect vision that your life was intended to be lived in accordance with God's purposes. And what He says here is that His church, His people on the earth is His purpose because it's that people becomes the window through which people can magnify and worship Jesus Christ. This is true in Providence, let's love Christ's church and seek her good always. Always.

Verse 11 says, "This is according to the eternal purpose that God realized in Christ." You know what that means? It means that what you see right now, this is a local church, what you saw on that screen was another local church, is that when God created those churches, it says that before the foundation of the earth, that was His eternal purpose that was accomplished, it was fulfilled. It was realized in Jesus Christ. It's interesting, if you go to Seattle, there's a good chance that you'll see Mount Rainier, I say good chance because oftentimes it's hidden in the clouds. You can see in this picture, this is such a cool picture, you see the whole city of Seattle and then in background there you see Mount Rainier.

When we were there a few years ago there was no clouds. We saw the whole thing. You could see all the way up to the peak. It was just an absolute spectacular thing. It was the cool thing that God, like man's made his little three story building or his 50 story buildings and all of a sudden towering behind it and over it and everywhere there's this mountain. It just overwhelms everybody. But most days in Seattle you can't see it because there's simply too much fog, there's too many clouds.

And so it is with the church. The church was intended to be the most creative, colorful display of His wisdom but oftentimes it is hidden behind the clouds of our sin or our apathy. And so my encouragement to you and to us a body is let's share God's concern and care for His church. I want to encourage you to connect to her as a member. If this isn't your home church and you're visiting, we're really, really glad you're here. Wherever you call home, wherever your home is, I would encourage you to ask God help you identify a church and then pour your life into that body of faith. You see there's a lot of people that treat the church like a renter instead of an owner of a house. Isn't it true that when you own the house. You care a whole lot more about the storm that's coming? When you rent it you're like, well, it's not mine, whatever.

So it is with the church. There's a whole lot of people that are renters of the church. God would exhort us as people, He would say, "Go ahead and be what the church needs." I would encourage you run to her need. You see a need here at the church, run to it. If you came in today and nobody greeted you, I am really sorry. And next week you can be the solution to that problem. You can station yourself right out those doors and you can make sure nobody enters those doors without being hugged or looked at or greeted. Everyone of us can be what the church needs. I would encourage you to invest your life, your talents, your time, your treasures in a local body on the earth.

Why? Because God desires to display His wisdom to the church. Second thing I want you to see is that God desires to build His church through the gospel. The church has to be built with something. There has to be some material, something that's strong enough that can hold it up. What the Bible says here is that's the gospel. In verse 8 and 9 he says, "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given preach to the Gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things." And then he says, "So that."

And so we build buildings here with steel, if you looked over there as you drove in, you saw a frame of a building. You see a lot of steel out there and it's created with steel. Aren't you glad it's not made out of really big Saltines that are just waiting for a storm or a rain, it would just make the whole thing fall down. But the reality is that's actually not the church, we're the church. And the church has to be built with steel though. What the Bible is that the steel of the church, the structure that's strong enough to hold up our sinfulness, that's strong enough to hold our frustrations with each other. That's strong enough to unify us. There's only one kind of steel and that's the gospel. It's the gospel.

And yet isn't it terrifying to think how many churches today and how many people are sitting under sermons where the gospel is never mentioned. Where Jesus is hardly ever mentioned. Where the Bible is not even read. You see, the Bible and the gospel within the Bible, the message of the Bible, the good news, it literally is the framework. You see the masterpiece on earth, the church is built with a message. It says here that this message was a mystery. We see that in verses 2, 4, 6 and 9 that it's a mystery. Sometimes we think of the word mystery in our language and our culture and we either think of a riddle or we think of something spooky. And that's not what it means in the Bible. What it means in the Bible is that something that's so uninventable, it's unsearchable. That's he calls them the unsearchable riches of Christ.

People can search out answers to this mystery and yet they can never find answers to this mystery. Isn't it true that we as people, we literally have uncovered scores of wonders that have been designed by God and yet no one can uncover the mystery that matters more than all mysteries combined. Paul speaks about this in First Timothy 3:16 when he says, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness." This is the mystery. This is the big mystery. This is the one that matters more than anything else is how can we as sinful human beings who are separated from God and separated from each other, how can we be made Godly to go to heaven together?

How can that take place? Isn't it true that we've tried to uncover this mystery by inventing all kinds of religions and rules and philosophies through time but to no avail. We're constantly trying to invent stuff to get up the mountain. We cannot scale that mountain of righteousness. And so God revealed it to us. He uncovered the mystery and He did so by sending His son in the likeness of man. He took on flesh, He came down the mountain, He lived on the earth. He lived in perfection when it came to all things. When it came to honesty. When it came to purity. When it came to righteousness. When it came to love. And yet Jesus willingly went to a cross where he gave His life as a ransom for our lives. To pay the penalty of our sin. The Bible says He was put into a grave to prove that He was dead. He stayed there three days but on the third day He rose from the dead.

The Bible calls this the gospel and we love it here at Providence and we're not ashamed of this gospel and the reason is because it is, it is the only way for human beings, for people to be forgiven by God. To be brought to God. To be reconciled to God and to be united to each other. You see, when we become members of His body, when we trust Christ, sometimes we think of this relationship with Jesus Christ almost like God sets up this romantic table for two, like this picture here. We think, oh, what a lovely thing. I'm an introvert so this looks appealing to me. How wonderful is this? One person I can focus all my time and attention on this person. I can get to know them, it's not overwhelming, there's not masses and masses and masses of people. And yet, isn't it true that this is not the portrait you find anywhere in the scripture.

The portrait that you find is that when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, he brings us into a huge, big hall where we find a big family sitting at a big table with big piles of food. This is what heaven's like. This is what it's like. And there all suspicions will be overcome as we together sit before Christ. Now listen, we started, if you remember, that God wants to be known. And so He's created something on the earth to be known and that is the church. The church is built by the gospel. And what that means is that when we trust the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are added into His family which He calls the church.

And so my exhortation to you, if you've never trusted Christ today is that you would admit to Him that you're a sinner. That you would confess your sin to Him. That you would believe and confess your belief in Jesus Christ that His accomplishments on the cross and His resurrection, that you're resting in that and in that alone for the forgiveness of your sin. The Bible says that if you'll do that and confess in His Lord of your life that He will save you. He will forgive you. He will adopt you into His big, wonderful family. This is available to you today and we urge you, I urge you today, look to Jesus Christ and believe in Him for the forgiveness of your sins.

You say, "But what about pain?" That's the third point. The third point is this, is God desires to use our pain to spread the gospel. He desires to use our pain to spread the gospel. Now it's really important and I started where I started and this is why. If you do not understand that God has a chief desire to be known, and if you don't understand that God has created a people on the earth called the church to be the expression that people could know Him. And if you don't understand the gospel of Jesus Christ and believe in that gospel, if you're not added to the church and if you don't understand that, then you have absolutely no category that's sufficient to deal with your pain.

You will never be able to come to grips with a sovereign God in personal pain. Unless you understand that God has a chief end, a chief means to that end. A one chief sole message by which that means accomplishes the end and that sometimes that God chooses to open up people's eyes of Christ's suffering as they watch you suffer. If there is no ultimate end, then there is absolutely no reason that you should believe in a sovereign God who allows you to hurt. You have to start with the foundation. You have to see what does He want more anything else? And even though His kids suffer, and that suffering is real, it's for a purpose.

I'm not trying to trivialize or spiritualize pain. It is real. Pain is real. It really hurts. Cancer is real. Death is real. Marriage trials are real. Adultery, parenting and single parenting and miscarriages and abuse and poverty, being depressed, it's all real and it really hurts. Losing our favorite toy is real. Having to call AT&T customer service is real. It's all real pains. I'm not saying, I'm not putting them all in same category in terms of severity. But isn't it true that sometimes when mundane, discomforts stack up that we can become so distracted by them that we feel afflicted by them. We get irritable. We get impatient. We strike out.

It's all real and Paul knows it real. He knows your pain is real but he also knows his pain is real. In verse 1 he says, "I'm chained to a prison. I'm a prisoner for Jesus Christ." Verse 13 he says that he's suffering. But Paul knows this is confusing. He knows it's confusing for us and he knows it's confusing for the church in Ephesus and this is why. He knows it's confusing when he talks about a conquering king who have kids that suffer. Think about that for a second. The gospel actually says that there is a king that has conquered everything in the world including evil and yet people who believe in him hurt. How can that be? There's a lot of preachers you can hear, you can turn on TV and you can find a lot of them. They say, "Well that's simply not the case." They say, "You believe in God, God your Father's rich, so you should be rich. God's at perfect peace so if you believe enough then you'll have perfect peace, you'll never be stressed. You'll never have anxiety."

I would encourage you to look down even as you watch some of these preachers be like the Bereans who listened to everything and then searched the scripture to see if it's true. I also encourage you to look at how many of these people don't preach their sermon with an open Bible. I don't ever hear Ephesians 3:1 preached on TV. I am a prisoner for Jesus Christ. That means intent. There's purpose behind it. Jesus knows it's happening and yet He's the conquering king over all things and His missionary, His church planner, the one who loves Him, the one who's called, he's hurting. Indeed Jesus even said to Paul when He called him into ministry, when He met him on the road, "You're going to see how much you must suffer for my name." But you're the resurrected king with all authority. Why do I have to suffer?

So Paul, even in his life he's learning and he's teaching and now what he wants to do is he wants to teach them because he knows that this young church in Ephesus that they're confused and so he comes to them and says, "Look, God wants to build His church through the gospel to glorify Himself." Verse 2, 3 and 4 he says, "I told you God, how Jesus met me on the road and revealed this mystery to me. I didn't find it anywhere, I didn't consult with other men. Jesus gave it to me. It was revelation given to me. And I'm in jail right now because I'm sharing what has been given to me. I want other people to know about Jesus Christ. But guess what? My prison time is opening doors. Oh, it's true I'm suffering and I don't like it by my affliction is giving me opportunities to talk about Jesus with people that I'd never met."

This is what he says over in Galatians chapter 1 verse 24, he says, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of His body." If you read that verse you have to answer this question, what is lacking in Christ's afflictions? The new testament right there says something is lacking in Christ's affliction. We just think it is finished, it's done. So what's lacking? Was the sacrifice not sufficient? Was His righteousness not sufficient? No, that's not it. This is what's lacking. The recipients of the cross don't know about the cross. He died for people who are alive right now who've never heard about Jesus Christ. They'd never heard the gospel.

And so what Paul's saying is this, is that I rejoice in my affliction because in my affliction, people can see that I'm hurting but I'm using and leveraging that hurt in my life in order to show them the hurt, the greater hurt of the perfect one who died for all of us. So my hurt, my affliction, my suffering is a window through which people can see the ultimate suffering servant which is Jesus Christ. This is a man who's been shipwrecked and beaten and stoned. That we're told over in Galatians that he has marks on his body because of Jesus Christ which means that he could up to you and you could say, "Hey, what's that one that from?" He says, "That was that rock in Lystra that was thrown at me." What's this one from? Well, that's when I was shipwrecked. How about this one? This is when I was beaten, left for dead.

It was all over him and yet isn't it amazing, he's in prison and he's telling the church don't lose heart. You would think that the church would be writing the prisoner saying, "Look, I know it's really hard in there and it's cold in the winter and it's uncomfortable but don't lose heart." No. But what we find here is a man who's absolutely certain about God's good purposes in the world that he's using his pain to leverage faith in other people. And so this is exactly what we find. He says, "Don't lose heart." We can reflect Jesus Christ in our suffering.

And so I want to encourage us, first is this, let's leverage our pain to help others know Jesus. If you have to go through it, you might as well use it for the good of somebody. Whether it's your good or someone else's good. Your pain can give you tremendous credibility in the eyes of other people that are also going through pain when you tell them the gospel. What if Paul chose to sulk instead of write, have you ever thought about that? What if like Cooper he said, "I just can't write today." Do you see who this is written to? He says, "I am in prison for Jesus Christ," on behalf of who? You Gentiles.

I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand, but how many of you in this room are Gentiles? That would be most of us, right? I want you to think about this, when Jesus rose from the dead the people who saw Him first were all Jews. They didn't really didn't want anything to do with the Gentiles. All of a sudden God calls a man named Paul and He says, "Look, you're going to suffer me but you're going to go to the Gentiles." And what this means is this. Is that somebody told you the gospel and the person who told you the gospel, someone told them the gospel and that line of Gentiles goes all the way back to somebody having to start. That saw Jesus Christ and was telling people who weren't Jews that Jesus had risen from the dead. In other words, there's a really good chance that for those of us who were Gentiles that our heritage goes back to this man named Paul that was willing as a Jew to tell Gentiles the greatest news in the world. Aren't you glad that he chose to write instead of sulk.

And so Providence, I would just urge you, as you hurt, it is real but ask this question, how can I point people to Christ's life as they see my life? How can I point people to Christ's pain as they see my pain? A few thoughts because we're a church family, we're going to be doing this together. I'm going to encourage you to talk about it 'cause talking about it helps. Sometimes we think well I just need to live in my own little bubble

and not let anyone know, be vulnerable. Let me ask you, does your respect for Paul increase or decrease because of his vulnerability?

It's a lie that says that people won't respect you if you tell them that you're hurting. This is why one of my heroes here at Providence or this group of people who are my heroes at Providence, among many others are those who lead our support groups. For they help people who are dealing with problems that they've gone through. That they've experienced. That they've hurt with. I would encourage you to remember that comfort is often better than answers. God doesn't always give us answers to why we suffer but He always give us His presence. Sometimes the worst thing you can do is to say anything and the best thing to do is just to sit by somebody.

But then there's times when it time to speak. And when it's time to speak, you need to remember that there's different causes for affliction. Some people, their affliction is because they're sinning. Some people they're being sinned against. Some people it's vicarious, meaning they hate Jesus and because you love Jesus they just want to hurt you. Some people it's empathy. There's some people and it just hurts so much because their friend is hurting. And it's people who are seeking to give council, to give advice, to give comfort through our words to people that are hurting, you need to remember that there's different causes to our affliction otherwise you're going to be just like Job's friends.

Job's friends they look at him, he loses everything in his life, his wife's being really mean to him, his good friends come and they say, "What sin did you commit?" What sin did I commit? No. One thing you can always tell people and know for certain that you're accurate is this. Is that even in your pain I just want you to know that Jesus loves you. I don't understand it but Jesus loves you.

And the last thing is this, is let's leverage our affliction to learn to rest in Jesus. I know for certain that there are people that are devastated right now at Providence. But I want you to know that God can use this even in your own life to great dependence upon Him. There's a person here at Providence, I was speaking to him just a few weeks ago and he said, "You know what? My dementia has been diagnosed and it's aggressive and unless God just intervenes, I'm going to see Him sooner than later." He said, "But you know what's interesting?" He goes, "That no other time in my life have I ever felt the presence of God and no other time of my life have I ever leaned more deeply on Jesus Christ as my rock and refuge."

See, Providence, whether you're in pain or plenty, my encouragement to you is to turn your head Godward. For God will use your pain to spread His gospel, and he will use the spread of His gospel to build His church. And He will use the building of His church to glorify His son in whose name we gather. Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your kindness to us. We thank you for your mercy. And God I thank you that our pain is not aimless. God, none of you can explain it. You don't always give answers for it either. God, we are thankful that even in it, God that we can trust that you are the one that loves us. You care for us and so I pray for those that are afflicted today that you would give them comfort and you would help them to see how they can leverage that to grow closer to you and to help other people. We thank you God that we have the privileges to take a moment to think about these things. And then God I pray that as we give not only of our resources but out of our heart as we sing to you. We pray Father that you will be pleased with what we give. We love you and pray this in Christ's name. Amen.



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