

# 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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Christmas of 1989, my family, we would spend Christmas either at my dad's parents, which was in East Tennessee, or we would be at my mom's parents in my hometown in West Tennessee. We would spend Christmas at one of those places. I don't know how you guys do Christmas, but when we did Christmas, we all stayed at the grandparents' house, even when we were in town, we would stay at our grandparents' house for Christmas Eve, we'd have a dinner. We would get up the next morning, we would open presents there at the house and have breakfast.

Well, that Christmas morning, we were in my hometown, but we were at my grandmother's and grandfather's house. We did Christmas presents in their living room, they had a little sitting room. We were all spread out there, and we walked in and there was a note on the Christmas tree. And it was to me, or I wouldn't be telling the story. The note had a red ribbon tied to it. The ribbon left the tree and went up the wall and around the doorframe and went on down. So, as the morning progressed, my father was more and more excited. Finally, it was time for me to open this card, and of course, the card was telling me to follow the ribbon through the house. So, it went from the living room to the dining room, past all the food, biscuit on the way, into the kitchen, right? It went through the kitchen, they lived in a ranch and so everything is spread out. It went through the kitchen, around the edge of the kitchen, into the laundry room. Then it ducked under the door in the laundry room that went out to the garage. So, I'm going to pause for a second and let you guys just kind of guess at what it might have been outside. All right, you got something in your minds, okay?

So, I thought, okay? I thought it was a dog. I really did, I thought it was going to be a dog, and that would have been awesome. But now you know it wasn't a dog, right? Because I said it would have been awesome. And I was really excited, I mean, and anticipation mounted as I followed this ribbon through the house. But as excited as I was, my father was even more excited. I mean, he about couldn't contain himself. In fact, if I remember correctly, he was opening the door when I got there. Like, he so wanted ... and I stepped out into the garage and it was a brand-new, used pickup truck. All right, it was remarkable, yeah, I mean, it's a great ... and I'll never have another Christmas like that.

But as much as I was excited about the truck, and I was. I was only 15. So, I couldn't drive the truck that I got for Christmas. But my father was elated. He could not ... in fact, the story goes that he actually bought the truck about a month earlier, and he was going to wait, and I was not going to get the truck 'til my 16th birthday, which was September, all right? So, my father could not stand it. He could not wait until September. So, he decided that he would break the gift out at Christmas time. He was like a little kid, and he was overjoyed at revealing the mystery of what laid at the end of the ribbon that ran through the house. It was a great present.

You might be saying, well, why that story? Because I think that that's what Paul is doing here in Ephesians. Paul is super excited about the mystery of the gospel that has been revealed. He cannot wait. I mean, at every turn in the book of Ephesians, he's hitting pause in what he's trying to tell, and he's jumping into this glorious truth of the mystery of the gospel that's been revealed through Jesus. He's amazed at the mystery. He longs

to reveal the secret that in fact was tied to the end of a crimson string that wove its way through the pages of history, from creation 'til it culminated on a Roman cross. So just like my father in his excitement, because he knew what was coming, Paul knew, because it was revealed to him what was coming.

So, let's read what Paul writes in Ephesians 3, "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you 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 been now 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 of Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all of 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 the 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 of 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'm suffering for you, which is for your glory."

And let's pray. Father, in the next few minutes, would you give us the grace to see the remarkable truth of the mystery of the gospel that was revealed in Jesus Christ and handed down to us. Lord, may we just sit and revel in your wisdom of salvation. And may we see the glory of what you've done. May we live our lives in light of it. And Lord, we pray these things in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Well, April 20th of 1718, there was a man born in Connecticut with the name David Brainerd. This man only lived 29 short years and died on October the 9th of 1747. You might be asking, well, what does his life have to do with this text? If you'll give me a second to kind of unpack the history of David Brainerd, maybe it'll make sense.

Brainerd was born in Connecticut to Puritan parents. His dad was a legislator in Connecticut, in the colonies. But he died when David was nine. So, early in his life, he faced hardship. His father passed away, his mother died when he was 14. So, by his teenage years, both his parents had passed away, and he had other family members that died at young ages as well. He was raised in a religious family, but by David's own admission, he did not come to faith in Jesus Christ until he was 21.

He was given to bouts of depression, which seem to have run in his family. There were tons of people who were even in his autobiography and his biography, of he had family members that died early deaths because of depression. He went to Yale, which is a remarkable thing, he went to Yale to college.

But he was kicked out of Yale in his third year. We get to that point in David's life, he's in his 20's, it's after his conversion. He's a student at Yale, he's kicked out of Yale. If he had not been kicked out of Yale, then we may never have known David Brainerd in the occupation that has had an untold impact on the modern missionary world.

The summer of the year that Brainerd was kicked out of Yale, he was licensed to preach and then appointed as a missionary to the Native Americans in the colonies, that are right outside of the colonies. For three years after that commissioning, Brainerd labored with very little success until June of 1745, when God moved among a tribe that he was interacting with in New Jersey. So, for the next two years, he invested his life into this small Native American tribe that had several members over the course of time that came to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. He was with them until he was physically unable to continue, and he died of tuberculosis at the age of 29. Actually died in the home of Jonathan Edwards.

His short life, full of sickness and disappointment, depression, only minor missionary fruit, and has inspired and encouraged countless other great saints of God. Jonathan Edwards, who was older than him, but he died in Edward's home. William Carey, Robert Morrison, David Livingstone, Andrew Murray, and Jim Elliot are just a few names of men that we might come across in the history of the church, who were impacted by the life of this man who lived in relative obscurity in New England and was a missionary to Native Americans and wasn't terribly successful at that.

He was an incredible writer, and we have his diary and his journals, which carried the sweet but hard rhythms of earnestness and devotion, of helplessness, of questioning his own calling, of longing for God, a fear of failure, of accounts of intense prayer and fasting and quiet meditation that spurred many to chase hard after God all the more. In fact, one writer, one contemporary writer, said of Brainerd, "His life is vivid, it's a vivid and powerful testimony to the truth that God can and does use weak, sick, discouraged, beat down, lonely, struggling saints who cry to him day and night and accomplish amazing things for God."

Why Brainerd's life in relation to this text? Because Paul starts out, and Paul's own life testifies to the truth that God will advance the gospel through affliction. God advances the gospel through affliction. Paul starts out and he says, "I'm a prisoner for Jesus Christ on your behalf," because of you Gentiles. And he ends this section of this passage saying, "I don't want you to be discouraged by what I'm suffering, for it's for your good and for your glory," right? So, Paul was riddled with affliction, and this passage even points to the fact that he starts to pray for the Ephesians, he loves to break out in prayer and praise when he writes his letters. And he starts to here, but then he stops and he has to jump into the mystery of his calling and the gospel, the mystery of the gospel that he was called to.

Now, to be fair, affliction is not the only way that the gospel will be advanced. God uses all kinds of things to advance his gospel. But certainly in Paul's life, it's a testimony to the fact that God can work through our afflictions to bring glory to His name and accomplish His plan.

Here in Ephesians, he's reminding his readers of the testimony of his conversion and his commissioning, which brought him to them.

In fact, if it were not for Paul's conversion and commissioning, most of us would not be sitting here today hearing the gospel. Because most of us do not claim ethnic Jewish background. And Paul, by God's own hand, became the one who took the gospel to the Gentiles. That's us. So we, in some remarkable way, we sit in this room today because of the faithfulness of Paul to the call on his life to take the mystery of the gospel to those that were outside of the lineage of Abraham.

Paul's own life was born out of affliction. And in Acts 9, we have the account of his conversion. And this is what is written, "Now, as he went on his way to Damascus ... " Now remember, Paul had in his hands orders from the Sanhedrin to imprison and kill people who professed belief in Jesus Christ. All right? So, he's on the way to Damascus to look for believers of the Way, of Christ. And on the way, " ... he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.'"

So, Paul's own conversion came at the hands of physical affliction, right? By the hand of God, he was blinded. Then he was sent into the city to wait for a man that God told him would come to heal him of his blindness. He was confronted by the very Jesus whom he was setting out to persecute people for following. At the hand of affliction, Paul came face to face with Jesus. Then his commissioning, his life's mission had ... it was riddled with the promise of affliction.

And if you go on in Acts 9, there's a man in Damascus named Ananias, and we pick up there. And he says, "Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered and said, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has the authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.'" And then this is what God says, "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and the kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my own name.'"

Paul's own life gives proof that these words would come true. In 2 Corinthians he writes and he tells us a little of his history. He's towards the end of his life when he pens 2 Corinthians, and this is what he says about his own life after conversion, after believing in Jesus and following him. "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger ... " There's a theme here. "... danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."

Paul's life shows us that God can use our trials to display his grace and give us power to proclaim his goodness, even in the face of affliction. You know, why talk about Paul's afflictions, and why do I think it matters here in Ephesians? Because, to be quite honest, if any of us in this room have lived long enough, we know what it feels like to face trials. We know what it feels like to suffer. If we get introspective in our suffering and we think there's no point to it, and we turn in on ourselves, and we're overcome with the nature of what's happening, sin stands in stark opposition to the authority of God. By default, that means that life is going to be hard. Because sin has entered the world, and it has affected everything, even creation itself. When we become believers, the weight of our sin, the eternal weight of our sin is removed from us. However, sin still stands until the final day of judgment in the world. When we are in Christ, we stand in opposition to sin, which means that trials and tribulations are going to come our way. It's why Jesus told his own disciples before his crucifixion in John 15, "Remember the words I said to you, 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

Guys, to know and share the gospel is a gift of grace. But how is that possible, right? Why would Paul in all of this talk of affliction and the fact that Paul's in prison, right, he's a prisoner because of Christ for the sake of the Gentiles. Because he has taken the message of salvation to them, he sits in prison. Because of that, he's persecuted in almost every place that he turns. And yet, even in this passage, Paul would say in chapter two, "... assuming you've heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me." And later on, in verse seven he says, "Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me by the working of his power." How in the world can Paul say these things after all that he has endured?

We get to the end of ... well, not the end of his life, but ... well it is the end of his life, he's writing 2 Corinthians. Earlier in that book, and he says in 2 Corinthians 4, "Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comprehension." How could Paul speak these words? Paul understood that no life, no matter how good, has eternal value apart from Jesus. And no life, no matter how bad, is beyond the reach of his saving grace. And no life spent for Christ, no matter how hard, can compare to the richness of salvation in the promise of what's to come. Paul came face to face with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and it changed his perspective. He realized that there was nothing more powerful than knowing Jesus, and being known by him.

I am in no way trying to diminish the real pain of affliction and suffering. And neither was Paul. He knew real hurt. He knew real sorrow, as did David Brainerd and any other of the thousands of men and women, who we could look at their lives and hear their testimonies, who've spent their lives for the sake of the gospel. Hurt, pain, sorrow, anguish. It weighs in on us. One modern missionary wrote of suffering, "No amount of good theology is able to take the pain out of suffering. Too often, we allow ourselves to believe that a robust view of God's sovereignty in all things means that when suffering comes, it won't hurt. God's sovereignty doesn't take away the pain and the evil that confront us in our lives. It works them for our good."

Guys, even at the heart of the gospel that saved us, there is a suffering Savior. The gospel came to us through affliction, through the affliction of the one who would do the unthinkable. Who would give himself in our place that we might be reconciled to God. So God uses affliction to advance the good news. But he also builds his church through the proclamation of that good news of the gospel. When the word is preached, the Spirit changes hearts, and dead men are brought to life, and the family of God grows. The church grows.

Paul tells us the mystery of the gospel is that salvation, the being brought into a right relationship with the one true God, is extended beyond the ethnic children of God. He says in verse six, he says it this way. "This mystery, the mystery of the gospel that has been revealed to me and to us in these days. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the gospel." This is the same language that he uses just a few verses before at the end of chapter two when he writes ... You Gentiles, you Ephesians, you who were not part of Abraham's lineage, " ... you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you're fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows up into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

So, what is it about the gospel that is so powerful that it's the means by which the church is built? It's Jesus. The gospel isn't good news if it isn't about Jesus and his saving work. Nothing, nothing confronts our pride, our selfishness, and our prejudices like the gospel. Because the gospel tells us this, that no one is worthy save Jesus, but anyone is accepted through Jesus. Think about that. The gospel is good news, because it tells us no one is worthy save Jesus, but anyone is accepted through Jesus. The gospel perfectly preserves God's holy righteousness, his justice, his grace, and his mercy and his love. It's only in the gospel that seemingly contradictory characteristics can be held in perfect balance to glorify God and to be for our good. The gospel is the seed that grows the church.

But this message, this gospel, this message of unsearchable riches of Christ, has to be proclaimed. We have a news that has to be spoken. So Paul writes, “... to me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given,” the grace to be a minister of the gospel, “... to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery that was hidden for the ages in God, who created all things.” He writes in Romans, in chapter 10, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they’ve never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?”

Guys, it is a gift of God’s grace, and a privilege to stand before you and proclaim the gospel. But here’s the reality. The same gospel that I can stand here and preach to you, has been entrusted to you as well. If you are a professing believer of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are given the ministry of reconciliation that the gospel brings. And you are called to preach it. You are called to extend it beyond these walls. I would argue even, that the church grows more by the proclamation of the gospel of the people who sit in the pews, than by any one man who stands in a pulpit ever. God has entrusted the mystery of the gospel to you. But it must be proclaimed, and when it’s proclaimed, God builds his church. Because when the good news is proclaimed, hearts are changed. People come to faith in Jesus and the family grows.

So, what do we do in response to it? Let’s join God in building his church by joyfully proclaiming the gospel. Joyfully proclaiming the gospel. At Providence, we work really hard to try and give you guys tangible ways to put these things into practice. And the team has done a remarkable job. They even provide out [inaudible 00:26:37], a card, a prayer card. And on this prayer card, it is to help you to identify people that need to hear the good news of the gospel, to give you something tangible to hold in front of you, to say who in my family doesn’t know Jesus? Doesn’t know this mystery of reconciliation that comes through the shed blood of a Savior? Who of my neighbors need to hear this good news? Who of my co-workers, or who of just people, random people in my life that I know, who needs to know this? And so, even with these little tools, they’re all meant to help you to move toward being part of the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus. You get to be a part of the remarkable work of God to build his church, through people coming to know him by faith.

God advances his gospel through affliction, he builds his church through the proclamation of the gospel. And then finally in this passage, we see that God displays his manifold glory through the church. And this may be the most remarkable thing that Paul says in the whole of this passage.



You know, being good North Carolinians, we probably know the history of the Wright brothers, but have you ever thought much about the mechanics or the physics of an airplane? Most of us don't think about the amazing feat of aeronautical engineering until we experience turbulence, right? And then we think about the mechanics of an airplane. But for a design engineer, someone who lives their life in physics and in just the science of it, the design and the mechanics of an airplane are breathtaking. Imagine the joy, you can see the picture here on that day in December, I think it's December 17th of 1903, just a few miles from here at Kitty Hawk, when the Wright brothers saw their powered airplane take flight several times that day in short flights. The mystery of fixed-wing powered flight was made known. It was through work, through their knowledge, and others who'd worked on aerodynamics, the mystery of fixed-wing powered flight was made known. And then it set in motion developments that changed the course of history for human transportation. Think about it, 1903, because of the work of the Wright brothers and others who were working on aerodynamics and powered flight, today we can reach the far corners of the globe, while we sit back in a chair and read a magazine or watch a movie.

As remarkable as the nature of flight is, Paul says the church is proof of the wisdom of God. Think about that, that the Wrights' airplane was proof that fixed-wing powered flight was possible, but Paul says the church is proof that the gospel is powerful. He says he was given this ministry, "... to bring to light for everyone what was the plan of the mystery that was hidden for the ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to," not just those in the human realm, but to "the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." But how? How is it possible? What is his wisdom that is put on display in the gospel in the church? Why would Paul say that the church is a picture of the wisdom of God, God's glory on display? It's this, because the church is the proof of God's reconciling all things to himself. And not only that, but reconciling us to one another.

Paul is writing to Gentiles, he spent a ton of time in chapter two getting to the heart of this very thing. We spent a ton of time in the last several weeks getting to the heart of how this applies to our modern lives. The church is the greatest representation of the reconciling power of the gospel that exists in the world. Paul says it gets to reveal the manifold wisdom of God. And he says in 2 Corinthians 5, "... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to," them, to those who responded in faith to Jesus, entrusting to, "... us the message of reconciliation." So, in Christ, God reconciled all things to himself, and then called us agents of reconciliation to show his glory to the world. The church gets the joy of being that before the world.

Now, to be sure, those of us who make up the church are imperfect. But the Savior who established the church is not. His wisdom is displayed in an imperfect people, who've been saved through a perfect sacrifice. What is the mystery of God's wisdom? The reconciling power of Jesus Christ. Salvation, extended to all who believe and trust in Jesus, not just to those who were born of Abraham. That the saving of people through belief in Jesus would result in what we are made to do, which is God being glorified. That the church, the saving of people, the reconciling of rebels to the Savior, that it would put God's wisdom on display. Because who else could come up with a plan to redeem us the way God has? Who else would call a people together who had nothing in common, and bring them together under one common thread of the shed blood of a Savior who reconciles us to the God who makes us?

This is what we get to be a part of. Think about that. That God by his gift of grace, that he gives us the body to put his gospel on display. So, what do we do with that? Well, let's passionately pursue a church that models the mystery of God's wisdom in the gospel. Let's long for a church that shows the complexity, of diversity, that shows the reconciling nature of God to the world. And let's pursue it with everything that we have. Let's set back and watch God be glorified and his wisdom be exalted as it becomes that.

Some of you guys know from a few, I think a couple of months ago, when I preached, I told you I'd been out in Southern Colorado earlier this year. One of the days that I was out in Southern Colorado, the wind was blowing out of the West, and I was on a peak, about a little over 10,000 feet. From where I set on this particular peak, you could look out. And across a tremendous valley, there was a mountain range that runs over 75 miles, and extends from Colorado down into New Mexico. It's a remarkable range. Most of the peaks are, I'd say most, a ton of the peaks in this mountain range fall above 12,000 and up to a little over 14,000 feet. So, you're talking about a magnificent sight. I mean, it's just hard to fathom the beauty that's there. But on this particular day, the winds were blowing out of the West, and they'd blown in a ton of smoke and haze from all the fires that were burning in some of the other Western States. And in that day, I set on this 10,000 plus foot peak and looked across the valley to where I should have been able to have seen 13,000 foot peaks, that were only as the crow flies, probably five miles away, and could not see the mountains. They were obscured by the haze.

But that didn't change that they were glorious, right? The mountains were still magnificent. They were just hidden by the haze. There's a ton of things in our life that will obscure the glory of God. Our own sin will do that. Our apathy toward one another and toward the things of God can do that. Sometimes even the church can obscure the glory of God. When it turns in on itself and makes it about something other than the shed blood of Jesus. But it doesn't make God's glory any less. It doesn't diminish his glory. It just stands in the way of seeing it.

So, today as we contemplate the greatness of the mystery of the gospel that was proclaimed through the shed blood of Jesus, and given to us to reconcile us to a Savior, let us not stand between others and the glory of God. But instead, let's embrace one another and embrace the good news of the gospel. And let's point people toward him that we might do what Paul says, that we might be the ones to display the manifold wisdom of God to the world and to the heavenly realms. And that they might declare, "Look at God's glory."

Well, let's pray. Father God, would you just ... would you help us to see your glory in a magnificent way? Would you help us to see that you call us to a ministry of reconciliation, that you call us to be the ones who are gifted with the gift of proclaiming the good news of the gospel? That even in the midst of our suffering and our pain that we are not alone, that we have a Savior who knows what it is like to feel the sting of toil and pain, and that you even shed your own blood on our behalf, that we might be reconciled to you. Not so that that pain would go away, though your promise is that it will, but so that we might know that all the promises that you make of what is to come are true. God, would you give us even this day a heart to long to see the world come to know this mystery that has been revealed? Would you help us to be a people who passionately pursue a church who displays your glory before others?

And God, as we stand here in the next few minutes and we sing our songs to you and we give of our tithes and our offerings, let us do it out of a grateful heart, because of the amazing gift of the gospel that has been given to us by no work of our own, but simply by your kindness. And may we with one voice, lift our voices to you and put your glory on display before the world that they might know you and know your saving power. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.



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