

Opening Words

Do you ever sense an opposition to your life? I'm not talking about normal opposition or feeling tired or fleshly but something more sinister and oppressive where it seems like nothing matters or it seems like you are walking through knee-deep mud.

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God commissioned Paul to enlighten people, to show them what God was doing in the world and how he was accomplishing it. What God was doing in the world was reconciling all things to himself and bringing the broken pieces of the world together. The way God was doing it was through Jesus Christ and in our previous broadcast we saw seven steps God has taken starting with the incarnation and going through his giving of gifts to advance his cause in the world.

This is why we preach Christ. Christ has not come just to make us feel good. Christ has not come just to make us better people. Christ has not just to make us nice people who attend church once a week and who smile at their neighbors. Christ has come to restore the kingdom of God on earth and he wants to enlist us in this great kingdom work.

But we have a little problem – the problem is that not everyone wants this to happen. Let me back up there. Yes, everyone wants heaven on earth. Everyone wants unity and peace and love and brotherhood. But not everyone wants Christ who is the only one capable of bringing heaven to earth. People want the kingdom without the king!

But there is an even bigger problem and Paul talks about this in verse 10. Let me back up to verse 8, read it and go into verses 10-11 today. Let's listen to Paul's words:

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*. ¹¹ *This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

What a rich passage where Paul speaks of his mission as a light bringer. He brings things to light for people, but he does this for a greater purpose which he mentions in 3:10. Paul preaches and brings Christ to light so that God's multi-faceted wisdom will be made known right now through us, to these rulers and authorities in heavenly places.

Remember them? Here they are again. They keep popping up in this book. Paul first talked about them in Ephesians 1 where he said that Christ was exalted over all rule, authority, power and dominion and every name that is named. No matter what their title, no matter what their authority, no matter what their power, no matter what their rank, Christ is exalted above them.

These powers were the ones who were entrusted with the responsibility of helping to make earth work. They were originally created good for God made all things good but they rebelled from their position and undermined humanity, first by causing our first parents to sin, and then by continuing to deceive the human family so that we would eventually become enslaved to them.

But Christ has now defeated them through the cross. And by his resurrection and enthronement to the right hand of God in these same heavenly places where they have reigned, he rules over them.

This presents a much larger perspective on what is happening in the world and why things happen in the world. The world is at war and I am not referring to physical warfare. The world is at war spiritually and there are forces arrayed against the people of God to keep the people of God from going forward and making progress with the Gospel.

Do you ever sense that? Do you ever sense opposition to your life? I'm not talking about normal opposition or feeling tired or fleshly but something more sinister and oppressive where it seems like nothing matters or it seems like you are walking through knee-deep mud. It's hard just to get through a day. This is, possibly, spiritual warfare that you are encountering.

This perspective presents a new way of seeing things. The biblical worldview is that the material world is not all there is. There is a spiritual world created by Christ and now in rebellion. Not all have rebelled. Some powers and rulers and authorities have remained loyal to God. We normally call them angels.

This is why we have verses like Luke 15:10 which says, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." This means they are aware of what is happening on earth and other verses tell us that they are also involved in what is happening on earth.

Hebrews 1:14 says that they are "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation." That's comforting. Angels help us. Angels serve us. The very same book exhorts the church to be hospitable because sometimes when you are hospitable, you may be entertaining an angel without knowing it. That's something to think about. Better polish up the good china and be ready!

We live in a physical-spiritual world that is inhabited by people and angels. In 1 Corinthians 4:9 Paul said, "we have become a spectacle to the world." And then he describes that world. He says the world consists of both angels and men." You are never alone. There is never a time when you are not being watched by fellow creatures. When you are in public, people and angels are watching you. When you are in private, angels are watching.

Let me share something that John Stott said about this that is so clear. I cannot improve upon his words.

"So then, as the gospel spreads throughout the world, this new and variegated Christian community develops. It is as if a great drama is being enacted. History is the theatre, the world is the stage, and church members in every land are the actors. God himself has written the play, and he directs and produces it. Act by act, scene by scene, the story continues to unfold. But who

are the audience? They are the cosmic intelligences, the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. We are to think of them as spectators of the drama of salvation.”

Isn't that good? I would add one point of clarification to this quote. They are more than spectators. They are involved in the great drama as well. But to play their part, properly, in this great drama, they must learn their roles, and the New Testament gives us some insight about this.

Let me explain this by our looking at a passage in 1 Peter 1:10-12. Peter talked about our salvation and said that the Old Testament prophets spoke about our salvation. They prophesied of the times in which we would live and as they made their prophecies they would often try to learn more. They would make inquiries. Perhaps some of the prophets would inquire of one another, those who lived contemporaneously. Perhaps they would pray and ask God to reveal more to them. And one thing God did reveal to the prophets is that they were serving a people who would come long after their time, and he was referring to all the believers from the first century until now.

Then Peter said one more thing, he said that angels long to look into these things. Angels are trying to figure it all out themselves and this brings us back to Ephesians 3:10 where Paul says God gave him grace to bring to light what God's mystery plan is and how God carries it out so that God's manifold wisdom might be revealed to these powers in the heavenly places through the Church.

What is it they are learning? Paul calls it the manifold wisdom of God. The word manifold literally means “many colored.” This word was used to refer to the many-colored flowers, the many-colored crowns, the many colors in an embroidery, and the many colors in a woven carpet. Paul uses this word to try to describe something of the wisdom of God. There are many facets and colors and hues to his wisdom. This tiny, four-word phrase, *manifold wisdom of God* reminds me of Paul's benediction in Romans 11:33-36: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? ³⁵ Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.”

God is now revealing his wisdom to these powers and notice that it is through the Church. Did you catch that in verse 10 – that his wisdom might now be made known through the Church. There is something about the Church that reveals the wisdom of God to these powers. What is it about the Church that shows the manifold wisdom of God? I wish I knew the full answer. I don't. I do have a few ideas that I can pass on to you.

First, God uses the Church to show these rulers of great intelligence and power, that he values humility. That would be an important lesson for them to learn, would it not? Especially the rebellious ones. Life is not about power and pride. Life is about taking the proper, humble place before the only Power, God Himself. And as God uses humble, earth bound, made-from-the-dust people, there is a lesson for them to learn (and for us as well).

Second, God uses the Church to show these rulers of great intelligence and power that he is a God of grace. Satan is called the accuser of the brethren. He has no grace. Satan tried to bring down Job. Satan tried to bring down the high priest Joshua. He and his cohorts are always trying to expose and

exploit our many weaknesses. Why do they have to serve such puny, miserable, little rebellious creatures such as we are? But God shows something of his wisdom when he overwhelms our sin with his grace, and at least the good angels learn more as they behold God's work in us.

Third, God loves variety. God is bringing Jew and Gentile into one body. The powers want to dominate and crush and make everything the same shade of grey but God makes all kinds of people with all kinds of colors and cultures and personalities and brings them together into oneness through Jesus Christ.

I wish I could say more about this. But that's all I know about Ephesians 3:10. If you have some insight on this verse, pass it on and we'll think about it together. But one thing is for sure, you and I and the whole Church are special if God uses us in this way to teach these powers His wisdom.

We'll talk about all of this some more and I hope you'll be with us as we continue exploring Ephesians and the wonders of the spiritual world.