



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

EPHESIANS LESSON 3

As we continue in Ephesians, let's keep in mind that the first three chapters in Ephesians explain the riches of God's grace. Paul continues his thoughts, further explaining the creation of God's new church. In chapter two, Paul explained in detail the mystery of God that he mentions again here in chapter three. He now shares with us personally what part he plays in this mystery. We find out how he views himself, his circumstances, and his role in the Kingdom of God.

Before you begin, spend some time in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to prepare your heart to receive the riches that He has for you today. I pray that this week you will be "strengthened in your inner man," just as Paul prayed for his friends, the Ephesians (3:16).

First Day

1. Let's begin by reading Ephesians 3:1-21. Observe and list the facts you find. (Who? What? Where? When? Why?) Write down any questions you have. Are there any repeated words or phrases? Any commands? Promises? Challenges?
2. What is your first impression of this chapter?
3. Title this chapter, illustrating Paul's main point.

4. What is Paul's tone?

5. How does this chapter relate to chapter two? How do they complement each other?

6. Paul reminds his readers in verse one that he was a prisoner. Let's take a minute to remember why Paul was even there.
 - A. Explain the events of Paul's arrest from Acts 21:27-40.

 - B. Paul addressed the people in Acts 22. According to verses 22-23, how did they respond?

 - C. Paul was definitely causing an uproar. He could have been afraid for his life. What gave him courage? Read Acts 23:11.

 - D. Paul was taken to stand trial before Felix the governor. What charges were brought against him, according to Acts 24:1-9?

The rest of the book of Acts records how Paul got from Jerusalem to Rome. Acts 28:16-31 describes Paul's house arrest in Rome. He was allowed visitors, but he dwelt by himself with a soldier who guarded him.

That's it for today. While you read this chapter, try to imagine being in prison for sharing the *Gospel*. Did Paul have a vindictive spirit? A complaining attitude? A revengeful heart? I don't think so. Paul had his eyes on his Heavenly Father, and he held on to what he knew was the truth. Can you do the same?

Memory Verse of the Week: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all the ages, world without end, Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21

Second Day

Practice your memory verse. This is my Women's Ministry life verse. Don't you love it?

1. Read Ephesians 3:1-13. Paul says he is a prisoner of Christ. Why doesn't he say he's a prisoner of Caesar? What does that tell us about Paul's perspective?

2. How should we look at every situation we find ourselves in?

3. Paul was persecuted for doing right (Matthew 5:10). Have you ever been in that position? What can you learn from Paul's example?

4. Paul was in prison, but yet he knew he was free. We have been set free, yet often still live in prison. What kinds of things keep us, as believers, behind bars?

5. Jesus came to set us free (John 8:36). Have you been allowing any sin to keep you in prison? Has your trial or a certain attitude locked you up? If so, what should you do?

It seems like Paul intends to pray for his friends, and when he mentions the mystery he has the opportunity to share, he gets all excited because he's so thankful to God for what He has done. He cuts himself off, then resumes his prayer in verse 14. Paul uses the term "**dispensation**" in verse 2, which means "the management, or stewardship of a household." God entrusted His plan to Paul, and now Paul was in stewardship over it. A steward holds something in trust for another. Over time, God has had different ways of managing and working with His people, and these different "stewardships" are sometimes called "dispensations." God doesn't ever change His principles, but His methods of dealing with people change over the course of history. Paul ushered in the new "age of grace."

Vines Expository Dictionary tells us that the word "**mystery**" means "something which is beyond natural knowledge, but has been opened to us by divine revelation through the Holy Spirit." The mystery was previously hidden but now has been revealed. It's now an open secret, which Paul can't wait to tell!

6. What is the mystery that Paul is dying to tell, according to verse 6?
7. Who gave him the privilege to share it?
8. God's plan was hidden but now revealed. Why now?
9. Paul calls himself a prisoner in verse one. What does he call himself in verse 7? What does he call himself in verse 8?

Paul says he is the smallest, or the least of the apostles. Kent Hughes made this observation; "Some think Paul was playing off his Latin name 'Paulus,' which means 'little' or 'small,' so that the idea is, 'I am little by name, little in stature, and morally and spiritually littler than the least of all Christians. I am small Paul.'"

I think Paul had a great understanding of who he was. He knew he was a man that had a terrible past, but he also knew God's amazing grace. He seems like he is overwhelmed that God would choose him to be a minister and a messenger of that grace to the Gentiles.

10. Describe the balance between being a child of God and a humble prisoner of God. (Who are you?)

In verse 3, Paul is most likely referring to his words in 1:9. Some think Paul may have been referring to another letter, previously written but not recognized by the church as Scripture.

It's very important to remember that the mystery Paul is talking about is not simply that Gentiles can be saved, but that they and the Jews will become one body in Christ. Verse 6 calls them "fellow heirs of the same body, partakers of His promise in Christ." The power of the Gospel made the Gentiles co-heirs with the Jews, making them co-equal. This was most certainly a mystery, a secret that is now being revealed to the family of God. This was a huge deal. The Jews may have thought Gentiles could be saved, but certainly not be on their same level.

11. We should be as excited as Paul because this mystery includes me and you! We are Gentiles that can now be partakers of the promise. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord, expressing your gratitude and love for including you in that promise.

Third Day

Study your verse. How does it speak to your heart?

1. Read Ephesians 3:1-13 again. Paul was called to share the mystery. Verse 4 tells us that the secret was not only for him. According to verse 9, who else was he supposed to inform?

2. How does this relate to what the angel announced at the birth of Christ, in Luke 2:10?

3. Who else, in verse 10, was the mystery now revealed to?

It has been said that "the history of the church is the graduate school for angels." John Stott adds, "It is through the old creation (the universe) that God reveals His glory to humans; it is through the new creation (the church) that He reveals His wisdom to angels."

4. The angels are watching us to see God's plan unfold (1 Peter 1:10-12). Isn't that an amazing thought? What does that tell us about angels? (List any other Scriptures you know that give us insight on the ministry of angels.)

It's an amazing thing to think that angels are watching us. We tend to think they know everything and maybe, just maybe, they might let us in on some heavenly secrets. Well, guess what? It's just the opposite. Angels, as well as Satan and his demonic forces, watch as God's eternal purposes unfold. It's like a great drama unfolding. The Old Testament believers played their parts well. The heavenly realm saw God's manifold wisdom portrayed in their lives. They watched as God created. They saw God's people serve Him and fulfill His purpose. They watched Noah, Abraham,

Moses, and David. They saw the incarnation, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They saw God save Paul by grace and watched him share the divine mystery. Now it's our turn. What will they learn from us? Will they see an example of God's manifold wisdom" in us?

The word "**manifold**" means "many colored," and is a rare adjective also used to describe Joseph's coat of many colors (Genesis 37:3,23,32).

5. Why do you think Paul uses that term to describe God's wisdom?

6. What do you think the angels learn from watching your life? Paul spent his life "dispensing" grace to others. What are you dispensing to others? (Search your heart on this one ... don't just skip it.)

7. According to verse 12, what do we have as a result of our faith in Christ? What word is used 3 times in verses 11-12? Also read Hebrews 4:15-16.

8. What does it mean to come "boldly" before His throne? What part does having a holy reverence and fear of God play in that?

9. We can have fellowship with God because we know have access to His throne. What does it mean to have fellowship with God?

In the Old Testament, only the high priest could enter *God's* presence once a year. Now, through the blood of *Christ*, we can approach *God* anytime (Hebrews 10:19).

10. Are you spending time fellowshiping with the Lord? Do you share your secrets, your desires, and your dreams with Him? Do you desire to know His heart and His plans for you? Do you come before His throne often enough?

11. Why would the Ephesians lose heart because Paul was suffering? (vs. 13) How could they glory, or rejoice, in his trials?

Are you carrying out your responsibility in *God's* plan? If so, whatever your circumstance, you can rejoice, because *God's* manifold wisdom is being revealed in you. Through our sufferings, *God's* glory is revealed. Let's rejoice with Paul as *God's* eternal plan is unfolding.

Fourth Day

What's your memory verse?

1. Let's now read Paul's prayer for his friends in Ephesians 3:14-21. For what reason does Paul bow his knee to Jesus?

2. Rewrite Paul's prayer in your own words. (What's he praying for?)

3. Who sees and know our inner man? (1 Samuel 16:7) How is our inner man strengthened? (2 Corinthians 4:16)

"The measure of inner strength is the measure of our daily contact with God."

Lehman Strauss

4. How does Christ dwell in our hearts? Read John 14:23.
5. How can we **practically** be "rooted and grounded" in the love of God? How would being rooted help us understand the depth of His love?
6. What can happen to us, as believers, if we don't root and ground ourselves in God? (What "other" things can we plant ourselves in?)

The word "rooted" is an agricultural term that refers to the roots of a plant. To be grounded is an architectural term that refers to the foundation of a building. Paul says that we, in Christ, are rooted and grounded. God's love for us is deep and strong. We, in turn, need to "root and ground" ourselves in Him so our love for Him can also be deep and strong.

7. Verse 18-18 seems to contradict each other. Paul prays that they might comprehend, or understand the love of God, but then turns around and says it passes knowledge. What's he trying to say?

8. How would you answer these questions:

- a. How broad is the love of God?
- b. How long is the love of God?
- c. How deep is the love of God?
- d. How high is the love of God?

W. M. Clow wrote a sermon on this section which he compares to John 3:16. This is his outline:

1. The breadth of the love of God- **"For God so loved the world."**
2. The length of the love of God- **"He gave His only begotten Son."**
3. The depth of the love of God- **"That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish."**
4. The height of the love of God- **"But have everlasting life."**

Paul prays that they might comprehend, or literally "to seize" the dimensions of His love. We might not understand it all, but we can experience it. Spurgeon said, "It is so long that your old age cannot wear it out, so long your continual tribulation cannot exhaust it, your successive temptations shall not drain it dry; like eternity itself it knows no bounds."

9. Have you experienced the depth of God's love in your life? Are you still in awe of it, like Paul obviously was? Meditate on God's love for you. Let it envelop and surround you.

Paul prayed for strength, for love, and for the fullness of God for the Ephesians believers. What a wonderful prayer.

10. Choose a friend and write out a prayer for them specifically. You may use Paul's prayer as a model if you wish. (Ask the Lord to increase the depth of your prayer life for your friends and loved ones.)

There are many things in this chapter to rejoice about, aren't there? How about His unsearchable riches and uncomprehendable love, just to name a few! See you tomorrow, and remember to stay planted and grounded in His love!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory. May it encourage your heart as you face difficult situations.

1. Let's read Paul's doxology in Ephesians 3:20-21. He now shares the reason why he believes God can answer his prayer. Rewrite these verses in your own words.

2. Is Paul saying that God will do anything we want?

Paul reminds us that God can do much more than we can even imagine. Kent Hughes said, **"God has a capacity which exceeds the people's capacity of asking-or even imaging!"** God is able!

3. In relation to your own life, fill in the blank:
God is able to _____.

4. Nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37). Are you putting any limits on Him? Are you facing an impossible situation right now? How does that phrase, "God is able," minister to your heart today?

5. Who does Paul remind us should receive all glory?

6. Twice in this chapter Paul refers to Jesus as "Lord." This is a title of majesty and kingship, or master. It implies ownership and complete control. How should our lives be different because Jesus is our Lord?

7. Not everyone who claims Him as Lord will be saved. Read Matthew 7:21-23. What must accompany our lip service? (Is He the Lord of your life?)

I pray that we allow Jesus to be Lord over every part of our life. He loves us more than we can even imagine, and that kind of love is one that we can trust. See you next week as we continue our study in Ephesians.

8. One last question ... Paul couldn't wait to share the "family secrets" with the world. How about you? Are you excited to tell the world what God has done for you? Ask the Lord to give you a heart that is exploding with the Good News! Do you believe He is able?

**"There are many who agree with God in principle,
but not in practice."**

(Richard Owens Roberts)