

Ephesians 3:1-12 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- ² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. ⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

“Stewards of God’s Grace”

Some of you have seen the HBO series Rome so you’ll be familiar with the character known as the Senate Crier or Herald. He was a podgy man who went out into the forum to inform the public of the pronouncements of the Senate, current events of the Republic of Rome, public service announcements, and even business advertisements. He had a very dramatic way of using hand gestures when announcing the name of an important Roman such as Gaius Julius Caesar. There were many things in that series that gave visual demonstration to things in the New Testament such as Jesus returning in clouds of glory. The portrayal of Julius Caesar and then Caesar Octavian’s triumphal entry into Rome to be crowned emperor will shed much light into the matter. If I remember correctly, they each rode into Rome perched high upon an elephant while the crowds were cheering and throwing white fluffy confetti-like stuff. If you want to know why the announcement of forgiveness was important, just note that when a new emperor was enthroned he usually put all his enemies to death.

This character of the Senate Crier also sheds much light into what Paul thought of his work of being an administrator of God’s grace and how he went about proclaiming the gospel and, and probably most important, what the gospel itself is. As I said a minute ago, in ancient Roman and Greek society the crier or herald performed the crucial function of keeping the public informed because most people simply could not read. When the crier brought news about the emperor or a message straight from the emperor it was called a euangelion or evangel or a gospel as we would say. Gospel simply means good news, but of a special variety. As the emperor was considered to be directly related to the gods and in some cases a god himself, an imperial gospel was considered to be an announcement of divine good news and was met with great joy and public

celebration. A gospel was proclaimed at certain events in the life of the emperor like his birth, coming of age, and ascension to the throne, or a great war victory.

So, if we do the math and translate this over to matters pertaining to Jesus, the first gospel pertaining to him was the gospel of great joy that the angels delivered to the shepherds. Next, Jesus himself proclaimed the Gospel that the Kingdom of God is at hand therefore repent and believe the good news. After Jesus, it was the apostles and prophets and, particularly, the apostle Paul, who proclaimed the gospel of the victory and enthronement of *Jesous Christos to Kyrios hemon*, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul understood himself to be a servant or slave of Jesus Christ, and as he says here a prisoner of Jesus Christ, sent (which is what apostle actually means, a sent-one) to the Gentiles to proclaim the gospel of and from Jesus Christ our Lord. He would go into towns and cities first to Jewish synagogues and then to the marketplace and like a Senate Crier he would proclaim this gospel: Jesus the Christ is Lord over all creation. He was the Son of God born a human descendent of the Judean king David to whom God promised one of his descendents would reign Israel forever. On earth rejected by his own people, he was enthroned upon the cross to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin and yet, by resurrection from the dead he was publicly and powerfully declared to be Son of God in accordance with the Holy Spirit. He has won the greatest victory of all. By his death and resurrection he has defeated sin and death. All is forgiven. Everyone in Christ Jesus is New Creation. He has ascended into heaven where he has been enthroned at the right hand of God our Father and from there through the power of the Holy Spirit he reigns on earth eternally. All peoples Jew and Gentile alike are called to serve him under his glorious reign of love and forgiveness. The eternal inheritance promised to the Jews now belongs to everyone. O the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus. He will return soon for his Triumph (a great big feast) and assume his throne here on earth. At that time all of creation will be made new and all peoples will be raised from the dead and judged according to how they have served *Jesous Christos to Kyrios tou pantou tou kosmou*. Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This gospel proclaimed something new that God had irrevocably done. In, through and as Jesus Christ our Lord God has delivered or saved his creation from sin and death. Jesus is Lord over all things and all peoples and in him salvation has been enacted. As this gospel is a divine gospel, a word of God that does not return to him having not done God’s purpose in speaking it, it has the power to save. At the very proclaiming of it people inexplicably came to have faith in and display faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ. They suddenly found themselves transformed in heart by the personal knowledge of the love of God in Christ Jesus. Wherever Paul proclaimed this gospel people, both Jew and Gentile, experienced themselves being personally summonsed by God and in his grace through the indwelling and in-working of the Holy Spirit they were transformed in heart, indeed in nature, and drawn together to form new communities called the *ecclesia* or church where they lived according to the reign of Christ embodying his love. The Holy Spirit acted in and by means of the

proclamation of the gospel to save people now so that by means of this newly created community embodying Christ Jesus all rulers and powers are getting a glimpse of what the wisdom of God looks like.

Here’s an example. When Abraham Lincoln signed the Declaration of Emancipation slavery was abolished in the United States. When the paper was signed in that instant those who were slaves were no longer slaves but free human beings. Some of those newly free human beings immediately and against staggeringly evil opposition began to live the free life. The gospel of emancipation immediately transformed those people. It changed who they were at the very core. Others refused to believe it true. The news was too good to be true. It took telling them over and over again until they finally began to live it. Many were simply too afraid to live the free life and stayed on the plantations working as if they were still slaves in exchange for room and board. For them nothing really changed except that the working conditions got minutely better, they weren’t beaten as much anymore and they had the right to say no.

The gospel is not as it has become; a theological proposition with respect to how we will spend eternity about which we make a rational decision. The gospel is the proclamation of the good news that God has saved his creation and everything and everyone in it from the futility of sin and death. The declaration was signed in Jesus’ obedient life, his death on the cross, his resurrection from death, and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father where he now reigns. He is Lord of all creation. Therefore, we are now presently already saved from sin and death and free to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The question to us now is not whether or not we rationally believe it so that we can be entitled to its outcome. Rather, since salvation is the new reality enacted in and by Jesus Christ, the question is whether we are going to live our freedom in Christ or are we going to sit back in fear and continue to live like slaves to sin and death. Are we just going to continue to live like everyone else around us? Or, are we going to strive to live the reality that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives? If that is our aim, then we need the church and to be the church.

The church is the place on earth where God’s grace is present and administrated. To participate in the life and mission of a Christ-centered church as we are here is participation in the reign, the Lordship of Jesus Christ regardless of whether you believe in him or not. God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son our Lord in the Holy Spirit by means of the proclamation of the Gospel has made us to be like Paul, administrators or stewards of God’s grace. If you remember, grace is God’s presence with us, his favour bestowed upon us, and his acting on our behalf. God’s presence, his favour, his acting on behalf of people is here in our midst and we are entrusted to see to its proper administration. We, the church of Jesus Christ, are the living result of the living word of God which is and undergirds the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This means living lives worthy of the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord. It means living lives that are compelled by the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord. And it is to do this together as the community that embodies the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Since Jesus Christ is Lord, we are free and by the Holy Spirit enabled to live as those not encumbered by addictions of all sorts, by materialism and greed, by hatred and unforgiveness, and by shame and guilt. The old life is gone a new has begun. The secret to living the new life in Christ is not focusing our energies on leaving the old life behind, but rather to fight that fight by immersing ourselves in Christ and growing in him by sharing our lives together in loving Christian community, meditation on Scripture, prayer, worship, being compassionate. When we are raised from the dead and asked to give account for our lives crowns and robes aren’t given for hard work poured into leaving the old life behind or even for believing the right things. They are given for how we lived the new life freely given in Christ. We are stewards of God’s grace. Invest that grace wisely that it multiplies. Let us not fearfully bury it in the ground as the parable goes. Amen.