

**EPHESIANS: GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR OUR SPIRITUAL MATURITY**  
**EPHESIANS 3:1-12**  
**2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, 4 JULY 2010**  
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Welcome to 2nd Street. This morning we're heading back into our study of **EPHESIANS**, continuing on into **EPHESIANS 3:1-12**. I originally thought we'd go through **v. 13**, but after studying this passage this past week it seemed more logical to end with **v. 12**. It's strange that there's a chapter break here between **EPHESIANS 2 & 3** - because there's really no break in thought in terms of what Paul's teaching at the end of **EPHESIANS 2** and at the beginning of **EPHESIANS 3**.

But before we unpack these twelve verses, I want us to revisit the significance of what Paul taught in the last eleven verses of **EPHESIANS 2** ... primarily that through Jesus' death on the cross, the price for sin had been paid, that the barrier between God and you and me was removed ... and the truth that after you and I respond to God through Jesus Christ, and come into relationship and fellowship with God through repentance and confession (telling God we're sorry for our sins, asking for His forgiveness, and telling Him that we want Him to teach us a whole new way to be human), that God then also gives us the **ministry of reconciliation**, asking us to mend, repair, and seek forgiveness in the relationships we have with other people.

I heard from several people this week that after last Sunday's service they took God up on His offer and made right some broken relationships in their lives. Awesome!

And in **EPHESIANS 2:14** Paul alludes to something that happened immediately after Jesus Christ's death on the cross that symbolized the removal of this wall between us and God ... the tearing of the veil in the Temple in Jerusalem.

**EPHESIANS 2:14 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

**<sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one* and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,**

We read in **SECOND CHRONICLES** that Solomon built the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem between 832-825 B.C. and that it was 30 cubits high. A cubit was the distance between the tip of your middle finger and the middle of the inside of your elbow, and could range from 17-22 inches. So the original Temple was somewhere between 42.5 feet and 55 feet high. But then, according to Josephus, the 1st-Century Jewish historian, during Jesus' lifetime, King Herod increased the height of the Temple to 40 cubits ... making it somewhere between 56 and 73 feet high.

The Temple **veil** was a massive curtain that separated the Holy Place, from the Holy of Holies inside the Temple. The Holy of Holies was the earthly dwelling place of God's presence ... and where the *Ark of the Covenant* resided. Only once a year was the High Priest allowed to pass to the other side of this **veil**, enter into God's

presence, and make sacrifices to God for the forgiveness for the sins of the Jews. Here's how what *The Gospel of Matthew* tell us about the tearing of the Temple veil immediately following Jesus' death on the cross ...

**MATTHEW 27:50-51 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>50-51</sup> And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

**EXODUS 26:31-34** tells us that this thick Temple veil was made out of blue, purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen. Josephus tells us that the veil was four inches thick and that horses tied to each side couldn't pull the veil apart.

What significance does the torn Temple veil have for us today? Above all, the tearing of the Temple veil at the moment of Jesus' death symbolizes that His sacrifice, the shedding of His blood, was a sufficient payment for the sins of the world ... and it illustrates loud and clear to us that after Jesus' death, the way into the Holy of Holies was opened up for all people, for all time, both Jew and Gentile. When Jesus died, the Temple veil was torn, and God moved out of the Temple.

In fact, **ACTS 17:24** says that God will never again live in a Temple made with human hands, but that God will now live inside of His people through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. The old covenant was fulfilled, and the new covenant started.

And gang, the Temple veil is also symbolic of the fact that Jesus Christ Himself is the only way to come into relationship and fellowship with God the Father (cf., **JOHN 14:6**). Because, remember, before the cross, the Jewish High Priest had to enter the Holy of Holies through the veil. But now, as we're taught in **HEBREWS 10:19-20**, Jesus Christ is our superior High Priest, and as His followers, you and I can now enter the Holy of Holies through Him.

**HEBREWS 10:19-20 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)**

<sup>19-20</sup> So, brothers and sisters, we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of Jesus' death. We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus opened for us. It leads through the curtain — Jesus Christ's very body.

I love what 19th-Century British pastor, teacher, professor and author, Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote about this beautiful and wonderful truth ...

**“It is not a *slight tear* through which we may just see a little; but it is *torn from the top to the bottom*. There is an entrance made for the greatest sinners. If there had only been a small hole cut through it, the lesser offenders might have crept through; but what an act of abounding mercy is this, that the veil is torn down the midst, and torn from top to bottom, so that the chief of sinners may find ample passage to God!” [Charles Haddon Spurgeon | 1834-1892]**

**EPHESIANS 3:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

**<sup>1</sup> For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles**

Three to four years before when Paul wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul came to Jerusalem and brought some Gentile Christians with him into the Temple area. And after he did this, and then after he told them that God wanted the Gospel to go to the Gentiles, the Jews wanted to kill him and he was saved by a group of Roman soldiers. You can read about this whole story in **ACTS 21-23**.

The local officials took Paul into custody to protect him - but 40 Jews made a vow to kill him [and you thought you had some enemies!] - and so in the end, the chief captain of the Roman guard had Paul shipped off to the city of Caesarea to the Roman Governor by the name of Felix. Paul had three trials in Caesarea, but then he exercised his right as a Roman citizen and asked to be taken to Rome to go on trial before Caesar Nero. Eventually he made it to Rome, where he was under house arrest for about three years, during which he wrote what are now called his “prison letters or epistles”, one of which is this letter that he wrote to the church at **EPHESUS**.

**v. 1 ... For this reason ...** this is a reference back to the end of **EPHESIANS 2** where Paul talked about the building up of the church, the Temple of God. And Paul’s saying, “it’s because of this church and how God is building it, that I’m now here in this Roman prison.” But notice that Paul doesn’t say, “I’m a prisoner of Rome, or of Nero.” He says he’s a “prisoner of Christ Jesus”. Paul had a perspective that only God could give him, and through that perspective he could see that even though he was in prison, the Lord was using him for His purposes, and among those purposes, including writing many letters of instruction, encouragement, and pastoral care to the early churches in Asia Minor. Paul knew prison couldn’t stop God’s plans because the work of the Kingdom of God moves and grows freely whether people are in chains or not ... and it’s all about people choosing to obediently follow God’s will, God’s way.



20th-Century Ukrainian medical doctor (1981-1940), social and political activist, and author Mikhail Bulgakov, the author of the infamous novels *Master and Margarita*, and *Heart Of A Dog* wrote in his autobiography that “manuscripts don’t burn.”

I love the truth behind Bulgakov’s words ... because you can throw the “person” into prison, but the gospel won’t ever be bound up because no one can burn, do away with, or destroy truth. Like Isaiah wrote in **ISAIAH 40:6-8** ...

**ISAIAH 40:6b-8 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

**<sup>6b</sup> All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.**

**<sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.**

<sup>8</sup> **The grass withers, the flower fades, *but the word of our God stands forever.* [emphasis added]**

In **vv. 3-6** Paul explains how he came to understand and surrender to God's plan that He wanted the Gentile world to be joined with the Jewish world into one spiritual family in and through Jesus Christ. God began showing Paul all the ways *The Old Testament* talked about God's love for the Gentiles and His desire that ultimately they be united with the Jews in following Him and being called "His people". And Paul heard this plan, understood this plan, and surrendered to this plan in the exact same way you and I connect with and become obedient to God's plans for our lives: **BY DISCERNMENT AND COURAGE** ... and by being attentive to God's instruction to us through His Word, through prayer, through meditation, and through other people.

**EPHESIANS 3:2-4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;

<sup>3</sup> that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

<sup>4</sup> By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

The Holy Spirit gave Paul wisdom to bring all the individual pieces of *The Old Testament* statements about the Gentiles together into a cohesive picture of God's desire to create one spiritual family out of every nation, every people, and every language. And what had once been a **mystery**, had now been **revealed**. What an awesome calling and responsibility God gave to Paul!

The word **mystery** in **vv. 3-4** comes from the Greek word **musterion** and is a word used repeatedly throughout *The New Testament* in reference to the gospel message, once being hidden, or unrevealed, but having been made known through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus first used this word **musterion** Himself with His disciples in **MATTHEW 13:11** and in **MARK 4:10-11** when He referred to the **secrets** or the **mysteries** of the Kingdom of God. And the Apostle Paul often used it in reference to the God's plan to bring the Jews and the Gentiles together and to form one church. But while Jesus used the word **musterion** in the future tense (as a **mystery** that was yet to be unfolded), Paul always referred to the **mystery** in the past tense, as a **mystery** that was no longer a **mystery**, because the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth has been revealed in the **life, the death, and the resurrection** of Jesus Christ.

Gang, what good news that there's no more **mysteries** remaining about what the requirements are to pass through the open **veil** and come into a relationship with God. **ROMANS 10:9-10** spells it all out for us ...

**ROMANS 10:9-10 (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)**

<sup>9</sup> Because if you acknowledge *and* confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and in your heart believe (adhere to, trust in, and rely on the truth) that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

<sup>10</sup> For with the heart a person believes (adheres to, trusts in, and relies on Christ) and so is justified (declared righteous, acceptable to God), and with the mouth he confesses (declares openly and speaks out freely his faith) *and* confirms [his] salvation.

So when you find the word **mystery** in *The New Testament* don't think that it's referring to some kind of **secret knowledge** that only a few select or special people know about. It's simply referring to God's plan that salvation go out to the whole world, not just to the Jews. It's referring to something that was once unknown, but that now has become known. Here's a few more of the specifics of how these **mysteries** of God's plans unfolded after Jesus died on the cross and rose again ...

1. **EVERY BELIEVER HAS DIRECT ACCESS TO GOD.** We don't need a priest to stand in the gap between us and God because Jesus Christ is now our intercessor and mediator.
2. **THE HOLY SPIRIT LIVES INSIDE BELIEVERS**, shepherding us and empowering us throughout the ups and downs of life. Previously the Holy Spirit was "with" the followers of God, but now He lives "in" us. (cf., [JOHN 14:17](#))
3. **"THE CHURCH" BEGAN**, and is God's plan for dwelling on the earth and reaching people with His message of Jesus Christ. Remember that the church is first and foremost a spiritual reality ... it's "the people, not the steeple." [George Fox] It's not a physical building made with human hands.
4. **THE FRUITS AND THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** came to us, and God wants to mature them in us and pour them out of us into the church and then through the church out into the world.

Paul originally wanted to be a minister to the Jews, but God gave him very little success on that front, because God's intention along was to send him to the Gentiles. Paul thought all his qualifications in life had prepared him to reach the Jews with the Gospel. But God had other plans. Have you ever had God surprise you that way? Remember the words of *The Old Testament* prophet Isaiah in [ISAIAH 55:8-9](#)?

[ISAIAH 55:8-9](#) (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

<sup>8-9</sup> "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts."

And this brings us to our **FIRST FAITH LESSON** this morning ...

## FAITH LESSON

God's plans are often different than ours. How we submit or fight against God's plans is one of the best ways to see whether we've truly surrendered to God, or we're just trying to use God as the source of power and blessing to accomplish our own desires. Whenever our will and God's will collide, it's a test to see if we'll pray Jesus' prayer in LUKE 22:42 ... "Father, not My will, but Yours be done."

### EPHESIANS 3:5-6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

<sup>5</sup> which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;

<sup>6</sup> *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

I love it in v. 6 when Paul said that he, and now you and I, are ... **partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus** ... God first made promises to Abraham, as the first Jew, and His promise was that **all nations would be blessed through the seed of the Jewish people** (cf., GENESIS 12:1-3; 22:16-18). And Paul tells us in GALATIANS 2:16, 19, 29, that that seed is Jesus Christ, and that now that the **blessing and the mystery**, has been revealed, we're the blessed participants in what God is doing.

v. 6 ... **through the gospel** ... none of the plan of God that Paul is describing here could happen until everyone in the world ... Jew and Gentile alike ... had an equal standing before God.

ILLUSTRATION ... It's like that new commercial about the bank that doesn't charge it's old customers fees that it doesn't charge it's new customers - but everyone gets the same deal. You know the one I'm talking about, with the "creepy guy" and the little kids. The kid there first gets a little plastic pony, the new kid gets a real pony. The kid there first gets no ice cream, and the *newer* kid gets a triple scoop cone.

Paul says that this **good news** he's talking about, and that he's a servant of, is only possible because of the **gift of God's grace** that God had given to **ALL PEOPLE**. In other words the **gospel**, which literally means **good news**, can't be **GOOD NEWS AT ALL** until it's **GOOD NEWS TO ALL**.

### EPHESIANS 3:7-8 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

<sup>7</sup> of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me according to the working of His power.

<sup>8</sup> To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

I love how Paul refers to himself in v. 7 ... as a **minister**. **Minister** is a title of **SERVICE, NOT EXALTATION**. In classical Greek literature the word **minister** (**diakonos**) is often used for the **table waiter who always stands ready at the bidding of his or her customers**. So do you see what Paul is saying here about himself and about anyone who would follow in his footsteps as a **minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ**? Like I said last Sunday, don't ever put any Christian leader, me or anybody else, up on a pedestal, because we'll only let you down. News Flash: We're all just human beings. But if there was ever a Christian who deserved to be put up on a pedestal, it was Paul.

He was a total **TYPE A** personality who nearly single-handedly took the **gospel** of Jesus Christ to the non-Jewish world and wrote 13 of the 27 books in *The New Testament*. If we'd been standing in the corner of the room when Paul and Peter compared the plans God had revealed to them for how to get the **gospel** out to the world, their conversation would have gone something like this ...

**Peter: I have a burden for sharing the truths of Jesus with the Jews.**

**Paul: Go for it bro. I'm behind you 100%. And don't worry about me. You take care of the Jews, and I've got the rest of the world covered. Seriously, I'm good.**

And yet Paul turned down all attempts to worship him or to exalt him in any way. Was he a strong, confident leader? Without a doubt. But was he arrogant? No way. But Paul's confidence was in Jesus Christ and not in himself. For you see, Paul had learned the great joy of letting all praise that came his way roll off of him just like water off a duck's back ... always focusing all the praise back to Jesus. Paul was just doing what God asked him to do, without seeking praise or honor.

**ILLUSTRATION ... George Washington Carver, the great African-American scientist, botanist, educator, and inventor was born in Missouri, in 1864 before slavery was abolished. Before Carver died in 1943, he'd developed hundreds of useful products from the peanut. And following in the footsteps of how the Apostle Paul handled praise that came his way, here's the response Carver often gave people when they asked how he'd accomplished so much in his lifetime.**

**"When I was young, I said, 'God, tell me the mystery of the universe.' God replied, 'George, that knowledge is reserved for Me alone.' So I said, 'God, tell me the mystery of the peanut.' To which God replied, 'Well, George, that's more nearly your size.' And He told me."**

See how Paul refers to himself in v. 8, as ... **the very least of all saints**? This hints back to **EPHESIANS 1:1** where Paul gave us his name and his office. His name, **Paul** meant **small**, and his office **apostle** spoke to a **sent one who was of the highest rank**. Sounds like an oxymoron ... both **small** and **of the highest rank**. But friends, the two can go together when we're fully surrendered to God, when we realize that in the natural we're nothing, but that in the spiritual we're somebody, and when our

identity isn't in who we're trying to be, but is squarely and firmly rooted and grounded in the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

Back when Paul wasn't yet a follower of Jesus, he considered himself to be what he called himself in **FIRST TIMOTHY 1:15**, the **chief of all sinners**. In other words, he was on the top rung of the ladder when it came to being a sinner. And now, as a follower of Jesus, here in **EPHESIANS 3:8**, he considered himself to be **the very least of all saints**, or on the lowest rung of the ladder. Listen to me, at one time you may have been the most powerful Olympic-gold-level sinner on the face of the earth, but once you decided to follow Jesus Christ, you're on the lowest rung. But in actuality you took a step **UP** ... because the lowest rung in God's kingdom is a promotion from the highest rung in Satan's Kingdom. Paul was just so humbled by God's willingness to invite him to **preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Jesus Christ**. Oh my friends, let's follow in Paul's example and stay humble.

Seriously, if you want to be used by God, don't try promoting yourself, because it will always be the fast track to failure, not victory. **Remember that it was the tortoise, not the hare that won the race**. We don't have to promote ourselves any more than David had to try and get God's attention so that He'd ask him to be the King of Israel. David just focused on what God had called him to do in the moment - to be the very best shepherd he could be - and then in due time God took him up another rung on the ladder. Here are three *New Testament* Scriptures that point us in this direction ...

**MATTHEW 25:21; LUKE 14:11; FIRST PETER 5:6**  
(NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

MATTHEW 25:21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your Master.'

LUKE 14:11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

FIRST PETER 5:6 Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.

Which brings us to our **SECOND FAITH LESSON** this morning ...

**FAITH LESSON**

One of Jesus Christ's character traits we so often struggle to take on is *humility*. Phillip Brooks hit the nail on the head when he wrote ...

"The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is."

Let's "measure ourselves against" Jesus and pursue His example when it comes to living out humility in our day-to-day lives.

**EPHESIANS 3:9-10 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>9</sup> and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;  
<sup>10</sup> 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.

God has asked Paul, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to make known to all the same revelation **mysteries** God had given him. Oh friends, how God longs to have you and me share with others the teachings and revelations He shares with us. How are you inviting God to pour into you so that you can then invite God to pour out of you? That's His plan. How are you participating with Him in it?

v. **10** sounds like God wants us to give instruction to angels. What's he saying here? The Apostle Peter taught this same truth in **FIRST PETER 1:12b** when he wrote ...

**FIRST PETER 1:12b (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)**

<sup>12b</sup> ... And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.

Present day Bible teacher and seminary professor, Wayne Grudem writes these words about this truth expressed by both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter ...

**“This *longing* by angels must therefore include a *holy curiosity to watch and delight in the glories of Christ’s kingdom* as they find ever fuller realization in their lives of individual Christians throughout the history of the church.” [Wayne Grudem | 1948 - ]**

Did you know that God wants to use you to mentor angels? God longs to reveal aspects of His character far and wide, **even to His angels**, by what He's doing through the church worldwide, and what He's doing through you and me as His church, right here in Newberg. **FALLEN ANGELS** look at what God is doing and are reminded that in the end, God, not Satan gets the last word. And to **GOD'S ANGELS**, God longs to have His church, you and me, be a testimony of His **amazing grace**. In other words, God doesn't tell the devil how smart He is, He wants to get that message across to Satan by how you and I live as His followers, and how we behave and minister His will and His plans in the day-to-day circumstances of our lives.

**EPHESIANS 3:11-12 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)**

<sup>11</sup> *This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,  
<sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

Oh, God's Word through Paul's words here in the first twelve verses of **EPHESIANS 3** has spoken some rich things to us here this morning. Here are several **key truths** ...

### ***GOD'S PLANS AND OUR PLANS***

Yes, God's ways are always above and beyond our ways, but God has no incentive to hide or withhold His will from you or me. God's will can be sought and found. And the greatest **mystery** of all is that we've been chosen by Him to come into relationship and fellowship with Him. Oh glory to God!

### ***LIFE ON GOD'S ANVIL***

God allows you and me as His followers to go through hard times to see the real ***DIRECTION OF OUR AFFECTION*** ... to see if we're willing to be His servants, if we're willing to deny our own wills, surrender to Him, pursue the desires of His heart, and take up His cross and follow Him no matter what He tell us to do and no matter where He tells us to go.

### ***OUR BROKENNESS MAKES US USEABLE, NOT UNUSEABLE***

God wants to use our spiritual gifts, our personalities, and our life experiences to live out the ministries He calls us to embrace. And He does all of this, not because we're great, powerful, wise, and enchanting ... but because we're broken, surrendered, wounded, and willing to embrace and pursue the character of the greatest wounded-healer of all time, His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

### ***ANGELS AND DEMONS IN THE FRONT ROW***

Angels and demons ... as well as Christians and non-Christians are watching us all the time, to see whether we're choosing self and sin, or God and righteousness. And it's because of these truths and so much more that Paul can say in **v. 12** that he has **bold, confident access through faith in Him**. Faith comes as a **gift of God** ... and the **faith** God has given us ***IS THE SOURCE OF*** our **boldness** to come to God. Which reminds me of what the author of **HEBREWS** was talking about when he wrote ... and we'll let these words be our closing prayer of this morning's worship and teaching ...

### **HEBREWS 4:15-16 (THE MESSAGE)**

<sup>15-16</sup> **We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He [Jesus Christ] has been through weakness and testing, experienced it all – all but the sin. So let's walk right up to Him and get what He is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help. [emphasis added]**

### ***NEXT SUNDAY ... EPHESIANS 3:13-21***

Paul's second prayer in **EPHESIANS**. We are a spirit, we have a soul, and we live in a body. How does God want to be alive and nurtured in each of these three parts of who we are?

### ***COME PRAYING AND EXPECTING!***