

How Important is the Church?

Text: Ephesians 3:8-13

Date:

CIT: The church is so important that God would have all men in it, every angel observe it, and any tribulation borne with courage for its advancement.

INTRODUCTION

Is the church dead? Is the local, visible, assembly of the saints doomed to go the way of the Woolly Mammoth and Tyrannosaurus Rex? Many today would have us to believe that is so.

Before we proceed any further in this direction, let me give you the answer of Jesus to this question.

Matthew 16:18 ... and upon this Rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

At this moment, there are thousands upon thousands of local congregations which are reaching the lost, discipling Christians, preaching the Word, sending forth missionaries to evangelize the world, ministering to their communities, planting new churches, filled with God's Spirit and growing in faith and grace all around the world.

And so it will be until Jesus again! The church of Jesus Christ is anything but dead.

That should tell us something of the importance of the church in the plans and purposes of God.

Just how important is the church? This text provides three answers to that question. It gives us three truths about this mystery called the church that make it worthy of the highest level of commitment and participation in our lives.

REVIEW

Let's take a moment to get our bearings.

In the first seven verses, we learn that what God was doing through churches like the one in Ephesus was once a mystery.

- A truth that had not been made known through the prophecies of the Old Testament, but which is now clearly revealed in the New Testament. (Verse 5)
- This mystery included 4 truths concerning the salvation of the Gentiles and their place among Jewish believers
 1. They were **fellowheirs** - sharing equally all the riches of God's grace
 2. They were of the **same body** - worshipping and serving together in the same congregation
 3. They were **partakers** of God's promise in Christ - every promise made to believers today may be claimed by every believer in Christ. If Jesus promised it, you can claim it, no matter who you are or how far away from God you were before you came to Jesus.
 4. They were **saved** by the **same Gospel**.

In verse 7, Paul reminds the Ephesians that God had made him a minister of the mystery. It was his responsibility and privilege to declare it to the Gentiles. As we come to verse 8, Paul reflects on what it meant to him to serve God in this way.

I. Paul's Reflection on His Ministry - 8a

A. Unbelievable privileges in Christ - *unto ME...*

1. We consider Paul a great man of God:
 - a) An apostle
 - b) The one man most responsible for the spread of Christianity in the first century
 - c) Author of almost half the books of the New Testament
 - d) Arguably, the greatest Christian who ever lived

2. Paul saw himself as nothing more than a “minister,” a servant of Jesus Christ, who in his own eyes was not deserving of the privileges he was given.

- Less than the least ... in Paul’s mind, *any* other Christian was more deserving than he was!

- NOTE: Paul considered himself the least of the apostles and the worst of sinners. No “hero” of the faith or “champion” for Jesus Christ, but the most undeserving man he knew to be used by God.

a) It’s a privilege to serve Jesus Christ in *any* capacity.

b) God didn’t use Paul because he was “great”.

c) God used Paul because he was surrendered to whatever service His Savior called him to perform, and faithful to perform whatever service he was given.

B. Undeserved grace in Christ - *is this grace given*

1. Paul never forgot that all he had become was solely by the grace of God.

2. A sense of grace always humbles us, and in humbling us, makes our lives more useful to the cause of Christ.

The presence of pride, a judgmental attitude, a critical spirit, is always evidence that we no real sense of God’s grace. We have no real sense of how undeserving we are of the least of God’s mercies.

APPLICATION

Many Christians wish they had greater talents or abilities to use for Jesus Christ. I know I do. We tend to think that if we had something “great” to use for God, God could do “great” things with us.

Perhaps you have heard of Hudson Taylor, one of the greatest missionaries of the 19th Century. It is no exaggeration to say

that multiplied *thousands*, if not *millions*, of Chinese Christians owe their salvation to the ministry of this man.

In 1888, Taylor was in Canada, visiting churches, telling them of the great need for more missionaries to reach the perishing multitudes of China. A newspaper in Toronto published a very unflattering editorial of the missionary.

“Hudson Taylor is rather disappointing. I had in my mind an idea of what great missionaries should look like. He being professedly one of the great missionaries of modern times must be such as they. But he is not. A stranger would never notice him on the street ... Nor is his voice in the least degree majestic. He displays little oratorical power. He elicits little applause ... launches no thunderbolts ...”

The man ended the article by stating that if Hudson Taylor were to apply to pastor a Canadian church under a different name, after he had preached, the church would grudgingly give him a love offering.

When confronted with the article, Hudson Taylor responded, *“This is very just criticism, for it is all true. I have often thought that God made me little in order that He might show what a great God He is.”*

It isn't the greatness of our talents that make our lives useful to God, but the greatness of His grace!

II. Paul's Responsibilities to His Ministry - 8b-11

Paul describes his ministry in two terms: to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery. Paul only had one Gospel to preach. However, he saw the Gospel as accomplishing two great tasks.

A. God's message for the world: the riches of Christ - Verse 8

The word Gentiles was not only used to make a racial distinction, but also a national distinction. A Gentile was not only not *Jewish*,

and he was not from Israel. He was from another nation. So, to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles meant preaching Christ among the nations.

1. The Gospel is for the whole world: every city and nation.
2. God offers His salvation to “**whosoever** believeth.” (**It’s for everyone!**)

The Gospel is meant to be preached to the world. **The church’s main task is to tell the lost in every nation that Jesus saves!**

The strong right arm of every church should be soulwinning and missions.

B. God’s message for the ages: the church - verses 9-11

1. Paul states that God had given him the tasking of making **all men** see where the church fits in to the **eternal plan** of God.
 - a) God wants us to know that the church (this mystery) was known to God *from the beginning of the world*.
 - b) God wants us to know that the church is part of God’s *eternal purpose* in Christ.
 - (1) The church is not an addition to God’s plan
 - (2) it is not an afterthought.
 - (3) it is part of God’s plan of the ages, **and he wants all men to see, to experience, the fellowship of the church.**

The point: for 2,000 years, it has been God’s will, God’s plan, God’s purpose that all men would hear the Gospel of Christ, and that hearing the Gospel they would be saved, and find their fellowship in the church.

You may say, “I don’t need the church.” According to Paul, “Oh yes, you do!”

2. Paul also states that God is using the church to make known to the angels the manifold wisdom of God.

God uses what happens in the church to help the angels understand that He was wise to send His Son to die for our sins. He was wise to reconcile us to Himself and to one another by our faith in Jesus Christ.

- Every time a sinner is saved, the angels see the wisdom of God's plan.
- Every time they see us wrestle with sins and triumph in Christ, they praise God for the wisdom of what He has done.

That's how important the church is to God's plan. It's so important that God would have all men belong to it and every angel observe it.

A church may be small, but what it does for Christ is BIG. That's why Paul ends this section with a reassuring word to the Ephesians.

III. Paul's Reassurance concerning his trials in His Ministry

Paul: I may be a prisoner, but I'm engaged in the greatest work in the world!

"Don't faint because of the trials I have experienced as a result of preaching the Gospel and establishing churches." God is using all my tribulations to do glorious things."

Conclusion

Paul would have us understand that God is not interested in merely saving men through the Gospel. He has planned that they join together in fellowship - in partnership with other believers - fulfilling the eternal purpose of God.

Church is not an event; it is not a building, and in the mind of God, it is not an option. It is part of God's eternal purpose in Christ, and **when you got**

in Christ, it becomes part of God's plan for you. When you are not part of a church, connected with a family of faith, loving one another, serving one another, encouraging one another, growing together in faith and striving together to reach the world for Jesus, then you are not fulfilling God's plan for your life.

How important is the church? The church is so important that God would have all men join it, every angel observe it, and any trial borne with courage for its growth and advancement.

How important is it *to you*?