

Introduction

My question for us this morning is:

Do you know your mission?

Do you know your mission? I'm aware that may sound like we are starting a Mission Impossible, Charlie's Angels, or James Bond movie with that question. Yet, there is a reason why movies like that are so intriguing. You start by knowing the mission—the real question becomes will they be able to complete their mission!

But imagine for a minute, you didn't know the mission of the movie's hero. You didn't know the goal. That is one confusing movie. Take out those couple of minutes where you are told the mission and goal—perhaps you were in the bathroom or getting more popcorn—and you have no clue for the next 30-60 minutes what is going on.

As an employee this is a basic aspect of your job. If you don't know your mission, what defines success, a job can quickly become frustrating. Anthony Higgins and I were talking recently about how their office runs on a specific methodology—an operating system to keep things humming smoothly. One of the goals of every system like that is to make sure everyone knows the goals of the company and understands their role in the organization to ensure the mission—corporately and individually—is known and activated on.

As a young parent, you learn the power of a mission by giving your kids a mission. If you tell a child the goal is to sneak up on mama and see if we can scare her while she is sitting on the couch, the amount of giggles and obvious-stealth-not-stealth is 100% worth it. We used to use this tactic with our kids with Saturday mornings for cleaning. Now, don't hear this wrong—their favorite movie at the time was Annie. So we would tell our kids their mission was to pretend they were orphans in the orphanage—like in the movie Annie—and they were to clean the whole house. We would put on “It's a Hard Knock Life” on repeat, and we would get at least four or five plays of that song with some fervent scrubbing of the hardwood floors with singing!

That is an interesting aspect about knowing your mission—it can even make hard things enjoyable or at least bearable if you have bought into the mission. It happens with scrubbing floors as kids, coding computer programs, working as a plumber, electrician, or landscaper. This is exactly what helps astronauts brace the unknown of space, military members stare down bullets and people who want them dead, and firefighters to run into burning a building. They have a mission that they have bought into and completely, wholeheartedly, believe in.

Paul, as we will see this morning, has completely bought into the mission he has been given from God. And this

matters because Paul's mission is your mission as well. It is my mission. So:

Do you know your mission?

Review

Two weeks ago we looked at Ephesians 2:11–22. We talked about “Imposter Syndrome” and how you and I, in Jesus Christ, are no longer imposters. Gentiles were outside of God's people, God's covenants and promises, and his law and ordinances. They did not know God's plan of salvation and his promise of the Messiah.

One of the most amazing and beautiful things that God has done through Jesus through the cross and his resurrection is to bring the Gentiles—me and you—close to God! We belong! We are now near to him and near to his people!

For so many of us—maybe all of us—this speaks to our deep desire to know we belong. That we have a purpose and that we have a people. It is such a grace to live this side of the cross as a Gentile because we have now been brought near to God through the blood of Jesus. We also saw how it was a grace for Jews as well because they were brought near by the blood of Jesus, just like the Gentiles. They too needed the “real circumcision” that was bought by Jesus—the circumcision of their heart.

As is often the case, the good news doesn't stop there. We have been brought near to God and near to his people. We belong. Yet we also have a mission. A mission that has driven God's prophets, apostles, and saints for thousands of years this side of the cross.

Paul's Introduction

In Ephesians 3 this morning, Paul is moving on from his description of the beauty of what God has done for the Gentiles in Christ, and, at first, he wants to start a prayer for the Ephesians. He starts here in Ephesians 3:1 saying:

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—

If we jump down to 3:14 we see him complete the idea he starts here:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
(Ephesians 3:14, ESV)

Paul wants the Ephesians to know he is praying for them. But, as he started this prayer, Paul gave them a description of himself that may trouble them:

a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles

That doesn't sound good. If you are in Ephesus receiving this letter, you might be extremely concerned about Paul. You're

in jail? For me, on my behalf? Wait, what is going on? What did I do that made you go to jail for me?

Paul needs to give more explanation to this statement. So, Ephesians 3:2–12 is a mission-centered diversion from his initial point about prayer. Paul pauses his initial thought about prayer and starts with an If-Then statement.

[assuming that, or If] you have heard of the stewardship
of God's grace
that was given to me
for you,
(Ephesians 3:2, ESV)

The word “assuming” here is just the word “if.” We translate it assuming, because as you will see, Paul is hoping that we and the Ephesians already know this. The content he says in 3:2–12 shows that he hopes his readers have already heard all of this. In fact, some of what he hopes we know is what he has just shared in Ephesians chapters 1–2.

Paul says that he has been given a stewardship. A stewardship is something you don't own, you didn't create, you don't even determine what to do with it. If you have seen or read the Lord of the Rings, think the Steward of Gondor. A good steward takes what they are given, whether it is a message, a kingdom, or a possession, and uses it the way

the one who owns it would want. In our country with money we call that a fiduciary. With people we call it a guardian. Paul says this stewardship is of God's grace—something he was given from God that is a gift he didn't deserve. And that it was "given" to him, for "you." For the Ephesians, for the church through the ages, for me and you today.

Paul says if we have heard of this stewardship, the mission he was given, then...and we have to jump down to Ephesians 3:13:

[So/Therefore] I ask you
not to lose heart
over what I am suffering
for you,
which is your glory."
(Ephesians 3:13, ESV)

If the Ephesians/me/you know of Paul's stewardship, THEN don't lose heart. Especially over what he suffers. Why? Why shouldn't they/we be concerned? Because Paul's suffering is for "you," the Ephesians, the church, me and you. And not only is it for us, it is FOR our "glory." That is a big statement. That image of glory is that we might be exalted, made into what we should have always been—live as the true kings and queens we are in Jesus Christ. God's image bearers. Paul believes his difficulties are exactly part of his stewardship and it is for others and something much bigger than himself.

Paul knows his mission.

We saw this statement from Paul in Romans 5:7

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die (Romans 5:7, ESV)

Romans 5:7 goes on to talk about our God who died for sinners—not even righteous people. But I would also dare to say one will scarcely die, scarcely suffer, scarcely go through even minor annoyance if we don't have a mission. Have you thought about how true that is? We can barely go through someone cutting us off in traffic, let alone through cancer, if we don't know our mission of why we should handle it with grace and aplomb (assurance, unwaivering). If we don't see where we are going, what God wants us to do, we can't weather even the smallest of hiccups. Paul knows his mission, and he is okay suffering for the Ephesians for the stewardship he was given. Because it is for their, and God's, glory, and it is part of his mission.

Me asking you if you know your mission is not a simple fun question of what will you do today, tomorrow, or next week. It is a question that, if we understand it, helps propel us through the darkest of valleys and the most challenging of hills. And more than that, our mission draws us nearer to the very one who gave us the mission. This happens because

when we are on mission, we are living the life God meant us to live. The reason he made us in his very image. One of the reasons why he saved us.

Paul is going to spend the rest of Ephesians 3:3–12 describing this stewardship, this grace, this mission he was given, so that by verse 13, whether you knew all this about him previously or not, you should BE ABLE TO “not lose heart.” To be able to glory in what God was doing through Paul, and not worry about Paul. And in doing so, know what God is asking of you and to trust him for his path for you.

How Paul Received the Mystery: Revelation

Paul wants us to know more about what God has tasked him with, so he describes five aspects of this mystery (as he calls it), which is part of his mission:

- 1) How he received this mystery.
- 2) How Gentiles/You/I can know this mystery.
- 3) His summary of the mystery.
- 4) His explanation of the mystery.
- 5) The extent of the mystery.

He starts with how he received this mystery in Ephesians 3:3

how the mystery was made known
to me
by revelation,
as I have written

briefly.

Remember, in the New Testament, mystery is something that was not previously known but now has been revealed. It is never something that, by the power of their minds, the person writing has figured out. That should give you pause whenever you see someone on social media tell you they, and they alone, have figure out they mystery hidden in Scripture. The mystery of when God is coming back, the secret to a successful life, how you too can have special access to God.

In fact, Paul is saying the exact opposite of that here. This was a mystery made known, to him, by revelation. Paul is not being arrogant by saying this was made known to him—that is just a fact. The same was true for you and I. At some point we became aware of who God was and what he had done for us in Jesus. And we can see that it is not arrogance on Paul's part because he immediately says “by revelation.” Again, mystery in Scripture is something revealed by God to his people. Not something we could figure out.

This idea of revelation is incredibly important to knowing our mission. Can you imagine if James Bond, upon receiving an update to his mission over the phone and says, “Is that you you Money Penny?” and hears back [deep James Earl Jones voice] “Yes, it's me.” “Money Penny?” It matters who gives you the mission.

It sadly becomes new, cool, intellectual every several decades to question whether or not Scripture is completely trustworthy and the word of God. Each generation asks the question with a new twist to it. Oh, these passages are just Paul saying what he wanted to say. This is really not meant for me and you, this was only for them (meaning the Corinthians, the Ephesians, etc). This was really just a Jewish perspective. My generation (Gen X) went through it in our way. The millennials and Gen Z are going through it in their way. This has been happening for over 2000 years, and every version of denying the Holy Spirit's authorship of Scripture has been found to be heresy. We believe the Bible is the very word of God given to us.

As early as the 100s, less than a full generation after Jesus's death and resurrection we see lists of accepted Scripture made. That makes sense. People are starting to create these new and novel ideas and ways they claim will help others to understand the Bible and God's revelation. And how do you know which are right? In 184 AD we see Irenaeus write down the accepted letters and books of canon. He is countering another list that came before him from Marcion. Marcion created his own list of Scripture to support and teach that Jesus was a distinct God from the evil, vengeful God who had created everything in the Old Testament. The God he thought he saw in the Old Testament. He supported that with his own gospel-the Gospel of Marcion.

Friends, we have the most amazing Scripture! Council of Christians after council of Christians have attested that this—this is the very word of God through his prophets and apostles. Those who were eyewitnesses passed on God's very word through his Spirit to us that we might know what he told them and what we should have to live our lives now. Those who received revelation straight from God gave it straight to us!

This was exactly the job of Luke. When Luke writes his gospel (the Gospel of Luke) and Acts he is writing for Theophilus that he might have an accurate account of what God has done from eyewitnesses to Jesus's life. Paul believes what Peter is writing Scripture (Galatians 2:11-21). Peter believes what Paul is writing is Scripture (2 Peter 3:15–16). They all understood themselves to be writing the very words of God for others that they may have assurance of what God was doing and had done. Whenever a question has come up since then, the worldwide church has come together and affirmed again and again that this is what God has shared with us. These councils did not make Scripture, they affirmed in the Holy Spirit that this was God's word given by His Spirit. That this is God's declaration of his plan through the Holy Spirit working in the lives of his prophets and apostles.

And most good scholars do not claim that no textual errors have crept in when people had to copy this by hand (there was no GoogleDoc to keep it going from one generation to

another). We talked about this idea before, and how any textual errors that are in here (and we know where they might be and the options) make no changes to any substantial doctrine in our churches. What we do claim, and what orthodox Christians claim, is that Scripture is truthfully and wholly what God wanted us to have, without contradiction and error in that sense.

This is the first statement in our Partner Affirmation and one of the important statements in most all historical Christian affirmations:

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament, is the authoritative and powerful word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

Application

If you are here this morning, and you don't yet put your faith in Jesus, or perhaps you are even skeptical about Christianity in general, this is one of the main questions you should care about. How can I know the Bible is the very word of God? This discussion right now was not meant to be a complete answer to that question, but there are good answers. There is so much evidence for the sufficiency of Scripture and it's God-breathed nature. And yet, there will always be an element of faith involved!

For all the believers here this morning, do not give ground in your belief in Scripture as God's very word. By any criteria you choose to throw out one part of Scripture, every other aspect of Scripture is able to be rejected, even the aspects you love most. This is either God's very word, through his apostles and prophets, and given to us through the Holy Spirit, or it is not. If it isn't, we should be pitied for believing it at all.

Paul ends this section with his statement:

as I have written
briefly.

Paul is referring to what he has just written to the Ephesians, specifically in Ephesians 1–2 about Gentiles and Jews both being saved by God through Jesus Christ and now being one people. Scripture you and I could read.

He continues in the next section on how that is exactly how you and I might know the mission of God and our mission:

How Gentiles/You/I Can Know This Mystery

When you read this,
you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,
which was not made known
to the sons of men

as it has in other generations
 been revealed
 now
 to his holy apostles
 and prophets

Paul is reiterating and expanding his point that God did not make this known previously, to other people in other generations, but it is now being revealed to the apostles and prophets—this mystery of Christ and how God was making one new people through faith in Jesus by the Holy Spirit in grace and mercy.

For us, it is helpful to see that the Ephesians, Gentiles, you and I, we can know this is true when we read Scripture. Reading God’s word is the most assured way for us to see and know it is God himself who revealed this. I find it amazing how often people have dismissed Scripture based upon preconceived notions yet have not read it. How often Christians have opinions on certain aspects of our faith yet haven’t studied it well in Scripture—rather have listened to the flavor of the day on Instagram or YouTube and have determined those people are right.

Friends, love that God gave you his word and read it. I have to remind myself of this often as well. Reading Scripture is our best way to come face to face with God today. God moves through his word and his word preached. Preach it to yourself and preach it to others. Can you imagine being away

from a loved one, yet having a treasure trove of letters that describe their love for you, their character, and all they want you to know and never reading it? What a tragedy that would be, and it is a tragedy, when we ignore our Bibles.

We can also see here from Paul the value of patience. God's good timing has brought about the perfect answer for the greatest problem of all humanity. When you and I wonder why something isn't happening in the timing we want, imagine our brothers and sisters who waited their whole life and never knew exactly how God would save them. These believers who diligently sacrificed animals day after day, month after month, knowing their pile of sins was growing faster than animals could atone for, and knowing that God promised this was pointing to something much better. A once and for all sacrifice. God was so patient. They had to be patient. We have an entire Old Testament that shows God's people being patient again and again (and sometimes not so patient).

Perhaps we been a little spoiled by the completeness of the picture that we have that we forget there is much that we still need to wait for God to reveal in our lives. That our day-by-day life unfolds and God is seen more beautiful as he grows us in dependence and character.

Paul's Summary of the Mystery & Mission

Paul then summarizes the mystery and his mission next:

This mystery is that the Gentiles
are fellow heirs,
members of the same body,
and partakers of the promise
in Christ Jesus
through the gospel [good news
of Jesus].

This is the mystery. This is what Paul has been talking about in Ephesians chapter two. Jews and Gentiles, fellow heirs together. Members of the same body. Partakers of God's promises together. And this happened only in one way—through the Messiah Jesus and the good news of what he has done for us. What beautiful summary of what Paul has been sharing with us and the Ephesians up to this point.

And when Paul looks at all of this, when he thinks about what God has called him to, this is what he says:

Of this gospel [this good news] I was made a minister
according to the gift of God's grace,
which was given me by the working of
his power.

When Paul says he is now a minister of this good news, he is talking about this whole package. How in Jesus's death and resurrection God secured a people made of Jews and Gentiles through His mercy and grace as they come to faith

in him through the Holy Spirit. Paul sees all of this as God's grace to him, given to him through God working the power of His Holy Spirit in Paul that fateful day on the road to Damascus. This ministry is Paul's mission. This is what God has called him to do. To share this message of unity and belonging through faith in Jesus our Messiah—our Savior.

Paul's Explanation of his Mission

And Paul explains what he means even further.

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given,
to preach
to the Gentiles
the unsearchable riches of Christ,

and to bring to light
for everyone
what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages
in God,

who created all
things,

Paul saw his ministry and mission in two main spheres. First and foremost it was to preach to the Gentiles the beauty of God and the riches of Jesus. Second, to bring to light for everyone, the plan of God in the mystery that was hidden but now revealed. The first is showing us that he is specifically trying to preach—to point people in their knowledge and

their affections to God and his glories. The second point shows us the scope—to everyone. That is what the word Gentiles means...all those not Jews. That was the rest of the world!

Paul sees his mission and looks at this world and sees a people waiting, literally dying, to know the beauty of what God has done. He takes his mission from God to share this with all he encounters. Gentiles, but Jews as well. To share the beauty of this message so that all people might know it.

This is the core of Paul's mission and our mission—to make sure everyone knows what God has done. But God was doing even more in bringing us all together in Jesus. **He was declaring** the extent of HIS mission—something to the cosmos and those watching:

The Extent of the Mission

so that

through the church

the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

So that. Paul continues this sentence telling us that God waited until this right time to reveal this mystery of how he would bring Jews and Gentiles together. He waited until the right moment that Christ might be born to the virgin Mary, die on the cross for our sins, and raised as the first of many. He shared the beauty of what he was doing with his apostles

and prophets. He shared it with Paul, who shared it with the Ephesians, SO THAT. There was a chain to all of this, a final goal, a purpose. That goal is that the church, God's gathering, his people—this new one-man created in Jesus Christ of Jews and Gentiles—that we might make known the manifold wisdom of God now to even the rulers and authorities in heaven.

We are told angels longed to look into these things (1 Peter 1:2). They wanted to understand how God could save the Old Testament saints, how he would truly bring in his people from the farthest reaches of this world, how he would redeem Jews AND Gentiles. How God would work in us, in a people gathered now, who are here only because of mercy and grace. In us, Rev22, the angles see God's wisdom. An astounding wisdom. And we are a foreshadow of what is coming in the New Heavens and the New Earth. People from every walk of life, most who had no part in the people of God previously, now brought in by faith in Jesus Christ. What a beautiful picture! What a declaration to the angels watching of what God was doing and has done.

Even more, Paul says:

This was according to the eternal purpose
that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,
in whom we have boldness
and access
with confidence

through our faith in him.

This, this making of the church, this making of his people, demonstrating his wisdom and power even to the angels watching in the heavens, done through Jesus Christ in God's timing, **means you and I have boldness, access, confidence, through our faith in Jesus.**

You might be tempted at times to think—I'm glad Paul did that so I don't have to. It seems like a similar thought when people think, I'm glad we have a pastor so I don't have to go meet with all those unbelievers, or preach, or share. Or, I'm glad there are people with the gift of evangelism so I don't have to do that. Paul, graciously, reminds us here that this is all part of our mission as well!

You and I, in the Messiah, Jesus our Lord (as Paul says), have the same boldness, the same access, through our faith as did Paul. We now have the same revelation given to us. We now know God's very plan and we are drawn now into this same mission that Paul has.

Conclusion

Do you know your mission?

Your mission is to continue the long chain. To demonstrate the wisdom of God by truly walking in our identity as God's beloved sons and daughters and sharing the joy of what he

has done for us in Jesus Christ to make us one people in faith.

Our identity in Jesus, as those who are saved by faith in Jesus, those who are now one new man in Jesus, leads to our mission in Jesus. The language of our identity—heirs, kings and queens, priests, sons and daughters—also speaks to our mission as those who are connected to God now in Jesus Christ. In Scripture, God through his apostles and prophets, is not just telling us how we can be saved. Or how we can live a good life. The summary we often use of Scripture:

Love God. Love Others.

Has a telos—it has an end, a destination:

Love God. Love Others.
Make Disciples of Jesus Christ.

Paul's mission is our mission. He had it uniquely in one sense—Jesus had to reveal directly to Paul what he had done in his life, his death, and resurrection. He had to demonstrate to Paul, in power, his very God-ness. I think that is why Paul often says he is “the least of the saints.” His faith basically came with no option—what else do you do when God meets you as he did that day that Paul was traveling than serve and follow him? Yet we have had the same truth revealed to us by someone at some point. What else can WE

do but respond in love and joy to a God who loves us like this?

Our identity coupled with our mission changes everything. **Our identity reminds us whose we are, who WE are, who has loved us, and who has a call on our life.** Our mission defines what we are to do now. And knowing our mission makes us able to withstand any of the challenges that we face—whether they are from God or from the enemy. Knowing who gives us this mission and the veracity of Scripture—it's truthfulness—means we do not doubt the call.

You and I are God's very witnesses to the world and the powers watching us from heavenly places. We are those who will prove—in our life filled by the Holy Spirit—the goodness and the wisdom of God's plan through Jesus Christ.

God setup the longest running proof ever! From Adam & Eve to Noah to Abraham & Sarah to Moses to David to Jesus to the apostles to you. He first showed us how it wouldn't work with external laws, how it wouldn't work on our own power, and finally showed us how it **WOULD** work with His very Spirit in us and a changed heart through faith in Jesus. We have no excuse if we don't come to faith in Jesus when we see, in God's word, everything he has done in love for us.

One of the most amazing parts to me is that it is God's manifold wisdom is to use us! Me and you! We are plan "A" of

God to care for others, to reveal to them the mystery of what he has done. Our mission is part of his mission to save others. Our living out our mission as God's ambassadors to the world is his plan to bring his people back to himself.

This morning, remember your mission. Remember the beauty of the God who revealed himself to you through someone else and through the truthfulness of his word, and in that joy, bring others into the same joy!

Pray

Announcements - Roslyn

Benediction

Eph. 3:20-21 - Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.