10-28-18

Ephesians 3:1-13 (3)

We look once more at these verses to consider the wisdom of God. As was mentioned before, Paul has three main ideas in these verses: Paul’s part in God’s plan to spread the Gospel, the mystery that God has kept hidden from the beginning of time until now, and how God’s wisdom is being revealed. So, we have Paul, God’s mystery, and God’s wisdom. These three ideas are spread throughout these verses but if we look at verses 8 through 11, we find all three listed.

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 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*.

Paul is absolutely amazed that God has chosen him through Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel, and especially to be chosen to bring it to the Gentiles. Paul does not forget that he ruthlessly persecuted Christians and therefore persecuted Jesus Himself. He understands that what God did for him is entirely by grace; that kind of grace is beyond understanding, or, as Paul says, unfathomable. Because of his previous life, Paul refers to himself as “the very least of all saints”. In spite of his sin, he gratefully accepts God’s calling and does his best to fulfill it.

There are lessons here for us. There is plenty of room in God’s grace, through Jesus Christ, for us. When we accept Jesus, we are saved and He has work for us to do. We are to go about that work according to the riches of Christ, which include forgiveness, righteousness, and the indwelling Holy Spirit. All of us have sins we are ashamed of and satan will constantly bring them back up to us. He is the accuser of the brethren. His tactic is to paralyze us with guilt so that we are ineffective for Christ. We must always remember that our sins are forgiven and God has cast them into the sea of forgetfulness. The guilt is gone and we must be about the work of our Father.

Next comes the mystery that God had kept hidden until it was revealed to the apostles and prophets of Jesus. It was made known in the Old Testament that Israel was to be a light to the nations. Somehow Gentiles could be saved through the Jews. But it is not revealed how radical this plan of God actually is. God’s plan is to actually bring Jews and Gentiles together to create a whole new group of people: Christians. Christians are a whole new creation. Remember that we have died to sin and that we live in Christ.

This is what we see in Christian baptism. In this ordinance, we give public declaration of identifying ourselves with Jesus. As Christ gave up His life for us, we give up our lives for Him and die to sin. As Christ was buried in death, we also, by being submerged in water, are buried as our Saviour was. But Jesus was gloriously resurrected, in an imperishable body, just as is promised to us when we rise from death in Christ. So, when we come up out of the water of baptism, we are associated with Christ in His resurrection. While we do not yet receive our resurrection bodies, we are a new creation. When we accept Christ, we are changed, we are different.

This brings us to the third point Paul speaks of in this section, God’s wisdom. When I was preparing and studying for this sermon, I had a difficult time. How do I talk about God’s wisdom? How do I explain God’s wisdom in this mystery? It finally occurred to me (I’m sure by a prompting of the Holy Spirit) that for me, a mere human-being, to try to expound God’s wisdom, is absurd. The wisdom of God is far beyond anything any person can comprehend. So, the best I can do is talk about it and to look at some of its effects.

Let’s just look at wisdom in general for a moment. It is not the same thing as knowledge. Knowledge has to do with having information; facts that we have accumulated and stored in our minds. Wisdom is the ability to apply knowledge or even how to deal with something when we have no knowledge of it. There are basically two kinds of wisdom: worldly and Godly. Worldly wisdom knows how to deal with people or situations in life and usually comes with experience. By this we know that older people ought to have more wisdom than younger; but it requires a person to have a desire to be wise. Many in the world have no desire for wisdom, they simply spend their lives selfishly seeking pleasure or perhaps, wanting people to think they are wise.

Obviously, Christians should desire Godly wisdom. God also wants us to have it and the Bible tells us how.

James 1:5

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

Godly wisdom must come from God Himself. Certainly, it will be better for us if we read the Bible, pray, and have Christian fellowship. But the Holy Spirit will then use these things and make the connections for us in our minds that are wisdom. We can also note that our quote from James was preceded by a discussion on trials. God will use trials to give us wisdom. All of us in this world have trials regardless of whether we are Christians or not. Why not gain the most from them and seek the wisdom God offers us in each of them?

Even with wisdom God gives to us, we can never hope to match Him. Solomon had great wisdom bestowed on him by God, yet Jesus said “You have a greater than Solomon here.” It is best for us to look for God’s wisdom displayed, and praise Him for it. We see an example of this in Romans 11:33. Paul has been writing about how wonderfully God has been working things out and he spontaneously breaks out into praise:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

This is what should happen to us when we think about God long enough. The Holy Spirit will place in our hearts a sense of wonder and awe; we then have nothing left to do but to praise God and worship Him, simply for who He is. Paul has been given a sudden glimpse of how God’s wisdom comes through, again and again, in some way that no one could ever conceive of. God is above us, far above us; we need to set aside our foolish pride and simply be impressed with God.

Here in Ephesians, Paul has explained the mystery that God had kept hidden since before the beginning of time. God had a master plan to bring all things together in Jesus Christ. That plan is still in operation. Part of that plan was the mystery of how the Gentiles would be brought together with God’s chosen people. God desires to be glorified; that is not some selfish or vain need that He has. It is the simple truth that He deserves it. Just as an added bonus, glorifying God is good for us; it brings us closer to God through Christ. In order to be glorified, God puts His wisdom on display at the perfect time.

In verse 10, Paul uses the word “manifold”. Not only does God display His wisdom in some way that is beyond our ability to have seen coming, but He does it over and over. All those displays interweave and connect with each other in mind-boggling ways. The part of verse 10 that should make us sit up and take notice is where Paul says that God uses us, the church, to display this wisdom.

Consider God’s creation of mankind and what an awful mess it has become; right from the beginning. It appears that God has no control of what’s going on. But He does. This mess did not take God by surprise. He already had a mystery planed long before He created anything. A mystery that shows He really does have everything under control and things will work out according to His will.

Consider how successful people have been in establishing world-wide peace. In spite of all the wisdom and good-will humanity can bring to bear, there is still war and turmoil. Treaties are made, treaties are broken. Greed and pride raise their ugly heads and cause strife. The constant situation of this world is war; the Bible tells us that. Mankind will never achieve true peace.

Now consider the *true* Christian church. It is spread all over the world. You could take random Christians from around the world and put them together, and even though they may not speak the same language, they can happily praise God together; they will worship the one true Saviour, Jesus Christ. That is because almighty God, in His infinite wisdom, has made us a new creation. We are a kingdom of people who want to be in this Kingdom and we want to be in this Kingdom as it is; with Christ as King. We all have the same goal; we all have the unifying Holy Spirit indwelling us to hold us together.

Verse 10 also lets us in on something else: The manifold wisdom of God is being shown to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. It is being shown through the church. These rulers and authorities are the spiritual beings created by God, both angels and demons.

God created the angels, most likely sometime during the six days of creation. At the end of the six days of creation, God proclaimed everything “very good”. But by Genesis, chapter 3, something has happened: satan has rebelled against God and sought to undo all the good God has done. Many of God’s angels joined satan in the rebellion. Speaking of the dragon, satan, we have from

Revelation 12:4

And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

These angels and demons have varying degrees of power. Paul describes this in Ephesians 6:12 for the demons.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

The same is indicated for the angels, for example, in Daniel 12:1.

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise.

But what is Paul saying about these angels and demons? The first thing for us to know about them is that they do not possess the characteristics of God. They are not all knowing. The demons thought they were messing up God’s plan; the angels, though faithful to God, didn’t know what was going on. In fact, from 1 Peter 1:12, we see that the things regarding our salvation are “things into which angels long to look”.

Although our salvation is not complete, it is sure; and it is seen through the church. God had a plan and at the perfect time, He revealed it. Now all of God’s created spiritual beings begin to see God’s wisdom in dealing with His beloved, yet fallen, creation. The angels see this wisdom and are delighted. They freely give glory to God for what He has done. They rejoice in their creator.

Satan and the demons see God’s wisdom - and despair. Satan’s defeat took place at the cross, but in the church, he can see his work undone. The day will come, when satan and all his demons will be forced to kneel before King Jesus, and offer Him homage. Because of God’s wisdom, He receives glory from both the angels and the demons.

The salvation we receive, the existence of the church, are nothing short of miraculous. God has not revealed everything about how life is and why evil is here and why we have to deal with it. But we have more than enough evidence that God is wise, more than enough evidence that God is good. And that is why we trust and praise and worship Him, regardless of how things look.

Prayer

O Lord, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth,
Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!
From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength
Because of Your adversaries,
To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.

When we consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?

We praise You for Your wisdom, that You have made manifest in Your church. We thank You that we get to be part of Your wisdom, and part of what causes Your spiritual creation to glorify You.

In the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, we pray

Amen