

The Stubbornness of God

Ephesians 2:2-7

Jeremy Cagle, May 3, 2020

Hello, and thank you for joining us for another Sunday morning service here at our YouTube channel. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jeremy Cagle and I'm the teaching pastor of Grace Fellowship Chilliwack. We're a non-denominational Bible teaching church located in Chilliwack, British Columbia; and like a lot of other churches are doing right now we're recording our services online due to the Coronavirus. We're not able to meet in person. So, we're doing it like this over the internet, and I might add, we started doing this on March 15. If you roll back the hands of time, that's when all this began; the whole pandemic started for us on March 15. It's longer than anybody expected. It's kind of caught us all by surprise, but we're trying to make the best of it. And trusting this is God's will for us right now.

This morning we're actually meeting in a home where our church first started. Our church began in two homes here in Chilliwack, and this was one of them, so it's special to be back here this morning. Some of you will remember this setting because you were part of those initial services. And we trust this is an encouragement to you for that.

The Washington Post did an article recently in which they said that a lot of churches are struggling right now. They are having a hard time with this pandemic because the separation is getting to them both personally and financially. Some experts said that this might even change the landscape of churches over the next few years because many smaller churches won't make it. They're saying that some of the smaller churches won't survive because of the toll on them financially. They'll have to close, and I don't know if it's true or not; but it is true that this is hard and the churches. It's very right to say that churches are struggling right now because this is not the way it's supposed to be. The church is supposed to be a personal thing. It's supposed to meet face to face. That's the way God ordained it. There is such a thing as a local church, but there's not such a thing as a digital church. That doesn't exist. There's such a thing as universal church, but there is not a church that is online.

The church is supposed to meet in person, which is why we're grateful for the Bible at a time like this, amen. It's why we're grateful for the Word of God because it transcends all of this. And it's the one thing that unites us at a time such as this. It's been said that when the sheep are scattered, the one thing that brings them together is the voice of the shepherd. The one thing that unites them is the voice of the master. And that's what we have in this book. That's what we have in the Bible. We have the voice of the Shepherd, and it's such an encouragement to talk about that week in and week out with you at this time. I've read this quote to you before several years ago, but I want to read it again. And this is what one anonymous author said about the Bible. He said this,

“The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrine is Holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to sustain you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler’s map the pilgrim’s staff the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword, and the Christian’s charter. Here, heaven is opened and the gates of hell are closed. Christ is the grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule of the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, health to the soul, and a river of pleasure. It is given to you here in this life it will be opened at the judgment and it is established forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and condemns all who trifle with its content.”

That's a great quote and that is so encouraging because this is what the Bible is to us. This is what it means to us as a church, it gives us the mind of God. It gives us light to direct us. And I mention that because in a time like this you need that, don't you? In a time like this with the Coronavirus, you need something to guide you. Because a lot of churches don't have this right now, so many of them are lost.

And you could take a survey, and you'll see churches doing all sorts of things right now. You'll see them focusing on anything and it could be anything like playing games and having fun. I remember hearing about a church years ago back in the States and its mantra was “Come and have a party on Sunday morning.” That's what they were into. That's what was important to them, you know, hire a circus, and bring the clowns in, show a movie, have a concert, but that was what was most important to them. That's all they cared about was fun. Go to other churches and you'll see other things like some churches focus on encouragement, which is a good thing. Nothing wrong with encouraging people, but that's the most important thing to them. Give people a boost, give them a shot in the arm once a week. Other churches focus on things such as the news and world events. Some are into the culture and being contextual, whatever that means, just follow the latest trends.

But friends, I want to remind you, we're not here for all that as a church. That's not our job to get into all of those things. We're here to teach the Bible. We're here to study the Word of God as a people. To say it another way, we're stubborn about this. We're not stubborn about a lot of things. But we are about this one. One commentator said we're not dogmatic about the Bible. We're “bulldogmatic” about it. This is an inflexible thing for us.

You know, a couple weeks ago, we talked about the stubbornness of God and how no matter how many times the church has disappointed Him, He never gives up on it. He never quits on the church. And we can say the same thing about the church's response to Him. The true Church, the living church, never gives up on Him either, never gives up on His Word. It keeps teaching and teaching and teaching it because this is where our light comes from. This is where we hear the voice of the Shepherd. We don't hear it in games. We don't hear it in fun and entertainment. We don't hear it in the news. We hear it in the Bible.

It was said that when the missionary, David Livingstone first went to Africa, he took 73 books with him into the jungle that weighed a total of 180 pounds; it was too much for him. He couldn't carry it all, and so as time went on, he shed every one of them, but one. One book, and that was his Bible. And I think a lot of Christians need to do that today. I think a lot of churches need to go back to that. There's only one book you need, and that's the Word of God, which is what I want to talk to you about this morning. It brings us to our sermon for today, and it's found in the book of Ephesians. So if you would, please go ahead and turn there with me in your Bibles.

Please turn to the book of Ephesians and we're in chapter three. That's our text for this morning. This morning I want to talk to you about the mission of the church. I want to talk about what the church is here to do. And we're going to find that in Ephesians 3:1-7 so if you would read that with me, we're going to look at Ephesians 3:1-7. There the Apostle Paul says this,

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow apart fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 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.

If you notice, as you read that passage, it sounds mysterious doesn't it? Sounds strange. And the reason is because Paul is talking about a mystery. As he says in verse three, he's talking about a secret. Verse four calls it the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men. And that word mystery is actually repeated four times in this passage, because that's the theme of it. And it's another way of saying the church. As I'll show you in a moment, the mystery of Christ is another way of referring to the church, that Paul has been describing in chapter two. If you look up in chapter 2:19-22 Paul says,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

All those images you see there, God's household, the building, the temple, the dwelling place, that's all a reference to the church. Which means the church is on Paul's mind as he writes this. The church is in his thoughts as he gets into chapter 3. So first, he calls it a household and a temple. Now, the church is a mystery. And the word mystery in Greek is *mysterion*, which refers to something that was hidden in ages past, but it's been made known now. It was a mystery before, a secret before, but now it has been revealed to us.

The first century had a lot of mystery religions, which claimed to know the secrets of the world; and the idea was that they knew it, but you don't, they knew the secrets, but you don't have a clue. That's not the way Paul uses this here. Paul says the mystery has been revealed to you. And the mystery is that both Jews and Gentiles can be one in the church. Chapter 2:18 says,

For through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

That's the mystery that Paul's explaining here. That's the big idea is that both can have access to God, you and Gentile. And what Paul goes on to say in chapter 3 is that it's the church's job to proclaim this, it's the church's job to make this known. In other words, it's our job to teach the Bible. That's what we're here to do. That's what God put the church on the earth to do. We are here to teach the Scriptures. We're not here to play games, we're not here to just encourage people. If somebody just wants to be encouraged, they can go to a self-help seminar. We're here to teach the Bible and bring the Word of God to bear in people's lives. And I might add, we're here to do that no matter what's going on in the world. You could say we're here to do that no matter what's being thrown in us.

A friend of mine sent me a cartoon this week that said, "This is a pastor before the Coronavirus," and it had a man sitting at his desk studying his Bible. That's what the picture had. And then it had another one and it said, "This is a pastor during the Coronavirus," and it had the same man sitting at the same desk studying the same Bible. Then it said, "Here's a man after the Coronavirus," and it had the same picture. And the point is that the work of the church is the same, that's not just for pastors. That's for Christians. That's for anybody. The goal of the church is the same. We're here to teach the Word of God because the Bible explains the mystery. That's the idea here.

The Bible tells us how everyone can be saved, how Jew and Gentile can both have access to God. That's why you have to teach it. That's why you have no other choice. If you think about it,

the Bible tells us so much. I mean, it gives you this so much good information. Take a simple book like Ephesians, just a book like this and just look at all the great things you see in here. It tells us what the church is here for what it's supposed to do, that's in Ephesians 3. It tells us how sin can be forgiven, and we can change and be made right with God, that's in chapter 2. Chapter 1 of Ephesians tells us how we can be blessed and enjoy the benefits of being part of the family of God. Chapter 4 tells you how to identify sin. Chapter 5 tells you how to be married and how to have a family. Chapter 6 tells you how to put on the armor of God; but that's just one book. All that information just comes from one book of the Bible. You won't find it anywhere else, which is why we have to teach this as a church.

It's been said, "If you are not hungry for God, then you're too full of yourself." And the same can be said for the Bible as well. If you're not hungry for this book, you need to repent of that. This book should be your lifeblood. And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning, so if you're taking notes today, in Ephesians 3, we're going to see three tasks that the church has to do in this passage. So that's our outline for today. That's what it's about, so it's pretty simple. In Ephesians 3:2-7 we're going to see three tasks that the church is to do, and they all revolve around the idea of teaching the Scriptures and in studying it, being stubborn about that.

Like I said, things are confusing right now for the church. Things are difficult. A lot of churches are struggling, some maybe even are closing. And I don't have to tell you, you turn on the news and there's a million distractions coming at you right now. There's a million different voices telling you all kinds of different things. And in the midst of all this, we want to stay focused. We want to get our eyes zeroed in on one thing. And Paul tells us how to do that by giving us three tasks the church has to do.

The first one is this, the church is to be a steward of God's grace. The first task the church is to do in this passage, is to be a steward of God's grace, which means that the church has to protect it and guard it like a steward would. We don't change the message; we don't mess with the message. We guard it like a slave. That's our job as a church. If you read in verses one through two, Paul tells you this was his job. He says,

For this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you.

Just to say a few words about that, if you notice, Paul starts off that chapter by saying "For this reason," which means for the reason I talked about earlier in chapter 2. For the reason of the church, I've been put in prison. We talked about this last week, but the idea is that this is what the church meant to Paul, this is how important the church was to him. It was enough to go to prison for, it was important enough to him to go to jail for. I don't know about you, but I can't think of

too many things I would go to jail for. It's a pretty small list. And Paul went to jail for the church. Some people won't get out of bed for church. And some people won't even watch a sermon like this on Sunday morning online. Paul got arrested for the church.

And he goes on to say not only was he a prisoner for Christ, but he explains it further by saying in verse two, "if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace, which was given to me for you." That's an interesting verse there because it shows you what Paul thought of himself, how humble he was. First, he's a prisoner. Now he's a steward. You know, first he's a common criminal for Christ. Now he's a slave. You really can't get too much lower in the ancient world than terms like this. Earlier in chapter 1, he says he was an apostle, which was the highest office in the church. It was the greatest title you could have because it referred to someone who was personally commissioned by Christ to go out; but now, to show you his deep humility, Paul says he was a steward. And the word "steward" here in Greek it's the word *oikonomia*, which is a compound word from *oikos*, house and *nomia*, steward or manager. It meant a house steward or house manager. It was the slave who was responsible for taking care of your home, the slave who was responsible for overseeing it. Because in the Roman world back then the masters didn't do much work; they were pretty lazy, and so the slaves did all the work, including overseeing the house because the house was too large. If you were a wealthy Roman citizen, you could have more than 100 people living on your property, including slaves and field hands and people like that. And so to oversee all of that they would have an *oikonomia*, a trustworthy slave to take care of it. They were called the house slave, the house manager; and Paul says that's what he was in the church. That's what he did for God.

And to shed even more light on this, the verse could be translated, depending on what version of the Bible you have, but "if indeed you have heard of the administration of God's grace, which was given to me for you" or in the King James Version "if indeed you've heard of the dispensation of it." That's the word that the King James uses. Again, this is this is deep stuff, but the Bible says salvation has always been of grace. It's always been of mercy. Even in the Old Testament men didn't earn their salvation and they couldn't. And so, God's always given it freely out of His grace, but the idea here is that He's done it in different ways at different times. He's done it through what we could call different administrations.

For example, in the time of Noah, God showed His grace through an ark, didn't he? God showed it through a boat. He showed His mercy by saving a few people that way, He didn't have to do that. God didn't have to save those people during Noah's day. He could have let them all drown; He had every right to, but he wanted to show his grace. In fact, if you think about it, when Noah got off the ark one of the first things he did was to get drunk, right? To see all those people gone, judged, disappeared, killed, destroyed, would have broken a man like that. So Noah responded by indulging in alcohol, getting drunk to show that he didn't deserve it; to show this was all of grace for God to save a man like that. Then you see the same thing happening with Abraham.

You see the same thing happening with the father of the Jews. God showed His grace through him. God didn't choose Abraham's neighbor, God didn't choose Abraham's cousin, or friend; He chose Abraham, a sinful man you might add. He lied about his wife, Sarah. You see the same thing happening later on with Abraham's son, Isaac; you see it happening with Jacob; you see it happening with Israel, the people of Israel, they were a mess; but God still showed grace to them. And you see the same thing happening today with the church.

It's what Paul is saying here, God is showing his grace today through us in the church because we're the current administration of it. We're the current stewardship of His grace. You didn't bring a lamb with you to worship today because you understand that the church is different from administrations in the past. The Lamb of God has been slain for the sins of the world, and He's now bringing Jew and Gentile together, which is something that has never happened before. And Paul says here that it is his job to protect the message. It's his job to oversee it. Which leads to a couple of applications here.

There's several ways to apply this to our lives because we have a similar role. We're not apostles, but we are slaves of Christ, and so this applies to us in a couple of ways. For one thing, this is a simple application, but we are stewards of God's grace, we're not the masters of it. We're slaves of the message, we're not lords of it. Which means that it's not our job. We're at the bottom of the food chain. We're not at the top which means it's not our job to change the message; we don't have the authority to do that. It's our job to get it right. It's our job to be faithful to the message to God's grace. The steward was just supposed to be faithful. That was it. That was his only role in life was to be trustworthy. He was supposed to take care of the master's property, and you and I have the same responsibility.

It's kind of like the runners in a race, carrying the baton, bloodied and beaten and just bruised baton, and they run down to the track, and they hand it to the next person who goes farther down the track, and hands it to the next person who goes farther down the track and hands it to the next person. That's what we are. That's what we do. We're taking the baton from others and passing it on. And I mention that because a lot of Christians are forgetting this today.

A lot of churches are forgetting their role. Like I said, they're very confused about what they're supposed to do because many think we need to change the message, or we need to modify it in some way. We need to update it. Make it more palpable for the world. You know, if you want to see this for yourself, you can do an experiment. Just go online and type in the word, "church growth" in your Google search engine and see what pops up. You'll get a million different ideas coming at you talking about all kinds of different things. They all tell you how to improve the message or make it better in some way. None of them talk about teaching the Bible, they'll tell you how to update your website, they'll tell you how to create your own stage performance, they'll tell you to change your clothes, grow a beard, and my favorite one was to give money

away. One of the church growth strategies was to give \$20 to people as they came through the door.

Paul would have said that's not my job. Paul would have said all of that has nothing to do with my task. I'm just a slave. It's my job to be faithful to the message.

A lot of churches today are getting into the habit of talking about being cultural or relevant. I can't think of anything more irrelevant than a prisoner, can you? I can't think of anything more countercultural than someone in jail. Paul had such a bad relationship with the culture that they arrested him. He says, "It's not my job to be cultural, it's my job to be faithful." That's our job as well. Which leads to another application to this.

Another way to apply this to our lives, and it's even more serious than that one, and that is that God will hold us accountable for this. God will hold us accountable for what we do with his church because the steward was accountable; A slave had to answer to somebody. Masters don't answer to anybody, slaves do. They're under authority. They can't just do whatever they want. When the master comes home, when the lord arrives and returns, he has to answer for what he did with his property. And we're the same way, which means the church is not a free for all where you can do whatever you want. It's not a democracy or an election where the loudest voice wins. This is God's household. This is his people. And He will hold us accountable for what we do with it. Which is why the Bible is so important. That's why this book is so crucial because it tells you what the Master wants. It tells you what the Lord requires of this church.

I've told you this before. But the phrase, "Thus says the Lord" appears more than 400 times in your Bible, more than 400 times, and the phrase "Word of God" appears 50 times to tell you that when the Bible speaks, God speaks. When you open up the scriptures you meet God there, which means that you meet the Master there. You meet your Lord there when you open the Bible. So we have to get this book right. There's too much at stake if you don't.

Steve Lawson says, "Tragically, many pastors today are catering to their people, sometimes under the guise of reaching the lost, when they should be catering to God. They need to avoid this tragic fallacy because it is a pastor's job to fill the pulpit, not the building. When they preach, it is their job to preach the Word of God." We would do well to remember that. It's not just for pastors, as a church body it is our job to uphold this book. That's what we do. God will hold us accountable to that.

It leads us to another point to consider this morning. A second task the church has to do. The first one is that the church is a steward of God's grace, which means it's the church's job to protect it and guard it like a steward would. Guard it with your life. Make sure the baton gets on to the next runner. Make sure that what was handed to you gets handed to them. It's our job to be

faithful. That word “faithful;” it's not a word that people often appreciate nowadays, is it. We all jump from job to job, we move all the time in our society, God wants faithful people. That's what's important to Him.

It brings us to another point to consider here. Another task the church is to do. And that is to be a revealer of the mystery. Paul gets a little deeper with this one, gets even more into the secrets here, but he says a second task of church is to do is to be revealer of the mystery, which means the church is to teach. To teach it and make it known to others. Not only do we guard it and protect it, but you're supposed to explain it. That's what we do as a church. This is explaining it from the pulpit like this, this is explaining it through our ministries online, this is explaining it to one another in the pew. However you do it, this is what we do. And if you read in 3:1-5, Paul says,

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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.

After saying he was a prisoner and a steward of God's grace, Paul goes on to mention another job that he was given to do; another task in the church, and that was to be a recipient or a revealer of the mystery. In other words, it was his job to tell people about the church.

Church just started in the first century. We drive around Chilliwack and there are churches everywhere. There were no churches in the ancient world. Paul was the first one to bring the church to a lot of ancient cities, and that's what he's talking about here. And to walk you through this, the wording is a little choppy here. but the idea here is that as a Jew, it would take a miracle to get Paul to believe this. As a former Pharisees, it would take a miracle from heaven for him to believe Jew and Gentile could be one in the church, could be together; so that's what God did for him. On the road to Damascus, God showed Paul a bright light from heaven that blinded him. And He said to him, “Go, for your chosen instrument of mine, to bear my name before the Gentiles.” And that's what Paul did here.

Verse three says, “that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery.” Verse 3 also says that he wrote about this briefly to the Ephesians and now he's doing it again. That's an interesting thing to think about, but apparently there were other letters that Paul wrote to the churches that we've lost. There were other manuscripts that he wrote to a place like Ephesus that we don't have anymore. Paul refers to one of them here to say, “I told you this once, now I'm telling you this again. I've said it before, let me say it again that this wasn't known.” Verse five

says that in other generations, the church was not revealed. That means the other generations of Noah and Abraham, all those people, church was not known. And Paul says, “as it has been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit,” which is another way of saying in the New Testament. The church was not revealed in the Old Testament, it has been revealed in the New; and Paul says, “It's my job to explain this to people.”

Again, this is kind of a difficult passage to walk through, but the whole idea here that Paul is saying is, “God has revealed to me the church and it is my job to reveal it to you. That's the baton that has been given to me.” Which leads to a couple of applications here as well, leads to several ways to apply this to our lives. For one, we've already mentioned this, but I think it needs to be said again, it's the church's job to teach. That's what we do. It's the church's job to open up the Bible and explain it to people. That's why in the midst of this pandemic, we're doing this every week. It's why we keep going at it because this is our job. The church is not in the entertainment business. That's not that's not what we do. It's not in the encouragement business primarily, we do encourage people but that's not only what we do. It's not in the sales business, it's not in the marketing business; it's in the instruction business because it's our job to make the mystery known.

You know, I've talked to Christians who say that they have visited churches where the Bible was never opened once during a service, never even referred to at all. It wasn't read, the hymns didn't sing anything from Scripture, and the pastor didn't talk about it, which is sad. That's so sad because that means that they're in the wrong business. They're in the wrong line of work, and they need to be rebuked. I've talked to other ones who say that they went to a service where the Bible is taught, but in a very shameful way in a very almost embarrassing way where the pastor says, “I don't know what this means.” Well, that's sad as well because we're supposed to know what it means. That's why people come to us; we're supposed to be able to explain it. And if we can't do that people are wasting their time coming to us.

Charles Spurgeon once said that, “Most people treat their Bible very politely. They have a small pocket volume neatly bound, where they put a white pocket handkerchief around it in order to carry it to the place of worship. When they get home, they lay it up in a drawer until the next Sunday where they bring it out again for a little treat, and take it to chapel where it's so happy to get fresh air and breathe again and see the sunlight. But alas, that's all the poor little Bible gets by way of company for when it comes home it goes back into the drawer again.” Spurgeon says, “This is how many Christians treat this heavenly book, which means that there's enough dust on their Bibles to write the word ‘damnation’ on them with their fingertips.” I think a lot of people need to hear that today. I think a lot of Christians need to hear that today because the way some believers are treating their Bible is shameful. You could write ‘damnation’ in the dust of it. Somebody said the greatest dust storm in Canadian history will be when people take their Bibles off the shelves and open them. It shouldn't be that way. We're here to teach the Bible. That's our

job. We reveal the mysteries of it. We tell people that we live in this current administration where Christ has come.

Which leads to another application we see here, another way to apply this to our lives, and that is we need to be grateful that we live on this side of the cross. We need to be grateful that we live on this side of the mystery because if we didn't, we would be lost. We wouldn't have a chance. You know, I think if we took a survey of our church or most churches around us, we would say they're made up entirely of Gentiles, right? They're made up entirely of non-Jews; and what that means is they're made up of people who would be lost under previous times. They're made up of people who would be lost at other times in Bible history because there'd be no one to save them. The Jews didn't evangelize. That was not important to them. They were a very closed community. They said, "Salvation is for us, it's not for you; but the good news is you don't live then, you live now. The good news is you don't live on that side of the cross, you live on this side of the cross, which means you can be saved. You can go to heaven, you can have eternal life, you can have your sins forgiven, because of the time in which the Lord allowed you to be born. We don't talk about that much. We don't think about the sovereignty of God in that way. But you didn't choose to be born right now. You didn't decide that you would live at this time in this age, but God allowed you to do that. That's the whole point of the church. That's what it's about. People like you and I can go to heaven and be forgiven of our sins. Thousands of Gentiles before you didn't get that, millions of them died and went to hell. But you were saved.

This week I read a story about a young man who was asked in a letter to give up reading the Bible because the critics said there was no reason to do that anymore. It's an outdated book. It's made up of a bunch of fictional stories. So the young man wrote them back and he said these words. He said,

"Dear Sir, if you have anything better than the Sermon on the Mount, more beautiful than the story of the Prodigal Son, or more convicting than the 10 Commandments or the Golden Rule, please inform me and I would love to make it's acquaintance. If you have anything more consoling than the 23rd Psalm, more enlightening than the book of Revelation, and more helpful than the words of Proverbs, please pass it along and I will take it in and read it. But if not, please do not ask me that again because the Bible is everything to me."

And he went on to say not only is it everything because of the words that it has, it has everything because it teaches me the way of salvation. Friends need to be grateful that you live in the time of salvation for the Gentiles. You live in the time of the church, when you can have all the things Paul talks about here. Which leads to one more point to consider this morning.

One more task that the church is to do. Just to review these other ones, the first, Paul says the church is to be a steward of God's grace, which means it's our job to be faithful with it and

protect it like a steward would. One day the Master is going to come home, and he's going to ask us, "What did you do with my church?" We'll have to have an answer, give an account. Second, the church is to be a revealer of the mystery. That's the second task we're to do, or to tell people what it means to live on this side of the cross. The church is in the teaching business, that's what we're into; we're not into all those other things, just to clarify our mission.

It brings us to a final point to consider this morning, one more task the churches to do. And these are all very simple by the way, on purpose, all very simple things. The last task is that the church is to evangelize. Just to round off the list and bring it to a close, a third task the church is to do is to evangelize or to go out and bring the Gentiles in. It means we're not just to teach the saved, we're to teach the lost as well. We're not just to instruct those within our four walls on a Sunday morning, we're to instruct those outside of it too. And if you read on, starting in verse four, Paul says,

By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow apart fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 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.

Verse six is an interesting verse in this passage; it's very helpful because it summarizes what Paul's saying here. Because Paul says that the Gentiles are now in Christ, they are fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers of the promise. In other words, they're equal to the Jews. They're not second-class citizens. They're not your third cousin twice removed. We're equal in Christ, and this is a summary of what Paul's been saying so far. And he says this in a creative way because all these words begin with the same prefix in Greek, the prefix *sun* or "with" you could translate that together with or equal width. So this verse, verse six could be rendered, "As it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit, to be specific that the Gentiles are *equal* heirs, *equal* members and *equal* partakers of the promise." That's the point of this text here.

For centuries, Gentiles were not equal with Jews. For a couple of millennia, the Jews were the special people of God. They were His chosen people. And what Paul is saying over and over again here, as a Jew, Paul is saying, that has changed now; the Gentiles can be part of His special people as well. He says that when you believe in Jesus, you become a fellow heir with the Jews, which means you can have the same inheritance as them; you can go to heaven as well. When you trust in Him, you become a fellow member of the body, it says, which means you have the same position before God. The Jews don't sit on one side of the room and the Gentiles sit on the

other. A number years ago, someone asked me they said, "What do you think about a Christian synagogue where Christians all go and sit in a synagogue together?" I said, "Why? What's the point? We're together with them now, we're fellows. Why do you have to separate us again?" We can be fellow partakers as well, partakers of Christ, partakers of the promise; but the point is that we're the same now.

While God does have a special plan for the Jews, the point is that we can have the same standing before God; and it's our job to tell people this. It's our job to go out and bring them in. The church has a responsibility to teach those inside and those outside of it. It has an obligation to the saved and to the lost. After all, this is why Paul was in prison in the first place. This is why he's suffering in this letter because he was going out to the Gentiles. If he would have stayed in Jerusalem and kept to himself, this never would have been a problem for him. But he did go out, got arrested on their behalf; and we have to have the same mindset as well.

You know, the whole idea of evangelism; it's fallen on hard times in recent years. It's fallen on tough times in North America. Because while crusades and revivals have done some good for us, they've done a lot of harm. They've done a lot of damage. And one thing they've done is to give us the idea that in order for someone to get saved, they have to come to church. In order for someone to go to heaven, they have to go to a crusade first, or a revival of some kind. But the problem with that is, what do you do when there are no crusades in your town? What do you do when there's no revivals or even church services going on? How does someone get saved then? Listen friends, you don't have to invite someone to church to tell them about Christ. You don't have to invite them to a revival in order to bring them to the Savior. You can just tell them. You can just evangelize them now. You don't have to wait until the Coronavirus is over. You don't have to wait until the pandemic stops. You can begin the work today. Tell your neighbor, it's a wonderful time to talk to people; they have lots of questions right now. They may ask you, "Why did God allow this to happen?" Well, you can tell them what God's plan for suffering is. His plan is to bring Christ to forgive us of our sins and suffer for us on the cross if we believe in Him. You can communicate that right now.

It leads me to ask you the question, you know, how are you doing with that today? When you read a passage like this and think of where Paul was at when he wrote it, how are you doing with sharing the gospel with the lost? Have you evangelized someone this week or this month? Or this year? Or now in the month of May? Have you even shared Christ with someone in the year 2020? Have you told the unbeliever next door down the street they can be saved and go to heaven? If you don't do this, I'll tell you no one will; if you don't tell them they're not going to hear from the world. So will you do that?

I ask this another way because this has been important for our pastors this morning. Are you reading your Bible? How are you doing with studying the Scriptures? Have you read your Bible

this week? Or this month or this year? Have you studied it recently? I ask you that because you can't teach it if you don't read it. You can't explain it and share it with someone if you don't know what it says. So how are you doing with that today? Do you have a hunger for this book? Are you stubborn about that?

Listen, friends, the ministry doesn't stop just because we can't be together. It doesn't end just because we have to meet online like this. It continues. You can still hear the voice of the Master if you open up the scriptures.

The story is told of the time when Charles Simeon first came to preach to his church in England in the 1900s. The people didn't like him. In fact, some of the people hated his guts. And they disliked him so much that they refused to come to church when he preached, and instead they locked up the pews so no one could sit in them. Every family had their own pew reserved, and they put chains on the pews; so that people had to sit in the aisles and stand in the back to listen to him preach. But as he continued week after week to bring the Word of God to the people to church group, and as he continued to preach to people standing in the aisles, standing outside windows with the windows open listening to him, the Lord blessed his ministry, because Charles Simeon said that the Word goes on even when the pews are locked up. The ministry continues even when there is resistance.

Friends, we need to have that perspective today. We need to think like he did and have some kind of holy stubbornness about this. The work continues even when there's resistance. The ministry doesn't stop even in the midst of the Coronavirus. There are still things for the church to do today. There's still a job to be done. We're to teach, we are to guard, and we're to evangelize. That's what God has called us to do. And let us only pray for us now that He would give us grace to do that in the days and weeks ahead. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for what You have called the church to do. And we thank You for a passage like this one in Ephesians chapter three. These are deep things, Lord, but we serve a deep God; and so we can't skim over them. We have to go deep with You, and I pray that justice would have been done to this text this morning.

And Lord, I do pray for our church. As we talk about all of the clarity of what You've called us to do. Lord, would you help us to be stubborn in a, in a compromising age? We do pray for other churches around us that preach the gospel. Lord, would You give them a holy resolve, to stand firm on the truth of Your word? Lord, I pray You give us that as well. And That our people would be evangelists in this dark time, that we will be lovers of Your truth. Give us a hunger for the Word like we talked about, help us to grow in these things.

May Christ be glorified, and may He be exalted as we love Your Word more and more every day. And Lord, now would You go with us through the rest of today on Sunday morning, would You go with us also through this week, and would we please you and give Christ all the glory. I pray this in His name. Amen.

Well, we appreciate you joining us this morning. If you would like to see more resources from us, please see our YouTube channel. You can just type in Grace Fellowship Chilliwack and see the resources we have there. You can also catch us online at gracefellowshipchilliwack.com. May the Lord bless you and have a wonderful day.