

EPHESIANS

9. THE WONDER OF IT ALL EPHESIANS 3:1-13

As Paul starts Ephesians 3, he stops his thoughts at verse 2 and explores a tangent until verse 14. This tangent reveals his own heart in the midst of hardship. Hardship is one of the ways that we experience the fullness of salvation coming together in the wonder of how He works amidst suffering.

Read Ephesians 3:1-13.

- ♦ **What kinds of things about God or the Christian life are you most excited about? If you were able to explore a tangent like Paul, what would you want to talk about?**
- ♦ **Have you ever seen hardship as the grace of God? What did that look like?**

1. **The wonder of hardship.** –3:1 *“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—”*

Ephesians has been showing God’s intention throughout human history as He creates a people for Himself. Paul says that sin is the problem and Jesus is our hope. Sin has separated us from each other and God, but God, through Jesus’ death and resurrection, reconciles us to God and each other. Paul gets sidetracked and starts to speak of his ministry and what it has cost him—the first being his suffering. Why is Paul suffering? Because he has been talking about the love and grace of God, offering hope to those who have none.

- ♦ **What shape has suffering taken in your own life?**
- ♦ **How do you relate to Paul or not?**
- ♦ **In the midst of suffering, what do you tend to think/feel about yourself? About God?**
- ♦ **As a follow-up to the previous question, how honest are you about those thoughts and feelings—with yourself? With others? With God?**

Paul doesn’t doubt God’s goodness or get bitter or disappointed with God; he knows he is where he is because he is under the hand of Jesus. To be a Christian is not simply to “get your sins forgiven.” God pulls us into His work and interacts with us; many times, that will bring with it a personal cost. For Paul, that cost becomes **financial, physical, and emotional.**

- ♦ **Have you ever borne a cost for following Jesus? What did that look like?**
- ♦ **How can we remind each other that Jesus is ultimately in control—even in our current cultural moment?**
- ♦ **How can we grow closer to Jesus in the midst of hardship?**

2. **The wonder of grace** –3:4-5 *When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*

Mystery is something revealed by God because we would never discover it on our own. The ultimate mystery revealed is salvation by grace. Whenever Paul uses the word “mystery,” it has something to do with the Gospel. The Gospel is that the Son of God came to earth and triumphed through weakness and suffering. As a result, when we are “in Christ,” we are justified by God; in our suffering and weakness, we see His power and love more clearly.

- ♦ **Do you see salvation by grace alone as a wonder?**

3. **The wonder of God’s people, the Church** –3:10 *so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known...*

Paul says the ultimate purpose of God is to bring together everything in the world in Jesus. How will the world see what God is doing? **Through us, His Church!**

- ♦ **How do you see God’s people, the Church, bearing witness to God’s purpose?**
- ♦ **Where do you personally feel called to live this out?**

4. **The wonder of freedom** –3:13 *So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.*

Paul says, “if you understand all I just said then you will not be undone by hardship, but grow through it.”

- A. No suffering is ever for nothing.
- B. No suffering can really hurt you.
- C. All suffering will be for His glory.

One writer said, “Jesus took away the one bit of suffering, the only kind of suffering, that can really destroy you. That is being cast out from God.”

- ♦ **How can we enter into one another’s hardships and point each other to trust in Jesus?**