



Series: Standalone/Guest Speaker

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Text: Ephesians 3:1-13

Title: The Plan of God

Furniture illustration: There is nothing, in my opinion, that is more satisfying than seeing plans laid out and having it all come together.

In this section of Ephesians Paul is laying out for the church at Ephesus the eternal plan of God and how, when it's looked at fully, is beautiful and fulfilling and absolutely nothing can thwart it.

We find Paul praying for the saints in Ephesus. In His praying, we see a side of Paul that I love. We see him pastor the people there by letting them know his passion and desire to see them understand God's plan in the midst of unfortunate circumstances.

As he begins to pray for them, Paul gets sidetracked and draws their attention to the plan of God. Next week we are going to focus on the prayer that Paul prays but today we get to look in on the rabbit trail he sets out on.

As I was studying this, I was encouraged to know that even Paul chases rabbit trails when he prays. If he does it, then there's grace for you and me when we do it as well haha.

What Paul is showing them and now us is that everything we have been seeing up to this point has been God's plan from the beginning and now everything has finally taken place. So, what is it about this plan that we need to pay special attention to day? **That involves us, it's fulfilled in Jesus, its show through the church.**

I believe Paul is reminding them and now us of this because of what we will face in this world. There are going to be times of trials and doubts in our lives, but we must pause and look at the plan of God.

God has a plan, and it includes you

We see in the beginning of verse 11 **11 This was according to the eternal purpose**

Now we are going to break this down, but I want to encourage you with something this morning. There was never a time where God was not in control. And there will never be a time where He isn't in control.



It says eternal. God was moving and shaking and doing and planning before the world was in existence. He had a purpose.

What was that purpose? We've been looking at it in chapters one two and now 3, that God's purpose was to redeem broken people to Himself. Remember Ephesians 1? He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless. He predestined us to be adopted as children through Jesus.

These broken people as we saw in chapter two are from every ethnicity and these people would become part of one body and part of His family to be in a loving relationship with God and each other.

For Paul, he could say I can walk through suffering and brokenness and imprisonment because I know the purpose that God has, and that purpose includes you.

There is absolutely nothing that you have done or will do that can alter God's plan for you if He has set his affections on you.

I think many of us need to be reminded of this today. Because we still live in a broken world and because we, unfortunately, operate in our brokenness, **we believe the lie that God we have become useless in the plans of God.**

Could you imagine how our life would look if we lived in the reality that God's purpose included us **even when we don't feel like we have a part to play.**

Listen to me: Before you made that mistake. Before you sent that text message. Before you lied to that person you loved. Before you said those words that you regretted. Before you made that decision that ruined your reputation. Before you had that affair. Before that addiction. Before that eating disorder. Before your crippling depression. Before any of those things that you wished were never true of your life, God knew all of that. God saw all of that. And He is saying to us "come out of hiding child and come to me and rest." Do you believe that God's plans include you? That means that everything you are going through, good or bad, God has an opportunity to show His plan in and through it.

Listen to me, **there is no such thing as a wasted experience!** God is in the business of teaching you who He is on the mountain top as well as in the valleys.

That divorce, that jealousy, that anger, that lust, that addiction, that lie you told, that depression, that insert whatever you think disqualifies you from the plan of God. I know when you sit in that it brings shame to you.



I know that feeling you feel. That feeling of not feeling worthy enough to be useful to God. You rehearse in your head over and over again the failures and the let down and the wrongs you have done. But can I let you in on a little secret? Being unqualified is what makes you qualified to be useful.

That's why we see in Titus 3:5 "not by being good or the righteousness that we have done but according to Jesus' mercy, He saved us." That's why in **Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) — 8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

Listen, it doesn't matter where you have come from, what you have done, what sins you have committed, what sins you will commit, your past experiences whether they be good or bad, even if you don't feel worthy of being used by God, he still has a plan for you.

How do we know that to be true? Because...

God's Plan is Fulfilled in Jesus

One of the main words in this section of scripture is mystery. You see it used four times. Verse 3, 4, 6, 9.

Now many of us love a good mystery, right? That's why so many were drawn to Making a Murderer and podcasts like

Serial. We are drawn to mysteries because we want to figure out what truly happened. My wife is notorious for watching mysteries and movies and trying to figure out what's going on before they actually reveal plot twists. Watching a movie with our kids and they are the same way. They ask who's the bad guy and they yell out what they think is going to happen. Enjoy the movie! You don't have to figure it out for everybody.

However, what Paul is communicating as a mystery is not something hidden that you have to try and figure out but something that has actually been revealed by God because you would not have figured it out on your own.

What was that revealed mystery? The fact that Gentiles did not have to become like Jews to be part of the promises of God. That both Jew and Gentile now have access to God.

To give you context here, Paul is building on what he spoke about it in chapter 2. That through Jesus, gentiles who were not God's chosen people, now have the chance, by His grace to be chosen.

It was the law-free gospel that Paul proclaimed, and because it was law-free it was applicable to Gentiles as well as to Jews. Gentiles, formerly kept apart from Jews by the barrier of the law, were now able to benefit from God's saving act in Christ



and to be incorporated in him along with Jews. This aspect of the secret has been revealed.¹ **And it was all by grace.**

Jesus, by His grace, overcame our sin and our guilt and our shame by taking it all on Himself. We were lost and hopeless and helpless and Jesus stepped in and showed us that we are loved and accepted and pardoned and delighted in and brought into His family. Even when we were **outsiders**. Even when we were dead in our sin. Even when we wanted nothing to do with God. Even when...That's the mystery.

It's mysterious because we would never operate that way. We don't operate that way. When people do us wrong our inclination is to hope they get what's coming their way. Or if they want our forgiveness, they need to show us they deserve it.

So, we approach God this way too. We want to earn God's favor and feel we need to work for His approval and show ourselves worthy of His love but here's the thing. We are going to fail at that over and over and over again.

We need to see the gospel for what it is...A chance to be known and be loved and to rest in what's been done on our behalf because of Christ.

That's why in verse 11 we see **11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,**

I love that line "has realized." You know what that means? It's done. It's finished. There is nothing you can add to it or anything you can take away from it. What Jesus did on the cross secured our standing in the eyes of God. All we have to do is accept it by faith.

Paul is saying, this is why I can go to prison. This is why I can suffer. So that people can understand the grace of Jesus.

Look at verse 7, **7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 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, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,**

¹ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 230–231.



He says it is his ultimate goal in life to preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus. This word, unsearchable, isn't used anywhere outside of the biblical Greek. When Paul thought about the glory of Christ, he literally made up a word.²

Family, we may not be financially rich, but in Christ you and I are richer than we could ever imagine. Man, if we would only live in those riches.

Have you ever played the "would you rather" game. I love those because it gives us a chance to think about life from a different perspective. The would you rather from yesterday was "would you rather **never work again, never pay for anything, never get sick, or never age?**"

To me that was easy, I love being a pastor, I rarely get sick now, and getting older imo gives me a chance to continue to experience life and share it with others so my answer was, never pay for anything. Could you imagine what life would be like if you never had to pay for anything again? The material riches would be indescribable.

But this morning as I was thinking about the question, in Christ we have all of those things already. I do not have to work for my salvation because its secured. I don't have to pay for my

sins because Jesus paid the price already. Sickness may rattle me here on earth but there will be a day where sickness is put to death, and I don't have to fear getting old in Christ because every day I pitch my tent closer and closer to eternity with Him forever.

Christ did all of this for me! Why?

10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

God's plan is shown through the church

We have become a chosen group of people who are designated as Holy and as priests that fully belong to God based on His work, not ours.

Guys, I can't stress this enough. If you are not aware of what you deserve, you won't appreciate what God gives. His grace in our lives should immediately cause us to worship. This should immediately blow us away. This should immediately cause us to be in a posture of here I am Lord, let me use my life as worship for you because I am putting on display your grace to others.

² Merida, Tony. *Christ Centered Exposition: Ephesians*, 76.



But it isn't just people who we see, the text says that we are on display for rulers and authorities in heavenly places to see as well.

Paul uses this same language in chapter 1 when he mentions Jesus at the right hand in heavenly realms as well as Jesus having all rule and authority over power and dominions. In fact, we are also going to see in Ephesians 6 it mentions rulers and authorities and powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.

What Paul is saying is that these beings are looking at us and seeing God's grace on display in our lives and they are looking in amazement that God would do this for us.

Our response? Let me go and proclaim your grace and your mercy. Your excellencies to those who are still in the dark. Family, when it comes to being part of the church, we are not called to be consumers for the building of our kingdom but carriers of the gospel for the building of God's kingdom.

Carriers, not consumers.

If we care more about the color of the carpet or the instruments being used on a Sunday morning or insert whatever thing that brings me comfort...if we care more about those things than we do the souls of millions of people

who are separated from the love of God, family we are missing the point.

Let me say it this way: The church isn't an audience, it's an army to be mobilized for the Kingdom.

It isn't a show, I am not here for entertainment. The worship team are not here for entertainment. If it ever gets to be about us, we must be willing to step down. Why?

The Church is a movement that was established by Jesus for Jesus, it's the vehicle He's given his message to. As those who have been restored through the finished work of Jesus, we have been charged to be ambassadors of restoration to a lost and broken world.

Living missionally isn't an initiative, a program or an event, it is a lifestyle. It's not about adding things to your life it's about intersecting what you already have with gospel intentionality. The gospel should overflow into everyday life through love, service and hospitality. In everything that we do, we're looking for ways to show and share the good news of Jesus to people in our neighborhood, workplace, community and around the world. This is why we exist; the church is God's plan A for reaching the world with the gospel!



So, the question remains. Why would Paul spend time pointing our attention to the plan of God? I believe we need to be reminded of the plan of God for a few reasons:

Focusing on the plan of God gives us the power to get back up after we fail.

God's plan was started by Him which means He is the one who will finish it. If that's true, then I do not need to allow my shortcomings lead me to feel defeated. Remember in chapter 1:4? [4] ...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

What did he choose us for? To be holy and blameless.
Believer, that will happen!

Or the verse I gave you a couple of weeks ago: *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand (predestined) that we should walk in them."* (2:10)

He predestined that I would be someone whose life would be filled with good works and my life would be to the praise of his glory!

That means that the burden of "fixing" my life is not on me. God has already decreed and supplied the power for it!

You see, many of you feel so defeated! You think, "How am I going to get over my lust? How am I ever going to fix my marriage? You just told me I should share the truth of Jesus; how can I be bold enough to that?

The good works God has for you, he has already predestined for you, and already provided the power for you to do. It has been part of the plan!

You can be confident in his plan to use you because that's why he said he chose you... John 15:16, You did not choose me, but I chose you... You just have to say yes and let him do it.

He saved you to use you to bring other people to Jesus. We are not tasked to figuring out the mysteries of how God has worked in our past, we are called to confidently embrace what He wants to do in our future.

Family, when you fail miserably as a Christian—and you will sometimes—when you look at the plan of God, you can have the strength to get up! **Prov 24:11, "The righteous man falls seven times, and gets back up again."**

7 is the # of perfection. Imagine being behind a man in the mall that fell *7 times*. The first time he trips you chuckle a little bit. The second and third time you laugh but not as hard as



before. Fourth time and on, you are wondering what the heck is up with this guy?!?!

Some of you are **discouraged by how much you fall**: The **righteous man shows his righteousness** not by never falling, but by what he does when he falls.

Falling just demonstrates that you are not perfect. Getting back up when you do demonstrates that you believe the gospel.

So, you've messed up, you've failed, you've disappointed yourself again, you've fallen flat on your face... **so what?** Get up and believe the gospel!

Focusing on the plan of God encourages us in our moments of suffering

Remember, Paul, pauses his prayer and reminds them that he is in prison. Paul is writing this letter from a jail cell, and he says, yes, I'm in prison, but I'm actually a prisoner for Christ. So, he lays all of this out and then says at the end of this section, **therefore...don't lose heart.**

Paul has every reason and right to be sad about his circumstances and the people in Ephesus have every right to be concerned for him and what could happen to them as well, but Paul says, don't be discouraged.

In fact, we see in verses 2, 7, and 8 that Paul focuses more on the grace of God in his life than the current circumstances he finds himself in. Why? Because he knows that God is in control and is using him to see people come to Jesus. However, it's happening through his suffering.

He is suffering in prison on their behalf, as their champion, standing firm for their inclusion in God's new society. He is so convinced that he is prepared to pay any price to see it become a reality.³

Paul is pastoring his people that the suffering he is stepping into is worth it and when the suffering in their lives comes up that they should know and understand its part for the course.

Can I ask you a question? How do you view your suffering? When God allows unfortunate circumstances to come your way. When you taste the bitterness of God's providence what is your response?

³ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 129.



We are going to walk through difficult seasons as followers of Jesus. We are going to have our prison moments, but Paul is saying to them and to us now, do not lose heart.

In the original language its communicated disheartened which means “your heart gets taken out of you.” Maybe you started your journey with Christ all the way in and recently feel like your heart just isn’t in it anymore.

The constant conversations with evangelicals who would much rather argue and chase after boogymen than extend love. The constant conversations with people who are frustrated with the church and you’re having to convince them we aren’t all like that. The ridicule that takes place towards Christians who are labeled “bigots” or “backwards thinking” or “on the wrong side of history.”

Maybe it isn’t even that. Maybe you have been praying to God for specific healing for yourself or a loved one and it hasn’t happened yet. You’ve been praying for a job, and nothing has come of it. Your spouse has done your dirty, that friend has betrayed you. That child has walked away from the faith. That sin keeps coming up and you just can’t seem to find victory over it. That addiction still has a grip on you. What is it that has caused you to begin to have your heart taken out of you?

What goes through your mind in those moments? Maybe you are angry with God or frustrated because you know life isn’t supposed to be this way. In the midst of your suffering, you can believe that God still has a plan for your life. That plan is to know Him and be known By Him.

Suffering causes us to doubt God’s goodness. Suffering challenges our faith. Suffering causes us to question the word of God. When we doubt God’s goodness or have our faith challenge or we question the word of God, we combat those feelings by...remembering the Word of God.

When Jesus was being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He quoted Scripture to fight back. My prayer for us family is that when we are beat down and cut up by suffering, we bleed scripture. That we, like the Psalmist says will hide God’s word in our hearts so that we won’t sin against Him.

When we spend time soaking and meditating on the word of God, it may not change the circumstances we are walking in, but it will give us the reminders we need as we walk through them.

When we meditate on the word of God, we will see that in it does it say that we will never go through suffering, but we will see in several places that Christ is with us in the suffering.



In fact, Jesus tells his followers that they will face many trials in this world, but he follows it up by saying take heart, don't lose heart but take heart, remind your heart of this truth, "I have overcome the world."

Paul, in this section, is holding on to that truth and says that in his suffering, it will give way for glory, and we need to see that our suffering, in Christ, will make way for glory as well. Why? Because as followers of Jesus we endure with hope that the best is yet to come.

That that sickness, that loneliness, that betrayal, that sin, that all of these momentary and light afflictions will seem as nothing in light of the eternal weight of glory.

Don't lose heart. God has a plan. **Call up our teams...**

When we fail to remember that plan, God in His grace has allowed us to partake in communion to do what? Remember.