



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Divine Purpose in History and Prophecy, Part XI

Ephesians 3:1-13

Eschatology Doctrinal Studies

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Which gives us so much light concerning the things that Thou art doing in this world Thou hast created. We tend, Lord, in reading Thy word to look at the past and then to look into the future and forget that the things that are happening today are things that are found within the divine purpose as well. And we recognize that Thou art doing things that are set forth in the Scripture as being important and significant for both Jews and Gentiles. We ask, Lord, that Thou would guide our thinking tonight, Thou would give us open ears spiritually to listen to the word of God, to ponder its teaching, and then to, ultimately, come to embrace by the ministry of the Holy Spirit and have it change our lives. We thank Thee now for this time together and ask Thou would be with us in it.

For Jesus' Sake. Amen

[Message] Well in our study in the Divine Purpose we have come to the present age and I'm stopping for two or three lessons to deal with the question of what God is doing now. When we think about the Divine Purpose, I think, as I mentioned in my

prayer to the Lord that we sometimes think about the past and reflect upon in then look into the future and then forget that we live also in the present time in the Divine Purpose and that we may expect to find in Scripture, we do find in Scripture, things that have to do with what the Lord is doing in the present day. And so we are stopping to look at that. Last week we look at Ephesians chapter 2 and now, this evening we are going to look at Ephesians chapter 3, verse 1 through verse 13. So if you have your New Testament there follow along with me as I read these verses.

“For this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard about the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you: found that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; which as I have briefly written already, by which when you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel: of which I became a minister, according to the gift of grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, his grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God, might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Therefore, I ask that you do no lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”

When we think of the present age and what Scripture says about it that there are certain things that come to our minds if we are Bible readers, and come very strongly to our minds, I think, one of them is that this is the time of Israel's national rejection. Now, national rejection not rejection of individual Israelites, but rejection of the nation, the people of Israel. In chapter 11 of the Epistles to the Romans, the apostle makes it very plain. I think, I'm going to read verse 11 through verse 14 or 15 of this chapter so you will see that that's what Paul acknowledges here that Israel has become a rejected nation.

“I say then have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not, but through their fall to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now, if their fall is riches for the world and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness; for I speak to you Gentiles inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles. I magnify my ministry. If by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them; for if they are being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be, but life from the dead.”

Now, you'll notice the characteristic words he says “they've been cast away.” He says also in verse 12 that, “they have fallen.” He says too that, “they have failed,” and so you can see from this he says they've fallen also in verse 11 because they have stumbled. So the Scripture makes it very plain in Paul that Israel has suffered national rejection. Now, of course, individual Israelites are being saved Paul says in that same chapter. There is a remnant according to the election of grace, a remnant, remnant of Israelites of his flesh. And Paul says also that part of his ministry is to provoke his flesh to jealousy that he might save some of them. So when we think of this present time we think of it as a time of Israel's national rejection and that's certainly true. That's linked, of course, to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on Calvary's cross there bringing him to death in the cross.

A second thing that we have commented upon is that the present age is characterized by Gentile acceptance as Gentiles. Now, think about this for a moment because this is a tremendous change. Who has had a divinely given religion? Well Israel had. The Old Testament Judaism set forth in the word of God was divinely by the Lord God through Moses. And so if you think about that for a moment you'll realize how significant it was to be an Israelite and how if you were not an Israelite it would have been or should have been very disturbing. In fact, it was disturbing to a lot of people. But, nevertheless, Israel is the people that received a divinely given system of truth.

Now, if Gentiles were to be saved in the Old Testament times, there were some, of course, they were to be saved by becoming Jews. It was necessary for them to be circumcised if male and to be incorporated into Israel, become part of the people of God, Israel. So the question of Gentile salvation was something that Gentiles who knew anything about Judaism would surely have thought about.

Now, in the New Testament in the Book of Acts we can see some of the struggles that went on when Israel rejected the Messiah, crucified him with the help of the Gentiles. Then we read of the struggles over Gentile salvation first of all in Cornelius' house and Peter, if you'll remember, didn't even want to preach the gospel to them because they were unclean. To be with them in the same house was to be with someone who was unclean, so he had to be admonished about that; and even then Peter was objecting a bit until God in a supernatural way caused the apostle to go the house of Cornelius. There he learned, if he had any doubts about it before, and evidently he did have doubts about it before, that Gentiles could be saved apart from becoming a Jew because these Gentiles in Cornelius' house experienced the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit that fell upon them then as Peter says in Acts, chapter 11, “just as we did.” So the apostle was brought by experience to understand what was transpiring.

Now, still the question may have been raised and evidently was in Antioch when Jewish believers came from Jerusalem and to the Antiochian Christians that they must be

baptized in order to be saved. And so that caused the Jerusalem discussion recorded in Acts chapter 15 and, finally, after a great deal of discussion and it was a very hearty discussion because the words that he used with regard to it are of a real debate going on over the question. And, finally, if you'll remember, Peter in Acts chapter 15 in verse 11 expresses a very significant fact in that company of people by saying, “But we believe that though the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” In other words they learned that salvation is a Gentile experience too. They learned also that they didn't have to become Jews in order to have the salvation spoken of in the New Testament. Circumcision was no longer a necessary thing. So Gentile acceptance as Gentiles, no question about Gentile acceptance, although some had doubts about that and stumbled over it but now, no question about Gentile salvation as Gentiles. It's obvious that that didn't settle everything because Paul was troubled by the “Judiazers” as he went around the world afterwards preaching the word in Asia Minor and then on in Greece. He was having trouble with “Judiazers” people but nevertheless as the Scripture set forth it was settled from the standpoint of the apostles.

Now, there is one other thing that we must not forget. This is often forgotten. It is forgotten often by some who believe properly in some of the covenants of the word of God but, nevertheless, believe that Israel does not have a national future. I don't see how anyone can really hold that if he reads the passages and ponders them because in these passages in which the apostle talks about Gentile salvation he never negates the fact that the promises made to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are also to be fulfilled. As a matter of fact they are being fulfilled every time a Jewish man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and every time a Gentile does because Jews and Gentiles are included in the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenants.

So characteristic of the present age then some of the characteristics include Israel's national rejection, Gentile acceptance as Gentiles and Israel's national predominance and the future as set form in the word of God, that still holds.

Now, the passage before us as you probably can tell from the reading of it, if you'll ponder just a moment particularly verses 5 and 6, is a passage in which Paul highlights Gentile acceptance with the nation Israel. Let me read it again “Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men as it is now revealed by his spirit to his holy apostles and prophets that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of his promise in Messiah through the gospel.” So what Paul is going to talk about now is Gentile acceptance which he calls a secret, a mystery. In fact, it was a mystery he says, “Which in other ages was not made know to the sons of men.” There was no question in the Old Testament about whether Gentiles would be saved. Abraham's promise said, “Indeed should all the families of the earth be blessed.” But to be saved and the same way and into the same spiritual position and blessing as an Israelite, that's another matter and history enabled them to understand.

Well the connection is fairly easy to follow here. He has just noted in Chapter 2, verse 15, “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances so as to create in himself one new man from the two thus making peace.” Peace between Jews and Gentiles and now the body of the believing people may be called “one new man.” The term that the New Testament has come to use for this one new man more than any other term is the term “the church” the called out body “ecclesia” *kaleo* plus *ek*, *kaleo* “to call,” *ek*, “out,” the *ecclesia* is the called out body, the church. And we pointed out that while promise was made that our Lord would build his church that the church was entered by the baptism of the Holy Spirit which did not occur until the Day of Pentecost. We went through all of this and also even in Acts chapter 11 when Peter says what happens in Cornelius' house he says that's what happened to us in the beginning and identifies it as the promise that the Lord had made in Acts chapter 1, that the Holy Spirit would come and baptized them into the union of the Church of Jesus Christ, so the “new man.”

And, furthermore, he says with reference to this “new man” that the Gentiles are a dwelling place of God in the spirit. Notice, chapter 2 in verse 22, well maybe read verse 19 again. Some of you were not here last Wednesday night, where were you, incidentally? But anyway, verse 19, “Now, therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets Jesus Christ himself, being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together grows into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you are also being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” So here the “new man” the dwelling place of both Jews and Gentiles. He calls this a dwelling place, a habitation of God.

Now, if I know the Apostle Paul when something like this is set forth by him the thing that he would be particularly interested in is that you and I, the Ephesians and anyone else would have just such an experience of the Lord God dwelling within us as an experience. Not simply as a doctrinal matter that some Bible teacher talked to us about but that we know what it really is in our personal experience to be a holy temple in the Lord built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. So, I think, that when Paul begins chapter 3, verse 1, he says “For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles” but Paul is a human person, he’s probably much more human than I am. I don’t know that I’m in human but I’m not as human as some people. Some come and say to me Dr. Johnson you’re kind of “standoffish” and that’s probably true. But the apostle was not like that. That’s much to his credit. And he is going now having said that “You are a dwelling place of God in the Spirit for this reason.” I’m sure he wanted to say to urge them to make this their own personal experience to realize that, to realize that they really were the dwelling place of the Lord God and order their lives by the Spirits’ help with that in mind. That’s something for each of us, isn’t it? If we have believed in Jesus Christ we are what he says, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit, a habitation of God in the Spirit.

Now, if we really believe that and if we really live our lives in accordance with that, I'm sure that it will make a big difference in the lives of all of us. I know when I think about that at times that truth grips me and my life becomes just a little bit different as certain decisions have to be made, the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Now, I think, that is what he wanted to talk about. He uses the Greek term *katoiketerion* which means a dwelling place. Now, it's a term that is derived from the word that means to dwell plus the proposition *kata*. Now, the reason I say this is because if you'll look down for a little bit you'll notice that in verse 14, he says, “for this reason.” Now, he just said “for this reason” in chapter 3, verse 1, he's picking up the same thing “for this reason” but then in verse 17, he says, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” And the verb that he uses there is the verb *katoikesis* closely related to the noun the habitation of God in the Spirit. So what he is saying then is that he is praying, he is bowing his knees, verse 14, to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, verse 17, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” In other words what you are in your position he would rather really like for you to have in your experience that Christ may dwell, make his home in that special sense there in his Spirit.

Well why didn't he say that? Why did he wait from verse 22 of chapter 2, and then verse 1 of chapter 3, why didn't he simply go right on to this prayer in verse 14, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father and ask that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith?” Well I suggest to you this and it is only a suggestion but knowing Paul a little bit you'll notice he said “For this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles.” The word that threw him off is the word “Gentiles.” He's the apostle of the Gentiles, isn't he?

Now, you young people you won't understand this, but I say this is true to experience that when you get to be an old man, and remember he was Paul the aged, what is the word, enhanced, chronologically enhanced? That's what he was, chronologically enhanced and when you get to be chronologically enhanced among the

things you have to contend with is your mind wanders. You know why, because you know so much. It's hard to pick out just among the many things you know what to say. I probably have some other things wrong with me too. But anyway what he intended to do you see was to say I want this to be a reality in your life. But Gentiles, I say, caused him to forget what he was going to say hold off on it because he's the apostle of the Gentiles and it means a whole lot to him. And he is writing to Gentiles and he is so pleased with what God has done for Gentiles. So we take it that that's what happened and so now, he's going to talk about the ministry to the Gentiles. Just a brief outline of it in verse 1 through verse 6 and first of all in verse 1 through verse 3 he says he got this by revelation. Notice the 2nd verse, “If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you. How that by revelation he made known me the mystery as I have briefly written already.”

A secret, now, the thing I want you to notice first is that Paul says “it was revealed” to him. I gather that the experience on the Damascus Road had a great deal to do with it. God appeared to Paul at other times when he went off and sought the face of the Lord for a lengthy period of time as he says in Galatians 1. Maybe that was the time but, nevertheless, this truth was revealed to him the truth of the mystery. So “I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for you Gentiles.” I like the way Paul writes this “prisoner of Jesus Christ” because actually he was prisoner of Nero when he wrote this. But he thinks not in human terms so much as he thinks in the light of the divine working in his life. In fact, I think that's characteristic of the apostle. He never did think ultimately and purely in human terms. He looked at his life as being something given by God, controlled by the will of God and, therefore, for him to understand things we must remember it is God who controls the affairs of men and of me. That pertains to you and that pertains to me also. We look at our lives, first of all, if we are wise, we look at them as life given by God for a particular purpose and us, each one of us, given by God for his particular

purpose. Prisoner of Jesus Christ, he mentions the dispensation of the grace of God. That's the administration of grace that God gave to him.

Now, there are different administrations in the Bible. We've already talked about the administration of the law when we talked about the Mosaic Law and the age of law. And we saw the age of the Mosaic Law extended over the period of time from Mt. Sinai and the giving of law to the cross of Jesus Christ when the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom, that was an administration, a dispensation, a dispensation of the law. Sometimes the people who are dispensational theologians think that they're the only ones that use that term. As a matter of fact, the covenant theologians used the term dispensation long before the dispensationalist did. Their dispensations are slightly different. Their dispensation or dispensations administrations of the covenant of grace, the covenant of the promises the Messianic promises of God. Dispensationalist have generally thought, although they are pulling in their horns at the present time, as dispensations as periods of testing designed to show man that he was a sinner one following right after the other. What Paul means here is simply the administration of the grace of God to the Gentiles. He was the apostle of the Gentiles and so he talks about that.

There is, of course, another administration that we look forward to in the future and that is the administration of the kingdom of God upon the earth. Paul doesn't say much about that in the epistle to the Ephesians. The church is his primary subject.

Now, he talks about the newness of it as being a mystery that he received by revelation. Now, two questions face us here and the first one is, what is the mystery? Occasionally you will hear people say and I think you found this written in particular things that have been written sometimes in study Bibles. I didn't look this up so my memory may not be absolutely perfect on this point but some have interpreted the mystery as being the church. That is the church is a mystery the church began on the Day of Pentecost, the church ends with the coming of the Lord and the church is a

mystery having no connection with the past or any connection with the future after the coming of the Lord; that is of the tribulation period of time.

Now, I don't accept that and I'll tell you why I don't accept it. First of all, of course, I don't accept it because I don't think it is biblical. That's not fair because people can always say that about anything. The church was essentially a Jewish church on the Day of Pentecost and in other words the people of God when the Holy Spirit came were Jewish believers and were Jewish believers the next day too. There is a definite connection between the saints of God gathered on Pentecost before the coming of the Spirit and the saints of God after the Spirit came. So I do not accept the idea that the church is something absolutely new. I've gone over this with you before and I don't guess I have to do it again. If you have any questions about it go back again and note the messages that I gave with reference to the church in this particular series.

What then is the mystery? Well, of course, it is not something mysterious like one of Agatha's mysteries. Although the rattle of the chains in Nero's prison might have enhanced the idea of something spooky, Paul doesn't talk about that. What he is talking about when he says here the mystery that has been revealed to him, the hidden truth that is now disclosed, is the relation of Jews and Gentiles in the one body. That's the mystery. That is that in the one body there is an absolute equality between Jews and Gentiles. That did not exist before now it does exist. He explains it. Just look at it carefully “which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men as it has not been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.” In other words he says in the Old Testament times, in previous times, we don't know anything about Gentiles being saved as Gentiles and possessing the same promised blessings as the Jews. He puts it more plainly in verse 6, “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ,” the Messianic promise, “through the good news.” So the mystery is the relation of Jews and Gentiles in that body.

The second question is to what extent was it known in Old Testament times? Did we have the church in the Old Testament? No we don't have the church in the Old Testament. I'm not trying to say that. Actually, two interpretations hang here on the sense on the little word “as.” “Which in other ages” in verse 5 “was not made known to the sons of men ‘as’ it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.” One interpretation takes this little article “as” as comparative. That is, we knew about this in Old Testament times we just didn't know about it to the extent that we know about it now and the other takes it as being restrictive. If we say the comparative sense as we knew about it in Old Testament times you have to acknowledge some partial knowledge at least of this relationship of Jew and Gentiles in the redeemed body.

Now, I might say this, by the way, I'll admit that there was very little knowledge of that. If we have to look at and find that kind of knowledge, we would find it perhaps in our Lord's promise that on the rock of the confession of his name, Jesus the Son of God, he would build his church. Or in John chapter 10 in verse 16, where he talks about other people, “other sheep I have which are not of this flock them also I must bring, not of this fold, and there shall be one flock, one shepherd.” In other words he gave indications but they were only indications.

Now, if you want to say that there was not indication of this in the Old Testament at all and no anticipation of it you would take the restrictive view of the “as” and you would say that when he says “which in other ages was not made know to the sons of men as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets” you would just say there was no knowledge. “As” is used in a restrictive sense. And there is a good bit to be said of this view. For example, the context supports the fact that this relationship in the body of Christ is new. He's called it a “new man” a fresh man using the adjective that means fresh rather than recent, fresh man, chapter 2, verse 15. Chapter 3, verse 9, he says, “To make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus

Christ.” That certainly seems to suggest there is no knowledge in Old Testament times or previous times of this equality that exists between Jew and Gentiles in the people of God. Parallel passages I think support it and if you were to look at Galatians 1:26, we don’t have time to look up all of these passages, you will see further support of that. He says that this is a revelation and that would seem to be opposed to that which is hidden or covered. It means to unveil, something unveiled and he even uses the adverb “now” “as it has now been revealed by his Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.”

Furthermore, you cannot so far as I know cite any Old Testament text saying that in the one body Jew and Gentile are fellow heirs of the same body partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel in the sense we are talking about here. The nature and the calling of the church, so far as I can tell, was unknown in Old Testament times. And even those who would disagree with me a little bit will acknowledge there isn’t much of that, if there is any.

Now, hosts, that’s the word “as, the Greek word is host. This word “as” can be used in a restrictive sense. For example, if we should have someone sitting here a blind man and you were to say to him or I were to say to him in conversation “I would like to say to you that the sun does not shine in the night as it does in the day time” now, what sense am I using as. I don’t mean to acknowledge that the sun shines in the nighttime; I’m using the “as” in this restrictive sense. The sun doesn’t shine in the nighttime. So I might say the sun does not shine in the nighttime as it does in the daytime. I’m using “as” in the restrictive sense. There are a few references to this in the New Testament that many would like to say are parallel with this.

So what I would like to say then is simply this that what Paul is saying is that, essentially the nation of Israel has been cast off, “there is a remnant of believing people,” Romans 11:5, they were Israelites, you see them on the Day of Pentecost, for example, the remnant, “in this age they have been joined and are being joined by Gentiles” Paul uses the figure of the graft in Romans 11, we’re going to talk about that in connection with

this, “these Gentiles have been grafted into the Olive Tree” representing in an illustrative fashion the covenantal program. So what we then have is Israel as a nation cast off. The remnant who were faithful, the apostles, others, believing people, in the gospel accounts you could read of them, they now have been joined by Gentiles, been brought in, Paul be particular of the minister of them, formed into a body in which each is equal. Jew and Gentile, as he says I’ll say it again, “fellow heirs of the same body, partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel.” Actually he uses words with the word preposition “with” together with in each of those words. I’ll translate them that way, “Fellow heirs, fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, fellow partakers of the promise.” In other words, the saving promises that the Old Testament has set forthcoming first from Abraham, through David through the New Covenant, now, present being preached are possession of Jews and Gentiles equally in the one body of Jesus Christ. This is the saved part of the Messiah’s kingdom and equality exists between them.

One of the well-known scholars of the Epistle to the Ephesians in a two-volume work, two big, big volumes, if I told you his name you’d be prejudice against him. So I won’t tell you his name. What he says is I think basically true. He says this, “It is the distinctive message of Ephesians that no Gentile can have communion with Christ or with God unless he also has communion with Israel.” He goes on to say “In each case the body to which the Gentiles are joined is none other than Christ and the first members of the body are the Jews.” Or to put in other ways I’ve quoted others to you more than once, I’m sure you have that in your memory, that if you are going to get salvation you must get it through Abraham. In other words, the church, the body of Christ, is composed of the remnant who believed, the promises were made good to them, God made good to them those Old Testament promises. The Messiah would come. There is, of course, a period of time between the first coming and the second coming but the coming of the Messiah was part of the promise. He made it good to every Israelite who was a believer. But they have learned and we’ve learned that God is not fulfilling all of

his promises at one time but there is a lengthy period of time of the mercy and long suffering of God by which many, many millions may be gathered into this body, the church of Jesus Christ composed of Jews and Gentiles.

Now, Paul goes on to talk, I've labored this point quite a bit because I think it's rather important. I hear so many people say the church is the mystery. The church is not the mystery. The mystery is the relationship of Jew and Gentile in the church, in the church.

Now, Paul goes on to talk in verse 7 and verse 8, by saying “Of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of his power.” You'll notice he twice mentions the gift of grace to do the work that God has called him to do, the apostle never thought of this as something that he earned. It's a gift, its grace. Every blessing that you and I have is the gift of the grace of God. We don't have anything to do with it. It's not our free will decision. Which is just another way of saying that we must act first before God can work. That's so destructive of the free grace of the Lord God. The gift of grace, what grace, “that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,” the untraceable riches of Christ. The adjective is really a word that means untrackable, that is, as an explorer you could not track out all of the riches of Christ. So he is preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Theodoric got the obvious question from an unbeliever. What would be the obvious question? If it is unsearchable how can you preach it? If it is untrackable how can you proclaim it? So Theodoric one of the earlier church fathers about the fifth century said, “Why are you preaching if the riches are unsearchable?” he asked the question. “For this very reason I preach because they are unsearchable.” They are so great that one cannot search them all out so you can keep preaching them and proclaiming them and studying the word of God and finding more of the blessings that are really ours given us through the gospel.” That's the way we study the way of God isn't it? We study the word of God and the more we study it the more we come to understand the remarkable riches

of God's goodness and kindness to every one of us poor sinners, unsearchable riches of Christ.

And the apostle was so pleased to be able to be the one to do this because he's the one who is less than the least of all saints. The Greeks say something like "littler than the littlest," you could render it. He's littler than the littlest of the saints and he does it because they are unsearchable. Jowett, one of the great preachers of a generation or two ago, talking about the unsearchable, untrackable riches of Christ used an illustration that kind of strikes home to me. He talks about a man tracking out a confines of a lake and as he goes around the banks of the lake seeking to understand the lake and what it encompasses, he discovers as he goes around the lake that there is no lake at all but its an arm of the ocean. And he is confronted finally by the immeasurable sea before him. That's kind of like it is when you take the Bible in hand and now, I'm going to read about the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ and you discover more and more and more and more. You think you're going to come to the end of it, no you will never come to the end of them. They are untrackable, these riches of Jesus Christ. Paul says further that he has been given the commission, verse 9, "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God and created all things through Jesus Christ." So to preach and to illuminate, in fact, you study Paul and you discover some things he's still doing his work through the Holy Spirit being the instrumentality for your illumination.

Now, finally, in verse 10 through verse 13 you might ask Paul what's the goal of all of this? You know when you ask that question you ought to, I think, I have to confess the goal of it was my salvation. Is that the way you feel? No you have a broader concept of things. Paul has done all this that I may be saved. Of course, of course, that's not all. That's the way I tend to think of this. You know all of this is I may get something, To the intent verse 10, "Now, the manifold wisdom of God might be known by the church by this called out body" I'm in that body, "to the principalities and powers in heavenly places

according to the eternal purpose which he purposed or accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The manifold wisdom of God, manifold in what sense? He deals with Jews he deals with Gentiles, now he is dealing with them together. If you go back and study the whole what we would call something like the *Heilsgeschichte*, scholars say, the history of salvation in the Bible. The philosophy of divine redemption in which God works with men before the time of the call of Abraham then he works with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, Israel. Then he works with this body in which we are in this body equal partners. And we think, of course, in the future, we are thinking of the marvelous way in which God has been dealing with the nation and with the nations. And this is what Paul calls in Romans 9 through 11, “Oh the depth of the wisdom” what is it “Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.” This is what he finds in this. This magnificent program set forth in the word of God from the time of Adam, especially in the time of the Abrahamic covenantal promises, the Messianic promise on through to the conclusion of them in the kingdom of God. Paul finds that so astonishing that he can do nothing more than say “for under Him, through Him and of Him are all things to Him be glory.”

Well this is part of it. To make all men see what is the fellowship and now to the intent that now the variegated wisdom of God, much variegated many sided, might be known through the church. Now, wait a minute, what’s the church? The church is the believing body isn’t it? If you are a believer in Christ you are part of the church that it might be made known through the church? Think of it, through the church? You mean to tell me that the manifold wisdom of God is being made know through the church? Yes, through these sinners. Could we say that the church is an instructor? Well we could say an instructress because we usually speak of the church in the female gender. An instructress of whom? Well look what Paul says, “A principality and powers in a heavenly places. The church, an instructress of the principalities and powers in heavenly places, of the cosmic intelligences, the church, the instructress, we used pedagogically to teach the

angles things? Yes, that what he saying. To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known through the church, by is used in that sense in this text, through the church to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. Some of the modern interpreters interpreted the principalities and powers as the political economic structures of society. You could hardly find an interpretation less spiritual than that. But, nevertheless, some of our Christian professors have suggested that.

Now, what Paul is talking about when he talks about the manifold wisdom of God is the origin of evil, the fall, the redemption through Jesus Christ, the national programs for Jew and Gentile, all of this is a lesson for the universe. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 4 in verse 9, you remember the apostle makes a statement that is parallel with this in the sense that it refers to essentially the same thing. Verse 9 of 1st Corinthians 4, he says, “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last as men condemned to death, for we have been made a spectacle to the world both to angels and to men.” So in other words we are, my Christian friends, male and female, young and old, we are individuals who are the means of the instruction of the angelic world about us. What have they learned from you? They have learned a lot a about fallen men and women. They’ve learned a lot about what fallen men and women think and what fallen men and women do. And the dastardly things that they can do and what they may do individually and what they may do as nations, bodies of people. And they’ve learned some things from what has happened to these strange fallen people how suddenly their lives undergo a change which they don’t understand. But, nevertheless, they puzzle over it and they at least learned that there is a body, the church, that’s different. He says that this is the eternal purpose doesn’t he? According to the eternal purpose this is part of the eternal purpose. We are talking in this series of the Divine Purpose in History and Prophecy; this is part of that divine purpose. He calls it, “The purpose of the Ages.”

Alfred Lord Tennyson, who was not a Christian man as far as I can tell, spoke about “through the age’s one increasing purpose runs.” He said something just before

that that makes it evident that he's not a believing man. He talks about man and uses the expression “the parliament of man” in the same work just previously. It's almost like a text from modern, liberal theology. But here, the eternal purpose, so verse 12, “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” That's the means by which we come to the possession of this marvelous position of equality in the body of Christ, possessing the Messianic promises, fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, fellow partakers of the promise of Christ through the gospel. The Messianic promises are ours through faith.

Now, Paul is concerned over his readers, he's concerned over their loss of heart and so he says, “Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you” he's in prison remember, “which is your glory.”

Now, I think, you can see something here that doesn't appear as it does in other passages but you can notice that Israel has not lost its position; that is Israel's dominance is expressed here in chapter 2, as well as in chapter 3, the Gentiles become fellow partakers, and fellow members of the body. There is no indication whatsoever that that special relationship that Israel has by virtue of the Messianic promises has been changed. It's only that the nation as a whole has departed from the Lord but believing Israelites are still there, and we as we read, next time Lord willing, we are grafted, we are grafted into that Olive Tree which Paul calls in Romans 11, “Their own Olive Tree.”

So it's true, you are going to get salvation. You have to get it through Abraham. Marcus Bart was not far off, oh I told you his name, was not far off when he said “The distinctive message of Ephesians that no Gentile can have communion with Christ and with God unless he also has communion with Israel.” That is precisely what happened when we are grafted in to the body of believing Israelites beginning on the Day of Pentecost, of course.

But now, that last thing is so important I'm going to refer you to something that John Stott said about the fact that we are the means by which the world is being

instructed. I look out and see your faces and I say, "impossible, impossible." [Laughter] You look at me and say the same thing "impossible." Listen to what he says, he said, "History" he says, "It is as if a great drama is being enacted history is the theater, the world is the stage, the church members in every land are the actors, God himself has written the play and he directs and produces it act by act, scene by scene, the story continues to unfold. But who are the audience; they're the cosmic intelligences, the principalities and powers of heavenly places. We are to think of them as spectators in the drama of salvation thus the history of the Christian church becomes" this is not Dr Stott's statement but it's the statement of John McKay, who was president of Princeton Theological Seminary a number of years ago, "The history of the Christian church becomes the graduate school for angels." This is the picture that Paul gives of the Christian church that we are instructors of the angelic beings. That too should make a difference shouldn't it?

Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the writings of the apostle, how marvelous they are. Enable us, Lord, to enter more into the understanding of them. We thank Thee for each one here. We pray Thy blessing upon them. And as they, Lord, are instructors and instuctresses of the angelic world, may they also be the means of the enlargement of the church of Jesus Christ and the spread of its influence in our day.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.