Day Three (3:1-21)

To Know the Love of Christ

Warm-up Groups:

— Work on Eph. 3:14-19. Divide the text into two parts (14-17a; 17b-19), and assign one part to each group.

— Assignment: attempt to describe the main theme of each part, using key words. What is Paul praying for in each part of this prayer?

A. Introduction.

- Chapter Three is a little harder to follow, especially the first part. Paul is attempting here to describe his ministry that has been assigned to him, and in a sense he gets carried away in the description of the gospel, and then has to return to his theme.

- The chapter closes first with a prayer, and then with a benediction (praise of God). There is a natural conclusion at the end of chapter three, something like the end of the first movement of a great symphony. It is not over, but there is a conclusion to this first part of the letter.

1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles –

2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

4 When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 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; 6 that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given to 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 make all men see what is plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; 10 that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

11 This was according to the eternal purpose which he had realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

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14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, 21 to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever, Amen.

B. CHAPTER THREE.

1. *The Revelation of God's Mystery* (vv. 1-13)

— First of all, notice the beginning of vv. 1 and 14. It appears that Paul initially began his prayer, but was inspired to describe again his ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles, and then in v. 14 he finds his way back to the prayer.

— The entire section, then, is something like a parenthesis, a stepping aside to speak about the gospel. But this does not mean that it is secondary in importance. It contains a profound statement of Paul's ministry of the gospel. In fact, it is largely a re-statement of what he has already said, but now in more personal terms.

1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles –

2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

4 When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 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; 6 that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

- Paul is in prison
    - Could be Caesarea – most popular idea
    - Could be in Rome
    - Some say this is post Acts in prison somewhere else

Mystery

— The subject of the section is what Paul calls 'the mystery of Christ'. This is what was revealed to him, and which he is ministering to others (note: the Christian faith is something that needs to be 'revealed'—we cannot see it by our own powers).

— The word, 'mystery' here primary means something that was hidden in God's purposes, but now has been shown. **It is like cards that he had in his hand**, and now lays down for public display.

Revelation

— But as we will see in the prayer that follows, the 'mystery' is also something that is beyond our comprehension to fully grasp. We can know it and proclaim it, but we cannot fully comprehend it.

— And what is the main content of this mystery?

Inheritance

— That the God of Israel has called the Gentiles to be fellow heirs with the chosen people, the Jews.

— And all this is accomplished in the Messiah promised of old. The startling truth is that the Gentiles now receive the same promises that were given to Israel.

— Where, by the way, do we find this sketched out in the Old Testament?

- In the promise to Abraham, Gen. 12:1-3, when it says that the nations will be blessed in him.
- And especially in the book of Isaiah, where it says that the nations will also come to God's holy mount to worship him, and will be called his own people (Is. 2:1-5; 19:23-25; 49:5-6)

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given to 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 make all men see what is plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; 10 that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

— Then in vv. 7-10, Paul speaks about his own role in this, recounting in summary form what Acts 9 describes.

— Though the least of all (because he persecuted the church and Christ himself), he was given 'grace' and 'power' to make the gospel known to the Gentiles.

- Notice the cosmic side to his description: the unsearchable riches of Christ, the plan hidden for ages in God, the creator of all, the revelation of the wisdom of God from of old through the Church to even the spiritual powers.
- This is not just the speech of a local deity, but the true and living God making himself known to all the earth, to all creation, both material and spiritual. Notice the ascending order of revelation: to the Gentiles, then to all men, then finally to the spiritual powers .

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me by the working of his power.

- Paul was made a minister
  - Minister - **Diaconus** i.e. a servant
  - At table, for example
- Excellent definition of charismatic gifting
  - "Gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power"
    - God's power works in a human being to produce some results
    - We do not earn it
    - It is given us, to do a job

11 This was according to the eternal purpose which he had realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

— And even though Paul is in prison (apparently), he is bold, confident in his access to the Father through Christ, and confident in the mission of the gospel going forward.

— Can we see something here of Paul's zeal for the gospel? Certainly he had a unique mission, but ours is something like it. To us is given a revelation of the wisdom and purpose of God in Christ, and to us is given a share in the commission to make it known to those round us.

— We are all called to testify, to bear witness
— Some have a special gift of evangelism

- Note again - we require the revelation of God to see things from God's point of view
    - A modern Christian assumption is that if I'm "good enough to turn to him" then he's there for me – God is always there for me, somehow beaming down
        - In a sense that is true, the problem is a problem of initiative – such a modern view says that it is essentially up to me to turn and look
    - **The biblical view in fact, is more that God's accessibility is pure gift and it comes at his initiative**
        - We have no right to it and unless God reveals himself we do not see him - we are fallen creatures who cannot see unless God opens our eyes
    - And so, access in this sense is a truly amazing event
        - Christianity is a revealed faith – pure gift
        - That is why evangelism without prayer is empty

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

2. *Prayer for the Indwelling of God* (vv. 14-19)

— Now Paul prays for the very thing he has just described. His prayer here is really a way of asking the Lord to communicate these very things into the hearts and minds of those reading the letter.
    — It is because of this call to preach the gospel that he prays for them in this way.

— Paul knows that this is a spiritual truth and needs to be spiritually received. As with his prayer in chapter one, he is praying that what he has proclaimed might be fully understood and effective for the listeners.

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

— He takes up the **prayer posture of kneeling before the Father**, the one who is *the* Father of all (and all notion of fatherhood derives from him).

16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man,

— And what does he pray for? That they might be strengthened with God's power in the 'inner man' through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Consider here 2 Cor. 4:16: *'Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.'* We need to be strengthened within, and this is something that can be renewed in us. He's praying here for Christians!
  — For their continued strengthening
  — An exercise bench

17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love,

— He also prays that Christ might take up his abode in us through faith. I do not think this is something simply different than what just came before, but a different way of saying the same thing. It is through faith that God comes to dwell in us. And when the Spirit comes to dwell in us, so Christ dwells in us as well (see Jn. 14:23).

18 may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

— And now the prayer reaches its climax: rooted in the love of God. Because we are rooted and grounded in the love of God, we are able to see and to know the full dimensions of God, his purpose and his love (breadth, length, height, depth)

— the goal is that we may know the love of Christ. But even our knowledge is not complete. We are paradoxically called to know what surpasses our knowledge. This is not just mumbo-jumbo.

  — This is the *mystery of Christ.* We can really know it and experience it, but can never fully comprehend it.
    — (e.g. of swimming in the ocean, or settling a vast land of inheritance).

20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, 21 to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever, Amen.

3. <u>*Concluding Blessing*</u> (vv. 20-21)

— In a standard and conventional way, Paul ends his prayer with a blessing or a benediction. He is praising God now for all his great works, and praying that all may be

to his glory.

— But notice what he says about this God along the way: this is the one who is able to do far more than all that we can ask or imagine even.

— Even Paul's own prayer cannot express all that God has for us—his purpose for us lies beyond what we can request, and even beyond what we can imagine in our minds.

Follow-up: a halftime report in DGs. . . Let's step back and talk to each other about 1-2 key things that you've grasped thus far. This could be from today's presentation, or it could be from earlier ones. The point is to attempt to put into words what God is showing you through the study thus far.