

See Jesus at the center of God's Plan

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Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church

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Awake, arise, go forth in faith. I feel like that's the call for all parents with teenagers on Sunday morning. Awake! Arise! Let's go! That's kind of how it goes in my house these days. I'm sure you've been through that as well. Getting awakened to the good news is really what this is all about. Ephesians chapter 3 is all about seeing that Jesus is at the center of God's plans.

Now, I think that as we continue on this in chapter three, you are going to see, I hope by the end, that this truly is what we get out of this. That Jesus is at the center of God's plan. The first three chapters in Ephesians all talk about God's desire for us, God's plan, and His purpose in this world. In the last three chapters, Paul makes Ephesians how they are supposed to make that work in their lives.

He takes them into relationships, into how they work, how they go about their day, and he says, knowing that Jesus is at the center of it all changes the way that you do all of the other things. So here, today, as we look at chapter 3, this is what we are ending with. Paul summarizes this for everyone. So what we see is that there are three parts to Ephesians chapter 3.

First, Paul reminds us of God's purpose for us, then he talks about his plan, and then he ends with a prayer. So that's the outline for where we are going today. Starting in verse 1, Paul starts, He always comes back to this purpose statement for this idea that there is a reason why I'm writing to you.

There is a reason why we take time to awake, arise, and go forth in faith. There is a reason why we are here today, to hear of God's great love for us. To see that in Jesus that love is made real, and to know that we have a purpose in this world that is not just designed by us, that is not just created by us, but that has been set forth for us.

By the God who has created all things, by the God who desires all things to be brought back to him. For this reason, Paul writes to the Ephesians. And for this reason, this writing, this letter, has been carried through by the Spirit for millennia to get to you today. Paul isn't just writing to the people in Ephesus long ago, he's writing to us here right now.

So that we would know what has been made known to Paul by Revelation. So what's been made known to Paul? Well, the mystery of Christ. What's the, what's the mystery of Christ? What's mysterious about Christ? I don't know, today, it's been thousands of years since Jesus died for us, since he rose again from the dead, since he has given life that he earned, that he won, to everyone who believes in him.

But until that day, it was a mystery, because God's promise of sending a Messiah had not happened. From the very beginning, when the world was broken, God promised to send a Savior, one who would heal the world, and make everything new again. And for every generation, that promise just seemed to not come true. I don't know about you, but it doesn't take me long to start to lose hope in things.

If, when I was a kid, my parents would have promised me, Hey, we are going to go to Disneyland next year for Christmas. And then Christmas came along, and we didn't go to Disneyland. What would happen? Well, I was kind of okay as a kid. I probably would have been like, you know, maybe we just didn't have the money for it, or maybe it wasn't in the plans. Maybe we want to do something else. But what about the second year, when we get promised again that we are going to do this? And then it doesn't happen. Or that we go promise the third year. And then let's say, like, which happened to me in real life, that we did go to Disneyland in California for Easter one year.

And the night before we were supposed to go to Disneyland, there was a huge earthquake and my family was very scared because we are from the Midwest and we drove out of LA and went back far, far away, as far as we could get. Have I been to Disneyland yet in my life? I have not. I have not. The promise has not been fulfilled.

Am I ever going to go to Disneyland? Well, I don't today. I don't care. But as a kid, you care about those things and this promise of year after year. Is it going to be fulfilled? Is it going to be fulfilled? Eventually, you are going to lose hope until you get to a point like me where I'm old and I think I don't really care about going to Disneyland anymore.

Think about this like the promise of a Messiah. The parents would tell their children God is going to send a Messiah. He's going to send a Savior. And year after year, it didn't happen. Generation after generation, it didn't happen. How hard would it be to carry on that promise? How hard would it be to keep that hope going from person to person, generation to generation?

And yet, the Spirit of God did just that. Kept that hope going through His people from generation to generation in a mysterious way. How is it going to happen? We don't know. What is He going to look like when He comes? I don't know. What is He going to do? We don't know. This is the mystery of Christ, but now, on this side of Easter, the mystery is known.

Jesus did come. He was born. He lived an incredible life, teaching us that the kingdom of God is at hand, lived the perfect life that we couldn't, was killed on a cross in our place, and on Easter, when the tomb was empty, everyone saw that he was risen from the dead. And when he came back to his disciples, he said, I have done this for you.

You have life in me. Now go and make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching and reminding them that I will be with them till the very end of all things. The mystery of Christ is now known to you and to the whole world, that you have life in him. That hope is known. Jesus is here.

Paul is reminding people That because this mystery is known now, God's purpose is real. His purpose to lovingly bring all of us back to him is happening, and it's happening through Jesus. The love of God that he wants to show his people and his whole world is made real in who Jesus is. Paul reminds the Ephesians and all of us today that the mystery of Christ is for all people.

The mystery that they are experiencing in Ephesus is that the Gentiles, along with those who carried that promise for so long, the people who were born into those families of the house of Israel, are now fellow heirs. They are together. They are fellow members of the same body, the same congregation, the same people.

And they are fellow partakers in the promise of Jesus through the good news of Jesus himself. Now, what does this have to do with us? Well, it's all about this purpose and the promise in the purpose. Is this purpose for you? Well, that's what we talked about last week. Even when we don't feel close to God, even when we don't feel like maybe we deserve what God has given to us, it is for us.

And it's exactly in those moments when we don't feel like we deserve it, that God gives us His grace and reminds us that He holds us in His hands, that He loves us, that He is with us. So, who is excluded from this promise? According to Paul, the great outcome of the mystery of Christ is that no one is excluded.

There are no human divisions that we can create between people that exclude them from the love of Jesus.

Think about some of those human divisions you like to create. Some of the silly ones, yes, you know, sports, all that, but some of the serious ones, people that you kind of look at differently, people who believe something that you just, you can't get on board with and just think poorly about them. These are all people that Jesus died for, rose for, and shows great love to.

They are people for whom hope is made real in Him. All people are now part of the people that Christ loves. So, the purpose is for us, and who's part of us? Well, it's everyone, because our God is a connecting God. From the very beginning, He's wanted to connect people and the world back to Himself. Now, I want you to think about this in a different way because there are people, let's say, not any of you here, not any of you here, but other people, might think that God is something else.

For example, God is a vengeful God. God is a spiteful God. God is an absence God. You've heard these arguments. You've felt them. Maybe

you've said them. Maybe you've thought them. But from the very beginning of creation, God comes to his people and he wants to connect with them. He comes to a world that was broken, and he wants to make it new.

From the very beginning, his plan was to reconnect people to him. And how is he going to do that? Through the Messiah. Through Christ. Through Jesus. Keep this in mind, that God is a connecting, connecting God, because that makes more sense when we look at what his plan truly is. Paul goes back to the Ephesians and says, Look, I was made a minister of all of this.

According to the gifts of God's grace. And what was I supposed to do? Well, to do what nobody else wanted to do. Was to go to the people who were other. Who were marginalized. Who this wasn't always for. But to bring them hope. Hope of, do you see that right at the very end? What is that last line? The unsearchable riches of Christ.

What does that unsearchable mean? This kind of caught me off guard this week when I was studying this. What does unsearchable mean? Because Paul says earlier, well, the unknowable mysteries of Christ, the, the, the wide incredible love of God, he uses a lot of, a lot of big words. But what does unsearchable mean?

And, I think when I got down to it, what Paul is trying to show the Ephesians is that you don't have to search for the riches of Christ anymore. It's not a mystery. Who Jesus is and what he has done for you is plain. It's been made known through the love that He showed through the cross, through His resurrection.

You don't have to search for it anywhere. You don't have to go on a silent retreat for six months and search for Jesus somewhere deep within yourself. He's right here. Here in our church, we have communion every single week. We don't have to search for it. We can taste and see that He is good. And that His forgiveness is for us.

The riches of Christ are offered to you all of the time. All of the time. Paul then says he's here to bring light to everyone, the plan of the mystery, that

through the church the wisdom of God may be made known. And this is where Paul starts to shift. He's talking about the plan, and it's through a church, the plan that everything has been made new in Jesus.

That Jesus is the center of it. And we learn about it through the church. Jesus, at the center of God's plan, helps us see ourselves, helps us see God, and helps us see our world through a completely different perspective than if we'd never heard of this at all. It helps us see that there is a Savior. There is someone who has done what we could not.

His name is Jesus, and He loves you. Through Him, God connects with you. So in whatever suffering is happening, whatever brokenness you are experiencing, do not lose heart. Because Jesus is here with you. Jesus is the center of what God has been doing in this world from the very beginning and will continue until the very end.

He's at the center of everything that happens. Well, when we pause on that, it takes us, well, into the next mode. Because when Paul finally says this to the people, he stops. And in response to that, there is only one thing that he can do. He can pray. He says, in all of this, in all of these things, in thinking about how all of you, and all of them, are loved by Christ, and have been saved by Him, and are being called back to God through Jesus, all I can do is give thanks to God.

I bow on my knees, and I pray this, and this was not just for the Ephesians back in the day, this is for you today. I pray that God may grant you strength and power in your spirit, in your innermost place, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that being rooted And grounded in love. You have the strength to comprehend with everyone else, with all the saints, the breadth and length, and height, and depth of the love of Christ.

Once we realize that God's purpose is not to be absent, not to be vengeful, but to reconnect his world with him, we start to see that he has accomplished that, through Jesus, through Jesus, only through Jesus alone. And how does he go about that? Well, he goes about that through love. Love is the key to all of this.

Love is the key to our relationship with Him. Love is the key to changing the world. Once we see this, can we be rooted and grounded in this? Can the way that we go about our lives and the way of thinking about God and relating with Him, relating with others, even those who we might think might be on the other side of whatever lions we've created, be rooted in love?

Well, this is the prayer that Paul prays for you. Knowing all of this, you might respond with the love that Christ has already given to you. That you might make the foundation of your life built on love. What are the other things you could make it built on? Well, great movies are built around revenge, right?

You can make the reason for your being revenge. You can make it I don't know, to bring peace. You can make it a success. You can make it wealth. You can make it popular. We are being called to make it love, which means giving of ourselves for the good of others at all times, in all places, in all situations, and for all people.

This is a big calling. This is a big calling. But through that, we are able to show the world the hope of Jesus. In the end, Paul reminds us that we are not alone in this, that we stand upon the words and the shoulders of the prophets and the apostles, and that we together with the church in this place and around the world are people who bring the power of God into the world.

And what is this power? It's hope. There are many other things that the church has tried to do across history. There are many other things, that we do here. There are many other ways that we can sometimes, maybe other churches, not ours, other churches, and people bicker, you know, they fight, they argue about things.

We don't, we don't do that. That's other people, right? In all seriousness, we here, from what I've seen the last six or seven months, we here show love to one another. This is what I've seen through you. This is what encourages me. This is what shows me that in this place, we are called to be people who are the hope for the people in our neighborhoods around us.

We have the ability, through God's Spirit, to share His hope that changes our hearts our minds, and our lives with the people around us who other people would overlook. We are the only people who bring hope of life to the world. This is our mission. This is what we are called to do. This is God's purpose and His plan working through us through who Jesus has made us to be.

So Paul ends with this prayer that focuses on the church being the hope of the world because the next three chapters are going to get a little dicey. They are going to get interesting. They are going to talk about the way we relate to others. They are going to talk about things that are challenging to us, and hard to do in a world that, well, where we often think so much about ourselves.

Go back to this, though. Jesus is the center of God's plan. His purpose is to connect us again with Him. And we, together, get to bring hope into this world. We are always close with prayer here, so let's do that as well. Would you please stand with me? And I want to close with Paul's prayer here at the end of Ephesians chapter 3.

If you wouldn't mind, let's all pray this prayer together, and then we'll continue with our creed. Let's pray. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church, And in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.