

MADE NEW: A New Plan Ephesians 3:1-13

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, and welcome to worship service today at Trinity on this Sunday before July the 4th. We are so glad that you are here. My name is Chris Wigley, I'm one of the pastors here at Trinity. If you are a guest, we want to say a very special welcome to you. We'd love the opportunity to get to know you a little bit. You can provide information to us by texting the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mount Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you send that keyword, a link will be sent back to you and that will take you to a form that is less than a minute to fill out. When you click "submit," it notifies me, and I always look forward to following up with our guests each week.

If text messaging isn't your thing, please swing by our information center located in the fellowship area, right out these doors in the lobby. We have a gift there for you just as a way of saying thank you for being our guest today. Again, we are thrilled you have chosen to worship with us today.

Later in the service... The Lord's Supper. Supplies are located...

JULY 4th:

Well, it is the Sunday before the 4th of July where we celebrate the birth of the United States of America, our independence. On a day like today we celebrate the freedoms that we enjoy. Freedom to gather in worship, freedom to pursue what we believe to be God's will for our lives, and the freedom to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But it is also on this day that we realize that those freedoms were not free, they came at a great price. And that we would not continue to enjoy our freedoms if it were not for those that have served to protect them.

You know, the Bible says to give honor to whom honor is due. I think it is appropriate to honor those in our midst that are either currently serving or have served in our armed forces, the army, navy, air force, marines and the coast guard. If you are serving or have served, would you please stand so that we can honor you and say thank you for your service this morning?

On behalf of a grateful nation, we honor you today. Thank you for your sacrifice and for your service. There is no amount of thanks that we can appropriately give to say thank you for defending our freedoms. So again, on behalf of our country and on behalf of this church, we say thank you to these men and women who have served us and our country.

I've asked Christopher Jones / Dennis Kelly to come and lead a time of prayer for our country and our worship service this morning. Christopher and his wife Abbie are members of our church. He served in the United States Army for 10 years, having completed two tours of duty in Germany. Christopher is also a Deacon in our church. Will you welcome Christopher Jones as he comes to pray for us this morning? [Dennis and his wife Brandy are not only members of our church, but they are also one of our mission partners. Dennis served in the United States Navy for 21 years. He saw 3 combat deployments in Iraq, Kuwait, and the Arabian Gulf. He is a recipient of many medals and served on ships with SEAL team 3. Will you welcome Dennis Kelly as he comes to pray for us this morning?]

SERIES OVERVIEW:

We are working our way through a teaching series we have entitled Made New. We are studying the New Testament book of Ephesians and the major theme that Paul teaches about is being made new in Christ. We've looked at how we have a new identity, a new focus, a new life in Jesus, and that we belong to a new body of believers. Today we are going to look at how there is a new plan in Christ.

So, I want to invite you to grab your bibles and turn with me in your New Testament to Ephesians. We are going to be in chapter 3 this morning and work our way through verses 1-13 today.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Plans we Makeⁱⁱ

I have a question for each of us as we begin this morning. How many of you would say that the plan you had for your life, when you were younger, the plan you mapped out for yourself, played out differently than the way you thought? I think we would all have to say that things turned out at least slightly different than we had planned. Right?

When I was a teenager and first began thinking about my future, I never thought that I would have been called to ministry. And when I was, I thought

that I would be a career Student Minister. 16 years in Student Ministry kinda felt like a career. I certainly never thought I would be a pastor, let alone live in Mt. Pleasant, Texas. The only thing I knew about Mt. Pleasant was in 1995, my Senior year of high school, they got eliminated from the baseball playoffs and Coppell High School, mine, and Cathy's alma mater, won the State Championship. I realize that might be still too soon for some of you.

How many of you, thinking about life, ever planned to live in a time where there was a worldwide pandemic. COVID wasn't in any of our plans, was it?! That was a crazy time where it seemed like plans were constantly changing.

It was the great author, Robert Burns, that once said, "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." While the plans of mice and men don't always pan out, the plans of God always do. And that's what we are going to be looking at in our study this morning. The plan isn't new to God, but when we come to faith in Jesus as Lord, God's plan becomes our new plan.

We are going today, see 3 truths about our new plan in Christ. So, let's begin today by looking at the fact that...

MESSAGE:

1) God's plan isn't our plan.

God's plan and the plans that we have for our lives rarely line up perfectly. Paul could certainly attest to that. You read along in your copy of God's Word in verses 1 through 3 of Ephesians 3. ***1For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— 2assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.***

The phrase, "for this reason," points back to the previous chapter. The fact that it was always God's plan to offer salvation to everyone, not just to the Jews, but even to the Gentiles, that's why Paul is on the mission he was on.

And notice that he says that he was, ***"a prisoner of Christ Jesus."*** Why was Paul in prison? Well, he was arrested on charges made by the Jewish religious leaders. Roman officials actually carried out his arrest. And in Acts 25, Paul had appealed to Caesar, but to no avail at this point.ⁱⁱⁱ So, the fact of the matter is that Paul was a prisoner of Rome by way of Jewish accusation. But that's not how Paul sees it.

In Paul's view, he is not a prisoner of Caesar, not of Rome, not of the Jewish religious Pharisees, and not even a prisoner of his circumstances.^{iv} Paul identifies as a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul's perspective is that he is only imprisoned because it was God's will, a part of God's plan for his life.

Now, certainly being placed in prison was not on Paul's agenda for his life. No, he felt called to take the gospel to the world, to the Gentiles. But in prison he was unable to fulfill that calling, at least the way we might look at it.

I would say that Paul's life is a testimony of how our plans are not always in line with God's plans. It was Paul's plan to go and persecute Christians, have them arrested, and even killed. But it was God's plan that he serve The Lord. Once he became a believer, it was Paul's plan to preach the gospel in many different locations, but it was God's plan that he wind up in prison here.

Why would this be God's plan? Well, think about it this way. Paul wrote at least 13 books that comprise the New Testament. Of those 13 books, 30% of them were written in prison. Now, if Paul is not in prison, do we even have these books to guide us today? You see my point, right? What seems like a derailment is simply God making the impossible, possible. See, the Jewish religious leaders thought by placing Paul in prison that they would stifle Paul's influence. But God had another plan. Because Paul was in prison, his influence increased, even to the point of us studying his writings today. This is why he says that he is a prisoner of Christ.

Paul also encountered danger, hardship, assault, pain, and ultimately death and martyrdom. Hardly his plan for his life. Yet God used him powerfully. And by looking at it with this perspective, Paul was, verse 2, demonstrating the "stewardship of God's grace." Stewardship means to manage well. In other words, Paul leveraged every opportunity.

I think it is important for us to see the same in our lives today. We often get discouraged by the challenges in our lives, when things don't go our way. **But listen, our plans are not always God's plans. But God's plans always work out way better than our plans.** We don't need God to change our circumstances, but rather we should understand our circumstances are a part of His plan.^v That's what Paul would say. We can always trust that God is at

work, even amid the challenges in our lives. And we may not always see what God is doing, but we can trust that He is working in and through it.

Isaiah 55:8 and 9 say, *“⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* God’s plan doesn’t always line up with our plan. But God’s plan is always best.

The second truth about our new plan is that...

2) God’s Plan is to Preach the Gospel.

While God’s exact plan is not always clear to us, nor are they the way we envision things, we do know for sure a part of God’s plan is to preach the gospel, always. Look at verses 4 through 10 of Ephesians 3.

*⁴When you read this, you can perceive my insight into **the mystery of Christ**, ⁵which 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. ⁶This mystery is that 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 me by the working of his power. ⁸To 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**, ⁹and **to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages** in God, who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church **the manifold wisdom of God** might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*

Four times in this passage Paul uses the term “mystery.” This doesn’t mean “mysterious,” like as in some obscure, way out there, strange phenomena. Paul is saying that something was previously unknown, but is now made known.^{vi} He said that, **“the mystery of Christ,”** is now made known.

So, what is the mystery of Christ? A couple of mysteries are revealed here. First, this phrase is better understood as “the mystery that is Christ.” In other words, the mystery that God would love humanity in such a way as to reveal Himself in the person and work of Jesus so that sinful humanity might be forgiven and saved. That is a mystery that goes beyond our understanding.

But the second aspect to this mystery is that salvation was not just for the Jews but for all people. Paul says that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ. This happens by way of the gospel. That’s the mystery.

The second thing I want us to see in verses 4-10 is in verse 7. Paul says that, **“Of this gospel I was made a minister.”** And in verse 8, Paul tells us that his ministry is, **“to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”** that is the gospel.

Now, we know that Paul is talking about his particular calling to be a missionary to the Gentiles. But I think there is a wider interpretation here. Follow me for a minute.

Paul says that according to the gift of God’s grace he was made a minister. You know, we often limit grace to the gift of salvation. But grace is needed and at work in many ways beyond salvation. One commentator I read said, “The grace of God always brings responsibility, it’s never merely a privilege.”^{vii} I like that. In other words, it was God’s grace that brought us to salvation, but it is also God’s grace that compels us to preach the gospel to everyone.

So, if you are in Christ, it is by the grace of God. And if you have been shown grace, it is then your responsibility to share that grace, and in so doing, we become ministers. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, *“¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and **entrusting to us the message of reconciliation**.”* Do you know what that means? If you are in Christ, you are a minister!

Wait a minute, Pastor Chris! You’re the minister, I’m just a church member. I give and serve so that you can share the gospel. Oh no! That’s not what the Bible says. You are a minister of reconciliation, too. The work of the ministry cannot just be for the quote, “professionals.” Grace calls us all to the gospel ministry. And the Great Commission sends us all in the gospel ministry! ¹⁹**Go** [Jesus is talking to all of us. Actually, as you are going] **therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,** ²⁰**teaching them to observe all that I have commanded**

you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” That means that when you are at work, you are to share the gospel. It means that when we go out to eat this afternoon, we are to share the gospel. It is always in God’s plan that we share the gospel with everyone. I read a pastor this week that said, “The church that does not evangelize, will fossilize.”^{viii}

I know we are short on time, and I still have another point, but I’ve got to show you a couple other things in this section real quick. I promise you, if you grab ahold of this it will blow your mind. Again, real quick.

Look at verse 8. Paul says, ***“Though I am the very least of all the saints.”*** We certainly wouldn’t rank the Apostle Paul as the very least of all the saints. But that’s the way he saw himself. And this is not some false humility that Paul is expressing. What he is saying is that he is a sinner, but by the grace of God he was redeemed and given the privilege to preach the gospel, the same good news that rescued him, to the entire world.

You and I may feel like the very least of all the saints. But I want you to know something, Beloved. By the grace of God, we sinners have been redeemed and given the same privilege to preach the gospel to the world. And while you and I may not feel worthy, we are to walk in grace and preach at all times.

The final thing I want to point out in this section is what Paul says in verse 10. He says, ***“¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”*** The word manifold meaning multi-faceted^x wisdom of God. It can also mean a multi-diverse wisdom of God.^x That is that God is breaking down every barrier and uniting together all believers into one body of Christ.

And look who this multi-faceted, multi-diverse, wisdom is made known to; ***the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*** To the angels who wondered, “What in the world is God doing with all these sinful humans?” Are now seeing the establishment of The Church and their minds are blown and they sing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!”

But do you know who else is in the heavenly places, in the spiritual realm? The demons, Satan. And they are looking on, having thought that there is no way God is going to accomplish His work, are now seeing the Church come together, lives being changed, the gospel spread like wildfire, and they are

thinking, “Oh no! We are in trouble. Look at the Church!” The angels are saying, “Look at the Church!” And the demons are saying, “Look at the Church.” Look at what God is doing in you! Look at what God is doing in me! The angels are praising God for it and the enemy is shaking in fear because of it.

God’s plan isn’t our plan, but God’s plan is to preach the gospel. Finally, the third truth about our new plan is that...

3) God’s Plan cannot be Stopped.

Look quickly at verses 11 through 13. ***¹¹This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ¹³So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.*** I want you to circle or underline the words, “eternal purpose,” in your Bible.

Eternal meaning without time, timeless. Which is in both directions. We can somewhat wrap our minds around the idea of time lasting forever in eternity. But we struggle to understand the timeless nature of God in that He has no beginning. So, when Paul is saying eternal, he is talking about eternity in both directions. How do we know that? Well, verse 11 says, “the eternal purpose that has been realized in Christ Jesus. That’s eternal.

The word translated as purpose means a setting forth.^{xi} In other words, a plan. God has an eternal plan. So, Paul is saying that God’s plan exists outside of time. In other words, God’s plan is that which is planned in advance and will certainly come to fruition in the future.

One pastor I read this week said, “God is not figuring things out as He goes along. Before time ever ticked it’s first second off the clock, there was a plan established in the mind and heart of God. From eternity past, He sought out to accomplish His plan and because He’s God He will accomplish His plan and no one or nothing will stop Him.”^{xii} God’s plan cannot be stopped.

Here’s what that means for us. There is hope and peace and comfort in knowing that God already has it planned out. We can find rest in the eternal plan of God. When you walk through difficulties, God will use it to accomplish His eternal purpose. We you are needing endurance through hardship, God’s eternal plan gives it. When you are wondering if you’ll ever have victory, God’s

eternal plan guarantees it. I'm confident this is way the early church talked about Jesus' return as much as they did. It gave them hope to endure. God's plan is not always our plan. God's plan is to share the gospel, though. And God's ultimate eternal plan cannot be stopped.

CONCLUSION:

I'm going to invite Micah and the team to come lead us in a time of response. There are a couple of ways to be responding to The Lord. First, if you need to visit with someone about trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior, our elders will be here at the front and would love to visit with you. Or if you are carrying a burden and you need prayer, you come during this time as well. We want to pray with you and over you.

But this time of response is also a time to prepare our hearts to receive The Lord's Supper. When Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth, he urged them to come to The Lord's Table with reverence, having examined their hearts. So, this time of response is a time to examine our hearts prior to partaking in the elements of communion.

If you have not already done so, this time of response is also a time where you can get supplies to observe communion. I know this is different than we have done before, but there are 4 stations throughout the worship center that have elements on them. During this time, you can make your way to those stations. Men, feel free to gather enough supplies for you and your family. Following this song of response, we will partake of the elements.

I also want to remind you that we believe that while The Lord's Supper is open to all believers, we do believe the Bible teaches that non-believers are to simply observe. So, if you are here today and you have yet to trust Jesus as Lord, we would simply as you to just observe as we partake is something that is deeply meaningful to us as believers in Jesus.

I'm going to pray, we will stand and sing, but let's all respond to Jesus. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

- ⁱ Works consulted in preparation for this message: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1986; Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1996; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, Word Books: Dallas, 1990; J.D. Greear, "Mystery and Clarity: The Mystery & Mission of the Church, sermon preached on February 21, 2010 accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/the-mystery-mission-of-the-church-ephesians-211-313>; Vance Pitman, "God's Eternal Plan," sermon preached at Hope Church Las Vegas on February 17, 2019, accessed online: <https://hopechurchlv.com/messages/gods-eternal-plan/>; Jack Graham, *Much More: The Stewardship of Suffering*, sermon preached at Prestonwood Baptist Church on March 1, 2020, accessed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gckXnBNruo>; Michael Youssef, *Discover Your Treasure House: Discover Its Benefits*, published by Leading The Way, April 14, 2013, accessed online: <https://www.ltw.org/watch/teaching/series/discover-your-treasure-house/part-4>; Michael Gossett, *Ephesians Living in Christ: Together in Christ*, sermon preached at Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, TX, February 6, 2022, accessed online: <https://www.gabc.org/episode/proclaim-in-christ/>; Dr. Joel Davis, January Bible Study: Ephesians 3:1-13; Chip Ingram *Unstuck: Overcoming the Pain of Your Past*, published by Living on the Edge, accessed online: <https://livingontheedge.org/broadcast-series/unstuck/>.
- ⁱⁱ Illustration inspired by Vance Pitman.
- ⁱⁱⁱ MacArthur, page 87.
- ^{iv} Quip taken from Jack Graham.
- ^v Quip taken from Chip Ingram.
- ^{vi} Strong's Concordance, 3466, mustérion.
- ^{vii} Snodgrass, page 166.
- ^{viii} Oswald J. Smith, *I Have Walked Alone with Jesus: Day by Day Meditations of Oswald J. Smith*, published in 1982.
- ^{ix} MacArthur, page 97.
- ^x Strong's Concordance, 4182, polupoikilos.
- ^{xi} Strong's Concordance, 4286, prothesis.
- ^{xii} Vance Pitman.