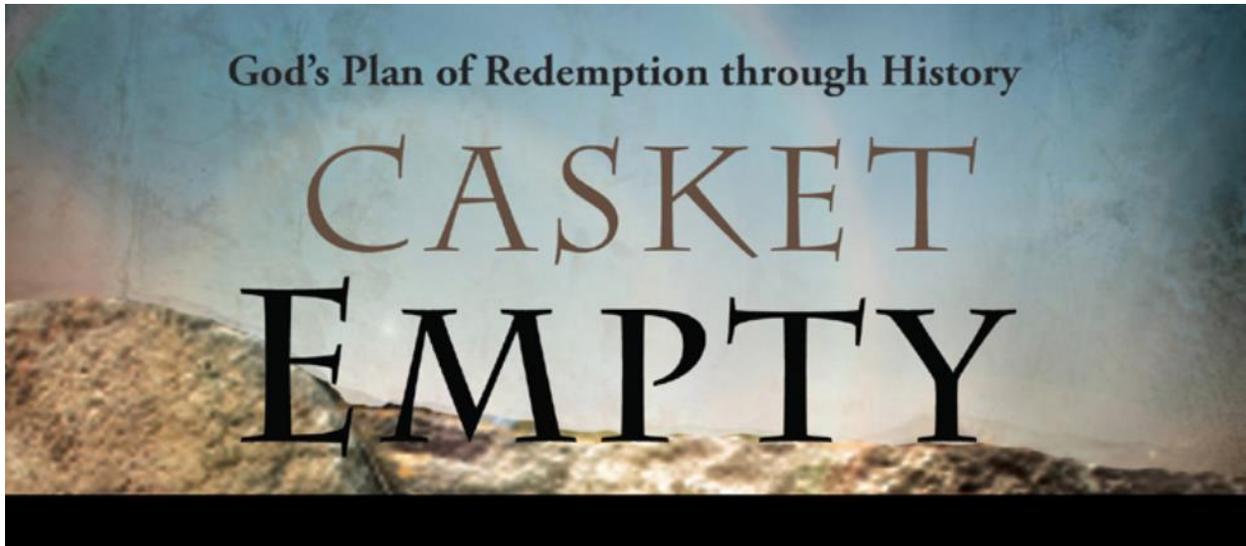
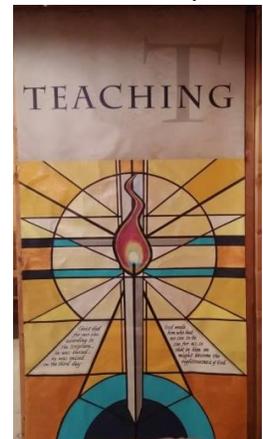


*T is for Teaching – Part 2*  
CASKET EMPTY Sermon Series  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
May 6, 2018

**TEXTS: Ephesians 3:1-21**



Good morning, beloved. This morning, we turn our attention to one the great chapters, one of the great portions in the New Testament. We are in the midst of a series following God's Word, the grand story of Scripture, Old and New Testament, and we are at that place in the story—T is for Teaching—where the Word of God goes forth. The banner for this portion, made by Susan Rice, shows us the Word of the Lord, the light of the gospel, radiating out to the ends of the earth. Underneath that light of the gospel we see these singularly important truths: that Christ dies for our sins according to the Scriptures; that God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf. This is the heartbeat of the gospel. As this Word goes out, amazing things happen. In fact, as this Word goes out, it is surprising the scale and scope that God works in this world to achieve His greater purpose. I want you to keep the Bible open to Ephesians 3. Last Sunday, we looked at the beginning of teaching in the opening sentences of several of Paul's early letters, and now we flash to the end. We flash to Paul's ministry, one of my favorite passages in the New Testament. The vision of Ephesians 3 is so great, it is so lofty that Paul breaks his own syntax to pray for his readers, that they would be strengthened to hold onto it. That is where the text is going.



As we look at this glorious text, we see what happens when Jesus sends out His disciples to make disciples of all nations, fills them with the power of the Spirit, and the gospel actually goes out. I want to look at Ephesians 3, so follow with me through this lofty, glorious text to see firstly, **the people of the gospel**. There is a people that is created as the gospel goes forth. Secondly, I am going to look at **the privilege of the gospel**. We are entrusted with this. It is a sacred and humbling privilege. Thirdly, I will look at **the purpose of the gospel**, and this is absolutely breathtaking, and that purpose leads us in the end, lastly, to **the prayer of the gospel** that we be strengthened to hold onto this great vision. So let's walk through this passage together.

Ephesians 3, first let's look at **the people of the gospel**. Ephesians 3:1 begins that Paul is a prisoner of Christ. He is in Rome at this time. What do you do if you are in prison for the Lord? You ask people to send you copies of the Bible, and you write your most significant life's works. That's how you use your prison time: you pray and communicate, and God uses this portion of Paul's life where he writes half of his letters. So, the prison time is not wasted. He tells us in the beginning that he is a prisoner of Christ, he is a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles, or rather, on behalf of the nations. The word *Gentile* is just the Latin word for *nations*. The Greek text that's behind this is the *ethnicities or nations*. It's the same thing that our Lord Jesus says: "Go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations." It's the same term that is used here. So Paul is in prison on behalf of the nations. You will remember that he is arrested in Jerusalem for the sake of the inclusion of the outsider. Most of us don't use the word *Gentile* often. When you think of the word *nation*, we use that word more often. What is really at stake, and what I want you to consider this morning, is to think of that category of people as whatever group you are inclined to exclude. What is the group that you think is most unlike you? Who is the other, the outsider, the stranger? Paul would say it was the nations of the world. It was obvious why they were excluded, because they were trapped in idolatry. Their lives were immoral. Other biblical images for them are the lost, the foreigner, the pagan, the worldly, the heathen, the foolish, the rebellious, those without God, without hope. Whatever term you use, whatever group you are inclined to say, "They are out," Paul says, "I'm in jail for you." He says in Ephesians 3:2:

*“. . . assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you.”*

The *stewardship of God's grace* is literally the *economy of God's grace*. You see, God has an economy, Hallelujah! and it can't be neatly packaged into human systems.

I was talking with a college student over the weekend who had just had a final exam on international economics. I said, "I studied economics as a side hobby in college." Then I asked, "Did you know that God has an economy? The Bible says that God has an economic model,"

and this is it. It's on display. Keep your eyes open for it. Paul says: "You have heard of the stewardship—literally, the *economy*—of God's grace that was given to me for you," for the outsider, the stranger, the foreigner, the nations. Paul says in Ephesians 3:3:

*"...mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly."*

He said it was made known to him by an apocalypse, by an unveiling of Jesus, and he wrote about it briefly. He's writing to his audience and those still hearing him this morning. He says in Ephesians 3:4-5:

*"When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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."*

It is out in the open. *Mystery* in the Bible is not like mystery in English. It doesn't mean something dark or mysterious or confusing or uncertain. *Mystery* in Scripture is used to refer to the counsel of God's will, and Paul is saying that God's will, His ultimate purpose, is now out in the open. What is it? He says in Ephesians 3:6 this mystery is God's saving purpose for the world:

*"This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."*

The nations, the Gentiles, the peoples of the world, the outsider, those excluded, now through the gospel, through Jesus Christ, are fellow heirs. They are members of the same body; they are partakers of the promise.

The text that Paul uses here is so compact and so beautiful. He uses three words right in sequence. The first one, maybe you're familiar with. You think of someone that is inheriting the property. Someone is an heir, and all of a sudden you adopt someone and you make them a co-heir. We have a category for that. Paul says the nations of the world in Christ are now co-heirs. Do you know what your inheritance is this morning? It's dramatic. Do you know that your names, when you believe in Jesus Christ, are written on the deed for the New Heavens and New Earth? I think some of you haven't realized that yet. We are written in with Christ, and Paul says the nations of the world are co-heirs, they are fellow-heirs, equal. The next word is not available in the language, so he just makes it up. The ESV says "*members of the same body.*" Well, what Paul literally says is, "They are *co-body*," co-heirs, co-body. When you are co-body, it means you are equal part, same status, grafted in. I love to say there are no bleacher seats in the Kingdom of God. Aren't you glad for that? There are no \$10 tickets. All who believe in Christ are fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and they are co-sharers of the promise through the gospel. What has been brought to light through the death and resurrection of Christ is the creation of a people, the creation of a people that join God's ancestral people as fellow-heirs,

co-body, co-sharers. This is the only theological foundation for inclusion.

In light of the gospel, the ground at the cross is level, and all who believe in Jesus Christ are full members of the family. This is staggering. Let's be honest. When you think about it, we are all racists. We all see some groups and say: "You're out." Some of us do that by class; some of us do that by skin color; others of us are more sophisticated, and we do that by denominational affiliation. We are all excluders. It's like a demonic parody of being excluded from the Garden of Eden because of our disobedience to God. That's the real, right exclusion, but when we exclude on our criteria, we miss God's saving plan. Did you know that last night, in the sanctuary here, we had a debate on the real identity of Jesus? We had a local pastor and a Muslim present their view of Jesus. In the crowd, there were women here, sitting where you are, dressed in full hijab hearing the real identity of Christ. Whomever you think to exclude, the New Testament vision, the gospel Word, goes out and it creates a people. It creates a people for whom all who believe in Jesus Christ are full members. They are co-heirs, co-body, co-partakers. It's a staggering vision that trumps all of the division that we would think to make. This vision is huge. It means that the church is not supposed to be ethnically based; it means that the church is not groups of people meeting in their own tribe separately, but that the church, the people of the Promise, are gathered together. It is an immense and lofty vision. John Stott who was an English theologian, one of the most influential Christian writers of the previous century, says this:

"It would be hard to exaggerate the grandeur of this vision. The new society that God is brought into being is nothing short of a new creation, a new human race whose characteristic is no longer alienation but reconciliation, no longer division and hostility but unity and peace."

It's only God who brings this about. It comes about, notice, by believing in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel is God in this world reconciling humanity to Himself and then giving that Word of reconciliation to humanity that we might be reconciled to one another, as well. It's a staggering vision. Is a staggering vision that then creates a people.

Secondly, it carries with it a privilege—the **privilege of the gospel**. Look at Ephesians 3:7. Paul says:

*"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."*

Paul said he was made a minister, a servant, a deacon according to the gift of God's grace. It is a great privilege to be entrusted with the gospel, and Paul says: "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given." The specific grace was to preach, to herald to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ. We think of Paul as great, and we should, but Paul thinks of himself as low and small. His name *Paulus* means small in Latin. Paul says: I'm the very least, and yet this grace was given to me to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Do you

know the riches of Christ this morning?

Let me summarize what he said in Ephesians 1 and 2. The riches of Christ are available freely because of the cross, and they include resurrection from the death of sin. The riches of Christ include victorious enthronement with Christ in the heavenlies. The riches of Christ include reconciliation with God, incorporation into God's new society, the end of hostility, the beginning of peace, access to God through Christ by the Spirit. The riches of Christ include membership in His kingdom and His family, being an integral part of His dwelling place, and these are just the foretaste. The riches of Christ, Paul says, are unsearchable. Literally, they are not able to be fully traced out; they are beyond our understanding and comprehension. Translators struggle to render this word in English and render it invariably as the *unsearchable* riches, the *inexplorable*, the *untraceable*, the *unfathomable*, the *inexhaustible*, the *illimitable*, the *inscrutable*, the *incalculable* wealth that comes to you through Jesus Christ. Whenever I swim—and I love to swim, I love the water—whenever I get into a pool, there are two desires that come up in my heart. One of them is to try to swim across the pool underwater with one breath, no matter how large the pool is. I always try to do that. Sometimes it can be a little dangerous. The other thing I love to do is to find the deepest part of the pool and go down and touch the bottom. Sometimes you have to put landscaping rocks in your pocket or you have to go off the high dive, go in like a pencil to get there, but touching the bottom, that's where it is.

Paul says that the well that is yours in Jesus Christ, you can't touch the bottom. You can't touch the bottom that in Jesus Christ He has given to us unfathomable wealth, riches, and the gospel, as it goes out, makes a people, it creates a people, a recognizable group of people, and this group of people feel deep within them a sacred privilege that comes with it. It's a sacred privilege to then make this gospel known. It is not an obligation; it is not a guilt trip. It is a privilege. Paul says: "I was given this gift, this grace, to herald the unsearchable riches of Christ." In Ephesians 3:9, he says he was also given this privilege, to enlighten people about God's plan:

*“. . .to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,”*

When you enlighten people, you bring them out of darkness. Life in darkness is not a great life, is it? The privilege of the gospel is to share the breathtaking wealth of Christ that is offered to us: forgiveness of sins, full adoption into His family. You have a new past in Jesus Christ, a new set of ancestors. You have a new present energized by the power of the living God and His Holy Spirit. You have a meaning for living. You have a new future in Jesus Christ as a member of His growing family, and then you have a new inheritance—this world with evil removed—a new heavens, a new earth, the city of God coming down. I wonder why we find it difficult to share

Christ. We are growing in that, and I'm excited about that. When we had the Vitales here just a few days ago, I loved hearing their response to our church. One of the things that Jo Vitale said was: "We travel to a lot of churches, and sometimes I hear people of the older generation, and they're just frustrated. They are upset about what has become of our country, what about these young people. They are on their phones all the time. Who is going to care for them as they get older?" Then she said: "The remarkable thing about Kenwood is that I heard so many of the 'senior' saints, or mature believers, saying, 'We need to learn the answers to these apologetic questions.'" What a sign of hope and life in Christ in our church. We are growing. We want to see God's Word made known. If we grasp the wealth of Christ, the riches available, it's easy to want to give that away, isn't it? The remarkable thing about Jesus' wealth is that when you give Jesus' wealth away, it doesn't get less. Some of you may have felt that an implication of the gospel, when you heard the word to the rich young ruler: "Go and sell everything you have and give it away to the poor," was terrifying. We live inside of a human economic model that says: "If I give my wealth away, then do the math. I have less." But the wealth of Jesus Christ, you can't touch the bottom of it, so it can be freely shared, given away, and it is given away as the gospel is made known to others. Paul says that the people of the gospel then receive this privilege of the gospel, and that privilege is heralding Christ and bringing light into places of darkness—turning the lights on for people. What happens when the gospel goes forth? It makes a people, and those people, like us, then feel and receive and take in this privilege, and we actually start to make Christ known. What happens? What happens is that God opens hearts, the Word of Christ is received. What happens after that? People who believe start meeting together, like this meeting here. They start gathering together in local assemblies. The fancy word for those assemblies in the Scripture is *church*. They start gathering together, and the groups of people gather together, the people of the gospel who have received the privilege of the gospel now put on display the purpose of the gospel.

What is **the purpose of the gospel**? Look at Ephesians 3:10.

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

Look at this closely and carefully. The purpose of the gospel is “so that through the church, through the gathering of people who believe the good news about Christ, the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places.” The church gathered together displays God's wisdom. The ESV says *manifold*. Other translations say *variegated*. The term that Paul uses here is a term that is used in a very common way in the supermarket when you select a number of different fruits and put them in your bag. It's a diverse selection. It's also the word that's used in the Septuagint for Joseph's coat of many colors woven together like a tapestry. The gathered congregation of people, those who believe from all nations assembled

together, Paul makes this breathtaking statement, that the church, this church, as one piece or portion of the body of Christ in the world, that the gathered congregation puts on display the wisdom of God. Who is the audience for this display of God's wisdom? Paul says that the gathered church displays God's wisdom to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. What's going on? Who are those figures? Our clearest way to understand is for us to look at Paul's own usage of these same words, especially in the same letter. When we turn to Ephesians 6, this audience becomes clear. In Ephesians 6, Paul says that we are to *"put on the armor of God to stand against the schemes of the devil,"* and he says, *"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers and authorities and cosmic powers over this present darkness and spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places."*

When we gather together in worship, the wisdom of God is on display to demonic power. When we gather together in worship, it is an advanced indicator in this world of God's ultimate triumph over sin, darkness, and evil. How does Sunday morning signal God's victory to the demonic horde and the devil himself? Is that what you were thinking when you came to church this morning? "We've got to be there. I need to be on time because the devil is watching our gathering, and when I come through the doors and sit in pew, there is just a trembling." That is what I was thinking, but I had a leg-up because I was looking at this passage all week. That's what you should be thinking. What is he describing? The church gathered together with the nations of the world—you know, we are up to 20 native languages in our congregation—when we gather together and we look at each other, brother sister in Christ, you are a co-heir. You are co-body. You are a fellow-partaker of the promise in the gospel. We are on this ship together, and we are moving forward, and together, this assembly is in advance sign in this world of the only glimpse of eternity that we have in worship. When we look and the veil is pulled back in Revelation 5, 6 and 7, you see an innumerable multitude, from every nation, gathered around the throne of God saying: *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain and purchased men, women, and children from every nation. I made them a kingdom of priests, and with Him they will reign for ever and ever."* When we gather together, this is the group that signals the reality of which we see the ultimate end in Revelation. Do you believe that? This is no small thing. This is not a Christian country club; this is not a Christian supermarket; this is not an eclectic gathering of people who say, "This is what I like; this is what you like." This is God's wisdom on display that signals a note of terror to the adversary of our souls. That's what this is. The devil loves division; he hates unity. Just reason backwards from Revelation 7. There is such unity around the throne. The devil loves accusation: "You don't belong here. Do you know what you've done?" He hates grace. The devil loves ambition—make a name for myself, exalt myself—and he hates sacrificial service. He loves idolatry and is very flexible in that. He doesn't care which idols you worship. You can worship different religious idols; you can worship man-made idols; you can worship yourself. He doesn't care what kind of idolatry you may be enticed

with as long as it's not worshipping the living God. It strikes a note of terror in the present when a redeemed people gather together and worship God, because it is an anticipation and a sign that we're ready.

This gathering is no small thing. God's wisdom is on display in this community, and then it must be lived out. Paul says in Ephesians 3:11:

*"This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,"*

Hallelujah! that verb is in the past tense. God's eternal purpose, literally God's plan for the ages, has happened. It happened in Jesus Christ. I am aware of this, and I want to have pastoral sensitivity, I've been thinking about this for 15 hours before you have, so I know I am a little ahead of you emotionally, and this is also one of my favorite passages in the whole New Testament, but I need what you need, and Paul knows what we all need after hearing that. He knows that it is too big, too big to grasp, and so the ending of Ephesians 3, after outlining the people of the gospel, the privilege of the gospel, the purpose of the gospel to put God's wisdom on display to heavenly powers, Ephesians 3 ends with a **prayer of the gospel**.

I am going to date myself here before your very eyes. It is always dangerous to use movie allusions, but for those who remember seeing the film *Jaws*, do you remember when Roy Scheider sees *Jaws* for the first time what he said? "We are going to need a bigger boat." We are going to need a bigger boat. The prayer is for a bigger boat—inside our soul.

Paul says in Ephesians 3:14-15 that in light of what he has just said:

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

For Paul, there is no people group that doesn't have God as their ultimate, ancestral Father. Everybody derives their family, tribe, clan from the Father, and Paul in Ephesians 3:16 says he is going bow his knee and is going to pray:

*". . .that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being,"*

Why do we need to be reinforced inside our souls? We are going to need tons of theological rebar just to have a structure that is strong enough to hold on to what he says next in Ephesians 3:17:

*". . .so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—"*

He says he is going to pray for them that Christ would strengthen them so that Christ would dwell in them. Then he says in Ephesians 3:17-19:

*“. . .that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

We need divine strength this morning, don't we? Can we agree together that God's cosmic vision of redemption is big and that it is a humbling, staggering privilege to be entrusted with it? Can we repent of the divisions that we are keen to maintain and reinforce and join together with brothers and sisters so that God's manifold wisdom would be on display in this world and to heavenly powers? We need that strength. We need to be strengthened in our inmost being. When God makes us strong and Christ dwells in us, when God makes us strong to grasp together with others this breath, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ, then we are that people of promise. We have the privilege of sharing the gospel. We resolve together to put God's purpose on display, and this image is so tantalizing, isn't it?

Commentators and scholars have wrestled with what has come into Paul's mind with this image of the breath, length, height, depth of the love of Christ. Most of us think in three dimensions, not four. What are the four dimensions that come to Paul's mind? I think, in light of his preaching and teaching, that the four dimensions that come rushing to his mind are actually crystal clear, that when he thinks of God's saving purpose accomplished through Christ, he thinks of the breadth, he thinks of the length, he thinks of the height and the depth and it is a picture of the cross of Christ, four dimensions: how wide, how broad, how high, how deep is the love of Christ!

Brothers and sisters, it is no small thing to gather together in His Name, to be a people who have been claimed and purchased by the cross, and it is so perfect this morning as a gathered people to gather here at this table. This table does not belong to Kenwood. It does not belong to any of us, though we are co-sharers in it. If you have believed the good news of Jesus Christ, you are welcome to feast at His table. It is He who gathered with His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, broke it in their presence, and said: "This is My Body given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." He took the cup and said: "This is the New Covenant in My blood which is poured out for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." We do remember this morning who we are, the people of promise, a people created by the gospel with the sacred privilege to make Him known, to put on display His wisdom. Would you join your heart with mine in prayer?

Lord Jesus, we honor You. You are great, Lord. But, Lord, even our best, we struggle to keep up with what You've done. Lord, I ask for us that You would forgive us this morning. Forgive us, Lord Jesus, where we have labeled the other as 'out,' or maybe we have compromised and given a second-tier seat. Lord, forgive us where we've looked at any of the human divisions that

are so rampant in our age—of class, or color, or any other human demarcation. We ask for forgiveness because we have underestimated the power of the gospel. Lord, we ask for forgiveness for hoarding wealth. You have given to us the unfathomable wealth of Christ. It is not our wealth, it is His. Lord, some of us here have big bank accounts of the wealth of Christ that we have stored and not given away. Lord, would You forgive us for that? Lord, would You forgive us this morning for our lack of faith, for our apathy, our inattentiveness to the significance and priority of our gathering together? Forgive us, Lord, for not joining in so that Your multifaceted wisdom would be clearly on display. We all need to be here. Lord, we ask for Your forgiveness, and we trust the Word of the gospel: *“If we confess our sins, You are faithful to forgive us,”* and so we trust You and we gaze together with unified hearts and unified vision at the breath, and the length, and the height, and the depth of the love of Christ.

In His name we pray, Amen.