

Ephesians 3 (Part 2): 1-13 • Calling and Power

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We are in the third chapter of Ephesians. This is our second week in this chapter. We just covered the first few verses last week—verses 1 through 3—and we're going to go ahead and read those verses again and read down through verse 13.

Follow along in your Bible as I read from the ESV here this morning. Paul writes:

“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 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.

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.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 bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,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.¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence 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.”
(ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word here this morning, and we pray that You would use it today to teach us and give us wisdom and insight into what Paul is bringing out in these verses.

Help us also, Father God, to apply the Word to our lives. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

You probably noticed how many times Paul used the word, mystery in these verses. Actually, no fewer than 4 times. I don't know if you're the kind of person who likes mysteries. I enjoy them as long as I'm not in them. I don't know if that makes sense or not. I like watching fictional mystery stories or something like that. It's kind of fun. If it's a mystery involving something in my life, I'm not too thrilled. Losing my keys or something like that just doesn't go over very well.

But Paul talks here about a mystery, and the reason I'm bringing it up is because the word, mystery means something different biblically than it does to you and I. Because that word mystery for you and I means something that we still have to figure out; there's a mystery ahead of us; we got to look at the clues—this and that—and figure out what's going on.

When Paul uses the word mystery, he's referring to something that was unrevealed previously but now has been made known. Okay? Now, for us, that wouldn't qualify as a mystery if it's already been made known, but for him, that's what the word mystery means.

And here's basically how he describes it; look with me again in verse 4 in your Bible. He says: *“When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, (and then he says in verse 5)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.”*

Again, I want you to note here Paul says that this mystery was previously hidden; now it has been revealed; it's been made known. And then in verse 6, Paul explains what the mystery is. You ready?

To you and I, it's not a big mystery, but in verse 6, he explains, *“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, (and he doesn't say it, but he means with Israel, and he says, we are) members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”*

All right; stop there. Let me explain a little bit about what's going on here because this is kind of a bugaboo sort of a thing for a lot of people, as it relates to understanding the relationship of the church and Israel.

Where does Israel come in? When we read through the Old Testament, we realize it's predominantly about Israel. I mean, you get to—like Genesis chapter

12, I think it is, where God puts a call upon the man Abram—who, of course, later is named Abraham—calls him away from his family, away from the place where he lived. Tells him to go to a new land, and once he gets there, God says I'm going to give this land to you and your descendants, all of your descendants after you—and, of course, Abraham is the father of the Jews. And then you go all the way through the last book of the Old Testament, which is Malachi, and you read about the Jews, the nation of Israel. It's all about the Jews.

Now—then, you get to the New Testament, and you start reading through the Gospel messages: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. It's still all about Israel. Jesus is the promised Messiah. Promised to whom? Israel. He comes, and during His ministry, who does He minister to? Israel. Did you know Jesus' ministry was to the Jews? Okay? He didn't come for the Gentiles in His earthly ministry. He died for us, thankfully, but His ministry was to the Jews. So, we have this interesting sort of picture where the Jews are front and center for the majority of the Bible.

But then something happens. The Jews basically reject the Messiah, right? And so, because of that rejection, the Bible tells us that God set aside Israel temporarily, and now His focus is on the church.

Now, this is an interesting sort of thing, and again, this is where a lot of Christians kind of stumble. How—what should we think of Israel? Where is Israel today? The church—I mean, did the church take over for Israel? That's what a lot of churches teach: that the church took over for Israel, and now all the promises that God made to Israel are now promises made to the church.

That's not what the Bible says. Okay? That's called replacement theology, and it's not biblical. Flat out. The church did not replace Israel. What happened is that Paul—and Paul explains this in Romans chapter 11—he says God did not reject Israel; they rejected Him, but he did not reject Israel. He, however, gave them a partial hardening—he talks about in Romans chapter 11—and He basically set them aside, and His focus is now on the church, which is an amalgamation of Jew and Gentile.

Look with me at verse 6 one more time. Can we read it one more time? Paul says: *“This mystery is that the Gentiles are (now) fellow heirs (with Israel), members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”*

So, we are living in what we call the church age. Okay? This is the church age. Here's what's interesting about this: the church age is nowhere revealed in the

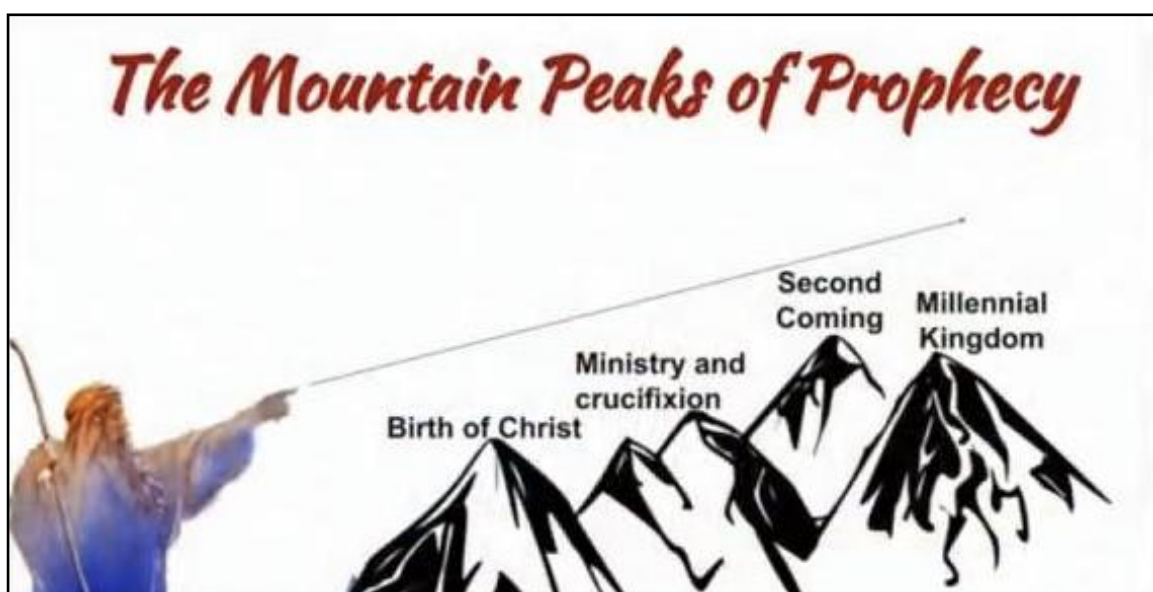
Old Testament. You will not find the church in the Old Testament. That's why Paul calls it a mystery. Something previously hidden, now revealed through apostles and prophets—and he's talking about prophets in his time period. That's when God revealed the church, okay? It was not revealed in the Old Testament. A lot of people look through the Old Testament, looking for the church. It isn't there. It's a mystery. Okay? So, we're in the church age.

When does the church age come to an end? Well, it comes to an end when the church is removed. The Bible tells us there's coming a time when Jesus is going to return for His church, His bride. We believe that's going to take place at the time of the rapture, when the church is taken off the earth, and that will begin that period of time called the tribulation period. But at that time, the stopwatch of God's prophetic timetable will start again for Israel— during the time of the tribulation and following.

So, the stopwatch has been paused. It was paused essentially when the Holy Spirit fell upon the assembled believers in Acts chapter 2, and the church was inaugurated and began at that time. That stopwatch will begin again when the Church or the Bride of Christ is removed from the scene, and Israel once again becomes the focus of God's prophetic calendar.

All right, but I want to remind you of something: this was a mystery. The church age was not revealed in the Old Testament, and again, that's why it qualifies to be referred to as a mystery.

Now, this is depicted—and it's been depicted graphically for many years as something we refer to as the mountain peaks of prophecy. Some of you perhaps have heard of this. Let me put this on the screen for you.



The mountain peaks of prophecy, essentially, are what the Old Testament prophets saw. When they were looking at this mountain range, if you will, that essentially was God's prophetic timetable stretching out into the future. All they saw was the peaks, and so, they saw the birth of Christ; they saw His ministry; they saw His crucifixion; they saw His second coming, and they saw the Millennial Kingdom. But what they didn't see was in the valleys.

When you look at a mountain range from end to end, all you see are mountain next to mountain next to mountain. But if you drive around to the side of that mountain range, and you look at that mountain range from the side, you see that there are valleys in between those mountains.

Now, the Old Testament prophets couldn't see those valleys, and so they just prophesied what they saw. But in the middle of those valleys were other things that God was doing, and one of those things was the church age—that period of time that you and I are in right now. That is the mystery that Paul speaks about, and that is the ministry that he said God gave him, was to take this mystery and to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

All right, that's where he begins to speak of this thing in verse 7. Would you look with me again in your Bible? He says: “*Of this gospel (and you know that means good news) I was... a minister.*”

Now, people, don't look at the word, minister, and see a title. It's not a title. It's a word that describes what you do. It's a descriptive word; it's an action word. This word, minister, that is in your Bible, is where we get our word, deacon. And in some churches, a deacon is a title. But, honestly, it's an action word. It means to serve. One who serves is a deacon. All right? Paul is basically saying, of this gospel, I was made a deacon; I was made a minister; I was made a servant. Okay?

I want you to notice, as Paul goes on and speaks here about his calling as a servant of the gospel, what he says about it. First of all, he says: “⁷*Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, (and then he says) ... given me by the working of his power.*”

So, what is Paul saying? He's saying, I was called, and I was given power to fulfill that calling. I was called—I want to go over this with you guys again because it is important we get this: I was called and I was given power to fulfill that calling.

I was called, and I was given power. Why am I emphasizing that to you here this morning? It's because we've gotten away from it in the church. We've gotten away from calling, and we've gotten away from power. If you were going to hear a modern-day pastor, minister, whatever, talk about his work in the ministry and coming in, he might say it like this:

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to my ministerial degree, and the authority of a search committee which approved my resumé and granted me this position.

Of this gospel, I was made a minister according to my ministerial degree and the authority of a search committee, which approved my resumé and granted me this position.

That's pretty much what we do today. Can I show you that statement now alongside Paul's?

Of this gospel, I was made a minister according to my ministerial degree and the authority of a search committee, which approved my resumé and granted me this position.

Ephesians 3:7 (ESV)

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.

Of this gospel, I was made a minister not according to some kind of a ministerial degree or accumulated credits; I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace.

And by the way, when you see the word, grace in this instance, it means power. I was made a minister by God's power, which was given me through the working of that very power.

Boy, that's quite a difference between those two statements, isn't it—between the one where we pretty much are today, essentially, and what Paul is saying here.

And here's my question to you. How did we get here? How did we get to the place where an earned degree and an impressive resumé came to mean more than understanding one's calling and seeing in their life a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit? When did those things become second-class citizens to a shiny resumé or the recommendation of a search committee? Why did we

move away from those things? Why did we get away from it? That's the question I want to ask.

When we read through the New Testament and we see God calling people, there's never a resumé or a search committee involved. You know what's involved? Prayer, the Holy Spirit, the confirmation of calling.

Let me show you Paul's confirmation. It's in Acts chapter 13 where it says,

Acts 13:1-3 (ESV)

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and (it names some of them there:) teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. (And it says—look at this) While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, (and I don't think they heard a voice like through a loudspeaker. One of the individuals who had a prophetic ministry spoke the Word of the Lord, and that word was) "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (And it says here) Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

You know what we're seeing here? It's a beautiful picture of calling and empowering. God says I have called Paul and Barnabas, and so the rest of the men who were there fasting and worshiping the Lord recognized the calling that God had placed upon these men, and they laid their hands on them and said God bless these men, and they sent them out to do the work that God had called them to do. Nobody asked to see a resumé; nobody asked them if they'd been to seminary; nobody asked them to prove their degree. It was the calling of the Holy Spirit that was most important.

I'm not speaking against education. I went to Bible college myself. I sent my own kids to Bible college—some of them. There's nothing wrong with it. But when we put that—we make that the emphasis of ministry, what have we done? We've ousted the Holy Spirit. We basically said He doesn't matter anymore. Essentially, the calling that He places upon our life isn't really the deal anymore. We're really looking for accumulated credits.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he spoke about this issue. He said do not neglect, Timothy, the gift that you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. (1 Timothy 4:14)

You see, there were prophetic words also spoken over Timothy, and the elders were there. They laid their hands on Timothy and said this man is called to the ministry, and they believed in the empowering of that calling. They believed that the Holy Spirit would follow up that calling, the declaration of that calling, with all the power necessary to go out and do the work of the gospel.

Today, we don't have to wait on the Lord to reveal who He's called or empowered. We just hire pastors. We just hire them and we ignore what Jesus says in the Word of God when He says, the hired hand cares nothing for the sheep because he's hired. (John 10:13) He's not gifted or empowered or called by the Good Shepherd. He's just a hireling. And here, Jesus said it, and we ignore it. It's just like, what are we thinking?

All right, here's my point. Why am I harping on this and how does this apply to you? Well, it applies to you in a lot of different ways. Number one, I think you should know these things going into any sort of church that you attend. You should know how the pastor comes about being a pastor, and so on and so forth.

But my point goes further than that. My point is this: Because we've ignored calling and empowering when it comes to leaders in the church, we've likewise gotten away from recognizing the calling that God has on everyone in the body of Christ and the power that goes along with that calling as well. Because we've ignored one, we've ignored the other. Because we ignore it in relationship to our pastors, we ignore it in relationship to our own lives.

And you might be thinking, calling—I don't remember ever receiving a calling. Well, you have a calling on your life. Paul expressed it. In fact, we're going to see it later on here in the Book of Ephesians—little preview of things to come. Let me put it up here on the screen for you from chapter 4, verse 1. It says:

Ephesians 4:1 (ESV)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Who's he talking to? He's talking about the rest of the body of Christ. He's talking to you. And what does he say to you? I'm urging you to walk in the calling that you've received from God.

What is your calling? Your calling is to live a godly life. To live a life that honors God and brings glory to His name. Your calling is to walk in victory over sin. Your calling is to serve your fellow man and to love him even when—and that's tough because he's very difficult to love, usually. And your calling is to share the Good News—whether you do it verbally or just do it through lifestyle evangelism. It's your calling to live in such a way that people are attracted to Jesus Christ. That's your calling. It's my calling, too.

Here's the question. Are we thinking about—in terms of our calling—and are we understanding that there is power that goes with it? Because when I tell you about your calling, did any of you have this shudder that went through you, like, I don't know if I can do that—that pressure of living a godly life that I was talking about, that pressure of loving people and serving them in such a way that it honors Christ, that pressure of sharing the gospel with the lost?

You know why we shudder when we think about those things? We've forgotten all about the fact that the power to do those things comes from Him! It's not yours. It never came from you in the first place; it comes from Him.

Look what Paul is going to say later in this chapter. He's going to say:

Ephesians 3:20 (ESV)

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,

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.

He's referring to that power that every single believer has, you have. Now, it doesn't mean you're walking in it; it doesn't mean you're experiencing that power on a daily basis. What I'm saying is it's available to you. But see, we've gotten away from it. And we've gotten away because we've gotten away from calling. Right?

It's a constant issue around here at Calvary Chapel Ontario. We try to put people into positions where we feel they're called, but man, that's hard because sometimes things just need to be done. But our goal is to find people who are called to certain areas. Sometimes, we just give an invitation to see if they'll bite

and if it's something that maybe the Lord has put on their heart to do. But ultimately, our heart is to plug you in where you burn the brightest, right?

And that's going to happen where you're called because where God calls, He matches it with power, okay? Let me say that again. Where God calls, He matches it with power.

And this was a constant theme in the New Testament. You read through the New Testament, you hear about these twin ideas of calling and empowering. It's just all throughout the New Testament. And guys, we got to get back to it.

Because these people who believed in calling, who believed in the empowering of the Spirit, turned the world on its ear. And they didn't have the internet, and they didn't have printing presses, and they didn't have all the transportation and global communication that you and I have today. They didn't have any of those things and they still turned the world on its ear.

What did they have? The power of the Holy Spirit and an understanding that I am called to go out into the world and be a servant of Jesus Christ, and He'll back it up.

So, who are some of the people that God calls? Some of you are sitting here, going, I don't know about this pastor—this whole calling thing, I— oh, we are so weird. We think you got to go to years of Bible college and have all this study, and go to seminary—which I call cemetery—but you got to do all these things; you go to do all this studying and stuff.

Look what Paul says in verse 8: *“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace (power) was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things...”*

Now, I want you to notice something about what Paul said about himself. He says even though I'm the least of all the saints. Who does God call? He calls the least.

If you're sitting here this morning thinking, well, I'm the least in this entire room, well, get ready because God's call is on your life.

Do you know why He calls the least? Do you know why He calls the unprepared? Do you know why He calls those who, in and of themselves, think I just don't have the goods to be able to do this sort of thing? It's because when

He finds those kinds of people, He can begin to empower them through His Spirit, and there's nothing to interfere with the work of His Spirit that begins to flow in their lives.

You see, when we think the other thing, like, well, I've been to Bible College, and I've been prepared; I took the apologetics class, and I can pretty much answer any question you have; I can debate with the best of them. Didn't that make you want to puke? I mean, that's not the kind of person that God's going to use because you know what? Self is going to get in the way.

And God told Paul something about how His power flows best, and he wrote it down in his second letter to the Corinthians. Let me put it on the screen for you.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

“...my power is made perfect in weakness.”

“...my power is made perfect in weakness.”

It's a very simple statement. You guys all know it. My power is made perfect in what? Weakness. You feel weak? You feel unable to be that servant of the Lord? You feel unable to live that holy life in such a way that brings glory to God? You feel like I don't think I can do this? You're a prime candidate to actually get the job done because His power is made perfect in people who are weak of themselves.

See, the world makes self the focus of our lives. They want to build up self. They're constantly talking about a poor self-image, and you have a poor attitude of self, and we just need to build up self. You know what? God comes along and says, hey, forget all that stuff. You go ahead and just be that lowly person you know you are, and I'll fill in the rest. My power is made perfect in weakness.

What was the first step of the Beatitudes Jesus gave in Matthew chapter 5? *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 5:13) What does it mean to be, *“poor in spirit?”* It means to be destitute of yourself. Blessed are those, God says, who have low self-esteem, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

The world says you can't do squat if you have low self-esteem; very first thing you got to do is learn to love yourself, then you can love others. What a bunch of malarkey!

That is not what the Bible says. You just start loving God, and you confess to Him your weakness, and He will fill you with His power to do whatever He has called you to do.

Look at verses 11 and 12 toward the end of this section. Paul writes: *“This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.”*

The reason I read these last couple of verses here for you is because this is another powerful key to walking in the power of God, and this is why we forget—we do such a poor job, frankly, as Christians today, of walking in the power of God. We've ignored calling. We've ignored power, and we've ignored the means by which we come in contact with that power—and that's at the throne of grace.

See, we've forgotten about—and the Bible talks here— Paul's talking here about coming with boldness into the access that we've been given through our faith in Jesus Christ.

Let me show you how the writer of Hebrews put it.

Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace (which is the throne of power), *that we may receive mercy and find grace* (again, that word refers to power; that we may find power) *to help in (our) time of need.*

People, we're not taking advantage of this. We're not going before the throne of grace. You know what we're doing? We go and check out a new book, a new self-help book, or we go and talk to somebody, or I need to talk to my counselor or something about this, and we have not gone to the throne of grace.

But we have access, and we are invited to come with confidence. What is that confidence? It's confidence in His promise that when we go there, we'll be met there by power— ability to be able to function in the calling that He's placed upon our lives.

Here's the bottom line. Every one of us, every single one of us, has a calling on our lives. Every one of you has a calling on your life. Your calling is to live a

holy life. That means a life set apart for God. When I'm talking about holy, don't think perfect, okay? Oh dear, yeah, you're going to make yourself crazy with those kinds of things. Holiness means to be set apart. It means to be special to God, and you already are.

Now, He wants you to live that life: special to Him. He wants you to love, and He wants you to serve your fellow man. And boy, that's a task for which you need the power of God. And then He wants you to share the gospel whenever possible, whenever the Lord so leads.

But He has not just called you to do those things; He has empowered you to do those things. And if you and I will start getting busy coming before the throne of grace— Our access, by the way, is the blood of the lamb. If you think you're not welcome before the throne of grace, well, if you're a Christian, think again because when we come to Jesus, and when we make Him our savior, we put on His righteousness, and that qualifies us to now come before the throne of grace.

Are you low on power? Then come before the throne of grace. Find mercy, and then find power to help you in your time of need. It's there. He's there. He's ready. He's ready to give you power to do what He's called you to do.

But we've stayed back. You see, we've held back, and we've been trying to find our answers through some other means—some other way, some other something.

And God says, no, come to Me. Come to me. I've got everything you need. Everything you need for life and godliness I have given to you. Now, come that I might fill you with power, amen?