

Sermon for July 27, 2008

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: Ephesians 3:1-21

Title: “Know It; Love It; Live It”

Introduction: Every summer, Sarah and I like to take the girls to an amusement park if we possibly can. Through our school’s reading program we’ve had at least a couple of daughters get free tickets to Six Flags parks, so we try to go to those parks. A little over a week ago when we went down to Kentucky, we went to Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom for a day. Well, this is the second year in a row that the temps have been well into the 90s with the humidity somewhere around 300% ... when I got there I knew I wasn’t feeling that good anyway, but I thought I could snap out of it because I love roller coasters so much AND two of my favorite roller coasters are there.

BUT, I could not snap out of it! I felt weak. I felt a little sick. I felt really tired and I just was not that much fun to be around. I did coax myself on to each of the roller coasters once, but I’m used to riding them at least a few times each. In the afternoon, we went into the water park portion of Kentucky Kingdom ... a few times around the lazy river with Lily and I felt a little bit better.

Right at the end of the day—just a half hour before the park closed for the day—Sally talked my into riding the Tornado (a water ride for 2 to 4 people with a big drop, etc.). I rode that twice in a row with my three older daughters and we had a blast! It was then that I realized what all I had missed that day with not feeling well. It was then, at the end of the day with the park closing, that I realized I had really missed it!

That’s one of the reasons Paul writes the Letter to the Ephesians from a prison in Rome. Paul does not want the people ... Jews and Gentiles either one ... to miss all that God has for them. Paul wanted them to get all of the spiritual strength, depth, grasp and fullness that they could handle!

Same with us ... ***We need to KNOW all that God has for us, LOVE and appreciate who God is by the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ, and LIVE like we get it!***

This morning we will be reminded by Paul not to miss it!

If you have not yet done so, let me encourage you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will find our Scripture for today and on the other you will find a brief outline with some room for notes on where we are going today. My hope is that each of us will hear something today from God’s Word that will help either ourselves or someone we know in the coming days or weeks in their life or faith journey.

Now, once again, before I go any further, let me say my disclaimer again. Understand that when Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians while sitting in a disgusting prison/dungeon, he was writing to challenge those believers to go way deeper in their faith than they had ever gone before. Paul knew that the people of Ephesus needed to have words to express where they had come from and where they were going as followers of Jesus Christ. He was also challenging Jews (chosen people of God) to become ONE under Christ with the Gentiles (not chosen people of God). This was deep stuff. This was hard stuff. This was not for the faint of heart in Ephesus. It was ***not for the pansies*** (followers of whoever is most popular at the moment) of their community.

In Ephesus, there were plenty of opportunities to be a pansy. Ephesus was a Roman capital and one of the most prominent cities in Asia Minor. Ephesus was, like Corinth, a harbor city. The port brought major commerce and world trade. Paul, who was well educated, understood that Ephesus could be a major exporter of the Christian faith as well. He knew that a well-established Christian church in a major trade city would help spread the Good News of Jesus Christ rapidly throughout that part of the world.

Now, Ephesus was a center of worship for the Greek goddess, Diana/Artemis and their Temple of Diana/Artemis was one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. There were many there who were into witchcraft and sorcery and of course, the worship of Diana/Artemis. But, then Paul showed up. Paul was only in ministry there for two to three years, but he had a major impact on the city.

Paul started teaching in the Jewish synagogues, but he got kicked out with his talk of the Messiah actually coming and dying on a cross for the sins of the people. He then started teaching in a school setting. He convinced many of the witches, sorcerers and their followers to burn their books (worth millions) and follow Jesus Christ (Acts 19). Those who had followed Diana/Artemis began to listen to Paul and their lives were transformed. This hurt the economy of Ephesus because those who sold the silver idols of Diana/Artemis were soon out of business.

So, Paul had a huge impact on the city with his clear preaching and teaching of God's Word ... until his enemies started a riot and Paul was asked to leave Ephesus.

Anyway, now Paul is writing to the leaders of the Church in Ephesus from a prison in Rome. And again, like Lance shared last week, Paul's preaching as he was led by God was changing the long-standing mindset of the world. Since the beginning of their known history, the Jewish people had claimed to be the children of God (the Chosen people of God) and if you were not Jewish ... too bad for you! The people in Paul's day understood that the Jewish people had laid claim to 'their' God and if you were not Jewish, you could not.

Now, Paul is teaching that the Gentiles have as much right to the blessings of God as the Jews and he's making enemies in a hurry!

Kind of like: irritating feeling in the mid-1990s when suddenly everybody was a Packer fan, even the people who didn't know who David Whitehurst, Lynn Dickey, Rich Campbell and Don Majkowski were!!

The Gentiles having the same rights to God's blessings that the Jews did would be like telling a teenager that they could start a new job and their starting salary would be the same as the person who had been trained and at the job for 30 years. NOT FAIR!

Let's get into our Scripture for today. There are two sections of Scripture. The first part of Ephesians 3 is Paul explaining again his special mission and ministry to the church and especially the Gentiles. Follow me into Chapter 3:

READ EPHESIANS 3:1-13 NOW AND PRAY!

I. A Historical Secret

- A. Let me keep this as brief and simple as possible ... Paul's special message to the Gentiles was:

“The Gentiles have an equal share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God’s children. Both groups have believed the Good News, and both are part of the same body and enjoy together the promise of blessings through Christ Jesus.”

1. This was made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Only God could include all of humanity in the hope that comes through Jesus’ victory over death!
 2. The problem with this message is that it upsets a whole lot of Jewish people!
- B. Have you ever wondered what it would be like if God just told us everything at once, so we knew what to expect in life and when to expect it?
1. I don’t think I could handle it.
 2. There are some things that I’m glad God keeps to God’s self until I have to know it.
 3. I’m glad that God only lets me know what I can handle at that moment.
- C. This secret that Paul is revealing at this point was known by God, but could not be told until the time was right. Do you know why?!?
1. Check out verse 10 ... “God’s purpose was to show his wisdom in all its rich variety to all the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.”
 2. In other words, the angels (both good and evil) and their masters (both good and evil) were just finding out God’s secret too.
 3. Don’t you think Satan would have backed off a bit about putting Jesus to death if he knew of the resurrection and the power that resurrection would give the Church?!?
 4. Satan thought he was killing Jesus off. Instead, he was giving Jesus the chance to be resurrected and bring the Church together. Satan thought he was going to stop the Church, but he actually helped the Church realize the power of Christ!!
- D. Last thing I want to say on this section of Chapter 3 is that Paul makes it clear what it takes to be included “in all the riches shared by God’s children”. Verse 12 = “Because of Christ and our *faith* in him, we can now come fearlessly into God’s presence, assured of his glad welcome.” (italics mine)
1. It has nothing to do with what nationality we are or what job we have or what kind of education or what we’ve done in the past or how much money we have, etc.
 2. We get to share in the riches of God’s children because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Period.

Let’s get to the second half of Chapter 3 ... This is where Paul prays for the people of the Church, especially the Gentiles...

READ EPHESIANS 3:14-21 NOW!

II. Paul Prays for Four Things

Strength, Depth, Grasp, and Fullness – These four things build off of each other, so we have to keep them in order.

A. #1 = Strength

1. “Mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit” = A strength to overcome the temptations to pull away from God.
2. A strength to overcome the temptations to be a ‘PANSY’ ... a follower of whatever everybody else in society is doing no matter what God’s Word says.
3. A strength to handle the difficult things thrown at me in a day and still reveal Jesus Christ to the people around me.
4. Strength to get past ‘playing church’ and actually pressing into the area of the reality of Jesus Christ.
5. We have to exercise this inner strength even as we pray to God for it. Our part is to exercise that inner strength with Scripture reading (Yeah Romans!), prayer and worship, deliberately staying clear of the things we know tempt us and being obedient to God.

B. #2 = Depth

1. The result of praying for Strength is that, together with God, we create a depth to us ... well grounded ... deep roots.
2. As we become more and more grounded in Christ (more and more like Christ) the more Christ wants to be with us. “...Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him.”
3. When Christ feels welcome in our lives, he moves right in.
4. It’s up to us to make the space...
5. When I let Christ become deeply rooted in my life ... our relationship / partnership becomes stronger, then my attitude and my conduct reflect Jesus Christ. “Christian” = like Christ.

C. #3 = Grasp

1. This is hard stuff. Paul wanted the people of Ephesus to ‘get it’!
2. Do we ‘get’ how incredible God’s love for each of us is?
3. At the same time Paul understands that we cannot completely ‘get it’, because even though we need to experience God’s love, we will never understand how big it really is!
4. But, as we pray for strength and experience a new depth to our relationship with Jesus Christ, we will start to get a grasp on how much God truly loves and cares for each one of us.
5. The more a Christian knows about Jesus Christ, the more amazed one is at Christ’s love for us.

6. We start to understand John 3:16 ... 'For God so loved the world and each individual in it throughout history that he gave His only Son to die a cruel death in our place, so that anyone who chooses to believe in Jesus will never die, but live forever in Paradise.'

D. #4 = Fullness

1. Finally, Paul prays for fullness. If you have a bucket full of rocks ... which is what I feel like at times ... and you start to pour water into it, do you know what happens? The water fills every possible crack and crevice in that bucket. It seeps into every possible gap!
2. That's what Paul is praying for; that the people of the church in Ephesus will be totally filled up with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.
3. Paul wants the people to experience the incredible completeness in life that comes only through Jesus Christ.
4. The Holy Spirit is holding the bucket of water. It's up to us to invite it to be poured into our bucket of rocks...
5. This fullness causes us to be excellent in our moral decisions and our personality becomes more like Jesus ... which, again, is useable by God.
6. When we come to that point where we are being filled up with Christ, then God can really use us for the Church and the Kingdom.
7. When we get filled up, it causes us to love each other. It causes us to become ONE!
8. More on 'fullness' in a couple of weeks...

III. My Prayer

- A. So, this is my prayer for each of you this week and I invite you to pray it for yourselves and those in these churches ...

"God, please give us Strength and Depth. Help us to Get a Grip and experience Your Fullness (repeat)."

- B. What a great opportunity to tell God that you are done 'playing' Church and that you are ready to get real with your faith.
- C. I'm praying for you and for this church to be all it can be, like Paul wanted for that Church in Ephesus!

Let's Pray!