

INTRODUCTION.

THIS A.M., ~ CONTINUE OUR LOOK AT 3:1-13, ~ WHICH WE ARE CALLING "PAUL'S detour."

AS NOTED, ~ IN 3:1, ~ PAUL BEGINS TO PRAY FOR THE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS, ~ THEN abruptly digresses, ~ or takes a detour, ~ that lasts through verse 13. ~~ Resumes vs. 14.

▶▶ This detour, ~ as we discussed, ~ consists of two parts.

▷▷ Verses 1-6, ~ which focuses on "the mystery of Christ."

▷▷ And verses 7-13, ~ which we'll begin to look at today.

VERSE 7 BEGINS A NEW TOPIC WITHIN PAUL'S DETOUR.

▶▶ If you'll recall, ~ in verse 6 Paul said that it is "through the gospel ~ and through the gospel alone, ~ [i.e., ~ it is only by hearing the gospel preached and believing it] ~ ¶¶

▷▷ that Gentiles become "fellow heirs with all those who believe in and follow Christ Jesus ~ become fellow members of the body of Christ, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ and become fellow partakers of the blessings of salvation provided through Jesus."

▶▶ Paul's mention of "the gospel" in verse 6 ~ leads him into a discussion of the gospel and his role in preaching it in verses 7-13. ~~ . . . Detour w/in a detour.

▷▷ Basically, ~ in verse 7, ~ he's saying, ~ "and speaking of the gospel" . . . ~ And then he goes on to speak about it and his role in preaching it.

▶▶ Everything in verses 7-13 centers on the gospel and Paul's role in preaching it.

▷▷ And we're going to zero in on verses 7-8a this morning.

PAUL BEGINS, ~ IN VERSE 7a, ~ BY TELLING US THAT HE BECAME A PREACHER OF this gospel.

PAUL SAYS, ~ ¶¶

▶▶ "Of this gospel ~ [i.e., ~ and speaking of this gospel,] ~ I was made ~ [or, ~ I became] ~ a minister." ¶¶ 1/9

▶▶Of course, ~ the gospel refers to the good news that Christ Jesus has provided salvation for lost humanity.

▷▷In 1 Cor. 15:3-4, ~ Paul summarizes the good news.

↳↳“For I delivered to you as of first importance ~ [i.e., ~ as most important] ~ what I also received: ~ ~ ¶¶

→→that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures ~ [or, ~ just as the Scriptures said], ~ that he was buried, ~ that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures ~ [or, ~ just as the Scriptures said].”

▷▷And in Acts 4:12, ~ using different words, ~ Peter also summarizes the gospel. ~ “And there is salvation in no one else, ~ for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

↳↳God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

GETTING BACK TO VERSE 7a, ~ PAUL SAYS, ~ ~ ¶¶

▶▶“Of this gospel ~ [i.e., ~ speaking of the good news that Jesus has provided salvation for lost humanity] ~ I was made a minister.”

▷▷Simply put, ~ “minister” here means one whose business it is to preach the gospel.

↳↳So, ~ basically, ~ here in verse 7, ~ Paul is saying, ~ “And speaking of this good news that Christ Jesus has provided salvation for lost humanity, ~ I became a preacher of this good news.”

THEN IN VERSE 7b, ~ PAUL TELLS US HOW THIS CAME ABOUT.

HE SAYS THAT IT WAS “ACCORDING TO THE GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE.”

▶▶I.e., ~ It was through “the gift of God's grace” that Paul became a preacher of the good news about Jesus.

▷▷The phrase “of God's” refers to God being the source of Paul's gift of grace.

↳↳I.e., ~ it was through the grace given to him by God that Paul became a preacher of the gospel.

▶▶The question is, ~ how is “grace” used in this context? ¶¶ 2/9

▷▷ Recall: ~ Normal, ~ free and undeserved . . . ~ Divine enablement . . . ~ Spiritual gifts . . . ~ God's word . . . ~ "the mystery of Christ" . . . .

▷▷ Since, ~ here in Eph. 3:7b, ~ Paul is telling us how he became a preacher of the gospel, ~ and we know that "grace" can refer to spiritual gifts ~ and one of the gifts was apostleship, ~ ¶¶

↪↪ I suggest that that is what Paul has in view here. ~ "grace" is referring here to the gift of apostleship.

→→ That this is the case is seen in Rom. 1:5, ~ where Paul writes, ~ and the NIV paraphrase gives a good rendering of this, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ "Through him ~ [i.e., ~ Jesus] ~ we ~ [i.e., ~ the apostles] ~ received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake."

▷▷ Paul was appointed an apostle by Jesus when he was converted by Jesus on the Damascus road.

↪↪ In Acts 9:15a, ~ Jesus told Ananias, ~ "Go, ~ for he ~ [i.e., ~ Paul] ~ is a chosen instrument of mine ~ to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."

▶▶ So, ~ basically, ~ Paul is saying here in verse 7, ~ "And speaking of this gospel, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ it was through the spiritual gift of apostleship given to me by Jesus, ~ that I became a preacher of this good news ~ that Jesus has provided salvation for lost humanity."

▶▶ Now, ~ just as we said about "the mystery of Christ," ~ we should note here that since "grace" normally means free and undeserved favor, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ most likely Paul is using it here to refer to his spiritual gift in order to emphasize its free and undeserved nature.

↪↪ And this applies to all spiritual gifts. ~ Our spiritual gifts are free, ~ and we definitely don't deserve them.

▷▷ And, ~ in fact, ~ we could say that the normal definition of grace is present and emphasized in each of the ways the NT authors used the word.

↪↪ "the mystery of Christ," ~ i.e., ~ to include those of us who are Gentiles in salvation is unquestionably Jesus' free and undeserved gift to us. ¶¶ 3/9

↳↳ Divine enablement, ~ empowering us to live the Christian life and to serve Jesus ~ is certainly His free and undeserved gift to us.

↳↳ The written word of God, ~ which Peter defines as "the true grace of God," ~ is without doubt a free and undeserved gift from Jesus.

▷▷ So, basically, ~ to build on [verse 7](#) for clarification, ~ Paul is saying, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ "And speaking of this gospel, ~ it was through the spiritual gift of apostleship, ~ a free and undeserved gift from Jesus, ~ that I became a preacher of this good news that Jesus has provided salvation for lost humanity."

▶▶ Paul was an apostle, ~ with all the authority and gifting that went with that office.

▷▷ But he freely acknowledged that it was Jesus who saved and chose him to be an apostle, ~ and who gave him the authority and gifting that went with the office.

↳↳ Paul didn't take credit for it. ~ Daniel . . . . \*

→→ \*Likewise, ~ Paul didn't take credit for being an apostle.

↳↳ This is how all God's people should be about their gifting and ministries.

▶▶ The apostles were special messengers ~ chosen and sent by Jesus bearing His authority ~ and speaking and writing His message.

▷▷ And since all of the apostles were chosen and sent by Jesus ~ bearing His authority ~ and His message, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ everything they wrote ~ are actually Jesus' messages to the church ~ and are therefore binding on all believers.

▷▷ This means that what Paul wrote is not just his opinion ~ or just his ideas that he thought he would share.

↳↳ What Paul wrote is actually Jesus' message to the church ~ and binding on all believers.

▷▷ Everything Paul wrote ~ is, ~ as he writes in [2 Tim. 3:16-17](#), ~ "breathed out by God ~ and profitable for teaching, ~ for reproof, ~ for correction, ~ and for training in righteousness, ~ that the man ~ [or, ~ servant] of God may be complete, ~ equipped for every good work." ¶¶ 4/9

▷▷ Simply put, ~ the book we are currently studying, ~ [Ephesians](#), ~ is the word of God ~ and not the word of Paul ~ and not something optional for believers to study or to follow only if they feel like it.

↳↳ I.e., ~ it is incumbent upon believers, ~ those of us who claim Jesus as their Savior and Lord, ~ to study Ephesians; ~ ~ ¶¶

→→ and to try to understand it as best we can, ~ even though, ~ undeniably, ~ as we said about Paul's detour, ~ [this letter is heavy in theology and extremely hard to understand in places.](#)

↳↳ And after studying it, ~ to then apply its teaching to our lives.

▶▶ Paul became a preacher of the gospel through the spiritual gift of apostleship, ~ a free and undeserved gift, ~ given to him by Jesus. ~ ~ [Notice that it was according to God's sovereign choice what gifting Paul received.](#)

▷▷ We can learn an important lesson about spiritual gifts here, ~ beyond the fact that they are free and undeserved.

↳↳ We can desire certain gifts. ~ ~ In [1 Cor. 12:31](#), ~ Paul tells us to ["earnestly desire the higher gifts."](#)

→→ And in [1 Tim. 3:1](#), ~ Paul says, ~ ["The saying is trustworthy: ~ ~ If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, ~ he desires a noble task."](#)

↳↳ But, ~ ultimately, ~ God the Holy Spirit chooses which and how many gifts we are to have.

→→ E.g., ~ [1 Cor. 12:7](#), ~ ["To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."](#)

↳↳ Paul's point here is that spiritual gifts are given to believers by the Holy Spirit so we can help each other.

→→ And in [1 Cor. 12:11](#), ~ ["All these ~ \[referring to spiritual gifts\] ~ are empowered by one and the same Spirit, ~ who apportions to each one individually as he wills."](#)

↳↳ I.e., ~ God the Holy Spirit alone decides which gift or gifts each person should have.

↳↳ Just as in Paul's case, ~ our spiritual gifting is according to God's sovereign choice.

GETTING BACK TO EPH. 3, ~ IN VERSE 7c, ~ PAUL SAYS THAT HE WAS GIVEN HIS gift of apostleship by the working of God's power.

MOST LIKELY PAUL IS THINKING OF HIS CONVERSION EXPERIENCE.

▶▶ And the point he's making is that his salvation and receiving the gift of apostleship was a demonstration of Jesus' power.

▷▷ For only God's power can turn a sinner into a saint, ~ a Pharisee into an apostle, ~ a persecutor into a missionary.

▶▶ In my own life, ~ God demonstrated His awesome power.

▷▷ For only the awesome power of the living God could deliver me from drunkenness ~ and give me the ability to stay sober and alcohol free for almost 38 years and counting.

PAUL BEGINS IN VERSE 8 TO EXPAND ON WHAT HE JUST SAID, ~ AND AS HE does so, ~ he inserts a parenthetical comment in verse 8a.

AND THAT IS WHERE WE'LL FOCUS OUR ATTENTION TODAY, ~ AND TAKE UP THE REST of vs. 8 along with verses 9 & 10 next time. ~~ "though I am the very least of all the saints."

▶▶ The NIV paraphrase brings out the meaning of the word for "least," quite well here. ~ "Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people."

▷▷ Paul is emphasizing his unworthiness to be an apostle, ~ since such a statement is logically impossible.

▶▶ Since, ~ in the context, ~ he is talking about his conversion experience when Jesus saved him and chose him to be an apostle, ~ most likely, ~ foremost in Paul's mind ~ is the fact that he once persecuted the church of God.

▷▷ 1 Cor. 15:9 confirms that this is most likely what was foremost in his mind. ~~ Paul writes, ~ "For I am the least of the apostles, ~ unworthy to be called an apostle, ~ because I persecuted the church of God."

↪↪ In Paul's eyes, ~ this rendered him "less than the least" of all believers.

▶▶ Paul is not displaying a false sense of humility. ~~ He is displaying a great sense of amazement at his great privilege of being a redeemed sinner and an apostle. 📖 6/9

▷▷ Hundreds of years later, ~ the hymn writer expressed it this way: ~~ "Alas and did my Savior bleed ~ And did my Sov'reign die? ~ ~ Would he devote that sacred head for sinners such as I?"

▶▶ And this great sense of amazement should be felt by all those ~ who have confessed with their mouth that Jesus is Lord ~ and believed in their heart that God raised Him from the dead.

▷▷ Because remember, ~ as Paul wrote in Eph. 2:8-9, ~ "For by grace you have been saved through faith. ~ ~ And this is not your own doing; ~ ~ it is the gift of God, ~ not a result of works, ~ so that no one may boast."

▶▶ And we should feel this great sense of amazement especially when we sing these words that we'll sing later: ~ ~ ¶¶

▷▷ "Amazing grace! ~ how sweet the sound, ~ That saved a wretch like me! ~ ~ I once was lost, ~ but now am found, ~ Was blind, ~ but now I see."

"ALTHOUGH I AM LESS ~ THAN THE LEAST ~ OF ALL THE LORD'S PEOPLE," ~ PAUL SAYS.

▶▶ The apostle Paul serves as an example that ~ no sinner in this life ~ is beyond the reach of the Savior.

▷▷ We've talked about this before. ~ ~ And because it's so amazing and so wonderful ~ and displays Jesus' awesome mercy, ~ awesome love, ~ and awesome grace, ~ it bears repeating.

▶▶ As we said, ~ before Jesus saved him and commissioned him as an apostle, ~ Paul persecuted the church.

▷▷ In Acts 8:1a, ~ Luke tells us that Paul approved of Stephen's murder.

▷▷ Acts 9:1-2 tells us, ~ "But Saul, ~ still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, ~ went to the high priest ~ and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, ~ ¶¶

↳ ~ so that if he found any belonging to the Way, ~ men or women, ~ he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

▶▶ But Jesus didn't hold this against Paul. ~ ~ Jesus didn't refuse to forgive Paul. ~ ~ Jesus forgives all who come to Him in true repentance. ¶¶ 7/9

▶▶Paul testifies to this ~ in 1 Tim. 1:12-14. ~~ Paul writes, ~ "I thank him who has given me strength, ~ Christ Jesus our Lord, ~ because he judged me faithful, ~ appointing me to his service, ~ though formerly I was a blasphemer, ~ persecutor, ~ and insolent opponent. ~~ But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ~ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

▶▶Paul was not beyond the reach of the Savior. ~~ No one, ~ in this life, ~ is beyond the reach of the Savior, ~ Christ Jesus.

▷▷Is. 59:1a declares, ~ "Behold, ~ the Lord's hand is not shortened, ~ that it cannot save."

▶▶If you've never accepted Christ, ~ it doesn't matter what you've done ~ or are doing. ~~ In this life, ~ you are not beyond Jesus' saving hand.

▷▷And as the old hymn says, ~~ ¶¶

↳↳"Though millions have found him a friend, ~ And have turned from the sins they have sinned, ~ The Savior still waits to open the gates ~ And welcome a sinner before it's too late. ~~ ¶¶

→→There's room at the cross for you, ~ There's room at the cross for you; ~~ ¶¶

↳↳Though millions have come, ~ there's still room for one; ~~ Yes there's room at the cross for you."

▶▶But don't wait another day. ~~ No one is promised tomorrow.

▷▷As Paul says in 2 Cor. 6:2b, ~ "Behold, ~ now is the favorable time; ~~ behold, ~ now is the day of salvation."

▷▷Although in a slightly different context, ~ the principle is illustrated in Jesus' parable of the rich fool in Lk. 12:16-20 . . . .\*

▷▷\*\*"Behold, ~ now is the favorable time; ~~ behold, ~ now is the day of salvation."

▶▶So Paul gives us encouragement ~ that no one in this life is beyond Jesus' saving hand.

WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT HERE ~ SHOULD ALSO BE A WORD OF encouragement for those who believe in and follow Christ Jesus.

▶▶We've also talked about this before. ¶¶ 8/9



▷▷ And because it's so amazing and so wonderful ~ and displays Jesus' awesome mercy, ~ awesome love, ~ and awesome grace, ~ it too bears repeating.

▶▶ Sometimes when we sin we may think that God could never . . . . ~ The enemy . . . .

▷▷ But that's not true.

↪↪ Speaking of God's blood-bought people, ~ 1 Jn. 1:9 ~ tells us, ~ "If we confess our sins, ~ he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

▷▷ Consider the apostle Peter . . . .

▷▷ Also consider Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, ~ recorded in Lk. 15:11-32, ~ which we should come back to often. ~ I believe that it's a picture of a believer who strays from God the Father.

↪↪ After the son comes to his senses ~ and decides to return to his father and admit that he has sinned "against heaven and before" his father, ~ Jesus tells us this in verse 20: ~ ~ ¶

→→ "And he arose and came to his father. ~ But while he was still a long way off, ~ his father saw him and felt compassion, ~ and ran and embraced him ~ and kissed him."

↪↪ Picture that the father was constantly looking for him . . . . ~ Picture of God the Father . . . .

▷▷ And consider what John says in 1 Jn. 2:1. ~ "My little children, ~ I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. ~ But if anyone does sin, ~ we have an advocate with the Father, ~ Jesus Christ the righteous."

## CONCLUSION

PRAISE BE TO THE "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" FOREVER AND EVER!

LET'S PRAY . . . . 9/9