Ephesians 3:1-13

The Privilege of God's Revelation

Sermon

We have taken a break through the holiday season but I'm excited to be back into the book of Ephesians. We are starting a new series today entitled "Entrusted with a Miracle".

I remember when Isaac was born. I held this tiny boy in my hands and I realized that I had been entrusted with a miracle. That God would entrust to Lorrie and I such a precious and priceless gift and responsibility for us to steward and care for was amazing to me. This is God's baby that He has entrusted to me!

After several days they cleared us to take Isaac home and we packed him tightly into the car seat in our tiny red Kia Soul. I'll never forget driving down Ridge Avenue in Evanston to our home and being so nervous. Ridge Avenue is extremely narrow and a very busy street. There are only two lanes and they are about the width of your car. People drive way over the speed limit. There are many turn offs so they stop abruptly. There are buses and people weaving behind and in front of them. I've never gripped my steering wheel so tightly…I think I can remember starting to sweat. We'd be entrusted with this small, and still very fragile miracle who was innocently sitting in the back not knowing that cars were whizzing in front of and around us. I was terrified something would happen and this little guy in the back might be harmed.

Think of the care and caution we take with OTHER things…things that are really unimportant and insignificant. When I shave, I'm always very careful to try to keep the lines straight and I slowly draw the line with my razor in case I might slip and my beard would have to turn into a goatee. Think of the time and energy we put into our taxes. Think of the care we put into college papers we write, or even the dishes we wash…we want to get ALL the food off. Think of the attention we give to our bodies! What are some of the things you give great attention and care to?

You and I have been entrusted with a miracle. Ephesians tells us of God's glorious plan of the gospel of Jesus Christ through whom God restores and reconciles all things that have been ruined by Satan, and sin, and death. The gospel is a miracle - do you cherish the miracle? How much attention do you give to it? Are you careful to not twist it? Do you share it with others? Do you study its message to know it well?

Paul had been entrusted with a miracle – the miracle of the gospel. He's already written about the miracle of our union with Christ, and the miracle of God saving us from His wrath through

the death and resurrection of Jesus. The miracle of grace – God giving us what we do not deserve. In our last series we talked about the miracle of reconciliation – God taking two hostile groups of people, the Jews and Gentiles, and creating one new people through whom He builds one new dwelling place of God.

Have you ever stopped to think of the miracle that God desires and delights to speak to you?! I remember when God opened my eyes to the reality that I could know Him personally. That He desired to speak to me through His Word and that He would listen to my prayers. This is an unfathomable privilege that we can so easily take for granted. Revelation from God is a miracle.

Here is the main point we are looking at this morning:

God entrusted to Paul the miracle of a revelation and that revelation has now been entrusted to all of us

Let's look at vv.1-3 together:

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—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. (Eph. 3:1-3)

Now you probably noticed in v.1 that Paul began what will later be in vv.14-21 a prayer. He writes - "for this reason". He already prayed back in 1:15-23 and he started his prayer there with these words also – "for this reason". But here Paul abandons his prayer for a moment and picks back up in v.14 where he again says, "for this reason" and THEN begins his prayer. Before praying, Paul has some things to say. He knows that his imprisonment (Paul was writing this from prison in Rome) could be a source of discouragement for the Ephesians. If you look down at v.13 he says, "I do not want you to lose heart over my suffering". So to encourage them Paul wants to elevate the glory of God's revelation given to Him.

The miracle of the mystery that God had revealed to Paul was worth the chains he was enduring. "Don't lose heart Ephesians…I am more than willing to endure this suffering BECAUSE God has revealed to me a glorious plan! We have to stop and ask ourselves, do we cherish the gospel miracle so much that we are willing to suffer for it?

When did Paul receive this "revelation" from God? What I want for you to do is keep your finger in Ephesians, but turn over in your Bibles to Galatians 1:11 (it's one book to the left of Ephesians) and we're going to see Paul's description of how God spoke to him personally about Jesus Christ. Paul was formerly a persecutor of God's people. Acts 9 tells us that he was on his way to Damascus to capture and imprison Christians when Jesus first revealed Himself to Paul. Shortly after, Paul tells us in Galatians that rather than going to the apostles, he wanted to get alone with God in Arabia for three years. Read with me…

For I would have you know, brothers, that ***the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.*** [12] ***For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*** [13] For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. [14] And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. [15] But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, [16] was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, ***I did not immediately consult with anyone***; [17] ***nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.*** [18] ***Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas [Peter] and remained with him fifteen days.*** [19] ***But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.*** (Gal. 1:11-19)

We learn from this passage how Paul received the gospel message that he preached to the Gentiles from God Himself. Notice in v.11 – it is "not man's gospel"…it didn't originate from man. God gave it to him "by revelation of Jesus Christ". We don't know for certain how this revelation came to Paul exactly because he doesn't tell us…but one thing I am sure of, Paul had his OT in hand. When you read the writings of Paul, they are filled with OT passages that support the gospel he received. He knew that if Jesus was in fact the Messiah, the OT had to confirm this. So for three years, Paul with Bible in hand, got alone with God and his Bible to receive revelation from God.

We too have been given revelation and Gods primary way of revealing Himself to us is through the words of Scripture? Is it precious to you as it was to Paul? May God raise up many, many, more people like Paul. Men and women who devour the Word of God because they are longing for God to reveal Himself to them! One of the visions and dreams I have for this church is that we would become brothers and sisters in Christ who are SATURATED with the Word of God. That God would pour into us His words, and that we would become like trees planted by streams of living water (Psalm 1).

I want to consider 4 things about the revelation given to Paul that has been passed down to us:

1. Paul's revelation of Jesus came through the Old Testament.

Paul didn't have the NT scriptures about Jesus they weren't written yet. He didn't have the gospels. Can I just ask you: "How well do you know your OT?" Do you know how the OT points to Jesus? Do you understand how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Mosaic law? Do you know passages in the OT that foretell God's plan to include the Gentiles as a part of His family? The OT was sufficient to reveal to Paul Jesus as the Messiah and what Paul calls "the mystery" –

that the Gentiles would be brought into God's family. We have an even greater revelation (than Moses, than Abraham, than David)! We have the complete and full revelation of God in the 66 books that we carry around…or maybe it sits on our shelf collecting dust. It's a glorious miracle that we have been entrusted with! Don't neglect it!

2. God is the ultimate source of revelation.

God desires to speak to you! Think of it! Paul didn't go to the apostles to receive revelation, he wanted to go to the source – to God Himself. It doesn't matter what I or anyone else says unless what we say can be supported by God's revelation given. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that All Scripture is "God breathed", the very words of God Himself – what an amazing miracle to be entrusted with! - and it's profitable and it will complete and equip you for everything in life.

Phone a friend: You all remember the game show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire"? If you didn't have the answer you were allowed to "phone a friend". The problem is that people are fallible, but God gets the answer right every single time. The Word of God is perfect, and infallible because the Bible contains the very words of God Himself. God has a PERFECT rate of accuracy.

When you need God to speak to you, you need advice, you need direction go first to God. He desires to guide you! Be careful going to a friend or your spouse or even your pastor FIRST. Go directly to the source of revelation, the Words of God, and there you will find God Himself speaking to you.

3. God has chosen to reveal Himself through words.

Go ahead and flip back to Ephesians 3. This is actually an amazing reality. Some in fact discredit the Bible because they say that it is logically impossible for finite beings to receive revelation from an infinite deity. God is in the miracle business! The virgin birth! The resurrection of Lazarus and Jesus! God can effectively communicate with His creatures however He chooses…and He has sovereignly chosen to communicate with us *through words*.

Look at v.4:

> ***<u>When you read this</u>*, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4)**

Notice that "insight" in this verse is dependent upon "reading". If you don't read, you will not get insight. Paul trusted that God was able to take his words that would be read and through his words reveal God's "insight" given to Paul to the Ephesians. This is a miracle!

God's revelation comes to us through the pen of human authors. T<u>hrough words</u> that are written and <u>through words</u> that are read. Therefore, to be a disciple of Jesus who receives

and lives life in accordance with the wisdom and insight of God – you MUST BE A READER OF SCRIPTURE. YOU MUST ASSUME A STUDENT MENTALITY because every word matters.

This takes discipline, focus, and effort – we never stop learning because we can always seek to get closer and closer to Paul's original words and meaning. I want to read to you all our church doctrinal statement on the sufficiency of Scripture:

*"**The Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who read it with a willingness to obey**" (taken from River Ridge doctrinal statement)*

Every word here matters. In other words, the Bible is sufficient to transfer to you the revelation God gave to the original authors. "The Bible was written in such a way" - Peter tells us the way, "no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pet. 1:21). The Holy Spirit is the author of revelation, and Paul's words relate that revelation. You are able to understand Scripture but notice two conditions – "by all who ***read it*** with a willingness ***to obey***". You must come to the Word of God with a desire to know God and to obey God…and you MUST READ IT.

Now I know what some of you may be thinking, "yeah but Brian I'm just not a reader." While I want to be very sensitive to the challenges people face with reading, I have to say this: God has chosen to reveal Himself to you through words. You have to become a reader, or you will miss out on the miracle of God speaking to you! This is God's chosen means to reveal Himself to you.

I have noticed that I can't drink much dairy anymore…it doesn't agree with my stomach. Some people are *unable* to eat certain foods because of allergies. However, some kids don't *prefer* to eat vegetables. It isn't an allergy, its a preference. A loving parent doesn't let their children choose everything they eat. We tell them, "you may not prefer vegetables but you still have to eat them or else you will become unhealthy." Some people speak of their inability to read the Bible as though it was an allergy rather than a preference. The problem is that God prefers to give to us His revelation through Scripture, and unless you read it, you will become spiritually unhealthy. Now I know that God's Word can be challenging, but over time and with the help of God's Spirit you can read and you are able to understand and follow God's Word. If you read it and are willing to obey it. Another miracle God has entrusted to us is His Holy Spirit to guide us in understanding His revelation to us. 1 Corinthians 2:12:

> **Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (1 Corinthians 2:12)**

God's word is sufficient and able to guide us and give us wisdom with every decision we make. I know for some it's difficult to understand…but will you make the decision today to stop making excuses and to start working at it? You have to become a student of Scripture. "That's not how I am!", well to tell you bluntly, "who are you to tell God who you are?!" Part of the Christian

growth is allowing God to rewrite your story. Let God tell you who you are! God wants to speak to you…it's a miracle! But if you don't open your Bibles and read it you will miss the miracle and you will inevitably become dull of hearing. Listen to the writer of Hebrews loving rebuke to Christians who had become spiritual infants:

> **About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. [12] For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food. (Heb. 5:12)**

They had become dull of hearing, they had remained spiritual infants. They should be teachers by now…these aren't new Christians! They were still on milk, and so they could not stomach greater revelation from God. It's like trying to get your kids to swim…at first they don't want to even put their face under the water and they will never experience the joy of swimming until they do so.

Philip Vanlear gave the sermon last week…you probably noticed that Phil is visually impaired. Do you know what Phil would give to be able to just sit down and casually open His Bible and read it? I remember when his vision was fading, I've known Phil when his vision was perfect, and as his sight faded he had to purchase this very expensive large screen that would hover over the Bible so that he could read it. We took some seminary classes together and he had to really adjust, and thankfully the professors were gracious to adapt their teaching to his challenges. Papa Phil completed His Masters degree at Moody in Spiritual formation and discipleship…and HE PHYSICALLY COULDN'T READ THE BIBLE!

We have to become desperate for God's voice to come to us. Are you desperate for God's voice to speak to you? Here's a starting point: start reading, and pray for God to give you a hunger and passion and desperation for His Word. One prayer I have often prayed, "Open my eyes that I might see wondrous things in your Word." (Psa. 119:18)

4. When you receive revelation from God you are responsible to follow it.

The man who move to Switzerland: I'll close with a story. There was a man who was moving his family to Switzerland. They were planning to build a home there, and so he went a month ahead of his family to find the perfect spot. He found a spot on a hill that was beautiful: it overlooked a valley, there was a stream running nearby. The sun came up every morning and shone down on the hill. Behind the hill the alps towered above. It seemed perfect. But he thought it would be wise to get some counsel from the locals, so he decided every night to go to the local pub and ask the locals where a good spot to build would be. "I'm going to be building a house, where do you think a good spot would be? I like the spot right over there." To which the locals responded, "That's not a good spot, you don't want to build there." So he went to

another local and another…every night the same thing over and over, "I'm going to be building a home, where do you think is a good location…I like that spot right there." Every single local told him it was a bad spot and not to build there. Finally the time came to build and the man built his home on the spot where every local told him not to build. Unfortunately, about a year after his family moved into their new home an avalanche came down the mountain behind them and thankfully the family wasn't there when it happened, but their beautiful home was destroyed.

Here's my question: "did the man REALLY want the counsel of the locals?" He had already made up his mind what he would do…really he just wanted the locals to confirm the choice he had already made. Sometimes we can approach Scripture that way. We just want it to agree with what we've already decided. Do you REALLY want the counsel of God? When you read the Bible, be willing to follow what you learn. Will you listen and obey God's Word even if it goes against your desires and plans? Will you allow God's revelation to transform and renew the way you think? Will you trust it even when what God requires of you is hard? God loves you and He has proven His love for you by sending His Son to die for you. You can trust Him and you can trust His Word.

Church, we have been privileged to receive the miracle of God's revelation. Let's handle God's Word with great care.

Connection Group Questions

1. Think back to when you first gave your life to Jesus, how did God first reveal Himself to you?
2. Why is it important that our primary way of receiving truth is found in the Scriptures and not from men? Have you ever had a time when someone in the church taught you something that the Bible clearly contradicts?
3. Read Galatians 1:11-19 – What is something that sticks out to you regarding Paul receiving revelation from God?
4. What are some Old Testament passages that point us to Jesus? (if needed, try looking at Isaiah 53; Micah 5:2; Psalm 110; 2 Samuel 7:12-13 as some examples)
5. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – what is the Bible helpful for?
6. What are some of the excuses people make for not reading the Bible?
7. Share with the group how your reading and study of Scripture is going…how can you make it even better? What steps will you take to make it better?