

# Ordination Sunday

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 3.! We're taking a break from our series in the Gospel of Matthew! Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word.

Heavenly Father, Father, we are your people, the sheep of your pasture.

Where else can we turn but to you? You have the words of eternal life. We come to you to learn about the office of elder. We come to you to learn about the ministry of the Gospel.

We come to you to learn about what we should be as a church. We ask that you will speak to us. We ask that you will make your priorities our priorities.

Your marching orders are our drive and passion in life. Impress deeply upon us with the love of Christ by which we might be strengthened and filled with more and more of you, with your fullness.

[ 1 : 54 ]     Amen. in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please stand to honor God as we read from His Word, Ephesians chapter 3, verses 1 to 21.

For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for 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, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation as I have written briefly.

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.

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.

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. 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 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

[ 3 : 44 ]     This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus, our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him.

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father. from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, 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.

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, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. Please be seated. We begin by addressing the role of elders in the church before I dive into this text.

The elders of the church are called upon in the Bible to govern the church and to labor in preaching and teaching. That's why in 1 Timothy 5, 17, it says, Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

[ 5 : 29 ] Every local church that you see in the New Testament is governed by elders. The church in Jerusalem is governed by elders. The church in Ephesus is governed by the elders.

And at the end of his first missionary journey, after having preached the gospel in Cyprus, Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, it says in Acts 14, 20 through 23, that Paul and Barnabas backtracked their way through those very cities, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. I should also note that every instance of elders being mentioned in the New Testament, it's in the plural, which is intentional.

The plurality provides more wisdom and accountability and protection and mutual encouragement for the eldership. After many years of trying, we are finally going to have a local plurality of elders.

By God's grace, we're becoming a more biblical and healthier church today. So if that's what elders are, why do we speak of ordaining elders?

[ 6 : 47 ] What does that mean? That's not a word we use often. The word ordain comes from a Latin word that simply means to appoint, to put in charge or to invest with authority. Paul does this for his protege Titus and he calls upon him in Titus 1.7, this is why I left you in Crete so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

So that word appoint is what we mean by ordain. When we ordain an elder, we as the congregation are attesting to his fitness for eldership and we are appointing him to the office of elder and thereby setting him apart for the ministry of the gospel.

And that's what Paul speaks of here in Ephesians 3. And the main point of this passage is that God makes gospel ministers according to his grace so that through their preaching and prayer, he might fill his church with himself.

So I'm going to break this down into two main roles of elders. One, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Two, pray for the unknowable love of Christ.

The first response we mentioned here is to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. It says in verse 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 : 17 ] It says, of this gospel. It doesn't say of a gospel because there's only one gospel. An elder is a minister of this gospel, this particular gospel that Christ proclaimed and his, that is, his apostles preached 2,000 years ago and has been handed down faithfully to us in our generation.

Paul just told us what this gospel is in verses 1 to 6. It's the mystery that was hidden in the previous ages but has been revealed to us in the coming of Jesus Christ. That's what we celebrate in the Advent season.

The gospel is the message of Christ crucified and risen. And because Jesus, the Messiah, died on the cross for the sins of God's people and because he was raised from the dead in triumph, now both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to each other in God and saved and adopted into the household of God.

Not by their own observance of the law, not by their own righteousness, but by the grace of God through faith. Paul spoke of his own eagerness to preach the gospel in Romans 1.16.

He says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. No other message in the world saves.

[ 9 : 40 ] Only the gospel. So he says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 2, I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

There is an ever-present pressure from the world for pastors to be about many things. They need to be leadership and management gurus.

They need to be a therapist conversing with the latest psychology. They need to be political activists. They need to be social media influencers and know the power of images and angles and product placement.

They need to be masterful presenters and motivational speakers that can galvanize a crowd. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1.17 that he intentionally avoided the eloquence of the Greek orators because he feared that by using their principles of eloquence he would empty the cross of Christ of its power and make it seem as though it's human eloquence that saves people.

What saves people is not our eloquent turn of phrase or clever witty sayings or a viral marketing principle from successful businesses or the latest insights from the modern world or the creative programming or our own personality or charisma it's none of these things.

[ 11 : 11 ] There's only one gospel and only the gospel is the power of God for salvation. And so my prayer for you Ed this morning is that you would be a man of one thing and preach this one thing.

19th century British pastor Charles Spurgeon once told one of my favorite stories of a Welsh minister who offered constructive criticism to a younger preacher. After his sermon he said it was a very poor sermon and the young man replied will you tell me why you think it was a poor sermon?

because said the Welsh minister there was no Christ in it. Well said the young man starting to regain his confidence Christ was not in the text.

We are not to be preaching Christ always we must preach what is in the text. The exchange continued don't you know young man that from every town and every village and every little hamlet in England wherever it may be there is a road to London?

Yes said the young man ah said the old divine and so from every text in scripture there is a road to the metropolis of the scriptures that is Christ and my dear brother your business is when you get to a text to say now what is the road to Christ and to preach a sermon running along the road towards the great metropolis Christ and said he I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it and if I ever do find one that is not a road to Christ in it I will make one I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my master for my sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savor of Christ in it so find the way to Christ in your ministry of the word from this pulpit in this church or in your private office chair as you counsel others find your way to

[ 13 : 23 ] Christ crucified the enemy will sow doubt in your head and tell you that the gospel is not enough people will not be impressed by you unless you offer them something more than the gospel people will not grow or change unless you offer them something more leave the gospel behind find something else find something new and exciting but don't deviate from the road to Christ we preach the unsearchable riches of Christ he says in verse eight the riches of Christ in the gospel are inexhaustible and unsearchable a person who thinks that he already knows all there is to know and appreciate about the gospel of Jesus Christ is like someone who looks at a fish tank in his living room and declares confidently I have seen all there is to see of the ocean the glorious riches of

Christ in this gospel our justification and sanctification and glorification our redemption and liberation our regeneration and reconciliation and adoption and our cleansing and purification it's bottomless of this gospel Ed is being made a minister today the word minister means servant ministers are servants of the gospel of Jesus Christ yes ordination confers authority of the office of elder but it is a Christ like authority our Christ who came not to be served but to serve and gave his life as a ransom for many so it's an authority that is wielded not for the sake of self advancement but in the service of others the gospel ministry is not for the advancement of our personal agendas or the promotion of our personal reputation the gospel ministry is not a means of gain it is no mere profession it is an entrance into servitude of

Christ and his gospel we are a! possession! the movable property of our master Jesus has absolute rights over our services he and he is our exclusive preoccupation to please him and him alone and notice that every verb in verse 7 is passive 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 God is the one who makes us ministers and gives us this gift no one but God makes ministers of the gospel it is according to the gift of God's grace and by the working of his power Ed has studied diligently has prayed earnestly He has served tirelessly to get to this point he has passed all his exams with flying colors and our church has deemed that he is qualified to be an elder as delineated in 1 Timothy 3 1-7 but even after all that in the final analysis

Ed did not earn this it has been given to him as a gift by our sovereign God he is being made a minister not according to his many wonderful qualities and giftedness but according to the gift of God's grace this is why Paul can say that this grace was given to him in spite of the fact that he's the very least of all the saints how can he call himself that in verse 8 the word translated very least is a comparative form of the superlative word least so it literally means something like less than the least or least!

you say you're the least well I'm leister it's kind of a one up man ship from Apostle Paul may have coined the word for this particular occasion because he deemed that the simple superlative least was not strong enough and all true Christians share this sense of wonder you remember who you were I remember who I was I was once a lying and cheating and gossiping and slandering and fornicating insubordinate Gentile dog that's what I was why should God love a sinner such as I but that wonder of God's grace goes even a step further imagine a clumsy child with butter fingers that tends to trip and fall and drop and break everything she has shattered many precious treasures in her father's house a gracious father might forgive her even though she's broken many of his things and still love her and embrace her but when it comes moving day he sensibly would not ask her to carry the family heirloom the fine china that's been passed down to generations

[ 18 : 56 ] I love you daughter but I can't trust you with something as precious as that you understand right leave it to your older sister but God doesn't treat us that way he doesn't say I love you you are forgiven but stay put over there in that corner and don't touch any of my precious things don't touch the precious people of God don't touch my precious gospel no he entrusts to us the pearl of great price he entrusts to us the treasure of the ages and tells us to go and proclaim it to all the world he calls gospel ministers to oversee and care for the church of God that he obtained with his own blood it says in Acts 20 28 how can

God give such an entrustment to the very least of all the saints it's an evidence of God's grace in Ed's life that he does have this sense of wonder pray for him that he never loses it we steward a greater wealth and treasure than the world's richest billionaires and what is the purpose and effect of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ verse 10 tells us so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places what do you think reveals the manifold!

wisdom of God maybe you think of the Niagara Falls with the largest waterfall in North America with 164 feet vertical drop and more than 5.9 million cubic feet of water falling every minute it's pretty awe-inspiring reveals to us the majesty of God maybe you think of the Grand Canyon 277 miles long 18 miles wide and a mile deep which dwarfs all of us as we stand in front of it geologists claim that its variegated rock layers have the appearance of 1.6 billion years of earth's history surely that reveals the manifold wisdom of God right maybe you think of the 200 billion trillions of observable stars in our universe with no two stars exactly the same all of these are amazing works of God's creation and we are supposed to learn something of God by observing them as it says in Romans 1 19 to 20 they reveal to us his invisible attributes his eternal power and divine nature but interestingly as we see in our passage this morning

God is not pointing to these marvels of creation to show his divine nature to show his manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places instead what does he point to God reveals his manifold wisdom to these angelic heavenly awe inspiring beings through the church it's hardly believable when people visit the United States they go tour the Niagara Falls and Grand Canyon they don't come to tour Trinity Cambridge Church yet God's ultimate plan for revealing his manifold wisdom God's end game we might say is the church the church is the culmination of the mystery hidden for ages in God it is the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose in Christ

Jesus our Lord and at the end of history the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from God the bride of the lamb that comes down from heaven above in Revelation 21 is the church of Christ God wasn't kidding when he said that his people are his special treasured possession it's easy to forget this truth a pastor sees the pride the sin the suffering and brokenness of people in the church up close and personal destructive choices and their consequences relational conflicts and fallout doctrinal errors and the wayward ways that stem from them persistent patterns of sin unrepentance there are many sighs and groans and laments and tears in ministry not only that the church of Christ has its own fair share of the world's critics that malign and belittle the church and the devil never stops whispering lies in your head what's the point of serving the church what difference does your ministry make you should pursue other more glorious more lucrative careers but it bears to remember that the church is God's ultimate plan for revealing his manifold wisdom when the

[ 24 : 11 ] United Nations and the World Health Organization and the World Bank are no more when Harvard MIT and Oxford are no more when Apple Microsoft and Amazon and Google are no more when China and the United States of America are no more the church of Christ will be standing in all her glory for all eternity I believe with all my heart there is no vocation more glorious than to be a minister of the gospel to be a pastor of the church of Christ to me to become the president of the United States will be a demotion despite all its present and temporary imperfections and weaknesses and infirmities in the church the church is the eternal bride of Christ and a pastor gets to serve as the friend of the bridegroom a groomsman of sorts who rejoices greatly to see the bridegroom united with his bride the other main responsibility of an elder is to pray that the church grows to know the unknowable love of Christ it says in verses 14 to 15 for this reason

I bow my knees before the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named why is Paul driven to his knees in prayer at this point the phrase for this reason continues Paul's train of thought from verse 1 where he began with for this reason before digressing to talk about his ministry so the reason that Paul is alluding to goes back to chapter 2 verses 11 to 22 when he spoke of the glorious reality that the Gentiles are now no longer strangers and aliens but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord a dwelling place for God by the spirit the sheer scale of Christ's saving work and the crushing weight of gospel ministry drive Paul to his knees remember verse 8 it said the gospel ministers are commanded to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ the riches of God's grace in kindness toward us is unsearchable it is fathomless the same word translated in Romans 11:33 as inscrutable or incomprehensible so get this how are pastors supposed to preach what is incomprehensible inscrutable unsearchable that is which is impossible to fathom how are pastors supposed to explore the bottomless ocean of the riches of Christ even our own oceans they say that 99% of the deep sea floor remains unobserved and our oceans have a definite bottom we see a similar dilemma in verse 19 we're supposed to help each other to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge in other words as Christians we're supposed to know the unknowable love of Christ it's the same thing as the unsearchable riches of Christ imagine being hired for a job and then your job description instructs you to do something that is impossible humanly impossible what do you do it's humanly impossible so you have to seek divine help that's why the conclusion of Paul's prayer in verse 20 and 21 is timely and necessary 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 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever amen if far more abundantly sounds redundant that's because it is redundant it means more than immeasurable abundance how can elders preach the unsearchable riches of Christ so that the church might know the unknowable love of Christ we must seek help in prayer from the God who goes beyond our limitations and is able to do immeasurably more than all that we ask or think this is why

Paul bows his knees before the father in prayer in verse 14 kneeling is a well attested manner of praying in scripture you know might remember that prophet Daniel prayed three times a day on his knees to God it's a posture of humility before God it's a posture of submission and dependence it is a proper posture because it is it is a posture of dependence say father I do not have what it takes to do what you have asked me to do I am not able to do in my own strength what you have asked me to do for this church so I come empty handed I need your help your power your authority help me a pastor

Ian Bounds once said a pastor who does not pray is prideful why does he say that because he presumes that he can do a God sized work on his own without a regular habit of prayer a pastor cannot last long in gospel ministry how can you go on think about this how can you go on preaching one inadequate sermon after another week after week floundering in the unsearchable depths of the gospel knowing that you can never do a single verse of scripture justice knowing that you can never adequately convey the glories of God how can you go on seeing the vast spiritual needs of the people of God and then looking yourself in the mirror looking yourself up and down in the mirror and seeing your own impoverished spirituality how am I supposed to help these people how am I supposed to feed these people you will succumb in short order to hopelessness and despair and self loathing unless you yourself drink from the fathomless depths of

God's grace and trust that God is able to do immeasurably more than all that we ask or think if we don't pray the limiting factor is our limited selves but if we pray the limiting factor is the unlimited God God is able to do more than we can think it says we mistakenly think that sometimes it's God's power that's limited and we can think up quite a few things it's the exact opposite God's power is not limited it's our imagination that's limited it's our faith that is limited so here's a God sized prayer that every elder should pray and all of you should join in praying the prayer of verses 14 to 21 continue the thought of chapter 2 that we are being built up together as the household of God as a holy temple in the Lord and being indwelt by God himself being filled by God himself and you'll see similar ideas expressed here in these verses verse 17 speaks of Christ dwelling in your hearts through faith verse 19 speaks of being filled with all the fullness of

[ 32 : 26 ] God this clues us into what that ambiguous phrase in verse 18 means the breadth and length and the height and depth these are dimensional terms that convey the idea of being filled with all the fullness of God being indwelt by Christ I think that's confirmed by a parallel in Job 11 79 can you find out the deep things of God can you find out the limit of the almighty it is higher than heaven what can you do deeper than Sheol what can you know its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea this is the only other place in the Bible where all these four dimensional terms are used and it's can you find out the limit of the almighty the passage speaking of the immensity of God the eternity of God who has no limits or boundaries so then

Paul is praying for nothing less than the church of Christ to be indwelt by and filled with the infinite boundless God himself Colossians 1 19 says in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell so now he prays that that fullness of God will dwell in the same way in the church which is the body of Christ and that's what he said earlier in Ephesians 1 22 to 23 God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him as head over all things to the church which is his body the fullness of him who fills all in all the same thing that he enjoys later in Ephesians 4 13 that we might attain to the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ of course Christians are individually already indwelt by the Spirit but that does not mean that we cannot become more full of the

Holy Spirit Ephesians 5 18 commends us to be filled with the Spirit all Christians have the Spirit but not all Christians are full of the Holy Spirit and that's what we all have to pray for to be more fully possessed by and controlled by and ruled by and empowered by the very Spirit of God it's an inconceivable!

prayer! How do you put a consuming volcanic fire in a fireplace? How do you put a tsunami in a water bottle?

The infinite God filling His people the church is an even more staggering thought? And that fireplace and water bottle would need major reinforcements and that's exactly what Paul prays for.

[ 35 : 24 ] In verse 16 he says God may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being and again in verse 18 that we may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and how do these reinforcement on the church verse 19 tells us knowing the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge verse 17 again being rooted and grounded in love the word rooted is an agricultural term and the word grounded is an architectural term that means to lay a foundation only a plant that is rooted!

will sprout up leaves and bear fruit only a foundation that is rooted only a house that is grounded and has foundation laid can then become a habitation for someone to dwell in therefore knowing the love of Christ is a prerequisite for the feeling of God the more we know not just theoretically but experientially know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge the more we are filled with all the fullness of God so how did Christ love us Ephesians 5 23 tells us husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her do you know church that you are the bride of Christ we were once an enslaved prostitute abused by devilish pimps but and clothed with the squalid filth and torn garments of our sinfulness but to redeem us from our slavery

Jesus Christ gave his own life he died on the cross for our sins he paid the debt that we could not pay that's why it speaks repeatedly of Christ riches the unsearchable riches of Christ in verse 8 he speaks of the riches of his glory why so many riches why does Christ have riches!

insurmountable debt of sin he died as our substitute and he was raised from the dead and he did all of this to set us apart as a bride for himself so that he can love us eternally 16th century English poet John Donne captured this tale of love in his holy sonnet the 14th batter my heart three person God I like an usurped town to another do labor to admit you but oh to no end reason your viceroy in me me should defend but is captive and proves weak or untrue yet dearly I love you and would be loved fain but I'm betroth unto your enemy divorce me untie or break that knot again take me to you imprison me for

I except you enthrall me never shall be free nor ever chased except you ravish me let's pray that this ravishing love of Christ would be deeply known by all of us and would mark Ed's ministry for the rest of his life father strengthen everyone here in their inner being by your spirit help them to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge so that they might be filled with all the fullness of God thank you for the gift of of

[ 39 : 47 ] Ed to our church that he's a faithful man who loves you a man of the gospel oh lord help us as a church to humbly receive him and to receive the gospel that he preaches in Jesus name we pray amen