

Series: "Ephesians"

"Turning Discouraging Times Into Glorious Times!"

Ephesians 3:1-13

April 6, 2008

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Our study in the book of Ephesians brings us to chapter 3 today. I'm titling this message -

SLIDE –

"Turning Discouraging Times Into Glorious Times!"

Or if some of you like it in more picturesque terms...

"Turning Mountains Into Molehills!"

I personally like the old but trite phrase...

"When Life Hands You A Lemon...Make Lemonade!"

Now why is it that I entitle the message this way today? Well, look with me at...

Take your Bibles, please and open them to the New Testament book of Ephesians 3. If you didn't bring your Bible with you today I would encourage you to reach forward and grab that burgundy colored Bible and turn to page 1157. (1st Service ~~Back in~~ Video Café – Raise hands for a Bible and someone will come by and hand you one! Keep it up!)

SLIDE –

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

READ v. 1

Just hear me out...if you were in prison would it be a 'lemon' day for you or a 'lemonade' day for you? Typically speaking? Lemon day!

By the way, are you aware of WHY the Apostle Paul is in jail/prison as he is writing this letter? ("For this reason" - Ch. 2)

He is in jail because he was standing up for the Gentiles and telling the Jews that Christ died for the Gentile's sins just like He died for the Jew's sins. And the Jews had him arrested because they didn't like that!

In fact, Paul was arrested and thrown in prison in Caesarea for 2 years. When he was finally brought to trial he appealed to Caesar and was shipped to Rome where he was held in prison for 3 more years before he was brought to trial again. ALL BECAUSE he said the Gentiles could get saved. Radical shift!

That is why he says... "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles."

Now that would be enough to get anybody discouraged...wouldn't it!

But wait a minute! Look with me at v. 13...

SLIDE –

I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Wow! How could he (Paul - who is in prison) say such a thing to people who are free (not behind bars)? "Don't be discouraged!" It should have been the people who were free saying to Paul who was in prison "Don't be discouraged".

APPL:

I wonder today...

- How many of you would be honest enough to say that you are currently going through some discouraging times?
- You, personally, may not BE discouraged (or you may be!) but the situation you are facing is discouraging (or could be looked at as being discouraging)?
 - Maybe you have some health problems that are discouraging
 - Maybe you have some relationship problems...
 - Maybe you have a situation that is discouraging
- Whatever it is...how many would say today that you are going through either a potentially discouraging time or a literally discouraging time right now?

Ah! Then take heart because we are going to see...

- How to turn discouraging times into glorious times!
- How to turn mountains into molehills!
- How to make lemonade when life hands you a lemon

Let me give you a saying/phrase to 'hang your hat on' today! Ready, here it is...

SLIDE –

"Nothing touches us that has not 1st passed through the fingers of God!"

REPEAT...

You see, if the Apostle Paul hadn't been sent to prison we may not have gotten this letter or Philippians or Colossians or Philemon! He wrote each of them while he was in prison in Rome!

Well...

- What exactly was it that kept the Apostle Paul from getting discouraged during his rough times?
- What was the Apostle Paul focusing his thoughts on that kept his mind from thinking these were discouraging times?
- What was Paul's viewpoint in regards to his situation?

If we can find where Paul kept his focus through discouraging times...then we will know where we are to keep our focus when we are going through discouraging times as well! I think there are 5 areas listed in these verses that we are to keep our focus on...

SLIDE –

1. We need to have a high view of salvation!

If we want to keep from being discouraged because of and in the midst of the trials and difficult situations we are going through the first place our thoughts need to turn is to our salvation! And we need to remember how 'precious' of a thing it is! How important salvation is to us!

Look how excited the Apostle Paul is about salvation!

SLIDE – vv. 2-6

READ and explain...

He is talking about salvation!

Look! When we are going through discouraging times we often lose sight of the fact that we are saved by grace! We are God's child!

He will 'never leave us or forsake us'!

He will 'make all things work together for His good'!

He 'has a plan' with all that is going on!

He 'keeps us in the palm of His hand'!

All because I am saved and I am His!

Oh folks...when we are getting discouraged, the VERY FIRST place to focus in on is our salvation by God's grace! Because we are heirs; because we are members; because we are sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus...we can rejoice in whatever it is we are facing because we know that God is out to glorify Himself through our situation! We need to get a high view of salvation!

If you are here to day and are discouraged because of the situations and circumstances you find yourself in today...remember...God had you on His mind to bring you to a saving faith '*before the foundations of the world were laid!*' Although it was a mystery to you and me (just like it was to the Gentiles) it was not a mystery to Him! We are not some afterthought of God!

- He knows the numbers of hair we have on our head...(for some that is not as difficult as others).
- He knows my name!

If you are discouraged today...refocus on your salvation! What the Lord has saved you out of and from and you will begin to be encouraged!

APPL:

I've shared with you before one of my favorite verses is from I Peter 4:3...

SLIDE –

For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles.

When I get discouraged I think of this verse! I really do! And I'm so glad that I don't live like I used to before I came to Christ! Living in Christ with discouraging times is far better than not having Christ as my Savior!

The second area to help us keep our focus during discouraging times...

SLIDE –

2. We need to have a high view of our spiritual gifts!

If we want to keep from being discouraged because of and in the midst of the trials and difficult situations we are going through the second place our thoughts need to turn is toward the spiritual gifts God has given to us!

Look at verse...

SLIDE – v. 7

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

Paul understood that he was given a gift from Jesus Christ when he received Him as his Savior! And he says because of this he became "Christ's servant"! I.e. - He was going to give back to Christ!

The word he uses here is the Greek word - “*diakanos*”! We get our word deacon from it...it simply means... servant!

You see, it brought great joy to Paul’s heart to know that he was saved and that God had given him spiritual gifts to use to serve Him! Scripture reminds us that each one of us...the day we receive Christ as our Savior...is given at least one ‘spiritual gift’.

I Corinthians 12 & Romans 12 list them for us...often they are boiled down to what we term today as the “serving gifts”. Here is a list of them for us...not an exhaustive list but it will give you an idea.

SLIDE – Spiritual Gifts

- Evangelism
- Serving
- Teaching
- Encouraging
- Giving
- Administration
- Mercy

Here is the truth I want to get across today...

Discouragement often sets in when we are not using our spiritual gift! In fact, what typically happens when we get discouraged? We stop serving! We stop ministering to others!

Why was Paul not discouraged even though his circumstances were far from exciting? Because he kept right on using his spiritual gift no matter what his circumstances! He was in prison and he was using his gift of EVANGELISM!

Turn with me one book ahead in your Bibles to the book of Philippians...

SLIDE – Philippians 1:12-14

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Wow! Did you get that! Because Paul was a servant...in prison...He kept on using his spiritual gift of evangelism and look! Guards came to know Christ and people were encouraged because of others getting saved! Talk about a “chain reaction”!

The point is...when you and I use our spiritual gifts (and these gifts came with ENERGY and POWER) we will see results and seeing those results will pull us right out of any discouragement we are in!

So let me ask you...are you using your spiritual gift today? Do you know it? You need to! If you don’t know your spiritual gift I would suggest you find out what one God has given to you and use it. We have a class at Bethany that Brad & Betsy Gerdes teach. It is called Discovering Your NICHE! You need to sign up for it and discover your spiritual gift and use it! It will help you get through times of discouragement!

Look at vv. 8-9

SLIDE –

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: **to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.**

What’s he saying? He is saying “I could look at myself as a nobody. I could think that I am a nothing. I am less than the least! (Leastest!) Look, I’m in prison and God doesn’t care!” BUT HE DOESN’T look at himself this way. He may be the “leastest”, but God still has something for him to do! And as he does it he sees what God’s hand in his discouraging time is all about!

APPL:

You may say, “*But that is Paul’s spiritual gift. I can’t share the gospel like that.*”

Okay...maybe your spiritual gift is encouragement!

ILL. - Yesterday 9:00 a.m. Sheri (our 3rd daughter in Colorado Springs) gives us a call at home. She is super excited! She was going through the drive through at Starbucks and as she places her order and then proceeds to get up to the counter to pay the cashier says, “*The lady in front of you paid for your coffee - and this breakfast roll too!*” Sheri had no idea who it was! But that act of kindness encouraged her!

I can bet that lady was pumped!!!

There are many ways to use your spiritual gift and no matter how you do it I guarantee, it will pull you out of your discouraging times!

We need to have a high view of salvation!

We need to have a high view of our spiritual gifts!

The third area to help us keep our focus during discouraging times...

SLIDE –

3. We need to have a high view of the supernatural!

If we want to keep from being discouraged because of and in the midst of the trials and difficult situations we are going through the third place our thoughts need to turn is toward the supernatural!

Look at verses...

SLIDE – vv. 10-11

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms; according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is he talking about here?

Well, let's first define these "*rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms*".

SLIDE –

Rulers = "*arche*" = first in rank and gives orders

Authorities = "*exousia*" = second in rank and who carries out orders.

And notice that it says these rulers and authorities are "*in the heavenly realms*".

1:3; 20

2:6

Here

6:12

And when we combine them all together it seems to mean all the angels (good and evil) who are in the realms of the heavenlies. And the heavenlies falls into three categories...

SLIDE –

- Heaven - third heaven (II Cor. 12)
- Universe - second heaven
- Atmosphere - first heaven

Ch. 4:7-10

Back to our text:

Why does having a high view of the supernatural ward off discouragement in our lives?

- Because we see that how we act and react to circumstance and situations on earth is being watched by the heavenly realms... THE PURPOSE...to show them the "manifold wisdom" of God!

What does that mean?

- It is through US...the church...those who are saved and know Jesus Christ as our Savior...it is by the angels (good and evil) watching us and how we react to everything going on around us that THEY understand God better! That they marvel at God! That they get a clearer view of the character of God!

You see, they were created without a soul! They have no idea what it is like to have a will that can choose right or wrong. They just do what they are told to do!

We, on the other hand, have a will! And when our will chooses to obey God and chooses to be encouraged in the midst of discouragement and chooses to accept His saving grace rather than reject it...the angels in heaven marvel at God's character! That God would have grace and patience with us. You see, the angels don't ever experience that. They don't need grace! They don't need to be saved from their sin! And when they see God giving us grace...well let me show you how they react...

SLIDE – I Peter 1:12

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Why? They don't know anything of God's grace!

So when you and I know that - how we react to discouraging times-teaches the angelic realm about the character of God - it is supposed to keep us from being discouraged!

You say, I don't get this yet! Okay...let me try this...

- Why was Paul in prison? To bring soldiers the gospel!

- Why was Joseph in prison? To get located at the right time and the right place so Pharaoh would select him to answer his question about his dreams.
- Why was Daniel in the lions den? To prove to the King that God was in control and not the King.
- Why do you and I go through difficult circumstances? Because God has a plan that He wants to accomplish through us to show the people around us His grace! And how we act and react will ultimately show the angels in heaven about the character of God!

When you and I take our eyes off of our circumstances and see that God has...here is how v. 11 states it...

SLIDE – v. 11

According to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If we want to keep from being discouraged because of and in the midst of the trials and difficult situations we are going through...

We need to have a high view of salvation!

We need to have a high view of our spiritual gifts!

We need to have a high view of the supernatural!

The fourth area to help us keep our focus during discouraging times...

SLIDE –

4. We need to have a high view of prayer! V. 12

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

We don't have time...oh the need for prayer when we are going through discouraging times. Paul is actually going to spend the next 8 verses in prayer! Prayer gives us a perspective and strength to get through!

Finally... If we want to keep from being discouraged because of and in the midst of the trials and difficult situations we are going through...

SLIDE –

5. We need to have a high view of suffering!

V. 13

I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

It is for our benefit!

ILL. -

Mark Richards...

Got to walk him through these points!

Will you persevere?

Will you display God's grace?

Will you see your suffering and discouragements through God's eyes?

SLIDE –

“Nothing touches us that has not 1st passed through the fingers of God!”

Pray...