

The great mystery

Have you ever watched nature movies, especially the ones where the animals are waiting with great anticipation for the rain to come or the sun to return after a very cold winter?

It is an each year returning cycle. Across the African plain, animals are tracking over great distances for food, until they can't go further anymore because grazing land has just disappeared and turned into dust bowls. They have to endure the hot sun, while suffering from heat and storms. They are continuously sneaked upon and attacked by roaring lions as well as other predators. If they get discouraged and stop for a pause, they will lose connection with the main herd and they may lose their lives to lions or other predators. A frightening prospect for them and it drives them on and on until the first rain rescues them and set them free and leads them in to a season of plenty.

The same for animals in the northern cold countries - the earth in the grip of icy cold winter storm, is making life for animals very hard. So much snow and ice covering their food supply. Winters are so long that they get discouraged, lose heart and are tempted to slow down a bit. Again, they might get separated from the rest of the herd too and become prey to marauding cruel wolves. Slowing down and standing still will cause them to get killed by the cruel and smart wolves.

The location is different, but the scheme by which the animals are harassed by predators is the same for thousands of years. In all cases getting separated from the herd is lethal. The animals move on instinctively and for older ones, hang on because they have a memory of something better to come. There is a faint hope for the rain to come or the spring with sunshine that will melt the snow so they could reach food supply again.

Modern times

As humans living in this modern world, we don't experience such extreme conditions, do we? We have tried hard to eliminate such natural influences and indeed we have been successful in it to some extent.

But have we been really fully successful?

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If you consider the spiritual life of the church and each individual believer, we could also say that we at times are threatened by becoming discouraged. Also, we are subjected to a barrage by wolves in sheep clothes with false teachings or roaring lions aiming at us to destroy us. These adversaries follow certain schemes to get us separated from the church / fellowship of believers and if we fall to it we are in a bad shape.

The storms and heat we are confronted with are discouraging us, so much that we lose hope of deliverance and this could be so bad that we entirely lose sight of the hope of glory that we have inherited already in Christ Jesus.

It is for this reason that Paul wrote the letter to the churches in Asia Minor / Ephesians. The believers were in danger of becoming discouraged. This is also the case for most of the Christian churches in the world we live in.

See how Paul starts with encouraging the church.

Gospel the Power of God

Paul starts reminding the believers of the gospel which is the power of God. This is Paul's divine scheme and it always works! So, this is something that we could apply always.

By believing the gospel that Jesus brought we are reminded of the inheritance we have already through Christ Jesus and in Christ Jesus, **Eph. 1: 3-14**.

We are reminded of this inheritance from **God's point of view**. An inheritance that we are privileged to experience right now. Such reminder will give a church or genuine disciple of Christ courage. Here are the reminders once again:

1. God chose us, called us, V4
2. Adoption to sonship, V5-6
3. Redemption through His blood, forgiveness of sins, V7-8
4. Made known to us the mystery of His will, V9 – 10
5. Predestined, V11-12
6. Get the truth from the real source, Jesus, V13
7. Marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, V13-14

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The way we were

Realize where you came from! We were once nothing, no past, dead and the wrath of God was resting upon us, **Eph. 2: 1-2**. *As for you, you **were dead** in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you **followed the ways of this world** and of **the ruler of the kingdom of the air**, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*

Saved and made alive

He made us alive with Christ, V4. God raised us up with Christ, V6. **Eph. 2:4-6**, *But because of his great love for us, God, who is **rich in mercy**, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is **by grace you have been saved**. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,*

What is grace? It is through grace that we have been saved. We have been saved not because we deserved it or because we did something. It is God's workmanship and we believe in it through faith. Whatever storms I have to go through, my position in Christ with God never changes. This position comes with the seven things we inherited in Christ Jesus.

What is mercy? While we are enjoying our position in Christ as adopted sons, God sees the miserable situation in which we are and may bless us with His mercies. Sometimes, it seems to me that God does not show His mercies to me. But I have to realize that He is sovereign and knows much better what good is for me. At all times it will be to the praise of His glory.

Paul worded it very well in **2 Cor. 12: 7-10**, *Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

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For this reason

During this time, he was a prisoner of Emperor Nero. Continuously chained to Nero's imperial guards, he considered himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles, **Eph. 3:1**.

Furthermore, Paul mentions that Christ revealed to him the mystery for the gentiles through God's grace. This mystery is the gospel with insights especially revealed for administration to the Gentiles. It is a mystery that was never revealed yet to men in other generations, **V3-5**. *that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.* ⁴ *In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,* ⁵ *which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.* ⁶ ***This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.***

Paul became a servant of this gospel by God's grace through the working of His power. **V7-12**, *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.* ⁸ *Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ,* ⁹ *and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.* ¹⁰ *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,* ¹¹ *according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.* ¹² *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

Therefore

Paul has been suffering for the Gentiles, but emphasizes that the believers should not get discouraged. **V13**, *I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

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Why is his suffering the church's glory? Because everything is to the praise of His / Christ glory and the church is the body of Christ.