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DISPENSER OF GOD'S GRACE

Ephesians: Recognizing Who You Are in Christ
Ephesians 3:1-13

I am grateful for what God's doing at Calvary and new things happening and people getting involved. If you're interested in getting involved with some things that are going on, talk to us.

Dan's back there running the PA today and setting it all up. It's his first day. He's starting from scratch over there and we're grateful for his work there. Tess and Lucien want to be ushers and help us out with ushering. I'm really grateful for you guys doing that.

The outreach on Saturday morning is going to be a real interesting thing as we try to go and do kind of evangelism in the parks and places. A number of you are part of that. So thank you. I'm grateful. It's fun to be part of a church where a lot of people are investing their energies and time and are committed. That's cool.

It's encouraging to me when you come to church on Sunday morning. It's encouraging to me to see other people who are saying, "I want to get to know God better and I want to be a part of what God is doing in our world." So thank you for being here with us.

Let's pray before we look at Ephesians 3 this morning.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace in our lives and just for the privilege of hanging out with you today. It's fun to see these new things coming about like this coffeehouse that Glen and the worship team are going to lead. We ask, Lord, that in each one of these things that you would bless our church, extend our borders, grow our fellowship. We pray that people would come to know you in personal ways. We pray that we'd have opportunities to disciple people, to understand how to live the way you want us to live. We know that you have so many treats waiting for us, spiritual treats that we can enjoy when we're serving you. So we're looking forward to that. Lord, thank you for the privilege that we enjoy together. Now as we look at your word, Father, we ask that you'd teach us, grow us, inspire us, encourage us this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.

Turn with me to Ephesians 3. Ephesians 3:1-13 is what we're going to look at today. As I start out in verse 1 I'm going to read the first three verses and then we'll come back and look in more detail about them. So open your own Bible, follow along in the passage with me so you can see what God is saying to the Ephesians through Paul and then what He is saying to you. We want you to be able to see this in Ephesians 3:1-13.

Let me start by reading verses 1-3. *For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles*—then this kind of awkward pause because the sentence doesn't end. We'll talk about that in a minute. Verse 2: *Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, that I have already written about briefly.*

We're going to talk about this administration of God's grace. What does that mean to be an administrator of God's grace? That's going to be a real interesting thing to talk about this morning. We're also going to talk about this mystery that he's talking about that's been revealed to him. That's kind of interesting too. We'll look at that as well.

Before we get to either or both of those things we want to go back and just look at the beginning of this and see what he's talking about because he takes a tangent starting in verse 2. So let's go back to verse 1 and figure out where he was starting to go and then where he ended up going starting in verse 2.

You have to think, they're writing a letter. Paul is writing a letter. Sometimes we see in the Bible as Paul is writing a letter he's writing with his own hand and sometimes he's writing through some secretary that he's dictating to and they're writing it down. But at some point he writes down the first few words and then he pauses and he says, "Wait a minute. I need to step back here and tell you some more things about this. I'm going to take a tangent here." And I love it when Paul takes tangents because when Paul takes tangents we learn things about God. That's what's going to happen in verses 2-13.

I want to show you where the tangent starts. Look at verse 1. It says, *For this reason*. Look at verse 14. *For this reason*. He comes back, you see, to the same idea. So he starts saying *for this reason*, says a few words, then he goes on his tangent, and then he comes back to the idea *for this reason*, and he goes into this prayer that we're going to talk about next week, Lord willing, and we're going to go into that beautiful prayer at the end of chapter 3.

But let's take this first part. He says, *For this reason*. Well what is the reason he's talking about? If you remember, in the early part of this book, the previous chapter, in chapter 2 of Ephesians, it starts by telling us about God's grace in our lives and how when we stand under God's grace (that is, by faith) we position ourselves, He gives us the grace of salvation. That's what He gives us. He gives us the grace of salvation to everyone, but not everyone receives it. You have to position yourself under God's grace, through faith, to receive it. That's what Ephesians 2:8-9 say. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith*. You stand under the spigot of that grace to receive that and faith is what gets you there. So you receive the grace of salvation from God. That's the first part of Ephesians 2.

Then in the last part of Ephesians 2 he's talking about this amazing thing that happens. The Gentiles and Jews that were experiencing hostility together (that's what it says in that passage) are brought together to be a new humanity because now they're Christians. When they become Christians the walls of hostility are broken down, these barriers of hostility are dropped, and now they become a new group of people, the church.

Many of you have experienced that. When there's been a barrier between you and someone else, but you find out they're a Christian, there's this unity that takes place. When we become Christians and start living the God-filled life that God asks us to live then barriers fall down and closeness is the result. That is so amazing. That's what he's talking about at the end of chapter 2.

So then he says, *For this reason* (because of all of this new unity that we experience in God) *I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles*— Remember Paul is in prison while he's writing this. He's in a Roman prison and he's writing four epistles. He writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon at the same time. Sends them all by the same mail carrier to all of the people in the area.

He's writing from a Roman prison, but he doesn't call himself a Roman prisoner. What does he call himself? He says, "I am a *prisoner of Christ Jesus*." Paul had a perception of life that said wherever I am in life I'm serving God. If it's in a prison, I'm serving God. If I'm on a mission field, I'm serving God. That's his attitude.

I think we can stop right there and take that application and apply it to our lives because wherever you are right now in your life (you may even view it as a prison in some ways, whether it be financial prison or a physical prison or whatever), you might view yourself in that situation, but you are a prisoner of Jesus Christ. You can take that perception of whatever problems, challenges you face in life; this is what God has called me to do, this is what I need to do right now, and I want to live for God in the midst of this.

That's what he says. He says, *I am prisoner of Christ Jesus*, and then he says, *for the sake of you Gentiles* because God has given Paul the job, the privilege of telling all the Gentiles that they can be embraced into the faith. Remember Paul was a Pharisee. He was a Jew. He knew God. He knew the law. He knew about all of those things and now he realizes that the Gentiles could all be brought into this beautiful faith that he's known all of his life.

Let me read it again. *For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles*—and he's writing this and he's going, "Whoa. I've got to stop right here because this reminds me of some things I've got to tell you," and that's where we enter into our tangent in verse 2.

It says there, *Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, that I have already written about briefly.*

Let's talk about this administration of God's grace. The word 'administrator' is the same word used for 'steward' in the book of Matthew. Someone who manages things. Paul is saying, "I'm a manager of the grace of God." That's kind of an interesting thought. You imagine him in this little storeroom and people bring the supplies in the back and he dispenses them out the front. It's like "I'm the administrator of God's grace."

Now he's going to talk about a particular kind of grace. In other words, it's this mystery that he's going to talk about that was revealed to him. That's what he's going to share with the world.

We'll talk about that in a minute. But let's just think about this idea about being an administrator of God's grace. It's not just Paul that received the grace. Look over in the next chapter at verse 7. Do you see that there? The next chapter, verse 7 says, *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.* That means everyone. Every one of us has experienced God's grace. Every one of us is a manager of God's grace.

Here's what happens. In order to get the grace (that is, get it into the back of the storehouse so you can give it to others), you have life experiences that God is present in and He gives you then those benefits. You're experiencing a problem in life. You trust in the Lord and God gives you some great benefits and strength in the midst of that problem that you're experiencing. When you get that it's like you've got this grace, not only to deal with your problem, but you've got a little extra to give to others. That's the grace. Now you are the manager of that. What are you going to do with it?

You have to realize that you are a dispenser of God's grace and now you're going to find yourself in life situations with other people that don't know much about God's grace. They're sitting there and they don't even realize they have an empty cup there waiting. And you're the one that can say, "Let me tell you about what God has done in my life." You're dispensing God's grace; you're passing it on. Let me tell you what God has revealed to me in my life. Let me share this with you. You're not going to believe this!" And you pass then on the message of God's grace to other people. You are a manager of God's grace.

That is what Paul is saying. "I'm an administrator of the grace of God." He wants them to understand what that looks like in very practical ways. If you're a husband, you are an administrator of God's grace to your wife. If you're a wife, you're an administrator of God's grace to your husband. Children, you're an administrator of God's grace to your parents. You ever think about that? How are you taking the grace that God has given you and passing it on to your parents? They need grace. Believe me. And often they get it from young people or from their children.

I cried a couple weeks ago when my daughter, Melissa, wrote me a note about some positive things she experienced in her childhood. That was such a gift for me. I cried as I read that. I'm going, "Oh, that's so cool." She was giving me some grace and I appreciated that. As parents we give grace to our kids.

But not just in the family. Even in the work world or in the neighborhood or with extended family. People are waiting for grace. They just need it in their lives. It's so important. And you are an administrator of it. You are charged with a responsibility. If you want more grace then you invite God into your life in more areas in your life and watch Him work. Because when He works, then you're blessed by the prayers of God's people or you're blessed by the answer to your own prayers and God does something amazing. You go, "Whoa. I've got to share this with other people." God has revealed something to you that you can pass on.

That is the grace of God and that is what he's saying there, that he's a manager of God's grace. But being a manager of God's grace for Paul meant I have a message I want to share. It is the mystery.

Let's talk about this mystery he's referring to starting in verse 3. He says, *that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, that I have already written about briefly.* This mystery he's going to talk about was made known to him by revelation. He experienced it himself. He understood what it was like. Just as God reveals things to you and you go, "Wow. That is really cool. God has done something really neat in my life. I appreciate that."

He's going to experience this mystery that was revealed to him. Verse 4: *In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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. 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.* So that's what the mystery is; the embracement of the Gentiles into the faith.

But let's go back and just look at the word 'mystery' for a moment. You have to understand the word 'mystery' in the Bible in the New Testament is a little bit different than the word 'mystery' for us, although there are some similarities.

When we think about a mystery, we think about a story where the clues are being unveiled until you finally discover that Mr. Black did it with the wrench in the library or something. So this mystery is being revealed. It is true that in the Old Testament there are some clues to the New Testament, but really the idea of the mystery is that something that wasn't understood before is now being revealed. That's the whole idea of the word 'mystery' in the New Testament.

Just to illustrate what I'm saying here (that mystery means before it wasn't known, but now is), look at verse 5. This is what he's describing: *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.* Do you see? Before it was not known, now it is, therefore we call it a mystery.

I'm going to show you a couple other verses just so you get this point, this theological idea of what a mystery is.

Look at 1 Corinthians 2:7-8. It says, *No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.* A mystery. Something that wasn't known before, but is now known.

Another verse, Colossians 1:25-27 says, *I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

It's this idea of mystery. Just picture it this way. Beautiful painting. But you can't see the painting because it's covered. It's going to be revealed, but it's not. You're just waiting for the revealing of the painting. It's got a big tarp over it and it's not revealed it yet. But you go and

pick up just a piece of the tarp and you see the corner of it. In this particular story the corner is all about the Jews as God's people.

God gave the Jews the Law and they were His special people and God would do some amazing things through the Jewish people to lead them out of Egypt and bring them into a Promised Land. He would give them a promise that they would be protected and He would conquer the land and great things would happen in this land. The Jewish people were special and God gave them the Bible, the Old Testament. They were written down by the scribes and they had them. And so the Pharisees of that day, like Paul, would study the Bible and they would see all the laws that were there and they would recognize that these laws represented a covenant between God and people. And as we work through the covenant we understand that obedience results in blessing and these Jewish people are so blessed.

That's just the corner of the painting. That's all Paul knew. And he had invested all of his life in that. That's why he was a Pharisee. He studied under Gamaliel to be one of the greatest Pharisees. He was on the fast track to be the president of all the Pharisees or whatever you want to call it. He was really invested in this.

And then God did something in his life. God revealed to him something different, something more than what was there. It was like the canvas is taken off the whole painting and now he doesn't just see the corner, but he sees that in the corner a baby was born, a Jewish baby was born named Jesus Christ who was more than a baby, a man; He was God. The cross then becomes this place where the painting opens up and now the whole painting is full of all the Gentiles and everybody else that's able to be part of the church and they're able to be experiencing the blessings of God.

Now the full painting is revealed and Paul is going, "Whoa. I never knew this. I can't believe this. This mystery that was hidden in the past is now revealed today and this is amazing stuff. I am privileged. I am the administrator of God's grace now to share the mystery that's been revealed to me with the whole world."

So Paul is on a track to share with the Gentiles this everywhere he goes. He gets on boats, he travels by land. He goes everywhere he can to tell the Gentiles, "You can experience God's grace. Let me tell you about the mystery of God."

That is what we have as the administrators of God's grace. Has God revealed Himself to you? Are you to the place where you see life is more than just getting up in the morning, doing your work, go to bed at night, and get up in the morning, do your work, and go to bed at night. Life is about something much bigger than that. It's about God's plan in the world. It's about what God wants to do.

Young people, I want to encourage you. You want to understand theology? Just look at three things. Start with these three doors and as you go through God will reveal great things to you. Understand this. Try to get to know God and understand who He is. Try to understand you; how God made a person and how He created that person and what He wants to do in your life. And then look at the plan that God has for you. Those three parts of theology are things that will

allow you to move forward and get to know God and His plan and be a part of it. It's revealed to you and you go, "Whoa. This is amazing."

That's what Paul is experiencing when he says, "God's given me the ability to be the administrator of God's grace, that is, the mystery that He has revealed to me." That's what he's saying.

Now God has revealed to each one of us certain things by our life experiences that come into the storehouse of God's grace. We're at the window dispensing God's grace based on what we've experienced. God has revealed certain things to you and then you pass them on to other people. That's who we are. We are administrators of God's grace, just like Paul, and that's what he's talking about here.

As he goes through to verse 6 notice he tells us what the mystery is that he's describing. *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.*

Do you see here the word *together* is repeated three times. The idea is that we're together in this. Now the picture's been revealed, now the Gentiles and the Jews are together, they're *one humanity* as described in the last chapter. This is great stuff. Now the Gentiles can enjoy all the blessings that the Jews could experience.

We can go to someone and we can say, "Let me tell you about the gospel of Jesus Christ." Because when you understand this you are a sharer together, an heir together, a participant together with God's grace, with me. We can work together in this and understand it. God wants to do something in your life. That's why we do evangelism.

There were six of you guys in the team that went out. I got a picture from Erik. Here's the picture of the people that went out. It looked like you guys were having a lot of fun going out and sharing the grace of God. And each one different.

Brenda Lani comes on and she's really strong like a hammer sometimes. You let them have it sometimes and tell them. John's over here and he's the theologian and he's got all this depth that he could share. So getting Brenda together with John and going out there; boy, they make a great team. And you've got Tyler, a young man. Tyler isn't here today, but Tyler is a young man. He's a teenager and Erik was saying he's scared to death going out there and sharing his faith. So he's going out there doing what he needs to do. Dan was out there sharing his faith. I would encourage you to join with Erik on Saturday and just go sharing in that park. And Nancy Muni and Denise and others just going out there and just talking to people about Jesus.

What you're doing is you're dispensing God's grace to people. Some of them don't even realize that they're walking around with an empty cup and it's like they're begging us to share the message and some are open to that. Some of them want to be positioned under the grace of God so they can receive salvation through faith. And all we're doing is saying, "Just step right over here. It's available to you." We're handing it out to people. We are dispensers of God's grace. It's the mystery that God has provided so that we can be heirs together and members together,

sharers together. Paul is saying, "It's my job to share it with you," just like it's our job to share it with others.

There are two kinds of books that sell really well. There's mysteries and love stories. Well, this is both of them. The gospel is certainly a love story of God loves us and woos us to Himself. But it's also a mystery that's been revealed. When people get this story, they go, "Wow. I can now see the bigger picture. I can now experience the grace of God. I've got to tell other people about it."

Now in verse 7 he's going to give his personal testimony. He's going to talk about himself. Go to verse 7. It says, *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace.* He's just going to keep talking about God's grace all the way through here.

It's the gift. That's what it is. It's a gift. It's not something you earn. You can't come and say, "I'm a Christian because I did all these righteous things; therefore I've earned my place on God's book." Nope. That doesn't work. That's not how it is. Even Paul, this great guy that we look up to as a missionary of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he got it as a gift too. Just like the rest of us.

A gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 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, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

See, Paul makes it very personal. He wants people to understand God has given me this task. My job in life, my number one job in life, is to share Jesus Christ with other people. And that's the job description that any of us have. Our job is to share the message of the gospel with other people. That is our number one job description. When we're asked, "Tell me about yourself," we ought to say, "I'm a Christian." That's what we ought to say first.

Let me tell you a story about these two presenters that came to be trained from the country of Lebanon. They came to Houston because we gave them a scholarship to come from Lebanon to be trained in part of our organization, the National Center for Biblical Parenting, along with other trainers. We have 110 presenters around the country who teach parenting seminars. These two had a scholarship to come from Lebanon. We've got some people interested this year coming from China. Our presenter training will be in September and they'll be trained to take parenting seminars back to their place.

Well, these two people come from Lebanon and we meet them and of course there's the cultural differences and all of those things. But they're staying in the home of the people from the Presbyterian church that's hosting this. So they're living in their home. That's where they're staying.

They come to me the second day and say to me, "I've got to ask you a question. Are those people Christians that we're staying in their home?" And of course they're Christian. I know them. They're staying in the home of these godly people. I said, "Yes, why do you ask?"

She said, "Well, they had some friends over last night to spend some time with us and meet us and greet us. We were talking and they said let's everybody go around and tell about themselves. So the first man says, 'I'm Bill. I work at such and such a company and I have three children and so on.' And the next person says, 'I'm Mary and I'm so and so and I work at such and such' (just like we would normally do). And when it came to one of them they said, 'I'm so and so (I can't even pronounce their names) and I'm a Christian.'" That's what she said. "Every time as we were going around I said, 'I'm a Christian,' first, but they didn't say that."

I said, "I understand. This is one of those things we could learn from people in Lebanon." It's the same thing that happened in Kenya when we were there. When you greeted someone you'd greet them and say, "Praise the Lord," first. You wouldn't say, "Hello," you'd say, "Praise the Lord," when you greeted someone. And here these people from Lebanon and they're coming and they're questioning our faith, the faith of these people who are Christians in this church because they don't announce that they're Christians first.

I said, "We can learn something from you folks. We should do what you do. They are Christians. I want you to know those people that you met last night are believers and are excited about what you're doing in Lebanon and teaching family ministry there. They are Christians. They just don't know really how to share their faith in their introduction as well as you do and that's just not how we typically do it in America, but we probably should do it differently."

I think we all ought to be like them. That's what Paul is like. He'd say, "Let me tell you about the gospel," when he'd meet people and he'd share. Just like you guys did with evangelism yesterday.

Look at verse 10. *His intent was that now (this is God's intent), through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.* When we come together as the church, we're not talking about a building; we're talking about the people of God. God brings people from all different kinds of ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic backgrounds and age backgrounds. He brings us all together and we share in the unity together and we have a message that we can proclaim to other people. So we have a unity among us even though there are a lot of differences among us. That's what the church is.

He says, *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.* The church becomes this vehicle now that when you open up the side of the painting you only see Israel and remember God gave a promise to Abraham (it's through you *all the nations of the earth will be blessed*), but it doesn't tell how that's going to happen. When you take the rest of the veil off the painting you see the cross of Christ. It opens up and now God is using the church to extend this blessing to the whole world. Israel still has a special place in God's heart, but now He's opened the door so that today it's the church of God that is called upon to be the people that are expressing the ministry of Jesus Christ to the world.

Yesterday I was driving through Indiana, teaching a parenting seminar two hours away from the airport, and all there is is farms between here and there. We're talking about farms and farms and I don't even know what they're growing. They're starting to grow this stuff and I can't even recognize it. I know nothing about farming.

We're driving through all this and then you have a church here. And you have a church over here. All through this farmland you've got these churches that are there as well. Each one of those churches - the United Methodist church there, the Baptist church there, the Church of God that we spoke at - each one of those churches are part of the mystery of God that He's revealed. He uses the church (not the building, it's the people) to extend His kingdom. That's what he's saying. *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.*

There are a lot of things you can meditate on here in this passage, but this is a great word: *manifold wisdom*. Manifold is *polupoikilos*. It means variegated, multi-colored. I don't know if when you were a kid you had crayons, but I'm old enough so that when I was a kid I had crayons. We didn't draw on the computer, we actually drew on paper and we actually had crayons and I had one of those packs of sixty-four. You open it up and it had all the colors there all organized. That's what he's talking about. The variegated colors.

Each one of us represents a color as we come and paint the picture. Maybe my color's brown and your color's blue and your color's red and then when we bring this out we help people see the variegated wisdom of God. If it was just one of us sharing the wisdom of God people would get a skewed picture of it. But when you hear the story of Denise or Nancy or Fred or other people, you go, "Whoa. God is big. This is variegated. This is many colors here."

That's what he's talking about. *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold, the variegated wisdom of God should be made known.* It's like God is making this big tapestry and people get to see a picture of it.

I like the story of a little boy playing on the floor looking up at Grandma who's sewing and doing needle work. All he sees is underneath the needlework is looks like a mess of a bunch of loose strings and tied knots. It doesn't look very nice at all. And he says, "Grandma, what are you doing up there? Why are you making all of that mess?" And Grandma says, "Son, come on up here. Sit on my lap and see it from my perspective." So the child comes up and looks and goes, "Whoa. Look at that beautiful quilt that's being made."

That's what God does. He invites us to come because we look at our lives sometime and, "God, what are you doing? It just looks like a big mess," and God says, "Come on. Look at it from my perspective for a moment. I want you to see what this looks like as I'm demonstrating my wisdom throughout the whole world." You and I have the privilege of being a part, just a piece of all of that. We get to see the tremendous perspective that God has from life and we learn from that. It's not always messy in our lives as we imagine because God has something beautiful planned. He's doing that work and He says, "Come on up here and see it." I wish we could see it more often because if we got the perspective of God we'd be more energized in our ability to move forward and understand it.

Let's go on. I'm going to read verse 10 again and go into 11. Verse 10 says, *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 that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Most of what we're saying today is worship material. It's just going, "Whoa, God. This is great. I'm glad to be a part of this. This is a lot of fun." But he gives two applications starting in verse 12 and I want you to take these home with you. When we say, "Take Jesus home," that's what we mean. Take Him home with you to your workplace, your home, your apartment, whatever, and learn what God is saying to us.

This is the application. I think verse 12 is the climax of the passage. It's where we come to and we say, "So what? What is this for? Why do I need to study all of this?" Notice verse 12 it says, *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.* That's the first thing. *I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

Let's talk about this confidence and freedom that we have because this is one of the applications that we experience. When you see the variegated wisdom of God, when you see God working you go, "Wow. I want to be a part of that." And then when you pray and you say, "God, would you answer my prayers?" and God starts doing that you personally experience the grace of God, it goes into your storehouse, and you go, "Whoa. I have confidence."

Now you don't have to stand at the counter of God's grace when people are around and say, "Well, I don't know if I really have some grace. Let me check and see if I have that. It may be out of stock." You're not doing that. What you're saying is, "I've got it! You've got to get this! This is so good," and you have this confidence as you share the gospel with other people. We've got it and so we can go in with freedom and confidence.

The idea of freedom is I don't have to feel unworthy anymore, I don't have to feel guilty anymore. Because as soon as you start doing stuff for God sometimes Satan comes in and says, "What do you think you're doing? Look at all the stuff in your life. You are not qualified to stand up there at that counter and dispense God's grace." And so God says, "You can stand up there with freedom and confidence," because you've seen the painting. You know how you're a part of it. You've seen the perspective of God. Come on, let's go forward. That's the freedom and confidence part.

The other part is he says don't be discouraged. Sometimes we get discouraged in our lives, don't we? We get discouraged, we feel despairing, we feel hopeless and that's because we're just looking at all the knots and stuff in there and we say, "God, I'm just feeling like I'm not getting anywhere. I feel like I'm trying to move forward, but every time I take a step forward it feels like I'm going backwards sometimes. I need your encouragement." God wants us to understand, be encouraged today.

Don't be discouraged about my suffering. Look what he's saying specifically. He says, "I don't want you to be *discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.* It's true. I'm in prison," he's saying. "I want you to understand. I'm in prison."

This is what he was reminded about in verse 1 when he's saying, "I've got to take a pause here and help you guys understand why I'm in prison and what I'm doing. I don't want you to be discouraged about the fact that I'm in prison. God is using this in an amazing way."

Whatever you're experiencing in life, if you're discouraged today, I want you to know that God has something very special planned for you. All you have to do is step up and look at the quilt from God's perspective. He wants to take you forward with confidence. Not only for yourself. Please don't think this is just for you. Because it's not all about you, it's not all about me; it's about us passing the message on of God's grace.

He equips us. He always gives you more grace. Not only the grace that you need for yourself, but He gives you the storehouse, the stock, so that you can dispense it to other people and help them understand more about who God is, who you are, and what His plan is. If we understand those three basic things about theology, we're qualified. We can go out and we can share who God is with other people. Amen? That's the message God's called us to. Let's do it together. Let's be the church that God has called us to be.

Let's pray together. We're going to sing and we're going to worship the Lord a little bit more this morning.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, thank you for the privilege of serving you. Thank you for the confidence you give to us so we can go out to the parks and we can go out to Trenton and we can go to our neighbors, even go back into our own families, and talk to people about who you are. I pray, Lord, that you would bless us, each one as we serve you. Give us more grace. Where there are places where we've been holding on to problems that need to be dealt with in your grace, we ask that you would give it. We need it. Show us what that looks like. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let's continue to worship the Lord together.