



Bible Study

October 12, 2016

Ephesians 3:8-21
Luke 8:22-25

Galatians 3:8-21 (NKJV) -

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Luke 8:22-25 (NKJV) - Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. But He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"

Commentary -

St. Paul speaks to us today about a mystery. The mystery which was hidden from everlasting

and unknown even to the angels. This mystery was finally revealed to St. Paul on the road to Damascus, after being revealed to the world in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is to spreading the truth revealed in this mystery that the Apostle has devoted the remainder of his life. To that end, he traveled to the extremes of the known world in his day, seeking to reveal to anyone who would hear the love of God as expressed in the person of Jesus Christ.

For most of his life, St. Paul had known God in a certain way. He had spent his life studying the Torah, the Law given through Moses. He had, from it, learned of God's radical holiness, that He is completely other than this created world. He had learned of God's complete righteousness, his standards, to meet which standards Saul of Tarsus had struggled diligently but ultimately failed. He had learned of God's justice, and that a day was coming when all would stand or fall before His judgment, receiving rewards or punishments for what they had done in their lives. This knowledge had not given Saul the rabbi a sense of peace, or joy. It had not given him a spirit of compassion. It had, rather, made him cold, unsympathetic, and merciless as he sought to destroy everything, both within himself, and in the world around him, that didn't conform to his own sense of what was right and good.

The pagan Romans of the city of Ephesus, one of the largest, wealthiest, and greatest ports in the Empire, knew even less of the true God. They, like their ancestors before them, focused much of their effort, as individuals, families, and a whole community, attempting to appease the powers of fate and destiny, to preserve their wives and daughters through childbirth, to preserve the lives of their unborn children, to keep themselves and their communities alive amidst manifold threats and potential disasters. To do so they conducted painstaking rituals, slaughtering sheep and goats and pigs and bulls by the dozens, redoing the rituals if they didn't have the desired effect. They spent their lives enslaved to these forces, doing whatever they believed them to be commanding no matter how dark in order to survive and make their way in the world.

Neither had any measure, even any estimate, of the depth and extent and reach of the love of the one, true God, until He came to dwell among us in the person of Jesus Christ. As we read in today's Gospel reading, no sooner had Jesus embarked on His public ministry but He retreated into the desert for fasting and prayer, and was there assaulted by the devil. The greatest of the dark powers who have enslaved mankind sought to enslave Christ. He offered Him nourishment, to meet His daily needs, and Christ refused. He offered all the kingdoms of this world, all of its power and wealth, and Christ refused. He offered safety, protection, and preservation of life, and Christ refused. In His refusals, Christ lived a life that was completely free. Free to love. Free to heal. And when the final conflict came between Himself and the powers of this world, He was free to lay down His life, to take upon Himself all that this world and the powers that rule it could possibly do to harm Him, and by passing through even death and coming out the other side alive, to defeat them utterly.

On the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus encountered the risen Jesus Christ and experienced for the first time the true depths of the love of God, the plan from before the foundation of the world for God the Son to suffer and die in the flesh to set Paul free. From that moment, St. Paul was an Apostle: one sent. He had no other concern but the proclamation to the whole world, and even to those very powers which seem currently to dominate it and enslave human beings through the law of sin and death, that Jesus Christ had defeated them in His life, His death, and His resurrected life thereafter.

This Gospel preached by St. Paul set free everyone who heard it, and put the powers and principalities behind this world's authorities on notice. The news of Christ's victory gave the people of Ephesus, and every other city in which it took root, the boldness and confidence to live a completely new type of life in this world, unafraid for themselves and their families because they had experienced firsthand the love of the God who created every human person and is the true Father of every family on Earth. The sure knowledge of the mystery of the love of God, hidden until Christ revealed Himself to all mankind by walking among us, allowed St. Paul, and every disciple he made, to relate to God in an entirely new way, based not in fear and desperate hope, nor in slavish devotion, but as beloved sons and daughters of God.

Questions to Ponder -

- 1) St. Paul lived and conducted his ministry under some of the most evil rulers in the history of the world, including Caligula and Nero. Despite this, and unlike many of his fellow Judeans, he never called for political revolution. Rather, St. Paul saw the true enemy as being the demonic powers and principalities who stood behind these rulers and who controlled them, and the Apostle made war against them by proclaiming to them the victory of Jesus Christ. St. Paul's goal was not the overthrow of Caesar, nor replacing bad emperors with good ones, but by preaching Christ, to convert Caesar and his empire to the worship of Jesus Christ. What weapons do you use against the people who hurt, offend, and hate you? Do you respond in kind? Do you respond with bitterness, resentment, or revenge? Do you gossip about them and seek to undermine them? Or do you show Christ to them in your words and actions in hopes that they will be reconciled to you?
- 2) St. Paul, in today's epistle, calls upon us to have confidence and not to lose heart. He does this by encouraging us to remember that the God who created all things through Jesus Christ, His Son, has loved us since before the world began. He created this world and us for the purpose of, in Christ, joining us to Himself that we might dwell in His love forever. If we truly come to know, or even to glimpse, the incredible weight of that love, how will it affect how we deal with the day to day challenges of life? How will it effect how we view other people in our lives, no matter how they may behave toward us? What would it mean to treat other people with the dignity they deserve as beloved by God?
- 3) In today's Gospel reading Christ shows the power and authority that is His as God. Despite always possessing that power, He chose to live a life of weakness and service for our salvation. Which do you find yourself pursuing in your life? Do you work for power, wealth, possessions, admiration, and strength? Or do you set those things aside in order to serve others? Are you willing to appear weak in order to follow Christ?

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