

For Anyone

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Date: 13 November 2011

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[0 : 0 0] Now I want to turn back today to Ephesians chapter 3 and particularly words that sum up the chapter in verse 8 where we have a kind of characteristic word from Paul about himself as it describes grace in his life. He said, although I am less than the least of all God's people this grace was given to 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 by God who created all things. Now I want to look today a little bit at that these verses in the light of our own an ongoing study about grace and I want us to give thanks today for grace in our lives as Christians I want us to do that and if you're not a Christian I would like you again and in a fresh way I hope to be challenged by grace and to be challenged by the reality of our need for grace our need for God's love in our lives and we see through this passage and through this chapter that God's grace is something that's beautifully planned and beautifully purposed in the lives of individuals and if you stop and think about we're talking about today being our remembrance day and rightly so and it's important for us always in our lives to be people who remember what's happened in the past not just in society and in life but in our own individual lives and it's important to give thanks as Christians for the grace that's changed us because grace has changed our lives forever sometimes we recognize that sometimes we maybe don't recognize that quite so much but we recognize that the the gift of God's grace in our lives is something well planned by God it isn't random it's something that has always been in his mind and it's something that comes through the whole of Scripture Paul speaks about in verse 9 making plain to everyone the administration of this mercy of this mystery rather and that's very much what the New Testament does and what Paul does is he unfolds the gospel of grace and we give thanks to him for that we recognize today and I want you to recognize today and give thanks today for the Apostle Paul because he is a very important from our point of view as we look at it an important player in God's purposes of unfolding grace so that we know Christ and we have come to Christ in Scotland in the 21st century the foundation of the gospel as it was made known was made known to the Apostles and to Paul we recognize that and that is important for us that we recognize that in chapter 20 or chapter 2 verse 20 of chapter 2 Paul speaks about the gospel and he says that the gospel in the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and of the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone the Apostles are important in the outworking of the gospel that we have taken and we've received for ourselves and that's significant for us they were witnesses of the gospel they were witnesses of Jesus Christ they were recipients of teaching that Jesus Christ gave to them which they have passed on to us so that that mystery which is maybe a slightly different meaning to the word than we think of mysteries is something mysterious mystery biblically usually

speaks of something that was hidden in the past but is now revealed so Jesus gave the Apostles the gospel and made clear what was hidden in the past was hidden very much to the Old Testament church they knew that God was their Savior they knew that there was the shedding of blood but they couldn't possibly have imagined that the Son of God would be the Savior who would die in a cross it was outrageous to them but gee the Christ and the Apostles had that revealed and made known to them for us we see that Jesus did that to these well in the road to Emmaus where he unfolded he opened up the mystery what was hidden right from Moses and the prophets about himself and about he how he had to be the Savior so the Apostles of this great work to do and Paul himself had this wonderful ministry to bring the gospel to the whole world to broaden it beyond the Jewish nation we'll see a little bit more about that tonight and it's good how really today tonight this morning and tonight without me doing any jiggery poker a all fits in so well and you'll see that and I hope you have time if you have time and they're able to come tonight that you'll spend a little time this afternoon going through some of the questions and unpacking these questions and helping

tonight as we dialogue about the chapter in Acts but it's great to remember and be thankful for Paul it was an utterly radical thing he was doing we can sit back and we take up all yeah the apostle to the Gentiles he went out and spread the gospel but it was it was a dangerous task that he had it was an uncomfortable task they had it took him completely out of his social circle and his cultural circle and even his religious circle but yeah it was grace that drove him to this place in God's administration God's purposes in God's plan Paul is used to bring the gospel to the Gentile world of which we belong and the wider world and not only does he bring that grace but he lives that grace he lives that grace and through the Holy Spirit and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit we have not only his teaching but we have the example of his life which is for us a model of how grace is outworked what it looks like not complete not absolute not exhaustive but he tells us and shows us what it's like to be a Christian who has been touched by grace and that's important for us because it's not just theoretical it's real in the lives of even the apostles and it's a challenge for us he displays grace and so we look at this passage and we look at what he's teaching and we see how does that match with my understanding of grace and my experience of God's love and God's grace in my heart and do I see the kind of change and transformation in my life that Paul could see in his life that that's what grace does and that's what we're going to look at briefly this morning grace is displayed and there's simply two things I want to say about the work of God's grace in our lives when we come to faith when we receive God's love and recognize his salvation and his love for us and dying in the cross for our sins that is a gift from him we look to that over these like I can't go over that ground but we've looked at that tremendous give we offer him nothing we don't cooperate with him in our salvation he gifts us salvation we come with nothing when we receive that grace in our lives there's two things two senses that it brings into our lives to a greater or lesser degree and I hope that senses that grow as we go on gives us a sense of humility but also a sense of honor that we're honored we're humbled and that we're honored and it's a beautiful balance because sometimes we stress one above the other but there's this beautiful balance between being humble humbled by God's grace and yet honored because of what it means for us and so Paul gives us that kind of balance here in this verse where he says although I'm less than the least of all God's people and that's really the paradox isn't it he sees himself with a new humility because he sees God he's met with Jesus on the road to Damascus and he is met with the risen God and he's seen as holiness his purity his glory and his love and he's aware of his own sinfulness and rottenness completely paradoxically to who he thought he was and it changed him utterly and radically in a moment we'll be singing Sam 51 Sam 51 says against you you only have I sinned his whole life has changed because up to that point he just been looking around him looking at everyone else comparing himself to everyone else and he was pretty good he thought he was great and he was confident and self-righteous and biblically astute and good living and he looked around him and he thought he was okay but when he met with Jesus and was touched by Jesus challenge why are you persecuting me and also by seeing the risen Savior and by then seeing his own heart it humbled him he was convicted by that he was given a great sense of his own failure and sin and he was he was guilty before God now we can't talk about guilt today you're not allowed to talk about guilt it's psychologically destructive to mention guilt it's a bad thing we want to bury guilt but guilt is not not good don't speak about guilt everyone needs to feel good about themselves rub each other on the back you're all lovely everyone's lovely nobody needs to talk about guilt because it's so destructive but that's rubbish isn't it guilt is only destructive if one it's not genuine or if two it's not dealt with but the reality of scripture is that when we come and see Jesus Christ and we see ourselves before him we feel our guilt and we are convicted by our darkness and their need and our sin and it's real because it's before God who made us but he doesn't let us wallow in that he doesn't want us to be paralyzed by that he wants us to take it to him and be forgiven and our guilt is then dealt with yes unforgiving guilt it's a desperate thing and guilt that is wrongly attributed as desperate but genuine guilt before a holy God in relationship where he promises to forgive us it's a wonderful thing and that humbled Paul massively to the point where he could say I'm the least less than the least of holy apostles what a difference for Paul to say that you know and people talk about Paul in scripture and they say isn't that Paul the proud guy the fanatical misogynist lunatic it's not what the picture we get of Paul at all in the New Testament can

I just point to one or two scriptures in 1st Corinthians and I want to read the name because they're significant to what he is saying here in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 9 he says for I am the least of the apostles and don't even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the

church of God but I am what I am and his grace in me was not without effect no I worked harder than all of them so he's working hard okay for the gospel even though he regards himself as the least of all the apostles and then in 1st Timothy chapter 1 and in verse 15 he says here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners sinners of whom I am the worst whom I am the worst the guards himself as the worst of all sinners and in Romans 7 speaks about himself as a wretched man who will enable me to escape from this body of death thanks be to God through Jesus Christ so worst of all sinners so was he was he the worst of all sinners just a little thought was he the worst sinner who ever lived very possibly he was in God's eyes we would maybe throw up our hands in horror say Paul no come on I ain't think of terrible terrible sinners compared with Paul but in God's eyes what was Paul well Paul was before he became a believer he was sorry I thought my microphone had gone he became before he was a Christian he was the highest of high in terms of self-righteousness wasn't he he really thought he was great he was morally pure he kept God's law he really thought he was good he was self-righteous and you know what Jesus thinks about self-righteousness you know the condemnation that Jesus had for the religious self-righteous people it was much more than anyone in the world anyone who wasn't a church goer or a religious person Jesus was damnatory of people in the church who were self-righteous and self were proud and had no time for Jesus and the gospel of God in the truth so he was self-righteous and then laterly before he was became a believer by meeting Jesus Christ he was out to destroy the church he was an anti-Christ figure he was out to annihilate the church the fledgling gospel church he went to imprison and to murder the early Christians so in many ways his sins were heinous he may well in God's eyes and I'm not sure how God grades these things anyway but in anthropological terms human terms it may be that he was the worst of all sinners but even if he wasn't I think it's fair to say from scripture he thought he was he felt that he was the worst of all sinners because he was aware not only of his past and how he let Christ down and how he was self-righteous and couldn't see his own heart before God but he also recognized as a believer that he always had this battle even with grace in his heart he said you know the good I want to do I'm struggling with and the things

[15:00] I don't want to do these are things I do and he knew there was a battle going on Roman 7 in his heart so he recognizes that he he feels that he is the worst of all sinners and you know that is often what grace will do for us and do in us it changes our perspective so that we stop being comparative we stop being parallel in our thinking looking along everyone else and comparing ourselves with them and we see ourselves before God and it changes our thinking entirely and it reminds us of who we are and what we are before him and you know that's a great thing it humbles us I'm not saying and the Bible never says it humiliates us but it does humble us and makes us think our right of ourselves before the living God maybe you're here today and you think well I'm too bad to be a Christian I've done too many bad things I'm the ultimate bad boy or bad girl and you use that as a reason for staying away from Jesus don't do that don't think more highly of your badness than it really is before God and don't think God's too small and too insignificant to deal with your sins if you could deal with the worst of all sin indeed he could deal with the worst sinners that filled this universe and his grace and his forgiveness and his atoning death and the cross would be satisfactory for them all so don't stay away from Jesus because you think your heart's too bad and because Jesus won't accept you that's who he's died for isn't it he's died for you if you recognize and see and know your need before him that's the great good news of the gospel or maybe as a Christian today you feel bad you feel like you're a rubbish Christian that's not a bad place to be sometimes I'm not saying we wallow in that I'm not saying we therefore sin all the more so that grace can abound but when we see ourselves before God as we are we need and recognize our need do we not on an ongoing way of his forgiveness it humbles us because we see not so much the kind of sins that everyone else is talking about the sins that are graded in this world but we see the our independent spirit or lack of prayer or pride or lack of submission to him bitterness or anger self-centeredness we see how much time we spend comparing ourselves with other people rather than looking at Jesus because it's much easier and we feel bad about that as it takes us to Christ that's a great thing maybe you don't feel bad at all maybe you have no sense of your need before God then I plead with you to consider praying to the God who alone can show you your need and show you the ugliness before God of your heart that will drive you to the foot of the cross to convict you of your sin so that you will cry out for repentant that is an understated message of the gospel we kind of want everyone to love Jesus and be friends with Jesus and as Christians we love that side of things but we need to recognize the humbling process that he must work through the

independent spirit that he must break that will bring us to that point where we cry out for his forgiveness and for his life and for his hope and you know he longs for that that's what he longs for he longs for a simply to make that cry to make that request to recognize that we need him and that we're not Saul the great self-righteous persecutor but we're Paul

the least less than the least of all the apostles of all the God's people isn't an amazing thing he says he's less than the least of all God's people that's because he's seen amazing grace and can I say when when you can say and when I can see grace is amazing we can say we're less than the least of all God's people we lose our self our sense of need for position and our need for being on the ladder and our need for being comparatively better Christians than everybody else so a sense of humility and can I say briefly also and this balance must be part of our understanding of grace because sometimes we go a little overboard maybe in our minds anyway on the humbling sides you know who is me I'm just hopeless and useless can't do anything that's not grace that's just false humility and its self-righteousness in a different guys that's all it is just self-righteousness in a different guys but the balance is that we also have a sense of honor because Paul says although I'm less than the least of all God's people this grace was given me to preach to the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ so here's someone that's got a balanced opinion of himself as he's come to faith in Jesus Christ because he knows he has nothing to give he knows he hasn't been chosen because he's a hot shot he knows he's not the big cheese he's not the significant one he's utterly lost he's undone he's got nothing to offer God but his cry for forgiveness and God comes to him forgives him and gives him honor gives him this great position and he becomes the apostle to the Gentiles not great the worst of all sinners very probably the worst of all sinners of all time the murderous self-righteous religious guy becomes the apostle to the Gentiles what a realization for him as he gets to share the mystery of the gospel share the mystery that was was hidden unfolded and given to the Gentiles the people of God he is the one who outworks the great purposes of God in the Old Testament which will look a little bit more at tonight that the gospel wasn't just for the Jews it was for the whole world for every nation and Paul was the means by which that gospel went out the greatest theologian the greatest evangelist we could say he had to share the message with the world his message that he was given transformed this tiny planet the history of this planet because God's purpose was working he had God's honor he recognized God at a task from and there's not great is a great thing about grace in our own lives that it humbles us it empties us of our sense of self-reliance in life and self-reliance before God it humbles us to see that we need his grace in that gift and then as we come to him and our forgiven and renewed and given life and the Holy Spirit we are empowered and tasked to serve him and to have purpose and meaning maybe far beyond what we thought we had in life we scramble about with our own ambitions he shows us his greater ambitions for us which may not be ours at all we see the reality of grace in his life it didn't leave him in the gutter it didn't leave him with a terrible self-opinion not at all we see in his life that he knew a new freedom and a grace and a confidence that he speaks about in verse 12 freedom and confidence he had this great vision for Christ where he says you know in verse 20 he's able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or even think he knew the Holy Spirit's power coursing through his veins spiritually in his life he also knew hard work he didn't say oh it's great to be saved it's fantastic and do what I want and I'll just lie back and enjoy it he worked really hard we read that in the passage in in 1 Corinthians even though he was the least of the apostles yes he's I worked harder than any of them so grace doesn't make us lazy it doesn't make us sit by what a lovely gift I'll just receive that and sit I'll just wait for heaven it's not no it's not like that it gives us a driving desire to work hard for Jesus in the short lives that we have here it's a great thing he says I am what I am by the grace of God he's not a robot he's not a kind of grace freak that has no personality and and no usefulness and no responsibilities not just a puppet Christ has redeemed him as a person with that in the mystery of the individuality of that I am what I am he says I'm unique real responsible not a clone not conformist I'm not enslaved I don't need to live like every other

Christian I'm in a relationship with the living God and he's given me tasks to do and I am what I am and I fulfill that task in my life I know his peace and his patience and his mercy glory be to God he recognized that and he was also grateful for his future hope as grace gave him this hope of being redeemed from this body of death and lastly and very briefly because I want to finish and we're going to sing before praying lastly he also this grace gave him a servant spirit it's a great thing the grace of God gave him humility gave him honor and in that honor of living he recognized the honor

of being a servant of God in verse 1 he says I'm the prisoner excuse him prison at this time I'm a prisoner of the Romans no I'm a prisoner of Christ and in verse 7 he says I became a servant of this gospel so he's a servant of God isn't he servant of the gospel a prisoner of Jesus he takes his rotten miserable circumstances where he's imprisoned and in darkness he takes them as being from Christ and that his bad circumstances are even from Christ that's a significant point for us to consider today is this relationship of worship of worth wildness through Christ that's the core of grace that he's received and you have this great servant spirit why am I going through the why am I talking about Paul like this because we should see these elements to a greater or lesser degree if we claim to be Christ's if we claim to be living by grace alone if we claim to have let go of the self-righteousness of religion behind we should be humble and we should have this honor of being a servant as well you know and the proof would why do we do things why do we serve I would better do it I ought to do it I dare it's just gonna nag on if I don't do it don't we serve because of who Jesus Christ is that's the motive and that's the Lordship not interested in you serving for guilt or me serving for guilt or position or importance is because of the love of Christ that we serve we serve God and we serve others isn't that a beautiful verse in to be he says surely you've heard about this administration of God's grace that was given to me for you given to me for you he didn't see it as his own possession he had the grace of God that was given for the people so that in verse 14 he could say that I spend my life I kneel before the Father from whom his whole family and earth derives its name I kneel for you I pray for you I plead for you I love you I serve you because of what Christ has done you see his servants but it isn't pious holy monotonous monastic service it's service for Christ but it's also service for people it's a beautiful picture of grace that we have here it's for everyone isn't it I think the title of the service today was for anyone the worst of sinners you can't be below that and say that Christ isn't for you you certainly can't be above it and say oh it's not for me Christ didn't need to die for me I don't need to come to him the worst of sinners it's for anyone grace is not just for anyone it must be for everyone there's no other way is there are you content to say there's another way I am the way the truth in the life God says no man Jesus says no man comes to the Father except through me do we believe that theoretically theologically or practically they walk out of the building again unchanged and moved by the gospel message because you're not for me not just now but this is the grace we need that humbles us and honors us you're honored to serve God and honored to serve your fellow people in the congregation here and whoever God puts you into company and into contact with do you know that and if you don't I ask you to repent and believe