

“A Servant of the Gospel” (Eph. 3:1-13)

This section has a very rich content. But today we want to just focus on the theme “A Servant of the Gospel”.

1. By Grace

1

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

Paul calls himself the prisoner of Christ Jesus. He was literally a prisoner. When he was writing this letter, he was chained in prison because he'd been proclaiming Jesus.

He was not only in prison physically, but his heart was also captured by Jesus. He loved Jesus so much to the extent he didn't feel ashamed to call himself the prisoner of Christ Jesus. He is not grieving over the fact that he'd been put in prison because of his faith in Jesus. He even says, “Don't be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (v.13)” He loved Jesus that much.

2

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,

He says, “the administration of God's grace that was given to me”, which is to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation by Christ. And he says this administration is “for you”.

Paul was not a person like this before. But by God's grace, he was changed like this, and started to live like this.

What kind of person was he before?

Acts 9:1-2

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues

in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

The “Saul” here is Paul. As it says, “Saul was ‘still’ breathing out murderous threats”, we can see that he ‘had been’ and he ‘was still’ breathing out murderous threats against Jesus’ disciples.

Why had he been doing like this? And why was he determined to be like this continuously? Had he been bullied by Jesus’ disciples terribly? Or had he been taken advantage of by them? Was he taking revenge on the disciples for the wrong they’d done to him? Or was he revenging his father? No, it wasn’t like that.

Paul thought that Jesus and his disciples were blaspheming against God, and that he had to punish them mercilessly.

Was Paul being mind-controlled and used by a cult group to do so? No, he had a cool and clear mind. He studied the Bible very well. And as a result of his study, he concluded like that. Then, is it because he was good in study, but he had problem with his behavior? No, he lived blameless life. He kept the law very well (cf. Phi. 3:4-6). He was such a great man that the leaders in those days trusted him and gave him authority. He believed that by persecuting and killing Jesus’ disciples, he was offering a service to God (cf. John 16:2).

But the great turning point was about to come to Paul.

Acts 9:3-5

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

To persecute Jesus’ disciples is to persecute Jesus himself. Jesus, whom Paul was persecuting, spoke to him. And Paul became blind. And through Ananias, his sight was restored and he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 9:18-21

¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. ²⁰ Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those

who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

Until just several days before, he was saying, "Jesus and his disciples are blaspheming against God, we must destroy them." And he was eager to find, catch and even kill Jesus' disciples. Then, suddenly, he was totally changed. Now he is proclaiming, "Jesus is God. He is Savior." And how he became like this is truly by the gift of God's grace.

He used to threaten Jesus' disciples. He tried to bind them and put them into prison and even kill them (Acts 8:3). In fact, he was there, when Stephen was killed (Acts 7:58). And he was giving approval to his death (Acts 8:1). But even he was forgiven. And not only that, he was accepted as one who serves Jesus and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but God even revealed the mystery of Christ to him (vv.3-6).

This is only by His grace, and cannot be by anything else. And now he is preaching this grace.

A servant of the gospel. It's the same for us. Grace makes everyone a person who serves for the gospel.

2. By Revelation

3

³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.

Revelation is made known by God. God reveals it. As for things of God, unless God himself reveals, we cannot understand.

Paul received the best education in those days. Under Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, he was thoroughly trained in the law (Acts 5:34; 22:3). And he concluded that Jesus was not God, and that those who believed in Jesus were blaspheming God. He didn't just blindly believe someone else's words. He himself studies the Old Testament diligently and came to that conclusion.

But by revelation, he came to know that Jesus is God and Savior.

When Paul received the revelation, a light from heaven flashed around him, he heard a voice and became blind. But it doesn't mean when you receive revelation, those phenomena must always follow. Paul happened to receive the revelation like this. So no one can say, without the phenomena, it cannot be revelation nor because of the phenomena it must be revelation.

The point is that God himself reveals himself, God speaks. That is revelation. God reveals himself by his Word. When God created heavens and earth, He created everything by His Word. God also works to us by His Word. He reveals his thoughts and He reveals Himself.

Jesus asked Paul, "Why do you persecute me?" Through this word, He came near to Paul. And Paul didn't ignore that word, nor rejected it. He also didn't defend what he did by using his knowledge of the OT. But, "Who are you, Lord?" he asked.

He opened his heart toward the word, and asked "who are you?" Then, Jesus revealed himself, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Jesus himself revealed himself. It is not because a light flashed from heaven that Paul came to know Jesus. Nor did he come to know Jesus, because he became blind.

"Why do you persecute me?" When he heard this, Paul was shocked, "Am I persecuting you? Am I opposing you? Who are you, who says I am persecuting you? Who am I opposing? Who are you? I want to know you!" When he responded to the voice, he opened him to the word. Then Jesus revealed himself, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Paul realized that this is the one whom he calls God and his Lord who has authority over all areas of his life.

This is not just about Paul's personal experience. Each one of us used to persecute Jesus. Of course, most of us have never used violence against Christians, nor bind them nor put them into prison. But, have we ever attacked Christian by saying, "you can't change the situation by Jesus nor faith."? Have you ever discouraged someone, when the person was determined to go forward by faith? Have you ever said anything to make him doubt or compromise? "Here is something more fun and worthwhile than church and worship. God is everywhere, so you don't have to go to church. Also you can worship Him anytime, it doesn't have to be on Sundays." By saying something like this, have you ever hindered someone from having fellowship with Jesus? This is basically the same as Paul's persecuting Jesus' disciples.

We used to misunderstand God's thoughts, and were actually opposing

Him. That's what we did. But Jesus had been, will be and is still now talking to us "Why do you persecute me?" Jesus takes the initiative to draw near to us, and tries to reveal himself.

When we become aware of Jesus, and respond to his word, "Who are you, Lord?", Jesus will reveal himself, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" and will speak to us "Come back to me. I've done everything for you."

3. By God's power

We've been studying the theme "A Servant of the Gospel" today. First of all, grace makes us a person who serves God. Secondly, God reveals himself to us. Through responding His word, we come to know God. When we encounter God, we become someone who serves God.

And thirdly, by God's power, we will become servants of the gospel.

We heard about Jesus, and understood Jesus is our Savior, God and Lord. But that doesn't erase the fact that we've been opposing Jesus. Our sins cannot be changed by having knowledge about God. And our sins cannot be canceled by our human effort. No matter how much we serve Jesus with all our might and with all our soul, sin still remains. And in many cases, it continues to accuse us through our memories. So are we supposed to serve God, while we keep feeling guilty toward our past mistakes and sins? Are we serving God in order to erase the guilt?

7

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

Paul was made a servant of this gospel through the working of God's power. What is that power of God?

1 Cor. 1:18

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The power of God. That is in the message of the cross. The power is

revealed through the cross of Jesus, through the fact that Jesus died on the cross and he rose from the death. This message of the cross is the power of God.

Then, what kind of power does it have actually?

Rom. 5:8-9

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Here God's message, His Will is clearly shown through the cross. There is the power of God's love in the cross. Jesus even loved and accepted sinners as they were. And His love works within those who believe in Him, and has power to transform them into peace makers who even love their enemies, persecutors and destroyers. And that power is now working in us who believe in Jesus.

Rom. 5:10-11

¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

The cross has the power for reconciliation. Jesus doesn't abandon nor forsake even those who oppose him. He will open the way of reconciliation for even for his enemy to come back to God. That's amazing! But this is not the end. He will also give us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Cor. 5:18-20

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Think about it. Paul used to be a persecutor. He used to catch Christians and try to kill them. But now he was transformed to be a messenger of

reconciliation for God. Moreover, Christians in those days accepted him into their fellowship as their brother. They listened to his teaching. They even received his correction for their immature faith. It's amazing! The cross has power to do that.

Rom. 4:25

²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

The cross and resurrection have the power for justification. We used to oppose God, bound by sin, following the ways of this world, heading toward eternal destruction. But on the cross Jesus received God's wrath and judgment which we deserve. And the cross has the power to justify before God those who believe in Jesus. Even the persecutors against Jesus can be justified. If so, then there is no sinner who cannot be justified by the cross.

What kind of power does the cross have? The power of the cross can transform the persecutors into those who love, the destroyers into messengers of reconciliation, and those who oppose God into the righteousness of God. And the cross has power for hearing damaged emotions, power for reconciling broken relationships, and power for bringing peace into the sinful corrupted world. Paul's life demonstrates this power. Paul was transformed into a servant of the gospel through the working of God's power. And he lived serving the gospel, telling the church "The gospel has this power. You have it."

4. With the cost

12-13

¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Paul, who used to be a persecutor against Jesus, says this. He is saying, "By God's grace and his revelation, through the working of God's power, I became a servant of Jesus. I was transformed to be a person who worship Jesus with all I am, and proclaim this gospel of Jesus at the risk of my life. I have freedom and

confidence to draw near to Jesus without any guilty conscience. That is how I am accepted by him. And Jesus will do the same for you. It doesn't matter if you are Jew or Gentile, a free man or slave." He wants to share this truth with church even if his life has to be used up for this. He wants church to know it, and receive it.

Paul is imprisoned because of the gospel. He is in the middle of hardship. There is no one who is happy to be imprisoned. Usually people feel ashamed of it. But he says, "The hardship we receive because of Jesus is glory. Even if we have to go through hardship, the gospel is worth proclaiming."

In fact, Paul is right now paying the cost of hardship to share the gospel, and writing to the church. He wants the church to know this gospel, he not only wants them to understand in their head, but he also wants them to live by the gospel. He wants them to experience how powerful the gospel is. The church is receiving this letter. And Paul is paying the cost for them to receive it. This is nothing but glory. "I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored. (NLT)"

Have you ever thought about this? The gospel was proclaimed to churches and reached us because of the cost of so many lives of God's saints. For me to hear the gospel, how many Christians who went before me had to face hardships to remain in faith and paid the cost to share this gospel with others in the last 2000 years.

The gospel is at the cost of Jesus' life. And in order to reach the gospel to us, the cost of so many lives of God's saints were paid. We received such a precious gift. Do we treat it as such a precious gift? Are we faithful for the gospel? We must be a servants of the gospel.

1) Be filled with the grace of the gospel. We can meet Jesus daily through the Word. Take time for him, for He is worthy to spend time with. Wait until He speaks. We can experience Him. And share our experiences of His grace with others.

2) Receive the power of the cross; the power that transforms us into a person who loves, and fulfills our call, the power that grows us into His holiness. Without this power, we cannot go through the hardship, we cannot stand on our own. And because we are in the hardship, all the more we know how real and mighty God's power is.

3) Live by the gospel. Being supported by God's power, we can fulfill our

all, a life of servant of the gospel, the life for glory.

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection:

1) How does Paul' life show the grace of God? And what changes can you see in Paul's belief or perspective? How did the changes affect his life?

2) Do you have any experience where God revealed himself to you, or God spoke to you? What was the experience? What was your first reaction/response? How did it affect your life?

3) Through Paul' life, what can you learn about the power of the gospel? How did the power work in his life? What was the key to release the power through him?

4) Can you recognize that the power of the gospel is working in and through you? What may hinder the power from being active? What is our responsibility in order to keep the power being active?