

“When Wickedness Backfires”  
Ephesians 3:13  
(Preached at Trinity, August 24, 2014)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we’ve seen, **Chapter 3** begins with prayer but Paul immediately digresses to remind his readers of his calling to evangelize the Gentile world. In **Verses 3-6** Paul shares specifically about this calling. It was a particular stewardship that he refers to as “the mystery” which he had received by Divine revelation.  
**Verse 3** - " that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery"
2. The great mystery that had been hidden was that Jesus Christ would be a Light to the Gentiles. The mystery that had been kept secret from the beginning of the world was that true Israel would include even the Gentiles.  
**Ephesians 3:6 NAU** - "*to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel"
3. Paul is saying that God has raised him up to preach the unsearchable, the unknowable, the glorious riches of Christ to the Gentiles—that which from the beginning of the world has been left hidden in the infinite mind of God but now revealed in the Gospel.
4. In **Verses 10-11** Paul declares that it is all according to God’s grand design. It is the duty of the church to declare what Paul refers to as the “manifold wisdom of God.”
5. All of God’s purposes are being fulfilled in Christ.  
**Ephesians 3:11 NAU** - "*This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord"
6. Then in **Verse 12** Paul states the wonderful truth that all of our confidence finds its foundation in Jesus Christ. In Christ we can have great confidence in our right standing before God. Through Jesus Christ we can have “boldness and confident access” before God’s throne of grace.  
**Ephesians 3:12 NAU** - "in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him."
7. Then Paul concludes his digression in **Verse 13** – “Therefore” . . .  
What does Paul mean by this concluding thought?  
**Ephesians 3:13 NAU** - "Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory."
  - A. Remember Paul’s purpose in this digression. He is in prison. Not only is he suffering the trials of his incarceration, he is barred from being able to come to them and he is barred from further work in the Gospel of Christ—or so it would seem.

- B. Paul reminds them first of all, that he wasn't really a prisoner of Rome. He was the prisoner of Christ. It was all for Christ and for His glory.  
Paul had been entrusted with a stewardship. He had received the revelation of the mystery of Christ. The mystery kept hidden for all ages but now revealed—that in Christ both Jews and Gentiles are united together into one body, the Church.
- C. Paul was in prison because of his faithfulness in preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. It is likely the Gentiles at Ephesus were greatly discouraged because of the circumstances that had led to Paul's arrest and imprisonment.
8. This is precisely what Satan had in mind. Paul had been frequently imprisoned and he understood clearly his enemy. He describes him clearly in **Chapter 6 Ephesians 6:10-12 NAU** - "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*."
9. Paul was frequently at war with this diabolical enemy.
- A. Satan continually hindered his labors  
**1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 NAU** - "But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while-- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. <sup>18</sup> For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan hindered us."
- B. Paul knew that his continual battles with false apostles and teachers was actually a battle against Satan  
**2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NAU** - " For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."
10. We don't know all the ways Satan rises up to hinder and discourage us. We know he is limited in his efforts to deceive the nations in their assault upon the Kingdom of God.  
**Revelation 20:1-3 NAU** - "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup> And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; <sup>3</sup> and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time."
11. There are countless ways he rises up to hinder and discourage us.
- A. We are told to be on guard.  
**1 Peter 5:8-9 NAU** - "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."
- B. We are told to bear the whole armor of God that we might be protected against his many schemes.  
**Ephesians 6:11 NAU** - "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil."

- C. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were not ignorant of the schemes of the devil implying that Satan's devices are not unknown to us.  
**2 Corinthians 2:11 NAU** - "so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes."
12. We do know this. Satan will not be successful in his schemes.  
 Paul is telling his Ephesian readers, don't be alarmed nor discouraged over his imprisonment. It has all been for their good. Satan's diabolical plans will not prosper. He told the Church of Rome.  
**Romans 16:20 NAU** - "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."
13. From the beginning Satan has sought to destroy the work of God.  
 When Satan rebelled against God he was cast down to the earth. The earth is his domain. We read about him in the book of Job.  
**Job 1:7 NAU** - "The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it."
14. As soon as man was placed upon the earth Satan has sought to turn his heart from God. We first saw this in the Garden of Eden as he called God's Word into question with Eve.  
**Genesis 3:1 NAU** - "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden '?"
- I. What I want us to see clearly this morning is that every wicked scheme has backfired and has turned out for the glory of God.
- A. Satan's diabolical plan in the Garden backfired. The very woman Satan sought to destroy by his temptation would be the very source of the seed that would destroy him.  
**Genesis 3:15 NAS** - "I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."
- B. God has maintained a Godly remnant who would praise and worship Him. Satan has always sought to destroy them.  
 Cain rose up and killed righteous Abel but Adam & Eve had righteous Seth.
- C. Satan tempted God's righteous seed and they intermarried with the wicked resulting in great wickedness upon the earth. Satan thought he was victorious. But not so fast! God shed his grace upon one man and his family.  
**Genesis 6:1-2 NAS** - "Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.  
**Genesis 6:5-8 NAS** – "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD."
- D. Satan has always labored to discourage and hinder God's people.

How Joseph must have been discouraged as he languished in the dungeon in Egypt.

1. Joseph interpreted the dream of Pharaoh's cupbearer and then pleaded:  
**Genesis 40:14-15 NAS** - "Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. <sup>15</sup> "For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."
  2. The cupbearer forgot Joseph:  
**Genesis 40:23 NAS** - "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."
  3. Satan must have rejoiced in laughter but God's purposes were not to be undone. Joseph would later tell his brothers:  
**Genesis 50:20 NAU** - "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."
- E. Job had always served God faithfully, praising and worshipping Him continually. He raised his children in holiness and prayed for them continually. God was most pleased and Satan was most displeased. The Greek word for the name Satan is Σατανᾶς which means "adversary." The Greek word for "Devil" is διάβολος which means "accuser" or "slanderer"
1. Job lived righteously and Satan continually slandered him.  
**Job 1:8-11 NAU** - "The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." <sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? <sup>10</sup> "Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup> "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face."
  2. Satan indeed took away everything Job had but God received all the glory as Job continued faithfully as the servant of God.  
**Job 13:15 NAS** - "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him."
  3. In the end God would reverse all of Satan's wicked scheme.  
**Job 42:10 NAS** - "And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold."  
**Job 42:12 NAS** - "And the LORD blessed the latter *days* of Job more than his beginning"
- E. Satan's chief agent for persecuting the new converts to Christianity was Saul of Tarsus. Little did he know that this man was none other than the Apostle Paul that Christ would call even while in the midst of his wicked work. Once again, Satan's wicked scheme backfired.
- F. Satan's greatest blunder in his effort to destroy the work of God was his assault upon Christ.

1. Satan knew clearly who Jesus was but he didn't understand clearly the nature of His incarnation.  
The demons declared their knowledge of His identity.  
**Mark 1:23-24 NAS** - "And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, <sup>24</sup> saying, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!"  
**Matthew 8:28-29 NAS** - "And when He had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs; *they were* so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road. <sup>29</sup> And behold, they cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"
2. Satan feared Christ and tried every scheme to destroy Him.
  - a. We can see it in the plot of Herod to kill Christ as a child.  
**Matthew 2:16 NAS** - "Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi."
  - b. We can see it in the wilderness temptation as Satan desperately sought to get Jesus to follow him.  
**Matthew 4:8-9 NAS** - "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; <sup>9</sup> and he said to Him, "All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me."
  - c. We can see it even in Satan using our Lord's own disciples to discourage Him.  
**Mark 8:33** – "But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."
  - d. Satan was behind the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot.  
**Luke 22:3-4 NAS** - "And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. <sup>4</sup> And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them."
3. Satan saw the crucifixion of Christ as his greatest victory. He had actually destroyed the Holy One of God. He had won! You can imagine the diabolical shrieks of the demons as they celebrated around the cross.
4. Satan had no idea that his greatest wicked scheme would be his ultimate undoing. The cross was the fulfillment of **Genesis 3:15**. Satan has received a crushing blow. He is defeated. His doom is sure.  
**Revelation 20:10 NAS** - "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

II. So consider our text this morning

**Ephesians 3:13 NAU** - "Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory."

A. Surely Satan was behind the imprisonment of Paul

1. Surely Satan thought he had won. Paul was God's greatest instrument in the advancement of the first century church.
2. Not only would the advancement of the church end, the disciples would be discouraged and defeated at the sight of their beloved leader in jail.

B. Paul is saying, "Don't be discouraged! In fact, be encouraged!"  
"You can glory in my imprisonment."

1. First of all, it was because of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles that he was imprisoned.

a. They were the fruit of his ministry.

**Ephesians 3:1 NAU** - "I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles"

b. Paul looked upon his converts as the source of his greatest joy and his reward.

**Philippians 4:1 NAU** - "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

2. Second of all, what Satan would have seen as his victory was actually another great defeat. Instead of Paul's imprisonment ending the spread of the Gospel it actually served to advance it.

Because of his imprisonment Paul was able to share the Gospel with the prison guard that would then advance the Gospel throughout Rome.

**Philippians 1:12-13 NAU** - "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that my imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else"

3. Instead of Paul's imprisonment serving to discourage the brethren it actually served to encourage them in their own suffering.

**Philippians 1:13-14 NAU** - "so that my imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, <sup>14</sup> and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear."

Conclusion:

1. Evil will not prevail upon this earth. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church.
2. What is it that discourages you?
  - A. Are you discouraged by physical weakness or sickness? Do you not know that God is using this for your greater good as He is conforming you to Christ? Is this not a great opportunity for you to glorify God? Rejoice!
  - B. Are you discouraged by your continued struggle with sin and the power of your own flesh? Do we not serve a powerful King and are we not filled with the powerful Spirit?  
**Romans 7:24-25 NAU** - "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! "
  - C. Are you discouraged by wicked men who are continually attacking you because of your commitment to Christ?  
**Matthew 5:11-12 NAU** - "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. <sup>12</sup> "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
  - D. Are you discouraged because our church remains small. Don't forget whose church it is.  
**Matthew 16:18 NAU** - "upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."
3. Be encouraged. God is working all things for His glory. He is working all things for your good. They are your glory. You can glory in them.  
**2 Corinthians 12:10 NAU** - "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."
4. We are already victors in Christ.  
**1 John 5:4-5 NAU** - "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"