

We continue to look at Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus and we learn from chapter three of God's undeserved favour. Paul has expressed his wonder at God's grace which brought him to Jesus Christ, and called him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, and now in verses 7 and 8 of chapter three, we come to what may be for Paul, the greatest example of God's grace of all: *I was made a servant of the gospel by God's special gift, which he gave me through the working of his power. I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ.* What is it that makes the privilege of teaching others about Christ such a moving example of God's favour to us? Let's consider this question as we look at Paul's ministry.

First - The Messenger: Paul can't get over the fact that this Good News was entrusted to the least of all God's people (v8). None of us are worthy or deserves to be entrusted with God's work. That we are saved at all is grace beyond all deserving so for God to allow us to serve Him, is grace beyond all comprehension. Yet, God has entrusted the most important assignments to people who are weak, selfish and sinful. Paul was acutely aware of his unworthiness for such a calling, and because of his background as a persecutor of Christians, he considers himself to be *the least of all God's people*. Unless we have lived perfect lives before God's and have never sinned, we should feel as unworthy as Paul.

Therefore, like Paul, we should marvel at the fact that God gave us, the least of all the saints, grace to share His Gospel. And whether we share God's word in the church or in our community, which is always more powerful; we've been entrusted by God to be Christ's witnesses in our world. Unless we can marvel at this as Paul did, we're unlikely to understand this grace.

The second aspect we should consider is ***The Market: Who was Paul taking the Gospel to? The grace that Paul was given was taken to the Gentiles, this grace is the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ (v9).*** We have to put ourselves inside Paul's Jewish mind to understand what this would have meant to him.

The Gentiles were people who were considered unclean and being outside the Hebrew Law; they were rejected and excluded from Israelite society. Although the Jews had made themselves undeserving of God's grace by rejecting the Messiah, salvation was still open to them because they were the Chosen People.

Paul was a member of God's chosen people, in fact he was a Pharisee and he had made himself utterly undeserving, by persecuting the early Church, yet Christ had saved him. Paul was in a special position to appreciate the wonder of the Gospel being made available to the Gentiles, who were people with no reason to expect God's goodness. The good news of the Gospel is that there is no one who is undeserving. This Gospel brings love for the unlovable and mercy for the inexcusable. So Paul remembers the former exclusion of his audience, not to put them down but because their lack of status brings into sharp focus the grace of God. No wonder he says: *I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles, the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ.*

The third point is The Message: *The message of the Gospel itself is of the infinite riches of Christ.* Think on these biblical passages: (get people to look up the passages) *For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. (John. 3:16). For sin pays its wage; death: But God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23). For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it. God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do. (Eph 2: 8 to10).*

It's clear that God sent His Son to die in our place for our sins, and God offers forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life as a free gift to be received simply by faith. If we accept Christ as Lord then God will accept us. And we don't have to earn God's acceptance; we don't have to deserve it and we can never be good enough. We just have to receive God's grace! This has got to be the best News ever; *I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ.*

The fourth aspect Paul considered was The Method: *How do we convey the Gospel message?* Paul didn't preach in the way we understand it. This was not the stuffy and self-righteous denunciation of the sins of others while safely ignoring our own sin. Paul's form of preaching wasn't overly long or boring, it wasn't full of clever words learned in theological colleges. Paul's form of preaching was simple evangelism; it was proclaiming Christ' good news, which is so wonderful that it's too good to keep to ourselves! In sharing this Good News; we get to proclaim freedom from condemnation, forgiveness, deliverance and eternal life. And we do this by simply telling people our story of what God has done in our lives, or by demonstrating God's love through our actions As St Francis of Assisi said: Preach the Gospel; use words if necessary. What a privilege we have: ***I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ.***

Fifth, The Might: Where do we find the might, strength and ability to share this Good News? It's through; *The working of His power (v7).* To have responsibility without ability is the definition of frustration. And to try to proclaim the Gospel in our own strength and wisdom is indeed to embody that definition! But this responsibility becomes a great gift and privilege when God works through us. Then we can say: *I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ.*

The last consideration for Paul was serving his Master: This is the greatest consideration of all, as we think of why the privilege of preaching the Gospel, is such a great gift. God doesn't sit with his feet up and send us out to do His work. He calls us to work alongside Himself, and in the Great Commission Jesus promised: ***I will be with you always; even to the end of time.*** Can we understand this amazing privilege? We are invited to partner with Christ in taking His message out to people in our time and space. Jesus is entrusting each one of us with this work! Jesus is giving us exactly the same task as He gave the first disciples, and He promises to go with us. This is the same Jesus who said *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?* and who said: *Come unto me all you that labour, and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest,* and He promised us: *And I will never leave you nor forsake you.*

And these weren't just words, Jesus backed up what He said with his death; and then His Father backed it up with the Resurrection. Who wouldn't die for the privilege of serving such a master or worshipping such a God? If we can sense the amazing and powerful privilege that having God invite you to work with Him, then you will know what it means to say: *I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ.*

In conclusion: When we consider the *Messenger, the Market, the Message, the Method, the Might and the Master* involved in this service, then surely we have to conclude that this is the height of grace. Given that Paul considered himself *less than the least of all God's people*, we have little excuse for not serving God by taking the Good News of Christ's infinite riches and grace to all people. If we have faith in Jesus and can share just one story about what Christ has done in our lives, then we are equipped as Messengers.

We don't have the excuse that we don't know who to share our story with because there are millions of people who don't know Jesus, our Market is vast! We don't have to start with strangers as Paul did, start by telling a friend or family member the difference that Christ has made in your life. Our Message is to simply tell someone what your faith in Christ means to you.

With regard to the Method, we can all speak plain English and remember that we don't have to use words at all. If someone knows you are a Christian and you show them respect or kindness, your actions will speak much more powerfully than words can ever do. And if you find the prospect of sharing your faith scary in that there's the risk you may be ridiculed; remember that we don't rely on our own strength and we don't work alone. Our Might is from God through the Holy Spirit. Paul acknowledged that all he achieved was through *the working of His power.*

And finally, we share the Good News of Christ because our Master has commanded us to do so. Christ commands His disciples both then and now, to: *Go to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,*

and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.

I have said that we need to consider building Christ's church in this place soon. This is why we are here, to represent Christ in this church and community. But in the meanwhile, in case you should think of evangelism as something that's for others, remember and hold onto Paul's words from Ephesians, chapter 3: *I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ.* And may God go with us all. ***Amen.***

(1879 words)