

Ephesians

Ephesians 1:13 - The word of truth

In **verse 12**, Paul tells us why God the Father chose us “before the creation of the world” (verse 4). It was “in order that...we might be for the praise of his glory,” or, as Paul phrased it in verse 6, “to the praise of his glorious grace.”

So God chose us to make real to us the wonder of his grace. And Paul could speak eloquently about that, having experienced the wonder of God’s grace in his own life. In two very real ways too: first, in God’s “unlimited patience” and “mercy” toward him when Paul, in his “ignorance and unbelief,” was “a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent man” (1 Timothy 1:13); and secondly, in the power he received when “he despaired even of life” (2 Corinthians 1:8) and his own weaknesses were “tormenting” him (2 Corinthians 12:7).

In Paul’s own life, then, his eyes were opened to the two wonders of God’s grace - forgiveness and power - which together enabled Paul to experience a triumphant life, knowing that nothing would destroy God’s love for him, and whenever he was in desperate need God’s power would see him through.

But it wasn’t just for Paul’s sake that he woke up to God’s grace, because Jesus had a job for him, and that was to “open other people’s eyes and wake them up so they turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God as well,” **Acts 26:18**. So what did Paul do to make that happen? Well, that’s what we’re about to find out in **Ephesians 1:13**.

To get an idea what he was up against, Paul was dealing with people who, according to Jesus in Acts 26, were living in “darkness.” The Greek word for “darkness” in that verse is *scotous* (scot-oss). It has its roots in the word *skia* meaning a “shadow,” the same word Paul used in **Colossians 2:17** when referring to all those religious festivals and the Sabbath day in the Old Testament as “a **shadow** (skia) of things to come.” And shadows are just that, they’re shadows. They give hints of a reality, but that’s all. And that was the world the Israelites lived in. They were stuck “in the dark,” never knowing what reality all their festivals and sabbath days were picturing.

But that was the world of the Gentiles too, because as Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 4:4**, “The god of this age has blinded their minds so they (too) cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”

Both Jews and Gentiles, then, were totally in the dark, or stuck with only shadows, when it came to the reality of what God was up to. It seemed like an impossible task that Paul had been given, therefore, but here we find him in **Ephesians 1:13** telling Gentiles that **“you also were included in Christ.”** So the impossible had happened. Even totally blinded Gentiles could now see that **“reality is found in Christ,”** as Paul phrased it back in Colossians 2:17. And that was the reality all those shadows in the Old Testament were pointing the Jews to as well.

So what was it that lifted Jews and Gentiles out of their world of shadows and blindness into the brightly shining world of reality? Well again, that’s what we find out in Ephesians 1:13. It’s because they **“heard the word of truth.”** “Truth” in Greek here is *alētheiah* (ar-laith-ee-ah) meaning “corresponding to reality.” Our modern definition of truth is the same; it’s “in accordance with fact or reality.” So it was **factual reality** that woke them up.

But factual reality about what? According to Paul, continuing in **verse 13**, it was **“the gospel of your salvation.”** Which in English may not have much impact, but Paul chose words in that simple sentence that would strike a powerful chord.

For **“gospel,”** for instance, he used the word *euangelion* (you-ang-ellion), which would come across like a cannon blast, because it meant the announcement of a military victory. Back then, if the Romans had scored a great victory on the battlefield, town criers would appear in the public squares yelling out the great news, the *euangelion*, that a battle had been won.

The word for “gospel,” therefore, carried with it this vivid picture of a triumphant victory over an enemy. So, when “Jesus went into Galilee” in **Mark 1:14** “proclaiming the good news of God,” he was being a town crier publicly announcing a great military victory too, that the kingdom of God had begun, guaranteeing the defeat of all enemies. Which is why Jesus added, “You’d better repent, then,” or “get on side,” because God’s kingdom was now taking over. No more shadows; the time had come to see the reality of what all those hints and predictions in the Old Testament pictured.

Which is why Paul at the very start of his ministry immediately set about **“proving that Jesus is the Christ,” Acts 9:22.** But why was that his top priority? Because as soon as the Jews heard the word “Christ” that was a cannon blast for them too, because “Christ” meant the “Anointed One,” and that was the term used for all their **Israelite kings.** So in calling Jesus the Anointed One, it opened their Jewish eyes to Jesus being their king.

But it went one huge step further, because for a Jew it also tied in with “the Anointed One, the ruler” in **Daniel 9:25**, who in **Daniel 7:14** would rule the entire world forever. Put that together with the word “gospel,” meaning the great news of a military victory, and we now have Paul like a town crier publicly announcing that Jesus was that great world ruler predicted in the Old Testament, whose “kingdom would never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).

And that would ring a loud bell in the ears of both Jews and Gentiles, because military victories over their enemies were cause for great celebration. Maybe it was pushing back a powerful enemy threatening invasion, or rescuing soldiers taken captive, or expanding their national borders by gained territory - it was all great news because for them **victory was crucial** for the growth and protection of the Empire. That was life for them. So when Paul popped round announcing the good news of Jesus being a powerful king setting up a mighty kingdom that no enemy could destroy, it meant a great deal in their terms. It opened their eyes to the reality of a world already in existence on the planet that was way more powerful than the one they were living in.

Which explains why, back in **Ephesians 1:13**, Paul called the word of truth the “gospel of your **salvation**.” Because the constant reality of their lives was the existence of enemies they needed saving from. It must have been very encouraging, then, to hear Paul use the Greek word *sōtērias* (so-tay-ree-us) for “salvation,” because it meant “**deliverance from enemies**.” But it also meant deliverance from THE enemy, the god of this age who had blinded them from ever seeing the amazing “gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4) - the “**glory of Christ**” being his decisive victory over Satan, already accomplished. It’s why Jesus came here, as John explains in **1 John 3:8**, that “The reason the Son of God appeared was to **destroy the devil’s work**.”

And because of that victory over the devil the doors to the kingdom of God had been flung open, so that Jews and Gentiles could enter in and experience the power of Christ’s kingdom instead. It was through that word of truth, the gospel of their salvation, therefore, that they’d been lifted out of their darkness and shadows into this brightly lit new world revealing what God had been up to in Christ - a world they could experience in its reality in their present lifetimes too.

So what clues have we got as to what this other world is like? Well, look what happened to the Colossians, for instance, who likewise in **Colossians 1:5-6** had “heard the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you,” and because of it they too got their eyes opened to “God’s grace in all its truth.” They too, then, had entered this world where God’s grace reigned supreme.

And what that did for them was experience “being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might” - “FOR,” **verse 13**, “he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom,” **verse 14**, “we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” And there you have God’s grace described in all its victorious, battle won reality again - **in the very personal experience of God’s forgiveness and power.**

And it begins with forgiveness, when it dawns on us for the first time just how easily we’ve been duped by the fiction that Satan embedded in our heads through the endless, nauseous stream of media and movies telling us that we have the power within ourselves to solve our problems. And even when faced every day on the news with our stumbling, never ending series of global crises without permanent solutions, it still wasn’t enough to wake us up to the reality of our helplessness. We lived in darkness, a world of shadows and tantalizing hints of a better world, and what life could be like on this planet, but that was all, never the reality. And so we stumbled on, none the wiser.

Which could be horribly depressing, not only realizing how blind and helpless we were, but also how powerless we are now to do anything about it. How can we in our tiny little world change this world for the better? “Oh well,” we say with a sigh, “just live as best we can, I suppose,” or decide to become an activist and loudly protest, or become a person of some influence, or do good work in the community. But millions of good people are doing that, and where is the world today? “Light has come into the world,” oh yes, **John 3:19**, but “**people still love darkness instead of light.**”

We too, then, are faced with the same challenge Paul faced. How on earth can people even want to be lifted out of the shadows when that’s all they’ve ever known and they don’t seek anything better?

Paul has an answer to that back in **2 Corinthians 4**, this time in **verse 2**, that “by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” So it’s still “the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation” that opens people’s eyes, but how do we put it in terms that gets through to people today?

Well, Paul gave us the clue to that too. In the same way that he personally experienced the two wonders of God’s grace that gave him great stories to tell of what that did to him, it’s now our turn to experience God’s grace in all its truth to give us real stories to tell of what that’s done to us. Because that’s God’s way of shedding light on his world and “commending it to people’s conscience,” it’s by setting forth the truth of his world of grace plainly in what happens to those who are living in it.