

## To the Saints at Kossuth Street . . . A Church is Faithful

Ephesians 3:1-7

January 9, 2011

**Intro.** For Kossuth Street Baptist Church, entering the New Year of 2011 means that we are close to completing 67 years of meeting at this location and active gospel ministry in this community and world. With that in mind it is certainly appropriate as the current, 2011 version of this community of faith to listen and reflect on God's word as he tells us what makes a church successful in his sight.

God's grace has rested on our church in some unusual ways over our history. In terms of global outreach, Christian Education, multiplication through church planting, student ministry, family ministry, leadership mobilization and compassionate care for each other in Jesus' name . . . we could easily spend days telling story after story of real time, life transforming grace. The impact of your/our (collective) faith over these years in lives around the world for the praise of God's glory can only be measured in eternity.

There is much to be thankful for and celebrate. This heritage that causes us to sing also should bring us to sobriety as we recognize the hand of God in our lives. We are a community of saved people with an assignment to be God's people . . . his church . . . in this community for his purposes and glory. As we seek to be faithful, responsible, obedient, dedicated and loyal to God as a church, what kind of church should we be? What would that look like today? What will it look like in the coming years? Has it changed much in the 67 years we have been at it?

To the informed observer, the most impressive fact to celebrate after 67 years is that our church signs would not need to change a great deal. By that I mean, on this picture of our first meeting building, the sign reads 'Bible believing' to describe the group of people that meet inside. With praise to God, I believe that would be a banner that fits and describes us today. God has protected KSBC by his grace to remain faithful to the authority and sufficiency of the Bible. So for several reasons, one of which is that it is a 67 year habit, we turn in our Bibles to Ephesians chapter 3 to hear and focus on the words of God regarding the sobering responsibility and outrageous opportunity we possess as a church family.

Read Ephesians 3

Note the Apostle's concern expressed in 3:13 that the readers not lose heart . . . the underlying concern being addressed in this chapter is that the churches reading this letter not become discouraged, distracted or grow weary in their assignment of being the people of God. Churches express weariness and discouragement in various ways.

The readers of the church of Ephesus were 'losing heart' because their spiritual leader and mentor was in prison for doing the very things that he was encouraging them to do in this letter. Acts 21 records the story of Paul being falsely accused, beaten, arrested and imprisoned for preaching a law free gospel in Jerusalem. Note Paul is quick to shape their thinking in 3:1 that he is a prisoner for Christ with benefit to others. It is wearisome to think that on your best day as a faithful member of God's family, you will face the reception, treatment and abuse that the Apostle did. Paul knew that these church members in Asia would be tempted to rewrite the charter just a little because being the church in any day and time is really hard.

It is relatively easy to lose heart when involved with teaching truth, defending truth, loving sinners, suffering, engaging in spiritual warfare, expressing bold faith and waiting on God in prayer . . . seemingly with fewer workers and less money than is necessary. What happens in many cases in churches like ours is that very subtly the primary question of 'how do we please God and remain faithful to him?' becomes an unaddressed assumption and replaced with some other compelling question or issue.

Mark Dever, a pastor and author in Washington D.C., advocates that too many churches and pastors have switched the primary question from 'How can we be faithful to God?' to 'How can we reach the world?' In doing so we see churches willing to define themselves by their methods and programs, their appeal to the unchurched through felt-needs and relationships or their immersion into culture to transform it in various ways. All of these emphases are fine in and of themselves but they do not represent the primary assignment of being the people of God for his glory.

Using the terms and themes of Ephesians (3:10, 13, 21; 1:6, 14), the primary question we must address and conform to is 'How do we as a church reflect the glory of God?' Put another way . . . How can we

bring to light who God is and what he is doing? How can we be faithful to God for the next 67 years?

The glory of KSBC is and must continue to be remaining faithful to the assignment God has given. The first 7 verses of Ephesians 3 teach us 2 core concepts that describe our assignment as God's people. These core concepts must be understood and embraced . . . especially in times where we are tempted to switch the primary question from faithfulness to measurable success, from God's pleasure to our satisfaction or from his glory to our innovation.

What does it mean to be faithful to God? How can we bring to light who God is and what he is doing?

**Core concept #1 Stewardship. Embrace God's way of doing things.**

Note the Apostle directs our attention to the concept of stewardship in both verses 2 and 9. It is translated 'plan' in verse 9 as well as in 1:10. It is a term that means the administration or arrangement of something. The NT uses the term to teach us the way to arrange, administrate or manage our life resources. We are to be good stewards. Here a stewardship is given by God to his church . . . this stewardship involves our responsibility to embrace the ways God is going to accomplish his work in our world in our day. As a church we must repeatedly embrace and define ourselves by two assignments:

1. We are stewards of grace. God's plan is to build his church by his grace. 3:2, 7, 8  
God's grace is described as powerful, measureless, free . . . we are assigned to distribute it.

- The transforming grace of salvation. 2:5, 7, 8
- The communicated grace of service. 3:7, 8 4:7, 11

Contrast with legalistic, man-centered, method driven, 3 steps to success, formulaic approaches. God alone saves and transforms lives. The times when we feel compelled to insert human resources to accomplish God's work . . . keep the focus on God's rich grace that we dispense in and through our lives and work.

2. We are stewards of the church. God's plan is to show his glory through his church. 3:9-10

The cutting edge of what God is doing in the world today is located in his church. Note v9-10 the plan of God is focused on the church and 3:21 summarizes with the request 'to him be glory in the church.'

Note terms of 2:15ff . . . one new man . . . in one body . . . fellow citizens, household members, holy temple . . . the church is being built by Christ.

Cmp 1 Timothy 3:14-16 note high view of protection and instructions of ch. 4:1ff

Contrast with individualistic, personal, unsubmitive approaches that place little or passing value on the authority or relevance of the local church. The church on the corner may not be everything it could be and may appear to slow down the more gifted or powerful among us, but it is the plan of God to bring glory to himself.

**Core concept #2 Mystery Embrace God's worldview objective.**

Note the multiple times Paul uses the term mystery to define what God is doing in our time – 3:3, 4, 6, 9. Mystery refers to something that is known only to those it has been revealed to. The mystery defines what our view of life and history should focus on . . . God's objective of bringing together a people for his name. Note how this mystery is described . . .

1. God's objective is found/understood only through revelation. 3-5

Contrast with surveys, opinion polls, need assessments, human wisdom

2. God's objective is described as the making of a new group of people in Christ. 6

- Heirs together. All that a person receives or will receive in salvation.  
No inner and outer; no primary and secondary
- Members together. A mystical union possessed by God's people  
One body . . . 1:22-23 . . . 2:16, 19-22 . . . 4:4
- Sharers together Partners in the promise of redemption in Christ  
Cmp. 2:12 promise = H.S.? 1:13; 2:16-18

Compare genuine evidences of conversion vs emphasis on numbers, conversions, methods

3. God's objective is accomplished through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the instrument by which God brings people to faith and incorporates them into Christ's body.

The gospel is that which ignites 'the working of his power.' V.7

Mystery . . . what God is doing is creating a double union of people with people and people with Christ through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Illus . . . ask the man on the street 'what is God doing in our world in our time?'

### **Take Aways**

1. Embrace God's way of doing things. Beware of the tendency to neglect grace and live independent from other believers.
2. Embrace God's worldview objective. Beware of minimizing all that God is doing in our world in our time through the transformation of lives by his gospel.
3. Identify and act on what is most discouraging to you about our church.

### **Study Questions**

1. Read Ephesians 3 as a group. Note observations of terms, themes or questions.
2. Review verse 13 together . . . what does the word 'so' indicate? What does 'lose heart' mean (cmp same term in Gal.6:9; 2Cor.4:1)? What was Paul suffering (Acts 21)? What is 'your glory?'
3. What causes you to become weary or discouraged at Kossuth Street? Why? Are there good/acceptable and bad/selfish answers to this? Is it ok to become discouraged because you pray hard, love well, serve faithfully, suffer patiently and preach clearly but there is seemingly no response or impact in people's lives? Why?
4. Review core concept #1. Share your thoughts, questions and application to embracing God's way of doing things by grace and through his church.
5. Review core concept #2. Share your thoughts, questions and application to embracing God's objective of creating a new people by his gospel.
6. Review the take aways for any sharing of application or ways you can encourage and pray for each other.
7. Pray together as a group for the glory of God to be shown in KSBC . . . pray in ways specific to your discussion and response to the scriptures.