

Intro: When you sign up for college classes they are usually described like this...

- 101: Intro to Psychology Freshman
- 200: Sophomore Little more in-depth
- 300: Junior level
- 400: Senior level

There is a progressive level of expectation, background, understanding and work required as you go further

This morning I am calling our passage and message: Discipleship 300 "An Introduction to Deeper Living"

Illus: Here is why I Call this 300 Level Discipleship Phil 3:10-11

- 100: Know Him
- 200: Power of His Resurrection
- 300: Fellowship of His Suffering
- 400: Like Him in His Death

Graduation: Attain to Resurrection: (Go to Heaven...Be Like Jesus!)

This is a 300 level sermon passage because in it Paul gives us some perspective on suffering. Look at it with me

Ephesians 3:1-13

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Read: Explain the Parenthesis

3 Life Lessons In 300 Level Discipleship

- God Sometimes works through you for the sake of others!
- God Doesn't always reveal Everything He is Doing to you!
- God Has an Eternal Purpose That is BIGGER Than You!

1. God Sometimes Works Through You For The Sake Of Others.

Ch 3:1-2

- Situation: Prisoner of Christ Jesus: Acts 27-28 Explain Prison (Rome Paul was kept)
- Reason: For the sake of YOU Gentiles! Paul writes He is in Prison FOR THEIR BENEFIT!!!
- Equation: To ME for You Paul says, God is using ME for your spiritual blessing!
For: *Lit* =(On behalf of, or For the Sake of)

You see, this is not Intro level spirituality...This is a level of Knowing and Being LIKE Jesus that we have to grow into!

Illus: We see this level of Spirituality on a regular basis when we look at the great men and women of faith in the OT

- Moses: 40 years in Desert, learning to live there...Preparing to lead the people through (40 YEARS!)
- Joseph: Sold into slavery by his brothers, Taken to Egypt...living as a slave there...Prepare for day he was needed!
- Mary: Single mom, pregnant, ostracized, looked down upon...Used by God to bring His Son into the world
- Jesus: 1Peter 3:18 "Jesus suffered once for sin, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God."

Lesson #1: God Sometimes Works Through You For The Sake Of Others!

2. God Doesn't Always Reveal Everything He Is Doing To You.

Ch 3:2-9

For some reason we seem to believe that God is obligated to share with us everything that He is doing...get our approval!

We struggle to understand when He says, "Trust Me" I'm doing something here that I will reveal to you at a later time."

The reality is though, God has done that over and over again in salvation history. Paul describes it here:

- Mystery: Lit = *Something not spoken, Secret, Not talked about (shut mouth)*
- made known by revelation Lit = *to disclose or reveal, to take the cover off*
- Not made known to men in other generations Lit = *This was not discussed, or revealed, or shown to*
- Revealed by Spirit Lit = *Some things are ONLY revealed by Spirit of God*
- Mystery Explained: (CHURCH) Through the Gospel Jesus is the Savior/Messiah, of ALL, Jew and Gentile
Gentiles are: Compound word: Paul is fond of it: Fellow...Heir, Body, Promise
>heirs together Everything they get... We Get
>members together of one body We are a part of the family
>sharers together in the promise We Share in every single promise

Illus: Now, that was a mystery that the Jewish nation NEVER understood! (THEY were God's chosen people...right?)

Col 1:25-27 The door of Heaven is open to EVERYONE...not Just the Jews!

There was a REASON they didn't see it!

It was HIDDEN FROM THEM! Vs 26

HOW COULD THEY MISS the Church? Prophets? PERSPECTIVE

APPLIC: God Doesn't Always Reveal Everything He is Doing to you...

Are there some things you don't understand today? That's OK...Keep Trusting

Sometimes in the middle of the trials...you have to TRUST Him!

That is 300 level Discipleship...Trusting in the middle of the Trials (Job, Though He Slay me!) Job 13:15

3. God Has An Eternal Purpose That Is Greater Than All Of Us.

Ch 3:10-13

The culture that we live in often times has more influence on us than what we think.

While we KNOW we should be formed by and oriented to what God tells us about life, we struggle with message around us Everything around us tells us that WE are most important in life...That WE must get what we want, desire, think is right Seldom if ever do we hear a message that says...Others are more important. Serve them, put them first, sacrifice for them

Yet...that is exactly how Jesus taught us to live:

First will be last, and the Last first. Want to Lead be servant of all Lay down life for others

This final Discipleship Lesson in our passage tells us that we are not the end all and be all of life.

God has an Eternal Purpose that is greater than we are...and our life fits into THAT perspective...not the other way around

- God's Intent vs 10 Lit = *God has a purpose and a plan...Not capricious, not haphazard, not off guard*
- God's wisdom made known Lit = *God's multifaceted wisdom made known to Spiritual Realm*
He is using us to reveal Himself, wisdom, grace, righteousness to all of heaven
Good and Bad Angels, Fallen and Righteous...All see His eternal grace and love
Poured out on our behalf...and Jesus Glorified and Exalted because of His work!
- God's Eternal purpose Lit = *Eternal Plan, The Purpose set forth from Eternity*
"The church becomes a mirror through which the bright ones of heaven (angels) behold the glory of God!"
In and through the work of Christ all of creation is redeemed and reconciled...God's purpose of bringing everything under His rule is worked out!

Illus: You see, there is a major theological implication here we have to come to terms with.

What is "This" all about? What is God doing?

Plan of the ages is NOT about us! We are a PART of what God is doing...but we are not the Center!

Anthropocentric: Centered Around Man

Theocentric: Centered Around God!

It is NOT about us...it is about Him! God is demonstrating His glory, and His grace, and His wisdom and His righteousness And He is doing that partially through His work through the Church in reconciling Gentiles to Himself, revealing His glory!

Phil 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Applic: Notice how Paul finishes: Don't be discouraged because of my sufferings...for you...which are your glory!

Don't worry...My prison is NOT about me...About You...and You...are about Bringing God Glory!

So...THAT is why we rejoice in sufferings! Because Through them God is doing something greater than us

We don't always See it...He doesn't always REVEAL it to us...But when we Trust Him all of Heaven and Hell sees!

Quote from Screwtape: "Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do (God's) will looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and STILL obeys."

CONCL:

3 Questions You Should be Asking Yourself Today

1. What is God doing THROUGH My Struggles? Who does He want to bless through me?
2. Am I Willing To Trust God Even When I Don't See or Understand What He is Doing?
3. How is the Eternal Purpose of God (To bring Reconciliation of the World and Glory to Jesus) being worked out in me?