

# **Ephesians 3:1-13 – God’s Great Mystery of Grace Revealed**

**1-3 The Mystery Revealed to Paul**

**4-6 The Mystery Revealed to the Church**

**7-9 The Ministry of the Mystery Through Paul**

**10-13 The Ministry of the Mystery Through the Church**

## **Introduction**

- Illustration: Unsolved Mysteries, TV show in the 80's & 90's, hosted by Robert Stack
- each episode, various unsolved crimes, unexplained events, dramatized re-enactments
- viewers encouraged, write or call with tips, occasionally some cases solved
- mostly true crime, missing persons, later years got more into weird, paranormal stuff
- there is something in us that is fascinated by the mysterious
- mystery fiction books consistently rank as one of the top bestselling genres
- Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie still popular
- mystery movies (Alfred Hitchcock), TV shows (police crime procedurals)
- why are we drawn to mysteries? have a curiosity of unknown, so much we don't know
- want to understand, make sense of things, put the pieces of the puzzle together
- science seeks to understand the mysteries of the created universe
- man made religion, philosophy seeks to understand the mysteries of God
- today see many conspiracy theories abounding, distrust of establishment
- people try to come up with ideas to bring order to apparent chaos around them
- have cacophony of voices, all claiming know the truth, solved the mystery
- Paul writing letter of Ephesians, dealing with similar environment his day
- Ephesus was a large port city in southwest Turkey, wealthy, very pagan
- Acts 19, Paul comes preaching first to Jews, then to gentiles, revival breaks out
- miracles performed, Jesus name glorified, people heard gospel & were saved
- repented occult, pagan practices, burned magic scrolls, worth total \$50,000 silver
- also known for Temple of Artemis, one of Seven Wonders of the Ancient World

- major part economy, craftsman sell idols to visitors, threatened by message of gospel
- Demetrius, silversmith organizes protest which becomes crazy, mob fueled riot
- this is the atmosphere and audience that Paul is writing to
- mostly gentile, many likely saved out of pagan and occult practices
- one aspect paganism at time, Mystery Religions, secret cults of pagan deities
- secretive & elaborate initiation, complicated rituals, about the experience, not truth
- knowing this would likely be in mind of Paul's readers, why he uses these terms
- uses mystery (Gr. *mysterion*) 3 times, also phrase 'make known' (Gr. *gnorizo*) 3 times
- as we'll study, the gospel of Christ isn't a mystery to be hidden but to be made known

### 1-3 The Mystery Revealed to Paul

*Ephesians 3:1-3 - For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles — assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.*

- Paul starts the chapter with a short testimonial of his ministry
- states he's a prisoner, he's writing this letter from prison in Rome (~62AD)
- prisoner of Christ, not Rome, knows he's there at the will of his Lord Jesus
- already had one miraculous prison break, also heard of Peter's escape
- not raging at circumstances, no 'if only I wasn't in here I could really serve God'
- trusting in God's plan & timing, knows Gospel isn't chained, serves where he is
- he's there for a reason, literally 'for this cause', what cause?
- broadly for gospel of Christ, specifically God's plan of salvation to the Gentiles
- studied last Sunday, once Gentiles (non-Jews), alienated, having no hope of God
- by grace through faith in blood of Jesus shed on cross, now brought near
- through his broken body he made peace, destroying the wall between Gentiles & God
- also the hostility and dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, creating a new man
- more, now part of the Family of God, being built into a new temple of God, the church
- once was alienation, hostility & division, Jesus brought peace, reconciliation & unity
- this was the heart of Jesus, as he prayed in John 17:20-23, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one,

just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

- Paul knew how important this mission was, willing to count the cost
- to be imprisoned, even give his life for the cause, like his Saviour Jesus
- making the point, not a trivial thing, not idle philosophy, there's a weight, gravitas
- what sacrifices were made for the sake of his readers, then & now
- not out of duty or, but out of love for Jesus & for those he died for
- Paul was entrusted with this mission as a steward, taking care of it for his Master
- not by anything he deserved or earned, only through God's grace (same for us)
- mystery was made known, God is a self-revealing God, makes himself known
- not for one special group, anyone who honestly seeks him will find him (Jer. 29:13)
- mystery made known to Paul by revelation from God
- he's not making it up, came from God, wouldn't be suffering, if his own invention
- we can seek, cannot come to understanding of mystery & truth of God on our own
- not in our own wisdom, knowledge, logic, intellect, we can read & hear & ask
- only way know spiritual truth God reveals it to us by his Holy Spirit (and he does)

#### **4-6 The Mystery Revealed to the Church**

*Ephesians 3:4-6 - When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

- God revealed the mystery of Christ to Paul by the Holy Spirit
- Paul then passes on the knowledge he received to the readers of this letter
- that by reading his words we would have the same insight that Paul had
- insight, 'synesis', flowing together, putting pieces together, come to understanding
- how awesome that God has revealed his mystery to us, it wasn't always this way,

- before Jesus came into the world, the mystery of Christ was still partially hidden
- there were glimpses of the picture of God's plan, not the full revelation
- when the time was full, Jesus came, splitting time & space, birth, death, resurrection
- forever changing the world, forever changing those who are saved by his grace
- *1 Peter 1:10-12 – ‘Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.’*
- by the Holy Spirit through Paul, other apostles & prophets
- God by his grace, revealed the good news of salvation through Jesus
- things not even revealed to angels (God will actually use us for this purpose)
- the revealed mystery is that there is salvation for the Gentiles (you & I)
- we're brought into God's family, once only for Jews, now all families can be blessed
- fellow heirs, share the same inheritance, adopted sons & daughters into God's kingdom
- members of same body, no longer strangers & aliens, united through Christ
- partakers of the promise, sharing in the salvation of Jesus the promised Messiah
- possible through the good news that Jesus died for our sins on the cross
- rose again from the grave, that we might have new & eternal life through him

## **7-9 The Ministry of the Mystery Through Paul**

*Ephesians 3:7-9 - Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,*

- Paul a minister (servant) by God's grace, only by the grace of God anyone ministers
- didn't give himself the ministry, only through God's supernatural work & empowering
- when we think of Paul's position in heroes of faith , probably rank him fairly high

- he doesn't claim this himself, humbly puts himself as least of saints
- Phil. 3, could boast in legalism, counts it rubbish, knowing Christ, sharing suffering
- he knew grace, former persecutor of church, redeemed by God to serve him
- serve by bringing good news of riches of Christ to the gentiles
- unsearchable riches, can't be traced or understood by human wisdom
- illuminate for everyone, shine the spotlight on God's plan of redemption through Jesus
- previously hidden, now revealed in the providence of our awesome creator God

## **10-13 The Ministry of the Mystery Through the Church**

*Ephesians 3:10-13 - so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.*

- Paul had his mission from God, his role to play in God's great drama of redemption
- to minister to the Gentiles & reveal the light of the gospel to everyone
- those who hear, who believe & receive the message, have heart & minds illuminated
- become part of this entity called the church, open to everyone regardless of background
- Paul does what he does for the sake of building up the church
- says the church by its very nature reveals the greatly varied wisdom of God
- working from before time, through all of human history to come to this point
- nobody could have imagined it, only an awesome, sovereign, loving creator God
- now God is putting his masterpiece, the church, on display for all to see
- revealed not just to the world, but to those in the heavenly realms
- God never revealed his plan to angels, they longed to look into it
- as a sign to Satan, the prince of the air & his fallen angels, that he is ultimately defeated
- all part of God's sovereign plan & purpose, now realized in Jesus
- because Jesus atoned for our sins by his shed blood, we're now justified before God
- Paul reminds us by faith in him we can now come, boldly & confidently before him
- and we have the hope that one day we'll be forever in his presence

*- Hebrews 4:14-16 - Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

- reminder of the incredible blessings & resources we have in Christ
- encourages the Ephesians (and us) to not look at circumstances & lose heart
- Paul was writing from prison, could look pretty bleak & hopeless, not God's plan
- just as we can look at circumstances now & feel things are pretty hopeless
- with all that's going on, where is God, how can this be a part of his plan
- God was fully in control of Paul's situation, he was where he was supposed to be
- Paul wasn't caged, he know he could come boldly before Jesus any time he wanted
- his being there was for the Ephesians (and our) glory, reflected from Jesus, to Paul to us
- you can almost imagine his letters, rays of light streaming out of that prison cell in Rome
- God is fully in control of the situation in the world & in our lives right now too
- he has the world's attention more than ever, now is our time to shine
- to share the hope & love of Jesus through light of the revealed mystery of the gospel
- remember key phrase from Ephesians 1, 'to the praise of His glory'
- all glory belongs to God, we just get to reflect a bit to the world
- finish by reading last part of 2 Corinthians 4, seems fitting companion passage

*2 Corinthians 4:5-18 - For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal*

*flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

2020-05-24

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