

Ephesians 3:2-12 “The Mystery of Christ” January 5-7, 2019
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Ephesians 3:2-12

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. ⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Introduction

Mystery – this word is used four times in eleven verses. A mystery is something that is kept secret or remains unexplained or unknown but may arouse curiosity – for example, how big is the universe? A mystery may be a novel, short story, play or film whose plot involves a crime or other event that remains puzzlingly unsettled until the very end – for example, a mystery of Agatha Christie. A mystery with many Minnesotans may be, if we complain so much about how cold it is here in the winter, why don’t we move to some place warmer? A mystery may be a truth that is unknowable except by revelation from God. Today it is this last definition that applies to the use of the world mystery in Ephesians 3. Let’s focus on the mystery mentioned there. It is **THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST.**

1) The Mystery

The “mystery of Christ.” Aren’t there a lot of them? For example, there’s the mystery of ...

- ... his life as the Son of God from all eternity,
- ... his role in creation,
- ... his being God and man in the person of Jesus,
- ... his being tempted but never sinning,
- ... being almighty and glorious God, yet becoming the humble servant Savior,
- ... having no guilt of his own, but suffering hell and death deserved by us sinners,
- ... being God and yet dying,
- ... his coming to life, descending into hell, and then his resurrection appearances,
- ... his holiness and forgiveness becoming ours through faith in him,
- ... what Jesus looks like in glory,
- ... the timing of his return in glory.

Couldn’t we list even more?

But Paul nails what he means with “the mystery of Christ” in v 6: “⁶ **This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.**” Paul’s point to the Ephesians: “You Gentiles (non-Jews) have the same privilege of being in the family of God and the body of Christ as the Jews.” Paul emphasizes that this was part of God’s plan, his administration of management of God’s grace (v.2).

This plan had been revealed before. In Genesis 12 God had told Abraham, **“All nations will be blessed through you”** – that is through Abraham’s descendant, Jesus. In Isaiah 49 God said to his Son, the Messiah, **“I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”** In the Old Testament times there were Gentiles who came into the family of God – i.e. Rahab, Ruth, and what about those Magi?

As a result of Old Testament revelation there were Jews who knew about God’s plan to include the Gentiles in God’s Church, God’s family. But they didn’t make it a practice to tell the Gentiles. Therefore, to the Gentiles God’s plan to include them for a long time was a mystery.

But now in the early New Testament times God was making his plan obvious. He was making it known as the Holy Spirit revealed it to the apostles and New Testament prophets who wrote and proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles. Think of Peter ministering to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius, Philip witnessing to a man from Ethiopia, Paul on his missionary journeys, Paul in Rome, Timothy ministering in Ephesus and Titus in Crete.

Often the Jews made the Gentiles feel like second-class citizens or less than full-fledged members of the family of God. Through Paul God said, **“Nope! You’re ...heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.** You are first-class members of my family.”

What This Mystery Means for Us

For the Christians in Ephesus, this was something to hear. It might be like an asylum seeker getting citizenship in the United States. But think about it. This has big implications for us!

Even though we are not Jews ... even though we are not worthy of being in God’s family, God in his grace has elected us to be his, redeemed us by the blood of his Son, and then brought us into his family through the gospel which the Holy Spirit used to bring us to faith. Now we are blessed to be full-fledged citizens in God’s Kingdom, legitimate daughters and sons in his family through faith in Christ!

Paul & His Purpose

Paul emphasizes that his mission, his purpose, was to make this fact known – **“⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.”**

Recall that before his conversion, Paul was Saul of Tarsus, a staunch persecutor of Christianity. Jesus appeared to Saul as he was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians. Showing that the power of conversion is not in us, Christ converted Saul from a persecutor of Christianity, to a proclaimer of Christianity.

Therefore, Paul points out that his purpose is to proclaim the mystery of Christ to the Gentiles. He pointed to the fact that God, as the creator of all things, had the wisdom and power to plan and implement a plan whereby the Gentiles would be brought into his family.

Now think about the example of Paul. While sometimes we may hesitate to tell others of Christ because we think we lack capability, sometimes people hesitate to tell others of Christ because they think that they lack credibility. They look at their spiritual falls and failures concluding, **“Who am I to tell others about Christ? Who will listen to me.”** But who is better talking to someone who needs Christ than someone else who also needs Christ and by God’s grace has found him? They have to conclude, **“If there’s room in God’s family for you, there has to be room for me too.”**

When my son was an emergency pastor and director of the Apache Christian Training School in AZ he had the

privilege of having a role in training an Apache man named Gary Lupe' to be a pastor. When Joel was assigned again to White River, AZ, to serve the Apaches, Gary preached for Joel's installation in both English and Apache. When he spoke English the Apache's in the congregation were serious and silent. When he preached in Apache, they laughed and were lively. After the service I asked Gary if he was telling jokes about us white guys when he spoke Apache. He replied "No. English, law; Apache, gospel."

Not only did Gary have a quick wit, he had a powerful way with the Apaches. You see he had been an unbeliever living a very openly immoral life dominated by drunkenness and addiction. When Apaches saw Gary as a Christian and a pastor, they had to conclude, if God can forgive, change, and use Gary, he can change, use, and forgive me.

Therefore, don't doubt your capability to tell others about Christ. It's simple news about sin and grace – "Our sin, our imperfect puts us in need of a Savior to save us from despair and eternal damnation. Jesus is that Savior we need. He has lived a perfect life in our place. He died on the cross for our sins. He rose again to assure us of forgiveness. This and eternal life are ours through faith in Jesus." Also, don't underestimate your credibility in telling others of Christ.

All Part of God's Plan

Using you, me, and other Christians is part of God's plan to proclaim the mystery of Christ to the people of the world – " ¹⁰ **His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,** ¹¹ **according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.** ¹² **In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.**"

Paul's reference to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms is a reference to the angels. He's pointing to the fact that as the mystery of Christ that God is including the Gentiles in his family, not only is this news to the Gentiles, it is news to the angels. God is giving them insight to his wisdom and plan.

It's clear, isn't it, that God wants his church to proclaim Christ – that people need him, that he is the Savior they need, and that he's the Savior of both the Jews and the Gentiles? Through this message the Holy Spirit works saving faith.

Through faith we can approach God with freedom and confidence in prayer, in worship, in service, and on the last day of our lives, in person as we go to heaven to be with our Lord.

Take-aways

- This week as you reflect on The Mystery of Christ we have considered today remember how blessed you are as a Gentile to be part of the family of God. Thank and praise God for this privilege in your soul and with your life.
- Remember – who better to tell a sinner of the love and God in Jesus than one who through faith in Jesus has experienced God's love and forgiveness?
- Keep in mind that the purpose of God's Church is primarily to get the gospel out to people here and elsewhere in the world.