

A Mystery Revealed

7-19-09

Ephesians 3:1-13

If you want to get somebody's attention – anybody's attention

All you have to do is ask the question – do you want to know a secret

Everybody wants to in the know

Everybody wants to be on the inside

Well Paul knows a secret – and he heard it straight from God

Today if you want to share a secret you would put it on the internet

In Paul's time you would put it in a letter to a church

That was going to pass the letter around to other churches

You see Jesus had told Paul a secret

And God wanted Paul to share that secret with the entire body of Christ

One of the great terms in Scripture is "Mystery"

Paul uses the word "mystery" 20 times in his writings

It is used another 7 times in the Gospels

Today it means something completely unknown

But back in Paul's time it had a slightly different meaning

A mystery wasn't completely unknown

It was known only to those to whom it was revealed - those on the inside

It was a word associated with the mystery religions

People in general did not know what went on in these cults

But the mystery was revealed to those who became members

Paul used the word the same way

When Paul uses mystery he describes something that was unknown

But is now fully revealed to those in Christ

Now the primary revelation of this mystery is this

The Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ

Last week I mentioned that Gentiles were not greater sinners than the Jews

God dealt with them differently

But the death of Jesus changed that

Because of Christ they now have the same standing before God

There is now no distinction

Paul says in verse 6 this mystery never before revealed

Is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel

That is essentially a summation of Chapter 2 vss 11-22

There is only one Messiah - and He didn't come just for the Jews

He came from the Jews – He came to the Jews

But God sent His Son for the whole world

And from His death on

Those who are not in Christ will be judged according to their own merits

Those who are in Christ will be judged according to Christ's merits

And lineage has absolutely nothing to do with it

Listen carefully – lineage never did

The problem was the Gentiles had no idea of God

And therefore could never have placed their hope in the Messiah

That is why Paul said in chapter 2 that

The Gentiles were strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world

You cannot place your hope in a Messiah of whom you have no knowledge

But Christ came for all – and Christ came for any

Salvation came from the Jews - but it is not limited to the Jews

Paul gives us five aspects of this divine mystery

The mysteries prisoner

The mysteries plan

The mysteries preaching

The mysteries purpose

The mysteries privilege

Let's start with the mysteries prisoner (READ VSS 1-4)

Vss 2-13 are really an introduction to the prayer that ends this chapter

You could, if you want to, put a parenthesis around them

A reduced version of chapter 3 could easily read

Vs 1, For this reason, I, Paul, then skipping down to vs 14, bow my knees before the Father

But of course if Paul had done it that way

He would have left out a lot of good stuff

Before beginning his prayer Paul refers back to the truths of chapter 2

All believers in Christ become new

We are all part of one body

Gentiles have the same position as Jews

And all believers are being built into God's temple and dwelling

Those are wonderful truths about the church

Those are wonderful truths about you and me

You were far away from God and getting no closer

God called you to Himself and made you into a new person

No matter how sinful you were - No matter how alienated you were

God has placed you into His Son's body

You now have the life of Jesus flowing through you

And you have the same status as every other saint in all of history

You are now - a child of God

When I was younger I used to think about certain grownups

And wonder what it would be like to have them as my parent

Now - I just sit and marvel that Almighty God is my Father

You and I can call the Creator of the universe – daddy

Utterly inconceivable – and yet it is true

Now God's truths are so marvelous and so vast

That we will never fully comprehend them

No matter how many times we hear or study them

That is why it's good to go back to the basics

You see there are two attitudes we should never display

The first is – we know it all – because we don't

There are mysteries about the Christian life and what awaits us

That we will never fully comprehend until we see God face to face

The second is that we are better than someone else because of knowledge

Scripture tells us that knowledge puffs up

With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility

Read the Bible – get to know it but always remember

God is not pleased with how much we know

But God is pleased at how well we live out what we know

And with how often we share what we know with others

No one knew more than Paul and no one shared more than Paul

Outside of Christ there is no more dominant figure in the NT

He wrote at least 13 of the 27 Books

And more than any other apostle

He revealed to the church the mysteries of the God's Kingdom

He revealed to the church things angels didn't even know

A guy like that might be pretty proud of himself don't you think

But here he speaks of himself as the prisoner of Jesus Christ

You might have thought he was the prisoner of the Romans

He did not consider himself a prisoner of the Romans

Paul was Christ's prisoner – He was the slave of Jesus Christ

He knew he had been bought with a price

Whatever he did – wherever he went – he was under Christ's control

You could lock him up but you couldn't shut him up

Now Paul didn't choose his apostleship or his ministry; he was appointed

And he gloried in the charge God had given him

To Timothy he wrote - **I thank Christ Jesus, my Lord, who strengthened me, because**

He considered me - faithful, putting me into service

Paul was chosen and commissioned purely by God's grace

Having been chosen by grace Paul became a purveyor of grace

In 1Cor Paul said - I have a stewardship entrusted to me

However the truth of it is this – you have a stewardship entrusted to you

Peter writes – As each one has received a special gift, and each one of us is gifted – as each has received a gift, use it in serving one another, (now how should we serve one another) as good stewards of the grace of God

Now Paul didn't just declare the mystery

He explained and clarified it

Paul's wanted those who heard him to understand it

And past understanding it – he wanted the knowledge to change their lives

Spiritual insight must always lead to practical application

That is how it works -

You understand spiritual truth and you apply it to your life

Paul was consumed by what he knew

He gave his finances his health his freedom and his life

So that he could spread the mystery of the Gospel

No sacrifice was too great - How about you

God has entrusted to you a special mission

Done for His sake, carried out in His power to glorify His Name

Are you a good steward of God's grace

Are you willing to sacrifice for it

Or must your ministry come with comfort and ease

Then we have the plan of the mystery (READ 4-6)

The plan is that Jews and Gentiles will have the same standing in the church

In other generations this wasn't known

It wasn't revealed until the plan unfolded after Christ's death

But the plan hasn't changed - this wasn't something new

God doesn't make plans and then change them

God's plans stand unaltered from the beginning of time

From the beginning of creation Gentiles were part of God's plan

Of course this has to be true for as we already learned from Chapter 1

God chose you before the beginning of time

But no one understood what God meant when He told Abraham

In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed

No one understood when through Isaiah God declared

I will make you a light unto the Gentiles so that My salvation shall reach unto the ends of the earth

No one got the picture when Rahab the harlot

Was saved into the line of the Messiah

Or when the Moabite Ruth became the grandmother of David

Who is the father of the Messiah

Unity for all peoples in Christ has always been God's will for the church

It is not possible for us to realize how revolutionary this was to the Jews

They had been set apart and privileged for 2000 years

They and they alone were God's children – special in His eyes

No one else – just them

But now here it is – Jews and Gentiles one in Christ

Peter gave a speech to the Sanhedrin which exalted Jesus

They wanted to kill Peter

Then Gamaliel a noted Jewish scholar and Paul's teacher said this

I say to you stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan of action is of men, it will be overthrown,

In other words is this Jesus was just a man this wont last

but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God

Have you ever fought against the grace of God

It's tragic when the people of God fight against the grace of God

But it happens all the time

Has God ever told you to witness to someone and you said - no

Brothers and sisters – that is fighting against the grace of God

Have you had the opportunity to use your spiritual gift and passed on it

That is fighting against the grace of God

Do you feel spiritually superior to others – I don't have to say it do I

Let me finish this section with this

Are you willing to obey God in every aspect of your life
Or are you fighting against the grace of God

We have the prisoner and the plan

Then there is the preaching of the mystery (READ7-9)

The Gospel is spread by men and women whom God calls to share it

Paul is the model

But he was to be the first in a never ending stream of Gospel proclaimers

God has given each of us the task of spreading the Good News to others

Romans 10 asks some questions that go right to the heart of the issue

How will they call upon Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

You are a Christian today because someone overcame their fear

And shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with you

Now listen - they did more than just overcome their fear

They obeyed their Master

Paul says that he is a minister

The Greek word translated minister is actually the word servant

God made Paul a servant of the Gospel

When you received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

You too were made a servant of the Gospel

What is the Master's command – we call it the Great Commandment

Go into all the world and preach the Gospel – preach the Good News

Paul was made a minister of the Gospel and preach the Gospel he did

And for 2000 years generation after generation

There has always been those following in Paul's footsteps

Until the Gospel reached your ears

Has it stopped with you

Today I want you to ask you

When was the last time you shared the Good News with someone – anyone

Are you a minister of the Gospel – a servant of the Lord

Do you proclaim the unfathomable riches of Christ

The unfathomable riches of Christ include all His truths and His blessings; all that He has and all that He is

When you received Christ you had your sins forgiven

You were transferred into the kingdom of Christ from the kingdom of Satan

You became part of the family of God called the body of Christ

You received access to the throne of God

You have been given the mind of Christ

In Christ you have everything you need pertaining to life and Godliness

You have every spiritual blessing there is

You have received God' kindness and patience His mercy and great love

You are a partaker of His glory

And you have absolute assurance of what awaits you when this life is over

In other words - the best is yet to come

That is just some of the unfathomable riches in Christ

In Colossians Paul just sums it up and says – **In Christ you have been made complete**

I like completeness

Because for years I felt incomplete

I knew that something was missing in my life

I just didn't know what it was or how to get it

And one day as Forrest Gump might say – Then God showed up

And by His appearance He changed my life forever

Didn't that happen to you – don't you want to share it with others

Then we have the purpose of the mystery (READ 10-11)

The purpose behind the revelation of the mystery

Was that it might be made known

To the rulers and powers in the heavenly places

Namely angels and fallen angels – the demons

God has brought the church into existence, at least in part, for the purpose of displaying His great wisdom in the heavenly places

In other words this revelation was a mystery to angels as well as to men

This may sound strange to you but it isn't about you

It is all about God and the glory of God

Everything God does has the ultimate purpose of bringing Him glory

As Paul wrote to the Colossians

There is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we exist through Him

All that we are – all that we have – all that we ever will be comes from the Father through the Son

The angels see the power of God in creation – the wrath of God at Sinai – the love of God at Calvary

But in the church they see His manifold wisdom of God

Taking slave and free – rich and poor – Jew and Gentile – black brown yellow and white – male and female

And making them one

God by the cross of Jesus has

Made us one spiritual body in Jesus Christ

In the classroom of God's universe

God is the teacher – angels and demons are the students

The church is the illustration

The lesson is the manifold wisdom of God

Finally we see the privilege of the mystery (READ 12-13)

When we place our faith in Jesus we have open access to the throne of God

Every request you make – He hears it

Every need you have – He is aware of it

The deepest desire of your heart – he knows it

Ever not know how to pray for somebody or even yourself

Ever pray

And even while you are praying you wonder if it is making any sense

Don't worry about it – go to God

God is a step ahead of you

When we don't know how to pray for ourselves the Holy Spirit does

So His Spirit in us is praying for us from within us`

In Judaism only the high priest could enter the presence of God

For anyone else, coming into God's presence meant death

The high priest was to enter the Holy of Holies with trepidation

And then only once a year

But in Christ all that has changed

We are told to boldly enter the throne room of God

We have confident access to God day or night

I understand the president of the United States has a red phone on his desk

A direct line to the Russian premier – it is only for emergencies

It doesn't go through the switchboard - If that phone rings he answers it

I saw a movie and a person who was supposed to be Margaret Thatcher

Was in the kitchen and the phone rang – she opened a kitchen cabinet

And hanging on the back of the cabinet door was her red phone

Well in effect God has a red phone with your name on it

And not only does He have this special line just for you

He hangs around waiting for your call

So no matter where you are no matter what time of day it is

No matter what you want to talk about – when you call - He answers it

You have unrestricted unlimited access to Almighty God

And if you just want to talk about the weather – God will listen to you

Are you taking advantage of that

Or is He just sitting there waiting for no reason

As hard as it is to imagine

God uses you to display His glory to angelic powers

God uses you to display His wisdom to angelic powers

God has revealed to you mysteries into which the angels longed to look

He has put you in a special place

And given you everything you need to successfully display His glory

Don't you think

It's time to cast aside the pleasures of this world

It's time to lay aside the toys that distract us

And lay it all at the feet of Jesus

Become a prisoner of the mystery of the Gospel

Become a preacher of the mystery of the Gospel

Share with others the Good News of Jesus Christ

Just as someone shared it with you