

Date: 17 August 2023

Scripture Passage: Ephesians 3:1-13

Title: The Mystery Of The Gospel

Introduction

- Remember that the apostle Paul was writing this epistle to the physicians from prison in Rome. We read of this in Acts 28. And unlike the book of Galatians where the church there was staying away from the gospel, the church in Ephesus was doing well. They were thriving. So what then was the purpose of this letter to the Ephesians? It was **to confirm and to equip a maturing church**. To tell the believers in Ephesus that they are rich beyond measure in Jesus Christ. This epistle is divided very logically with the first 3 chapters primarily dealing with theology. And then the last three chapters dealing with the practical application that would follow.
- In Ch1, it opens up the plan of God from eternity past that will stretch through to eternity future. How God, the Holy Trinity have planned for the salvation of his people. God the Father has chosen for himself the people to be saved. The son of God has agreed to come to die for them. The Holy Spirit agreed to apply the saving benefits of Christ to his people. You can see this in 1:3-14. Then at the end of Ch1, in v19-20, Paul made the revelation that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that saves his people. So Ephesian Christians (and us who are Christians today) have been saved by the mighty working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. **We are unable to save anyone**. We only use as instruments of God to preach and share the gospel. It is the Holy Spirit, who uses the preached word to convince and convict the hearer. Salvation is truly of the Lord.
- In Ch2, he begins to expound on what has actually happened individually and corporately. Individually, the power of the Holy Spirit that was at work in our conversion continues to be at work in us. This in 2:1-10. We were dead in trespasses and sin, but God has given us new life to faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit must cause you to be born again. must be spiritually born by the Holy Spirit in order to see spiritual things, to understand spiritual things, to appreciate spiritual things. Then in 2:11-22, Paul tells us about the spirit working in us corporately. There is no difference between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. There's no one race better than the other. Both Jews and Gentiles are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. The middle wall of separation has been broken down. We are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens and members of the household of God. And we as a corporate body of Christ, together are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.
- So we have seen how the spirit works individually and corporately as a local church. Now we come to Ch3, v1-13, where we see the holy spirit working universally. So in this passage chapter 3:1-13, Paul shows us **how God's work among His people throughout the world through the ages fit into his overall plan**. He starts off by saying that this is a mystery. So we are going to see first **What is that mystery**, then we will see **How is it being revealed?**, and finally we will see **Why is it so wonderful?** So the what, the how, and the why. We will be focusing more on the why, how wonderful it is.

I. What is that mystery?

- *Mystery is not something unknown & strange, as in common usage. In Bible, something hidden, now revealed. Would not have been known, until God reveals. In the past, known that: (i) true believers will become fewer, the remnant; (ii) Saviour would come; (iii) Gentiles will be saved. Not known that Gentile & Jewish will be made one people, sharing blessing (cf 2:14-16). Hard to accept, but it is God's will.*

So what is that mystery that the apostle is talking about here in Chapter 3? **Read v1-4**. So what is the mystery? It's the mystery of the gospel. It's built off on the things that he had spoke about in the earlier chapters, that Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ. That the wall that separate the Jews from the Gentiles have been broken down. So as far as the church is concerned, there is no more Jew and Gentile. We are all one in Jesus Christ. And here in Ch3, the apostle Paul wants to elaborate on what he has already revealed in Chapter 2. And here he tells the Ephesians (who were mostly Gentiles) that this mystery of Jesus Christ! That mystery of who Christ is, why he has come, died on the cross, and risen from the dead, so that they might share in the blessing that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. So this

is called a mystery. That God should send his son to this world to be the Savior, not only of the Jews but of the Gentiles. And the way of salvation is the same for both. They were to be made one in Christ Jesus.

- *Jews at that time had wrong understanding that: (i) they were children of Abraham by descent; (ii) they are God's people no matter how they live; (iii) they would always have a privileged position before God compared to Gentiles. Gentiles had to be proselytes, i.e. worship God & ways of Jews, but always second-class in God's kingdom. Never occurred that: (i) all have to repent & be saved thro' Christ; (ii) wall of separation will be abolished; (iii) they will become one body; (iv) share same privileges & acceptance before God. Amazingly, today same idea prevail in Christian church.*

The Jews thought that they (i) were children of Abraham by descent; (ii) they are God's people no matter how they live; (iii) they would always have a privileged position before God compared to Gentiles. But now Paul is revealing the mystery of the gospel, that Jesus Christ was that savior promised to the Jews in the Old Testament scripture. And more than that, it is now being revealed to the Gentiles, who were without the Old Testament scriptures, that through faith in Jesus Christ they are all reconciled to God. The promised savior is not just for the Jews, it is for all! That we may become one in Christ. The wall of partition has been removed. In **Ch2:14-16, Read.**

During the time of the Lord Jesus Christ, there were proselytes. Proselytes are the non-Jews who wanted to follow the Lord. They saw the truth in the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures. They would go to the synagogue, they would worship the God of Israel, they would listen to the teaching of their scriptures. They would live according to the teaching of the Hebrew scripture. But these proselytes were not fully accepted by the Jewish community. They were allowed to come to the court of the Gentiles in the Temple in Jerusalem to worship their God, but they were not allowed to go into the inner court to be with the Jew. But now the mystery of the gospel is revealed, that when they come to true faith in Jesus Christ, the wall of partition had been removed with the wall of partition separating the Jews, and the Gentiles is removed. Not physically, but spiritually. All are to be regarded as one. Jesus Christ is the Messiah, and all (regardless of Jew or Gentile) who wanted to be reconciled with God must come to Jesus Christ. He was the perfect sacrifice, who died on the cross for the sins of His people. John the Baptist pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ and said, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Lord Jesus Christ when he hung on the cross of Calvary, he was offering himself as a sacrifice. He was taking upon himself the punishment of God on behalf of his people, to spare his people from the punishment they should receive from God for their sins. The sinless son of God, he came to be perfect man, and as God and man in one person, he laid down his life on the cross to pay for the sins of his people. His blood was shed for the cleansing of their sins, and he is resurrected from the dead is now in heaven seated at the right hand of God, waiting for his people.

It is not by our effort that we are saved. It is by God's mercy shown to us in Jesus Christ who died. So we must trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. So the Gentiles were now accepted as God's people together with the Jews. And so this is the mystery that is being revealed. And this is so amazing to Gentiles and also to the Jews, the Gentile believers and Jewish believers came to see that what was hidden before was now being made known to them. **Read v6**

II. How is it being revealed?

- *There were apostles & prophets in NT time (v 5). Spirit reveal this truth to them. Paul one of those. In fact, specially assigned to Gentiles (vv 1, 8 cf Acts 26:17-18). Paul preached also to the Jews, but a special instrument to the Gentiles. Some questioned his apostleship (cf 2 Cor 12:12). Paul here forestalled any doubts.*

Then how is it being revealed. In v5 we are told. **Read v5.** It is the spirit of God, the spirit of Jesus Christ who revealed to the apostles and prophets. You see how this is repeated in **2:20? Read 2:20** Paul was an apostle. Ever since the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down upon the church. The spirit will indwell all true believers and never leave them. Whenever the gospel is proclaimed and people come to

faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will live in the person and never leave him. Even if a Christian backslides, the holy spirit will chastise him until he repents. God will not allow his chosen people to be lost. Just as Christ Jesus said, in John 10:27-30 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.”.

the apostles and the prophets were teaching. And making regulation of the gospel truth by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was revealing it to them, and they in turn was teaching it to others. This truth needed to be strengthened by Paul, as his apostleship was being challenged by some. He had to emphasize to the Ephesian Christians that he was indeed a true apostle of Jesus Christ. In **1:1**, Paul start out his letter by saying “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God”. And in **3:1**, he says “I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles”. He is a prisoner by the will of the Lord.

- *Consider his calling. Guided by the Lord (v 1 cf. Acts 21:13-14). His imprisonment was Christ's will. Given message by the Lord (vv 2-4). Reference to earlier letter? More likely to ch.2. Called & sent by the Lord (v 7). Receives iHs power, to be effective, to be sustained. Healthy diffidence (no confidence in own ability, unworthiness), v 8 cf Jer 1:6. Also 1 Cor 2:3-5. Compulsion to preach (v 8 cf 1 Cor 9:16; Jer 20:9). No more extraordinary officers, gifts, new revelation. But all called show marks (cf Eph 4:11).*

So why did Paul say that he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus? It wasn’t because he did something wrong, or foolishly got himself arrested. Instead, it was because of his calling as an apostle. His ministry as an apostle, and the revelation of God to him that he was going to be arrested and brought to Rome to bear witness for the Lord there. We see that in Acts 21:13-14. Paul was actually guided by the Lord. He was doing God’s will and the Lord was guiding him.

Then consider the message that he was preaching. It was also from the Lord. In v2-4 it shows to us that this mystery was revealed to him as an apostle. Then in v7 it tells us that Paul was called and sent by the Lord. **Read v7**. So he received power from the lord. There were so many attacks on Paul that it would have broken his spirit. He would have given. An ordinary man would have been broken. He would not have continued, but the spirit of God was at work in him, causing him to persevere. He continued to be used by the Lord.

Read v8. You see this is all part of Paul’s calling from God as an apostle. He did not dare to have confidence in himself. It was a grace. It was by the power of God working in him. So is not because of his strong willpower that Paul persevered on despite so many attacks. No, he’s saying that he’s unworthy. He is weak in himself! But it is God who empowers him. So this goes to show to us that his was a genuine ministry. In **1 Corinthians 2:3-5**, Paul writes “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of ^[a]human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” It was the spirit of God working in him that gave Paul the power to preach to gospel and to reveal this mystery that was given to him as a genuine apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. And for our church here, we want to look for such a man. We want a Pastor of the church who is called to the ministry, to serve the Lord in word and doctrine here in the Greater Boston area.

III. Why is it so wonderful?

- *His message is linked to the eternal purpose of God. Not made known in other ages, now revealed (v 5). Hidden in God from before creation (v 9). Planned within Trinity (11 cf 1:3-14).*

We have covered what is that mystery, and how it is being revealed. Now we consider why it is so wonderful. There are three points that we want to raise.

First, this mystery of the gospel is linked to the eternal purpose of God. Remember what Paul wrote in chapter 1:3-14? This truly an amazing passage. It gives us a panoramic view of the Plan of God. And

what was that plan? It is that God has planned from eternity past, to choose for himself a people; and the son of God has agreed to come to die for them; the Holy Spirit will apply the saving works of Christ. And God will ensure that his chosen people are brought safely to be with him in heaven to Eternity future. We will be serving God and worshipping him forever and ever. The new heavens and the new Earth will be created. God's plan unfolds itself in history in what **we call the Covenant of Grace**. The apostle Paul is saying to us that with the coming of Christ, this **Covenant of Grace** is being fulfilled now. What has been hidden in the past is now being made known to you. So this is the mystery. In v5 it says "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now be been revealed". And in v9, it says "and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ".

This mystery of the gospel would remain hidden if not for it being revealed by the Holy Spirit and to the apostles and prophets, and if not for it being proclaimed to us. Since the word of God is complete, what is needed now is to proclaim it to others. Those who are chosen by God will respond to the gospel call. They will repent and they will trust in Jesus Christ as their savior sooner or later. Our role is to bring the Gospel to others.

So why is this message of Christ and him crucified so wonderful? It converts individuals and brings life to them from being dead in trespassers. And they share all the inheritance in Christ. We are then all reconciled to God by the same savior and in the same way. There is no more middle wall saperates between Jews and Gentiles.

Now taking a step back and looking at it as a whole. How does this mystery fits into God's plan? We realize that this fulfills the eternal purpose of God. In v11, it says "according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord". This mystery of the covenant of grace, is the outworking of the eternal plan of God.

The apostle Paul is trying to show to us in this passage in Chapter 3:1-13, that when we believe and have faith in Christ, not only the Spirit that resurrected Christ works in us individually, it is also at work in us as a body in the form of the church. The middle wall of partition is broken down. We are all reconciled to God by the same savior in the same way. And now as Paul unfolds it even wider to show how it fits into the eternal plan of God. We come to realize that it's so wonderful. What a great privilege it is to us to be made to understand that **salvation by grace, to faith in Jesus Christ** actually fits into this overall eternal plan of God. Wow. That gives us a sense of direction, a sense of purpose, and a sense of destiny. When converted, we begin to understand where we came from. We were all descended from Adam and Eve. We were all sinners. We heard the gospel and we were made alive in Jesus Christ. We are a redeemed people. We become a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. And now we are meant to see how we fit into this eternal plan of God.

That from eternity past, the Holy Trinitarian God has already planned to save for himself the people. He has chosen people to be saved through faith in Christ, and to be with him for all eternity. What an amazing revelation this is!

- *His message accomplishes God's will in the spiritual realm. Gentiles & Jews are made one (v 6). A witness to the angels (v 10), the manifold wisdom of God. Always praising God (Rev 5). Liberty of access to God (v 12).*

Secondly, this message is wonderful because it accomplishes God's will in the spiritual realm. It includes the salvation of the elect from among the Gentiles and the Jews. Look at **v6**. We are told there "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel". Fellow heirs of whom? It is heirs of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are going to share in the inheritance of Christ. Christ is the son of God, the only begotten of the father. We are adopted Children of God and will share in the inheritance that is in Christ. **This is wonderful. This is amazing.** The world has been trying to be one and trying to be united, but human effort will never achieve this. It will only be achieved In Jesus Christ. And although in the church, this is not perfectly reflected. Nevertheless, the

principle is at work within us. Our conscience is pricked when we fail to accept others in the church. We have to repent. We know that we have to accept one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. The only way of genuine acceptance of one another is through faith in Jesus Christ.

Apart from looking at things horizontally regarding human relationships, more important is that we look at things vertically and see our relationship with God. In verse 12, it says "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him". Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have access to God. We become the children of God. God has truly forgiven us our sins because Christ has already paid for the punishment that we deserve for our sins. There's no more guilt because it's fully paid by Christ dying on the cross from his people. And we are fully accepted by God, because the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross of Calvary as cleanses of all our sins and iniquities. We are His children. We can draw near to God in prayer. We don't have to go through a Human priest. Christ is our high priest mediating for us. We can come directly to God.

- *His message is centered around Christ. Christ called him, sent him (1). God's plan centers around Christ (4) Everything is accomplished in Christ (6). In short, his messages is about Christ: unsearchable riches (8), created thro' Christ (9), eternal purpose accomplished in Christ (11), boldness & access thro' faith in Him (12). Do not be discouraged by his imprisonment, my tribulations, but your good (13). So today (Rom 8:29).*

And finally the message is centered around Christ. Christ is the one through whom we are saved. V1 shows us that. And Christ is the one around which the plan of God revolves, V4. And all creation is accomplish in Christ, v6. In short, the mystery of the gospel that is being revealed is about Christ. There is unsearchable riches in Christ, V8. And all things we created through Christ, V9. The eternal purpose of God being accomplished in Christ, V11. And in V12, we have boldness and access through faith in Christ.

You see now everything centers around Christ. When Christ is lifted high, the heart of the believer glories in it! How wonderful is that! The person who is indwelled by the Holy Spirit will praise God whenever Christ is lifted high.

So for these three reasons, we say the gospel message is so wonderful. It shows how the gospel is linked to the eternal purpose of God is so wonderful. The gospel message also accomplishes God's will in the spiritual realm is so wonderful. And the message of the gospel centered around Christ lifts up Christ high, and it is so wonderful.

Summary

- *A great privilege given understanding, strengthen in hope, to be saved! Resolve to serve, come to Him!*

In Summary, what a great privilege It is for us to understand the gospel! It is not just merely just Christ and Him crucified. It is really understanding it. Who is Jesus Christ? So why it is that he has to die, what he has accomplished, what he is doing in those who hear the gospel. It is so wonderful. See we must resolve to come to him. We must resolve to serve him.

- *Christ is truly risen! His power at work in conversion. Faith in Christ brings us all these blessings. Come to Him!*

Christ is truly risen. He's at work as the gospel is preached. Souls are being saved and the church is being built up. And the eternal purpose of God is being fulfilled because the Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit is at work in our souls individually, in the church, and the world without end. May God have all the glory.