EPHESIANS 3:1-13

1 For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles — 2 you have heard, haven't you, about the administration of God’s grace that he gave to me for you? 3 The mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have briefly written above. 4 By reading this you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. 5 This was not made known to people in other generations as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: 6 The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 7 I was made a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. 8 This grace was given to me — the least of all the saints — to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, 9 and to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. 10 This is so that God’s multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens. 11 This is according to his eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him. 13 So then I ask you not to be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf, for they are your glory.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A "Servant of Christ" (TLB). Paul’s obedience to Christ’s call on his life led him to be incarcerated.

B “Stewardship” (NASB); “special responsibility” (NLT)

C The gospel is no longer a mystery because God made salvation available through His Son.

D “God himself showed me this secret plan of his” (TLB). This refers to special revelation of God’s will and Word through direct communication or the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

E "You’ll be able to see for yourselves” (The Message). All who are in Christ are equally in Christ, no matter their ethnicity, and will all inherit eternal life (Rom. 8:16-17).

F Paul also used this analogy in Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 5:30.

G The promise of salvation is “given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:22).

H "Minister” (ESV); “helping people understand and respond to this Message” (The Message)

I Paul viewed himself this way because of his previous persecution of the church (1 Cor. 15:9).

J "Make plain” (NIV); “bring to light” (ESV)

K The church is God’s vehicle for proclaiming and spreading the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20).

L Jesus’ sacrifice means we can go to the Father and know He cares for us (Heb. 10:19-24).

M “Suffering” (ESV, NLT); “momentary light affliction” (2 Cor. 4:17).
1. THE MYSTERY (Eph. 3:1-6)
   - Paul characterized himself as a prisoner because of God’s revelation of the gospel.
   - All people, including Gentiles, are recipients of God’s salvation through faith in Jesus.
   - Emphasize the mystery as including the creation of a new community, the church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

2. THE PROCLAMATION (Eph. 3:7-9)
   - Paul explained that God made him a servant of the gospel for the purpose of proclaiming Christ to all people, especially the Gentiles.
   - Our sharing of the gospel is in response to God’s grace demonstrated to us and our understanding the depth of God’s richness.

3. THE PURPOSE (Eph. 3:10-13)
   - Paul described the purpose of his proclamation in terms of making God’s wisdom known in accordance with God’s redemptive plan.
   - Faith in Christ makes it possible for people to approach the Father confidently.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
God invites believers to proclaim the revealed mystery of the church.
- God offers salvation to all people, providing them each a place in His church.
- Believers can tell others about the grace and richness of God that they have received in Christ.
- Believers find purpose in sharing the gospel with others.
FOCUS ATTENTION

How good are you at keeping secrets? Is it good or bad to keep secrets?
- Some secrets should be kept, others shared, for the good of others.
- Secret-keepers know the anticipation and satisfaction of revealing something that’s unknown at just the right time.
- God kept a secret hidden until the right time. He revealed it to Paul and commissioned him to proclaim it to the world.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

EPHESIANS 3:1-6

How did Paul describe himself and why?
- Paul regarded himself a prisoner of Christ, not Rome, and a steward of God’s grace to the Gentiles.
- Paul was about to pray for the Ephesians. His mention of the Gentiles made him think of God’s revealed mystery. He took a divinely-ordained rabbit trail, not returning to his original thought until verse 14.

What mystery did God reveal to Paul?
- A biblical mystery isn’t a puzzle to be solved, but a previously hidden truth to be revealed.
- To know God’s secret, look to the Savior.
- God offers all people salvation and a place in His church, where all equally share every spiritual blessing.

Why was this revelation radical?
- The Old Testament speaks of all nations being blessed through Abraham. God’s revealed secret is that His covenant people are a multi-ethnic body in Christ.
- Think how radical it would be for someone to say the most divided groups in our world today are now loving members of one family.

EPHESIANS 3:7-9

Why was Paul so passionate about his mission?
- Paul regarded it a privilege to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles and shed light on the miracle God is working in His church.
- Paul was overwhelmed by the gospel. He never ceased to be amazed at what God accomplished in Jesus.
- Paul was convinced that all who put their trust in Jesus will never be impoverished, only enriched.
- Only a radical transformation could have compelled a legalistic Jew like Paul to embrace and proclaim God’s mystery revealed in Jesus.

What transforms any believer into a passionate proclaimer of the gospel?
- When we become overwhelmed by the depth of God’s grace to us in Christ, we won’t be able to keep quiet about it.
- We don’t proclaim an oppressive religion of dos and don’ts but a liberating relationship with a Messiah of incalculable riches.

EPHESIANS 3:10-13

Analyze the relationship between God’s purpose and Paul’s purpose.
- Paul’s purpose was to make known God’s purpose of creating a church from all nations.
- God’s multifaceted wisdom in fulfilling His plan is so amazing that heavenly authorities sit up and take notice. They watch in fascination as once-divided people become one new humanity, loving and serving as equals.

What does God’s revealed purpose mean for us individually and corporately?
- An individual’s confident access to God is another purpose He accomplished in Christ.
- Faith in Christ is personal but not private. The gospel is good news of a new life and new society. The church is central to God’s eternal plan.
- As believers live in fellowship with God and each other, we display to the world God’s power and purpose to bring about true reconciliation and restoration.
- Many people search for purpose in life. One purpose for being on this earth is to share the gospel with others.
- Paul asserted that any hardships we encounter in living out and sharing our faith are worth it.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can believers today share God’s revealed mysteries?
- The gospel is not a secret to be selfishly hoarded but great news to be generously shared. That occurs when we’re overwhelmed by the gospel.
- Believers reveal God’s truths by living in community with diverse believers in the church.
- We’ll never come to the end of the riches Jesus has in Himself. He gives us what we need to share the gospel and live in unity.
- Personal Challenge: Are you hoarding or sharing salvation? Deep-down, do you think a place in Christ’s church is only for people like you? Determine ways you’ll share God’s secret this week.

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OBJECT LESSON

A STACK OF BOOKS, INCLUDING A MYSTERY NOVEL AND A DICTIONARY

Display several types of books, including a mystery novel. Encourage adults to identify genres of literature people enjoy reading. Ask: Which of these genres can be used to describe the Bible? State: Unlike novels, the Bible is true and not fiction, but it’s also a book that includes romance, war, history, and mystery.

Explain that Paul referred to mystery three times in Ephesians 3:1-13. Invite adults to lookup the definition of mystery. Explain that the Greek word *mysterion* Paul used refers to a truth previously hidden but now known. Ask: How was God’s mystery made known to Paul? Call for someone to lookup *revelation*. Emphasize that when God hides something, people can’t discover it on their own. Only God can reveal what He has hidden.

Ask: What mystery did God reveal to Paul? The mystery of the gospel is that individuals can become reconciled to God and one another through Christ. As God’s mystery unfolds, He sums up all things in His Son and is uniting diverse people into a loving family. Ask: What was Paul supposed to do with this mystery? Unlike literary detectives like Sherlock Holmes or Miss Marple, Paul’s calling was to proclaim the mystery God had revealed to him. Ask: What might you feel compelled to do after reading a great mystery novel or seeing a great mystery movie? Close by highlighting that all believers should feel compelled to reveal God’s great mystery—God can save anyone and make them part of His church.

THE MYSTERY OF PAUL VS. THE MYSTERY OF EPHESIAN CULTS

In first-century Ephesus, there was a popular cult movement identified as mystery cults. The Ephesian church would no doubt have encountered them and would have had to counter their teachings with the truth of the gospel. The mystery of Christianity, Paul explained, is not like the mystery of their cults.

Tony Merida, professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote,

This “mystery” was not like Ephesian mystery cults. It was not a mystery of esoteric knowledge, reserved for a secret few. This mystery, this message about Christ, is for all nations. … This mystery was “hidden” or “not made known to people in other generations” (v. 5); but now, at this point in history, it can be understood. While the plan of God was present in the Old Testament, parts were unclear or “hidden” in a sense (v. 9).¹

It was Christ’s life, death, and resurrection that made God’s plan and purpose clear, as Jesus said following His resurrection: “‘Wasn’t it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:26-27). Jesus’ explanation of all these things resulted in the disciples “hearts burning within [them]” (Luke 24:32), and later Jesus commanding, “This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48).

The result of the gospel is that the way to have peace with God isn’t a mystery. God calls us to make it clear to all nations. God saves us and makes us righteous (Rom. 3:21-26). So instead of keeping the “mystery hidden” (Eph. 3:9), which was the goal of these cults, Christians should seek to make the knowledge of God known to all the world.