

## Ephesians 3:2-12

<sup>2</sup>Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup>that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup>In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup>which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup>Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup>and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup>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, <sup>11</sup>according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup>In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

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### A MYSTERY REVEALED

If we did a poll here this morning and asked what your favorite type of story was, we'd likely get a variety of answers. If you considered the types of books you like to read and movies you like to watch, I'd take a stab at saying that many of you would answer mystery stories are your favorite. We like those page turners, the thriller movies that have us on the edge of our seats, guessing what might be the explanation of what is happening before us. Sometimes the mystery is revealed at the end, some mysteries remain a mystery forever, with no real answers coming to the surface.

Suspense is what keeps the mystery seekers coming back. The whole point of the mystery is that the audience doesn't know what is happening or why. If the mystery novel explains the mystery on the first page, you probably won't read any further. That would "spoil it" for you, wouldn't it? But today we'll hear of a mystery that is a little bit different. We'll see through Paul that **A Mystery** has been **Revealed** to us, but the message is so wonderful that we keep coming back for more. Knowing this Mystery Revealed, doesn't spoil it for us, but it motivates us to hear it more and more. May God grant you that zeal to continue to seek to hear the mystery that he reveals through faith in his Son, our Savior.

Today we celebrate the Epiphany, a season which is very appropriately named. The word epiphany means "appearing or revealing." On Epiphany, the church remembers the visit of the Wise Men to the young Jesus. This event marks the first time that Jesus was revealed to a person who was not of Jewish descent. For this reason, Epiphany is sometimes referred to as the Gentile Christmas. On epiphany we celebrate that Jesus is the Savior of Jews and Gentiles alike.

Our second lesson from Paul's letter to the Ephesians fits quite well into the Epiphany themes of salvation for all people and also the theme of revealing what was unseen before. Paul's entire ministry was based on these themes and his words describing his ministry are so fitting for our consideration today.

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Paul is a man for whom ministry seemed to always be a joy. Even after being thrown out of cities, beaten, and stoned several times, he always picked himself up and went to the next place and carried that same polarizing message with him. He rejoiced in suffering, he embraced the pain that came his way as a result of preaching the gospel.

Sadly that's not always our attitude about being servants of the Lord, is it? I'll be the first to admit that sometimes having a sour attitude toward serving him is one on a long list of imperfections in my ministry to God. I don't always skip and whistle on my trek across the parking lot from home to church. Sometimes the Elders visits and the planning meetings are a source of frustration. Sometimes when my own sins and the sins of others have me down, I don't always pop back up with a smile on my face. Sometimes I feel like I'd rather get up and go home. Does that ever happen to you? God shows you an opportunity to serve or to help others, but instead of jumping at the chance you complain about how the timing was wrong or about how the person might receive your help. We all have a call to serve the Lord, but we are not always as grateful about it as Paul was!!

Perhaps considering Paul's situation can help to clarify our focus. He says: ***I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,*** Paul could carry out his ministry with joy because he recognized the privilege that was his. He called it a gift to be able to serve God. Do you think he was as happy about that gift as the stones struck his head, as the whips pierced his back, as he rolled out the city gates after being tossed out? I think that it was precisely at those unpleasant moments that Paul was reminded what his life was really about and the change that God had made. As he calls himself ***less than the least of all God's people***, he certainly is referring to the life he used to live, a life that was on the other side of persecuting Christians. When Stephen, the first martyr was stoned, Paul was there participating in the stoning. He had dedicated his former life to destroying the church of God. Had God not stepped in, had God not given him the privilege of becoming a Christian, Paul would have died in unbelief and ended up in hell. Those whips and stones paled in comparison to the destruction caused by hell's eternal fires. He knew how God had saved him and he wanted to do all he could to bring that salvation to others.

We may not ever receive the persecution that Paul received, but we can realize the same grace. We too, were headed to destruction and torment, but God stepped in and gave us a free gift of his grace. He stepped in and revealed to us his Son. He revealed to us the ***unsearchable riches of Christ***. He revealed to us a love that can say ***while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*** (Romans 5:8). We didn't deserve this gift, we didn't deserve this love, yet God gave it none the less. He forgives our apathy to his call to spread the truth. He forgives the times that we succumb to our trials and give up on serving him. He forgives the times we consider it a burden to be his follower. He forgives all our shortcomings and grants us the one who fulfilled the whole law Jesus Christ our Savior. He is our gift, our hope, our light.

It is truly a mystery of grace that God chose violent Paul to serve him and his church. It is a mystery of his love that he would choose sinners like you and I to do the same. And he reveals a further mystery. ***<sup>3</sup> the mystery (is) made known to me by revelation ... then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed ... <sup>6</sup> 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.***

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For as long as the world had been turning, it was God's plan to reveal his plan of salvation and his promise of a Savior through the Jews. Abraham was the one who was chosen to be the father of a great nation. His descendants were the ones that carried the promise and passed along God's words of truth. There were some Gentiles who heard the word. God sent some missionaries to foreign lands, but primarily it was the Jews who had been given the message. In the Old Testament, salvation was, for the most part, was a secret to the Gentiles. But what was a mystery to them was now being revealed. What they did not know and could not fathom on their own, God was now bringing in full force to them. The time was right, the stage had been set, and Paul was the one who would preach this message to a new people. He would take the mystery that was revealed to him on the road to Damascus that day and spread it to all people. He would dedicate his life to telling the world **The Mystery is Revealed.**

The blessings that Paul revealed to the Gentiles are blessings that he reveals to us today. We are *heirs together with Israel*, There is no distinction or disadvantage based on race. Jesus came to save all nations, Jews and Gentiles, alike. We are *members together of one body*. The New Testament talks about the church as being the "New Israel, or the True Israel." No longer are the groups divided into nations, rather now they are divided based on faith in Jesus. He is the one who brings us together with all believers and makes us one body, his body, the church, of which he is the head. We are *sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus*. The gift of his grace, the promise of salvation, the riches of his mercy are those which God gives to all his children and are blessings that bring us together in his name.

The world may never know exactly how the pyramids were built. We may not know who shot JFK. It's possible that these things will remain a mystery until the Last Day. On this earth, certain things will remain a mystery to us, but we can praise God that his love is no longer one of them. We can praise him that Christ's death on the cross for our forgiveness is now **A Mystery Revealed.** We can thank him for revealing to us the gift of his love and we can please him as we reveal it to others. That's the gospel calling we have and it's a calling that can bring us joy.

Let's close today with a prayer:

*Dear God , thank you for revealing to me the mystery of your mercy and grace. Grant that I may be a part of revealing it to others. Help me to support the mission of revealing your grace to the world through prayer, through generous offerings, through my using my talents to further your cause. Show me the many ways that I can be your servant and that I can help to reveal to others forgiveness and life in your name. When the opportunity to tell of your love arises, fill me with the courage and the strength that I need to be a faithful herald of your love. I pray with the boldness and confidence that comes through Jesus, who gives me access to your throne of grace. Amen.*