

Mystery Made Known

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[0:00] Thank you, Sam, for reading. Before we start, shall we just pray?! And what we need to know this morning.

Give us words that we need to hear. Will you help our hearts? We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Everyone loves a mystery, don't they?

Got a favourite crime drama series that you're into at the moment? Anybody used to watch The Bill? Just a blast from the past. The Bill.

I wish that was back. I'm actually a sucker for Poirot, personally. And we've been watching Ludwig at home. Any of you guys watch Ludwig? It's kind of fun, isn't it? Ludwig.

If you're a bit more serious, maybe you like Nordic Noir. It's like a genre of crime mystery drama that's very sort of bleak and Scandinavian. No emotion in the face. Just a lot of death.

[1:18] You know, that kind of stuff. There's a really good Dutch one on ITV. You can go and watch. Van der Falk. I can recommend that. That's not bad. Or maybe you're into the slick American ones, sort of CSI kind of line of work.

That's very glamorous, isn't it? And then there's the slightly weird English ones that I don't think anybody else understands, like the Thursday Murder Club. Do you come across that? Slightly quirky English people bumbling their way through and then the mystery is revealed.

And that's the thing, isn't it? Because actually, the only thing better than a good mystery is when the mystery is unraveled, is revealed. And the detective gets all the suspects in the room and explains how it all went down and then says, it was you that did it.

It's the best, isn't it? I think we love these things because we know on some level that we're in the middle of a mystery. Right? It's called life.

And life itself is full of big mysteries. Like, well, what is all this about? And what is my part in the story? And how does this situation fit into where this is all going?

[2:28] Why isn't that clear? So many mysteries. We know how stories go, especially if you've done your English GCSE. You know, they go introduction, crisis, resolution, conclusion.

How most stories go. And where are we? Humanity. In the middle of the story. Bang in the middle of the mystery. In the crisis. The bit before the resolution.

And the only thing that really helps you when you're in that place, in the crisis, in the middle of the mystery, is knowing how you're going to get to the happy ending. That's the only thing, really, that's going to get you through at that point.

And this passage is that. This passage is the mystery made known. This is the how we get to the happy ending bit revealed.

It's like Paul gets the Ephesians together and he says, guys, I know you're in the middle of it. So am I, sitting in my prison cell. But I've got to tell you, we know how the happy ending works.

[3:40] We know how that works. We know how God achieves the happy ending. The mystery has been made known. And we get to share that with other people. And we're going to get there in three steps today.

The mystery is made known in Jesus. That transforms Paul into a preacher of Jesus, which builds a church, which displays the good news of Jesus.

Flick back to Ephesians chapter 3 if you're not there. Let's pick it up at verse 1. For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles.

And then there's this dash thing. And that's the translator trying to tell us that Paul just seems to kind of break off in the middle of a thought. And he does that because he realises that he needs to explain how God achieves all that good stuff he was urging us to remember last week from Ephesians 2.

Do you remember that? The fact that we were separated from God, from anything good, from each other, that we're now reconciled to God and each other, and that he's building us into his visible home on earth.

[4:46] He realises he's got to explain that. He's introduced it earlier. Just turn back to chapter 1, verse 8. Second half of verse 8.

Chapter 1, verse 8. With all wisdom and understanding he made known to us the mystery of his good will, mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

And now he's got to the point Paul has where he realises chapter 3, he needs to explain what that means. How God achieves that plan.

And to explain that mystery he needs to start by saying here's how I fit into this, Paul. How I, Paul, fit into this. Here's how you fit into this, Ephesians, and then how all of us fit into it.

See if you can follow that thread as we go along. Chapter 3, verse 2. Surely you've heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you.

[5:56] That is, the mystery made known to me by revelation. As I've already written briefly. That's referenced back to chapter 1 right there.

In reading this then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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.

So Paul says that the mystery of how God will fix things in this world and in here and how we can possibly be fair and just and deal with all the rubbish and the evil and yet also pull good out of all of this is verse 2 something to do with God's grace.

Do you see that? The administration of God's grace. And this mystery is about Christ. Verse 4.

In reading this then you'll be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. Two clues. So what's the truth of this mystery about how God is going to make things right?

[7:08] Paul explains in verse 6. This mystery is that through the gospel the good news about Jesus.

The Gentiles are heirs together with Israel members of one body and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus. So the great reveal about how God achieves our happy ending is that through the good news that Jesus died on our behalf for our sins rose to defeat death we're made one with him so we have all his rights and his rightness and his future and we're made one with each other.

All of those things we are thinking about in chapter 2. That's it. That's the mystery. That's the mystery made known. The good news of Jesus achieves our reconciliation to Jesus and each other and secures our eternal future.

And now we know that as Christians we know that not because we were smart enough to figure it out sorry about all those other guys but because God has revealed it to us.

God has shown us which means our faith is not about reaching some place of zen where we finally achieve enlightenment and rise above all the troubles of the world to this beautiful state of perfect peace and detachment.

[8:41] We're not mystics. We know because God has told us. And so a Christian mystery when you come across that word in the Bible is not really a mystery at all.

It's the whodunit and the howdunit revealed and the answer is Jesus Christ. That means that we're not waiting for more revelations or reveals.

We don't need a book of Mormon to tell us what's really going on. We don't need three new prophecies this week to tell us how the truth about Jesus really works because we have it here. It's not an evolving solution. Verse 11 According to God's eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Past tense. Done. God's answer to the mystery of this world and how he's going to achieve his happy ending is and his truth is not going to change.

[9:53] It stands. It is accomplished. The mystery made known is the good news of God's grace in Christ that reconciles us with God and each other and secures our eternal future.

Job done. When you get home, if you're interested, flick over to Colossians chapter 1 verse 24 onwards, there's a parallel passage which says exactly this.

Still a question though, isn't there? How? How does that mystery made known, that good news, go out and do its work and reconcile us to God and to each other?

And this is why Paul's broken off. He's broken off because in answer to that question, how, he's given us the case study of himself. That's what's going on in this passage. And that brings us on to point two.

So the mystery made known in Jesus transforms Paul into a preacher of Jesus. Let's read verse seven together. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

[11:10] What happens when Jesus reveals the good news of God's grace to Paul? It transforms him into a servant of that good news. Even verse one, a prisoner of it.

You see that? Right at the beginning. verse eight. 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 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God who created all things.

So what happens? He's transformed into a servant of this good news and then he preaches it by God's power. The mystery revealed to him becomes the ministry entrusted to him.

Do you see the movement, the relationship, the connection here? Revelation and commission go together. If we're shown something, we're to share it.

And what have we been given to share? Verse eight. The boundless riches of Christ. Christ. All those blessings we're encouraged to enjoy in chapter one and two, that's what's being summed up here.

[12:30] And we're called to make it plain to everyone as Paul did. In fact, we really have them, but it's inevitable that we will share them. Because that's what the good news does.

When God opens our eyes to how he's saving us, it turns us into people who want to see others have their eyes open too. Preaching is making plain the mystery made known to everyone.

That's what it is. So we tell others. And you're thinking, uh-oh, he wants us all to be preachers now.

This isn't going to go well. Think about how Paul's feeling about this. That's how you're feeling.

Verse eight. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me.

He's terribly conscious of his weakness and failing, isn't he? The least of all God's people he calls himself. It's shades of Moses, aren't there? Lord, I can't speak. And somewhere else, if you know your Bible, he says he's the worst of sinners.

[13:42] That's what he calls himself. I don't think he actually was the worst of sinners, but if you know your own sin best, then you feel like it's the worst, don't you? In fact, if you dig a bit deeper, there's actually more going on here, because he makes a play on his name in this passage in the original language.

He's calling himself Small Paul. Little man. Not tall Saul, who he was named after.

Small Paul. He knows he's not impressive or attractive in the normal sense. But then you read the Bible and you think, boy, this guy, he's got guts.

He doesn't let anything stop him. He doesn't let shipwreck stop him. He doesn't let beating stop him.

How does that happen? And he answers in verse seven. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace.

This grace was given me. So it's a gift. It's not by right because of some natural ability. And it's by grace. And even that only works because of God's power working through him, who's just read.

[15:00] It's by grace. Just like Paul, none of our records stand up to scrutiny. None of us are qualified. We're not going to win people because we're impressive and attractive.

But all of us can share the good news because all of us are given God's grace, which changes us into people who make it known. Maybe there's some of you in the room just wondering, is there a call to some other or deeper form of ministry or mission?

Is that what I'm hearing the Lord say? And you're thinking, but could I do that? Maybe this is an answer.

The mystery made known in Jesus transforms Paul into a preacher of Jesus, which builds a church which displays the good news of Jesus.

Let's keep reading. Verse 10, pick it up there. His intent, God's intent, was that now through the church, there suddenly is the church in the middle of God's plan, in the middle of the plot.

[16:13] You see, the Ephesians and everyone heard Paul making known the mystery that had been made known to him and the church is built exactly like God has promised at the back end of chapter 2. Verse 22, back end of chapter 2, and in him you two are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

The church is suddenly on the map. And what's the church's place in this plan? Let's keep going in verse 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 according to his eternal purposes that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So God's plan for the church looks like this. God reveals the good news to Paul. Paul preaches it to the Ephesians and everyone. The church is created as the spirit applies the good news to our hearts and then the church shows how God is carrying out his rescue plan.

Displaying that to the whole universe. If you like diagrams? Here's one that tries to do that. That's something to think about, isn't it?

That our place in God's plan is to display the wisdom of the gospel to not just people on earth but the cosmic powers and authorities who are looking on going either, wow, this is God's plan?

[17:42] That's the angels. Or, oh no, that's God's plan. That's the demons. That's our part as the church in God's plan.

Because the mystery made known builds a church which displays the good news of Jesus. That means that this mystery, this revelation, isn't some kind of airy-fairy vision that just lives in our heads, right?

Some theoretical faith that only affects us as individuals. that's not what it is. It's sitting all around you. The church is God's vision brought to life.

It's just one reason why church really matters. One of the commentators says, all of this demands a view of the church so high that it challenges belief. Yeah. Yeah. Live in God's view of you, that's the title of our series.

If you take God's view of you, of us, of the church, if you do that, that we make known the mystery of the good news, that we show how we reach the happy ending, that we display the manifold wisdom of God in salvation.

[19:11] And church isn't really optional, is it? It's not really a, if I feel like it today, kind of thing. It's easy to get discouraged, isn't it, when church is hard?

It can be. And life feels like it has a lot of unsolved mysteries in it, and we're in the middle of the plot crisis. What does Paul say? Verse 13, I ask you therefore not to be discouraged, because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Paul says don't be discouraged. Don't be discouraged that it looks silly. That it ends up with me being in prison. That sharing the good news will mean suffering for others, just like it did for Jesus, the one who revealed this mystery.

See, Paul is so convinced of the truth, of the glory, of the goodness of this mystery revealed in Jesus Christ, and of God's sovereignty in his life and in that plan, that he dares to call himself a prisoner of Jesus.

Verse 1, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus. It's not Jesus that put him in prison. It's the Emperor Nero. But this is what the gospel of grace does to people.

[20:26] It doesn't matter that I'm a prisoner, that I'm suffering on your behalf. Don't be discouraged. You'll suffer too. Don't be discouraged. This is about Jesus. His plan. The mystery that he has made known.

His goodness. His grace. Just want us to take a couple of minutes to reflect. Here's a couple of questions to think about.

Just in a minute. Silence. Am I living God's view of the church? If not, what words of grace and power does he have for me? From this passage. Secondly, am I discouraged in my faith and in the church?

Ask the Lord to show you his view of you from Ephesians and his view of the church. Just take a minute to do that. Then we'll finish up. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. I just want to finish with the story of the Apollo 8 mission.

[22:20] If you're a space nerd, you'll know this mission. It's a mission to go to the moon. Months of training. It's lonely. It's difficult. This is, you know, 40 years ago, and technology was much less advanced.

