The Mystery Revealed - Whodunnit?

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[0:00] Thank you very much, and that is a great reading, and it's a real privilege to share with you as you're going through the book of Ephesians together, a great book. In that particular passage there's so much, but I want to highlight three key themes in it, the themes of grace and mystery and power. I just want to stop and invite you to pray with me. Let me tell you what I'm going to pray in my prayer. Sometimes it's awkward when people start praying, you're not sure if you want to be in on it or not. So let me tell you what I'm going to pray on my prayer. I'm going to pray, first of all, that I'll preach well. You'll probably want to be in on that one, won't you?

Secondly, I want to pray, God speak to me, and I'll leave a pause and just invite you all just silently in your mind, whether or not you're a Christian, you're not a Christian, whether you feel that God is so close to you, far away from you, whether you're not even sure whether God exists, whatever. Just invite you to pray, God, if you really are there, will you speak to me this morning? Let's just pray. Father God, please help me to teach your word faithfully and accurately.
God, speak to me. God promises that he will speak through his word faithfully taught. And it's a great mistake not to read the Bible, not to listen to the Bible, not to do what it says. And many people are like that because they think that somehow the Bible is going to limit them. And, oh, I don't want to be, you know, I want to be free to do my own thing. But if it's the maker's instructions, then actually we're set free by following it. And it would be a great mistake not to follow the maker's instructions. Let me give you an illustration. When I was a student, I bought my first car.
I paid £75 for it. I was really pleased with it. It costs me more now to fill up the tank, or my current car then. I'm a bit embarrassed telling you about it because it was a Reliant three-wheeler. Not so much a car, more of an airfix kit, really. It was in the time in the 1970s when crumple zones were coming in. Do you remember? You know, this will crumple if you're in an accident.
[2:34] A Reliant car made of fiberglass basically was a crumple zone. If you got hit by something, you'd just be left on the seat. And worse still, it was bright purple because this was my hippie era.

Carol and I were hippies in the 1970s with long hair and love beads and psychedelic t-shirts. Yeah, frightening, isn't it? You may wonder if there was a time when hippies roamed the earth.
There was. There was also a time when dinosaurs roamed the earth. And the way to tell the difference is that dinosaurs were marginally more intelligent. Anyway, I was this hippie in the 1970s with my bright purple car that I bought for £75. It was always going wrong. And I remember one time I was trying to fix it. The more and more trying to fix it, I just couldn't do it. And a friend of mine says, you need to get the workshop manual. I said, what's the workshop manual? He said, it's the maker's instructions. I said, I don't need the maker's instructions. I don't need a workshop manual.
I can figure it out on my own. My teenage arrogance. I can figure it out on my own. More I tried to fix it, the worse it got. Inevitably, eventually, I swallowed my pride, got the workshop manual, and I was able to fix the car. And I was set free to enjoy it. Freedom comes from following the maker's instructions. But I remember working on the car, looking at the instructions and thinking, what I really need, though, is Mr. Reliant, the manufacturer himself, to come and stand alongside me and put his hands on my hands and show me how to do it. That's what the Bible is. It's not just God's maker's instructions. God promises his presence. The Bible is the only book in the world where the author promises to be with you when you read it.
Isn't that amazing? Isn't that amazing? So let's explore that passage and expect God to speak to us through those three themes, grace, mystery, and power. We start with grace. If we pick it up in verse two, surely you've heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you.
[4:51] Grace. What is grace? Sometimes people get, you know, sidetracked. Oh, that's that funny prayer that some people pray before a meal. I heard a story of a family who'd invited some very

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important people over for dinner. And they wanted to show off. So just as everyone had sat down, the important people and parents and their young son, they said to the young son, will you say grace? And the little boy said, well, what do I pray? And mummy said, well, pray the same prayer you heard daddy pray this morning.

So he said, oh God, do we have to have those boring people for dinner? That isn't what grace means here. It's not the prayer we pray before dinner. Grace literally means God's undeserved favor. God's forgiveness of our sins, new life in a relationship with God, because Jesus died for us, taking the death penalty that we deserve, to enable us to be forgiven, an undeserved favor. We don't deserve it. We can never deserve forgiveness. Sometimes we hear people say, oh, that person, terrible person, he doesn't deserve forgiveness. Well, of course not. No one can deserve forgiveness. That's the whole point of it. But God wants to forgive us because of his grace, undeserved favor for us that Paul says was given to me to share with you the church here in Ephesus.

Why does he want to forgive us? Because he loves us and he wants to restore us into that relationship with him. That's why Jesus died. His love for us is unconditional. If you remember nothing else from this service this morning, remember this. God loves you. God really, really loves you. And that's an unconditional love. He doesn't love you because you're beautiful. Many of you are. He doesn't love you because you're good. Some of you might be. He loves you because he loves you because he loves you.

Nothing you could do would ever make him love you less. And nothing you could do would ever make him love you more. He calls us through his grace, this undeserved favor, this unconditional love, this forgiveness through the death of Jesus into his family to be members of his body. Jump down to verse 6.

Verse 6. This mystery of the gospel that we are then one body and share us together in the promise of Christ Jesus. Through his undeserved favor, this grace, this forgiveness, we're called into one body, one family. We're invited to belong in God's family, not just fit in. There is a difference between belonging and fitting in. You know, to fit in, I have to be like you. To belong, I can be like me, and loved and accepted. And it's interesting if you look, as with all passages of Scripture, you've got to take in the whole kind of thrust of the whole word. You look in the life and teaching of Jesus. You see that he called the disciples to belong. He invited them to follow him. First of all, it began with belonging. Gradually then, they came to believe. If you read Mark's gospel, particularly, you'll see in the middle part of it, it's halfway through, often called, subtitled, or headed, [8:43] Peter's confession of Christ. By the way, the headings in the Bible are not original. They weren't there in the original. So, but it's where Jesus says, who do people say I am? And Peter says, you are the Christ. In Matthew's account of it, Peter says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

At that point, he's come to believe. He's come to understand. He's been with Jesus for quite a while already. So, he's already been belonging, and now he's gradually believing. But does he then behave?

No. See, the rest of the story of Peter, and actually, even just at that point, if you read it there in the middle of Mark's gospel and Matthew, you find that Jesus then teaches that he's going to suffer and die. Why? For our forgiveness of our sins. And Peter rebukes him and says, no, don't go and do that. So, first of all, he invites his disciples to belong. Gradually, they believe, and gradually, eventually, they behave. And that's what God's undeserved favor is. He calls us into his family, offers us that free forgiveness, invites us to belong, gradually believe, and eventually behave.

And unfortunately, some churches turn it round another way. When Carol and I first came to faith, we did spend a while in a particular church that seemed to have everything round the other way. They expected you to behave, first of all. There are all these things you had to do, well, mainly things you had to not do, like not go to the cinema and not teach, not watch TV. And we were young teenagers, you know, so don't go out in groups of less than 600, you know, and don't get closer than six inches to another person. So, we were expected to behave, and then we were expected to have a whole list of things to believe. Here's a checklist.

You believe this, believe this. Eventually, if you behaved okay and believed all the right things, you might be allowed to feel that you belong. But that's not the way of Jesus. You see in Jesus his undeserved grace, our undeserved favor, that actually he invites people to belong, gradually believe, and ultimately changes in our behavior. Let's stop for just a moment of reflection. Just

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think, just silently in your own mind. Do you feel that you belong, or you feel under pressure to fit in? Jesus invites you to belong to his family.
[11:27] The second theme about mystery, we pick it up in verses 3 to 6. In fact, in verses 3 to 6, it's used three times. The mystery made known to me, the mystery of Christ. This is the mystery.

Paul refers to a mystery made known to us, revealed so that we can come into a relationship with God through Jesus. Inevitably, there are mysteries for us in Christian faith. Of course there are. I mean, we are called into a relationship with the infinite, eternal creator God, and we, with our puny little minds, are never going to understand everything about God. Our limited human brains could never fully comprehend it. But we can know everything that we need to know in order to come into a relationship with him. We may not know all the answers to the questions that we want to know. And I meet people quite often who say, I can't become a Christian until I've got the answers to these questions. Well, I'm afraid you might be setting yourself too high a target there, because there are great mysteries, and we have to live with those mysteries. But God shows us enough so that we can respond to him and know about him and come into a relationship with him. Russ was talking earlier about the open question times I used to do when I was doing these missions in universities and colleges.
And it's lovely actually talking with Russ about Westminster, because it's all come back to me. I can remember, it's hard, because I did 65 university and college missions, and then needed half an hour to lie down in a darkened room, I can tell you. But so much of them were all open debate, question, dialogue. And I remember one particular, I don't remember which university it was in, but I remember there were just this group of people who were asking me these really obscure philosophical questions. And I had to say, well, that's a very deep question. I can tell you a little bit, but I've got to really say, you know, there's a lot of that that I don't know. Next question. Yeah, I can tell you a little bit, but you know, I've got to say, I don't know. And then one smart aleck said, you don't seem to know much, do you? They all thought that was very funny.
But that's the reality of life, isn't it? Albert Einstein famously said, the more you know, the more you realize you don't know. There are great mysteries. It's hard for young people, particularly to accept that, that there are things, you know, they want to know, or they think they know everything. I saw a car bumper sticker that said, employ a teenager, employ a teenager while he still knows everything. But we have to learn that actually, there are things that we don't know, there are mysteries, and we have to wrestle with those mysteries. And I, looking back on that particular open question time there in that university, I think actually, that me saying, I don't know, was kind of like a turning point, as it turned from hostility to more kind of genuine engagement. And I remember in that, I vividly remember one student saying, this isn't how I thought it was going to be. He said, I thought there would be like a wall, and you'd be one side of the wall, and we'd be the other side of the wall, and we'd be lobbing bombs at each other.
But he said, it's not like that. It's like you've kind of come around the wall, and you're on our side, helping us to climb over. That was wonderful to hear, that actually we recognize there are mysteries. One of my favorite verses in the Bible, it's from the book of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy 29, 29. The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. There are secret things, there are mysteries, there are things that we don't understand. But God has revealed that which we need to understand, so that we can come into a relationship with him. I'm certain that God is there. I'm certain that God loves us. I'm certain that Jesus came to die for us, so that we can be forgiven. I'm certain that if I receive his forgiveness, turn towards him, then I will have eternal life living with him. Around each of those, there are great mysteries, all sorts of things.
[15:55] How do we explain the atonement? What exactly happened on the cross? How do we understand exactly how the eternal God created this finite world? So many questions that we don't know. But if we're honest with people about the uncertainties, then actually they might be more willing to look and explore actually the things that we can know and come into a relationship with God through.

I was on a train a while ago and a guy sat opposite me. He kept looking at me and then he said, you're Nick Pollard, aren't you? And I said, yeah. And he said, you came to my university back in whenever it was. I said, yeah. And he said, you had all these questions and debates and stuff. And it really got me thinking. And you gave out Mark's gospel and I took away Mark's gospel. And I thought and I thought and I read and thought. And he said, you know, some weeks after that, I

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came to faith. That's marvelous. And then we got to a stop. And just as he stood up, he stood up to get off and he put his hand on my shoulder and he said, by the way, by the way, now I'm a Baptist minister. So, which was marvelous. So it's, but it's through recognizing the mysteries, the uncertainties. So let's just again reflect together. Just close your eyes and reflect for a minute. How do you handle the mysteries, the uncertainties, the things you don't know, the things that you're, if only I understood that. Are you trying to get all the answers before you will fully trust in Jesus? Or are you prepared to say, Lord, you've shown me all that I need to know in order to come to know you. I respond like a child responds to their father, full of questions. Why, why, why? But trusting the father. Finally, the third theme, God's power at work in us.
It was the last two verses that was read. Now to him who is able to do, this is verses 20 and 21. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us. Not only did Jesus come to enable us to be forgiven, but also to enable us to live a radically transformed life through his power. We don't have to do it on our own. One of my favorite books in the New Testament is a book of Colossians, and Colossians 2 verse 6 says, just as you received Christ as Lord, so continue to live in him. Just as you received Christ as Lord, so continue to live in him. How do we receive Christ as Lord? By faith. We can't do anything. We don't deserve it. It's undeserved grace. Undeserved favor. We receive by faith. Then it's, then Paul says to the church and Colossae, then continue to live in the same way. Live by faith. Trusting God. The danger is we kind of come to Jesus through faith, but then feel we have to live through works. You know, that there's all these things I've got to do, and these rules I need to follow, but that's not what a relationship is. Carol, you've got to meet my lovely wife. That's lovely. We're coming up to our 48th wedding anniversary shortly, and it was over 50 years ago that I asked this 17-year-old girl to marry me. Sorry, I've given away the figures. People can do the maths and work it out. But anyway, when I asked this little 17-year-old girl to marry me, she said yes, and I'm eternally grateful. I couldn't have done anything in my life without my wonderful wife. But imagine she'd said yes, I'll marry you, but here's the rules. Here's my rules. You are to cook half the meals every week. You are to tell me you love me every day, and I want to kiss every hour on the hour. Right? Can you imagine that? What kind of a relationship would that be? But the fact is, I do those things because I love her. It's not because there's a set of rules to follow. You know, because I love her, I want to cook. I enjoy cooking nice food for Carol. Because I love her, I want to tell her I love her. I'm always telling her I love her. Because I love her, I want to kiss her. Sorry. Yes. When I'm talking to young people about, and I talk about kissing, they go, but we're all, you know, many of them are the same generation. Kisses are wonderful. Feel like heaven. Tastes like honey. And sounds like a boot coming out of a cowpat. Anyway, so, but that's because I love her. I love her, so I want to do those things.
[21:10] Relationships are not built on rules, but on love. Love then empowers us to live a different life. As Paul says there, according to his power that is at work in us. We receive his undeserved favor.

We receive his forgiveness. We set aside those mysteries that we can't understand, and we accept the love that we can understand, we wrestle with the mysteries, and then because we've received his forgiveness, we go on to live just as we received, so continue to live, knowing, experiencing God's power in us to transform our lives. We're in a time of Lent and approaching Easter, and it is a good time for all of us to reflect on how God's power is working in us. You know, how are we being empowered to live for Jesus in this world? Not because there's a set of rules to follow, but because we love Jesus, and because we love Jesus, we love other people and want to see lives transformed. Perhaps it's a time to reflect on that and think about what is the Jesus who called us to belong to him. How does he call us to invite other people to belong? Throughout Jesus' life, he stood up to the powerful. He stood up for the powerless. He welcomed the outcast. He reached out to the lepers. Throughout his life and ministry,
Jesus welcomed and welcomed and included everyone. And that's what he calls us to do through his power at work in us. Not because there's a set of rules that tells us to do it, but because we love him, therefore we love other people, he empowers us to work to see justice and equity in this world. A world in which all people can thrive physically, emotionally, spiritually, where people are not written off because of who they are or what they've done, where the door is always open for reconciliation, for redemption and restitution. To live in God's world, in God's way, because of God's love, through his power living in us. For the final time, let's just close our eyes and reflect for a

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minute.
What practically is happening in your life because you're forgiven, you're empowered, you're given the love of God to welcome others. Just think through your day tomorrow, just quietly in your mind, just think about your day coming up tomorrow, what are you doing?
[24:05] Think, who might you come across tomorrow who may feel rejected or powerless? What could you do practically to help them feel included and empowered?

How might your living through tomorrow be different? Because you're forgiven, because you're transformed, because you are empowered by God's power to welcome and include and value everybody.
Thank you so much for having me. It's been a joy and a pleasure to be here with you. Thank you for looking after my big sister as well.
Appreciate that. God bless you. God bless.

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