

Mystery of the Gospel, Manifold Wisdom of God.

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[0:00] Good morning. It's a joy to see all of you here.! It's good to be having some cooler weathers. That's also a blessing from God.

Do you not agree? You look like, I don't mind the warm weather. Oh yeah, yeah. That is true. Winter is coming, isn't it? So, we'll continue in Ephesians this morning. We're in verse 18 to 13. If you have a Bible, open there.

If you don't have one, there should be one in the pews. It's on page 1160 in your pew Bible. Paul, previously in the first seven chapters of verse 13, that revealed the mystery that which he was being charged to proclaim.

He's marveled at the fact that he was the kind of person that God would call to do that. And he continues now in verse 8. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentile the unsurgable riches of Christ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

[1:36] Paul, in verse 8 to 13 here, focuses on his own unique role as a steward of the mystery of Christ. He fulfilled the mandate Christ gave him at his conversion and at his commissioning by firstly proclaiming the good news of the unsearchable riches to the Gentiles.

Secondly, he fulfills it by teaching and revealing to the church at large and everyone who will listen that this mystery God has proposed to reveal and as now revealed, God has proposed it from eternity past.

Why did Paul find it necessary, you might ask, to proclaim this mystery and to teach the church to old fast to the truth revealed in it?

It's because he wants the church of Christ to know who he is in truth. That the church there may, for the church to resemble God, to resemble in the world what God has made her to be in bringing together living stones from far and near fitting them together to be built into his holy temple.

Paul says, I am the very least of all the saints. Now, we all know who Apostle Paul is.

[3:10] If you were writing on behalf of Paul, you would not even come close to saying such a thing. It almost sparks of, it's not quite blasphemy, but it's, this is Paul, Apostle Paul, the very least, no, he might be second, many will say second to Christ himself.

He's the greatest of all the saints. But he refers to himself as the very least of all the saints. Why would Paul, an apostle, a missionary, an evangelist, par excellence, refer to himself in that way? Perhaps it is because what Paul is called to proclaim is something that has not only been revealed to him, but something which he has a first-hand experience of.

Paul, the truth of his message, had come home to him. It has transformed his own life in unspeakable and miraculous ways.

So it wasn't false modesty on its part when he refers to himself as the least of all the saints. Paul knows from whence he came.

[4:20] He remembered his history as a persecutor of the brethren, the one who masterminded the martyrdom of Stephen, the zealot who was dead set on hunting down Christians.

This same man was now commissioned to be the herald of the good news of the gospel to the nations. So I think Paul sees the enormity of the mercy that was lavished upon him while he was an enemy of Christ.

Remember a story on the Damascus Road when Christ, the risen Lord, confronted him. At that point, Paul knows he deserved death.

And that would have been just and right for the Lord to do. To just eliminate him. But instead, the Lord Jesus gave him abundant life.

The justice that Paul deserved was taken upon Christ himself and he was given life. Life abundantly. And much more he was given.

[5:36] God gave him the glorious ministry to proclaim the mystery of this gospel. Of his gospel, that in Christ, all are welcome.

All are made alive. All are adopted into God's family and assured of eternal life. This, Paul knows. Paul's message was first and foremost a personal and experiential reality in his life. And you remember as he said elsewhere, that he said that all his righteousness, this is before he was found in Christ.

Paul and Paul, by human standard, would have been considered a righteous man. An upright man, by human standards. But Paul says, all his righteousness before he was found in Christ were as filthy rags.

Because he knows that without the grace of God that was given to him, he was heading straight to the pit of hell. Here was a man who knows the measure of grace that was given to him.

[6:45] Even though he was not deserving of it. And this is what a grace-filled life looks like. A proper self-awareness that leads to humility.

See, the more you are aware of God's grace in your life, the more you are aware of God's grace in justifying you, in daily attending you in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to sanctify you, the more you are aware of the peace and joy that comes with knowing that you are Christ's own possession, that you belong to him, the more you will realize you are undeserving of it.

And you might say like Paul, why have I been given so much when I am so undeserving? And you might marvel then at God's great gift and God's great goodness.

So is you. And it's this message that Paul was especially called by God to proclaim. He was the vessel.

He was the vessel, the mouthpiece, which God used to proclaim to the Gentiles that God had come to them in Jesus Christ to be reconciled to them.

[8:14] Paul says that this is the plan of the mystery that was hidden for ages in God who created all things.

The plan, this plan, now revealed to Paul, is what he was committed to stewarding. Remember how he described himself as a steward of the gospel?

He was committed to stewarding this plan. His own ministry consists of stewarding this truth, proclaiming it, teaching it, and defending it.

And if you read his 13 letters in the New Testament, you will see that he was a faithful steward committed to this. He stood in the gap against all those who would seek to lay an added burden upon the Gentiles, making them add on man-made rules to God's salvation that's already been accomplished and applied to them.

He even rebuked Peter, a fellow apostle, when he succumbs to those same people. To Paul and for Paul, Jesus Christ has secured all that is needed for reconciliation in God.

[9:33] And by union with Jesus Christ, we who are far off have been brought near. Nothing else is needed but Jesus Christ. Paul preached this, defended this at personal cost to himself.

And what's the purpose? Why was he adamant to do this? To defend the church of God in this way? He says to us in verse 10, so that through the church, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might, it's actually, blessed to read it, must, the manifold wisdom of God must now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

What's the purpose for which Paul was so intent on being a faithful steward? It is that the manifold, the word here, manifold, multifaceted angles of the wisdom of God may be made known.

The word translated manifold! In your ESV translations is actually two words in the Greek. It denotes something that is multifaceted, multicolored in a way.

It reminds me of what Paul said in chapter 2, verse 10 of Ephesians, that we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus. We are made up of different colors all brought together on the canvas of God's tapestry to show forth God's beautiful design.

[11:18] This is God's manifold wisdom. Let us consider this wisdom of our God. It is the wisdom that created the world and all that is in it, in its great diversity and unity.

So much so that all that is made is sustained by His hand. It is this same wisdom that has brought Jews and Gentile nations together into one body in Christ Jesus.

creating what the early church fathers described as a third race. That's how, for example, Clement of Alexandria referred to people who are in Christ.

We are a third race. people from all ethnicities and nations have been called out to be a new race of people, a new kind of humanity.

Old and a greater allegiance to our identity in Christ over all other allegiances, over all other identities. that's what the church is to be.

[12 : 35] Let me rephrase that. That is what the church is. Diverse, yet unified in Christ. Christ. And our union with Christ and with one another is our primary marker.

So, when we put other identities over above that which we are in Christ, we tell a lie to the world. And we tell a lie to the principalities and powers, the rulers in the heavenly places, about what the church is, about what this body that Jesus Christ has shed his blood to redeem is actually is. The point Paul is making here is that this mystery that was hidden from eternity past is now to be displayed.

Right? It was hidden in God, Paul says. But now it's been revealed. And not only revealed, but it's meant to be displayed to the whole of creation. Note the word there.

[13 : 50] He says in the heavenly realms. He says that it's meant to be known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. Another translation says to principalities and powers.

That includes angels. Both fallen angels and holy angels. We are to display God's glory and God's wisdom to the heavenly beings.

Peter himself says it in 1 Peter 1 verse 12 that concerning this salvation, concerning this great thing that God has done, angels longed to look at it.

They were waiting expectantly to see what God will do and what God is doing. They were also wondering how God's wisdom would be displayed.

For example, in the birth of a human child to a young poor virgin girl from a small town. How is God?

[15 : 02] What is God doing here? The angels were wondering. Some theologians believe that Paul is only referring to the fallen angels, not the holy angels, when he says rulers in the heavenly places.

but while that is true, I think it also includes the holy angels. When God sends them as his emissaries, they were wondering, even as they did God's call and they are God's messenger, what is God's plan in this unrivalment of his salvation, the revealing of how he's going to save the world? God how is he using these people? Do you mean these twelve riffraff people he's going to make the foundation upon which he builds his church?

How is he going to come to a virgin girl? How is he going to call even in the Old Testament, the saints that he called in order to be the remnant?

And the fallen angels were also wondering. They're probably looking around like, okay, we got him now. But they were constantly being confounded by the wisdom of God.

[16 : 26] And the world was looking along in their own wisdom, wondering what God is doing, how God is revealing himself. Can you consider how ridiculous it looks to the forces of darkness?

How frustrating it is to them that God's weakness is greater than the world's strength. That it is in the very display of his weakness in the cross, in calling foolish and weak things of the world to shame the wise and the strong.

It is in the very weak things in which he conquered and secured his victory. This is God's wisdom. This is God's wisdom, which is foolishness to those who are perishing, Paul says in 1 Corinthians. And this wisdom was displayed supremely in Jesus Christ.

And it's still on display to the world. This wisdom is still on display to the world. How, you may ask, it is displayed through this gathered assembly of believers.

[17 : 43] Through you and I, the Church of God, as we guided here this morning from different backgrounds, different ethnic groups, different socioeconomic brackets, united under the name of Jesus, all sharing a common identity in him, we display God's marvelous wisdom to the world.

That's what Paul is saying here. When we love one another, when we display the fruits of the Spirit towards one another, love, joy, peace, patience, patience, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

when we do this, we display the marvelous wisdom of our God that his grace can transform such a group of sinners such as we into the likeness of Christ.

That his love can so saturate such a diverse collection of people that they reflect unity in Christ Jesus. Jesus. But the opposite is also true. When there is strife among us, when there is anger, envy, rivalries, we tell a lie about what God has done in us and among us.

[19:17] And what a grievous lie it is. We cannot be a display to the world of God's marvelous grace. We can't because we look just like the world when we let these things exist and take root among us.

We cease to be light shining in the darkness to the world. God. You know, the angels, both fallen and holy angels, they know, they see all our weaknesses.

Right? They see all our sins. They see our nature that's marred and deformed by sin. Yet, at the same time, they see God's grace displayed in the life of a believer.

Look at a believer such as Paul. God's grace displayed in the life of this apostle of Jesus Christ. Look at a believer such as yourself.

God's grace displayed in your life. The angels see this. They're looking and marveling at the great drama God is writing with our lives.

[20:31] As John Stott puts it, it's as if a great drama is being enacted. History is the theater. The world is the stage.

And God's people, we're God's people, the church. God's people, believers, in every land, are the actors. We are the actors on God's stage enacting God's drama.

God has written the play, and he directs it, and he produces it, act by act, scene by scene, the story continues to unfold.

We are God's actors on that stage, writing God's story, displaying his marvelous goodness and wisdom to the world. So, how we conduct ourselves, how we relate to one another in this church matters.

It matters. It matters to more than just ourselves in this room, in this four walls, in this church. It matters to the world out there needing a picture of God's power.

[21:47] It matters to the angels who are also looking on at the display of God's glorious wisdom. It matters.

And Paul continues, says, this was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized, or he has accomplished in Christ Jesus. All of this, all of this displaying calling the people from different places to gather as one body unified, it was all according to his eternal purpose.

This mystery reveals and furthers God's eternal purpose in Jesus. This is what Paul had said already in chapter 1 verse 10. It's before the foundation of the world.

God has proposed, planned to do this. This is a preview. What's going on now in the church is a preview of Christ's work of resolving all things in himself.

The church of Jesus Christ is a sign. We are a signpost to all of creation that God will restore all things, redeem the whole of creation, the whole cosmos, that sin is broken.

[23:09] Do you know that? When God sees, when people, the world sees the redeemed believer interacting with one another in their fallenness, yet clinging to Christ, displaying love to one another and displaying love in the world, it's a picture of God's redemption and the promise that God will redeem all things.

And that God will do it in this way as also being God's eternal purpose from before the foundation of the world. There's a comfort in this verse, verse 11.

The comfort is this, that this has been God's plan all along. There is no contingency plan with God in case the first plan doesn't go as planned.

God doesn't have contingencies. All that God wills and plans comes to fruition. And this has been the plan from before the foundation of the world.

Isn't that marvelous? That he will yet plan to use you and I all along to display his glory. So Kristen, look at your life.

[24:28] Are you in Christ? If so, nothing happens to you that is unknown by your loving Father. Nothing catches him by surprise, especially if it is concerning his precious ones.

And he will redeem all things. In fact, he's already at work redeeming all things in and through his church of which you are a part. It may not look like that to you presently, but you have the promise of God in his word that that is what he is doing.

And you as a child have a father, God as your father, through your faith in Christ Jesus. and you have access to him, to this father.

You have access with boldness, with the boldness of a favorite child even. And it says, because it's the access that God, Jesus Christ, the beloved of the father, has freely given to you.

That's why Paul says we have boldness to go to our father God. And it's always an open door. It's always an open door to him. Look at Paul.

[25 : 50] He's sort of ending this long digression. He meant to pray, remember, in the beginning of chapter 3 and he went into revision. He's sort of ending this long digression here and exercising this access to the father by praying, as he will do, starting in verse 14, by praying for the Gentile church.

This is the way in which we have access to God, in prayer. And Lord willing, we'll cover chapter 14 to 19 next week.

But as a last encouragement, look at verse 13 there. Paul knows that these Ephesians that he's writing to might be discouraged.

They know where he's writing from. He's writing from imprisonment in Rome. So as a last encouragement to them, he says, don't be discouraged.

It's actually, he's saying to them, don't grow weary. It's more of an active thing. Don't grow weary by my imprisonment.

[26 : 56] He told them not to lose heart. All that Christ is doing in Paul, even his suffering, is for God's glory. Or even more than that, it is also for the Gentiles.

Glory. So he told them, and the same message applies to us, by the way, when we see God's people suffering persecution in the world, such as the hardship that is before our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan and other places in the world, we are not to grow weary.

When we ourselves face hardship because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we are not to grow weary. We are not to lose heart. We are not to give in.

That's the thrust of Paul's encouragement to them in verse 13. Don't give up. Don't give in. Don't become weary. Don't become weary of displaying the wisdom of God in your love of God and your love of neighbor.

It's easy to be when the world is against you to start to become callous and build a bitterness to the world. But Paul here, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is encouraging us to grow weary in doing good as the people of God.

[28 : 25] Don't lose heart, even though there is suffering all around you. In fact, your faithfulness in the midst of that suffering is one of the many ways God is showing forth his wisdom to the world.

Let us pray.