

Mystery Revealed I

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[0 : 00] Let's pray together as we stand. Father, will you by your Spirit now open the eyes of our hearts, that we may see your truth and that we may see it clearly, that we may believe it and put all our trust in your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Well, I hope you will keep your Bibles open to page 181 of the New Testament section of your pew Bibles.

We are going to be looking at that second reading, Ephesians chapter 3, verses 1 through 7. Now, I grew up, I spent most of my childhood in the 1980s.

And that means that my imagination was kind of fertilized by a rich mixture of Cold War espionage movies on the one side and Star Wars on the other.

I think if you combine those two things, you can explain a lot about who I am, which is a little frightening. But somewhere around 1986, there began to be rumors and whispers in the news about a new military aircraft that the United States government was designing.

[1 : 34] And the only name that we had for it was the word stealth. And it was a beautiful sounding word to me. It just ignited my imagination.

I just wanted to know what this was all about. But the thing was, it was top secret. It was a total mystery. There were whispers and rumors, but there was nothing clear at all about what this airplane was or what really it would do.

I remember going to an air show as a kid and running past all the displays of the various airplanes until there was the display that claimed to reveal the stealth airplane.

And I went there, but all the guys had done is just wheeled out a fuel line, propped it up in midair as if it was fueling an invisible airplane.

And I was crushed. But then in November 1988, at Edwards Air Force Base, which is the middle of nowhere in California, a giant hangar door rolled open and out came the B-2 stealth bomber.

[2 : 46] And all the news reels were running. And on that day, it went from being top secret to being top news. The mystery was unveiled, and everyone was able to see what had been hiding for so long.

Well, as we've been walking through the book of Ephesians, Paul has been doing a very similar thing with regard to Christ. He's been unveiling the mystery of who Jesus is.

In chapter 1, he talked about how, chapter 1, verses 9 and 10, how all things in heaven and on earth will be united in a common destiny of honoring Christ as Lord.

And then in chapter 2, he unveiled for us something of the nature of the church, that the church is the beginning of Christ's re-creation of the world, and that it is now the people of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And one of the things that we saw last week was that the church is to be built upon the foundation of the apostles. And what we're going to see in our passage this morning is something of that relationship.

[4 : 05] How is the church to relate to the apostles? What are the apostles' role in the life of the church? And it all has to do with this mystery that has been unveiled.

And what we will see is this, that the mystery of Christ was unveiled uniquely through the ministry of the apostles. But that the mystery of Christ is to be permanently displayed in the ongoing life of the church.

Let's start with the ministry of the apostles first. Now, in chapters 1 and 2, as we've seen, if you've been reading along and kind of keeping up with the series, or if you've been studying the book of Ephesians in Bible study, you'll know that Paul runs at this kind of breakneck speed.

It's amazing how much he can pack in to just a very few number of words. It's a gift that few people have. And he's been running along at this breakneck speed, and then we get to chapter 3, and it's as if he hits the break.

It's as if he hits the break, and he turns to us, and he says, Now, hang on. Hang on, guys. You don't think I made this up, do you? You don't think that what I've been teaching you has come out of my own mind, do you?

[5 : 30] Because that's not the way it worked at all. Instead, the mystery of Christ was revealed to me in a way that changed my life completely.

Look at verse 1. For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

I don't know if you've heard people talk this way, but from time to time, you'll hear people say and make the claim that Paul is actually the inventor of Christianity.

It's put differently from time to time, but oftentimes they describe it as Paul took the teachings of Jesus and then inserted more information, more ideas out of his own kind of religious genius and then put that together and served up this new religion called Christianity.

I think if Paul heard people say that, he would either laugh out loud or he would get really angry, but either way, he would not agree at all with it.

[6 : 54] It's not that Paul thought up the mystery of Christ and the gospel of grace. It's that the mystery of Christ and the gospel of grace invaded his life.

It's that it erupted into his life with a life-shattering force. You know that Paul is a former bad guy, right?

For those of you who know the story of Paul, he was a zealous religious leader. But when Christianity first started going, when the church first started spreading, he led the charge to eradicate Christianity.

You can read the story in Acts chapter 7 and chapter 9. And Paul was sent kind of on a business trip to Damascus.

And his objective in going to Damascus was to search out the Christians and to imprison them. And at that time, Paul was utterly clueless that there was anything valid or true or important about Jesus.

[8 : 12] The mystery of Christ was an utterly closed secret to him. But all that changed in a moment. As he approached Damascus, Jesus erupted into his life with a blinding flash.

Light blazed around Paul, and in that moment he was struck physically blind. He was struck physically blind, but the eyes of his heart were opened.

And in that moment, beginning there, and then in the next few days, and then in the next few years, Paul was given the gift to be able to see the mystery of Christ with an unprecedented, pristine clarity.

And Paul was able to see, through the grace of God, that Jesus was not the heretic from Galilee, but that he was, and that he is, the Lord of all, to whom every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess, that he indeed is the sovereign Lord of all creation.

On the road to Damascus, the mystery of Christ went from a closed secret to an open and unveiled and undeniable reality that was so forceful in his life that within just a few days, he himself was persecuted for preaching Christ.

[9 : 48] The tables were entirely turned. And in verse 2, Paul calls this grace. I hope you don't think of grace as a passive thing.

I hope you don't think of grace as this kind of divine politeness or a weak sort of thing.

The grace that Paul talks about in this verse and in other places came into his life with a life-altering power.

God's grace is always transforming grace. And the particular grace and the particular gift that God gave Paul was to unveil the mystery of Christ so that he could see who Jesus was from first to last. And it's the same grace he gave the other apostles. Look at verse 4. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which has not been made known to the sons of men and other generations, as it's now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

[11 : 13] Those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament will know that as you read the Old Testament, every now and then, you'll begin to get hints and whispers of the coming Christ.

And the whispers and the anticipations in the Old Testament of the ministry of Jesus were enough to raise anticipation, were enough to raise expectation.

But they weren't enough to gain any kind of comprehensive clarity about who Jesus was and would be. There were, in a sense, if you think of movies, there were trailers and previews, but the feature film about who Jesus is was reserved for the ministry of the apostles.

And to them, God gave the gift by the Spirit for them to see with clarity the mystery of Christ.

And then, they were sent out to fully divulge everything that they knew about Jesus to the world.

And they did that very substantially through preaching.

[12 : 24] You know, Paul was an itinerant preacher. He went from city to city, proclaiming the mystery of Christ that had been revealed to him. But they also did it through their writing.

Look at the end of verse 3 and the beginning of verse 4. And I want you to notice words having to do with reading and writing. Look at the end of verse 3.

He says, As I have written briefly, and then the beginning of verse 4, when you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ.

Do you see what he's done there? Do you see how he's connected reading this letter with perceiving his insight into the mystery of who Christ is?

It's subtle, but it's important. The letter of Ephesians, Paul says, is not the result of his human ingenuity, his thinking up brilliant thoughts about who God is.

[13 : 35] It's not the result of human philosophy. It's the result and the report of God's divine revelation to Paul. And that has really big implications for us.

This is part of the reason. It's not the whole reason. There's more to this doctrine than just this verse. But this is part of the reason that the scriptures always have final authority in the church. Now, we're Anglicans. And we unapologetically value tradition and reason. And we value tradition because it's the story and the history of the wisdom of the church down through the ages.

And it would be foolish to ignore it. We value reason because God's given us a brain and so we should use it. But neither tradition nor reason are ever to be allowed to compete with scripture.

And the reason for that is really quite simple. The reason for that is that the scriptures are uniquely the result of God's of the unveiling of the mystery of Christ and God's revelation of truth to the apostles.

[14 : 59] Through the gift of the Spirit the apostles saw the mystery of Christ unveiled before them. And following the example of the Old Testament prophets that went before what they saw they wrote down and passed on to the church so that now we are able to see what they saw when we read what they wrote.

And therefore it is always the final authority for the church. In the same way that for the apostles themselves. Do you notice how Paul says he is in verse 2 and in verse 7 he is a steward and a servant of the mystery not its inventor or its author.

And just as the apostles were under the authority of the mystery of Christ and the revelation of God so we in the church are under the authority of God's revelation given to us in scripture.

And that is not a burdensome thing for us friends it is our very life because the mystery of Christ which was revealed to the apostles uniquely is now set on display within the life of the church.

Look at verse 4 and verse 6. When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ.

[16 : 27] Pause there skip to verse 6. That is the mystery of Christ how the Gentiles are fellow heirs members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Do you notice in the book of Ephesians how Paul is seemingly obsessed with the church? He's always talking about the church. I think for a lot of us we think of the church as kind of peripheral to our faith or we think of it as a kind of necessary evil.

Not exactly sure why it's important but we kind of think it is. But when the apostle Paul thinks of the church he thinks of it as the first installment of Jesus' ministry to recreate the entire universe.

At the end of time all of the universe will be recreated and we see it in the beginning here in the church. But the church is born.

Christ creates the church when the mystery about Jesus is proclaimed in the gospel. Do you see at the end of verse 6 the phrase through the gospel.

[17 : 55] Up until this point Paul's talked about the mystery of Christ. The truth about Jesus which was revealed to the apostles. Now he switches to the word gospel which refers to the same truth

only as it's proclaimed in the world.

And in verse 6 he says that when the gospel goes out into the world when it's proclaimed from the lips of the apostles and from those to whom they give the ministry through all of God's people when the gospel goes forth Jesus something amazing happens Jesus gathers together a new kind of humanity a new community that is bound together not by ethnicity or by nationality or by race but is united simply in their common worship of Christ as the Lord of all.

Friends when the gospel is proclaimed churches are born. Do you know that's the story of this church?

Amber and I my wife and I haven't been here for very long we've been members of this church for about three and a half years but one of the joys that I've loved over my time here is to speak with some of you who have been here for a long time and to hear the stories of how God first knit the gospel into this church somewhere around the mid-70s the church here was not in a particularly healthy situation numbers were down vitality was low but then God in his providence gave a gift to the church in the ministry of a few people Harry Robinson Dr. Packer others and when they came they came not with this complex scheme for church growth or whatever else they came with a very simple message the simple message of the gospel they proclaimed the mystery of Christ that was revealed to the apostles and handed down to them in the scriptures they proclaimed from this pulpit into this congregation and as they did that simple thing

God did an extraordinary work he began to knit together people from all over this city he began to draw people from all over the world together here mainly from Australia it would seem but God drew together a people in this church to be according to verse 6 fellow heirs members of the same body partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel friends it was through the gospel that God built us together and he built us together that we may put on display and that we might showcase the mystery of Christ within this city when the gospel is proclaimed churches are born and when the gospel is obscured and neglected churches die

[21 : 26] I think this is why if you read through the psalms you'll notice a theme that pops up again and again and it's the theme that the people of God always love God's word do you remember how the psalms start Psalm 1 blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of scoffers but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night Psalm 119 I will never forget your precepts for by them you have given me life the people of God always delight in the word of God in the revelation of

Christ's mystery because it's through the word of God and the revelation of Christ's mystery that we come into being just as God created the world in Genesis 1 through the word of his mouth so now Christ is ever creating his church through the proclamation of the gospel when it is believed with faith and that's our story and that's why it's always been a strength here at St.

John's because we are a people who have tasted the sweetness of God's word we are a people who have perceived the beauty of God's word no one needs to tell us how valuable it is but I think we do need to ask ourselves individually and as families are we cultivating that taste and savor for God's word is the word of God and the revelation of Christ's mystery the delight of your soul and the delight of your family God because God has called us to be not merely a people who delight in God's word when we gather together for worship but also every moment of our lives through the week listen to Deuteronomy 6 let this be an exhortation for us an exhortation to life Moses says this these words that I command you today are to be upon your heart you shall teach them diligently to your children and you shall talk about them when you sit in your house when you walk on the road when you lie down and when you rise up you shall bind them as signs on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes you shall write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates that's the kind of church that

God's calling us to be one that so delights in the revelation of Christ's mystery which was given to the apostles and handed to us in the scriptures that it saturates us individually within our souls and collectively in our church and in our families so that we become the showcase of Christ's mystery in this church and in the city let's pray father you are so generous you are so generous that you give gifts that are far more glorious than anything we can ask or imagine and one of those gifts is the unveiling the unveiling of the hidden mystery the mystery of your son oh father by your spirit will you cultivate within us such a delight such a taste such a love for your word that we might continually be a people who showcase and display the gospel of

Christ within this city grant that to be true of every one of us individually grant that to be true of every family and grant that to be true of our church collectively through your son our savior Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit one God forever and ever Amen Would you kneel as we continue in prayer dear dear Lord Jesus on this glorious Father's Day morning we give you thanks for all the fathers and grandfathers of this parish and pray that they might be encouraged loved and supported this day and would continue to serve you and grow in your love help them to be defenders of the faith and examples of your love in all they do

[26 : 56] Lord in your mercy hear our prayer Lord we give thanks this morning for our ministry here at St. John's we give you thanks for our ministers David Dan and Jim this morning and as the school year draws to a close we give particular thanks to our Sunday school teachers youth leaders and teachers of our toddlers and infants give them all rest and renewal through the summer months we pray for the tireless work of our office staff and administrative team for our music ministry and the innumerable volunteers who serve you through their work here at St.

John's encourage and support them Lord and help them to see your will being done and keep your word central to all that they do Lord in your mercy hear our prayer as we continue to pray for your church in this world we ask that you fill it with all truth and in all truth with peace where it is corrupt purify it where it is in error direct it where anything is amiss reform it where it is right strengthen and confirm it where it is in want furnish it where it is divided and rent asunder make it whole again Lord in your mercy hear our prayer prayer we pray this morning especially for the missionaries who have gone forward from this church Lord we ask that you would comfort and encourage them in the difficult work that they do we ask that they would be confident in proclaiming the gospel and that others might know your love through their works we pray that their financial emotional personal and spiritual needs might be met and that others in this parish would be encouraged to seek to serve you in some kind of ministry we pray especially for those parts of the world where the gospel is not known and we think this morning especially of

Iran and we think of those places where the gospel is only studied in secret and we ask for safety for those who bring the gospel to these places Lord in your mercy hear our prayer dear Lord Jesus we pray this morning for all those people we know who are sick or suffering and are in need of your comfort we pray especially for Rob Edith Rowena Lorna Fiona Harold and Mehran we ask that you might provide them healing and deliverance from all afflictions Lord in your mercy hear our prayer dear Lord we want to pray for your world this morning there are so many places torn apart by war suffering from natural disasters or struggling with corrupt government and lawlessness we pray for hope peace security and justice

Lord that shattered lives could be mended and your will be done Lord in your mercy hear our prayer we pray for the children and youth of this church that we might honor our baptismal covenants toward them and ensure that we continue to support them towards a deeper understanding of you and your word our we we pray we pray and we pray for this prayer we pray especially this morning for the unemployed or underemployed Lord and ask they might find meaningful work and we ask that as summer approaches we might continue to give generously to those families who find they have particular needs at this time.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Finally, Lord Jesus, we give you thanks for this day. Give us the confidence to face this week in a world that still rejects you.

[31 : 26] Encourage us to share your meaning in our lives with someone who does not know you this week and pour your grace and mercy upon us. Let us go forward knowing that there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Amen.