

Ephesians 3:1-13 Early Morning

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Preacher: Rosanna Lo

[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we exalt you. You are the maker and ruler of heaven and earth. You are the almighty one who reigns, yet you do not hide your face from us.

Reveal your wills and plans for us as you speak to us through your word today. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Right at the beginning of Ephesians 3, the Apostle Paul was about to start praying for the Gentile churches in verse 1, which reads, For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, dash.

Before a verb would appear, Paul lost his train of thought. And as we can see, it was not until verse 14, For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, that he was back on track.

If we put into perspective the fact that this prisoner of Christ, who was physically imprisoned for the sake of his readers, we can imagine how much it weighed on Paul's mind that his suffering would not cause the Gentiles to lose heart, as he wrote in verse 13, but instead to see glory from his reflections in today's passage, reminding them how his journey unfolded.

So to unpack what Paul was trying to communicate, we will begin by tapping into three key terms that Paul was emphasizing within the 13 verses.

[1 : 5 0] Mystery, made known, and grace. We'll look at how they tie in with each other. Then we will reflect on how we are tied in with them.

Mystery. We all probably grew up with some unsolved mysteries in our head. Whether it's why the sky is blue when it's clear, or how we sometimes get the hiccups out of nowhere.

Even if you can provide me with a perfectly accurate scientific explanation today, the truth is, it's probably not an answer we could have understood as a child.

Paul was talking about a profoundly different type of mystery here, where he was writing to Gentile believers while in jail. As Paul wrote in verse 6, this mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Today, if you're not of Jewish descent, the fact that you and I, as Gentiles, are worshiping God together here and now, that we get to share what was promised to the Jews through the gospel results from this very revealed promise bearing fruit.

[3 : 1 7] Perhaps not much of a mystery to us. Indeed, the fact that God had a purpose for the Gentiles was not hidden even in the Old Testament.

Back when God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it was clear and made known that all nations would be blessed through them. But look at verse 6 again.

And we must be careful not to miss the new revelation that this mystery of Christ implied a double union. It is meant to be a complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ.

This also meant that Jews, as the only chosen people of God, was to be replaced by a new community of the church, incorporating both Jews and Gentiles alike to become one body of Christ. This plan of God was unheard of before Paul's time, radical, and simply unthinkable for the Jews. But there is yet another reason to why Paul used the word mystery.

[4 : 3 6] In fact, the Greek word for mystery was originally used by pagan religions, referring to secrets which were exclusively accessible to those who were initiated.

Acts 19 gives us an account of what Paul himself had encountered with some of the converts who turned in and burned their magic books with which they had formerly used to practice such mystery rites.

And it is this very same word that Paul had chosen to use in a different context to give it a new meaning, overriding the dark mystery of the pagans with the power of the gospel to bring light and hope for all.

This mystery of Christ that Paul was boldly revealing here is a divine truth, though it was previously hidden as verse 5 tells us, that it was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

In verse 3, Paul emphasized how the mystery was made known to me by revelation. What's more, this mystery made known by God was now out in the open and paradoxically even meant to be made known far and wide, as verse 9 reads, to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden.

[6 : 15] For three times in this short passage from the epistle, Paul was trying to highlight another key word, which was the grace given to Paul by God.

Verse 2, the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you. Back in chapter 2, Paul had briefly given his readers an elaboration of what grace was.

Chapter 2, verses 8 to 9, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

To Paul, to be gifted grace is a privilege that granted him access to the mystery of Christ. He felt privileged he was chosen to be on the receiving end when God made known the mystery of Christ. Yet, from the last two words in this verse, for you, it is interesting to see how Paul connected a purpose as to why he was given God's grace.

[7 : 26] As Paul mentions this grace a second time in verse 7 of this gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

The fact that he found it a great privilege to be commissioned is no mystery. What really stands out is that Paul was convinced that the reason he was entrusted with the mystery was that he would make known to others what was made known to him, to give what he received.

For Paul, it was merely grace, not because of who he was or what he did, as he called himself the very least of all the saints, that he was gifted this grace to be appointed, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, as he said in verses 8 and 9.

Now, allow me to sum up Paul's storyline using these three terms. because the previously hidden mystery of Christ was made known to Paul by God, Paul perceived the revelation as a gift of grace and also saw it as grace that sent him out to make this mystery known to others.

This reminds me of someone from the Old Testament whose storyline can also be summarized similarly with these terms. to Joseph, son of Jacob, how he ended up being sold to Egypt had been a mystery until it was made known to him as he explained to his brothers in Genesis 45-7.

[9 : 26] And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. He, to understand that it was God's grace that sent him to Egypt and made him a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

What about us today? Are we able to make such connections to our own stories which God writes? I wouldn't exactly call it a mystery when my family first moved us here to Vancouver when I was 11. The mystery to me was why we had to move back to Hong Kong three years later. I came to know Christ shortly after when I got back to Hong Kong but I don't think the mystery was made known until I moved my family back here more than two years ago.

Today with the grace I was gifted with I can relate to Paul how obligated and yet privileged I feel to be able to make known to others the gospel.

Let's take a final look at what Paul's reflection means for us. God's revelation of the mystery of Christ did not stop with Paul. Today we are being made known the same mystery that was revealed to Paul.

[10 : 57] that through the gospel we are all adopted into the family of God and into a new undivided humanity as the body of Christ as the church.

That means we also share the same grace given to Paul that we have the privilege to make this mystery or good news known to others and we indeed are the church that Paul talked about in verse 10.

That it is through us that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. people of people of different races cultures and backgrounds come together as one united people of God.

With the grace we are each gifted our storylines are woven into a beautiful tapestry putting on display God's wisdom, power, and grace not just to humans whom we can see but even to powers

that we can't see but are still under God's reign.
Amen. Amen.