

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER 29TH - 30TH, 2022 // BOOK OF EPHESIANS

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST (EPHESIANS 3:1-6)

When Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, he was most likely in the city of Rome under house arrest.

- He was probably free to move around the house during the day, but at night he would've been chained to a Roman guard to make sure he didn't escape until he stood trial before Caesar.
- But Paul was not a prisoner of Rome; he saw himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus (vs. 1).

It was because of Paul's obedience to Jesus and his passion to take the gospel to the Gentiles that he was imprisoned.

- Paul saw his life as not belonging to himself: he had arranged his life's mission according to God's eternal mission.
- Until we have this same kind of mindset of obedience and commitment to God's mission, sacrifice for Christ and others will be unthinkable.

Paul assumes that the believers in Ephesus have heard about this "administration of God's grace," which was a beautiful mystery God had revealed to Paul by revelation (vs. 2-5).

- The "mystery" is that because of Christ, there is now no longer a spiritual distinction between Jews and Gentiles (vs. 6).
- Now the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners with the Jews!

This was a radical idea in the early church, but it gets lost on many of us today.

- The Jews had this amazing heritage of God's covenants, His law and morality, His temple, revelations of His glory, and an understanding of His character (Rom. 9:4).
- They had a framework to understand this idea of "Messiah" (the Christ) and who Jesus was and what He came to do!

BUT THE GENTILES...?

The Gentile world in the first century was one of paganism, polytheism, and idolatry.

- Greek and Roman cultures were characterized by sexual immorality, materialism, entertainment, drunkenness, and wild debauchery.
- If you grew up in a Gentile home, you knew nothing about Judeo-Christian values like modesty, self-control, and temperance.

IMAGINE THIS...

The most hyper-religious, theologically and morally conservative people who have grown up in religious homes with an incredible spiritual heritage.

- The most unchurched, theologically ignorant, religiously illiterate people who have grown up in pagan homes with zero spiritual heritage.
- People from both groups come to Jesus.

God's great mystery is this: because of Jesus, both of those groups are on a level playing field before God spiritually.

- Whether you grew up in a religious home with a strong moral foundation and you've kept all the rules; or whether you grew up in a broken and unchurched home and you've broken every rule imaginable...
- ...if you are in Christ, we're equal in God's eyes.

UNSEARCHABLE RICHES (EPHESIANS 3:7-13)

Paul was made into a servant of the "good news" (gospel) by the gift of God's grace given to him by the working of God's power (vs. 7).

- Paul considered himself to have no qualifications for this mission God gave him to proclaim the good news to the Gentiles (vs. 8).
- Paul had an incredible religious heritage, yet he sees now that his work is not to promote religion but to proclaim "the incalculable riches of Christ."

"...THE INCALCULABLE RICHES OF CHRIST"

The greatness of God's grace is such that even the most pagan, hedonistic, and godless people can now come before Him and stand as holy.

- Those far from God can be brought into a relationship with Him as a member of His family!
- Paul wanted to "shed light" on this mystery that had been hidden for ages but was now being proclaimed (vs. 9).

Why was this mystery (that the God of Israel planned to save and redeem the Gentiles) hidden and then only revealed in these last days?

- So that the manifold (multi-faceted) wisdom of God may be known (vs. 10).
- God's wisdom will be revealed *through* His work in the Church, and He will reveal it to the rulers and authorities in Heaven (angelic beings).

There is a whole world of "rulers and authorities": we are surrounded by invisible spiritual beings, and they intently look upon us (1 Pet. 3:12).

- These angelic beings see us perfectly and know us better than we know them. They see us in our weakness, sin, inconsistencies, and mess.
- And they see God at work in our lives to redeem, restore, and cause His Spirit to dwell within our mess.

If you've ever thought that God saved you and works in your life because you're somehow spiritually superior to others, any angel who has seen and watched over you in your life knows that's not the case.

- God's rescue plan through Christ in your life causes the angels in Heaven to adore, praise, worship, and magnify Him for His grace, power, and great wisdom!

God's plan to save sinners and reconcile pagan, irreligious Gentiles to Himself through Christ was part of His eternal purpose (vs. 11).

- God's plan of salvation, purposed before the world and executed in the cross, clears the path to God.
- Because of Jesus and our faith in Him, we have boldness and confident access to God Himself.

So Paul says in vs. 13, "what I'm suffering for in my imprisonment is worth suffering for! Don't be discouraged; it's for your glory!"

- What does that mean? Through Paul's sufferings, these believers gain glory because they can understand Christ more fully and the gospel more intimately.
- This is the greatest message on planet earth, and it's worth *everything*.

A PRAYER FOR POWER (EPHESIANS 3:14-21)

Because of God's great eternal plan to reconcile the nations to Himself through Christ, Paul's response is simply to kneel before the Father (vs. 14).

- This is a position of utmost humility that expresses a posture of subjection to a King.
- God is the creator of all things and every person, and God is the creator and architect of every people group and ethnicity (vs. 15).

STRENGTH (VS. 16)

Living the Christian life is difficult.

- The only thing that gives us the strength we need to live the Christian life is the power of the Holy Spirit that only God can provide.
- When our "inner being" is strengthened daily by His Spirit, we have the power to obey God, serve God, witness for Christ, discipline others, and serve within the church.

DEPTH (VS. 17)

Three words are used ("dwell," "rooted," and "established") that convey the idea of spiritual depth and maturity.

- We're to welcome Christ's presence dwelling in every corner of our hearts and lives.
- We're to be rooted and established in love: our love for God and others keeps the priorities in our spiritual lives in the right place.

COMPREHENSION (VS. 18-19A)

Paul asked that they might be able to understand together in community every dimension of the love of Jesus.

- Paul wanted them to know it by experience and not just in words.
- God's love has dimensions ("length, width, height, and depth"): we experience God's love in very practical, tangible ways in Christian community.

Paul's prayer is for these believers to know Christ's love even though it "surpasses knowledge."

- The word for "know" Paul uses is the word "*ginosko*," which means to come to know through personal experience and intimacy.
- God's love for us is something we can experience personally and intimately through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

FULLNESS (VS. 19B)

Paul wanted Christians to experience life in Jesus Christ, the fullness of God (Col. 2:9), and to be filled to their capacity with Jesus, even as God is filled to His own capacity with His own character and attributes.

- The only way to be fully satisfied in God is to be filled daily by His Spirit, presence, and love. This only happens when we pursue Him.

The Christian life is hard. We *daily* battle doubt, discouragement, and temptation.

- We live in a world that doesn't share our values or submit to our King.
- We battle spiritual forces that want to take us down.
- God wants to give us strength, spiritual depth, comprehension, and fullness of His love and presence every single day. How can this happen?

God is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think (vs. 20a).

- He's able to do this according to HIS power that works in us (vs. 20b).
- The only fitting response is to give God glory, especially within the church, and then in Christ Jesus throughout all the ages (vs. 21).

- When the church understands and walks in God's eternal purpose, God will be glorified.

THE "MYSTERY" OF GOD IS THAT BECAUSE OF JESUS...

- Any person from any walk of life can now come and experience salvation and a brand-new life (vs. 1-6).
- In our weaknesses, imperfections, and even in the confusing events of our lives, God has a purpose; it's for our good and His glory (vs. 7-13).
- We don't have to live the Christian life by the power of our strength: God gives us the power we need to be who we're called to be (vs. 14-21).

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST.

- If you've ever felt unworthy, not good enough, not smart enough, not spiritual enough, or like you've made too many mistakes to be a part of God's family... you're not alone.
- But you're also mistaken. God's love for you and acceptance of you isn't dependent on your performance or religious pedigree.
- It's dependent on the sacrificial work of Christ.
- If you've ever looked down your nose and felt like you're just a little bit better of a person than someone else because of their past mistakes, religious illiteracy, how they've voted, or what they believe... you're not alone.
- But when you do that, you're wrong.
- God's love for people isn't dependent on their performance, but on His character and Christ's work on their behalf. Do we *know* this?