# The Mystery Displayed — Delivery Transcript

**Ephesians 3:1–13 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, December 5, 2021** · *The Mystery of God*

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You can open it to the book of the Bible— we are pressing pause on our study of the book of the Revelation. If this is your first time to Broadview for Sunday, typically in our church, we pick a book of the Bible and we work our way through line by line, verse by verse. And we were doing that with a book of the Bible, one of the most challenging books of the New Testament, the book of the Revelation. And it's fascinating. We've been in there since Easter, but we came upon a phrase in the book of the Revelation in chapter 10 called the mystery of God.

It was this presentation of this angel who said that in the days of the seventh trumpet, when the seventh angel blows his trumpet, the mystery of God is going to be completed. And that just raised a question in my mind of what is the mystery of God, biblically defined, and how is it not completed, and what's it going to look like when it is completed? And in kind of pulling that thread I saw so many interesting things in the New Testament about this phrase. And so I thought for our Advent season we would press pause on Revelation and do this little topical study, Mystery of God, and it's really been a lot of fun.

And so if you're a guest today, you picked a great Sunday to be here. Last week we looked at what it meant for the wisdom of God to be revealed and Paul defines what the mystery is in Colossians chapter one. It's a very powerful text. And it's a powerful reality, and Paul says the mystery is the reality of Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we talked about how every human being who's ever been born has a craving for glory. You do, I do, we all do. It's why we watch the Super Bowl Sunday, it's why we watch college football, it's why we spend money we don't have to buy things we can't afford to impress people we don't like.

It's why we look to have the nicest house and the nicest clothes and drive the nicest cars. It's that glory. Pascal talked about it as deposed royalty. We know that we're kings, we know that we're queens, yet we don't possess the glory we think we deserve or that we're supposed to possess. And so we strive and we earn and we try to find it. And Paul says, I've got an answer for you. That glory chasing— you chase that glory, you've been trying to cover up its absence. You don't have to cover up its absence any longer.

You can have the reality of Christ in you, and that is the hope of glory. It will be yours, it will be possessed, and that's what the gospel is. And really, if you wanted to substitute one word for the word mystery in the New Testament, when you talk about the mystery of God, what's a substitute word? I would say you could use the word gospel. That story that God is holy and that we are sinful and that our sin separates us from this holy God and that we need reconciliation, that we've lost the glory.

The glory's departed, but we want to regain it. How can you be reconciled to God? How can you recapture the glory? The gospel message is through faith, through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To repent of sin, to acknowledge that your sin has separated you from a holy God, but that God in his great love for you sent Christ Jesus into the world to live the life we couldn't live and to die the death we should have died. He died on the cross for us in our place. He absorbed God's wrath into his own body.

He was buried, but three days later God raised him from the dead, essentially putting a stamp of approval on the death and resurrection of Jesus, saying, the sins have been atoned for, they are paid in full, the work is completed, the price has been paid, salvation can be granted, and so now when we trust in Christ today and believe on him for the forgiveness of sins, not only are we forgiven of sin, but the gospel message is that the perfect life of Jesus is credited to us, that we are clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, so that when we stand before a holy God guilty and condemned because of our sin, he looks at us and doesn't see our sin, but he sees the life of his son.

He sees the son whom he loves and he says to you and I well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master. Even though your sins are red, Jesus has washed them white as snow. And not just are we reconciled to God today, not just can we have communion with God today and go to heaven when we die, but we are filled with the Spirit of Christ. His Spirit enters into our bodies and we are filled with the fullness of joy. We're brought into a new covenant, a new family, a new kingdom.

We have new desires. We have a new attitude. We have a new approach to everything. We are a new creation. That's the gospel. That's the mystery. And that's what Paul says I was commissioned to proclaim. This is the mystery. It's in you. It's an inner reality. It's not just words on a page. It's not just something from a preacher. It is an inner reality of power in

your life if you will repent and believe on the Lord Jesus. Okay, that's the mystery revealed. But how is the mystery displayed? That's what I want us to look at this morning.

How is the mystery displayed? And the mystery of God is displayed, not just in your life as an individual, but biblically speaking, the mystery of God is displayed through this vehicle we call the church. And most people, when they think church, they think capital C, universal church. When we like to complain about the church, we say, oh, the church is so broke and the church is so carnal. And what we mean by that is never our church, our local church, we mean the church in general. But there's a problem with thinking about the church in those terms.

Okay, it's true there is a universal church. The universal church is every man, woman, boy, and girl who's ever believed. That's the universal church. The problem is you can't go visit the universal church, right? You can't go knock on the door, you can't attend their service. There is no pastor of the universal church, right? Some people think they're the pastor of the universal church, but they're not. You can't go to the small group of the universal church. You can't see the universal church. What you can see is the local church.

The services that you can attend are the services of a local church. You can go see the pastor of Broadview Baptist Church. You can attend the small groups at Broadview Baptist church, and that's how the mystery is displayed, through the local church, local churches like this local church, and that's what we're going to see in our passage today in Ephesians that the mystery of God is displayed through the church. If you've never read the book of Ephesians, it's maybe my favorite New Testament letter. If you want to know how the gospel is applied to the context of a local church, there's really no better book.

First and Second Timothy come close, but Ephesians really is. Paul spends all of chapter 1 talking about the essence of the gospel. He talks about the mystery in Ephesians 1. The mystery is that Jesus Christ brings or unites all things together, things in heaven, things on earth. He brings heaven to earth and earth up into heaven. And then in Ephesians 2 he talks about the reconciling power of the gospel, that when you come to believe in Christ as Lord, not only are you forgiven and saved and made new, but you're reconciled to other people, that people you would normally not have anything to do with.

You would say, I'm not a part of that culture. You're all of a sudden brought into a new family where it's multicolored and multifaceted in all sorts of different flavors because God has reconciled us to one another in addition to being reconciled to himself through his son. Then in chapter three, he's going to essentially shift into this prayer for knowledge that these things that he's been talking about, the essence of the gospel and the reconciling power of the gospel, he prays at the end of chapter three that the church would be rooted and grounded in love, that they would comprehend just how deep and long and high and wide is the love of God for them.

But before he can give the prayer, he kind of gets distracted by this rabbit trail. You know, a lot of preachers chase rabbits. Paul was a preacher, he chased rabbits. And our text today is that rabbit trail. And I tell you it's a rabbit trail because if you look at verse 1, Ephesians chapter 3, verse 1, you see, a lot of translations will have like this little hyphen. It starts out, Paul says, for this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, and then he takes this little hyphen— assuming you have heard about the administration, he goes into this rabbit trail starting in verse two.

And he doesn't end the rabbit trail until verse 14, which I don't have on the screen, but in verse fourteen, if you have a physical copy of the Bible in front of you, he goes back to this phrase for this reason, I, Paul, pray for you. So this whole section from verse 2 all the way down to verse 14 is a parenthesis. It is Paul's rabbit trail, and it is essentially Paul getting so caught up in the majesty and the wisdom and the power of God, displaying his wisdom and power through this thing called the church that he cannot help but kind of get wrapped up in it and re-articulate it all over again.

So he essentially summarizes chapter one and chapter two again in chapter three and the first thirteen verses, and that's our text this morning, which shows us how the mystery of God is displayed through the church. So starting in verse 2: Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming you have heard about the administration of God's grace that he gave me for you, the mystery was made known to me by revelation. He's talking about his experience on the road to Damascus when he was blinded by the light. No, I'm sorry, I couldn't help it.

He was blinded by the light. He had an encounter with Jesus Christ. He was converted. He became a Christian. He went from being a church persecutor to a church planter, from a Christian killer to a Christian builder. It was made known to me by revelation, as I have briefly written above, chapter 1, chapter 2 of Ephesians. And by reading this, you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. This mystery was not made known to people in other generations, as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

All that we looked at last week: it was concealed in the Old Testament. They couldn't really see it. It wasn't until Jesus Christ came, died, rose again that the mystery was revealed. And here's Paul saying, here's the craziest thing about it. Verse 6. The Gentiles, you guys, you non-Jewish pagans, you guys are co-heirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise or in the covenant. How? Through your self-effort? No. Because you got yourself cleaned up? No. In Christ Jesus through the gospel. That's the mystery. The gospel saves you.

The gospel sanctifies you. The gospel brings you into this new thing. And I was made a servant of the gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his

power. This grace was given to me, the least of all the saints. To proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, and to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. This— here's our key. This whole— me being entrusted with the mystery, this mystery reconciling everything together, Jews and Gentiles, big happy family, all of this is so that God's multifaceted wisdom may now be made known, may now be displayed through the church to the rulers and authorities in heaven.

This is according to God's eternal purpose, accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him. So then I ask you, do not be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf, for they are for your glory. That's a big chunky text, I get that. And there's a lot of different ways you could go with it. But the bottom line is Paul's saying the mystery is displayed through the church. The local church is God's chosen vehicle for displaying to the world, displaying to your uncle, displaying to Satan and demons and principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God.

God is full of power. God is very smart. God is very wise. God has an eternal plan that He is unfolding. A plan of redemption. And for whatever reason, he chose the church as the vehicle for displaying the beauty and the power and the wisdom of that plan. And so this thing, this thing you're a part of right now, your membership to any local church is a big deal. Okay, some of you are here because your spouse drug you, your mom or dad drug you, for whatever reason you're here. And what Paul is saying is, it's so much more than that.

It's so much bigger than that. It's so much more than just songs and a sermon and a social circle. It is God's vehicle. It is God's eternal plan from the ages now revealed through Christ and this thing called the church to display his wisdom and power to principalities and powers in heaven and on earth it is how he shows off. He shows off his wisdom and his power through the church. Whew, what a big responsibility, right? Doesn't that kind of put a little bit of weight on your shoulders? So what I want us to do this morning is to kind of get a bird's eye view of what that means.

And then I want to show you the two ways in this text I see the church doing that well, and how our church can grow in that calling. So an illustration I came across the other day that I think is so helpful for this dynamic is to imagine God as a painter. And obviously God is not a painter, God's a spirit. But imagine he had painting skills and hands and a body. God's painting is his mystery. God's painting is the gospel. He's painting this picture of the gospel and the implications on the church and in the world, and you and I are the paint.

Okay? And left to ourselves, flying solo, we're not all that impressive. Maybe you're a magenta, I'm azul, or blue, some of us are gray, some of us are green, some of us are yellow. Left to yourself, you're not all that impressive, just kind of boring. You and I are the paint, and churches are paintbrushes. Some paint brushes are short and stubby, some are long and

you know, thick, they have lots of goat hair, some have horse hair, just like there's a lot of different kinds of churches, all different types of churches.

There's Baptist churches, there's Pentecostal churches, woo, you know, fun churches, boring churches, healthy churches, sick churches. There's all different brands, all different types, all different denominations. And God is using the people in those churches to paint. And he's using the paint brushes, the churches, the local churches themselves. And he's dipping the brushes in the paint. He's getting the paint and he's putting it on the canvas. And the canvas is the universe. It's heaven, it's earth, it's the whole deal. And so he's essentially painting this picture. And I don't know if you've ever watched artists who have really painted a really compelling picture.

I remember a couple of years ago, several years ago actually, Jana Bailey was a member of our church and we were doing this Easter special. And she had these boxes stacked up on top of each other and she was painting on the boxes and at first it was just like big blobs of black paint. And then red paint and then white paint and it just looked all kind of crazy and didn't make sense. But then over time as she got further and further along you kind of started to see how it all fit together.

And then there at the very end, you know, she tied everything together and then boom, it just really popped this moving, compelling picture of the crucifixion of Jesus. Well that's basically what God is doing with the gospel. In the Old Testament, with the Old Testament saints, it was just kind of blobs and it didn't really make sense, and it was shadows here and there, but it was very difficult to understand. And then when Christ came to the earth, things started to come together, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension.

Then the church is filled with the Holy Spirit, and then things really begin to come together. The Spirit of God is being leveraged by believers in different local churches from the first century all the way now to the 21st century. And God is more fully painting this beautiful picture of how his church displays the mystery of God to the world. Different people, different personalities, different cultures, but yet all coming together under a common love and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. And then finally, one day, when the seventh angel blows the seventh trumpet, that mystery will finally be completed, and Satan and demons and angels and principalities and everybody who's ever lived will look at that painting and go, amazing!

God is so wise. God is so powerful. I didn't see it coming. I didn't know how it was going to work. But now that I see the final product, glory to God. That worship there will be an acknowledgment that Jesus Christ is Lord and that He has glorified Himself through the radiance of His church. That word that is used— in some translations it's the manifold wisdom of God. In the CSB it's called the multifaceted wisdom of God. It's actually a compound of two Greek words that are so hard to pronounce.

I'm not even going to attempt to try. I had my computer try to pronounce them a little when I was studying. And I listened to my computer pronounce the two Greek words and I thought, nah, I'm not doing that. It's a super complex word. But it's basically a word that sounds like what it means. It means very complex, it means variety, it means nuance. Have you ever had some of those problems in your life that are not simple black and white? They're complex and the more sin that was in that situation, the messier it got.

It's just all sorts of complexity. That's behind this Greek word. Put the word poly in front of it; it means multiple, right? Polyamorous, polygamy. Poly means more. So it's basically saying variety, nuance, difference, plus more variety, nuance, difference. Put those two words together. That's this word, and he's saying that's the way the wisdom of God is through the church. He takes different people, different personalities, different passions, different loves, different strengths, different weaknesses, and somehow in his masterful plan, he weaves them together and brings them together. And churches work with churches.

And at the end of the day, though they are jars of clay and though they are imperfect and sometimes get it wrong, he beautifully, powerfully displays his wisdom through the church. That is his great goal. His great goal is to show off in the church. And his other great goal is to show off through the church. In the church, he shows off with all the different people who find a way to love one another. Through the church, he shows off by the church being for his mission so much so that they embrace sacrifice and pain, and sometimes even death, so that the mystery of God can be known.

It is through the proclamation of the gospel by the church that the glory of God is ultimately revealed. And when you get to the end of human history, this is the chief end. We saw this in Revelation chapter 7, that there are people from every tribe, tongue, and nation gathered around the throne singing, salvation belongs to our God, worthy is the Lamb. This thing, this manifold wisdom of God being displayed through the church, that's the chief end of human history, and that's the chief end of missions. It's why we go.

It's why Jesus said go and make disciples of all nations. He did not make a mission for his church. He made a church for his mission. That's always been his heart. That's always been the chief end is that a variety of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation would be voluntarily kneeling before the throne of grace, singing, salvation belongs to our Lord, worthy is the Lamb who was slain. That's our job. That's what we are here for. That's why we exist. And we need to— how should I say this? Every now and then, local churches like ours need to be reminded of truths like these so that we can realign ourselves with the heart of God.

Okay, we're not here just to hear sermons and to grow in your faith and to get your kids discipled and all of those things. Those things should happen and hopefully they will happen, but that's not the main goal. God's main goal is that he would display his wisdom in

the church and proclaim his wisdom through the church. It is missions, it is evangelism. It is proclaiming the gospel. So, how do we do that? I want to show you two ways in this text and then we'll be done. The two main ways in this text that the church advances the goal of God, finishes the painting, is through ethnic diversity and evangelistic zeal.

Ethnic diversity, evangelistic zeal. Those are not very, I don't know, relevant sounding, but let me try to work on it. Okay. First thing, ethnic diversity. And you see this, I think, in Ephesians chapter 3, verse 6. When Paul says that the Gentiles, and that phrase just kind of goes over our head, a Gentile for them was anybody that was not Jewish or anybody who was not religious. So think pagans, think foreigners, think the others, those people. Paul is saying those people, those pagans, those non-Jewish outcasts, are co-heirs, members of the same body, partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Every one of those words is important. It's actually got three words with a Greek prefix, sun, or s-y-m. That's where we get our word synonym, S Y N. I'm sorry. So a synonym is a different word that has the same meaning. Different words have the same meaning. Paul is saying the same thing about Jews and Gentiles. They're different, there's all sorts of different Gentiles. There's those from India, those from Pakistan, those from Africa, those from Europe, the barbarians. Slaves, free, there's all kinds of variety. Paul is saying in Christ Jesus through the gospel, all of that variety comes together.

All of them are co-heirs, meaning they're entitled to the same legal inheritance. They're part of the same body, which means Christ is the head of the body, and everybody is part of that single body. There is no such thing as two bodies of Christ. There is a movement by some to say God has his special people, the Jews, and then he has these other special people, the church, and they're two distinct bodies. Yes, they are two distinct peoples, but it's one body. They share one promise. There are no two bodies of Christ.

There's one body of Christ, one inheritance. And then he finally says they are partners of the promise, same Greek prefix, same kind of idea, meaning all the promises of God, all the promises of God in the Old Testament to the people of God now belong to the people of God in the New Covenant. And vice versa. The promises of God and the new covenant now belong to the people of God in the old. This was mind-blowing for the Apostle Paul. It rocked his socks off. These were fighting words to ethnically Jewish Christians in this culture.

There was a sentiment, there was such racial ethnic animosity. For many people who grew up Jewish, that the thinking was the reason why God made the Gentiles is so that he would have fuel to keep the fires of hell burning hot. That's how bad it was. There were rabbis who kind of get— you know how some people, when they get their doctorate, they get a little hoity-toity? Who once they were fine and all that, they had a prayer that they would pray and they would say, God, thank you, thank you, God that I'm not like a Gentile or a woman.

So they were not woke, right? Very kind of sexist and racist. And that spirit was in the church. And here Paul comes along and says, if that spirit's in the church, you don't know what the church is about. Church isn't about any of that. He really unpacks this at the end of chapter 2. You can go back and read Ephesians 2, verse 14. He talks about the walls of hostility. Do I have that up there? Ephesians 2, 14? Yeah. Jesus is our peace. He made both groups, Jews and Gentiles, one, and he tore down the dividing wall of hostility.

So this cultural hostility that you have between Jews and Gentiles, this prejudice, this racism that is killing people in the culture. In the church, we have none of it because Jesus Christ is our peace. And he has brought us together as one. And I know that today we probably don't feel that kind of hostility unless there's some anti-Semitism in our ranks, which hopefully there isn't. There are white supremacists or other camps who have an anti-Semitism, who hate the Jewish people, but by and large that's not our issue. But that does not mean we don't have walls of hostility in our culture because we do.

It's human nature to identify yourself with a group because there's power in numbers and I want to be part of the cool group. You see it early on in junior high and high school— second grade. I'm already seeing it, watching it happen with Blaze. I got to be in the cool kids group. I got to be part of the cool group because that group's different from the other group because that other group is weird because of that. And our group is not weird, our group is cool because of this. So we find ways, it's human nature to find ways to differentiate yourself from others and to differentiate your group from the other group and to elevate your group above the other because of X, Y, or Z attribute.

We do it on the basis of class, of money, we do it on the basis of language, we do it on the basis of appearance. I don't dress that way, I don't walk that way, I don't talk that way, and we otherise other groups because of those things. In our culture, those separations, those walls can become walls of hostility. And there becomes prejudices and racism and all of those dynamics that are in the culture. And Paul is saying, if you want to be a church that is obedient to the will of God, if you want to be a church that is displaying powerfully the beauty and power of the gospel, that cannot have any place in your church.

In fact, it's got to be the opposite. You've got to bring together what the culture separates. You've got to become one where they try to make you two. Tear down the walls of hostility. Now I know that this is politically fraught with, you know, I might get myself in trouble. But in 2020[1] they had the horrendous killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, which were in a line of other killings of black Americans. And it reignited the conversation of racial tensions in America, racial reconciliation. And cultural forces took that narrative. And you can blame it on whoever you want to blame it on, but it became a political, a polarizing political discussion.

And there were people who leaned left who identified with one set of tools and one solution, and then there were people who leaned right that identified with another set of tools and another solution. And both of those groups were in local churches. And what ended up happening, instead of the church powerfully displaying how things like racial tension can be remedied through the gospel, we allowed ourselves to be pigeonholed into the left or to the right, this tool or that tool and missed an opportunity. In my mind, I think we missed an opportunity.

Now I'm not saying that if you care about racial reconciliation, you have to be woke or get woke or identify with certain ideologies. I think a couple of months ago we talked about critical theory and how certain tools and certain ideologies are unhelpful for reconciling because they're anti-gospel tools and ideologies. So I'm not saying that we should use cultural tools. I'm not saying we should embrace godless ideologies. I'm not even saying the church can fix the culture because the church cannot fix the culture because we don't have legislative powers or any of those kinds of things.

But the church can fix the problem. And we can display through our local churches that the problem can be fixed through the gospel and powerfully display and preach to the culture and to principalities and powers. This is the power of God displayed. And to do that, you don't have to embrace these worldly solutions. The solution is the gospel. We have to allow those things that unite us to be stronger than those things that divide us. Our secondary preferences cannot trump our ultimate allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're taking notes, there are certain core truths that unite all of us.

Red, brown, yellow, black, and white, young, old, rich, poor, whatever your culture, whatever your ethnicity, we have a common problem, which is sin. It's affected all of us. There is no big sinner, little sinner. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We have a common solution, which is the cross. Jesus Christ died for our sins. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. There is no one more or less deserving of God's forgiveness through the cross. We are all equally condemned and equally participants of God's grace, none of us more or less deserving than the other.

And we all have a common authority, which is the Word of God. The living word, which is the Lord Jesus Christ, the sovereign authority of our lives. But we come to know the living word through the written word, and so we allow the Scriptures to dictate: you can use this tool set, you can use this ideology, you can use this set of assumptions, but not that. And if and when we allow that kind of unity to guide us forward, then we will together powerfully display the beauty of the gospel through these cultural walls of hostility.

Whether it's class or race or ageism or whatever the case may be. And it's one of God's primary goals for the local church. And so we should lean into it. We should lean into ethnic diversity. We should want that kind of thing in our church family. And that may mean you

have to be a little bit uncomfortable. That may mean you have to open your ears instead of opening your mouth. It may mean a lot of listening. It may mean questioning certain assumptions, but it's a good thing that illustrates the power of God.

The second way we can do it is evangelistic. And you see this in verses 8 and 9, where Paul says, this grace to preach the mystery. This grace was given to me the least of all the saints. I love that. Why does he say this? He says this because he used to be a persecutor of the church. I used to hate Christians. I used to hate Christianity. I used to want to wipe it off the face of the earth. But God in his grace— I was blinded by the light. Not only did he convert me, but he gave me a mission, an important mission, to proclaim the mystery to the Gentiles.

Even though I was the least of the saints, I'm proclaiming to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, and I'm shedding light for everybody about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. So the second way we can display the mystery of God is by proclaiming the mystery of God. Not just displaying it through ethnic diversity in the church, but proclaiming it through evangelistic zeal through the church. And we are, by God's grace, that kind of church, A church that is committed to missions and evangelism.

You show me a church that's ethnically diverse, I'll show you a church that probably has the Spirit of God at work. And if you can show me a church that is dedicated to missions and evangelism, I'll show you a church that's full of the Spirit of God. I was personally challenged by the Brazil mission team who came back all smoked up about evangelism and thought to myself, man, I need some smoke in my guts. You know, where's my smoke in my guts? You know, it just kind of brings you back to life.

That's the Spirit of God quickening your heart because you were meant to be part of an organization that advances the gospel through evangelistic proclamation of the gospel. This is why we're an Acts 1:8 church that every year, in addition to our general fund offering, we have a totally separate offering, a totally separate emphasis to proclaim the gospel among the nations. We do this every December. It just happens to fall, today's the first Sunday of December. But we were able as a church a decade ago or more to go to places like Tanzania and Romania and West Bengal and Brazil and all these different places, when we used to never be able to do anything like that, because we would say like Paul, we're not big enough, we're not strong enough, we're not good enough.

That's for the megachurches. That's for them big churches. That's not for people like us. But we felt the call of God to display the mystery of God through the proclamation of the gospel. And people gave generously. People did things they would otherwise not do. They gave amounts they would otherwise not give, and we were able to see God use us powerfully. And what happened back then continues to happen today. And so it's through people like you and

me, being more generous than we would otherwise be, being more courageous to go to places we would otherwise probably not go, because we are committed to being a church that displays the gospel to the ends of the earth.

It's not just displaying the mystery in the church, it's proclaiming the mystery through the church. And by the way, it's not just going over. That's a big part of it. Our church is actually going to get to send our own IMB missionaries, Lord willing, this next year, with Tanner and Kendra Clark, feeling called by God to serve as missionaries overseas. They're part of our church. That means our church is going to get to lay hands on them and commission them and send them out and keep up with them and support them and pray for them.

The Great Commission is accomplished through the church. Parachurch orgs are great. The IMB is awesome. The other sending organizations are awesome, but they are not what's going to accomplish the Great Commission. Churches are, because God chose the church to accomplish the Great Commission. So churches advance it internationally, but it's also opening up your mouth in your own circles of influence. It's refusing to allow things like fear and insecurity and shame to silence your witness. You may want to argue with the Apostle Paul. You're not the least, I'm the least, you're not the worst, I'm the worst Christian who's ever lived.

Don't let that silence your witness. If he can use Paul, he can use you. Paul is an amazing speaker? He wasn't. He was actually quite boring, by his own testimony. I'm not talking trash about him. He was not a great speaker, but God used him powerfully because he was filled with the Spirit and he was participating in what the Spirit was doing in the churches. So here's how I want us to respond as we close. If it's true, if it's true that the church is God's vehicle for displaying his mystery, I think that has two implications for us.

The first is that I want to challenge you to be much more engaged with this local church than you are today. All of us have different levels of engagement, all of us have different levels of commitment, but what I've noticed over the last five years, especially ever since 2020, there is a tendency for people, because of whatever reason, to say, you know, the church is not first for me anymore. My hobbies, my interests, my whatever the case may be, that's more important to me than being involved in the church. And maybe you got offended, maybe you got wounded, maybe the church hurt you, and I know that churches hurt people.

They hurt people worse than a lot of other things in this world. But it doesn't negate God's plan. God's plan is to display his wisdom through the church. And if you are a Christian, there's no solo Christian. There's no solo Christianity. He's put you as a part of a church family. Now, if you can't stay part of your church family, then find a church family you can stay a part of, but engage with that church family because you being gathered and engaged is how God is displaying. God can't display the mystery if you're not here.

God can't display the mystery if we don't gather. That's why the whole thing about shutdowns and all of that stuff was a terrible thing for the church. Because this is how we display the mystery of God. So be much more engaged than you are right now. That may have implications on your church attendance. Maybe that has implications on your generosity, maybe that has implications on how you parent your children. I want you to pray about it and think about it. All right. I'm not trying to tread here, but— second thing, to grow to connect with people.

Thank you. Churches unfortunately are full of cliques. And yeah, I know I've participated in that bad spirit. Our culture's full of cliques. It's a reality of human nature. It does not have to be that way here. We do not have to be a cliquish group. And the way to break that spirit is to intentionally connect with people that you think are weird or you wouldn't otherwise hang out with or you know those people when you're in the grocery store and you're thinking, avert my eyes. Please don't talk to me. Go to the next aisle.

Next time you see that person in the grocery store, I want you to look them in the eye and engage them in conversation and see if you can have a spiritual conversation. Or if they're in your small group, take them out for lunch next weekend. Embrace the awkward. Connect with people who are not like you. And when we do that, not only are we displaying the compassion of Christ and the Spirit of Christ, we are displaying to the world how the church can do it differently, how the church can bring reconciliation where nobody else can find it.

And then the church has a set of tools and a power through the Spirit of God to fix so many of the cultural issues that are bringing us down. And so growing your commitment to our church, growing your commitment to connect with people who are not like you. As Crystal comes up and leads us through a time of response, I want to challenge you on those two fronts. I know that everybody's different, everybody's got a different set of things going on. But I feel led by the Spirit of God to put that on your table for you to process as the Lord leads.

If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian and you feel like the Lord is leading you to become a believer, to have the reality of . . .

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "in 2008" (it can also be heard as "2000"); the killings of Ahmaud Arbery (February 23, 2020) and George Floyd (May 25, 2020) both took place in 2020. Source: Associated Press coverage of both cases; Encyclopaedia Britannica, "George Floyd protests." ↩