

THE MYSTERY AND THE MINISTRY

Grace Revealed and Grace Empowered

Ephesians 3:1-13

Paul: A Prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of the Gentiles

Assuming that you have heard...

Paul's autobiography: God's gift of grace to Paul

- Paul was an enemy of the Lord
 - "But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." Acts 9:1-2
 - "For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers." Galatians 1:13-14
- Jesus revealed Himself to Paul
 - Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." Acts 9:3-6
 - "¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ...¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me..." Galatians 1:11-12, 15-16
- Paul is commissioned to ministry
 - "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.'" Acts 9:15-16
 - "...in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles..." Galatians 1:16
- Paul lives out his commission immediately and faithfully
 - "And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'" Acts 1:20
 - "They were hearing it saying, 'He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God because of me." Galatians 1:23-24

Also see Acts 26

**THE MYSTERY MADE KNOWN
GRACE REVEALED (v. 3-6)**

Mystery = Truth revealed

- That which was previously unknown to man but has now been revealed by God to His people

WHAT IS THE MYSTERY?

- **“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.” Ephesians 3:6**
 - “making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, **to unite all things in him**, things in heaven and things on earth.” Ephesians 1:9-10
 - “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory.” Colossians 1:26-27
- The mystery is the double union:
 - The complete union of people from all nations (Jew and Gentile) with each other
 - Through the union they each have with Christ
 - Made known to Paul (v.3)
 - To God’s holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (v.5)
 - Through them to the saints (Col 1:26)
- The mystery is now the common possession of the whole universal church.

**THE MINISTRY MADE KNOWN
GRACE EMPOWERED (v. 7-12)**

Gospel = Mystery proclaimed

WHAT IS THE MINISTRY?

- To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ
 - “To preach” = Greek “euangelizo” = to tell the good news, convey the Gospel
 - the now present application of Jesus’ divine dominion and way of salvation by His death and resurrection
 - Riches of Ephesians 1-2
 - His riches are unsearchable
 - The riches of creation
 - “...who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.” Job 5:9
 - The riches of salvation
 - “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” Romans 11:33

***“What is certain about the wealth Christ has and gives is that we shall never come to an end of it.”
-John Stott***

- To bring the eternal plan and purpose to light to everyone
 - “To bring to light” = “to cause to know” = “to enlighten”
 - Ephesians 1:18: The eyes of our heart to be enlightened to know the HOPE, the RICHES, and the POWER
 - Paul’s commission to enlighten:
 - “But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” Acts 26:16-18

THE OUTCOME OF THIS MINISTRY

- **“so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 3:10**
- It is through His old creation (the universe) that God reveals His power and glory
 - “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” Romans 1:20
- It is through His new creation (the church) that God reveals His wisdom to the heavenly realms
 - ⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” Revelation 7:9-12

SUFFERING AND GLORY

The bookends of Paul’s thought:

Don’t be alarmed when suffering for the Gospel
This suffering is for the good of the Body of Christ

“For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles...” (v.1)

“So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.” (v.13)

“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”
1 Peter 1:6-7

Suffering for the Gospel is guaranteed	Glory is the outcome of suffering	
"In the world you will have tribulation."	"But take heart; I have overcome the world."	John 16:33
"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake..."	"...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."	Matthew 5:10
"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account..."	"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."	Matthew 5:11
"For this light momentary affliction..."	"is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."	2 Corinthians 4:17
"we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance..."	"and endurance produces character, and character produces hope..."	Romans 5:4
"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time..."	"are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."	Romans 5:18
"...should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."	"For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory..."	Hebrews 2:10
"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."	"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."	1 Peter 4:12-13
"And after you have suffered a little while,"	"...the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."	1 Peter 5:10

CLOSING THOUGHTS

1. Truth revealed is a gift of grace
2. Ministry entrusted is a gift of grace exercised by the power of God
3. The mystery revealed and the ministry entrusted go together. You cannot have one without the other.
4. Glory is the outcome of suffering for Christ
 - a. Glory of God: Honor and praise
 - b. Glory of the saints: Edification
 - c. Glory of self: Sanctification

DISCUSSION

1. Jesus appeared directly to Paul to reveal the mystery of the Gospel. We now have the Word to reveal the mystery of the Gospel to us.
What truth of the mystery do you remember being enlightened to you when you came to believe? What Scripture was made clear to you?

2. How did the truth revealed to you empower you to live a life of ministry, proclaiming and revealing that truth?

3. How does the Church reveal the manifold wisdom of God?

“Suffering is not just martyrdom or physical persecution but is also ‘the mundane frustrations and unspectacular difficulties of our everyday lives when they are endured for [Jesus’] sake.’”

4. What does suffering for Christ look like in our culture? How is our suffering for Christ the same as Paul’s? How is it different?

5. Can you think of someone in your life who suffered for the Gospel, leading you to greater glory in the Gospel? (v.13)

HOMEWORK

Paul's 2nd letter to Timothy, who was ministering in Ephesus, was written 3-5 years after Ephesians. In this passage from 2 Timothy 1:8-14, try to identify how Paul's message to Timothy is consistent with message to the Ephesians. Look for any topic we have covered in Ephesians 1-3 and write it beside the phrase in this passage:

"⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, ¹²which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. ¹³Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."

- 1. What stood out to you as most similar to his letter to the Ephesians?**
- 2. What is comforting about the consistency of his message across years and much suffering?**
- 3. How can we be as focused and consistent as Paul in our message and our ministry?**