

Mystery, Ministry and Me Ephesians 3:1-13

INTRODUCTION

Mystery. What comes to mind when we hear that word? Well, mostly famous novel writers. Or perhaps what comes to mind are the mysteries around our homes. An earring is missing or a sock. **You place 12 matching socks in the dryer and lo and behold only 11 emerge after the fact.** Just like that one sock has suddenly disappeared and cannot be located. So, we search through nooks and crannies; we agonizingly retrace our steps and movements; we grow suspicious of some gremlin having invaded our home to snatch things. We theorize and postulate, trying to decide a solution to what's missing. And then it shows up between the cushions on a sofa or stuffed into a shoe or hung up in the dryer. **Or, as in the case with missing socks, it remains a mystery!**

Scientists investigate mysteries in the human body or with a microorganism or with the atmosphere. Astronomers search through their massive telescopes to discover mysteries in space. Oceanographers plunge into the depths to find mysteries surrounding a long-forgotten sunken ship. **But none of those kinds of mysteries explains what the Bible means by mystery.** It's not a "*who dunnit*" or a missing piece of clothing or a four-hundred-year-old sunken ship.

A biblical mystery is something like a treasure hunt. In a treasure hunt, you are given clues. You must figure out one clue in order to discover the next. Finally, after finding all the clues, you arrive at the treasure. It is not until you find the treasure that the mystery is solved.

Our Lord Jesus is the treasure. In the Old Testament God gave many clues about the Messiah. Nevertheless, people did not understand how all the clues fit together, like pieces of a puzzle needed to make a complete picture. Even the Old Testament prophets themselves did not understand their own prophecies, and thus found them to be a mystery (see **1 Peter 1:10-12**).

In **Ephesians 3**, we are introduced to another mystery. Not the mystery of salvation thru Jesus Christ but the mystery of the church. Paul has hinted at this mystery in **chapters 1 & 2** but now he goes into greater detail. Let's consider several aspects of this mystery.

Let's dig in...

I. The mystery _____ (3:1-3)

Before introducing the mystery, Paul introduces himself - **the steward of the mystery.** The manner in which he introduces himself is striking. **He introduces himself as Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus.** What is so striking about this introduction is that, for the past few years Paul has been a prisoner of Rome. He was arrested in Jerusalem. And he was transported under guard to Caesarea. And then he was placed onto a prison ship and transported to Rome. He has now been in Rome for some time. He is a prisoner. He is under house arrest. But he describes himself as a prisoner, not of Rome or of the Empire, but of Jesus Christ.

Paul understands that all which has befallen him came first through a nail-scarred hand. He has been imprisoned in accordance with the plan and purpose of Jesus. This plan is for the sake of the Gentiles. It has been accomplished so that the gospel of Christ might be taken to the Gentiles throughout the Roman empire. What sort of man was Paul? A man with a strong view of providence (3:1). **For him, the doctrine of God's sovereignty was not an abstract concept, but a truth to be lived by.**

II. The mystery _____ (3:4-5)

God's method of communicating with the Israelites was to reveal His words to a chosen prophet, who would in turn teach the people. The former generations in the time of the Old Testament prophets did not clearly understand the mystery which has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. **God's plan was hidden from previous generations, not because God wanted to keep something from his people, but because he would reveal it to everyone in his perfect timing.**

And what is this mystery? Please note...

III. The mystery _____ (3:6)

In 3:4, Paul refers to the "*mystery of Christ*" which means "*the mystery about Christ*" or "*the mystery, the substance of which is Christ.*" In Colossians 1:27, the mystery is the indwelling Christ, "*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" In Ephesians 1:9, *the mystery refers to God's plan to unite all creation in Christ.* Here in Ephesians 3:6, the mystery refers to the fact that Jews and Gentiles who believe are united in Christ. Don't miss this groundbreaking, earthshattering **truth: The mystery revealed is that God determined through the person and work of Christ to incorporate the Gentiles into one body of the church as equal partners with Israel.**

This inclusion of Gentiles with Jews is described in three terms:

A. Fellow _____

B. Fellow _____ of the same body

C. Fellow _____ of the promise

IV. The mystery _____ (3:7-8)

V. The mystery _____ (3:9-10)

The world is watching you to see what Christ does in the life of a person. And the world is not the only one watching. **Angels and rulers and heavenly beings are also watching.** Beings so powerful and so majestic that, were one to appear, we would be sorely tempted to fall down and worship. But they are fascinated with us. Not with us in ourselves, but in what Christ is doing in us. Amen?

VI. The mystery _____ (3:11-13)

CONCLUSION

What can we take with us this morning? Paul was writing to the Christians in Ephesus, but everything he says applies to us as well.

As such, let me leave with some practical applications:

- 1. See the _____ of the _____ we have been given.**

- 2. Live life with a whole-hearted _____ in the Lord and in His _____.**

- 3. See the _____ of the _____.**

Most of us live with little to no awareness to the drama going on around us. Our lives, and this church, have cosmic significance.