

# EPHESIANS 3:1-13

## The Mystery Revealed

### Memory Verse

“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

### Real-life Problems

Who doesn't love a free gift? It is always fun to be surprised with a gift we didn't expect or be given we didn't think we could ever earn. However, we don't necessarily love seeing other people get the thing we wanted or thought we deserved. Jealousy has been an issue since the first family—Cain and Able.

### The Good News

In Jesus, the mystery of the gospel has now been made known to all people. This mystery is that all nations have been brought into the family of God, His church. In turn, by grace the church has been given the ministry of the gospel. They are the witness of God to the world and have access to His power through their faith in Jesus.

## I. Introduction

### OPENING QUESTIONS

**Idea #1:** Have you ever read the end of a book first or looked up the end of a movie while watching it? What made you skip to the end before knowing the rest of the story?

**Idea #2:** Has there ever been a time when someone else got something that you thought you deserved? How did you feel when you found out they got it?

### PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

### REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

#### What does gospel mean?

Good news

#### What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

#### Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

#### What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

## REVIEW

### 1) What were the two reasons Paul wrote this letter?

1) To remind the church of the power of the gospel 2) To encourage believers to live in light of their new identity as the church

### 2) Who was the original audience of this letter?

The church, or followers of Jesus Christ, in Ephesus

### 3) Where was Paul when he wrote this letter?

Paul was in prison for his work in spreading the gospel.

## *What's going on?*

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### REMIND

Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, He not only preached peace, but made peace. Christ offered a way for all mankind to be brought into His family. He broke down the very thing that divided us and made us a new family in Him. God has made a way for all nations to be made one through Christ.

### TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) In Jesus, God has revealed the mystery of the gospel which is the salvation of all people.
- 2) By Jesus, the church has been given the ministry of the gospel.
- 3) Through Jesus, we can draw near to God in boldness.

## *Read*

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Read **Ephesians 3:1-13** aloud in your group.

## *Tough topics*

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### Inclusivity and Exclusivity of Christ's Invitation into the Family of God

It is worth noting in this passage the challenging reality of what we mean when we talk about the family of God and Christ's offer of salvation to all. Students may question what this means for their friends, especially those who worship in another religion.

This is an opportunity for you to help your students sit in a difficult, but beautiful, tension of the gospel. Because of Christ, the invitation to the family of God has been made inclusive to all who would believe. So, the reality now is that not only was there a way of salvation for the Jews, but for the whole world. However, this is where the exclusivity of Christ's invitation matters. While the way of salvation is now open for all, salvation is only for all who would believe. Believe in what? Believe in the death and resurrection of Christ and would confess Him as Lord (Rom 10:9-10). The exclusivity is not in who can receive the salvation of God, but in how we can be saved. There is only one way to salvation, and that is through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

## *II. Questions for Discussion*

### A. WHAT?

**1) In Ephesians 3:3-5, Paul talks about the mystery of God. To whom does he say the mystery has been revealed and how has it been revealed?**

The mystery has been revealed to Paul through revelation.

**2) What does "revelation" mean in verse 3?**

It means that something has been made known to you by God.

**3) To whom was the mystery not revealed (v. 5)?**

"Sons of men in other generations"

**4) According to verse 6, what is the mystery that has been revealed?**

The mystery is "that the gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

**5) Looking at verse 7, of what is Paul a minister and how did he receive it?**

Paul is a minister of the gospel—that is through Christ Jesus (v. 6). He was given his ministry by the working of God's power.

**6) Then, in verses 8-9, what are the two tasks Paul says he was to do with the grace given to him?**

- 1) to preach to the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (ref. Ephesians 1)
- 2) to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery.

**7) According to verse 10, what does God want to do through the church?**

He wants to use the church to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

**8) Because of Jesus, how can we now approach God according to verses 11-12?**

With boldness and confidence

**B. SO WHAT?****1) Looking back at verse 6, take a second to write down the message of the "mystery" in your own words.**

Answers will vary. However, do not rush this question. It is important to make sure that students understand exactly what Paul is declaring as the "mystery" revealed. The "mystery" is the message that the gospel is good news for all people, both Jew and gentile. Through Christ, God has now made a way of salvation for all people.

**2) Paul writes in verse 9 that the "mystery" was hidden for ages. Why do you think that God would chose to keep the "mystery" hidden?**

God has been revealing His plan of salvation over all of history. However, the "mystery" Paul is referring to here is the inclusion of the gentiles into that plan of salvation (v. 6). God did not reveal this in the ages past because He was using His people—Israel—as a witness of His grace and riches. Now, because of Christ's sacrifice, the salvation of God is offered to all people through faith. The people of God are now the church, who God has now given the role of witness to the world.

**Mystery Revealed**

Watch through minute 1:30 in this vide with your students: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Du8cwx68EAc>

In this YouTube video, a couple spends the day surprising their family members as they come to visit them in the hospital. The family believes they are coming to meet the couple's new baby when, in fact, they find out the couple had twins.

The husband and wife knew they were having twins, but kept the secret from their family for nine months in order to surprise them.

While the family knew they couple would be adding a new child to their family, when the time came and the secret was revealed, the moment was even sweeter than the family could have known.

This is a simple illustration of the beauty of a mystery revealed. Even more, it is fun to see the way the family responses to knowing that the blessing they expected is actually even more than they thought.

God was not simply keeping a secret when he hide the mystery for ages. Instead, He knew that as His people were waiting in anticipation for one thing, the true revelation would be even greater than their expectations. It is not what God's people thought; it is more.

**3) Why do you think Paul would refer to himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ?**

If we look at the bookends of this passage, verses 1 and 13, we can see that Paul is calling himself a prisoner of Christ Jesus because he understands that his imprisonment is part of God's plan for him. Paul's view of his imprisonment was not one of misfortune, but he knew that he was imprisoned by the grace of God for the sake

of the gospel ministry to the gentiles. He knew his life was not at the hands of Rome, but his life was fully in the hands of God for the sake of Christ.

**4) Why do you think Paul would consider himself in verse 8 to be "the very least of all the saints?" What does this tell us about Paul?**

It is clear in this passage that Paul understands that his ministry is solely a gift of grace by God. Paul knows that he did not walk with Jesus during His earthly ministry. He was not a part of the disciples that Jesus commissioned before His ascension. It is only by the working of God's power that Paul had been radically changed as a disciple of Jesus. Paul links power and grace together, knowing that it was God's power that changed him and God's grace that commissioned him. So while Paul had so much to boast in when it came to earthly accomplishments, we see his genuine humility in this passage as he recognizes his position as a servant/prisoner of Jesus, but rejoices in that position as a gift from God.

**5) Look back at 1:20-21. Why do you think Paul uses the same phrasing here as he does in verse 10? What connection do these two things have to one another?**

Paul intentionally is drawing the Ephesian readers back to what he just told them about Jesus. In chapter 1, we see that when Jesus had completed His work, God sat Him down in the heavenly places above every authority and ruler. In recognizing this connection, the church should be empowered in their mission to the authorities and rulers because they already know God has power over them all.

**6) Why do you think God would choose the church to make His wisdom known to the world?**

Because the church is the new people of God. Jesus is the head of the church (Eph 2) and the church is the body of God. The church is the fulfillment of God's plan for salvation. Who better to carry the message of salvation than those who have received it?

**7) How do you think Paul's view of grace informs his willingness to suffer?**

Over and over again, Paul refers to his imprisonment, ministry, and suffering as being given to him by God's grace. Paul knows that his suffering is actually a gift of God because, in his suffering, the gospel of God is going forward. Just as the disciples in Acts counted suffering as a worthy calling, Paul knows that any opportunity to serve God is a gift from God to draw near to Him. Grace is more than being given things, it is being given God Himself—even if that means through suffering.

**8) Why do you think Paul's sufferings can be considered for the "glory" (v.13) of others?**

Paul knew his suffering were helping to further the gospel to the gentiles and increase their faith. So his suffering was for their glory because God loved them enough to give His saint to suffer on their behalf, that they might be encouraged and built up in their faith.

## C. NOW WHAT?

**1) Look back at verse 6. How does understanding this "mystery" change the way you tell others about the gospel?**

When we consider what Paul told the Ephesians in chapter 2, this "mystery" is not simply good news for the gentiles, but it is good news for the family of God. Because of Christ, the promises of God now reach across borders and nations. The wall that once separated God's people has been broken down. This means the power

of the gospel and the hope it offers, is not only ours to keep, but to give. We can take confidence in our identity as God's children and boldly share this good news with others because, by grace, God is calling all people to faith in Christ.

**2) How does Paul's view of suffering challenge your own view of suffering? How should our understanding of grace change the way we respond in suffering?**

Our immediate response to suffering is probably not to consider it a gift from God. For most of us, our response to suffering is most often to ask "Why?" and "What did we do to deserve this?" We view suffering as punishment from God instead of His grace. However, the grace of God in our lives is what Paul mentions in verses 11-12, that we would be able to boldly and confidence draw near to God. God's grace in our life is not that we would have a comfortable life, but that we would know and grow in God. When we understand grace in this way, we can see how God might grant us the opportunity to suffer as a chance to draw near to Him and be united with Him in His sufferings (Phil 3:10).

**3) In what ways do verses 10-12 challenge or encourage your view of the church? Why should the church matter in our own lives?**

God's divine purpose from the beginning has been to accomplish His plan of salvation through the witness of the church. If God values the church in such a way, so should we. If God has placed the church at the center of His salvation plan, then our connection to the church matters. While God's salvation is extended to individual people by grace through faith, we are not saved merely to ourselves. As Paul has shown in the last two chapters, God saves us to a family. Through His saving grace, we are brought into a family, and family matters. This is what the church must matter in our own lives.

**4) How does our faith in Jesus give us boldness and confidence to draw near to God?**

When we say we have "faith in Jesus," what we are saying is that we believe in His life, death, and resurrection as the only true sacrifice and atonement for our sins. We are saying we have faith that Ephesians 2:1-10 is ultimately true and we believe and confess Jesus as our Lord. By this, Jesus has not only conquered sin and death, but is currently seated at the right hand of God on high (1:20) and has seated us with Him in faith. We have done nothing to earn our place with Christ, but instead, by grace, Jesus has given us His righteous standing. So we can now approach God in confidence because we are in Christ—meaning it is not our works that matter, but the completed work of Christ that has been accepted in full by God.

## *Main takeaway*

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In Jesus, God has revealed the mystery of the gospel. By Jesus, the church has been given the ministry of the gospel. Through Jesus, we can draw near to God in boldness.

## *III. Closing*

### REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

In Jesus, the mystery of the gospel has now been made known to all people. This mystery is that all nations have been brought into the family of God, His church. In turn, by grace, the church has been given the ministry of the gospel. They are the witness of God to the world and have access to His power through their faith in Jesus.

### CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father, thank You for revealing the mystery of Your gospel through Jesus. We ask You would give us a deeper understanding of the beauty of Your grace and the power of Your Spirit today. And help us to be a faithful witness of those truths to the world. Give us eyes to see our suffering in light of Your grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## *Supporting resources*

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### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) In what ways do you need to challenge your own view of grace in light of this passage?
- 2) As a Christian, why does the church matter? In what ways do you need to better value the church in our own lives?
- 3) In what ways does your faith Jesus give you confidence to draw near to God in prayer?

### QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) How would you describe the mystery of the gospel that Paul talked about in Ephesians 3?
- 2) Why do you think God would have chosen to keep the mystery hidden for ages before revealing it?
- 3) How did reading about Paul's response to suffering challenge or encourage you?