

The Mystery Revealed

Ephesians

By Don Green

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Bible Text: Ephesians 3:5-7
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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

I am very grateful for the people of Truth Community Church, grateful for a congregation that delights in coming to the word of God and seeing the name of Christ upheld. That's an increasingly rare commodity in this world and even within the church where God is misrepresented and God is portrayed as someone other than he is. Think about it: the Scriptures say in Proverbs 1:7 that, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction." Elsewhere, Proverbs says that the fear of the Lord keeps one from evil and if there is anything that could be said about modern Christianity or what passes for it, is that there is profoundly missing a sense of the fear of God in the heart of worship and in the heart of much of what supposedly passes for Bible teaching. It's very narcissistic, it's very self-centered, it's very man-centered and we're doing our best as a young church, for those of you that are visiting, to step away from that kind of model and to be a God-fearing, Bible-fearing, Bible-loving, Christ-loving church and if you're visiting with us here today, I just want you to know that that's the spirit from which we're coming from. We do our best not to try to cater to what will entertain people but rather to teach in a way that would exalt God and lead people to fear him and as they fear him, come to realize that in Christ he can be trusted, that in Christ alone there is salvation for the forgiveness of our sins and that in Christ alone we find one, in Christ we find a Savior who calls us not to enjoy life at his expense but one to deny ourselves and come to him and give ourselves wholly over to him. That's what we're trying to do here. That's the point of this pulpit. That's the point of this church is to exalt God and to have a high view of him and a high view of his word no matter what the world around us does. That's why we exist. That's what we want to do.

One of the ways that we try to further that goal is through verse by verse Bible teaching and that's what we're doing on Sunday mornings. We're teaching verse by verse through the book of Ephesians and I would invite you to turn to Ephesians 3 as we continue in our exposition of this book. One of the natures of verse by verse exposition is that it prevents you from getting too man-centered in your teaching because the Scriptures exist to reveal God, to reveal Christ, to reveal his glory as he works out his plan through history, to reveal his glory in the work of salvation that Christ accomplished on the cross and Ephesians 3 is an unfolding of the glory of God in the work of salvation and in his oversight of indeed the entire universe. And you see as you go through the book of Ephesians how God is working out purposes through the unfolding of history that go far

beyond what any man could ever guess. There are things contained in the Scripture, there is valuable truth in the word of God that you would never guess at and that you could never arrive at through human intellectual pursuit. You must come to God and humble yourself as a little child if you would have Christ. You must humble yourself before this word and receive it as one needing instruction rather than one sitting in judgment about what the word of God says. It is a totally different mindset that is in direct opposition to the pride of man and the force of our culture here today which boasts in self and even the very word "selfie," most of you know what it means, we are preoccupied with ourselves so much as a culture that it's hard to step into a realm where we say, "I must humble myself and fear God and I must learn from him. I need to be instructed. I need God to minister to my soul because it is sin-sick and shriveled and I fall short of the glory of God." We don't apologize for that. We proclaim that as a reason that we exist.

Well, verse by verse Bible teaching helps you in that and the understanding that we need to receive instruction rather than make demands on God comes very clearly in the text that is before us here today, Ephesians 3:4-7. I would invite you to turn there if you haven't already as we get into this wonderful text. This is just such a humbling text on so many levels. In Ephesians 3:4-7, we looked at verse 4 last time but I'm going to start there as I read the text that is in front of us. Paul says,

4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

As we've seen as we've gone through chapter 2 and now beginning to work our way through chapter 3, Paul has portrayed the lost condition of mankind and particularly of Gentiles, declaring that apart from Christ all men are dead in their sins. They are dominated by Satan and they are doomed to suffer the wrath of God. Gentiles are those who are apart from Christ, are described as those who are strangers to the covenant, without God and without hope in the world. You wouldn't guess that because man in his pride does not want to think of himself as somebody lost and needing a Savior and yet that is true of every one of us apart from Christ and apart from Christ, you are without hope. You are a stranger to promise. You are without God in the world. You are facing a miserable eternity when you die. And only those kinds of truths taking root in our heart, taking root in our understanding, only those kinds of truths will drive out our pride and self-sufficiency so that we look beyond ourselves, we look outside of ourselves to find a Savior who can reconcile us to God.

As Paul is writing these first 3 chapters of Ephesians, he is rejoicing in the fact, he opens up in Ephesians 1:3 saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he is rejoicing in the fact that God has done just exactly such a work, that God has made

himself known in Christ, that God has revealed that he chose us and adopted us and redeemed us and sealed us in the Spirit, all as an expression of his boundless grace and mercy to those that he sets his affection upon. And these things were made known to Paul as an apostle. They were revealed to him and he's saying here as we go to Ephesians 3:4, that these things were given to him and when you understand his unique role as an apostle, you can understand why he has so much insight into the mystery of Christ. It's because God did a work in Paul and imparted knowledge to Paul which he was to administer like a steward over someone else's resources and take to the Gentile world and now here we are 2,000 years later living in the midst of the benefit of Paul's faithfulness to that call and more supremely, the work of God that he did through him.

These are all things that you can't find in human understanding and let me just say that because these are things that are revealed, because these are things that come from the mind of an omniscient, omnipotent God, you cannot measure them by your human standards of fairness or understanding. God does not submit his work of salvation, his sovereign purposes, his distinction between the elect and non-elect, he does not submit that to us for our approval, for our assent, he reveals them and calls us to believe them and submit to them because it is his truth. Salvation is his gift and he has the prerogative, absolutely and unconditionally, to administer it as he sees fit. We do not sit in judgment of this God who gives his revelation, rather we gratefully respond and say, "O God, thank you that you have made these things known to us," and we humble our intellect, we humble our will, we humble our affections and give all of it over to Christ in grateful response to one great climactic, perfect act of redemption on the cross. And this risen Christ who calls us, who says, "Come to me all ye who labor and are heavy laden," who calls us and says, "Unless you deny yourself and become like a little child you cannot know me at all," we come to him on his terms without preconditions, without subjecting God to our miserably fallen intellect. Instead, we gratefully respond in the recognition that things have been given to us that have been withheld from others in the past.

So as Paul is speaking here in Ephesians 3, beloved, he is explaining essential truth about the church, about the body of believers, of true believers in Christ, and this truth is so foundational to our blessing today. We're going to focus on verses 5 through 7 here this morning and we're going to see 3 aspects of the church that give us a sense of the privilege that is ours, of the great blessing that has been bestowed upon us. You know, there is just such a multi-colored, multifaceted wonder to God's salvation. We see him in his glory and we fear him. We see him in his mercy and we love him and we trust him and we're thankful for that. Then we see the marvel of the work that he has unfolded through the ages and we're just overwhelmed in our intellect, overwhelmed in our understanding, to see this vast mind of God in small portion put on display before us. These are things that we can't guess. We wouldn't understand unless God had made them known to us.

These are things that Paul is talking about. He said there in verse 4, look at verse 4 with me. He said, "you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ," a mystery being something that was previously undisclosed but now God has made known. Paul says, "You can understand why I know these things by referring to my apostleship." Now he

goes on in verses 5 through 7 and gives us 3 different aspects about this ministry that we are supposed to understand, this mystery that belongs to those of us that are now in the church. We're going to take it verse by verse and point by point here.

Point number 1 here, we're going to see the season, what I'm calling the season of the mystery. The season of the ministry. The time in which this mystery was made known. Last time we saw that the Jews of the day were extremely hostile to Paul's ministry. They were hostile to his outreach to Gentiles. It threatened their spiritual superiority and they wanted to silence it no matter what. But here as we see chapter 3 unfolding, we see that the Apostle Paul was undeterred, that he was firm, that he was solid. He was continuing on in that ministry despite that prior opposition and here he says, he gives us more understanding as to why it is that he is reaching out to the Gentiles, why it is that the Gospel has moved from being primarily centered to the Jews in the Old Testament, now moving on to the Gentiles in the New Testament era. He goes on in verse 5 to explain this new season in the work of God and you can see that as we look at verse 5 as we go into our first point now this morning.

Paul says, "you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ," then he uses this word "which," "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men." As you are following his thought here, as you are following the flow of God's revelation in this book through the Apostle Paul, you need to understand what's going on. You need to follow those connective clauses and those relative clauses which unfold the meaning of the text so that we can understand and grow from it. This word "which" that opens verse 5 is introducing a clause which further describes the mystery, this new revelation that has been given and what Paul is saying here is that the New Testament church introduced a new chapter in redemptive history that was different from God's work in the nation of Israel. We need to be clear here as we consider this so that we understand exactly what we're saying. The fact that God was extending blessing to the Gentiles in general was not something new. That's not what Paul is talking about. Embedded throughout the Old Testament even from the beginning in the early chapters of Genesis, we see that God had an intention to bless the Gentiles through the line of Abraham. He told Abraham, he said, "In you, all the nations of the earth will be blessed." It says in Psalm 117:1, "Praise the LORD, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples!"

Look back at the book of Isaiah where we were at just earlier for our Scripture reading, in Isaiah 42, as we try to pull a couple of different themes of Scripture together. Isaiah 42. Paul is saying that there is something new here in his preaching to the Gentiles and we're trying to establish exactly what that newness is. Well, it's not that God would bless the Gentiles because that was revealed and that was made known in the Old Testament, for example, in Isaiah 42:1. Notice that the prophet says, "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations." There was a promise of justice to the nations, not simply to Israel. Not simply to the Jews. There was a promise of blessing that went beyond the Old Testament people of God.

Look at verse 6, "I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness," this is Isaiah 42:6, not going back to Ephesians just yet. Isaiah 42:6, "I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations." This looking forward to the Messiah and this Messiah would be a light to the nations, not merely to the Jews and so we see from the Old Testament in just these limited references that could be multiplied, we see that God had in mind that one day there would be great blessing brought to Gentiles, brought to non-Jewish peoples, that through the line of Abraham, there would come a servant who would serve to be a blessing to them. We see that. God promised justice and light to the nations.

Now, turn back to Ephesians 3 with that little bit of background in mind. Many good Bible teachers, far more gifted than your speaker here this morning, many good Bible teachers have looked at those Old Testament themes that we looked at just now and looked at those texts and said that what Paul is talking about here in Ephesians 3, since God had said that he was going to bless the Gentiles from Old Testament days, for Paul to say, "Here is blessing to Gentiles," he must not be speaking in absolute terms, that he is talking about a relative, comparatively greater revelation that is continuous with what was said in the Old Testament and expands on it but is not something that is totally, totally new. Paul is just making it clearer than it was before, they would say. Now, at first glance, that may not sound very controversial to you but it opens the door to a lot of theological mischief. If Paul is merely clarifying Old Testament truth rather than explaining that something brand-new has taken place, then the church is not much different than Israel in God's plan. If Paul is only saying something, that he's expanding on something that was already made known in the Old Testament, if you take that view then you can start to say things like, you can start going in directions and saying, "Well, the church then replaces Israel and there is no distinct future for Israel as a nation," and that what God promised to Israel is simply a continuation and now given to the church because there isn't a distinct difference between the church and Israel and what God did to Israel in the Old Testament is now transferred over to the church. Some would go so far as to say that God is completely done with the Jews, in part, because they don't believe that there is a sharp distinction of which Paul is speaking here in Ephesians 3.

Here's a question based on what we talked about last week: if that's true, if Paul was simply expanding things that were already known to some degree in the Old Testament, those of you who were here last week can understand from which I speak. If it wasn't that much different than what the Jews had already known, why then did the Jews so violently oppose it? Why were the Jews so committed to silencing Paul, to keep him speaking these things? Why did they react so violently, so riotously, so irrationally, to silence Paul's ministry to the Gentiles if it was something that was already there in their own Scriptures? If Paul is merely expanding on the Old Testament, why did his teaching cause riots among the Jews? That doesn't make any sense.

So let's take a closer look at what he says. Look at verse 5 with me now. Ephesians 3:5. Paul says, "which in other generations," obviously referring to past generations, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men." It's a causative form, God

had not made it known in the past. He had not made it known to the sons of men, a reference to humanity in general. This was something that humanity did not know anything about, whatever this mystery is which he's going to explain in verse 6. But look at verse 4 with me, he says, "You can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which," let me explain more about this mystery then, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men." This is something that they did not know. It's not something that they knew in part and now Paul is completing the picture, this is something that was unknown to them, that God therefore had to make it known.

You can see the contrast as you look on in verse 5. He had "not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." He says, "They didn't know it then, now God has revealed it. God has uncovered it. God has taken the lid off and allowed people to look in. He has pulled the blinds up so that people can look through the window and see his purposes in a way that was previously dark and unknown to them. This is something new. This is something different." Notice that he says there in verse 5, this has been revealed to his "holy apostles." It's not referring to the fact that they had a special degree of sanctity and therefore we should make saints out of them, it's saying that the apostles were holy in the sense that they were set apart for this purpose. God took a unique, non-repeatable, non-successive group of men, set them apart in the first century and says, "To you as apostles, I will make this truth known that I had not made known prior in the past." His holy apostles and prophets, speaking of New Testament prophets, not Old Testament prophets as we saw back at the end of chapter 2, in the Spirit.

Prior generations, beloved, did not know about what Paul is speaking about here in Ephesians 2 and 3 and that's his point. He says, "You can understand how it is that I am telling you things that you've never heard before when you remember that I am an apostle to the Gentiles that God sent me apart for this and God has made known things through the apostles that previously were not made known in other generations." They did not know about this but God disclosed it to his apostles and New Testament prophets by the work of the Holy Spirit. Those men, that unique group in that transitional time between the Lord Jesus Christ and the completion of the Canon, were receiving new revelation from God as he advanced his purposes in redemptive history and they had been set apart for that information. Beloved, this was new information to God's people, not merely a clarification of what he had said before.

Look at Ephesians 3:9, Paul says in verse 8, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." He says, "For prior ages this was unknown. Men could not find it this through their searching." This aspect of which he is speaking was not something made known in the Old Testament because it was hidden in the mind of God who created all things. So it's not that it was partially disclosed and Paul expands on it, whatever he's talking about here in Ephesians 3 is something new. It had been kept secret.

Look at Romans 16. This is not the only place where Paul makes these kinds of statements. Romans 16, right at the very end of Romans, the last 3 verses. If you're still getting acquainted with your Bible, Romans would be back to your left a little bit from the book of Ephesians, over the Corinthian epistles. Romans 16:25. Here is Paul's concluding emphasis as he brings this great epistle to a conclusion. He says, "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested." Paul is speaking in absolute, not comparative terms. He's saying, "This was secret. It had to be revealed." For long ages unknown, now made manifest this mystery of which he speaks. It is now "manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith." You see it there. He says, "This was kept secret but now it is made known to all the nations in a way that was previously hidden in the past."

It's even more clear in a parallel passage to the Ephesians passage in the book of Colossians. Turn over to Colossians 1:25 on the other side of Ephesians, past Philippians in your Bible. Paul says, echoing much of what he said in Ephesians which is not surprising because those 2 letters were written at about the same time. He says, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God." What is that, Paul? What word? "That is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." It was a mystery, past ages, unknown, hidden, now manifested to his saints for the benefit of Gentiles. Again and again and again, Paul makes this emphasis about the content of his teaching.

So whatever this is, it is something that is new and was previously unknown in the Old Testament is what Paul is saying. And what is it then, what is this mystery that is revealed? Why would Jews kill to stop it? If it's something more than just a general sense that God would bless Gentiles, what is this mystery? Go back to Ephesians 3:6 now as we come to point number 2: the substance of the mystery. The substance of the mystery. What is the content of the mystery? Paul here in verse 6 is giving an exegetical explanation of what he means. He is explaining what he means as he talks about this mystery. He says in verse 5, "This is the mystery which was hidden," and now in verse 6, he is going to explain specifically what it is that he is talking about. This is so very important for you to see and understand. It is not something general and vague and simply echoing themes that you could have read the Old Testament and guessed at, the things that were completely, clearly, plainly stated that God would bless the Gentiles. That's not new. The Old Testament indicated that. The spies gave blessing to Rahab and Joshua. Jonah took preaching to the city of Nineveh, a pagan city, and God honored their repentance. The fact that there would be a blessing to Gentiles was not new. It's so important to see that.

So what is it then? Verse 6, "to be specific." Paul explains what he's talking about in a climactic statement. He says, "Let me tell you exactly what I'm talking about," and then

he goes on and does precisely that. He is precise in what he says. "To be specific that," here's the mystery, here is the substance of the mystery, here's its content, he says, "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." Notice the key words in English. They are "fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus." The mystery that is now revealed is this: that Gentiles are now on equal spiritual footing with the Jews through faith in Christ. That was new. Before in Old Testament times, Gentiles if they wanted to come to the God of Israel had to come through the Jews, they had to be a proselyte to Judaism. Paul is saying and Paul's preaching was, "That is no longer the case." That is why Gentiles did not have to be circumcised before they could come to Christ. That is why in Acts 15 the Jerusalem Council refused to impose the Jewish law upon these new Gentile believers. They didn't need the Jewish law. They didn't need the Jewish ceremonies. They didn't need to be circumcised because in Christ the fulfillment of the law, they came and they found in Christ the perfection of everything. Christ satisfied all the demands of the law and a Gentiles could go to Christ and in Christ be on equal footing with a Jew who also came to Christ. There was no longer a spiritual distinction like had availed in the past. So they are fellow heirs, fellow members and fellow partakers. In Greek these words are all built with the preposition "with." What you're seeing translated in English in our version, "fellow partaker, fellow heir," it's the Greek word "with," the Greek preposition "with" attached to these different words.

So what is Paul saying here? Look at verse 6 with me again. Let's read it again and just keep it fresh in our minds. "Here's the mystery," he says, "let me be very clear that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." Where is his emphasis? It's on "fellow." He's not emphasizing the fact that there are Gentiles being blessed, the emphasis of the verse is that they are fellows. Gentiles with Jews are heirs of God's promises and share the same legal status before him. Gentiles with Jews are members of the body and have an equally vital relationship with God through Christ. Gentiles with Jews share in the promises and have precisely the same blessings in salvation as do believing Jews. When Paul said in Ephesians 1, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," he is saying, "Jews have that blessing, every blessing in the heavenly places in Christ and so do Gentiles." When he said that, "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world," Jews and Gentiles alike, believing Jews, believing Gentiles, same exercise of God's electing choice to save them. When he said that they had been redeemed through the blood of Christ, Jews and Gentiles alike sharing in that. Sealed in the Spirit, Jews and Gentiles alike. All sharing those blessings together.

That's the emphasis. That's the mystery that Paul is saying has been deposited and that he is now making known. As we said last time, one of the serious temptations for us in this room today is to say, "Eh, what's the big deal?" Don't let your 21st century position cause you to diminish what Scripture is saying here as though it is something extraneous or irrelevant. It couldn't be irrelevant or God wouldn't have put it in his word. You see, you and I take it for granted in a society that was built on segregation between Jews and

Gentiles, what Paul was saying was sensational. It was contrary to prevailing thought. It was contrary to the way that the Jewish temple itself was built: Gentiles excluded in an outer court, only the Jews could enter into where the Holy of Holies was more closely found. You see, the key is not that they were Gentiles, the key in what Paul is saying to help us understand what he's saying here in verse 3, is that they were equal and all of a sudden the Jews' prerogative and privileges that they thought that they had were gone. They couldn't lord it over Gentiles any longer. That's why Paul in this letter calls so much for unity, for harmony, for peace between Jews and Gentiles in the church. It's because there was the same spiritual standing and therefore our life in the church should flow from the equality of standing that we have Jews and Gentiles believing in Christ together.

Fellow heirs. Fellow members. Fellow partakers of the promise. You can't flatten that by simply saying that Paul is talking only about bringing salvation to the Gentiles. That's not it. Just look at his emphasis: fellow, fellow, fellow. The mystery has to be tied to what is the fellow aspect of this, not simply that Gentiles are saved. It's more than that that he's talking about. The key is not that they were Gentiles, the key is that they were equal. One writer said this and I quote, "The mystery is not that the Gentiles would be saved for the Old Testament gave evidence of that, but rather that believing Jews and Gentiles are joined together. That was a revolutionary concept for Jews and Gentiles alike."

Gentiles, people like you and me, those without any blood connection to Abraham could entirely bypass Jewish rituals and still be fully reconciled to God. That's how great, how perfect the work of Christ was. He fulfilled that law in its entirety so there were no requirements left over for us as Gentiles to have to fulfill. And when Christ comes and bids you as a Gentile, "Come to me and I will never cast you out," you come to Christ realizing that you are guilty and condemned by God's law but in Christ, in the perfect righteous life of Christ, and in the perfect atoning death on the cross, you have fulfilled in him every possible aspect of pleasing God that would ever be necessary. Christ did it all and when you receive him by faith, all of that great merit and worth and forgiveness is credited to your account so that you are perfectly reconciled to God in the same way that a Jew who believes in Christ is perfectly reconciled to God and therefore there is equal footing, equal basis. A Jewish believer is no better than a Gentile believer in the sight of God. That's what Paul is saying.

This was revolutionary. To go to Jerusalem before the temple fell with this knowledge and to stand and to look at the outer court of the Gentiles, you would see instantly that that couldn't possibly be perpetuated and it was just a short time later that Rome came and sacked the temple under the sovereign hand of God and destroyed the temple which was a symbol of the ongoing barrier between Jews and Gentiles that Christ had died to demolish. Christ demolished it spiritually, demolished that dividing wall spiritually and in a very short time thereafter, God brought the Romans upon Jerusalem and that temple fell and there is no physical representation of it anymore either. From a Jewish perspective, if you were an unbelieving Jew, this was your national identity. This is what made you better. This is what made you stand out. For somebody to come and say that that was no longer the case would be an attack on you. To simply say that Gentiles could be saved is not the same thing.

Well, let's bring it to today. Let's bring it to you. How are you supposed to process this in your heart? Beloved, we should always be living life, we should always be conducting our thinking under the umbrella of the revelation of God, of what Scripture teaches. We should never be thinking about ourselves apart from the work of Christ on our behalf. There is a real spiritual union that we have with him. We are united in Christ. Scripture talks about how we are in Christ, in him, in the Beloved so we should not be thinking about ourselves apart from Christ at any point. We should always be tying it back into Scripture, back into Christ, back into the Gospel.

How great is your salvation? How much has God blessed you? There you were, separate from God. Your sins had made a separation between you and your God and your iniquities had hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. That was you. Condemned. Judged. Dead. Doomed. Under the domination of Satan. A child of the devil. Your sinful, lying life was simply a mark of who your true father was, Jesus said, of your father the devil. Now, now for those of us that have come to Christ, those of us that God has brought by the power of his Spirit to faith in Christ, now once separate, now we are reconciled. Now we realize on this side of salvation, we realize that God chose us for our unique position before the foundation of the world. We realize that the eternal Son of God left the glories of heaven in order to come to earth in order to offer his life as that sacrifice which would make reconciliation possible. As we have seen in the past from the book of Ephesians, we've been adopted into his family. Our sins have been washed away. We are declared righteous before him in a perfect legal standing that can never be overturned by any other verdict. The final verdict on your life has been delivered and God has declared you righteous based on the work of Christ.

Not only that. Not only that, God has so blessed you as a Gentile who believes in Christ, God has done such a magnificent work on your behalf, Christ has so greatly served you as your brother in heaven, that God has given you equal standing with those who shared the blood of Abraham although you were not included in the direct promises he made to the early Jews. The great patriarch, Abraham, was told, "In you all the nations would be blessed." Christ comes, the Spirit is sent upon the church for the first time in Acts 2 and this great miracle of regeneration takes place and among the many other blessings that we have discussed here, we now find God didn't take anything away from the Jews in order to bless you, he gave you more than what could have even been suspected in the Old Testament. He is faithful to the Jews and he goes over and beyond his promises to the Jews and pours out more blessing upon us as believing Gentiles than we ever could have guessed so that even though we are physically from a different line, we still share in the promises that God made to Abraham 4,000 years ago. We are on equal standing. We were orphans with no home of our own in the house of God. You were stranded. Lost. And God in time reached down and had mercy on you, drew you to himself for the purpose of bestowing all these spiritual blessings on you and now you enjoy as a Christian privilege beyond compare, hope that is certain of fulfillment, complete forgiveness, the indwelling Holy Spirit and on and on and on it goes.

It is as if you were an orphan outside the house of God and he brought you into his family and said, "I will give you all of the privileges that my natural born children have." And you say, "Wait, wait, what did I do to deserve that? Where did that come from? Why me? You look around and you remember me, right? You remember my past? You remember how I blasphemed your name? You remember how I rejected and mocked the Gospel when it was presented to me? Do you remember that, God? Why am I here in the center of this blessing where you no longer even make distinctions between your Old Testament people who believe? God, how good are you? How gracious are you? How much have you bless me." And the teaching of Scripture in response is, "He has blessed you without measure. He has blessed you without partiality to your bloodlines."

And we humbly say, "Lord, I don't deserve this," and that's precisely the point. That is precisely the point, beloved. Do you see it? You did not deserve this. You could not attain this. You could not earn this. You could not have even recognized it intellectually if God had not made it known through the holy apostles and the prophets of the New Testament. This was all hidden, tucked away in a place where man could not find it in the mind of God who dwells in unapproachable light, who no man has seen nor can see and live. Out of this righteous throne of Shekinah glory, God sent Christ and made it known and gladly poured blessing upon you for no other reason than the fact that he is a merciful, gracious God and he chose to be kind to you in your sin and undeserving.

It's that kind of holy hush that must have somehow been as the glory of God was displayed to Moses, "Take off your sandals, you are standing on holy ground." A similar thing said to Joshua as well, "This is holy ground," and Joshua fell before the Commander of the Lord, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, and worshiped. That's what we should do. And as you work it out, as you work out the whole force of what all of this means, it humbles your intellect. It humbles your mind. It humbles your affections. It lets you let go a little bit of this earthly life and say, "I'm not going to clutch this," as if this was all it was about, "because what has been given to me in Christ is of such great surpassing value that by comparison, I can let all of this go if only I can just walk in the midst of the glory of the knowledge of Christ." You see, this reorients everything that you love. Everything that you think, everything that you pursue is defined by this kind of understanding that Paul has made known to us in Ephesians 1 through 3.

You see, Christ is not something that you merely add to your existing life like you would add a new car or you get another degree or you add a new friend. No, no, what we're talking about here revolutionizes the very understanding that we have of the purpose of our existence and it lays claim on our affections because it is so great and so high and so mighty and so wonderful that we bow in worship before it and then we pursue an affection after it. We magnify God as we recognize the great privilege that all that entails.

Well, as we come to the end of our passage here for this morning, let's look at point 3: the source of the mystery. The source of the mystery. Paul delivered the message. Paul made this known. He was the human voice of it but in verse 7, he gives all the glory to God. Here he is an apostle who has been to the third heaven and has seen things that men are not allowed to speak of, here he is with this unique position in the very foundation of the

church, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone, here he is as the one given this great treasure to administer and what does he do? He gives all the glory to God. He gives all the glory to God.

Look at the end of verse 6, "Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which," here's another one of those clauses that explain a word, "the gospel, of which," he's explaining now an aspect of the Gospel here in verse 7, "of which I was made a minister." I was made a servant of this. I simply wait the tables, he says and I do this, "according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. " "I was made a minister and my service came as a gift from God to me and the gift of God's grace expressed in the Gospel, this was given to me according to the working of his power. God's grace. God's power is at work," Paul says, "in my apostolic ministry. It's a gift of grace. Just as you did not deserve salvation," Paul says, "I didn't deserve this apostleship," and he felt that very keenly as you read through his writings in the New Testament. He was very mindful of the fact that he was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor of the church. As one who previously persecuted the church, now he has the privilege of serving the living God and being of benefit to untold millions through the ages. Paul says, "I didn't deserve that. God was just gracious to me."

He says there at the end of verse 7, "this was according to the working of His power." God powerfully called Paul on the road to Damascus in Acts 9 and blinded him with an appearance of Christ. God powerfully enabled Paul to fulfill his ministry. What kind of power is it that perseveres through riots and beatings and hunger and imprisonment and unflinchingly carries on? God powerfully at work in the soul of that man, powerfully sustaining him through the many tribulations in his ministry. God powerfully worked through Paul and Paul reminds us here that we worship the God of our salvation, not the vessel who delivered it to us. We look past Paul. We look through Paul and see the God and the Christ and the Gospel that he unveiled for us. God powerfully worked through Paul as the Gospel message imparted spiritual life to Gentiles who had previously walked in darkness and were without hope. James Montgomery Boice says and I quote, "To have that," the blessings of salvation in other words, "To have that as Paul says the people of God do, is to have a share in the greatest of all possible human blessings. To share it with others from a great variety of races, peoples and cultures is to participate in the mystery which was revealed to Paul and declared by him."

Beloved, do you see how magnificent the Gospel is? Do you see what a treasure it is? Do you see what a magnificent gift it is? That not only could you not earn it, you couldn't have even figured it out. You did not have the mind, the capacity, the access to God's inner thoughts to do that and now here we are, indwelt by the Spirit, with a certain hope of heaven and, beloved, think about your life as it stands today in the things that give you joy and the things that cause you concern and the things that cause you sorrow. Do you realize as we have talked through these things that all of those things that we necessarily have to engage our lives in thinking about, dealing with, do you realize that those things are nothing by comparison to Christ? Do you realize that they are nothing in comparison to the Gospel? Do you realize that they are transient? That they are passing? That even

the worst of situations that you face are not going to endure forever? The Gospel gives you that perspective to see them from that light. The Gospel gives you the prospective to say, "I can go through this. I can deal with this because in Christ, in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the salvation that God has given me contained and revealed in his word, I have all I need." Nothing is more important than this and we have this as a multi-splendored gift from God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It was all of grace. It was all of God's wisdom. It was all of God's plan, not of our deserving.

These are things that just send your heart into orbit for joy and then you are humbled still further to realize that the best is yet to come, that what we have right now is as bad as it will ever be for us in Christ. It's better than we could ever imagine and yet what lies ahead, the glory that is yet to be revealed to us will make all of this pale in comparison. When we see the face of Christ, when we are in glory with him, all of this is going to be left behind and we will be consumed by the greatness of the eternal blessing to which we were appointed before the foundation of the world. Beloved, that is meant to define your whole perspective on life. That is meant to overturn all of your priorities until Christ alone is at the center of your affections and what you pursue. All of grace. None of our deserving. All guaranteed by the authority of this inerrant word.

Please bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for the revelation of the mystery and we thank you that you saw fit to include us in the plan. O God, we couldn't have found it on our own. We didn't find it on our own. We wouldn't have come to you at all except by a prior work of your Spirit to convict us, to change us, to lead us and now here we are, adopted into your family on an equal footing with believing Jews and the best yet to come. God, we are overwhelmed by the glory and the wonder and the perfection of the Gospel. We thank you for it. We ask you to help us be faithful to it. And Father, we would pray still further for those who are in this room, who might hear later on subsequent media, who are still in darkness, O God, would you open their eyes even as John Knox prayed, "O God, open the King of England's eyes," Tyndale actually. Open the King of England's eyes. Father, we pray that you would open eyes in this room now that the greatness of what is before us would not be missed and would be received by a willing, submissive, repentant heart who says, "Lord Jesus, save me too. Don't leave me behind. Take me with you into your kingdom." Would you hear the humble, inarticulate cries of hearts like that here today, Lord, and save them that others might join in the chorus of which we will now sing? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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