

The Mystery of God’s Glorious Grace
“God’s Marvelous Mystery Made Ours”
Palmetto Baptist Church

Texts: Eph 3:1-13

Ephesians 3:7-10

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given to me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Introduction:

As we head into the final segment of Ephesians, it will be helpful to remind ourselves of the **theme**, the ***new realities created*** by God to accomplish that theme, and the magnificent, ***marvelous mystery*** He has revealed to us for the very first time in this book.

Pastor Jason gave the series a very fitting title – “The Glory of God’s Grace”. God’s grace is in fact glorious in every way. But beyond the fact that the grace of God is glorious, God Himself is even more glorious. And it is His intention and desire that the entire universe see, understand, and exalt His glory as they observe the working out of His marvelous grace in His church.

His grace truly is amazing. Grace changes everything because its main effect in our lives is to ***establish a true and unbreakable peace with God***. For Paul’s readers, peace meant much more than the absence of conflict or trial. It’s fuller meaning indicated that ***all was well and as it should be in every area of life***. The word God’s people used for this idea was “***shalom***” and if you are ever in Israel, people will greet you with this term and repeat it as they take their leave from you – similar to the way we use the term “aloha”.

This concept of “shalom” is so important to Paul’s thinking in Ephesians that it is the first thing he states in the letter – “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2). Sin has alienated us from God the Father and created a hostility (an enmity) with Him. ***But in amazing, unanticipated display of grace, we were reconciled to Him by a peace that was made by Jesus the Messiah who is now our Lord.***

This “shalom” had far-reaching effects for God’s people. Not only are these effects stunningly profound – they were totally unanticipated by God’s people until He revealed them for the first time through the writings of the Apostle Paul.

As we study one of the foremost of his letters that speaks of this peace, we need to ***remind ourselves*** of **three important things**:

1. The theme of Ephesians –

Ephesians tells us what God the Father is doing in the heavenly realm through the Church (in this realm), in Christ, by His Spirit, for His glory in this age and in the age to come (3:21).

2. The four new realities God created by His power (1:19ff), grace, mercy (2:4-5), and wisdom (3:10), in order to accomplish this theme for the praise of His glory.

a. New Life which God has given us in Christ – 1:3-2:10

- we were dead and blind in our sins
- we were sons of disobedience, under condemnation, and destined for wrath.
- we followed the ruler of this earth and fulfilled the sinful desires of our flesh.
- we were far from God, separated from Christ, and without God.

BUT

- We were enlivened, enlightened, and empowered
- We were justified, sanctified, and glorified (seated in the heavenlies)

- We were chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and indwelt by the Spirit
 - We were adopted into the family of God
 - We were made part of His new creation – the church
- b. New Community which God has created by and for Christ – 2:11-3:21
- Totally unexpected by everyone in the OT age
 - This community was not formed by Gentiles becoming Jews or Jews becoming Gentiles – but Jews and Gentiles becoming part of a brand-new community of believers who followed Jesus as their Head – the Church. A community which had never existed before on earth and was not anticipated until Christ announced it and promised to build it.
- c. New Morality which God empowers through Christ – 4:1-5:21
- Walking worthy of the calling God has given to the church (4:1)
 - Putting off Old Man behavior and putting on New Man behavior
 - Living in love as spiritual light that reproveth and overcomes the surrounding spiritual darkness
- d. New Relationships which are made possible by Christ through His Spirit – 5:22-6:24
- As members of the household of God, relationships are to be very different from all others in Ephesus.
 - They would have a different relationship with their God than the pagans, with the humanity around them, and most importantly with one another.
 - While they lived in distinct social orders as citizens in Ephesus, they were all of equal value and on equal ground as members of the new community. This was radically different from anything ever seen or heard of in Ephesus or in the Roman Empire!
 - The gospel changed and impacted everything!

But what was at the heart of the gospel of God's grace that had been entrusted to Paul – and why is it called a "mystery"? (3:2-3)

The answer to that question is the third reality we need to review –

- 3. The marvelous, majestic mystery *that God has disclosed to us*** in Ephesians must become the focus of our thinking and the central purpose for our living. (*what follows is a high-level overview of that mystery as Paul unfolds it in 6 different texts in Ephesians*)
- a. God revealed this mystery to Paul – a divine secret that Paul had been commissioned and empowered to announce that revelation to all men (especially to us) and to cause us to understand and embrace what God had disclosed.
 - b. In 1:9 – we are told that God made known the mystery of His will – so whatever this divine secret is, it has to do with what God the Father has purposed to do for His glory.
 - c. In 3:3 – this secret was made known for the first time when God disclosed it to Paul, the Apostles, and the NT Prophets.
 - d. In 3:4 – God commanded Paul to share this secret with all believers and to teach them its content and implications so they will understand it and embrace its implications. Whatever this secret is ... it has to do with the messianic ministry of Jesus as the Christ (messiah).
 - e. In 3:9 – this secret is one we hold in common with Paul and all other genuine believers – it is common knowledge we all hold, cherish, protect, and proclaim and thus is the grounds of our unity and fellowship believers.
 - f. In 5:32 – This mystery has to do with the relationship that exists between Jesus and the Church – union with Christ. To help us understand the magnitude of this relationship, God designed human marriage to illustrate the intimacy and permanence of the relationship we have with Christ. Further, as the first marriage partners, Adam and Eve were to prefigure the cosmic function God designed for Christ and His bride, the Church.
 - g. In 6:19 – Paul asks his readers to pray that in his appointment as an ambassador, God would grant him boldness to announce that mystery

by preaching the good news (gospel) occasioned by this mystery accurately, authoritatively, and compellingly to those in this realm.

With that in mind, this morning I want to trace out five important aspects of the mystery that God disclosed to Paul and that Paul is now disclosing to us – and the goal for our journey is not just that we would gain information and understanding ... but that the information and understanding we gain would produce two things: 1) Word-energized transformation of our lives – our values and behaviors; and 2) Spirit-enabled joyful celebration of what has happened to and for us and of what God intends to do through us!

I. **The Nature and Disclosure of this Magnificent Mystery (1:9-10)**

A. *Nature of this mystery* – a divine secret God has now made known.

- term “mystery” occurs 27x in NT; 20x by Paul
- used in OT to describe what Daniel was called to do for Nebuchadnezzar – (Dan 2:18, 22-23, 28-30, 47).

B. *Disclosure of this mystery* – so what is God’s secret that He has finally disclosed?

- God has been working out a plan that He has kept in the secret counsel of his wisdom – a plan by which He intends to bring about a stunning reconciliation by which all that is wrong in the Universe (on earth and in heaven) will be made right.
- Sin occasioned and driven by Satan brought about a massive disruption and an irreparable division in the Universe – God separated from fallen angels; a division among angelic hosts; an enmity between God and the sons of Adam; a division between men – chief of which was the unbridgeable divide between Jew and Gentile – epitomized by a dividing wall of hostility (2:15)
- And throughout the ages of human history, God had been working out a plan to bring about a magnificent reconciliation great enough

to end all of the hostility and remove all of the enmity not just on earth between Jew and Gentile but on a Cosmic Level!

- And the appropriate time had come for God to fully disclose this plan (1:9-10) to the world!
- So what happened that made this the appropriate time? The appearance of the promised champion who would triumph over all the wickedness and end all the hostility by making, establishing, and preserving an unbreakable peace – shalom.
- This champion had finally arrived on earth and his name was Jesus.

II. **The Revelation and Content of this Magnificent Mystery (3:2-7)**

A. *The Revelation of this Mystery (3:2-5)*

- To Paul – a former persecutor of Christ but powerfully transformed by this mystery
- By revelation – not accessible by human ability, study, or intuition. It was only accessible by divine illumination into the revelation given by God. (cf., Peter’s confession in Matt 16:13-18). It requires that the Holy Spirit enlightening the eyes of our hearts so that we would perceive the truthfulness of the mystery and understand the implications of its claims.
- This revelation is new – not known to past generations (3:5,9)
- It is fully trustworthy and authoritatively binding because God gave it to authorized spokesmen who were inspired by the Holy Spirit as they wrote this revelation down (Apostles and NT prophets – v. 5).
- So the revelation is accurate, authoritative, available, and accessible to every believer!

B. *The Content of the Revelation (3:6-7)*

- In 1:9 the mystery has to do with “God’s will” – something God is doing for His glory.
- In 3:4 the mystery has to do with “Christ” – something that Messiah would do for His people.

- He would procure, establish, and maintain an amazing unbreakable peace in the universe – shalom.
- Shalom – more than just the removal of hostility and the absence of conflict. Shalom has to do with a full-orbed sense that everything is as it should be in life! That all is well – and conditions of divine favor and blessing exist!
- And that is precisely what Messiah came to do – to make a magnificent peace by which the universe and its inhabitants could enjoy God’s full favor and blessing!
- And what was stunning is not that Messiah would write the terms of a peace treaty that would accomplish this – he himself would be the peace (2:14).
- This peace would not rest on the terms of an agreement made verbally or in writing – but rather it would rest in the eternal work of a person who himself became the peace.
- Jesus Christ stood as the peace between God and man and between men and God.
- And He was this peace because in His person he rendered a life of perfect obedience satisfying the holiness of God and by His voluntary, sacrificial death he satisfied the justice of God – tearing down the wall of hostility so that through Him and in Him we would have full access to God (2:18) and enjoy every spiritual blessing from God (1:3).
- And the specific, visible evidence that Christ really made peace at a cosmic level is a very specific peace that has been made in this realm – in the here and now – between particular Jews and Gentiles.
- Any Jew and any Gentile who embraced the person of Jesus Christ became equal partners in a new entity – the Church!

C. The Full Explanation of the Revelation

- Now, in Ephesians 1-2; full explanation, in the Pauline Epistles.

III. The Display and Validation of this Magnificent Mystery (3:8-12)

So... how will people on earth and the cosmic powers in heaven know that God has really done what He set out to do through Christ and the reconciliation Jesus made on the cross?

Paul was given a stewardship, a revelation, and an enablement to do a very specific thing with regard to this mystery – he was uniquely commissioned to bring to light the disclosure/insight God had given him about this marvelous mystery to a particular group of people – the Gentiles (us). (3:8-9)

What he is bringing to light is something that apart from God telling us, we would never be able to trace out or map (unsearchable, v. 8).

What Paul is mapping out for us are the riches of Christ that are now available to His people – and what has made these riches available is the multi-faceted intricate wisdom of God (v. 10). And it is this wisdom that God wants to display to the entire Cosmos – a wisdom by which He has triumphed over all His enemies!

So how will this stunning, jaw-dropping wisdom be displayed in the cosmic realm? By a group of people that have been:

A. Summoned and Adopted by the Father (1:3-4)

B. Redeemed, Reconciled, and Cleansed (sanctified) by the Son (1:5-12)

C. Sealed, Secured, and Strengthened by the Spirit (1:13-14)

These people have been constituted into a household that belongs to God (2:19), a temple that is indwelt by the Spirit (2:22), and a body (community) led by the Son (1:22).

- This is why our walk matters – because of our calling (4:1).
- God has not left us guessing about the way in which we should walk – He marked this walk in advance (2:10).

IV. The Blessing and Magnitude of this Magnificent Mystery (5:32)

Paul turns now to an even more amazing and stunning revelation God has disclosed to him about this mystery – specifically about how the people who now make up the Church are related to their leader – Jesus Christ.

And he alerts us to the magnitude of this revelation by telling us that this aspect of the mystery is “great” (mega” – meaning profound.

A. The Blessing of this Magnificent Mystery for Us

- This new entity (the church) is related to its leader (Christ) in ways that were simply unheard of in the ancient world.
- Pagan gods did not love their followers – they used their followers and were totally dependent on them for their honor, glory, and very existence.
- Paterfamilias used members of their household for the social and economic advancement of their name and their household.
- Roman Emperor used the people of Rome to sustain his position and accumulate his wealth.

- Jesus Christ was a different leader in every way – at the head of these differences was the intense affection and exclusive devotion He felt for his people – to the point of serving them with his very life!

- And to help us understand the intensity of this love and the exclusivity of this devotion, God the Father designed a particular human relationship that every human on earth could see and experience – marriage.

- This puts marriage at a whole new level for Christians. We don't follow biblical instruction merely to have a good and happy marriage – so things will go well or us. We do what we do in our marriage because of what is at stake for the rest of the watching world!

- You don't have to be married to understand and experience this amazing reality – most humans on earth have seen human marriages, many of them badly broken. And then they encounter a Christian marriage (yours and mine) – that is very different in every regard from what they have seen and perhaps experienced. And when they inquire about this – Christians have a powerful vehicle to share the love and devotion God makes available to them by the gospel!

B. *Magnitude of the Mystery*

- The first Adam and his wife Eve were commissioned and equipped by God to rule over the first creation. All of this was ruined by sin and the Fall.
- Now there is a 2nd Adam – Jesus Christ. And He has been given a bride – the Church. And together, this 2nd Adam and His Bride will rule over a new Heaven and a New earth ruled by righteousness and marked by “shalom” – peace.
- And their relationship in this realm is being watched in the cosmic realm because it is visible proof that God's Wisdom will actually restore conditions of shalom to this earth when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom on earth.

So ... what are we supposed to do with this incredible revelation that has been disclosed to us about the mystery of God's will, the mystery of Christ, and the mystery of the plan that God is working out by His wisdom, power, and mercy?

The answer is in the final passage where this mystery is identified as the “gospel” – the good news from God about what Christ has done for His people that Paul has been called to proclaim and explain!

And so Paul ends his letter by asking the Ephesians to pray for him in a very specific way – that God would give him words about this mystery and boldness to proclaim them.

V. The Proclamation and Advancement of this Magnificent Mystery (6:20)

Paul asks for prayer for three specific things related to his charge from God to make this disclosure known to the Gentiles:

- A. *That God would grant him words to proclaim it boldly – that words would be granted to me.*
- B. *That God would guide him to speak those words appropriately – as I ought to speak.*
- C. *That God would sustain him and advance those words through suffering – for which I am an ambassador in chains.*

Paul identified himself as an ambassador of this message. In ancient times an ambassador had received a commission, protection, and ceremonial chains symbolizing the authority of his office and thereby advancing the message he bore on behalf of his sovereign.

Paul had been given a commission (a stewardship – 3:2). He had been granted protection and enablement by God for this task (3:7). And now he reminds us that he has been given chains that will actually advance his message.

These chains were the chains he wore as a prisoner of Rome. But they were the very means by which the Gospel would spread. These chains allowed him to carry the gospel to Rome. For two years these chains allowed him to preach the gospel freely in Rome. These chains became the means by which many in Caesar's own household became followers of Jesus. And these chains provided the time and means for Paul to write many of the letters that would provide full explanation, insight, and understanding into this mystery!

“So” ... Paul says, “don’t despise my chains!” (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). “Don’t lose heart over what I am suffering – for it is your glory!” (3:13)

Conclusion:

If indeed Christ has triumphed over the cosmic powers and has been given authority over them and He has,

If indeed the mighty power that God displayed in raising Christ from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies has been applied to us and is right now at work in us ... and it is,

If a cosmic peace has been established and maintained by a stunning reconciliation made by Christ to bring shalom to everyone and everything in the universe ... and it has,

And if God intends to use suffering and affliction in this life to display and advance this stunning news through the gospel ... and he does

Then how should we respond?

1. We must receive and embrace the truth God has disclosed in this magnificent mystery personally.
2. We must strive to know and comprehend what God has disclosed in this mystery truly and transformatively.
3. We must celebrate and enjoy this mystery thankfully and joyfully.
4. We must share and proclaim this wonderful mystery God has now made known with our lives, by means of our relationships, and with Spirit-enabled words – to everyone around us!
5. And we must pray for one another – that God would strengthen us and use our suffering and circumstances as powerful means to advance this good news to those around us!