

Ephesians 3-1-6
The mystery revealed!

So far I have only used Arnold...

Ephesians 3:1–6 (ESV) — **1** For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— **2** assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, **3** how **the mystery** was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. **4** When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the **mystery** of Christ, **5** which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. **6** 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.

Prayer for illumination: please join me in prayer...

Sermon introduction:

According to the Guinness book of world records Agatha Christie, writer of mystery novels, is “the world’s best-selling fiction writer.” Her books have sold a staggering 2 billion copies. To put this in perspective, JK Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books, has sold a measly 500 million books. I don’t know how she pays the bills. JRR Tolkien has sold 150 million books.

Apparently, lots of people love mystery novels. When I say lots of people, I mean at least 2 billion people. How many of you have read an Agatha Christie novel? Many of us are endlessly fascinated by mystery novels. We want to figure out who killed the maid, the butler, or the oil tycoon. We have a deep desire to solve the mystery. We love the challenge of trying to solve the mystery before the story is over, which is often hard to do with Agatha.

These brings us to this morning’s passage. The word mystery is used three times in our passage.

A mystery in the NT is not like an Agatha Christie mystery. Which raises a crucial question. What is a NT mystery? Sadly, the nature of NT mystery is mysterious to many of us.

Fortunately, the apostle Paul explains the nature of NT mystery in Ephesians 3:1-13. This morning we are going to look at the first 6 verses of chapter 3.

In these six verses Paul explores the profound nature of biblical mystery.

Trust me when I say this, if you are a gentile, this mystery has profound relevance for you this morning....

I would like to explore the topic of mystery under three headings.

The proclaimer of the mystery

The nature of the mystery

The details of the mystery

First, the proclaimer of the mystery

Who was the proclaimer of this mystery? The apostle Paul!

Ephesians 3:1 (ESV) — **1** For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—

Paul just explained in 2:11-22 that God has joined together Jews and Gentiles in one new body the church, which is the dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

He is so moved by these wonderful realities that he starts to pray, “For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles...”

During his prayer, he mentions his calling. He gets so excited about his calling that he stops praying and spends the next 13 verses discussing his calling. He comes back to his prayer in 3:14.

Here is what I want us to see for now, Paul’s prayer in 3:1 reminds the Ephesians that Paul is “a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of the gentiles.”

Paul wants the Ephesian gentile Christians to know that he is in prison because of his passion to tell gentiles about the unfolding mystery of God. Paul wrote Ephesians while under house arrest in Rome. He is probably chained to a Roman soldier 24-7.

According to Acts 21-22, Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem for the crime of proclaiming the gospel of God’s free grace to the gentiles. Eventually he was transferred to a Roman prison.

Lets keep reading....

Ephesians 3:1–3 (ESV) — 1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— **2** assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, **3** how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

In Paul’s day, a steward managed a household or a business on behalf of someone else. In other words, a steward took care of something that belonged to someone else.

According to verses 2-3, God made Paul a steward of God’s grace for the gentiles. In other words, God entrusted Paul with the responsibility to make his grace known among the gentiles.

When did God do this? According to verse 3, this stewardship was made known to Paul by way of a direct revelation from God. This is probably a reference to Paul’s Damascus road experience in Acts 9.

From this moment on, Paul was totally consumed with a passion to make known this mystery to the gentiles!!!

He was so committed to making known this mystery to the gentiles that he ended up in prison.

Illustration:

In 1732, Johann Dober and David Nitschmann felt called by God to take the gospel to the African slaves on the islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix in the Danish West Indies. At the time, both men lived in Herrnhut Germany, the famous Moravian missionary compound.

They soon discovered that the only way to get onto the island was to become a slave. Although both men were freemen, they agreed to sell themselves into slavery in order to be with the slaves in the West Indies in order to tell them about Jesus Christ. Eventually, they found a slave owner, gave up their freedom, and boarded a vessel to the West Indies with chains around the ankles and wrists.

As the ship pulled away from shore, their families begged them to reconsider.

I have heard this inspiring story many times. There is only one problem with it. It has been heavily embellished. Although these two men said, “they would sell themselves into slavery in order to reach the slaves,” they never did. Instead, they found other ways to get to the islands.

But the story of the apostle Paul has not been embellished.

Application:

Paul was so committed to proclaiming God’s unfolding mystery to the gentiles that he ended up in jail.

What motivated Paul? Love...

Do we share Paul’s love for lost gentiles???

But Dave, I’m not the apostle Paul! I understand, but God has given every Christian a similar commission to take the gospel to the gentiles (Matt. 28:18-20).

Are we too, willing to give up comfort and ease to take the gospel to the gentiles?

Our problem is often a lack of love...

I read a convicting prayer this week by Scotty Smith. I went like this, “God, I want your love to be so compelling that I don’t think of ‘witnessing’ to people, just loving and serving them.” Scotty Smith.

Let’s pray together that God would give us more love for the gentiles, so that we would proclaim gospel mysteries to them.

We have looked at the proclaimer of the mystery. But what exactly is the mystery? This brings us to the second point.

First, the proclaimer of the mystery

Second, the nature of the mystery

In our day, a mystery is something we can’t figure out. It is something that is unknown. We can’t figure out who killed the maid, the butler, or the oil tycoon. Calculus is a mystery to many. We simply can’t figure it out. This is not how Paul uses the word mystery.

A biblical mystery is something that was concealed in the past but has been revealed in the present.

God’s plan to unite Jew and Gentile was concealed in the past but it has been revealed in the present.

Let’s look carefully at the concealing and revealing of this mystery.

This mystery was concealed in the OT!

Ephesians 3:4–5 (ESV) — 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, **5** which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations...

The “sons of men in other generations” were the saints of the OT. Paul is saying that the mystery of Christ uniting Jew and gentile was concealed to the OT saints.

If you are an astute Bible reader, verse 5a is probably causing you to scratch your head, since the OT *does* seem to reveal God's purposes for the gentiles.

For instance, In the OT...

God promised to bless all the nations (think gentile nations) of the earth through Abraham (Gen. 12:3).

God promised that Israel would be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6; 60:1-3).

God promised that one day all the gentile nations would pilgrimage to Jerusalem and even "flow to it" like a mighty river (Micah 4:1; Isa. 2:1-4; Zech. 8:20-23).

These OT texts, plus many others, seem to teach that God always had a plan to bless the gentiles.

This is true, but the OT does not reveal how radical God's plan was.

What do I mean? The Israelites all believed that gentiles would have to become Jews to experience God's blessings. In other words, they believed that gentiles had to do all the things that good Jews were supposed to do; obey the Mosaic laws, observe the animal sacrifices, and get circumcised, in order to experience God's blessings.

But God's plan to unite Jew and gentile was far more radical than the Israelites ever could have imagined. This brings us to the NT.

This mystery was concealed in the OT. But...

This mystery was revealed in the NT.

Ephesians 3:4-5 (ESV) — 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, **5** which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

God revealed the secrets of this mystery to the apostles and prophets of the NT. This mystery centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ, which is why Paul refers to this mystery as the mystery of Christ in verse 4.

What did God reveal?

God revealed that through Jesus Christ, God was creating one new man composed of Jew and Gentile. This was not a Jewish man or a gentile man. Nor was this man half Jewish and half Gentile. He was an entirely new man; he was a third race. This new man is the church of Jesus Christ, the community of the New Covenant, and the temple of the living God, where God promises to manifest his presence by the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:19-21).

All of this was made possible because Jesus Christ destroyed the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and gentile (Eph. 2:11-18). He did this by dying in the place of Jews and gentiles in order to forgive their sins and bring them into the church together.

Here is what really befuddled the Jews. In creating this one new man, Jesus Christ made the temple, the Mosaic Covenant, and circumcision obsolete. In other words, Jesus made it very clear that one did not have to become a Jew to be part of the people of God.

God was creating a brand-new people, known as the church of Jesus Christ.

All one has to do to become a member of the people of God is repent of one's sins and put one's hope and confidence in Jesus Christ; the true temple, the true sacrifice, and the true Israel of God.

It is hard to think of a more radical idea in the mind of a 1st century Jew. They simply did not see this union coming. Which is why God had to reveal it to them.

Illustration:

I remember when I caught my first caterpillar. Do you? Most caterpillars are not that attractive. They are stuck on the ground, with poor vision, and they are often slimy. Caterpillars must work very hard to get around. To go from A to B they have to crawl over everything in their path. It is a hard life, feet stuck to the ground, moving around very slowly, with a very limited perspective.

But eventually every caterpillar fastens itself to a branch and forms a cocoon. It's life as a caterpillar will soon come to an end. It lies in a silk cocoon and hangs limp and lifeless.

When springtime comes something mysterious happens. The caterpillar has become a beautiful butterfly. It spreads its wings and takes flight. It no longer crawls across the dirty dusty ground but now soars over the grass and trees.

Did anyone see this coming? No... no one saw this coming.

The Jews did not see God's plan coming. It was shrouded in mystery. It was concealed under the OT. But when it was unveiled, it was far more beautiful than anyone could imagine.

But how is it more beautiful? This brings us to the last point.

*First, the proclaimer of the mystery
second, the nature of the mystery*

Third, the details of the mystery

In verse 6, Paul describes the specific details of the mystery

Ephesians 3:6 (ESV) — 6 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.

At the very heart of this mystery is the glorious fact that Jews and Gentiles now share together in the blessings of the new covenant.

Paul spells out these blessings with the threefold use of the Greek preposition *syn*, often translated as together.

The word together is really the heart and soul of the mystery...

This is easier to see in the NIV Translation of 3:6...

Ephesians 3:6 (NIV84) — 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

In other words, Jews and gentiles are-

Heirs together
Members together
Recipients together

Let's examine each blessing in detail....

Jew and Gentiles are Heirs together

Ephesians 3:6 (ESV) — 6 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.

Jew and Gentiles are equal heirs. What does this mean? Paul says that we are heirs of the Holy Spirit in 1:14. This is significant because the HS guarantees an even greater inheritance in the future. Furthermore, Paul speaks of the fact that we will inherit the kingdom of God when we die (Eph. 5:5). And in Romans 8:17 we are told that we are fellow heirs with Christ. Which means that someday we will inherit everything that Christ has earned.

All of these verses refer to our future inheritance. In other words, all of these verses deal with what we will inherit when we die.

Paul's point is simply this, Jews and gentiles will both inherit glory when they die or when Christ returns whichever comes first. Not because they have earned it, not because they are good, not because they are religious, but simply because Christ came to rescue both Jew and gentile from the ravaging effects of sin, by dying on the cross in their place.

Application:

Because of the unfolding of God's mysterious plan, you gentile, get to go to heaven with all the Jews that are trusting in Jesus!!!

I don't know about you, but this last year has made me long for heaven like never before...

Covid- 19

Death due to Covid-19

Unemployment due to Covid-19

Not being able to meet with the saints on the Lord's day.

Racial tension which has led to rioting, looting, and violence.

Political maneuvering, lies, and spin as the election approaches.

The evaporation of religious freedom.

The holocaust of the unborn.

Broken relationships, death, and pain.

But... this text reminds us that Jews and Gentiles are heirs together of heaven. Which means that someday, all of our pain and misery will be over!!!

Jews and gentiles are Heirs together! In addition...

Jews and Gentiles are members together!

Ephesians 3:6 (ESV) — 6 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.

Jews and gentiles are members of the same body. Gentiles get to be part of the one new man (Ephesians 2:15). We get to be part of the people of God. We get to be part of the church of Jesus Christ. We get to be members of the new covenant community!!!

Part of God's mysterious plan was to unite Jews and Gentiles to Christ and unite Jews and gentiles to each other.

This is the family of God.

Application:

Because of the unfolding of God's mysterious plan, you gentile, get to be a member of God's family!!!

You don't have to be alone.

You are not supposed to be alone.

God has designed for you to live the Christian life with other members of the body of Christ.

Are you taking advantage of your family? Get involved in a small group this fall!!!

Jews and gentiles are Heirs together!

Jews and gentiles are Members together!

Jews and Gentiles are Recipients together!

Ephesians 3:6 (ESV) — 6 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.

Jews and gentiles are both recipients of God's promises. The specific promise referred to in verse 6 is probably the promised Spirit.

He has already referred to the HS as "the Holy Spirit of promise" (1:13).

See also Gal. 3:14

The coming of the Spirit is one of the primary blessings of the new covenant (see Ezek. 36:26–27; 37:14; Joel 2:28–30).

Application:

Because of the unfolding of God's mysterious plan, you gentile, can be indwelt by the HS.

It is hard to think of a better promise for the here and now.

I don't know about you, but I need supernatural power to live the Christian life.

We need supernatural power to put to death fear.

We need supernatural power to love our spouses.

We need supernatural power to boldly proclaim the gospel.

We need supernatural power to give away our money.

You don't have to earn this power; you simply need to receive it. When you are in trouble, ask God for help!!!

Conclusion:

Many of us are intrigued by the mystery novels of Agatha Christie. Others are intrigued by mystery shows like Foyle's war, The Mentalist, or Person of Interest. Mystery novels and mystery shows captivate our imaginations. We often have a hard time putting them down or turning them off. Sometimes, we binge watch 6 episodes in a row. We can't quit until we have figured out who did it.

How much more captivating is the mystery of Christ. Through Jesus Christ Jews and gentiles have been brought together in one new man. No one saw this coming!!!

This means that through Jesus Christ Jews and gentiles are

Heirs together of heaven.

Members together of the body of Christ.

Recipients together of the promised Holy Spirit.

Maybe you are wondering, how do I get to heaven, join this family, and experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit?

Let's look at verse 6 again...

Ephesians 3:6 (ESV) — 6 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.

We experience these blessings through gospel of Jesus Christ... in other words, we experience these blessings when we turn away from our sins and turn to Jesus Christ (explain).

Let's pray...