

God's Self-Revelation

Opener: Describe something that once seemed mysterious to you that's no longer a mystery.

Scripture: For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 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. ⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. Ephesians 3:1-13

²³ "I have worked harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move, been in danger from rivers, bandits, Jews and Gentiles. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches." 2 Cor. 11:23-28 (condensed)

"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." Isaiah 49:6b

We declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. I Cor. 2:7-8

Discussion Questions

1. Although Paul was in a Roman prison, he said he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. What does it mean to be a prisoner of Jesus? What can we learn from Paul's assessment of who was in charge of where he was? How was he a prisoner "for the sake of you Gentiles?" Ephesians 3:1; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28
2. What did Paul mean when he said that the administration of God's grace was given to him for them? How have you seen that at work in your own ministry or in our church? Ephesians 3:2-3
3. Everyone loves a good mystery, and to solve a mystery usually means we look for clues. But Paul says he was given a revelation. What's a revelation? Have you ever received a revelation? What was it? What evidence from the OT confirmed that his revelation really was from God? Ephesians 3:3; Isaiah 49:6b
4. Why do you think God had kept his plan for the Gentiles hidden? Ephesians 3:4-5 I Corinthians 2:7-8
5. What exactly is the mystery Paul refers to? Heirs of what? Members of what? Sharers of what? How do Gentiles receive these benefits? "Together" is mentioned three times. What does that indicate about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles? Ephesians 3:6
6. Why would Paul say he was the least of all the Lord's people? How did that affect how he regarded the ministry he was given? How could it change our attitude toward ministry? Ephesians 3:7-8
7. Ephesians 3:10 tells us that God uses the church to make His manifold wisdom known to those in heaven. What does that mean and how can we reveal anything to those in heavenly realms?

Wrap Up: Imagine there were three kids from three different countries which were by nature enemies. They were all orphans, but one family adopted them all. As they grew, they developed strong relationships with one another that created a bond that overcame the natural barriers between them. When we're tempted to show prejudice against a fellow believer, we can remember that we're in the same family. That's how we show those in the heavenly realms how great God's plan is for the church He created.