

All the Mystery

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read. Paul is lent it to the Ephesians in chapter 3.

Ephesians chapter 3. As I mentioned, we're going to look at the whole chapter this evening. But if we read again from the beginning. Ephesians 3 from the beginning.

Where Paul writes, As for this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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.

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.

[1 : 1 1] And so on. I probably shouldn't, but I love watching murder mystery programs on the TV.

Whether it's Midsummer Murders or Poirot or Silent Witness or CSI or even Line of Duty, they're all murder mystery programs. I would seek to find the evidence, follow the clues, and then frame the culprit.

And I suppose we love murder mysteries because, well, I'm sure we all see ourselves as a bit of a detective. But our love for mystery and even murder mystery probably started, I think it probably started from a young age, when we were all watching Noddy the Toyland Detective, or even Scooby-Doo and the Mystery Machine.

We love mystery. We love murder mystery. We love to find the evidence and follow the clues and frame the culprit. But as Paul reminds us in this passage, there's one murder mystery that we'll never be able to fathom or figure out.

And that's why God would choose to love us. Why God would choose to save us by sending his only Son into the world to suffer at the hands of evil men and to die upon the cruel cross of Calvary.

[2 : 3 2] It's a murder mystery that we will never be able to fathom or figure out. In fact, it was because of this mystery that Charles Wesley, the famous hymn writer, this is what he wrote.

The hymn was And Can It Be. In the second verse, he says, And it reminds us that our salvation, our salvation is a murder mystery.

A murder mystery that we will never fully fathom or figure out. But as we come to Ephesians chapter 3, we can see that this chapter, it's divided, if you noticed, it's divided into two sections by the phrase, For this reason.

You see it there in verse 1, and then you see it again in verse 14. Paul says, For this reason, first section, the mystery is revealed. For this reason, the mystery is revealed.

And then secondly, he says, For this reason, the measurements are requested. So for this reason, he says, the mystery is revealed. And then for this reason, the measurements are requested.

[3 : 5 6] And so there are two headings this evening. The mystery revealed. And then secondly, the measurements requested. So first of all, the mystery revealed. The mystery revealed.

You'll notice the word mystery is repeated three times in the first six verses. But just to reread again from the beginning. Paul says, For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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.

So by using the phrase, For this reason, Paul begins chapter 3 by building upon what he has just emphasized and explained in the previous two chapters.

He says, For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles. So Paul, he wrote this letter, as you know, to the Ephesians while he was in prison and while he was being guarded because of the gospel.

[5 : 14] He was in prison and he was being guarded because of the gospel. But as he reminds the Ephesians in verse 2, he reminds them that even though he's been guarded because of the gospel, Paul remains a guardian of God's grace.

Even though Paul is being guarded because of the gospel, he remains a guardian of God's grace. And Paul reminds the Ephesians of this because he wants to assure them that his imprisonment shouldn't cast doubt upon his ministry and it shouldn't cast doubt upon his message.

All that he's writing to them should come to them with this great assurance that it's from God, it's God's word. Because even though he's being guarded because of the gospel, Paul, as he says, he remains a guardian of God's grace.

And he's a guardian of God's grace because as he says there, you follow the thread of what he's saying, he says, the mystery of salvation has been made known to him. It has been made known to him by revelation, by apocalypsis.

We remember that word from the book of Revelation. It's an apocalypsis, an apocalypse, a revelation. In other words, Jesus has personally and powerfully revealed the mystery and message of salvation to Paul.

[6 : 30] And undoubtedly, right there, Paul is referring to his own personal encounter, his own personal experience with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. Whereas you remember Paul or Saul as he was at the time, Paul was dramatically converted on the road to Damascus.

Not only dramatically converted, he was directly called into ministry. He was called to preach and proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. And now as an apostle, as a sent one of the risen saviour, even though he's guarded because of the gospel, Paul is saying, he remains a guardian of God's grace. And he's a guardian of God's grace because as an apostle, he has been authorised to announce the astonishing and astounding message of God's amazing grace.

And that's what we must always remember. As an apostle, Paul has been authorised to announce the astonishing astonishing and astounding message of God's amazing grace.

And that's what he's written about in the first two chapters of his letter. Because Paul, in the opening chapters of this letter, he has taught us and told us about the mystery of salvation.

[7 : 48] He's taught us and told us about the mystery of salvation through the death and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And now, having reached chapter 3 in his letter, Paul writes there in verse 4.

He says, When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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.

So, having read through chapter 1 and chapter 2 of Paul's letter, and having read up to this very point to verse 4 in his letter of chapter 3, having read up to this point in his letter, Paul knows that the Ephesians have now learned about the mystery of salvation.

The mystery was revealed in chapters 1 and 2. And we saw that. Because remember, Paul began his letter to the Ephesians with that wonderful sentence of salvation.

Verses 3 to 14 of chapter 1, where he emphasizes and he explains that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.

[9 : 00] And Paul, he gave us this long list of blessings, all these blessings that have been graciously given and gifted to us, all from the hand of King Jesus. We've been given election, predestination, adoption, justification, sanctification, redemption, forgiveness, pardon, perseverance, glorification.

And we have this wonderful inheritance, says Paul, that has been given to us and it's all sealed to us. It's gifted and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. And Paul says, all of these gifts have been given to us from the hand of King Jesus.

This is the mystery. Paul says, it's all a mystery because there's no rhyme or reason why we, why we have received all these blessings and all these benefits and others have not.

There's no rhyme or reason to it. It's all a mystery why we, tonight, are elect of God and others are not. It's a mystery why we are predestined for glory and others are not.

Paul says, it's a mystery why we are adopted and justified and sanctified by the grace of God and others are not. It's a mystery why we, as fallen sinners, why we are redeemed and we are forgiven and we are pardoned and others are not.

[10 : 26] It's a mystery to us why we are given and guaranteed this eternal inheritance in heaven by the Holy Spirit and others are not.

My friend, Paul is telling us that salvation is a mystery because there is no rhyme. There's no reason for us to be saved and others are not because we're not better than anybody else.

We're not brighter than anyone else. We're not braver than anyone else. In fact, when you look at yourself, when I look at myself, there is no evidence in our lives that would ever suggest that we have determined or desired or even deserved to receive this gracious gift of salvation from the hand of King Jesus.

It's all of grace from beginning to end. It's a complete mystery as to why we here in Barvis have received and been given this privilege, this position more than someone else.

which is why, you know, we should respond to God's salvation always by praising our Saviour and providing our service.

[11 : 44] We should always respond to God's salvation in our lives by praising our Saviour and providing our service. We should respond to the mystery and to the majesty of our salvation by serving the Saviour who loved us and gave himself for us because, you know, God has been so gracious towards us.

The least we can do, the least we can do is seek and strive to serve him with our lives. God has been so gracious to us.

You know, that's what Paul sought to emphasize and explain even in chapter 2. He told us there in chapter 2, he's explained the mystery, the mystery of salvation in chapter 1. Then he explains how we've received this mystery.

It's all of grace. He says there in chapter 2, it's all by grace that you've been saved through faith. It's not of yourselves. No way is it of you. It's all a gift of God.

It's not of works. So no one will ever boast. So you've been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and it's all, all of it is to the glory of God alone.

[12 : 55] And as we saw and said last time in chapter 2, our personal grace should impact and influence our public grace. So our personal grace, the grace of God that has personally affected us in our lives, it should impact and influence our public grace.

So the grace of God should impact and influence our public lives as members in the church of Jesus Christ. And you know, when you look at this, and then you go back into the Old Testament and you see that that was the Lord's request, that was the Lord's required response to his salvation when the Israelites entered the promised land.

It's the same request, same required response, that his personal grace would impact and influence their public lives. And the Lord did this in the Old Testament by reminding the Israelites of the mystery of their salvation, just like Paul is reminding us here.

The Lord reminded the Israelites of the mystery of their salvation. He reminded them that his grace and his mercy has been shown to them by rescuing them and redeeming them from slavery and bondage in Egypt.

You know, you go back to Deuteronomy chapter 7 and the whole of Deuteronomy, it's a message to the Israelites on the banks of the Red Sea, of the River Jordan. And the Lord says to his people, he says, you are a people holy to the Lord your God.

[14 : 29] The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. And it was not because you were more in number than any people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all people.

But it's because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath, the covenant that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

You read it, Deuteronomy chapter 7, read it when you go home. The Lord says to the Israelites that he set his love on them and he chose them simply because he loved them.

He set his love on them and chose them simply because he loved them. There was nothing in them. They weren't a great people, they were the fewest of all people, there was no reason why he would choose them, but he set his love on them and chose them simply because he chose to love them.

But as you know, Paul here, he's not writing to Jews, he's writing to Gentiles in Ephesus and these Gentiles like ourselves have been graciously brought to experience and enjoy the mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ, which is why he writes there in verse 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.

[16:10] So the mystery is that these Gentiles, just like the Jews, they're fellow heirs of the promises, they're members of the same body, they're partakers of the same promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

So Paul emphasises and he explains that the mystery of salvation is not only that the Israelites were graciously redeemed by the Lord, but also that Gentiles are graciously redeemed by the Lord. But not just redeemed, he says, we're fellow heirs, we're members of the same body, we're partakers of the same promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore, like the Israelites who were graciously loved and chosen as a nation simply because the Lord loved them and chose them as a nation, Paul says, we too, you too are loved and chosen to be God's people.

and wait for it, it's not because of anything good or gracious or great in you, but simply because the Lord loved you and the Lord chose you from all eternity.

It should blow your mind that the Lord would love you and choose you at all. And you know, Paul here, he's emphasising and making this point to us that it's all of grace.

[17:38] We are loved and chosen not because anything in us but simply because the Lord chose to love us and the Lord chose us as his own from all eternity.

But you know, make it personal because Paul is describing here personal grace. So tonight I can say to you the Lord loves you because he loves you.

The Lord loves you because he loves you. There's no rhyme or reason to it. There's no reason why the Lord should love you when you, and I say this to myself too, our sinful hearts, there's no reason why he should love us but the Lord loves us because he loves us.

And for Paul that's the unsearchable riches of Christ. That's what he talks about. He goes on to talk about that. That's the unsearchable riches of Christ. That's the mystery of God. That's the wisdom of God. That's the plan and purpose of God that the Lord loves you because he loves you.

The Lord loves you because he loves you. There's no reason why he should love you. In fact, we give him so many reasons why he shouldn't love us and yet he loves us because he loves us.

[18:58] He chooses to love us as his people. And as we'll see, Paul goes on in the second half to describe the measurements of God's love. How much does he love us? He describes the measurements of God's love in the second half of the chapter.

So he moves from the mystery revealed to the measurements requested. That's what we see in the second half of the chapter. So the mystery revealed and then secondly the measurements requested.

The measurements requested. It says there in verse 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

So we mentioned earlier that Ephesians chapter 3 it's divided into two sections using that phrase for this reason. Paul says in verse 1 for this reason and then he talks about the mystery of salvation being revealed and then Paul says here in verse 14 for this reason and then he gives later on the measurements that are requested and like the first for this reason which connected the first half of the chapter with the previous chapters chapters 1 and 2 the second for this reason the one in verse 14 there it connects the second half of the chapter with the first half of the chapter for this reason because the mystery has been revealed we see that for this reason the measurements are requested and so based upon the mystery of salvation that God loves you not because of anything good or gracious or great in you but that the Lord loves you because he loves you Paul now

requests as you see there in verse 14 he makes a request in prayer he requests that we would know the measurements of God's love in our lives that's what he prays for Paul requests that we would know the measurements of God's love in our lives he says there in verse 14 for this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named and you know even those few words there Paul not only describes his posture in prayer that he's praying on his knees Paul also describes or demonstrates the priority of prayer because you know this is the second prayer that Paul has written in this letter this is the second prayer we read the first prayer in chapter 1 from verse 15 of chapter 1 Paul is praying he prayed that every one of these blessings and benefits of salvation he prayed that this mystery of salvation that has been revealed to us all these blessings all these benefits that have been gifted and guaranteed to us Paul prayed through them all that we would experience and enjoy a deeper relationship with God by knowing Jesus better but now we have the second prayer [22 : 29] Paul is praying again it's the second prayer that's written and recorded in this letter which ought to demonstrate to us straight away Paul has a priority and his priority is prayer Paul you could say was a powerhouse of prayer he was a prayerful pastor he was a prayerful preacher he was a prayerful man for the people of Ephesus but also you could say he was a prayerful man because he describes his relationship I bow my knees before the Father he knows that as a man of prayer he is accepted by God the Father and he's adopted in the Beloved but he also knows that all the Ephesians are the same they are also accepted by God the Father they are also adopted in the Beloved where God is our heavenly Father and we are his children and so Paul is praying here he's praying for the church in Ephesus but he's praying with them and for them as a church family that's the description he's giving he's praying before the Father for whom every family in heaven and on earth is named he's praying for a church family a church family that are loved by the Lord not because of anything good or gracious or great in them but they're loved unreservedly loved unconditionally by the Lord as a church family they're loved simply because the Lord loves them and we can say the same of ourselves we are loved simply because the Lord loves us as a church family we're loved unreservedly we're loved unconditionally by the Lord as a church family and as a church family that's loved by the Lord

Paul teaches us here as a church family that's loved by the Lord we're to love one another we're to pray for one another he shows us that here and we're to bear one another's burdens as a church family that's loved by the Lord we're to love one another pray for one another and bear one another's burdens that's what he says for this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of his love and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God so Paul highlights that we're to pray to our heavenly Father as a church family for every home and every family connected to our church family

I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named so we're to pray to our heavenly Father for every home and every family connected to our church family not only because he knows every home and every family connected to our church family but also because as our heavenly Father he wants to give us and gift to us as it says there the riches of his glory so that we'll be strengthened with power through his spirit as Paul says in our inner being so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith you read it you follow Paul's train of thought and Paul here he's exhorting us he's encouraging us as a church family that's loved by the Lord that we too are to love one another we're to pray for one another we're to bear one another's burdens as we encounter and experience all the smiles and all the sorrows of this life together and that we're to pray to our heavenly Father for every home and every family connected to our church family we're to remember that we are a family the family of God and you know when you listen to what Paul is saying there it reminded me of what I think is one of the most beautiful parts of our church service on a Sunday morning because on a Sunday morning we gather together as a church family from different homes different families and we not only sing praise together as a church family but we also pray together as a church family and I think

I think it's one of the most special occasions to have people at every stage and every age in life you have the young the very young the young the middle aged and the elderly you have children

parents and grandparents those who are 8 and those who are 80 and you hear them you hear those who are 8 and those who are 80 and they're all praying together with one voice they're praying as a family directing our prayers and petitions to our Father which art in heaven I think it's the most beautiful most special occasion on a Sunday morning to pray together as a church family a church family that's loved by the Lord and I think we forget this we are loved by the Lord not because of anything good in us not because of anything great in us not because of anything gracious in us we're loved simply because the Lord loves us as a church family and you know we want others to be part of that church family do we not we want more people to be part of this church family and you know it's because of the Lord's unconditional love towards us that Paul prayerfully requests that we would be rooted and grounded in love and that as a church family we would be able to know the measurements of God's love that's the measurements he requests that we would know the measurements of God's love that we would be able as he says there we would be able to comprehend what is the breadth and length and depth and height of God's love because as you know the love of Christ it has been displayed to us it has been demonstrated to us at the cross of Calvary the apostle John says behold what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God this is the love that surpasses every love that we have ever experienced and ever enjoyed in this life because as Paul says this love is a love that's full filled with the fullness of God it's a love that's filled with the fullness of God that's what he says it's a love that's filled with the fullness of God but you know these measurements that he requests the length the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love the measurements of God's love the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love these measurements they remind me of two songs these measurements remind me of two songs the first song is psalm 103 where david the psalmist he's describing all these blessings all these benefits he blesses god that's what we sang oh thou my soul bless god the lord he blesses god for all that god has blessed him with and he describes how gracious god has been how merciful god has been how loving god has been and david confesses that the lord doesn't deal with us as our sins deserve because he forgives all our iniquities he heals all our diseases he relieves all our pains he redeems our life he crowns us with loving kindness he satisfies our mouth with good things and he renews our youth like the eagle and he does it all not because of anything good in us or gracious in us or great in us no he does it all because he is gracious and he is merciful and he is long-suffering and he is slow to wrath and he is full full of love that's what we'll sing later on he's full of love and david says there in psalm 103 that the lord is so full of love that it's as high as heaven his love is as high as heaven and his love is as deep as the earth and even more so he says his love stretches as far as east is distant from the west that's how full the lord's love is the length and height and depth of his love it's so full that it's as high as heaven as deep as the earth and it stretches as far as east is distant from the west that's how full the lord's love is towards us or as the second song puts it which is more at my level in order to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of god's love we're all familiar with the children's hymn jesus love is very wonderful jesus love is very wonderful jesus love is very wonderful oh wonderful love so high you can't get over it so low you can't get under it so wide you can't get around it oh wonderful love and that's it he wants us to know to comprehend the length and height and depth and breadth of god's love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of god it's oh wonderful love and you know my friend you know you read through paul's chapter here about the mystery of the gospel and you read through it and you consider the mystery revealed and the measurements that are requested and you have to conclude the way paul concluded this chapter you have to come to the end of this chapter having thought about this mystery that we have received the mystery of salvation not because we deserve it but all because god is gracious and we have come to know and experience the love the height and depth and length and breadth of god's love and so we have to conclude this chapter with a doxology we have to conclude the chapter with a doxology now you know a doxology it's derived from the word doxa which means glory so a doxology is all about attributing and ascribing glory and honor and praise to god there are many doxologies throughout the bible many benedictions throughout the bible but paul's doxology here after reflecting upon the mystery revealed and the measurements requested what does he say now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think according to the power at work within us to him be glory in the church and in christ jesus throughout all generations forever and ever amen may the lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh lord our gracious god we marvel at the wonder of salvation and lord we look at it and we realize that we are deserving of the least of it we marvel lord

that the god who has revealed thyself to us and even not to others that we are elect that we are foreordained for glory predestined for eternal life we are those who have received the blessings and benefits of salvation that we have come to know the length and depth and breadth and height of thy love and lord we look at it all and we wonder oh that god of heaven has been so good to us

[35 : 22] help us we pray to respond to respond to the work of thy son by serving thee in the little that we do for the glory of thy kingdom and the furtherance of thy name lord bless us we pray help us we ask to live lives that ultimately bring glory to thee that our lives would be a doxology giving glory to god in all that he has done and all that he continues to do for us and all that he will do for us throughout the endless ages of eternity lord give to us an eternal perspective that we would live lives that seek to bring thee all the praise and all the honour and all the glory bless us lord together as a church family help us to love one another to bear one another's burdens and lord that in loving one another others would be drawn to christ that is our longing that more would become part of the family of god and acknowledge thee as our heavenly father do us good then we pray go before us we ask take away our iniquity receive us graciously for jesus sake amen well we're going to bring our time to our conclusion this evening we're going to sing again in psalm 103 psalm 103 page 369 in the scottish psalter psalm 103 we're singing from verse 8 down to the verse mark 12 the lord our god is merciful and he is gracious long suffering and slow to wrath and mercy plenteous he will not chide continually nor keep his anger still with us he dealt not as we sinned nor did requite our ill for as the heaven in its height the earth surmounted far so he loves us as high as the heaven and as deep as the earth so great to those that do him fear his tender mercies are as far as east is distant from the west so far hath he from us removed in his love all our iniquity so these verses of psalm 103 to god's praise the lord our god is merciful and he is gracious long suffering and slow to wrath and mercy plenteous he will not chide continually nor keep his anger still with us he dealt not as we sinned nor did requite our ill for as the heavens in its height the earth surmounted far so great to those that do him fear his tender mercies are

as far as east is distant from the west so far hath he from us removed in his love in his love all our iniquity the grace of the lord jesus christ the love of god the father the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all now and forever more amen amen