

The Mystery

1 Cor. 2:6-13

One of my childhood memories that stands out in my mind was a visit to see King Tut's tomb. Being the youngest of six children, we didn't do much of that sort of thing when I was growing up, but this was different. This was special.

The tomb itself was first opened in November, 1922 by the English archaeologist John Carter. The artifacts were carefully assembled and were displayed on a world tour in the 1970s. I saw them in Toronto, 1979. Some 27 years later I took my own family to see the return of that exhibit in Chicago, in the summer of 2006. It was absolutely spectacular.

And now there is speculation that there are further rooms to be discovered in the Egyptian king's underground burial chambers. Many believe that more treasures await discovery, more secrets will be unveiled. And I use that as an example and definition of a mystery. Something waiting to be revealed.

In the Bible, a mystery is not something that is simply too tricky to figure out. In the Bible, a mystery doesn't refer to something that remains impossible to understand. Rather, a mystery is something that is made known by revelation, something that awaits discovery. The emphasis is upon what is made known! The idea of a mystery in the Bible focuses what is revealed, what is discovered, like anticipated treasures from King Tut's Tomb. And that's what we have before us this afternoon. Remember what we looked at this morning, Paul's rejection of the presentation of human wisdom by means of human eloquence.

v.1 "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony

of God."

He continued,

v.4 "And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom..."

Sounds like a good excuse for dull and boring preaching, doesn't it? Certainly not the kind of preaching the proud and educated Corinthians would want, as their Greek minds would have been longing for exalted wisdom. Great eloquence. Think, perhaps, in terms of an academic institution today, a university steeped in tradition. Maybe an Ivy League school. The best professors in the country, the most renowned. The best students, with the highest test scores and top ranking IQ's. The elite. The privileged. Showing off their wisdom. And Paul says, "No." No persuasive words of human wisdom.

However, verse 6 begins with that contrast. "Yet," as the NASB translates the Greek. It could be translated even more simply, "But." Or more descriptively, "Nevertheless..." "Notwithstanding..." Or, "to the contrary..." That's really the point. "To the contrary," there is wisdom in what Paul is preaching. And his point is that,

I. WISDOM IS FOR THE MATURE.

v.6a

That must have really annoyed the Greeks. The obvious implication, the obvious insult, is Paul's insinuation that they are not mature. And an insult it is! Because he snubs them, the intellectuals. But, to the contrary, he speaks wisdom among those who are mature. So who are they? What does he mean by maturity? What is the goal of maturity?

I could ask the same questions today, couldn't I? It is the

same issue that applies today. Who are the mature? What is maturity? Does it refer to an age, like at 18, or 21. Maybe age 30. That's the definition of maturity. Sadly, lots of examples would contradict that!

Maybe it's money, or self-sufficiency. That's the definition of maturity. But that still doesn't get to the heart of the matter. So what is,

A. The meaning and goal of maturity.

Meaning first. Meaning of maturity. The Greek word means "perfect," and we don't usually translate it that way because everyone immediately thinks, "sinless perfection." And Paul never teaches that. But the Greek word refers to something that is brought to fulfill its purpose. If you are a student, this maturity, this perfection, means you graduate. If you set a goal in your life, then maturity would be defined by accomplishing that goal. Finishing or completing that project. And so for a child, even those we call a young adult, maturity means growing up! Being able to live successfully in the world, not dependent upon parents. Not dependent upon the government. Not dependent upon outside assistance. You have what you need to go about your life successfully. Maturity.

Can I define that maturity for Christians just a bit more specifically?

Eph. 4:1 "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

That's what it means to be grown up as a Christian. Lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering. Or as Paul would continue,

Eph. 4:13 "...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."

Maturity means that you grow in godliness, that you grow up, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." That's a lofty goal. Regardless of what anyone else is doing, you grow up. You become like Jesus, more and more.

Eph. 4:22 "...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

We need to recapture this idea of maturity in our day. This goal of basic growth in godliness. It has to be your goal and the object of your pursuit, because wisdom is for the mature! God's wisdom. Which is to say,

B. The origin of wisdom is in God.

That's what this is all about. Wisdom doesn't come from a man. Wisdom isn't found in a man. It is found in God. So I, preaching as Paul preached, will say this as clear as clear can be. "We speak the wisdom of God." And that's where the idea of a mystery comes into play.

v.7

So let's think about that for a few minutes.

II. THE MYSTERY OF WISDOM.

But remember what I said in the introduction. I don't mean a mystery that you cannot understand. I do not mean a mystery as something that only I can know, because I have been to seminary. I don't mean a mystery that only people who are well educated will be able to figure out, nor do I mean something that just can't be figured out, as if it would be OK if we all came up with our own ideas.

No, the mystery of wisdom is that wisdom which God makes known. But to say that, at the outset, I need to emphasize that,

A. Wisdom is hidden by God.

That's a hard concept for some people to understand, but it is what the Bible says. God hid the wisdom of the gospel, and he did so as a judgment upon sin, a judgment upon the hardness of men's hearts. And to make the point very simply, God hid the wisdom of the gospel so that he could reveal it in the fullness of time, when Jesus came to live and to die for the sins of his people. So this hiding, this concealing of the wisdom of God, is used to more clearly make Jesus known! So Paul speaks of his own ministry in terms of ministry to the church, preaching,

Col. 1:26 "...the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. 27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. 29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."

So God's hides his wisdom, so that he make clear the presentation of the gospel of Jesus in the fullness of time. And that, for the revelation of his own glory!

Rom. 16:25 "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 kept secret since the world began 26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith — 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen."

Wisdom is hidden by God so that God can most fully display his own glory. And in that context, this wisdom that God has hidden is eternally defined by God.

B. Wisdom is eternally defined by God.

In other words, the wisdom of God is that which God knew and determined before the foundation of the world. This wisdom of God, this plan of God for the salvation of all nations, was determined by God before he ever created the world. It was determined by God in eternity past. It was predestined by God.

v.7

That word ordained means pre-ordained. God appointed this wisdom beforehand, he pre-ordained it. God established and defined this wisdom of the gospel before he created the world. And so he created the world in order to display his wisdom! He created the world in order to reveal that wisdom in Christ, a wisdom he himself defined and determined first. That's the meaning of the word predestine, and that's the meaning of these words before us this afternoon. I don't need to tell you that many people stumble over those words, but here they are. Plainly. God's plan of salvation is an eternal plan, one which he determined beforehand, a plan attributed to his predestination.

And don't miss the end of verse 7, "for our glory." In other words, for our salvation. God hides the wisdom of the gospel so

that it can be revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And all of that is for the purpose of our salvation, for our glory. God does all of this, for the benefit of our salvation. That was God's plan from eternity, that was God's predestined wisdom, that Jesus Christ would be born of a woman, life as a man and in his humanity obey the law perfectly. He would suffer and die as the punishment for our sins. And he would be raised from the dead so that we who believe in him might have life with him!

Aren't you glad the wisdom of God is no longer hidden? You who believe in Jesus, you who have faith in Jesus, you who trust in Jesus for your eternal salvation, you have eternal life. That is God's eternal plan and purpose now revealed.

Please note just how that revelation has come, namely through the power of the Holy Spirit. But note also just how necessary that work of the Holy Spirit really was. When it comes to,

III. THE REVELATION OF WISDOM,

...we have to admit that,

A. Unbelievers are unable to understand the wisdom of God.

They are unable. They don't have the ability. They cannot do it! It is not just that they won't, but because of their sin, they are made blind. They cannot see. They cannot hear. They cannot understand.

That's an obvious point, isn't it, in,
v.8

And they missed the glory of the gospel, in their sinful unbelief!

v.9

The wisdom of God is glorious, so glorious that no one can fully comprehend it. And yet, the proud, the self-sufficient unbelievers would miss the whole thing. They would miss the fullness of God's glory as it was made known in the gospel and made evident in Jesus.

Verse 9 quotes Isaiah 64. Isaiah 64 is a lament, that so many people wouldn't believe. And they would not acknowledge the glory of God. And then Isaiah 64 is an evangelistic appeal! First the lament, crying out to God, that his name would be made known.

Is. 64:1 "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence—2 As fire burns brushwood, As fire causes water to boil —To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence!"

But they wouldn't believe, just as people wouldn't believe today!

Is. 64:3 "When You did awesome things for which we did not look, You came down, The mountains shook at Your presence. 4 For since the beginning of the world Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, Nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him."

Then comes the evangelistic appeal, actually the cry of repentance and faith,

Is. 64:6 "But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. 7 And there is no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself up to take hold

of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, And have consumed us because of our iniquities. 8 But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand. 9 Do not be furious, O Lord, Nor remember iniquity forever.”

In other words, forgive us our sin!

Unbelievers are unable to understand the wisdom of God, but today is the day of salvation. So the message is plain. Repent, and believe in Jesus, and you, too, shall have life. For even as I preach this afternoon,

B. The Holy Spirit makes known the wisdom of God.

It's a mystery. It's hidden. It's a secret. From all eternity. But it has now been made known! And not because I have any wisdom. Not because I have any eloquence. Not because I might be persuasive. No, because the Holy Spirit opens the minds and the hearts of those who were dead in their sins. And so when I preach the gospel, when you share the gospel, the Holy Spirit makes known the wisdom of the gospel.

v.10

Therefore, v.11

So Paul's conclusion is clear,

v.12-13

That's why the person of the preacher doesn't matter. That's why we really can ignore that elephant in the room, as I emphasized this morning. It doesn't matter who does the preaching. What matters is what God the Holy Spirit reveals through his word! So the words that are preached are combined with the revelation of the Holy Spirit. That's what verse 14

means. The Holy Spirit is our teacher, and the words of the faithful preacher are a proclamation of what the Holy Spirit has revealed.

And so I will preach to you nothing other than those words which the Holy Spirit has revealed in Scripture, words which define and proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ, his life, his death and his resurrection!

I preach them to you as the words of life, that you who believe in him might have eternal life.

That's what it is all about. It's not about me. It's not about your pastor. It's not about you. It's not about this church, or our denomination. It's about Jesus, Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And that is why this sacrament is so significant, because here at this table the gospel is made known in an outward and tangible way. Here, as you eat and drink, you proclaim the Lord's death. And you declare his resurrection. You look forward to his return.

Here, as you recognize and understand the gospel, as you discern the body and blood of the Lord, here you gain the nourishment of your soul in way that only God the Holy Spirit can provide!

So eat and drink, and believe. Believe that God will forgive you your sin. Believe that God will show his love to you, in what Jesus has already done for you. For in Jesus, God has revealed the mystery of the gospel. That is the wisdom that I will preach to you who are mature.