

### Mystery Solved – Eph 3:1-7

Eph 3:1-7. I'm eager to get back to our study of Ephesians and our theme for the year: *Live Coram Deo*. We're in God's presence and we ought to live that way. Under his authority and for his glory. And this passage, like the others, spurs us on to that by solving some mysteries. Mentioned 3 times.

➤ And oh how everybody loves a good mystery. Books are written about *fictional* mysteries, blogs about *supposed* mysteries; even games are played about mysteries, role-playing games. **(Photo)**

Like the one we did for a staff Christmas party a few years ago. Where I had to dress up as a "Bad Santa" who just got out of jail (straw). Everybody loves a good mystery.

Unless it's a *real* mystery and a matter of life and death. And you're at the center of it.\*\*\*\*\* Like when your child is lost and you're in a panic. Or your loved one is sick and they don't know what's wrong. Then the mystery isn't so fun. And all you want, more than anything in the world, is to *solve* it. Explain it. Know the outcome.

Which exactly what Paul does here with respect to our problem of sin and separation. Our separation from God and others. A life and death mystery that lingered for thousands of years until it was solved by the death and resurrection of Jesus. And Paul, in this passage, explains the implications of it. The outcome for those who believe. v1-7.

[1] For this reason [referring to our oneness in Christ from chapter 2] I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus [or for 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. [7] Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. (ESV) **(Intro)**

➤ The first mystery that Paul solves is our role as children of God. Having been saved by grace through faith, how are we to live? How should we see ourselves? It's a mystery. At least it was to them, the first believers.

And the solution, or answer, comes from two phrases that Paul uses to identify himself: a *prisoner of Christ Jesus* in v1, and a *minister* in v7. Do you see them?

The first is a wordplay on his situation. Paul was in prison, remember? 62AD. About 7 years after his stay in Ephesus. And instead of seeing himself as a prisoner of his circumstances, as most people do these days, he sees himself as a *prisoner for Christ*. Someone with an opportunity instead of a problem. Someone constrained and compelled to advance the cause of another – Jesus. Constrained and compelled to advance *his* message, and his kingdom. He's a *prisoner* [for] *Christ*.

➤ Not only that, but he also describes himself as a *minister*. v7. *Of this gospel I was made a minister* he says. Which carries a boatload of meaning.

First, the word for minister is *diakonos* in Greek. And it means servant (**diakonos = minister = servant**). *Diakonos*, minister, and servant are interchangeable and mean the same thing. In fact, *diakonos* is sometimes *translated* servant. Like in 2 Cor 6:4 where Paul describes himself and those with him as *servants* [diakonoi] of God. (Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*)

Second, **it applies to all of us**. All followers of Christ are diakonoi-servants. Not just ministers or pastors. Because Paul also uses the word to describe his many co-workers. Men *and* women. Like Tychicus, Phoebe, Apollos, Timothy, and Epaphras.

Put all that together, from Paul's example as a *prisoner for Christ*, to the meaning of the word *minister* and its broad application to others, and our role as followers of Christ is solved. We are servants, constrained and compelled by Jesus, to do his will.

### Mystery Solved: We are servants with a mission. (v1,7)

That's how Paul saw *himself*, that's how he saw *other* New Testament believers, and that's how *we* should see ourselves.

What he didn't see, was a victim. He didn't see himself as a victim. And boy could he have done so. Paul could very easily have seen himself as a victim of his circumstances. A victim of life. A victim of his culture.

Think about it. He was Jewish man, hated by the Gentiles, and unjustly held in one of their prisons. Talk about racial issues. Talk about injustice.

But instead of seeing himself as a victim, he saw himself as a servant. And not just any servant, not some go-along-get-along lackey, but a servant with a cause. A servant with a mission. In this case, to the Gentiles. v1. I, Paul, [am] a *prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles*. The Gentiles in Ephesus to whom he was writing. His mission was to reach and preach to the Gentiles. Something he's explicit about in v8.

*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*. That was his God-given mission. To reach the people around him who were dead in their trespasses and sins. Just like so many around us.

And he did it, he fulfilled his mission, because as a prisoner and a servant, he could do no other. He was compelled and constrained *spiritually* because he was gripped by Christ, and he was driven *physically* because he was gripped by his mission.

➤ How about you? Have you adopted that mindset? Do you see yourself as a prisoner of Christ instead of a prisoner of your circumstances? A servant with a mission instead of a rebel with a cause? I hope so. Because our world has far too many of the latter these days, and far too few of the former. Out with victimhood, and in with servanthood.

The question is, what's your mission? And don't say you don't have one because everybody does. Everyone is compelled by something. Even if it's watching TV.

Maybe it's your work. Or your hobby. Or your role as a husband, a dad, a wife, a mom. What's your mission? What compels you?

If it's your work, do you labor as a prisoner for Christ, or a prisoner of your desires? Do you work to make a buck or make a difference? Make a name, or bring him fame?

Or maybe your mission these days is parenting. If so, do you disciple your kids to live for Christ or live for themselves? Love him or love the world?

How about the money you make? Do you use what you get to advance yourself and your family *alone*, or to help others and their families as well? Yourself alone, or your church as well?

If you're a prisoner for Christ like Paul, a servant with a mission as you should be, it's the latter. And you can do no other. Because you're compelled and constrained from the inside out, and couldn't be happier.

Be a servant with a mission. God's servant, on God's mission. That's the first mystery Paul solves. **(Summary)**

➤ The second, is the issue of God's revelation. His plan to save the world, and the results of it. Saying in v2, "you're my mission"— *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*. Probably referring to chapter 1, or maybe his letter to the Galatians. Hard to know.

In any case, *the stewardship of God's grace* that Paul was given, is the privilege and responsibility of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. Like we saw in v8. *This grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*. The Gospel. It's a stewardship.

➤ But the issue here, is the mystery. What is *the mystery* in v3, *that was made known* to him by *revelation*? God's plan to save the world, and unite us as one (2:11-22). Jew and Gentile alike.

And just in case we didn't get the unity part, he reiterates it in v6. *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*.

In other words, the mystery that Paul clears up, is the 3-fold benefit of believing the Gospel. That . . .

Jews *and* Gentiles are fellow heirs of eternal life.

Jews and Gentiles are members of the same body.

And Jews and Gentiles are mutual recipients of salvation.

You know what that spells? Family. The family of God. We're fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the same promise.

**Mystery Solved: All who believe the Gospel are part of God's family. (v2-3,6)**

If you're a fellow heir, you're a child of God. If you're a member of the same body, the body of Christ, you're part of his household. If you're a partaker of the Father's promises, you're in his family. God's family.

The question is, how do you access it? Faith. Belief. By grace we are saved through *faith* we saw in chapter 2. Faith in Jesus. Belief in him. Trust in who he is and what he's done. That's how you enter the safety and security of God's family.

And it's available to everyone. *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*. (Rom 10:13). Saved from an eternity of hell and the consequences of your sin, and saved to an eternity of life and the glory of God.

All who believe in the Gospel are part of God's family. Mystery solved.

➤ But it wasn't always that way, and it wasn't always that clear. It had to be revealed. And God did it, first *to* Paul, and then *through* Paul. v3. "You're my mission" Paul says, *assuming that you have heard . . . how the mystery was made known to me by revelation*.

Paul didn't just *stumble* on God's plan to save the world and unite his people. Nor was he predisposed to look for it or smart enough find it.

It was revealed to him. First on the road to Damascus when Jesus *himself* appeared to him. Then in Arabia, when he presumably grew in his understanding. And finally when God spoke to him through the inspiration of his Spirit. To pen the words we have in front of us. The mystery was revealed *to* Paul, and then *through* Paul.

➤ When we were on vacation, some of us went to an escape room (**photo**). And we ended up getting out in the second fastest time ever. 58 minutes and 30 seconds. And we did so, largely because we put our heads together, and with a little luck, figured out all the puzzles, locks, and riddles. We felt pretty proud of ourselves.

But even then, we needed help. The staff had to reveal some things; give us some clues. Otherwise we might still be in there, stumbling in the dark and at each other's throats. Just like we might still be in *spiritual* darkness if God hadn't revealed his plan of salvation.\*\*\*\*\*

But he didn't just tell us about it, he did it. As if the owner of the escape room sent one of his employees into the room *with* us, to do the whole thing *for* us. That's the kind of revelation Paul is talking about here.

And all we have to do to take advantage of it, to be a part of God's family, is believe. Which you can do right now. "Oh God, I believe. Help my unbelief." Wait no longer. Otherwise the mystery of this life may never be solved for you.

And if you *already* believe, this ought to be the revelation you shout from the mountaintops and repeat over and over again. Especially these days. It's the solution to all the unrest, all the rioting, all the protests, all the disagreement, all the everything in our world. No belief, no family; no family, no peace. No unity. No forgiveness. No love.

Be a part of God's family and invite others to join you. That's the second mystery that's solved in this passage. **(Summary)**

➤ The third, and last, comes from v4-5 where Paul reveals the *method* of God's revelation. Not just the substance as we just saw, but the method. Settling the question of how to treat

the Old and New Testaments in our Bible.

v4. *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.*

So many people, outside the church *and* in, misinterpret the Scriptures or miss the message entirely, because they fail to see the progressive nature of God's revelation. That he revealed himself and his plan more and more as time went by. So that what comes earlier should be interpreted in light of what comes later.

Like the issue of who comprises God's people. The topic at hand in this passage, and the topic Paul covered in the second half of chapter 2. No longer are his people comprised primarily of Jews who follow the Law, but Jews and Gentiles both, who believe in Jesus. And only those who believe in Jesus. Fail to recognize the progressive nature of God's revelation, and you'll fail to get that.

Or how about the Old Testament Law itself? Leave out the New Testament, the most recent revelation from God, and you'll end up trying to follow the particulars of the Law instead of the principles. You may even miss Jesus himself as the fulfillment of the Law.

Don't go there. The mystery has been solved.

**Mystery Solved: God's revelation is progressive not static. (v4-5)**

That's not to say God's *nature* has changed. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). But the way he has related to us, has changed. And how much of himself and his way he revealed to us, changed.

Far from a *static* revelation where God downloaded everything all at once, he revealed things progressively. Especially his plan of salvation, the Good News of Jesus. Look at v5 again. The mystery of Christ, the Gospel, *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* [referring to the inspiration of Scripture as he moved them to write].

We saw back in 2:20 that *apostles* refer to the men who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection, and were personally chosen by him to declare his message. Meanwhile, *prophets* most likely refer to a select group of others who were closely associated with the Apostles, and also proclaimed the Gospel. Not to be confused with *Old* Testament prophets.

The point being, God revealed some of his way, and some of his truth, and some of his life to Old Testament believers; but it wasn't until Jesus came that he revealed all of it. Indicating that his revelation is progressive.

And it's important that we see it that way, or we will fail to rightly handle it (2 Tim 2:15), rightly interpret it, rightly apply it. Mystery solved. **(Summary)**

➤ And everybody loves a good one. Especially when they're a part of the solution. So be a servant with a mission. Be a part of God's family. And be aware of God's Word.

**Prayer** – Lord, we are blessed of all people. From a Bible that reveals your way, to a

family that reveals your heart, to a mission that reveals your will. Find us faithful to serve, faithful to love, and faithful to know all that you've revealed.