

Ephesians chapter 3 - verses 1 to 13 is our passage this morning

There's the usual outline to jot down notes

But let me pray for God's help before we begin...

## Recap

We're returning to the book of Ephesians this morning - after a break in October - when we looked at the Reformation

Let's do a quick recap where we got up to in Ephesians - before we look at this morning's passage

[Powerpoint 1-Recap 1]

### Recap

Paul is writing to the Christian Church in Ephesus:

So far he has:

- Told them/us what spiritual blessings "God's eternal good stuff" they have - because of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- Described their/our condition that without believing that Jesus came & died for the sin of the world - we are separated from God & spiritually dead - and so they/us need to be reconciled to God

## [Powerpoint 2-Recap]

### Recap

We are saved from being punished for our sins:

**BY** Grace – God’s undeserved favour on us  
**THROUGH** Faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection  
**BOTH** a gift from God  
**NOT** by works – so we don’t boast  
 But  
**FOR** Good works which God has prepared for us

## [Powerpoint 3 - Recap 3]

### Recap

- There was a barrier between JEWS and GENTILES
- Gentiles are other nations=Goyim=Gentile dogs!
- Jews are God’s people
- God made a covenant/agreement with Abraham
- God’s plan was to bless **all families** of the earth through Abraham and his descendants
- Instead of being a witness and a light to other nations – the Jews developed a fierce prejudice towards the Gentiles
- This prejudice remained in Paul’s time
- Yet Gentiles are to be part of God’s people too!

## Context/Mystery (Ephesians 3:1)

That's where we got up to in our last look at Ephesians.

Which brings us to Ephesians chapter 3 verse 1

[If you turn there now]

And Paul reminds the Ephesians of his credentials:

[Powerpoint 4-Context]

He says he's a

prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

He's a prisoner in the sense that he is literally in jail - under Roman guard - as he writes this letter.

And He's a prisoner of the Jesus - in the sense that when he met Jesus on the road to the Damascus - and was changed from Saul the terrorist - to Paul the Apostle - he became captive to the will of our Lord Jesus - who is the Lord of His life now - and not the Roman government - and Paul's now captive to the job that Jesus gave him to do...

And we get a hint of that job in verse 1 - when Paul says he's a prisoner for the sake of 'you Gentiles' - non Jews - like the Ephesians - and like us.

Paul's job was to bring the message of Jesus to the Gentiles - non-Jews

And he's about to explain that this job is a bit of a **'mystery'**

So we'd better be clear what a mystery is:

[Powerpoint 5-Mystery]

The dictionary definition is:

- a novel, short story, play, or film whose plot involves a crime or other event that remains puzzlingly unsettled until the very end
- a religious truth that one can know **only by revelation** and cannot fully understand.

### **Greek = Mysterion**

- the secret counsels which govern God in dealing with the righteous, which are hidden from ungodly and wicked men but main plain to the godly

The mystery that Paul is going to explain has been around for centuries before Paul

### **Old Testament Mystery (Exodus 19:5-6 & Isaiah 49:1-7)**

In the OT - we have verses like this in Exodus 19:5-6 - God says this to Moses:

[Powerpoint 6-OT-Exodus 19]

*<sup>5</sup> Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my **treasured possession**. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”*

So it's the Israelites (the Jews) and not the Gentiles - who are to be God's treasured possession and a holy nation.

No wonder the Jews - saw Gentiles as dogs!

Yet throughout the Old Testament (which we saw in our Bible Study during the week) - there were provisions for non-Jews to become part of the Jewish nation

How can we reconcile this?

Is it just the Jews that are God's people - or are Gentiles included?

It's been a bit of a mystery from OT time's right up to Paul's time.

But when we hit our OT passage this morning from Isaiah 49 - we can actually see that there was a hint of how this mystery was to play out.

[So please turn your Bibles to Isaiah 49:1-7]

[Powerpoint 7-Old Testament Mystery - Isaiah 49]

These verses talk about a coming Servant

And verse 1 predicts the birth of this servant - a very special baby - none other than Jesus

Verse 2 shows the power of this servant's words - are like a sharpened sword that can pierce our hearts with the truth of God

Then in verse 3 - the servant is called Israel -

Hang on - didn't we just say this servant was Jesus - not Israel

How can God be saying on the one hand - this servant is Jesus - the Messiah - God's chosen one - and then on the other hand say - this servant is Israel

Well first - Jesus the Messiah comes from Israel and represents the nation of Israel - And second Jesus the Messiah fulfills the name Israel - which means "God prevails" or "Governed by God"

Then in verse 4 - we get a glimpse of Jesus the Messiah's time on Earth - it's fair to say - Jesus was not universally accepted when He came to Earth - and that could have been a discouragement to Him - but He did not succumb to that - and left the last word to God the Father

Then we get an idea of the Servant - Jesus the Messiah's job - in verse 5 - He will bring Jacob (another name for Israel) - He will bring Israel - his holy nation - back to God

But that's not the whole of His job - see the end of v6

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

That sounds pretty much like the Great Commission that Jesus gave his apostles and us in Matthew 28:19

Therefore go and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

So right back in Isaiah - 600 years before Jesus

God had a plan for His Servant - Jesus - to be a light to the Gentiles

But it remained a mystery right up to Paul's day

Until Paul met THE LIGHT - on the road to Damascus.

Now in Ephesians 3:1-13

[Please turn to Ephesians 3 from verse 2]

Paul explains how the Mystery was revealed to Him (verses 2 to 5)

And then reveals the Mystery to his readers - the Ephesians (verses 6 to 12)

### **Mystery Revealed to Paul (Ephesians 3:2-5)**

So in verses 2 to 5

[Powerpoint 8-Mystery revealed to Paul (Eph 3:2-5)]

Paul basically reminds his readers that as they read over what he's written so far they'll see that this mystery was made known to Paul by revelation from Jesus. The Greek word for revelation is "apokalypsis" where we get our English word - apocalypse from

It means "laying bare, disclosing the truth about things previously unknown, bringing the truth to light"

And he says because Jesus has explained this mystery to him - and given him insight (literally mentally putting things together) - given him insight into this mystery in verse 4 - a mystery Paul says - in verse 5 - has been hidden from people in previous generations. But now it's been revealed to Paul - and the explanation Paul was given - is consistent with the hint we had from the OT prophet Isaiah - in our OT passage - and it's consistent with what Jesus promised in Matthew 28:16-20 (Great Commission) and consistent with His promise in Acts 1:8 - that the apostles would be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the Earth!

### **Mystery Revealed to the Ephesians/Us (Ephesians 3:6-11)**

However it seems that God uses Paul to specifically declare how this mystery - of God's people - being not just Jews but also Gentiles - is going to actually work out in practice

### **[Powerpoint 9-Mystery Revealed to Ephesians/Us]**

This was something hinted at in days gone by

But now through Paul's revelation from our Lord Jesus

Paul is to reveal that mystery in verses 6 to 11 to the Ephesians and us

See verse 6

through the **gospel** the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

What Paul means is that through the Gospel

The Gospel in Greek means - The Good News - literally The Good Message

That Jesus died on a cross - to take the punishment for sin against God - and pay for it once and for all - it was the sinner's punishment - but Jesus took the sinner's place on the cross - and gave forgiveness instead of punishment

And the Good News - continued - in that Jesus rose from the dead 3 days later - and gave the gift and promise of eternal life - for those who believe in this Gospel - or Good News of Jesus -

And Paul is saying that both Jews and Gentiles - are both made right with God - in the SAME way - through believing in this Gospel - this Good News of Jesus

And so the Jews and Gentiles - come together as ONE body of believers - and they inherit the same things - forgiveness and eternal life - and they share in the same promise - the promise of Heaven

The implications of that is that Gentiles - don't have to get bogged down following all the Jewish rules and traditions and feast days - they are part of God's people simply by believing the Gospel of Jesus

Paul goes on to say in v7 - he is a servant of this Gospel - because God in His grace - through God's undeserved favour - God gave Paul this Gospel job to do

Paul sees this as a huge privilege in verse 8

In fact he feels unworthy of this job - because he says he is the least of the Lord's people

Why does Paul feel like this?

Firstly because - an encounter with the Lord Jesus - like Paul had on the road to Damascus - coming face to face - with the glorious light of the Son of God - would humble anyone - and make them feel unworthy

And secondly - Paul feels unworthy because he persecuted Christians before he met Jesus and became a Christian (1 Cor 15:9)

Nevertheless, Paul is determined to preach the Gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles and he describes what he is going to preach in verse 8 as "boundless riches of Christ Jesus" - a better translation might be "unsearchable riches" - tapping into what Jesus gives us - is like tapping into a seam of gold in a gold mine - and the seam just keeps going and going

Charles Spurgeon describes it this way:

*I am bold to tell you that my Master's riches of grace are so unsearchable, that he delights to forgive and forget enormous sin; the bigger the sin the more glory to his grace. If you are over your head and ears in debt, he is rich enough to discharge your liabilities. If you are at the very gates of hell, he is able to pluck you from the jaws of destruction*

And Paul sees his life work in verse 9 - is to make plain this mystery that Jewish and Gentile believers are all part of God's family

And Paul says God's given us an instrument or vehicle for the wisdom of God to be made known - and that instrument is the church! - in v10

That's not this building

But the universal body of Christian believers - who have eternal salvation in Jesus - and meet together to worship and give glory to God - and share their belief with those in the body and those still to become part of that body of believers

So as we meet as a church family - Paul says - the wisdom of God is being made known amongst us - as we sing, as we pray, as we read God's Word and as we hear God's Word preached

And look what Paul says at the end of v10 - this wisdom of God is being made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms!

Who are they?

Angels and heavenly beings!

They're interested in what's going on down here in St. David's

This is not me saying this

In Luke 15:10 Jesus says this:

In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents

Angels are doing cartwheels in Heaven when someone repents and turns to Jesus!

It's like they're saying "WOW! Fred became a believer today! WOW!"

Angels are concerned about what's happening on Earth - especially when it's to do with people being saved!

The apostle Peter says similar in 1 Peter 1:12:

... those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

And what's even more mind blowing is verse 11

Is this mystery has been a plan that has been in operation since the world began  
See v11 - God had this plan for Jews and Gentiles to be in the one family all along  
according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our  
Lord.

It wasn't God's afterthought - it's not like God said - "Oh Plan A didn't work -  
Adam and Eve stuffed up - I'd better bring out Plan B - out you come Jesus!"  
God knew humans would sin and stuff up - so he already had planned Jesus to be  
the Servant Saviour Messiah - from before time began!

### **Our Response (Ephesians 3:10, 12-13)**

So how we will respond to this mystery being revealed?

Well - the Apostle Paul has the answers for us in verse 10 and verses 12-13

#### **[Powerpoint 10a-Response 1]**

1. In v10 - we are the church - we share in Paul's job - now that the mystery -  
that Jews and Gentiles can all be Christians together has been revealed - we  
share in Paul's job. But are we sharing that job with Paul - are we sharing the  
Gospel - the Good News of Jesus - or keeping it as a mystery only revealed  
to us?

#### **[Powerpoint 10b-Response 2]**

2. In v12 - Because of our faith in Jesus - we can approach God with **freedom  
and confidence**. The Greek for freedom means - open, frank, bold, without  
concealment. So we can come to God in prayer about ANYTHING and

EVERYTHING. Nothing is off the agenda! It also means we have the freedom to say whatever is True about Jesus and God - without being afraid. And confidence in the Greek means not so much being cocky or sure of ourselves - but more in the way of being reliant and trusting of God. Because we're His - we can trust Him and rely on Him for ALL THINGS. So are we claiming that reliance on Him and relying on HIS strength to get through things - or are we still relying on ourselves? I've personally been convicted of that this week - in that I'm sometimes too self-reliant - when I have God to strengthen me - and in whom I can rely on perfectly

### [Powerpoint 10c-Response 3

3. Then finally - our response is in v13 - Paul says don't be discouraged about my sufferings. Paul was shipwrecked, hated, persecuted and jailed. All these sufferings contributed to the Gospel of Jesus being spread - even to the Ephesians he's writing to. Paul says it's all worth it because God says it's worth it and it's all part of God's eternal plan.

In the same way, each of us has a place in the service of God's eternal plan. Knowing this and working towards the spreading of the Gospel - should guard us against losing heart when we face the trials and sufferings and tribulations that lie ahead - which we all certainly will face

Let's pray...