**Brought to Life; Brought Together**

**The Mystery of the Gospel Revealed**

Ephesians 3:1-6

December 29, 2019

David Taylor

 We are back in our series, Brought to Life; Brought Together, based upon the New Testament letter of Ephesians. Today’s message, The Mystery of the Gospel Revealed, is from 3:1-6. If you have a bible turn to Ephesians 3:1-6 as we read the passage together. The passage can be divided into three sections, Paul describes his *circumstances* as a prisoner of Jesus Christ (1), then he describes his *commission* as an apostle to the Gentiles, a mystery that God revealed to his apostles (2-5), and then *clarifies* the gospel mystery, by faith Gentiles are included fully and equally alongside believing Jews as the new people of God, the church (2).

Big Idea: The gospel unites Jews and Gentiles into God’s new covenant community, the church.

**Paul’s Circumstances (1)**

Paul begins to pray for the Ephesians, but as he looks at the soldier he is chained to, he is reminded of the reason for his imprisonment and digresses to clarify his apostolic ministry to them (2-13) and eventually comes back to his prayer (14-21). Paul describes his circumstances as a prisoner of Jesus Christ on behalf of the Gentiles (1). He is *in prison for two reasons*. *First*, he is a prisoner of or for Jesus Christ. He has been a prisoner of Rome for about five years now. He is a prisoner of Rome because of the hostility and accusations of the Jews (Acts 21:27ff). Yet he does not describe himself as a prisoner of Rome but sees himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ. It is not by accident that he is in prison. When he was called to be an apostle, God told him he would suffer much (Acts 9:16; 2 Tim 1:11-12). He is suffering for the gospel but he recognizes God’s sovereignty over his suffering. God is sovereign over all human suffering. For Christians, suffering has a redemptive purpose, for our good and God’s glory (2 Cor 1:8-10; 12:7). This is why Paul is not bitter, angry, or feeling sorry for himself. His suffering caused him to depend upon God and it advanced the gospel. Prison forced Paul to write letters to the churches whereas if he had been free to visit them, he may have never written his letters.

*Second,* he is in prison on behalf of the Gentiles, for preaching that Christ nullified the Jewish law that created a barrier between Jews and Gentiles so that he might create one new humanity, the church (2:11-22). The Jews saw this as distorting Judaism, undermining the law and the Jewish people. The law so defined Jews that even Jewish Christians had a hard time *not* requiring Gentiles to follow the law. This made Paul an enemy of the Jews who persecuted him and created controversy among the Jewish Christians. So Paul is in prison for two reasons, because of God’s sovereign purposes and for bringing the gospel to Gentiles.

**Paul’s Calling (2-5)**

Then Paul describes his calling as, assuming you have heard of the *stewardship of God’s grace* that was given to me for you (2). He saw his ministry a gracious gift from God (Col 1:25) that he did not earn or deserve even though he knew from the beginning he was going to suffering greatly (Acts 9:16). This grace was given to him for the benefit of the Gentiles, Paul was called as an apostle to Gentiles, the nations. Paul’s stewardship was like a project manager overseeing the Gentile mission by preaching the gospel to the nations and then shepherding the churches that formed. Then Paul describes the *Gentile mission as a mystery* that God made known to him by revelation (Acts 9:1-19) that he wrote about in chapter two.

Then Paul draws a conclusion, you will understand my insight into the mystery of Christ when you read this letter (4). The churches will understand the mystery by reading what Paul wrote. In the early church, the apostles wrote letter to the churches to address their issues and give them doctrinal truth. These letters were read because most people were illiterate and there was originally only one copy of the letter. Listen carefully to what he says, when you read, you can perceive my insight understanding into the mystery of Christ (4). Reading is the normal means by which to know and understand the bible! This is the primary way God speaks, reveals truth to us.

This mystery of Christ was not revealed clearly to the Old Covenant prophets but has now been made known in the New Covenant to God’s apostles and prophets (5).[[1]](#footnote-1) This mystery of Gentile inclusion is a new covenant truth that was not clear in the Old Covenant. The Spirit pulled back the curtain of truth so they could see it clearly. This was a radical truth for the early church. The church remained Jewish in Jerusalem and resisting going to the Gentiles until persecution forced the church to scatter among Gentile territories around Jerusalem and there they preached the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 8).

**Mystery Summarized (6)**

After describing his calling and how he came to understand the gospel mystery, Paul gives a summary statement of the mystery (6; see also 2:18-22). The mystery is that through the gospel, Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the same body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus (6). We have seen that Gentiles, who were once excluded from God’s covenants and God’s people, are now, by faith, included alongside Jews with the same status and privileges forming the new people of God, the church. Paul describes this Gentile inclusion three ways. *First, Gentiles are fellow heirs* (Rom 8:17; Heb 11:9; 1 Pet 3:7) to the promise salvation as God’s adopted children (1:5). In the New Covenant, all ethnic people groups become part of the new people of God by faith. *Second, Gentiles are fellow members* of the same body made up of individuals who are interdependent/dependent upon each other like parts of human body. *Third, Gentiles are fellow partakers* of the promise in Christ. Partakers of the promise probably alludes to the covenants of promise (2:14) and describes Gentiles full participation in new covenant and all that comes with it. Add to these three, Gentiles have been described as fellow citizens (2:19) we see that the mystery is that God's purpose has always been to create one new humanity, one new body, the church, in which Jews and Gentiles share equally as fellow-members and fellow-heirs and fellow-partakers of the promise given to Abraham and the patriarchs (see [Eph. 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%202.12),[19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph%202.19)). Gentiles are equally joint members and necessary for the life of the body and which without them the church would not exist. It is in Christ and through faith in the gospel that this comes to pass (Gal 3:16, 29). By faith we are united to Chris or in Christ so that spiritually we are in him and he is in us, a spiritual and mystical connection so that his life becomes ours. And when we become united to Christ we are united to others who are in Christ so we are one in Christ. The gospel unites Jews and Gentiles into God’s new covenant community, the church.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. What is the big idea of Ephesians 3:1-6?
2. How did Paul understand his calling as an apostles as God’s grace?
3. What is the mystery?
4. WHow did God incorporate Gentiles into the people of God?
5. What was Gentile inclusion such a radical idea?
6. How does God creating a new humanity relate to creation and hope of new creation?
7. How is God speaking you through this passage?
8. How does this passage support the command to make disciples
1. For instance, this came to Paul on his Damascus road experience (Acts 9) and to Peter (Acts 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)