**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon Series**

**Paul’s Letter to The Saints in Ephesus**

**~ Mystery of God’s Grace ~**

*Chapter 3:1-12*

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

 We see here in Ephesian 3:1 that Paul describes himself as a *prisoner* of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles. The word *prisoner* carries with it the meaning that a person is not directed by their own will in the course of their life, and they are not free to travel down any other road. Paul uses the Greek title, *Christ,* in substitution of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, who was prophesied, and, in fact, did come to save the world. This does not leave any doubt of who Paul’s primary audience the letter is initially directed at - Gentiles.

 It is of note that Paul first witnessed the Good News to the Jews, but then, through many rebuffs by them, he dusted his feet off and turned to the Gentiles.

**Acts 13:46-49**

46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

 47 "For so the Lord has commanded us,

'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'"

 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

 We remember, that all the Apostles were commissioned by God to be His witnesses to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8). Then specifically, in Paul’s commissioning in Acts 9, God states that Paul will bear His name before the Gentiles.

**Acts 1:8** but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

**Acts 9:15-16** 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

 Of special note, we see Paul quotes the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who wrote about 700 years before the Incarnation, by saying, *I will make you a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth* (Isaiah 49:6). To highlight the point that God always intended to reach all people groups – we can read the Psalms and additional passages in Isaiah - witnessing that the Word of God/The Gospel Message of the Good News of Christ Jesus is for the whole world. We have quoted how Abraham’s initial covenant with God includes the *nations* of the world (Genesis 12:3). The Gospel of John declares that Jesus’s Cross was for the whole world (John 2:1, John 1:29, John 4:42, 1John 4:14).

 For our readers who are not familiar with the Psalms or additional passages in Isaiah - they may be enlightened by the prophetic voice of God when He announces His intent and plans for the salvation of the world.

**Psalms 98:2** The LORD has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.

**Psalms 98:3** He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

**Psalms 117:1** Praise the LORD, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples!

**Isaiah 42:6** "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations,

**Isaiah 42:1** "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.

**Isaiah 45:22** "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.

**Isaiah 52:10** The LORD has bared His holy arm In the sight of all the nations, That all the ends of the earth may see The salvation of our God.

**Isaiah 60:3** "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.

 So, let us read Ephesians 3:1-6, taking note of Paul’s focus on the *mystery* of Christ.

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus

for the sake of you Gentiles--

 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace

 which was given to me for you;

 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery,

as I wrote before in brief. [Ephesians 1:9; Ephesians 2:18]

 4 By referring to this, when you read

you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;

 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles

are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body,

and fellow partakers of the promise

(Abraham - Gen. 12:3, Galatians 3:18)

in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

Paul considers himself to be a steward of God’s grace. It is my view that we all are stewards of God’s grace. Paul makes a special appeal to the Gentiles in that he claims God gave him His grace to carry with him to shower on them. In return, the Gentiles would receive God’s grace and experience for themselves the love God has for the whole world (John 3:16).

What is the *grace* Paul delivers to them?

What is the *mystery* Paul delivers to them?

 It is the Good News that God in the flesh, as Christ Jesus, willingly, by prophetic planning, went to the Cross to pay the price, the debt owed to God for their sins and the sins of the whole world. This is the *mystery* *of Christ* which Paul speaks. The Greek/Gentile world was foreign to the Word of God and His salvation-plan. The Gentiles were not from a culture that knew of. . . nor read…the Hebrew Scripture. They did not have any concept of how the Law, given to Moses by the God of creation, worked or His detailed plans to save humanity from an eternal separation from Him.

However, we have God speaking to all people in Romans 1:18ff that He has revealed Himself to everyone from the beginning of the creation through what He has made. This revelation reaches all people but did not detail the Incarnation or the Cross of Christ Jesus.

For the Jews, they had Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 (as an example), detailing and prophesying the Messiah’s Cross. And as we have noted, the Jews had the witness of God’s promise to Abraham - that a person becomes in right-standing with God through faith.

Of course, we must declare that the separation people experience from God was due to intentional act(s) on their part. All people willingly depart from the plan God had for their lives. We have the account of Adam and Eve demonstrating all people’s decision to rebel against God. All have fallen, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; (Romans 3:10/Psalm 53:1).

All of us know this is the condition we find ourselves. The answer . . . for all of us. . . is in Paul’s words when he declared to the Believers in Rome . . . *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death* (Romans 8:1-2).

To be clear, the word *mystery* is used to express that which was not previously known. In addition, the works of God are of a miraculous nature. Meaning they cannot be explained by common knowledge. When Paul speaks of the *mystery, as he wrote before in brief* (verse 3), he relates back to what he already wrote to the Ephesians about the mission of God in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:7-9).

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the *mystery* of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him. (See also: Colossians 1:27, 2:2, 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:9; Mark 4:11-12; Ephesians 3:4-6, 9-10, 5:32, 6:19-20)

**What we receive from God’s Word in Ephesians 3:1-6**

1. God’s grace, in this context, is the atoning act of Christ Jesus on the Cross and His Resurrection from physical death accomplished for the whole world. This means the Gentiles.

2. Believers are stewards of the message of God’s grace.

3. Believers are living witnesses as beneficiaries of God’s grace.

4. During the life of Paul, God’s grace (Incarnation to the Cross) came to pass and was uniquely revealed, witnessed through the Apostles, Prophets, and Believers like Paul.

5. God’s grace, in the work of Christ Jesus, was prophesied but not revealed. . .that is - come to pass, until during the life of Paul. This is the specific *mystery* to which Paul speaks.

 In verse 7, Paul attributes God’s power at work in him - given to him to be a minister to deliver the only grace that can save a person from eternal separation from God. A gift is given and like grace - is not earned. Both can be rejected. This is not anywhere better stated than when Jesus calls-out - *'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.* (Revelations 3:20).

7 of which I was made a minister,

according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me

according to the working of His power.

 8 To me, the very least of all saints,

this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles

the unfathomable riches of Christ,

 In verses 9-12, once again, Paul points to the *hidden mystery* of God . . . that He gives all people freedom to surrender to Him. In Galatians 3:14-18, Paul makes it clear that the *promise* to Abraham extended to all the nations. Hence, a witness that God’s promise was tucked away, as witnessed within the covenant God made with Abraham – which was a person gained right-standing with God through faith in Him (Genesis 15:6). This mystery of salvation by faith and faith in God’s grace and love to deliver the victorious blow to sin and death was by willingly going to the Cross, rising from the dead and walking from an empty tomb - " O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

 **Galatians 3:14** in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

 9 and to bring to light

what is the administration of the mystery

which for ages has been hidden in God

who created all things;

 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God

might now be made known through the church

to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose

which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

12 in whom we have boldness

and confident access through faith in Him.

 Our witness is about God’s grace gift of Himself on the Cross. We witness our access to God’s grace gift through faith – which is a heart-surrender to Him.

 AMEN