

Time to Reflect

- What are some of the unchangeable principles of the Christian faith? How can we communicate them effectively in today's world?
- Why do you think some believers and churches lack the spiritual confidence and power that God wants them to have?

Last week we considered Christ's peace mission and how it dealt with separation, offered reconciliation and brought unification. We reflected on how God is both loving and holy, and we were encouraged to recognise just how important God takes promises. This week we will be focusing on the great message that Paul proclaimed, and how this 'mystery' was for both Jews and Gentiles.

"In the New Testament, a *mystery* is not something eerie or inscrutable, but rather 'a truth that was hidden by God in times past and is now revealed to those who are in His family.' A *mystery* is a 'sacred secret' that is unknown to believers, but understood and treasured by the people of God."

(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians*, p80)

Specifics

- Our passage begins by revealing that Paul was a prisoner. Twice in this letter, Paul reminded his readers that he was a prisoner (3:1, 4:1) and at the end of Ephesians he called himself "...an ambassador in chains" (6:20).
- He was a prisoner "...for the sake of you Gentiles" (v1). Paul believed that God extended His love and grace to both the Jews and the Gentiles, and that He called them into one body – the Church.
- Despite being a devout leader in Judaism before he came to faith, Paul was radically obedient to the call that God placed on his life. He was to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15, 26:13-18) and he did so without reservation.
- In (v2) we see how Paul reminded the Ephesians that God's amazing grace was also for them. Note how he referred to this as a mystery that had been made known to him by divine revelation.
- God called Paul to faith and then to service. He revealed to Paul what needed to be communicated and who needed to be reached. This reminds us that mission is God's work but we are also agents in His mission.
- Two thousand years have passed since the time of Paul, yet the mission of God continues. We still need to be in the business of proclaiming the great message of salvation.
- Warren Wiersbe reflects, "God's principles do not change, but His methods of dealing with humankind do change over the course of history. 'Distinguish the ages,' wrote Saint Augustine, 'and the Scriptures harmonise.'¹"
- The message that Paul proclaimed was and remains truly good news. It is briefly summarised in (v6). In Ephesians 2:11-22 we discovered that Christ's work on the cross offers salvation, reconciliation and unity to those who believe.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians* (David C Cook, 2009), p82.

- Paul longed for the Ephesians to fully understand the eternal significance of this message. Wiersbe suggests, “It reconciled Jews and Gentiles to each other and to God. It is this truth that Paul presented here, and you can imagine what exciting news it would be! The truth of ‘the mystery’ reveals to believing Gentiles that they have a wonderful new relationship through Jesus Christ.”²
- We are reminded that the good news of the gospel is extended to everyone. All believers are part of the one body that is the Church (v6) and our unity is based on our faith in Jesus Christ.
- Paul moved to personalise this message and its significance by sharing from his own faith journey (v7-8). He sought to highlight the power of the gospel to bring lasting and meaningful change, even to the most unexpected of people.
- Paul was transformed by God - not by his own intellect or ability, but by the grace and power of God (v7). Note his humility as demonstrated in (v8). Paul never wanted to be the focus of attention. He wanted everyone, including the Ephesians, to be drawn to God and experience “...the boundless riches of Christ” (v8).
- These riches, as we have observed in earlier studies, are available to every believer. When we accept Christ as Lord, and grow in our knowledge and love of Him, then we can experience the spiritual blessings that God has for each of us.
- Wiersbe reminds us that “The mighty resurrection power of Christ is available to us for daily life and service.”³
- The remaining verses of our passage (v10-13) serve as a reminder that the gospel message is still powerful and effective for us today. God is still at work in the world, through the power of His Holy Spirit.
- As believers, we need to be confident about this and boldly proclaim the great message of God’s love, mercy and grace. We are challenged to remember the eternal significance of what Jesus has done for us and, through faith in him, “...approach God with freedom and confidence” (v11-12).
- Unfortunately, this is not always common practice within faith communities in today’s world. Wiersbe recognises this and contends, “The reason many churches are weak and ineffective is because they do not understand what they have in Christ. And the cause of this is often spiritual leaders who are not good ‘stewards of the mystery.’”⁴
- Put simply, biblical literacy and teaching have depreciated significantly. Paul actually warned Timothy that such spiritual regression would take place (2nd Timothy 4:3).
- We are reminded of the importance of being a biblical people who are confident in our faith and trusting entirely in God. We are challenged to grow closer to God and deeper in our knowledge and love of Him.
- As we do so, we should seek to make ourselves available to serve God and open to the powerful and amazing ways that He is working in our world today.
- Wiersbe offers a timely conclusion as he suggests, “When you know what God is doing in the world, and you work with Him, you can be sure that He will work in you and for you. All of His divine resources are available to those who sincerely want to do His will and help Him accomplish His purposes on earth.”⁵

² Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians*, p82.

³ Ibid, p83.

⁴ Ibid, p87.

⁵ Ibid, pp87-88.