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## The Mystery of the Gospel

*“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and*

*partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.” Eph. 3:1-7*

In the beginning of Ephesians chapter 3, Paul reveals more about the mystery of the gospel. Paul describes himself as a prisoner of Christ for the sake of the Gentiles. He also affirms that the things he preached were given to him by revelation and not from any man. The gospel is God’s power to save all who will believe and obey.

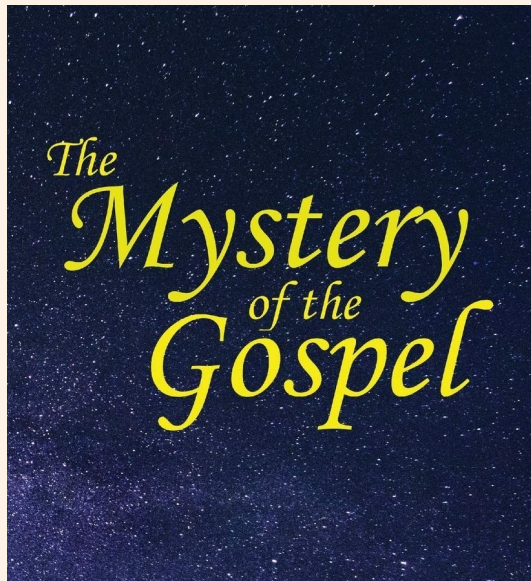
### The Prisoner of Christ

For what reason was Paul a prisoner? Paul has just been saying that the Gentile are no longer foreigners and strangers, but they are now a part of the building that God had planned, built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets with Jesus Christ as the chief corner stone. The preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles was the primary reason that Paul was in prison.

Nero was ruling in Rome at this time, but Paul did not identify himself as the prisoner of Nero. He was the prisoner of Christ Jesus. From his imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote to the Philippians:

*“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.” (Phil. 1:12-18)*

Paul was the Lord’s servant no matter where he was located, even in prison. This is true because Paul considered himself dead. As he writes in Gal. 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”



What a revolutionary change it would make in our lives if we had the mind of the Apostle Paul regarding our lives. We tend to believe that our lives are our own, and we try to persuade God to help us achieve all the things that we want to accomplish. Paul was seeking to do the Lord's will and he endeavored to have Christ live in and through him. He could be free, or he could be in prison, he could be at home, or he could be traveling. Any time of the day or night, no matter where he might be, Paul was the Lord's servant and ready to do his bidding. God called him to preach to the Gentiles and he preached to them, and it landed him in prison, so be it.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, *even* to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:8-10). Paul was not the prisoner of Nero or any other man, he was the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles.

### **The Dispensation of the Grace of God**

What is the dispensation of the Grace of God? Strong's 3622 *oikonomia* (from 3621 */oikonoméō*, "a steward, managing a household") – properly, a *stewardship*, management (administration), i.e. where a person looks after another's affairs (resources). [A "dispensation" can also refer to a special period of *time* (management). But this is a *secondary* (not primary) meaning of 3622 (*oikonomia*).]

This was a stewardship for Paul. He was administering the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul often had to defend his apostleship. He always made it plain that the gospel he preached did not come from Peter, John or any other Apostle or man. It came to him by revelation.

In Gal. 1:11-24 Paul gives an account of this revelation:

*"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have*

*heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God in me."*

Paul was called by God to be an apostle and he received a direct revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ, and he saw the Lord.

### **The Mystery of the Gospel**

What is the mystery of which Paul is speaking? He says he has already written about it briefly. A mystery is something that is concealed, something that we do not know clearly. By definition it is something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain. We most often see the word used today in a novel, a play, or a movie dealing with a puzzling crime, especially a murder.

It is interesting to note that there was an execution that is associated with this mystery. Sometimes we speak of the mysteries of God. To name but a few key examples, these include the nature of the Trinity, the virgin birth of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus. These are mysteries in the sense that they cannot be explained or apprehended by reason alone. The word *mysterion* (μυστήριον) is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament.

But this is not the sense in which Paul is using the word *mystery* here in Ephesians 3. Of course, this

is no longer a mystery, and Paul very plainly states it in verse 6: “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.”

### **In Other Ages Not Made Known**

While this plan of redemption was hidden in past ages, nonetheless there were glimpses of it revealed in the Old Testament. We often refer to these passages as Messianic Passages. The very first one is in Genesis 3:14-15, “So the Lord God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, you *are* cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.’”

We see it also in the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, “Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

We see it again in Isaiah 9:6-7, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

There are many prophecies and signs in the Old Testament that pointed to Jesus the Messiah and to the mystery of the gospel. Although it was once hidden, it was made known by the apostles and prophets. Peter assures us that we can trust the word of God. In 2 Peter 1:19-21 he writes, “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as*

*they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.”

It is not an accident that the prophets wrote the things that they did because the Holy Spirit was guiding them to proclaim hidden things that would one day be revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, the mystery is no longer a mystery. It has been revealed through the holy apostles and prophets.

### **The Gentiles Fellow Heirs**

From the foundation of the world God was making provision for his plan of salvation for all men, both Jew and Gentile, who would be fellow heirs and partakers of His promise: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:26-29).

Both Jew and Gentile would be of the same body. In Ephesians 2:16 Paul stated, “...and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”

In Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul wrote, “And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

We should remind ourselves again that the body, the building, the family, and the kingdom are all the same group of people. They are the ones who are heirs of His promise in Christ. All of this comes to us through the gospel. All of this is the effective working of God’s power according to the grace of God given to Paul and the other apostles.

We conclude that this power demonstrated in the gospel of Jesus Christ is the salvation proclaimed throughout the New Testament. It is the message Jesus commissioned the Apostles and us to preach: “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded

you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.' Amen" (Matt.28:18-20).

It is God's Power to save as Paul proclaimed in Romans 1:16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

And thus, the mystery of past ages has now been made known through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All men are made one and are reconciled to God in Christ Jesus. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all. (Eph. 4:4-6).

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(Resources: Burton Coffman Commentary)

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## 45 Lessons Life Taught Me

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This was written by Regina Brett, 90 years old, of the Plain Dealer, Cleveland, Ohio.

"To celebrate growing older, I once wrote the 45 lessons life taught me. It is the most requested column I've ever written. My odometer rolled over to 90 in August, so here is the column once more:

- Life isn't fair, but it's still good.
- When in doubt, just take the next small step.
- Life is too short - enjoy it.
- Your job won't take care of you when you are sick. Your friends and family will.
- Pay off your credit cards every month.
- You don't have to win every argument. Stay true to yourself.
- Cry with someone. It's more healing than crying alone.
- It's OK to get angry with God. He can take it.
- Save for retirement starting with your first paycheck.
- When it comes to chocolate, resistance is futile.
- Make peace with your past so it won't screw up the present.
- It's OK to let your children see you cry.

- Don't compare your life to others. You have no idea what their journey is all about.
- If a relationship has to be a secret, you shouldn't be in it.
- Everything can change in the blink of an eye. But don't worry; God never blinks.
- Take a deep breath. It calms the mind.
- Get rid of anything that isn't useful. Clutter weighs you down in many ways.
- Whatever doesn't kill you really does make you stronger.
- It's never too late to be happy. But it's all up to you and no one else.
- When it comes to going after what you love in life, don't take no for an answer.
- Burn the candles, use the nice sheets, wear the fancy lingerie. Don't save it for a special occasion. Today is special.
- Over prepare, then go with the flow.
- Be eccentric now. Don't wait for old age to wear purple.
- The most important sex organ is the brain.
- No one is in charge of your happiness but you.
- Frame every so-called disaster with these words 'In five years, will this matter?'



- Always choose life.
- Forgive but don't forget. (I'm not sure about this one!)
- What other people think of you is none of your business.
- Time heals almost everything. Give time time.
- However good or bad a situation is, it will change.
- Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does.
- Believe in miracles.
- God loves you because of who God is, not because of anything you did or didn't do.
- Don't audit life. Show up and make the most of it now.
- Growing old beats the alternative -- dying young.
- Your children get only one childhood.
- All that truly matters in the end is that you loved.
- Get outside every day. Miracles are waiting everywhere.
- If we all threw our problems in a pile and saw everyone else's, we'd grab ours back.
- Envy is a waste of time. Accept what you already have not what you need.
- The best is yet to come...
- No matter how you feel, get up, dress up and show up.
- Yield.
- Life isn't tied with a bow, but it's still a gift."
- "Everything will be alright in the end. So if it's not alright, then it's not the end"

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Oklahoma City, OK

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## Reflections of the Psalms: Psalm 4

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One of the most important characteristics of David was that he was a man of prayer. Day and night, David was aware of the presence of his God, and he gained strength from that awareness. A good example of this is found in Psalm 4. This Psalm may have been written at night just prior to David going to bed.

Verse 1 shows David's attitude as he began to present his prayer to God. Although we may not use the same words, the thoughts should be just the same when we address God the Father in prayer. As David begins his petition to God, it is clear that he is dealing with serious problems. Yet, there is no hint of pity or resentment. Instead, his first thoughts were directed toward those that were marching against him. David was God's anointed. As such, it was the Lord's will that the people fol-

low him - not fight against him. David knew that, in spite of those against him, the Lord would hear him and answer his prayer.

In the next two verses, David may have directed his thoughts to others that may be with him. We know from 1 Kings that there were many times where David and his followers were outnumbered and fugitives. It would be easy for some to become discouraged, tired, and angry. But David wrote, "In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord." That principle would echo down through the centuries to Paul's words to the church in Ephesus, "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold".

The lesson of David's words are equally valid today. Yet, how often, when we are faced with a real problem, do we heed the words of David? How often do we go to bed while we are filled with distress and anger? Do we sleep well? Do we wake up rested? No.

Then, the next day, we try to deal with our problems ALONE, and the last thing we will experience will be peace and rest. David understood that. Many years of his life were spent as a fugitive. Yet, he could find rest! How?

David wrote . . . "offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord". In time of trial, the time we spend just before going to bed can be very important for us. A few moments or minutes need to be used to consider the day, and involve the Lord in helping us. In prayer, we can ask for help from the Lord. But do we REALLY believe that the Lord helps us? One way we can know the answer to this question is to examine our practice of prayer.

How often do you pray? Where does prayer fit into your thoughts in dealing with problems? If prayer is not one of the FIRST things that you do, then you are either robbing yourself of one of the greatest sources of aid available, or you do not really believe that prayer works. Think on these things! Think about David's dependence on the Lord, and compare it to **your** dependence upon the Lord.

Yes, the time before we prepare to go to sleep at night can be a time to ask for help. We can simply ask for peace to have a good night's rest. Many of David's problems were still present the next morning, and the same holds true for us. But, the Lord will help us to have a restful night. That alone can help us to meet and solve the problems we face.

Finally, in the evening we can get our priorities straight once again. We can pause to count our blessings, and turn the worry over to the Lord. **He** can handle it - we usually cannot.

We don't know all the thoughts that went through David's mind as he wrote this Psalm. But in spite of how tired he was, in spite of how much danger he was in, he remembered to trust and praise the Lord. We have the PROMISE of eternal life, because we are now children of God! How much more should we trust and praise our Father in Heaven?

In the last three verses, David wrote, "Many, LORD, are asking, 'Who will bring us prosperity?' Let the light of your face shine on us. Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound. In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety." Here are the words of a man of faith. Here are the words that every Christian should be able to echo, "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety." Praise God that we can also say that as His Children!

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Friday Funnies from Preacher Stuff – Oct. 22, 2021

A guy cut his thumb in his workshop so he drove down to the local emergency room. When he walked in he found himself in a hall with two doors, one marked "Adults" and other "Children." So, he went through the Adults door and found himself in another hall with two doors. One door said, "Above the waist" and the other door said, "Below the waist." He was holding his cut thumb up, so he went through the door marked, "Above the waist." He found himself in another hall with two doors. One door said, "Internal" and the other door said, "External." So he walked through the door that said external. He found himself in another hall with two doors. One said, "Major injury" and the other read, "Minor injury." So he walked through the door marked "minor" and found himself standing back out in the parking lot. So he got back in his car and drove home. His wife said, "Did you get any help at the hospital?" He said, "No, I didn't get any help, but I have never seen something that was so organized!"

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