

A Mystery Worth Revealing – Ephesians 3:2-

12

Pastor Colin Rieke – January 8, 2017

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. ⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

In 1946, a Bedouin shepherd, while looking for one of his flock, tossed a stone into a cave on the hillside. He was surprised to hear the sound of pottery breaking. After climbing up to see what it was, he discovered a number of pots, with their lids sealed, and contained within them were a number of ancient scrolls. This accidental discovery turned out to be one of the most significant archeological finds in the 20th century – more commonly known now as the Dead Sea scrolls. Over the next several years, historians and archeologists discovered more and more scrolls in different nearby caves. Many of these scrolls were far older, and thus more valuable, manuscripts of books of the Bible than were previously discovered. The most famous of which is the Isaiah scroll which is dated to 200-300BC.

But not all of the scrolls contained fragments of the Bible. There were other scrolls that told the story of the people who had kept and hid the scrolls. One of the more curious scrolls that has attracted a lot of attention was not made of parchment at all, but was made of copper. That's right, a scroll made of copper. But it's what's written on the scroll that has everybody curious. The copper scroll of Qumran is actually a treasure map. But it's not just a singular treasure trove, but a variety of hiding spots for treasure. For instance, here is one of the lines on this scroll: "In the salt pit that is under the steps: forty-one talents of silver. In the cave of the old washer's chamber, on the third terrace: sixty-five ingots of gold." In case you're wondering, no one has yet found any of this buried treasure. This is the mystery of the copper scroll of Qumran. A mystery as to where this treasure is buried. A mystery about whether the treasure existed at all. Unless the treasure is found someday, it will remain a mystery.

Whether you've heard about the copper scroll of Qumran or not, chances are, the mystery of the treasure is not going to keep you up at night. You might say there are far greater mysteries out there worth finding out before we go searching after this treasure. One mystery that had many people confused for a long time was a mystery mentioned in our second lesson this morning from Ephesians. It was a mystery that God had hidden from the world for a time. The mystery was what part the Gentiles are going to have in God's plan for his people. While it might not seem like a mystery to us, just try to imagine what this mystery would have appeared like to the Jews, God's original chosen people. Throughout the Old Testament, God repeated to the Jews that the Gentiles would have a part in God's plan. But exactly what part, people didn't know, that was the mystery.

In our second lesson for this morning, the apostle Paul wrote about this mystery revealed. A mystery that God had revealed when his Son Jesus came. The mystery God revealed is that the Gentiles, those who were not Jewish, would have an equal part in God's plan. This was captured in verse 6 of Ephesians 3, **"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs *together* with Israel, members *together* of one body, and sharers *together* in the promise in Christ Jesus."** This was A MYSTERY WORTH REVEALING in Paul's day, but it's also A MYSTERY WORTH REVEALING in our day as well. This MYSTERY IS WORTH REVEALING because:

1. God's wisdom is seen
2. God's riches are shown

(1)

When we take a look at the Bible, there's a number of simple divisions we can make. The Bible is divided into the Old and the New Testament. The Old Testament happened before Jesus was born, and the New Testament (during and) after Jesus was born. The first four books of the New Testament are called the gospels, they are the books that tell us about Jesus life, death and resurrection. Following that you have the book of Acts, which details the history of the early Christian church including some of the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. The remainder of the New Testament is a collection of letters, mostly written by that same Apostle Paul as he was making those missionary journeys Acts talks about. It is one of those letters of Paul that we take a look at this morning, a letter he wrote to the Ephesians – those living in the city of Ephesus.

The city of Ephesus rested on the western edge of modern day Turkey, it was a cultural center for its day, and it had its fair share of Jews living within the city. It was during Paul's second missionary journey that he stopped there and actually spent more time with the congregation in Ephesus than he did with any other place. However, Paul didn't write the letter of Ephesians from Ephesus, but likely from Rome. And he wrote this letter to give the church encouragement. To remind them what a precious treasure they had in the gospel.

Like I mentioned earlier, in this specific section of Ephesians, Paul is writing about a mystery. A mystery revealed, A MYSTERY WORTH REVEALING. To us living in 21st century America, it doesn't seem like that much of a mystery that Gentiles should have an equal part in God's plan to get to heaven. But to the early Christian church, this was a great mystery that had just been revealed. It was a mystery that

Paul had been privileged to share with the Ephesians. The mystery was revealed when God's wisdom was seen.

God's wisdom was seen in Jesus Christ. Just think, Paul says even the angels didn't know exactly what God had in mind. Who would have thought God would find a way to save man from what he had coming after he slapped God in the face with his unbelief and disobedience? Who would ever have thought God would plan to sacrifice his Son as the substitute for the human race? Who would ever have thought God would plan to use human beings like Paul, a former persecutor of the church, to tell about the Savior? Who would ever have thought their message would have the power to make spiritual corpses alive? God did! When his plan unfolded and they saw what resulted, the angels saw how wise he is. God's wisdom was not only seen, but it was seen working. Jesus working miracles, rising from the dead, Paul converting, people believing that we would think would have no desire to do so. This is God's wisdom.

But how often do we only pay lip service to God's wisdom? How often do we think that we have the right to question God's wisdom? How often do we think God's wisdom really isn't wise at all? On a day when we remember the victims of a tragic shooting, how easy is it to question God's wisdom in letting it happen? When you find out a relative has cancer, when a friend is in an accident, or when a child dies, how easy it is to ask where God was? It's easy for us to question God's wisdom when it comes to living our life. Oftentimes we just see a bunch of restrictive rules rather than wisdom for life.

But if left to our wisdom, tragedies would still continue to happen, people would continue to get cancer, and accidents will still occur, and surest of all, people will still die. This is why it's important to constantly go back to the mystery that Paul reveals. That's why it's A MYSTERY WORTH REVEALING even today. Not only that God chose the Gentiles in the same way he chose the Jews, but it's the mystery that he chose us in the first place. It's God's grace that took all of our foolishness away and has given us eternal life. Where is God when bad things happen in this world? Probably in the same place he was when his Son was dying on the cross. God's wisdom is not our wisdom, God's way is not our way, but also remember, and this is key, God has more wisdom in his little finger than all of the smartest people combined.

(2)

Now, knowing this, how does it affect your life? Knowing that God's wisdom in sending the Christ child, is the same wisdom he displays in your life today, what difference does that make in your life? A new year is a new opportunity to rededicate yourself as a Christian. Now, I'm not saying you need to get re-baptized, or re-confirmed, but to reevaluate your life as a Christian and its priorities.

Take a look at what Paul says in Ephesians, **"Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."** This is A MYSTERY WORTH REVEALING because God's riches are shown. For instance, if I were to tell you there was a \$100 bill taped underneath one of the benches you're sitting on right now, I'm pretty sure I can guess what the response will be. I think most, if not all, of you would take the time to at least look to see if it's under your seat, and then go looking for it under the others.

If that is our reaction to a \$100 bill, what should our reaction be to the riches of Christ? We have contained in God's Word something far more valuable than a \$100 bill. We have something far more valuable than a high paying job, we have something far more valuable than being able to drop those last few pounds of weight, we have something far more valuable than even the family and friends we love so dear. We have the unsearchable riches of Christ contained in this book.

But how much have you mined the unsearchable riches of Christ? How much have you plumbed the depths of the unsearchable riches of Christ? I'm afraid all too often we are content with some little nuggets of wisdom. We know the basics of Jesus coming to live and die for us, and we don't go any further. You know why? Because searching the unsearchable riches of Christ takes work, just like it would take work to look for that \$100 bill, just like it takes work to earn money, just like it takes work to drop a few pounds of weight. But if we are willing to work for those things, shouldn't we also be willing to search the riches of Christ? And is that work worth it? Absolutely. It is worth putting on your schedule: "Sunday, Church: 10AM" It is worth setting a timer for 10 minutes, just 10 short minutes, of quiet time alone with God in his Word. It is worth studying in depth 10, 2 or even just 1 single verse of the Bible. You know this already. I challenge you to apply what you know. Because it is worth it to mine the riches, to plumb the depths, to count the wealth that you have in the riches of Christ.

The copper scroll of Qumran has certainly attracted its fair share of treasure hunters, as they try to piece together the clues on the scroll that they hope will lead them to a treasure. But up until this time, it has all been for naught. As Christians, we too are treasure hunters. But we do not have to wonder if this treasure exists or not, we don't have to wonder where to find it. God's Word is our treasure map. A treasure map revealing the wisdom of God and the riches of Christ. I pray that in 2017 you will join me on this treasure hunt as we uncover the riches of Christ together. Amen.