

# I've Got A Secret

REVIEW: We have been working our way through the book of Ephesians. We have seen the incredible spiritual blessings that God has granted us, and Paul expand and fill in the details of some of those blessings. We have witnessed one of Paul's prayers for the Ephesians. We have seen what we WERE like (children of wrath) and how Christ changed that for us as individuals as well as for the Gentiles themselves.

INTRO: Today, we look at the deeper implications of the fact that God offered His blessings to the Gentiles. This passage overlaps the previous passage some, but it also expands it. The thing that makes these passages so personal to us is the fact the we are the ones being talked about - we are the Gentiles.

- I. Our problem in identification with these Gentiles
  - A. Someone raise your hand if you have ever been hated, despised, rejected, insulted or otherwise affected negatively because you are a Gentile
    1. No surprise there - no one!
    2. The fact is that we have never felt what the Gentiles went through with the Jews
  - B. The Jews are God's chosen people, but God planned all along to bless the Gentiles through the Jews
    1. But the Jews got big heads and thought they were the only ones God cared for - all others were second class citizens
    2. The Jews often would call them names, considering them "dogs"
    3. Sadly this attitude was drug into the church when it began
  - C. I say that to you because we live in a day when you can scarcely find a Jew in the Christian church - the Christian church is made up of Gentiles
    1. So we do not know what this is like - what this kind of division and hatred is like toward us
  - D. What's worse is we may know what it is like the other way - being the persecutors
    1. Some of you are old enough to have lived during the segregation and civil rights movement - the hatred that existed even in the church
    2. And if you think that is confined to a by-gone era, there are many Christians that think that gays don't belong in church
      - a) If that is where you are, realize that you are saying that gays are beyond the grace of God, and we cannot welcome them in the church
      - b) Not sure where you got that from - yes, the Bible declares homosexuality sinful
        - (1) But I promise you I can take the same Bible and point out sinful things in your life

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- (2) The grace of God is an amazing thing, and God can reconcile all people to Himself, and to each other
- E. I bring all of this up as we get started because the Gentiles (us) were the ones that were on the outside looking in - being made fun of by the Jews
- II. In the first verses you can almost hear Paul skipping around like a little child saying "I've got a secret! I've got a secret!" - v. 1-5
  - A. He calls himself a "prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles"
    - 1. Quick reminder/background
    - 2. Why was Paul put on trial before the Jewish council in Acts, which eventually led to his being put on trial before the Romans, and eventually it took him all the way to Rome?
      - a) He was accused of bringing a Greek into the Temple (which was a lie)
      - b) When he stood to defend himself he spoke in their language (Aramaic) and told them his life story (good little Jewish boy - trained as a Pharisee by G. but God met him on the road)
      - c) When he told them that God said He would send them to the Gentiles the crowd freaked out and Paul was arrested and taken to be flogged
    - 3. So when he says he is a prisoner for Christ for the sake of the Gentiles - he means that literally
      - a) He is most likely under house arrest in Rome at the time
      - b) But that is what precipitated his incarceration
  - B. Verse two Paul talks about the "administration of God's grace that was given to him..."
    - 1. What he is referring to here is the ministry he was given to the Gentiles
      - a) God literally (Acts 9, 21-22) gave Paul a ministry to Gentiles
    - 2. And this brings up an interesting point for us to camp on for a bit: Our view of ministry
      - a) I dare say that most people view ministry as what we give back to God
        - (1) The problem with that view is that ministry can seem like a burden when we think that way
        - (2) It can become a drudgery that instead of bringing life, can suck life from us
      - b) Paul's view of his ministry is that it was a grace from God Himself
        - (1) I'll be honest with you here, when I wrote this sermon I was having a horribly discouraging day
          - (a) Some things were already taking place that I kind of did to myself

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- (b) But then more things piled on, stresses about the church, and basically I was in a mood where I was frustrated, lonely, hurting, angry - viewing ministry as a chore not even close to a grace
- (2) Then I was preparing the sermon, doing my reading, and I came across this idea - God graces us with our ministry
  - (a) While I was still human and felt some of what I had
  - (b) It was a huge lift off my shoulders and helped adjust my perspective
  - (c) My ministry here is a grace and gift from God
- c) If ministry is a grace of God, and we know that grace empowers, why are there so few involved in ministry in church?
  - (1) The fact is, and I know this is strong, but I have to state it in a way that will wake some of you up - "You cannot be a Christian and be passive."
  - (2) According to Paul's view of ministry, God has given you a ministry - which means if you are not ministering one of two things is true of you
    - (a) Either you are not a believer, changed by the grace of God
    - (b) Or you are living in disobedience
- d) Action step for today: be praying for, and seeking out a ministry in the church
  - (1) If there is not one that you fit well with, then come talk with leadership about starting one
- C. Paul goes on to talk about his big secret - the mystery that God revealed to him
  - 1. It is a mystery that was not known to previous generations
    - a) When I say not known, I mean not understood - it was hidden
    - b) It was not understood by the Jews before Paul, but God has seen fit to reveal it at this time
    - c) Before we get into Paul's secret, here is another area to slow down and take in - Paul's attitude toward God's revelation
  - 2. Part of this revelation that Paul is referring to is the gospel
    - a) If we do not value the gospel as God's revelation, it will never impact our lives
    - b) We all have a value system
      - (1) Usually it is an unconscious thing - we don't even think through our value system
      - (2) In the Christian life value is given to all kinds of things
        - (a) Tradition

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- (b) A specific cause
- (c) The Christian subculture
- (d) And sadly we can adopt the values of the surrounding culture but forget what is the most valuable
- c) To really value the treasure that God has given us we need to re-focus on the gospel
  - (1) The grace of God shown to us in Christ's death and resurrection, our justification and adoption into God's family - that is all the first priority
  - (2) We need to be people who are all about the gospel - so much so that it defines EVERY part of who we are
- d) If this sounds too simple - like I am making this to be "just trust the gospel"
  - (1) Ponder for a while on words like "boundless" "unsearchable" "manifold"
    - (a) Manifold means multifaceted, many and various
    - (b) These are the words that are used to describe this gift - this gospel
  - (2) If the gospel is varied, multifaceted, and unsearchable what makes you think that you have a firm grasp on all of its implications for your life
  - (3) You can't mine the depths of the gospel and the multitude of ways it affects our lives
    - (a) I'll make no bones about this one
    - (b) All of us could do a better job about considering the implications of the gospel for our lives and putting them into action
- e) Make a commitment now to treasure the revelation of the gospel and dig to understand all of its implications in your life

## III. Then Paul gets to his secret - v. 6-11

- A. Now comes the big reveal - the mystery is: Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs with Israel
- B. Warren Wiersbe, the former pastor of Moody church in Chicago says it this way: "A mystery is a sacred secret that is unknown to unbelievers, but understood and treasured by the people of God"
  - 1. Now before you blaze past that remember the history we mentioned at the beginning of the service
  - 2. The Jews despised the Gentiles
    - a) They thought they were superior to all others because the One True God had picked them above all nations on earth

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- (1) Did you realize God is actually the One the told them and reminded them of that often?
  - (2) God meant it to be a reminder that He could have picked others that were stronger, or better in some way, but He picked them
  - (3) It should have been a humbling thing to Israel
  - (4) Instead of being humbled they used that as a point of pride to the point of superiority
3. This winds up being a great reminder to us that the gospel should never lead to a superiority complex
  - a) Think of history this way, if God had chosen to keep the Gentiles out of His graces, you and I would be eternally lost
  - b) God made a choice to include us, and that choice is being revealed to Paul as the missionary to the Gentiles
  - c) But God's choice should humble us that He included us
  - d) Which in practical reality should translate to things like
    - (1) Feeling as if some other race is beneath you
    - (2) Feeling as if some sinner that walks in the door is beneath you
      - (a) Reminder: the reality is you sin differently
    - (3) While we seek to keep this church as a family atmosphere, there is ALWAYS more room in the family
      - (a) Not reaching out and striking up relationships with new people in the church is flatly sinful
      - (b) If your mindset is "This is our church and you don't belong" you are sinning and you need to repent
4. The best word to describe this section of the passage is: unity
  - a) Paul is excited to be a part of the unification of the Jews and the Gentiles
    - (1) Unity is so much a part of this passage that I will agree with one of the commentators who wrote: "If we do not proclaim unity, we have not proclaimed the gospel."
    - (2) Sadly most people have experienced disunity in churches, which explains so much of why people leave churches
      - (a) Egos and personality conflicts
      - (b) The worship wars
      - (c) Pet projects in ministry
      - (d) What color will the carpet be - the list could go on and on
  - b) Unity is not the goal of a church, but it is the by-product of the gospel!
    - (1) Same commentator: "If we do not live unity, we have missed the gospel's impact."

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- (2) Of all people on the face of the earth, we have the greatest principle to unify around ever: the gospel
- (3) In Christ we are drawn together into one body
- c) This is something that the church needs to take heart and allow this by-product of the gospel to help define it
- d) I would say that this is one that in general we do fairly well in
  - (1) We can always explore unity deeper and its full implications
  - (2) But by the grace of God we have not seen the kind of disunity that marks many churches
- C. As Paul speaks of this mystery revealed he calls himself “less than the least of the Lord’s people”
  - 1. Paul has actually made up a word here: “leaster”
  - 2. Doubtless, Paul has in mind his former days of persecuting God’s church
  - 3. He knew that he was not entitled to be let into the family, yet God chose Him
    - a) Not just to be a part of the family...
    - b) But to have a ministry to the Gentiles
      - (1) Again, we circle back around to this idea of having a ministry
      - (2) There is no such thing as a Christ follower without a ministry
  - 4. But this is not all about Paul’s lack of worthiness, but about his experience of grace and the purpose behind it
- D. The text gives us three reasons that this grace and ministry was given to Paul - v.8b-11
  - 1. The first is to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ
    - a) So if the mystery is that the Gentiles are accepted, heirs with Israel, part of the body of Christ, and share in the promise of Christ - that needs to be announced and proclaimed
    - b) Enter Paul - that is the first reason God displayed this grace to Paul
    - c) That is part of the reason that God graced Paul with this ministry
    - d) For Paul to proclaim the “boundless riches of Christ” that is a direct reference to the grace which God is showing
  - 2. The second reason mentioned is “to make plain the administration of the mystery”
    - a) That’s a funny sounding way of saying, “make sure people know how this happened”
      - (1) How did this mystery come to be
      - (2) How was it revealed?
    - b) This is pointing back at salvation history
      - (1) The fact that God, before the world was founded, chose a people for Himself

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- (2) In the beginning that people was made up by the Israelites
- (3) However, even from Genesis 12 when God was speaking with Abraham, the Gentiles would be getting in on God's promises and grace as well
- c) One of the reasons for this grace that has been given was to show How God was redeeming people for Himself in Christ
  - (1) Through the Messiah's death, resurrection and ministry
- 3. The third purpose really flows out of the first two purposes:
  - a) Because Paul is announcing the boundless riches in Christ
  - b) Because He was showing everyone where the plan started and how it was God's plan all along
  - c) It would be a display through the church of the wisdom of God
  - d) The manifold wisdom of God
    - (1) That term unto itself should excite our hearts and bring us comfort
    - (2) It is an expression that points clearly to the many sided, the various manners and expressions of the wisdom of God
      - (a) To put it very plainly, God is far smarter than you would ever hope to be
      - (b) We should be excited and trust in that rather than fight against it
  - e) Here is the weird part: God's wisdom is displayed to the rulers and authorities in heavenly realms
    - (1) So what does this mean? How are we the display to the rulers and authorities in heavenly realms?
      - (a) First, who are these rulers and authorities
      - (b) Considering the other times you encounter that term in Ephesians it is referring to the evil powers - seems like that is appropriate here
    - (2) Most scholars believe that it is the very existence of the church that stands as a display of God's wisdom
      - (a) The fact that God can and has united Jews and Gentiles into one body - His own, it shows the wisdom of God
      - (b) Eventually all things will be brought under control and reconciled through Christ
      - (c) The church stands as the announcement to the opposing forces that they are on the losing side - God will reconcile all things to Himself in the same manner - through Christ
- 4. Again, we have something to slow down and take a look at
  - a) Most people have an incorrect view of the church

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- (1) Church is the place where we have services, we meet with like minded folks, we talk about God
    - (a) All great things
    - (b) But elevate your thinking
  - (2) Church is not just those things that we keep bound here in this life, church is the place in which the purposes of God are displayed to the world, where unity enters in
    - (a) God is seeking to work out His purposes in this world
    - (b) He will use His church to do so
    - (c) You can jump on board with what God is doing through the church or miss out
  - b) Personally I would rather correct my view of the church, understand that God has purposes that He is working out, and be a part of it all
- IV. Paul ends on a positive note in negative circumstances - v. 12-13
- A. The translation in the NIV weakens the force of the original
    - 1. Literally it is "In whom we have boldness and access in confidence through his faithfulness" (or faith in Him)
    - 2. Do you see the difference?
      - a) The NIV is weaker, placing the focus more on us
      - b) The literal shows the strength of Christ, in whom we have our confidence
  - B. The main point is still the same that we can approach God with confidence because of being in Christ
  - C. This also leads well into verse 13
    - 1. Our confidence is in Christ and because of what He did in reconciling us to Himself and to each other
    - 2. So please don't be discouraged because of Paul's sufferings for Christ
  - D. The last two verses leave us with two more lessons for us
    - 1. First, we have every confidence to be able to approach God, having been reconciled in Christ
    - 2. Second, don't be discouraged
      - a) Paul never diminished his hardships
      - b) He never focused on them - His focus was always on Christ
      - c) Paul was always aware of God's larger plan
      - d) Paul's point in these last two verses is that the privileges of working for Christ and having access to God outweigh any difficulty
    - 3. For us, our hardships will probably not be like Paul's
      - a) But when we truly identify with the cross, hardships will come in some form



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- b) From verse 12-13 we may go through hardship, but never alone - we always have access to God through Christ