

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 3:1-21

Key Verse: 3:4-6

"In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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. 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."

In chapter one, Paul taught us the word "predestination"; God decided first to give his one and only Son to save men from their sins and bring them back to his kingdom by his grace. Paul believed basic truth firmly in an uncomfortable prison cell. As we know, Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years. There, many Jews and intelligent Greeks heard the gospel, as did people in the province of Asia. When Paul proclaimed the gospel of Jesus, unlikely Greeks believed in his gospel. Many who had practiced witchcraft and sorcery believed in Jesus. It was indeed unbelievable, even for Paul, that the work of God converted people so mightily. Through the work of God in Ephesus, Paul saw a vision to evangelize the whole world. Acts 19:21 says, "After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. 'After I have been there,' he said, 'I must visit Rome also.'" Paul could not visit Rome right away. So he wrote a letter. According to his plan, he visited Jerusalem with two purposes. First was to report to his Jewish co-workers in Jerusalem how God had been working in the Gentiles. Some disciples did not know whether they had to be happy or be embarrassed to hear about the gospel work among the Gentiles. Once, when Peter was eating with a Gentile sheep at the same table, a bigoted Jew came to them. Then Peter was greatly embarrassed (Gal 2:12-14). Second was to deliver relief money and food provided by the Gentile converts. Paul had a father-like compassion on his people in Jerusalem. So he and his Gentile converts carried heavy relief goods on their backs, and traveled a long distance, and finally arrived in Jerusalem. Finally, because of several bigoted Jews' accusations that Paul, a Jew, associated with the Gentiles, he was imprisoned in Jerusalem. Later, he was transferred to Roman prison.

First, my insight into the mystery of Christ (1-5).

Look at verse 1. "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...." Look at 1:1. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus." Paul really wanted to consolidate the new converts' faith. He wanted to talk about many things. But he was in

prison. Paul thought that his being in prison is precisely the mystery of God. Look at verses 2-3. "Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly." In verse 2, "the administration of God's grace" means God's wisdom in carrying out world salvation work. In verse 3, the word "mystery" is the counsel of God, unknown to man except by revelation, especially concerning his saving work and ultimate purpose in history. In this chapter, the word "mystery" is repeated four times (3,4,6,9). Why did Paul use the word "mystery" so many times? It is because God's world salvation plan is so glorious and precious that he described his idea with the word "mystery."

Actually, this mystery is known to his chosen people. Exodus 19:5,6a says, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." God's mystery was that his chosen people would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation so that they might spread the knowledge of God to the people of the world, so that they might be shepherds and spiritual fathers and mothers who would teach the Bible to each person, one by one, so that the world would overflow with the word of God. God's heart's desire, in other words, God's mystery, was that all people of the whole world would hear the news that they could learn the word of God and quench their thirsty souls. Isaiah 2:3 describes the mystery of God so wonderfully. It says, "Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." God's mystery was declared to his chosen people that his chosen people will proclaim the knowledge of God to the people of the whole world and that the world would be like a paradise. Isaiah 9:6,7 poetically describe the mystery of God, that is the fulfillment of world mission purpose. It says, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he 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. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

Right after 430 years of divine training in Egypt, God's chosen people could understand generally the mystery of God, the world mission purpose. But during the 40 years of wilderness training, they became like communists. They could get manna and quail regularly, so they didn't have to work hard. God wanted to motivate his chosen people to grow up to be mature shepherds and shepherdesses. But they became very habitual and lazy and men and women of complaints. So the first

generation all died in the desert except General Joshua and Caleb. As God promised, he gave them the promised land, flowing with milk and honey. There, they should remember the mystery of God, the world salvation purpose and conquer all the enemies with the spirit they had when they crossed the Red Sea as on dry ground. And with the Spirit of God they should conquer the invincible fortress of Jericho. They continued to conquer the promised land. But when the twelve tribes could settle down in beautiful locations, they did not fight anymore. They just ignored the scattered enemies, obvious and hidden. What is worse, they began to like milk and honey more than God. When they did so, the mystery of God, the world mission purpose, left from their hearts. The mystery was there. But they could not see it, because of their worldly way of life.

Why does Paul talk about this inscrutable story again and again? It is because Paul really wanted to plant God's heart in the hearts of the Ephesians as well as in all other churches. Here we learn Paul was crying, not because of his old and tired body, and not because of his uncomfortable prison life. He was crying so that somehow God's heart for world salvation might be planted in the hearts of Ephesians especially. Paul's faith is really great. Ephesus was comparable to modern Las Vegas. But Paul had faith that God could use such people to accomplish the world mission purpose.

Second, in Christ, Israel and the Gentiles alike become the heirs (6).

At that time, the people of Israel thought they would become the heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ and inherit the kingdom of God all by themselves. But Paul urges that the Gentiles also can become the heirs of God like Israel. This story seems to be simple. But in history, there are always masters and servants. Masters are honored and servants are harshly treated and used up until they die. After World War I, the French colonized Vietnam. French people took away a good many raw materials and fruits to their country. And at the same time, French people treated Vietnamese like slaves. There is a story. One day, a French army officer was on horseback to enjoy the fresh morning air. He was a French army officer, but he was poorly educated. On the way, he passed a noble Vietnamese, a man of great learning. The French officer dismounted and beat the old Vietnamese scholar almost to death, because the Vietnamese scholar did not bow his head and did not say, "Good morning, honorable French officer." At that time, all the Vietnamese ought to call the French "honorable," regardless of their status. During World War II, the French army went back to their own country. After World War II, the French again attempted to colonize Vietnam. But they lost 80,000 soldiers at Dien Bien Phu. One morning, they surrendered and went back to their country. If we study Indian history, there are many interesting stories. One is the Indians' caste system with over 3,000 classes. The caste system is inflexible.

According to rank of caste, people become honorable or dishonorable. Those who are in higher castes are very proud and never make progress. Those who are in the lower castes never try to learn in their fatalism. In history, so many heroic Indians tried to destroy this caste system. But they failed. Another interesting story is that they do not have enough food supply. But people in both the higher caste and the lower caste make cows and oxen very unhappy. The cows and oxen were born to be eaten by man, as man was born to live for the glory of God. But Indian people think these animals mysterious, and they cannot get out of their fixed idea. However, God is working mightily through Missionary Jimmy Lee in New Delhi, India, with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a pretty big newspaper company. Among the workers, there is no distinction between boss and employee in terms of courtesy. Employees say to their higher boss, "okay," or "yeah," when they have to answer. The bosses also say, "okay," or "yeah," not knowing these words are street talk. Outwardly, it shows their intimate relationships. But they are not really. If a boss does not like a certain employee, he records in his journal all his mistakes. Soon, the employee is called to the boss's office and gets an envelope in which a dismissal letter is cordially written.

Here, the word "mystery" is introduced, which is indeed glorious and everlasting. Look at verse 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." In this verse, Paul tells us that even the Gentiles become heirs together with Israel. In Paul's time, only Paul could understand this mystery, that is, God's heart, that the Gentiles, the people of the whole world, would be heirs with Israel. It is indeed marvelous and glorious when we think about the word "mystery" that Paul tells us.

As we know well, there was a Samaritan woman. Samaritans were despised by the people of Judea. Samaritan men despised Samaritan women. And among Samaritan women, the Samaritan woman mentioned in John's gospel chapter 4 was despised and completely isolated because of her wayward life. In short, the chosen people Israel could not become one, but despised one another. However, Jesus approached the Samaritan woman where there was a well, situated in the valley between the Mountains of Gerizim and Ebal. Jesus was tired after a day's journey, and his disciples went out to get some food. But Jesus, out of his compassion, asked the Samaritan woman's favor by saying, "Will you give me a drink?" (Jn 4:7) Then she answered, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" She described the split situation of the country, and the enmity between them so well. But Jesus continued to help her, until Jesus could say, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I

give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Then she said, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (Jn 4:13-15).

Look at verse 6 again. "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." When we prayerfully read this verse we find that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel. We believe that Paul really wanted to say to the Ephesians that they are going to be heirs with Israel. At that time, Gentiles were regarded not to be saved, simply because they were Gentiles. But Paul says in his mystery that Gentiles will be the heirs of God together with Israel, even though they were like animal men, even though they thought they were born accidentally and they live their lives according to their fate. The Gentiles were sorrowful even though they were kings and princesses. Cleopatra might be a good example of this. But they would become heirs of God together with Israel.

What does "heir" mean? Biblically, "heir" means the children of God and rulers of the whole world forever. 2 Timothy 2:11-12a says, "Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him...." Romans 8:17 says, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Even if they receive eternal life, that's more than enough. But they receive in the Son the grace of Jesus (the forgiveness of sins), and eternal life and the kingdom of God as their inheritance. Not only so, they share glory and power with Jesus forever. What a glorious blessing it is! Now we know why Paul talked about the mystery of God so much. Let's read verse 6 once again. "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."

In verses 7-13, Paul applies the mystery of the gospel to himself. In this part, Paul gives his own testimony to the Ephesians. He became a servant of God by God's grace (7). He was not worthy of being a servant of God because he persecuted the church of Christ. But God chose him as an apostle for the Gentiles. Especially, Paul urges that the mystery of God was enlightened to him uniquely, only to him. It is obvious that Paul saw a vision that the mystery of God is shown to the Ephesians that they might all be spiritual generals in conquering the world with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Finally Paul wanted to encourage them not to be discouraged because of his imprisonment. His imprisonment is rather their glory, because it is the process of fulfilling the world salvation plan (7-13).

Third, Paul's prayer and vision (14-21).

In this part, Paul basically prays that all the discordant elements should be brought into one in Jesus. For this, Paul knelt down and prayed. In this prayer we learn two things.

First, Paul prays that by the love of God their inner man may be strengthened. Generally, worldly people think Christians look weak and weird. But that's not true. Christians are gentle, but very strong. Here, Paul prays that the Ephesians would be very strong in their inner man. How can they be strong? They can be strong by God's love. Look at verse 16. "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...." In this verse, the phrase, "his glorious riches," is the same as the love of God. Many people think life is very difficult and sorrowful. But that is not true. They are always sorrowful and difficult because they are weak. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In this verse, "sinners" are the same as the weak. People have many ideas. One of our missionaries wanted to become the Governor of Illinois when he first came to Chicago. But many people thought it would be a great success for him if he would become a mailman, because he was weak, begging his wife's love all the time. One young man wanted to be the President of the United States of America. But he still remains unemployed, and as a weakling, for he does not know the love of God. When we study the Bible prayerfully, our God is all-powerful God. At the same time, our God is the God of love. When we study the Bible prayerfully, we learn that we can be clothed with the power of God when we accept the love of God. God's love is stronger than the hatred of Satan. Let's read verses 18-19. "...may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Here we learn that the love of God is infinite. We must do our best to know its four dimensions: height, depth, width and length. Especially, in these verses, Paul clearly manifests that the love of God is the power of God. And one who has tasted the love of God can be a powerful man in the sight of God. Finally God fulfilled world salvation purpose by sending his one and only Son to this world to die for the sin of the world. Men are too weak to practice love. But when we accept God's love through his Son, we can be powerful. One young man could not love his wife, simply because he had no power in his inner man to love his wife. Then his wife did not respect him, thinking he is a weakling, despite his big mouth. When Father Polycarp was 84 years old, he was arrested on account of Jesus' name. The enemies of God tied him at the stake and demanded that he deny the name of Jesus. Father Polycarp had no physical strength due to his old age. But he was strong in his inner

man. Father Polycarp said to them, "My Lord Jesus has loved me all my life. How can I defy my Lord Jesus' name?" Soon smoke and fire from the sticks flared up. There was a poor Korean pastor for helpless lepers. One day two radical communist men came and shot his two sons to death. They were soon arrested. Then Reverend Sohn went to the CIA and took them on the condition that he would adopt them as his sons. People wondered at it. Then he said, "Our Lord adopted me when I was a sinner, so I adopt them as my own sons."

Second, we must have faith in the promise of God. Look at verse 17. "...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love...." This means that we must accept one word of God and keep it until it takes root in our hearts and grows like an oak tree. Colossians 2:6,7 says, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." There are many kinds of human ideas. During the last 2,000 years, some human ideas grew better. In this situation, orthodox Jews wanted to keep their rituals. So they suffered more than enough. But they had faith in the Messiah. So they overcame the world. Paul urges again to have one word of God in verse 17, "...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love...." We must have faith in the word of God, as is written in Luke 21:33, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

May God bless you to be a man of mystery. May God bless you to have the heart of God. May God bless you to have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Most of all, may God bless you to have the love of God in your heart so that you may be strong.