

Have any of you seen the T.V. show “Unsolved Mysteries?” It was most popular when I was in grade school, but I hear they ran it until 2010, and they’re still showing reruns on some channels. If you haven’t seen it, that’s okay – the title says it all. The show was all about mysteries that, despite all our best research, haven’t been solved. Some were from ancient history – how they built the pyramids, whether Atlantis ever existed. Others were more recent – cases of missing persons who seemed to vanish into thin air. Still others touched on the supernatural – ghost ships and U.F.O. sightings.

I loved that show. Even though it sometimes gave grade school me nightmares, I still watched it. There’s something about mysteries that captures our imagination and piques our curiosity. Sure, questions like, “Who built the pyramids?” or “What happened to Jimmy Hoffa?” don’t have much impact on your life – so they don’t keep you up at night. But they make for good entertainment.

Of all the mysteries out there, though, one is the greatest. This one is certainly not entertainment. No, this is a mystery that has kept human beings in every age up at night - one that doesn’t just impact your everyday life, but your eternity. And it’s a mystery that, despite man’s best research, would most certainly have been left “unsolved” if God hadn’t revealed it to us. And he has! Paul’s message to you this morning is “A Gracious God Makes Known the Greatest Mystery...” to you, and through you.

<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> 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, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup> 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, <sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

*I. To you*

You heard Paul use the word four times in those verses, didn’t you? **Mystery**. But maybe I should explain how he’s using it. He’s not referring to something no one can ever know, or something you have to figure out on your own. He’s talking about something no one could ever

know or figure out on their own...something God had to reveal to us. The mystery Paul is referring to is the answer to this question: How do sinners get right with God?

That there is a God, that I am a sinner, that I need to get right with – that's not so much a mystery. Because that's something everyone can already know. In catechism class, we call it the natural knowledge of God. Everyone can look up at the stars in the night sky and know there's a Maker, and that he's way more powerful than we are. And everyone has a conscience which tells us our Creator has standards for what is right and what is wrong and doing what is wrong angers him and earns us his punishment.

But, Paul says, there were things going on behind the curtain that we couldn't see....things **hidden in God's heart for ages past** that we didn't know. Everyone can know sin angers God...but that God still loves us completely, despite our sin? Everyone can know that sin earns us God's punishment...but that God's plan was to become one of us to suffer the punishment we deserved, so that he could freely give us what we don't deserve? That it's not up to me to get right with God...that Jesus makes me so right with God I can approach him with freedom and confidence? That **mystery of Christ** is one that no amount of stargazing or soul-searching ever could have discovered.

So a gracious God pulled back the curtain and revealed it. Paul writes that this mystery **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.** God's been revealing the mystery in every generation since Eden, and Old Testament people who believed it were every bit as saved as we are. But, Paul says, you and I have a special privilege. The Savior they saw in part and in promise, God reveals to you in full and fulfillment in the gospels.

Not just that he came to save, but who he came to save. Not just the Jews who were waiting for him, but Gentiles who weren't. He may have been a Jew, born among Jews, who lived and died in Israel, but God always had it in his heart to send a Savior for *all*. And he reveals that mystery in his word – that he's your Savior, too. That **through the gospel we Gentiles are heirs together with** believing **Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.**

Friends, I guess our first response to all this is simply to thank God for revealing this mystery to us. Because it can happen so easily that we take it for granted. We can forget that there was a time in each of our lives when we did not know it, and if we had died then, we would have been lost. That there was a time in the not so distant past when our Gentile ancestors were worshipping stones and wood, and if God hadn't sent people like Paul out into the world to make the mystery known, we'd be doing the same.

We can stop appreciating how wonderful it is that God lays bare his saving secrets in the bible sitting on our shelves, and then our bibles just gather dust on the shelves. We can think that since we already know the mystery, it isn't all that important to keep hearing it. We can lose our awe of the miracle it is, so as God pulls back the veil in church to reveal it to us again, we listen with a yawn, or hardly listen at all.

Friends, when we see the lengths God went to make this mystery known...and compare that with the shabby way we treat it...well, it makes you wonder if God revealed it to the right

people. We don't deserve this! We deserved for God to keep the curtain closed and leave us in the dark forever.

So, isn't it amazing? That this morning, he's pulling back the veil again? Laying bare what was hidden on his heart one more time, just so you can know it and believe it? That even though your sins angered him, he still loved you completely, in spite of them. That even though your sins earned you his punishment, his love led him to become one of us and suffer the punishment you deserved, so that he could give you what you don't – forgiveness. That he didn't just do that for some, he did it for all, and that means he most certainly did it for you, even you. That he did his job so well that there's nothing left for you to do, and no bit of anger left on God's heart toward you – in Jesus, you can approach God with freedom and confidence.

What grace, that God is still revealing this greatest mystery to us! Paul wants you to know what a privilege it is. Every time God reveals the mystery, Paul says he's making known the **unsearchable riches of Christ**. God is taking you by the hand and pulling you into a room packed with the treasures Jesus won for you. Every time you're there, there's something new to show – there's no end to them. And every time you're there, he says, "All yours."

Every time God reveals the mystery, he's showing you his **manifold wisdom**. That word means multi-faceted, multi-colored. The mystery of God's love for you in Christ is like a diamond with facets, and every time God shows it to you, you see a new color, a new beauty to it.

## *II. Through you*

But there's another privilege Paul writes about here. It, too, is a gift of God's grace. <sup>7</sup> **I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.** <sup>8</sup> **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.** When Paul was Saul, an unbeliever and persecutor of God's people, Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and graciously revealed the greatest mystery to him – brought him to faith and saved him. But he also gave him another undeserved gift: Now Jesus would use Paul to graciously reveal the greatest mystery to others.

But, here's the thing: It wasn't just Paul, and it wasn't just pastors like him, that God gives this gift to. Did you hear what Paul said? **His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.** The church is all believers, which means it most certainly includes you. This grace is yours: To reveal the greatest mystery to others.

And it really is a gracious privilege. God doesn't need us for this – he could get the work done all himself. But it brought him such great joy to reveal it to you. And he wants you to know the same joy. Of walking someone into the room packed with the unsearchable riches of Christ, and saying, "All yours." Of holding up for them that multi-faceted love of God so they can see its many-colored beauty, too. Of telling them Jesus isn't just your Savior, he's their Savior, too. Amen.