

Ephesians 3:2-12

Dear Fellow Stewards of God's Mysteries,

Do you like reading a good mystery? The best ones are the kind that you really can't figure out until you get to the end, but then you see how everything fit together. At the end of the book you finally see how the author was giving you clues all along, but you just didn't put it together until the author revealed it to you. Once you get it, you want to talk to someone about it. You want to tell those who have not read the book to read it. You want to talk to someone who has read the book so that you can discuss the different clues and how clever the author was.

I think you can see some parallels with what Paul writes to the Ephesians. In a sense, God gave the world a mystery. He revealed the ending first. He promised a Savior to the world who would be born of a woman and yet be able to crush the power of Satan. But exactly how and when he was going to do this he kept hidden. Over the centuries he began giving clues about the how and the when of this coming savior. As people looked back over the clues that he caused to be recorded in Scriptures they learned that the Savior would be a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah and the line of David. They learned that he would be a king, but that he would also suffer. They learned that he would be born of a virgin and even that he would be from Bethlehem. But, as we see from the Scribes and Pharisees who knew the clues best and discussed them constantly, it was easy to get off the track. It was easy to focus on the clues that talked about his kingship and power and forget about the clues that talked about his suffering.

Having grown up in the sect of the Pharisees and even taken classes under the great Rabbi Gamaliel, Paul had focused on the wrong clues. When he heard Stephen's speech accusing him and others of resisting he Holy Spirit he was happy that Stephen was stoned to death. He was determined to do whatever he could to wipe out anyone who professed what Stephen had preached, that Jesus was the promised Messiah. He was convinced that he knew the clues God had given about the Savior and he was certain that Jesus of Nazareth didn't fit those clues; that Jesus was an imposter, a false Messiah.

Paul didn't get that Jesus was the promised Savior, and he never would have gotten it, if Jesus himself had not appeared to him in all his glory while he was traveling to Damascus to persecute believers. The one Paul thought was dead, the one he thought was an imposter, who couldn't possibly fit the clues God gave in his word, was not only alive, but glorified and speaking to him from heaven! Now Paul got it. Now he was enabled by the Holy Spirit to put it all together; to see that even though Jesus had been crucified he was a king, more powerful than he had ever imagined. Now he understood that his suffering was what had been pictured by every sacrifice made at the temple; it was a sacrifice of atonement, a payment in full for the sins of the world including his own.

Paul says, **I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.**

It's the same for each of us. The Bible clearly teaches that we are all like Paul. Because of our sinful nature we can't figure out the clues even if we think we know them and have them memorized. Because of our sinful nature we will get off the track and concentrate on a clue or two that seems to make sense to us or that would benefit us the most physically. Like Paul, we need an epiphany. We need the Holy Spirit to remove the scales from our eyes so that we can see the truth about ourselves, that we are lost and condemned sinners; and the truth about

Jesus, that he has fulfilled every clue God gave perfectly; that his life, death and resurrection were what was necessary to win our eternal salvation.

Jesus may not have appeared to us in glory and asked us why we were persecuting him, but, if we believe in him as the promised Savior, our Savior from sin, it is only because the Holy Spirit has enabled us to believe. You and I must say with Paul, **I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.** Or as Paul wrote in the previous chapter, **it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this** (your whole salvation including faith itself is) **not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.**

When Jesus called Paul to faith he not only revealed to him that he was the fulfillment of all the clues God had revealed in scripture about his kingship and his suffering and resurrection, he revealed something else that was difficult for Paul, and the other disciples who were Jews to believe. He revealed to Paul, and through him to us, that Jesus is not just the Savior of the Jews, but of all people. That through Jesus, non-Jews **are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.** Israel in the New Testament is not a political state or those who trace their ancestry to Abraham, but it is all who believe in Jesus as their Savior. And, he called Paul to be the one to head up the effort to make this mystery known to all non-Jews. **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.**

Paul was a good steward of the mysteries of God. He poured himself into preaching the gospel of salvation by grace through faith and the equality of Jews and Gentiles in Jesus to as many as possible. You know his story, how he traveled through Turkey and Greece and Italy, and even very likely as far as Spain. He persisted in his preaching even when he was persecuted for it. In fact, he was writing this letter to the Ephesians while he was under house arrest in Rome. Nothing, not even the threat of execution, was going to keep Paul from administering the grace God had given him; nothing was going to keep him from proclaiming the gospel to all people and especially to the gentiles. Paul says that **God's intent is that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

By calling us to faith and revealing to us the mystery that Jesus of Nazareth, by his life, death and resurrection has fulfilled all the clues given in the Old Testament and is the one and only Savior, God has made us stewards of his mysteries. He has revealed to us that everyone who believes, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, whoever is brought to believe in Jesus, **is an heir together with Israel, member together of one body (a part of the body of Christ), and a sharer together in the promise in Christ Jesus.** He has given us insight into God's **unsearchable riches and his manifold wisdom.** If we are to be good stewards of these things, we need to pour ourselves into sharing the gospel of salvation by grace through faith with as many as possible.

Just think of the honor and privilege God has given us! He has chosen to make his mysteries known to others through us, through the church! And not only to other people, he has chosen to make his mysteries known in a way that shows how manifold or multifaceted his wisdom is to rulers and authorities in heaven, to the angels. He has chosen to do this through us! Doesn't

that make you say with Paul, “through me? I am less than the least of all God’s people! Through me?” Yes, through you!

Maybe that’s why Paul concludes the section with these words, **In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.**

If we are good and faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, like Paul, we will face opposition. We will be tempted to wonder if it’s worth it. No one seems to listen. No one seems to share our joy and excitement over the gospel. Some laugh and make fun of us. Others try to put a stop to our work. It’s easy to become discouraged and fail to be good stewards of God’s mysteries. What a blessing and encouragement to know that in Jesus, we may approach God and ask for his help, his guidance, his strength, to do what he has asked us to do, and his forgiveness when we fail to be good stewards of his mysteries.

You gotta love a good mystery. The best mystery ever has been revealed to you. Jesus is God and Man, just who he needed to be to be the Savior of the world. In him we are all equally sinners and equally saved. If we look to talk about a good mystery we have read with others, certainly we will want to talk about this greatest mystery with everyone!

God has made you a steward of his mysteries. He has revealed his mystery in Jesus to you. He has called you to be a good steward of his mystery and to share what has been revealed to you with others.