

The Mystery – An Old Story Made New

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Ephesians 3:1-6

2:²² **In him** you also are being **built together** into a **dwelling place for God by the Spirit**.

3:1 For this reason **I, Paul, the prisoner of the Messiah Jesus** on behalf of you **Gentiles** –
 ² assuming that you heard (understood) the **universal plan** (*oikonomia*)
 of the **grace** of God **given to me for you**, –

³ **the mystery** was made known to me by **revelation**, as I have just written briefly.

⁴ By reading this, you can perceive my understanding of **the mystery of the Messiah**,
 ⁵ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men
 as it has **now been revealed** to his holy **apostles and prophets by the Spirit**,

⁶ that the Gentiles are sharers of the inheritance,
 and sharers of the same body,
 and sharers of the promise in Messiah Jesus through the gospel.

...¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Ephesians 1:7-10

⁷ In him we have the **redemption** through his blood, the **forgiveness** of trespasses,
according to the riches of his **grace**,⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all **wisdom and insight**⁹ by
making known to us the **mystery of his will**, according to his good pleasure, which he set forth
in him¹⁰ as a **universal plan** (*oikonomia*) for the **fullness of times**, to **sum up together all**
things in the Messiah, things in the heavens and things on earth in him.

Ephesians 6:19-20

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will **fearlessly**
make known the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am **an ambassador in chains**. Pray that
I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Galatians 1:11-17

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that **the gospel** I preached is **not of human**
origin.¹² I did not receive it from any human source, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it
through a revelation of Jesus Christ.¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in
Judaism, how intensely **I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it**.¹⁴ I was
advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was **extremely**
zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

¹⁵ **But when God**, who set me apart from birth and **called me by his grace**, was pleased
¹⁶ to **reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles**, my immediate
response was not to consult any human being.¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who
were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

Colossians 1:24-26

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my **sufferings** for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is
lacking in **the Messiah's afflictions for the sake of his body**, that is, the **church**,²⁵ of which I
became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make
the word of God fully known,²⁶ **the mystery** hidden for ages and generations but **now revealed**
to his saints.

Prisoner of the Messiah

In Eph 3:1 Paul is ready to shift the direction of his letter. He is about to begin an amazing prayer (3:14) and a challenge to a new way of life (4:1). As Apostle (1:1) he has been lifting their eyes to see the great vision of God's purposes for the universe brought together in the Messiah Jesus (1:10), the miracle of their own personal new life in him (2:5), and the creation of a new humanity in him with hostility destroyed (2:15), a new temple (2:22).

He now re-identifies himself as a prisoner ("in chains" 6:20). Traditionally he is thought to be writing from Rome during his imprisonment there. But if this Gospel is so powerful, why is Paul in prison under Roman power, threatened with death? One could lose heart (3:13).

Paul realizes that he has to pause and explain. He wants them to see his suffering (and their sufferings and discouragement) in a new light. Not as defeat but as the positive working of the Gospel. He is not suffering because of evil things he has done. Just the opposite. It is because of his transformed life in bringing together Jews and Gentiles in the churches that he was arrested. He is not Rome's prisoner; he is the Messiah's prisoner. But why?

The work and love of Jesus reached its climax in Jesus' suffering and death on the cross for us. That deep truth stamps the life of all of Jesus' followers who "take up the cross" after him. Living the Gospel – self-giving love, honesty, sexual purity, radical generosity, sharing the gospel – brings inevitable conflicts with values and practices of society. A new paradigm.

Paul knows he is a prisoner of the Messiah, completely belonging to him, for their sake. But for him that is a delight because he is part of a vast and wonderful work of God for them.

The Surprise of God's Hidden Story

Paul speaks of a mystery. Not an occult secret for only the elite few. Rather the mystery is something that was always there in the scriptures, the story of Israel that he shared.

He speaks with a sense of delight that he wants to share. He had always known that he was part of a great history – Abraham, Exodus, Law, Temple, Holy nation, future Messiah to purify and restore. But God's grace had revealed a plan so much bigger than the nation of Israel: The universal plan for all of creation that was always inside the story of Israel.

"The Mystery of the Messiah": They had thought he would be powerful and victorious in normal political terms, defeating Israel's enemies, renewing the Law, bringing just government to the nation, restoring the temple, driving out Gentile oppressors.

But Jesus turned out to welcome sinners, even tax collectors, to oppose the Temple, to be crucified. But he was powerful on an unimagined scale. In his defeat he defeated death, sin, Satan, and all human divisions and renewed creation and began resurrection life.

Strangers and Enemies and Friends United

What happened in Jesus broke the patterns of power, competition, religious exclusion, economic domination, etc. A radically new paradigm created and enacted, given to us as a gift of grace beyond our dreams. Like a vast estate we inherit and must now explore.

Paul links three words each beginning with *syn-* ("with" or "co-"). Each an exploration of that deeper story of scripture. All people on earth share the inheritance, the body, the promises offered in Israel's story. No new religion: It is the glory of Israel and the World.