



SEQUIM COMMUNITY CHURCH

EPHESIANS

SESSION 5A: THE MYSTERY FINALLY MADE CLEAR

Ephesians 3:1-13

"Exploring the new life and new society God has created through Jesus"

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Ice Breaker:

1. Have you ever worked on a problem for a long time, and the solution just came to you? Talk about how you approach putting together a puzzle. Do you look at the box, do the edges pieces first? Or is there another set way? _____
What does this say about how you connect loose ends together? _____

This passage is divided into two parts. First Paul describes in verses 1-6 how he came to grasp the truth that the Jew and Gentile are one in Christ. Then, second, he explains in verses 7-13 how he came to preach the truth.

For many years, the Old Testament prophets had predicted that the nations of the world would one day worship the one true God. The book of Isaiah is full of references to God's salvation coming through the Jews to the people of the world.

To Israel, God says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob, and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."-- Isaiah 49:6

Yet there was a problem. Over the years the Jewish people became so nationalistic that they stubbornly refused to be a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6), which meant that they were representatives of God, to the other nations. Instead, some became secluded from the surrounding cultures, and others intermixed and lost their distinctiveness. Very few were lights in a dark place. Isaiah lamented this fact when he wrote, "We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world". (Isaiah 26:18) In essence he was saying that they had so much potential, but in fact all they did was "break wind" and accomplish nothing. Ouch!

But there was an obscure promise found in the pages of Isaiah that offered hope.

"In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. -- Isaiah 11:10

It was the fulfillment of this promise which was the "mystery" that Paul speaks of in Ephesians chapter 3.

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles -- 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 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." Ephesians 3:1-6

2. Some think that the "mystery" Paul is referring to is that "the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel." Others say that the "mystery" is in fact the mechanism by which this will take place: ie God will accomplish this well known Old Testament promise of incorporating and gathering the nations "through the gospel" - the saving work of Christ. What do you think? _____

3. Remember what Jesus had to do with his disciples on numerous occasions: He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:45) What difference does it make in the way you interpret the meaning of "mystery"? _____

• Can both be right? _____

4. Talk about how God's word has suddenly made sense to you at various times, like putting together a puzzle. _____

The meaning of "the gospel" becomes all the more important as we continue. It was known in the Old Testament that the Gentiles would receive salvation, as we have just seen, but it was never revealed that all Gentile and Jewish believers would become equal in the body of Christ. Yet this equality was accomplished when Jesus broke down the "dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14) and brought reconciliation.

5. Why is it significant in verse 3:6 that "together" is mentioned three times? _____

"I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 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, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things." – Ephesians 3:7-9

Praying for one another

How would you compare Paul's mission to share the mystery of the gospel with your own passion to share the Gospel? Do you need some prayer for motivation? For years, God's desire was for the Israelites to take initiative with those who didn't know God, yet many were content to continue along in a "Holy Huddle". Jesus came along and broke things wide open. Is there anyone that you know who feels excluded from God and would probably long to approach him with freedom and confidence? Ask God to show you who needs to hear this truth, and pray for any things you are facing in the group.