

INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! My name is Justin Wellum, and I am one of the elders here at Fathom Church. Typically at Fathom, our lead pastor Chris will preach about 40 times a year which allows for about once a month an elder, staff member, or a guest preacher to preach. I am thrilled today to be able to share God's word with you. I have left each week in this series challenged, encouraged, and at times, really thinking about what is being shared in the sermons and in Ephesians. I hope that today is a day that the Lord can use this message to penetrate into your hearts and minds and allow us to grasp the glorious nature of who He is.

If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to **Ephesians 3:1-13**. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to Ephesians 3. That's on page **821** in those Bibles under the chairs.

INTRODUCTION - Mystery Novels

Growing up, I loved to read. I still love to read but I now have two kids and our 18 month old thinks that magazines and books are fun new toys for him to rip in front of my face. Breaks my heart. I do listen to a ton of audiobooks and try to absorb content from biographies, Christian theology, fiction, and memoirs. However, there is still a genre of books that, without fail, grab my attention. Mystery novels. I may date myself with the following statements but my brothers and I had all 58 Hardy Boys books (yes the books before the TV show). I dreamed of driving around in a cool car, catching the bad guys, and deciphering the clues that led to the villain. Beyond Hardy Boys, I read Agatha Christie's novels that intricately planted clues throughout the novel that ended up with a conclusion that I never saw coming. I remember staying up all night using a flashlight (yes there were no phones with flashlights or Kindles or anything with a light) to finish the book. Additionally, even though his books are almost always the same and he produces a million books, I still cannot put down a John Grisham novel and I am

impressed with the level of detail that he puts with his characters. As I was preparing for this sermon, I was taking my kids on long walks just to get in a few more chapters on my audiobook.

Our culture is obsessed with mystery novels. They are the second most popular type of book sold in US bookstores with about 40,000 new titles added every year. Anybody want to guess which genre of book is the #1 sold book in the US?

Romance....I know. I know. There probably is a whole other sermon about that with what it says about our culture and our society.

Why are mystery novels so popular? According to some research I did while prepping this sermon, “Mystery novels start with an exciting hook, keep readers interested with suspenseful pacing, and end with a satisfying conclusion that answers all of the reader’s outstanding questions.”

For me, it’s the suspenseful pacing and the uncertainty of the conclusion that brings me back to them again, and again, and again. It’s me attempting to put the clues together and waiting for the great reveal.

No theological scholar is going to argue that the Bible is a mystery novel, but in a sense it is. There is foreshadow, rise and fall of characters, and prophecies interwoven throughout the text. Even though Ephesians 3 is not the end of the Bible, we are given the answer to God’s mystery in the text. We are told his grand master plan of how He is going to change the world and society as a whole. Today, in our text, we see God’s mystery revealed to us and how we get to play a part in it. I hope you are on the edge of your seat just as I am when I am reading a mystery novel.

This is why I am titling this sermon, “Revealed”

Let’s go ahead and take a look at the passage. Let’s read together, Ephesians 3:1-13

Ephesians 3:1-13

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— 2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, **3** how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. **4** When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, **5** which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. **6** This mystery is^[a] that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. **8** To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **9** and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in^[b] God, who created all things, **10** so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **11** This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, **12** in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. **13** So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

CONTEXT

As we begin a new chapter of Ephesians, we need to quickly recap where we have been in this book. In Chapter 1, we heard about the calling that God has for all believers. We heard about God's divine plan and how he chose us first because He loved us. In Chapter 2, we have heard about how depraved we were in our sin. Not that we needed a lifeboat but that we were dead on the bottom of the ocean. After that, we

see that God has a plan to unite the Jews and the Gentiles into one union with Christ. Paul begins to say a prayer for the Ephesians. He desires to pray for them and the sufferings that they are enduring and to give them strength. However, Paul doesn't make it long in his prayer for them. He makes it about 15 words or one verse before Paul does what is called a "digression." We have seen Paul do this before in Ephesians 1 and in many other places but he uses verses 2-13 to do the following things, "Make known the mystery to the Gentiles, Show us God's plan of when and to whom this new revelation would come, and the content of the mystery that is shared throughout the Bible." He picks up the prayer in verse 14 but we are going to focus today on this digression. In Greek this is one long sentence. Imagine Paul frantically writing this. He's excited. He's compelled. It's almost as if the Spirit is filling him up that he has to get this out as quickly as possible before he forgets it. Paul tells us the end of the story. He tells us the meaning of the mystery. He reveals to us the greatest truth in human history. He sums up the climax of the Gospel in these 13 verses or 189 words and it will leave the readers changed, and hopefully us as well. Today, we are going to see three key aspects of how God reveals the Gospel to the Gentiles, and how he is gloriously using us, the church, to advance the Gospel around the world and in our community. Let's begin looking at the first five verses of this text. Turn back and look at verses 1-5.

Key Point #1: God's Purpose (Verses 1-5)

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— 2
assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me
for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written
briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5
which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been
revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

We see here that Paul intended to start this section with an intercessory prayer for the Ephesians due to the suffering that they are experiencing. Paul also connects back to what Chris shared last week that the Gentiles are now able to access the same Spiritual benefits that the Jews can offer. However, after verse 1, Paul diverges into providing more information about his specific calling to minister to the Gentiles, a calling which would not have been the norm at the time.

Just as a reminder, Paul, who used to be named Saul, was trained as an elite Jewish leader. He trained under the top scholars, attended the “right” schools, and had every privilege that could be offered a Jewish young man. He took his training and fanaticism to a whole new level with a goal of trying to eradicate any follower of Jesus. We see in Acts 8 his arrangement of the stoning of Stephen and the constant fear that he put all early Christians due to arranging them to be murdered and killed. Paul, in our limited eyes, would not have been a good guy. Yet we see his conversion in Acts 9 and the complete reversal of Paul. Take a look at the passage on the screen:

SLIDE: Acts 9:20-22

20 And immediately he(Paul) proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” **21** And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” **22** But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

One can assume that Paul is reflecting on his conversation as he is writing these words in verses 2 and 3 and describes that he is a “steward of God’s grace” and that the “mystery of God was made known to me by revelation.” Paul was specifically called to leave his life of murder, deception, violence, and hate and be the beacon of truth to the Gentiles, a group of people that he was told never to associate with. This leads to my first point that **God Reveals His Purpose** to Paul, the Gentiles, and to even us today.

SLIDE: Purpose

Explain: Purpose

As we think about Purpose, oftentimes as Christians, we get caught up in thinking about what God has “called us to do” or how we should spend our lives. We often equate work with purpose and want to ensure that we are fulfilling God’s purpose. In my line of work, I work as a school administrator but specifically lead our College and Career Counseling and Planning for our school. My responsibilities involve meeting with students and families and asking the annoying questions that you all hated when you were a kid, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” “What do you want to study?” “What kinds of things do you like?” I’ve noticed that these questions, while good natured, can send high school students into a spiral. It sent me into a spiral. I thought I had to know the right answers and had to make my mind up for my future in order to be successful. Because, obviously, if you don’t know EXACTLY what you want to do after high school then you likely are on a path to total and epic failure and will likely die alone working at Chick Fil A, which I guess isn’t the worst thing in the world?

However, church, I want to encourage you all today that God has already revealed his purpose to each of us just like he revealed it to Paul. It's being shown here in this passage and throughout the Bible. Our central purpose as Christians, from the Westminster Catechism, "...is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." Our unifying purpose as believers in Christ is to form a deeper relationship with God every single day. After that, we are called to share the Gospel and expand his global kingdom in whatever way that God has uniquely gifted us to do so. Tim Keller in his book, "Every Good Endeavor" said, "If you make any work the purpose of your life—even if that work is church ministry—you create an idol that rivals God. Your relationship with God is the most important foundation for your life, and indeed it keeps all the other factors—work, friendships and family, leisure and pleasure—from becoming so important to you that they become addicting and distorted."

Church, how are you living out God's purpose in your own life? How are you daily strengthening your relationship with him? How are you living in a way where you feel like God is allowing you to steward his grace and to share that with others?

If we see God revealing to Paul and to us his unique purpose, then we see God's Plan shared very openly. Let's take a look at verses 6-10.

Key Point #2: God's Plan (Verses 6-10)

6 This mystery is[a] that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. **8** To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **9** and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in [b] God, who created all things, **10** so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places

Did you see all of the clues laid out in this text? Did you pick up the glorious conclusion of the Gospel? This is the climax that we have been building to for the last few chapters in Ephesians and in the whole Bible. The second point for today is that **God Reveals his Eternal Plan to Maximize his Glory.**

Slide: Plan

Let's go back and look specifically how God's plan was promised from the beginning and how it was done to maximize his glory.

EXPLAIN: God's Eternal Plan

If we take a look at verse 6, we see that the Gentiles are promised three things that the Jews were promised throughout the whole Bible. They were promised to be fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the same body, and fellow-partakers of the same promise. Paul intentionally uses these three adjectives to show that this revelation has been planned from the beginning of time. I'm going to show a few different verses on the screen to make the point that God has been building up to this throughout the whole story of the Bible. I'm essentially displaying the clues that were written throughout the Bible. Let's

first look at “Fellow-Heirs.” Fellow-heirs pick up on language from Abraham and the covenant that God made with him. If we look at Genesis 12:1-3,

Slide: Genesis 12:1-3

Now the Lord said^[a] to Abram, “Go from your country^[b] and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **2** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

God promised Abraham and his descendents this blessing and Paul is now stating that this blessing of being a fellow heir is now including the Gentiles. We see him make this case clearly in Romans in two spots: Romans 4:16 and Romans 8:17

One Slide: Romans 4:16 and Romans 8:17

4:16 That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all

8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Putting this all together, we see that the Gentiles are included in the covenant that Abraham was part of with God. It is a New Covenant though that is more global,

expansive, and brings the Jews and Gentiles in together. They are heirs to this glorious covenant. This is clearly stamped when Paul uses the language of “Fellow-Member” and “Fellow-Partaker of the Promise.” These two terms build on Fellow-Heirs and even go deeper. As mentioned last week, under Christ there is a new union where Jews and Gentiles don’t just co-exist but they are given the same level of membership in one body. It’s a new kind of people that are united under one thing: Christ. One commentator summed up the this section of revealing the mystery with the following:

The mystery or open secret of Christ is ‘the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ. It is this double union, with Christ and with each other, which is the substance of the “mystery

Church, we are called and granted the title heir and member with Christ? How are we embracing that in our own lives? Do we live in a way that is honoring God with being his heir? How are we viewing others in that same way, especially those who we may not think are worthy of being heirs such as ourselves?

We saw that God’s plan was eternally pre-determined but we also see in the text that God’s Plan was done to maximize his glory. Let’s look again at verses 7-10 to see that.

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. **8** To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **9** and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in

God, who created all things, **10** so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

In this section, we see that Paul emphasizes again that he is able to fulfill his calling due to the grace that he has received from God. It is not of his own doing but of the gift of God that he is allowed to be a minister of the Gospel. I often have wondered, in my own weakness, why Paul? Why wasn't Peter involved? Why didn't Jesus fulfill his own mission? Why wasn't Moses or Elijah brought back from the dead to carry out this mission? Why did Paul choose God in that particular time, and particular place, to bridge the gap between the Jews and the Gentiles? Well, I don't fully know and I don't think we can ever fully know. You see, God works in a way that is going to maximize his glory and to bring about his salvation to his chosen people. He works in a way that is bigger than us and has chosen to use us in ways that defy logic or reason. We do not deserve to be used by God, yet he has chosen us.

How does Paul respond with being chosen? He is overwhelmed with intense gratitude and a deep understanding of his sin and how beautiful grace is. In verse 8, he uses the term "very least of the saints" but in the original Greek it should be translated as a new word, "leaster" or "less than the least." Paul knew his past and how God's grace changed his life and gave him a calling to share his Gospel. He is overwhelmed with this task of, "...preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ." Let's read that phrase again, "...the unsearchable riches of Christ." That means that there is no end, no width, or depth. It's infinite. Larger than our known universe. Bigger than our fears. This is the privilege that

Paul had, “to share the glory of God to both Jew and Gentile.” Church, we are called to the same purpose. We are being used by God to fulfill his mission and that same purpose lives in the heart of every Christian. Does that make you feel humbled before God? Honored? Terrified? Scared? Unworthy? It’s complex. We see Paul navigating his emotions in this text. But, if we see so far that God’s Purpose has been Revealed to us, and that God’s Plan has been Revealed to the Church, then we can take courage that God’s Power will allow us to fulfill God’s mission.

Slide: Power

Let’s look at the final section of our text today. Verses 11-13

Key Point #3: God’s Power (Verses 11-13)

11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, **12** in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. **13** So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

As we consider God’s Power, I began to think about what is the most powerful thing in our known world? Is it a human? An animal? An idea or concept? So I did some research and here is what scientists have determined to be the most powerful thing in the universe, “gamma radiation.” My former chemistry teacher got so excited about this. According to an article I read, “The most mind-boggling explosion you can imagine doesn’t come close to what the universe can create. When stars 150 times the size of

our sun explode, they produce the brightest light sources in the universe and release as much energy in a few seconds as our Sun will produce over its entire lifetime of 10 billion years.

That's about the same amount of energy in 10 trillion trillion billion megaton bombs!

These explosions generate beams of high-energy radiation, called gamma-ray bursts (GRBs), which are considered by astronomers to be the most powerful thing in the universe.”

However, we can also view power as influence and an ability to dictate world events.

Are politicians more powerful or is it superstars like Beyonce or Tom Brady, or maybe Gisele after some recent events? Regardless of how we attempt to conceptualize earthly power or power in our universe, they compare nothing to the power that Christ has for us. Both gamma radiation and humanity were made by God and sit under his rule. We do not deserve access to God but yet, through Christ we are given access and the ability to fulfill his mission. We could not do anything on our own and it is only because of what Christ has done that we are actually able to approach God with boldness and confidence and to partake in living out God's gospel mission. How is this possible? It's because Christ gave up his own life for us by dying on the cross and standing in place of God the Father and absorbing all of our sin and bearing it on himself. He took our sin and paid the price. This act changed the world. It changes us. That is the most powerful thing that anybody has ever done and will ever do. This should leave us astonished. We then have assurance that we don't have to do all of this alone. We have a God who loves us and will empower us to fulfill his plan. Therefore,

when things are getting tough and challenging, we have the ability to persist and endure through them. Paul encourages us in verse 13 to not lose heart. We are called to trust that because Christ has endured far more for us because he loved us. He is now asking us to live out according to our purpose, following God's plan, and being empowered by his Spirit.

APPLICATION

The reality, church, is that God is calling us actively into his mission. We see in verse 10 that **10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.** God has chosen to use Fathom church and his global church to carry his mission out to the world. He is doing so to reveal the mystery that in God's kingdom there is no separation. Jews and Gentiles are united in one flesh and both considered fellow-heirs and a part of the kingdom of God. As we sit in this, I have a few application questions for us to consider today.

1. How can you in your life fulfill God's purpose of sharing his Gospel mission? This may be staying faithful at work, raising children with Bible truth, or inviting others into a relationship with you. Think about how you can actively take on God's purpose this week.
2. What will you do when you doubt God's plan for you? We all will have doubts and moments where we feel "less than the least." How will you remind yourself of the truth that you are loved and chosen by God and used by him for his own glory.

3. How can we truly believe that the riches of Christ are infinite, unfathomable, and endless? How can we use that to live a life that is full of God's power?

Church, we have been told all of the clues of the mystery. Even better, we were part of the story this whole time. Let's go into this week as Christian who have been told the greatest, most powerful, truth that has ever been shared.

Let's pray.

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD'S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

First song reflection.

In 1 CORINTHIANS 11

Paul lays out the words of institution for the Lord's Supper. But he also calls us to examine ourselves before we participate

So, I'm going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we'll take communion, and then we'll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Love you church, let's stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

- The Letter to the Ephesians (Pillar New Testament Commentary) Peter O'Brien
- Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary by Harold Hoehner
- The New International Commentary on the New Testament by F. F. Bruce
- Every Good Endeavor by Timothy Keller