

## *The Mystery Message of God to Earth • Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 1:9-10, 3:1-13; Colossians 1:26-27*

Listen up everybody! Hear the big news:

“We’re engaged!”

“I got the promotion!”

“I was accepted by the university!”

“We’re going to have a baby!”

“I’m announcing my candidacy for President of the United States!”

Some announcements shape all of life. Some shape all of history. They are the big news, the huge revelations.

You have wondered for a long time if he would ever pop the question, if she would ever become pregnant, if she would get that promotion to manager, if he would really be accepted at that university, if he might some day be a presidential candidate. Now we know. The mystery is over. The announcement is public. Everybody can know.

When you made your really big announcement you were filled with excitement. You wanted everyone to share that excitement with you. And it’s the same way with God. God had a secret, a mystery that he kept hid-

den for a very long time. He wanted to “go public” at exactly the right moment. He must have been brimming with excitement. It was really important. The angels of heaven stood silent; the first recipients on earth were dazzled and somewhat bewildered.

This mystery of God could not have been more important or life changing. So we are going to do some serious Bible reading to find out what God has to say. Let’s start out with Romans 16:25-27. This is actually a benediction that was prayed and written by St Paul at the end of his letter to the Roman Christians. Usually we think of a benediction as a statement that is made at the conclusion of a church service, but that is not necessarily so. The word is actually a combina-

tion of two words, *bene* which means “good” and *diction* which means “to say”. So it is a “good saying” and it can come at any time. It is a blessing. Romans 16:25-27 says:

*Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

This benediction tells the background of the mystery. It is a mystery that was hidden for ages

past—thousands and thousands of years. Oh, there were hints. There were clues. But the clues are a whole lot easier to understand from this side of the mystery than from the other side. The only hope all the ancient people had was that someday the mystery would be revealed, but they sure could

not figure it out by themselves.

Do you do crossword puzzles? I have started some, but I have never actually finished one. I get lots of words but have too many “downs” and “across-es” that are blank. The hint is some obscure reference to science, history, language or music that I have never heard of. If you would tell me just four more words I could finish the whole puzzle—but without them it remains a mystery.

That is the way it was with the mystery of God. Earlier generations could fill in some of the blanks but they could never finish the puzzle. And then came Jesus. The Gospel of John starts out by saying, “*In the beginning was the Word . . .*” That refers to Jesus. Jesus was and is the Word

***Jesus was and is the Word that fills in the blanks and solves the mystery of God. Without Jesus no one ever could have figured it out. With Jesus it becomes amazingly easy.***

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I have a confession to make. In some of those crossword puzzle books the answers are all in the back. Now, I have never copied an entire crossword puzzle but I have looked to see the one word I could not get. With that one word I could figure out the rest of the words.

When it comes to the great mystery of God the one word is actually a person—JESUS CHRIST. When you have Jesus Christ it all fits together and makes sense. This is explained in Ephesians 1:9-10 where the apostle Paul wrote:

*(God) made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

God solved the mystery with Jesus. The crossword puzzle of eternity comes together at the name of Jesus. In Philippians 2:10-11 we read, “. . . that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

So, what is this mystery? The mystery is that the good news of Jesus is for everyone!

Well, you say, I knew that. Right, just like you knew that  $E=MC^2$ . But, without Albert Einstein there is not an outside chance you could have ever figured that out by yourself. And, if you are honest, you will admit that you really don't understand how the Theory of Relativity works. Just because we have heard something many times does not mean we could have figured it out by ourselves, nor does it mean that we fully grasp or understand the significance of what it is all about.

And so it is with the mystery of God when he reveals the good news that Jesus is for everyone. This is more fully explained in Ephesians 3:1-13:

*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.*

*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. 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, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

In the ancient world every nation and tribe had its own god. Egyptians had Isis. Greeks had Zeus. Romans had Jupiter. Philistines had Baal. Israel had Yahweh, or Jehovah. Everyone tended to think their god was better than anyone else's god and that their god could beat up your god. Also, most ancient people thought they were the chosen people of their god and superior to every else. Greeks called all non-Greeks barbarians and treated them with contempt. Romans made non-Romans into slaves. Jews called all non-Jews Gentiles and looked down on them as inferior and doomed to eternal annihilation. Basically, every ethnic, religious and racial group considered everyone else inferior and themselves su-

perior. As a result, ancient religions were not evangelistic. To the contrary, they were exclusive. They wanted to keep their own gods for themselves and be superior to everybody else.

In some ways it is much the same today. To be Japanese is to be Buddhist. To be Indian is to be Hindu. To be Greek is to be Greek Orthodox. To be Saudi is to be Muslim. Many people still tie ethnicity and citizenship to religion. Numerous nations have laws to enforce the established religion. It is illegal to proselytize or to convert from one religion to another. It is considered unpatriotic.

The mystery of God is a blockbuster. The God of Israel is the God of all nations. He is the creator of everything. He is the one and only true God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Everyone can connect to him—Jews and Gentiles; males and females; Asians; Africans; Europeans; Native Americans; rich and poor; young and old. Jesus is for everyone!

St. Paul was stunned by his own call—*“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 by God, who created all things.”*

The God of the Bible is no local God. He is the creator of all things. And the riches of Christ are for everybody, even Gentiles, even non-Jews.

God revealed this mystery as very good news (“gospel”). But that was not always how it was received. To many Jews this was terrible news. They wanted to be God’s chosen people who were totally different. They did not want to share their God or their salvation with Gentiles. As for the pagans, this was also bad news. They did not want to accept the God of the Jews and they certainly did not want to hear that their gods were fakes.

The same negative response to God’s mystery may happen today. There are Christians today who would just as soon keep Christianity to themselves rather than share Christ with people who are different. And there are people of other religions who do not want to accept Jesus as their

Savior and admit that their gods and their religions are false.

Here is the mystery: The God of Israel is the God of all. He sent his Son to earth to rescue all humans from sin and death. He offers this salvation to everyone who will believe in him and accept Jesus as Savior and thereby receive the rich and eternal blessings of God.

Let’s look at one more important statement about this mystery of God. The Apostle Paul wrote about it in Colossians 1:26-27:

... the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The mystery that was hidden to previous generations God has now disclosed to *“the saints”*. So, who are the saints? St. Peter? St. Paul? St. Mary? St. Andrew? Actually, the saints are all

Christians. If you are a Christian then you are a saint. “Saint” means “holy one”. You may not feel “holy” but that is what God says you are if you have accepted Jesus as your Savior. You are a

saint whether you feel like it or not.

Feel free to use the title. When you fill out a questionnaire instead of writing Mr., Mrs., Ms. or Dr. just cross all that out and put “Saint” in front of your name. If you order a customized license plate go ahead and get “Saint”. Introduce yourself by saying, “Hi. I’m St. Carol” or “Hello, I’m St. Dan.” Think of the possibilities. St. Paul. St. Louis. St. Joan. St. Bernard! You are a saint! So act like the saint that God says you are!

Something embarrassing happened in Iraq during the Gulf War. American soldiers stole Iraqi property for personal wealth or for souvenirs—things like guns, money, art. These soldiers were representatives of our country. They were sent to bring liberty and freedom. They were there for the benefit of the Iraqi people, not for themselves. They wore the uniforms of the United States of America. They were on a mission to help people. But they did everything contrary to

***You are a saint! So act like the saint that God says you are!***

what they were supposed to do. That is not good!

As Christians we wear the name of Jesus Christ. Our rank is “saint”. We should act like saints. We, as the church of God’s Son, are not here for our benefit; we are here for the benefit of others. Our mission is *“to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

God has revealed to us this mystery of eternity. It may not seem like it is that big a deal, but it could not be a bigger deal. This is a mystery that transforms sinners into saints. It is a mystery that changes the way we see people. If anyone in the world should see others without prejudice it is the followers of Jesus. We no longer see people as Jews or Gentiles, as Greeks or barbarians. We no longer see people primarily in terms of race or gender or as Americans or foreigners. This mystery changes the way we see the church, as well. We no longer see it as a place to service us and our needs and desires. We see the church primarily as a place to serve others and to get the

message of the mystery of God out to everyone else. This mystery also shows us what we are supposed to do with our lives. Our mission is to make known the glorious riches of Jesus Christ.

This is the mystery. Jesus Christ is for everyone!

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