

Ephesians 3:1-13

For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—you have heard of the administration of God's grace given to me for you, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation (as I have already written briefly). When you read this, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. This mystery was not made known to people in past generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and people who also share in the promise through the gospel. I became a servant of this gospel, in keeping with the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. To me—even though I am the very least of all the saints—was given this grace: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to enlighten everyone about the administration of this mystery. In past ages this mystery remained hidden in God, who created all things. He did this so that, through the church, the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was done according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him we can freely approach God with confidence through faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart because of what I am suffering for you, because it is your glory.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

For years it sat on a farmhouse wall gathering dust. And when Fiona McLaren redecorated, she didn't even take the time to cover the apparently worthless painting in a protective sheet, so it got flecked with specks of house paint. However, in an astounding twist, that picture was the work of master artist Leonardo da Vinci and was worth over \$200 million dollars. How did such a valuable painting end up in a Scottish farmhouse? The painting was given to McLaren's father by one of his patients, but other than that not much is known about how it ended up on the British Isles, or how no one seemed to realize that they had a treasure on their hands.

Is there perhaps a valuable painting hanging in your house? Maybe it was a piece you picked up at a garage sale because you liked the colors or just wanted the frame. Wouldn't it be something if that painting was worth \$200 million? But what are the chances that *you* are sitting on such a treasure? Well, if you have a Bible, you have a treasure. In our continuing study of the book of Ephesians, the Holy Spirit today will give us **A God's-eye View of the Bible** and help us see that it offers treasures like nothing else in this world can.

You would, of course, expect a Lutheran minister to tell you that the Bible is a treasure. It's a theme Lutheran pastors have been expounding since the days of Martin Luther himself. But because of that, you may now view the Bible the way that Scottish lady viewed her da Vinci painting. Since it was something she had seen every day since she was a child, she didn't think much of it and certainly didn't take care of it like she should have. Likewise, it's easy for us to take the Bible for granted because we have such easy access to it. But look at how the Apostle Paul here in our text helps us gain a new appreciation for the treasure that is the Bible.

We'll only begin to appreciate the Bible if we understand what it is: God's revelation. Paul put it like this: **“When you read this, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. This mystery was not made known to people in past generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles”**(Ephesians 3:4, 5). What Paul had shared with his readers in the previous verses, which was last week's sermon text, was not just his religious opinion. It was a secret revealed to him and the other apostles by the Holy Spirit. That's what Paul meant when he spoke about the **“mystery of Christ.”** The word **“mystery”** here doesn't mean something “mysterious” as in you can't understand. No, when Paul talks about the **“mystery of Christ,”** he means something you wouldn't know unless it was revealed to you.

So the first reason that the Bible is such a treasure is because it tells us what God thinks about us. That's something that you would never be able to figure out by looking at the stars or reading tea leaves or listening to your dreams. And what we learn is what we heard a couple of weeks ago when Paul said that we were once dead in sin but made alive in Christ Jesus and have been given the gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

What I just said is worth more than a \$200 million da Vinci painting. You could in fact own every da Vinci painting but would not be able to exchange the collection for what God just offered us through his Word: a place in heaven. You see, we're like a canvass that a preschooler got hold of and wiped his dirty, snotty fingers

all over. But Jesus painted over the filth with his crimson blood. That is the “**mystery**” of salvation that everyone needs to learn and believe if they want to enjoy their life after death.

But has this message of salvation become a familiar painting that we hardly glance at anymore? If so, consider what Paul says next. **“He did this so that, through the church, the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”** (Ephesians 3:10). Not only has God revealed the “**mystery**” of salvation to us through his Word, but his plan is also that now, through the church, that is through believers, this “**mystery**” is revealed to the “**rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**” Who are these rulers and authorities in the heavenly places? Angels. Much of what you read in the Bible is information that not even the angels knew until it was revealed to the apostles. The angels were enthusiastic about learning exactly when Jesus would be born, and how he would conduct his ministry, and how he would die and rise again. The Apostle Peter tells us that the angels **“long to look...into these things”** (1 Peter 1:12).

Do you long to learn more about the plan of salvation God has so carefully arranged for sinners? Or is news about Jesus, his life, his teachings, his death, and his resurrection no longer exciting? We should never get “bored” by the message of salvation considering what Paul says next. **“To me—even though I am the very least of all the saints—was given this grace: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”** (Ephesians 3:8). Through Jesus we have “**unsearchable**” riches. The word “**unsearchable**” can also be translated “**untraceable.**” After a snowfall you can easily track someone in the snow. But after a couple of weeks of people walking in the snow, it would be impossible to trace their movements anymore. There would have been just too many boot prints overlapping each other in an untraceable pattern. That’s how it is when you study the Bible. At first, it’s easy to follow the thread of thought: we have sinned; God has provided salvation through faith in Jesus. But as you keep studying the Bible you discover more and more truths, so many truths that you will never be able to count all the coins that add up to the riches of God’s grace. Paul gives us some examples of those riches in our text. Paul wrote, **“In him [Jesus] we can freely approach God with confidence through faith in him”** (Ephesians 3:12).

One of the riches that we enjoy through Jesus is being able to approach God with freedom and confidence. Hopefully you have that kind of freedom and confidence to approach your earthly father. If there is something on your mind, your father should welcome you when you share with him your problems and ask for advice. But although your earthly father may receive you warmly and openly, he is often unable to help you with your problems. If you’re sick, he can’t make you better. If you’re having trouble making friends, he can’t make those friends for you. God of course can do all those things...if it’s in your best interest. And so we never have to hold back from him any of our problems or worries. We can and should take them to our Lord in prayer because through faith in Jesus we have the freedom and confidence to boldly approach God.

But sometimes God allows us to suffer even though we have brought him our problems. What then? Well Paul models for us the kind of cheerful behavior we can have no matter what the situation. Look at the first and last verses of our text. Paul wrote, **“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...So I ask you not to lose heart because of what I am sufferings for you, because it is your glory”** (Ephesians 3:1, 13). Isn’t it interesting that Paul calls himself a prisoner of **Christ**? After all, wasn’t he really a prisoner of Caesar? As we’ve pointed out before, Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians when he was imprisoned in either Caesarea or in Rome. You would think that he would complain about this because it was hampering his ministry efforts. He wasn’t free to go from town to town as he had been doing, telling others about Jesus. Now he was confined to one spot, and his future was uncertain.

Nevertheless, Paul took a God’s-eye view of matters and knew that he was a prisoner of **Christ**. He knew and trusted that ultimately Jesus was in control of the situation. And if Jesus thought it was good for Paul to be imprisoned, then so be it. That explains why, when Paul had a chance to escape from prison after that earthquake in Philippi, he didn’t run. What kept him there was God’s love for sinners because at that moment Paul saw how the prison guard was going to kill himself since he thought that all the prisoners had escaped. God’s love, not the chains, kept Paul in the cell so that he could tell the jailer about Jesus. You too show that you are prisoners of Christ when you help others through their troubles. Why do that? Because the Bible’s words are not only a treasure, they are a power that works in and through you to reveal God’s love to others.

We have such a wonderful treasure with the Bible. It reveals the mystery of salvation, and it continues to give insights for life, and empowers us in our daily living. Don’t keep that book in the corner of your bookcase, read it, meditate on it so that you appreciate better and better the riches you have in Jesus. Amen.