

Title: A Mystery Worth Dying For

Illustration: Who would be the hardest person for you to love?

Martin & Grace Burnham served with (New Tribes Missions) in the Philippines for 17 years. He was a jungle pilot delivering mail, supplies & encouragement to other missionaries & transporting sick and injured patients to medical facilities.

While on a brief anniversary trip in 2001 they were kidnapped by a radical Islamic group and held for 376 days:

“During that time Martin was often used as a servant to carry the terrorists’ supplies in treacherous terrain. But while bearing their loads he never complained, viewing even his servitude as a calling of God and an opportunity for the gospel. Though the Burnhams were increasingly weak and malnourished, when relief agencies managed to get food packages to them, they shared their food with their captors for their sakes. At one point Martin even repaired a satellite phone for his captors. He said to his wife, ‘The Bible says serve the Lord with gladness. Let’s go all the way. Let’s serve him all the way with gladness.’ The evidence of that resolve became apparent even to his captors who would debate about who would chain him every night. Each hated to be the one to chain him, because every night he would thank them and over and over in the evenings Martin would patiently explain the gospel to his Muslim captors. He was living for them, and viewed his situation as a calling of God to minister the mysteries of the gospel to these lost souls.”

We have been working through a Letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus. Though the circumstances were different, Paul too was a prisoner on behalf of a pagan people & like Martin Burnham, he showed a love for people who were once his enemies. And this gets to the heart of what Paul meant when he wrote about the Mystery of the gospel. In our text this morning -

Big Idea: The Mystery of the Gospel is Revealed (*through two events*)

- I. The mystery is revealed through Paul’s Prison
- II. The mystery is revealed through Paul’s Preaching

I. The Mystery of the gospel is revealed through Paul’s Prison

Paul was a prisoner.

(vs. 1) “ For this reason, I Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles – ”

Keep in mind that the animosity between the Jews & the Gentiles was as big as it gets.

Jews view: Acts 22:21 “And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”²² Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.”

And consider Paul’s background:

Staggering considering Paul’s background: born to a prominent, family – wealth & prestige. Taught by Gamaliel – one of the premier teachers of the Law in the 1st century. Trained as a Pharisee – He would have hated the Gentiles and would have had nothing to do with them.

Paul went from happy, healthy, wealthy & popular to prison. *why? Jesus & the Gentiles*

(vs. 1) “ For this reason, I Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles – ”

God had specifically called & gifted him to reach out to the Gentiles with the good news about Jesus:

(vs. 2) assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you,

This doesn't make sense by human reason alone. Paul was actually with the Ephesians from AD 53-56 and now he's in prison doing the same...

While in prison he wrote: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians & Philemon

Transition: Someone absolutely opposed to the Gentiles would spend his best years in life seeking to save them, even if that meant being martyred. (Oh for more people who would stop tweeting about racial injustice but instead give their lives to personally pursuing real individuals...)

The mystery of the gospel is revealed through Paul's Prison.

(we get a picture of it in Paul's Prison, & we get a definition of it in Paul's preaching)

II. Paul's Preaching

(vs. 3) "...how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly..."

How did Paul come to understand this mystery? *Not by intuition or reflection but By revelation*

Jesus appeared to him -

(Acts 26:17-18) ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Paul wasn't the only one who received an understanding of this mystery?

(vs. 4 – 5) "When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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."

Peter & the others:

Acts 10:9 – 11:18

"... ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven..."

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him..."

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Who didn't receive this revelation? (vs. 4b) "...which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations..." O.T. Saints *not even Moses!*

Gen 3 → Gen 12 → Rahab, Ruth, Nineveh

What was the mystery? (vs. 6)

(vs. 6) "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

In Greek – Paul tripled the word "together" here:

"Heirs together" – same family

“Members together” – part of the same body

“Sharers together” – of the eternal covenant

“So he plays with the word “together” in Greek to create a triple echo of special emphasis. When Hebrews wanted to emphasize a word they doubled it & when they wanted to thunder a word they tripled it, as in the phrase ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty...’ Is 6”

Bryan Chapell

Bill Hybels – the man who (1975) pioneered the seeker friendly church and the Homogeneity principle.

It’s easier to attract once kind of person → upper – middle class white people in the suburbs of Chicago. 25,000

The heart and soul of this mystery is the word “Together”. (among people who have nothing in common!)

Jews & Gentiles together! The most unlikely fellowship in the history of the world – together.

Rodney Stark: (early church scholars)

What made Christianity so absolutely unique in the ancient Roman world was that in its congregations were people who lived in unity that never got along anywhere else except for the church.

It’s impossible to overemphasize how important it is to have each other. Warts and all, especially because of our differences.

Heirs Together / Members Together / Sharers Together → Jews & Gentiles

Not just an application – *It’s the mystery of the Gospel*

Ephesians 3:10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Transition:

Big Idea: The Mystery of the Gospel is Revealed (*through two events*)

- I. Paul’s Prison
- II. Paul’s Preaching

What must I do?

1. Value the church:

The church is the one institution that doesn’t just take people who are similar and give them a point of contact. The church takes a diverse group of people who at times have nothing in common but Jesus and Brings them “together” and makes them one. (but this isn’t just a membership roll & a head nod on Sunday mornings. It’s far deeper than that.

Golden Rule: *Love my neighbor as myself...* → Good Samaritan

Colson: Born Again: small breakfast group (Democratic Senator Harold Hughes of Iowa – a fierce Nixon opponent). Hughes – “For years there were men towards whom I felt consuming bitterness. I wasn’t hurting them, only myself. One of the men that I hated most was Chuck Colson. But now that we share a commitment together in Christ, I love him as my brother. I would trust him with my life, my family, with everything I have.”

2. Pray that we would know the love of God: Eph 3:1, 14

Why? ...we love because he first loved us...
What is it about his love that inspires ours?

Jesus → man & died for us (his enemies)

(2 Cor 3:18) "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord , are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another..."

Let's pray