

Opening Words

The fulfillment and life the religions of the world fail to deliver, Christ can deliver because in him are the riches of wisdom and knowledge, and in him is fulfillment and life.

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I made some strong statements in my previous broadcast about how I fear that the Church in many places has stopped preaching the riches of Christ. Oh, they mention Christ. I don't mean they are necessarily preaching another Gospel, but I fear the emphasis has shifted away from what Paul preached to simplistic messages on how to be a better person.

And while these kinds of messages can be helpful to people and God uses them, I fear that they are only appetizers to a meal that never comes. I love appetizers and when my wife cooks a sumptuous feast for the family, the appetizers are always there to hold us back from the kitchen table until everything is ready. But imagine if the feast never came. Imagine if after these little appetizers she announced to us, "OK, that's it. I hope you enjoyed our food." There would be great disappointment. Imagine if that is all we ate all the time – I suppose we could survive for a while on appetizers, but what we all need is full, well balanced meals.

This is what the Church needs – full, well balanced meals. This is what Paul preached and taught his churches, and he describes it with the phrase "the unfathomable riches of Christ."

Let me unpack this a little more before we continue into chapter 3.

What Rome could not offer in power, Christ can offer because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. Christ is rich in power. But Christ does not offer power to the power hungry, to those who want to dominate others. Christ offers power to the weak and to the humble that they might use it to transform lives.

What Greece could not offer in wisdom, Christ can offer because he is the wisdom of God. Christ offers the riches of wisdom to all who will come to him for answers to life's biggest questions.

The fulfillment and life the religions of the ancient world failed to deliver to their adherents, Christ can deliver because in him are all the riches of wisdom and knowledge and in him is fulfillment and life. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:24 that Christ is the power of God and he is the wisdom of God.

These reasons and many others are why the worship of heaven is described like this in Revelation 5:11, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

Just as Christ was the riches that the ancient world needed, so is he today the riches that the modern world needs. The modern world needs power to do what is right. The modern world needs wisdom to answer life's biggest questions. The modern world needs fulfillment and life that only come from the unfathomable riches of Christ.

After Paul used this phrase he said that God gave him grace for something else. He said in verse 9 that God gave him grace to bring to light the administration of the mystery, this mystery that had been hidden in God, the creator, for generations.

There are two components to the mystery of God in these verses in Ephesians 3. There is a “what” component and a “how” component. The “what” component we have already looked at in previous messages where we discovered that the mystery is the unfolding of God’s kingdom plan for the earth. His kingdom plan was to use his kingly power to create a worldwide family from every tribe, tongue, people and nation and reconcile them all in one body to God. That is a revolutionary message that can change the world.

But the “how” component is the way that God went about this. We know what the mystery of God’s plan and will is, but how does God accomplish it. In verse 9 of Ephesians 3 Paul says that God gave him grace to bring to light, not just the mystery, but **the administration** of the mystery, i.e., the method God uses to accomplish his will for earth. I have scoured English translations for a clear rendering of this important verse and to my dismay, in looking at over 30 translations of this verse, I only found three that came close to emphasizing the “how” component. They all emphasized the “what” of the verse – that God has a mysterious plan he is working out but they failed to express that Paul also was speaking about how God carries out his purpose.

So, I looked it up myself in the Greek and I discovered that the word for administration is our word for stewardship – *oikonomia* – and if you have been tracking with us in our recent broadcasts you learned with us that Paul referred to himself as a steward or a manager. We learned that *oikonomia* refers to someone who is put in charge of managing the resources of another.

Here in Ephesians 3:9 Paul tells us that God gave him grace to enlighten people as to what this mystery plan is and to enlighten them on *how he carries it out*. It is one thing to have a goal, a plan. It is quite another to carry out the goal.

So how does God steward his plan? How does God administrate his mystery? How does God carry it out? Paul already told us in Ephesians 1:9-10 when he said that God made known to us the mystery and was summing up everything in the heavens and on earth in Christ Jesus. God plan was to unite everything in the universe, to bring all the broken pieces of the world back together through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the steward in this verse. Jesus Christ is the method God uses. Jesus Christ is the one who administrates the plan of God. Jesus Christ is the one who carries out the plan of God. I’m sure you are not surprised by this, and I hope you are not disappointed after all this build up. It’s not like God had some secret method other than Christ. It’s not like God had some secret technique that he used to carry his plan. That’s what we like. We like new techniques and methods and principles. But what God likes is Christ and Christ is the creator of all, the goal of all, the method by which the plan of God comes to fruition in the world, and the one by whom the broken pieces of this fallen planet come together.

Paul said, God has given me grace to enlighten people about what Christ is doing. This word “enlighten” is the same word Paul used earlier in his letter. Remember his prayer. He said, “I pray

that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you will know the hope of his calling, the riches of the inheritance, and his mighty power toward you.” When God first called Paul, he told him that he was sending him to the Gentiles to open their eyes that they might turn from darkness to light.

Paul has that same idea here. His ministry is to shine light on **what** God is doing – the mystery – and **how** he does it – the stewardship of it. What he is doing is reconciling all things to himself. How he did it was through these seven steps.

First, the eternal Word of God, the Messiah, became a man. We call this the incarnation where God became a man.

Second, this God-man, the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed the reign of God in Israel. He proclaimed that God’s reign was now coming back to earth in fulfillment of prophecy. It was not there in totality. But it had started. He healed people. He gave sight to the blind. He made the lame walk. He made the sick well. He cast out evil spirits. He gave people a fresh start by forgiving them. He said this was the kingdom of God, in seed form, that he brought to bless Israel and through Israel the world.

But the rulers of Israel did not like his version of the kingdom. They wanted a kingdom that would come all at once and that would get rid of the Romans. They did not realize their main enemy was not Rome but themselves! And so, they crucified Christ, but this played right into God’s hands for when Christ died, he cancelled the guilt and the debt that we had piled up by our sin. God took it away. And this was God’s third step he took to reconcile all things to himself.

Fourth, he raised Jesus from the dead inaugurating the end-time resurrection for Jesus is called the first fruits of those who rise from the dead. The resurrected Jesus gathered his scattered followers, taught them and prepared them for the mission ahead.

Fifth, Jesus ascended back into heaven and was enthroned at the right hand of God where he is now Lord over all powers and rulers and dominions that seek to enslave mankind. This is the holy war in heavenly places we have been talking about. Jesus has been exalted as the universal ruler and God now accelerates his kingdom work on earth through the enthroned Lord of all.

Sixth, the first thing this enthroned ruler did was to pour out his Spirit upon his followers. Before he returned to heaven he commissioned his followers to go to the rest of Israel and to go to all the nations, to go into this broken world and to preach the gospel of peace that reconciles man to God and to one another.

And seventh, he gave gifts to his people, like Paul, and like you and me that we might be good stewards of our gifts and use them to advance his cause in the world. This is what Paul has been talking about in this passage where he has spoken of receiving the grace of God to be a good steward, a good preacher of the riches of Christ and to be one who enlightens people as to what God’s plan is and how God carries out his plan in the world.

I've been watching a documentary on the history of India and learned about a 3rd century AD ruler who conquered part of India and then regretted his action as he saw the suffering and grief that it brought ... for what? For nothing really. He began to seek for answers to life's questions and he sought to create a kingdom, really, a world where there would be justice and brotherhood and peace. It was quite amazing what he wanted to do and he sent emissaries to far off countries with his message of justice, peace, and brotherhood. But, like others, he failed.

The reason he failed is that he was a fallen man and others to whom he shared this noble vision were fallen people. The only way justice and brotherhood and peace can come, the only way Paradise can return to earth is through Jesus Christ for only he got to the core problem – sin. And only he died to take away sins and only he rose from the dead and only he is Lord and only he gives the Spirit and gifts to empower his people to make all things new.

Do you know this Jesus? Have the eyes of your heart been enlightened to see him who is the wisdom of God and the power of God? Call upon him today and enter the bright new world that Jesus is making.