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EPHESIANS

3:1-13

THE MYSTERY OF FAITH



It's official! Ephesians is the most mysterious book in the bible! In the translation of the Bible that we normally use, the word *mystery* appears 26 times in total, and 7 times in this book of Ephesians, making Ephesians *the most mysterious book in the Bible!* And the word *mystery* appears loads of times in this reading, making this passage *the most mysterious in the Bible!*

When I visited my grandparents as a child, I worked my way through a whole shelf of Agatha Christie mysteries. Loads of them. The crime happens, and then at the end the detective gathers all the suspects around and reveals what has happened. That is what Paul is doing now. Something not terrible but wonderful has happened, and he wants to draw us all in and explain to us exactly what has gone on. And just like the roomful of people in the Agatha Christie stories, we are all to be involved in what has been going on.

In a way the mystery is what Paul has already explained in Chapter 2, but he is so amazed by it himself, and convinced that other people might not 'get it', that he decides to explain again. The mystery is that through Jesus, Gentile and Jewish believers alike are heirs together, members together, sharers together.

It is this word *together* that gets Paul, isn't it? Heirs together. Being the eldest, I have been known to complain to my dad that I should get the share of the family estate, when I know they have shared it equally between the three of us. The younger brother, the Gentiles, you and me, we will inherit equally with Jewish believers because we are heirs through Jesus, the true son, the true heir. We were apart from God, but now we belong together to the body through Jesus, our head. We had no seat at the table, but now we share together in everything which Jesus

promised.

I want us never to be dulled to the gospel by many centuries of Christian tradition in this country, or many decades of our own discipleship. I want us to embrace again this amazing mystery. I want us to consider where we were without Christ. We have spoken in recent weeks of how he moves us from death to life, from far to near. We were dead, we were far away. We are alive, we are near. I want it to quicken your heart to think that Jesus is for all of us, for you and for me, and he stands in our midst.

Imagine being one of these first Ephesian Christians hearing this. Imagine having felt there was a wall built up around the Jewish people and their God, the only true god, and now it had all come tumbling down. Imagine being in a part of the world where all of this is new. They are discovering something wonderful, and mysterious, and *new*. O that for us the gospel would be *ever new*.

It is new for Paul, isn't it? It has made him look at Jesus in a new way, it has made him look at the world in a new way, it has made him look at himself in a new way. It is not about us any more than it was about Paul. It is God's gospel, God's grace, God's power, and we are God's servants. Paul has learnt this thing which needs to be new to all of us, constantly new. You are where you are because of God; you do what you do in his kingdom because of God.

But although it isn't about us, it does involve us. It is all to be revealed through the church. *Look at us*, we're to say to the angels. *We're going to show you the wisdom of God.* And it's not some crazy one-off idea of God's. It is his eternal purpose. Through Jesus, he always intended it to be this way.

And what does someone do, when they grasp the amazing dignity and purpose which the gospel gives them? They don't look at God in fear, from far away. Remember 2:13? "We have been brought near by the blood of Christ." No, they approach God with freedom and confidence.

And what do you do, when you know you can approach God with freedom and confidence? Well you pray, don't you? Paul is a man who knows that he can pray. Next week we will focus in on his prayer for the Ephesians and the amazing thing that it is.

But what about today? Well we know now, don't we? We have a mystery revealed. A mystery that is revealed by God's Spirit, revealed through the church, and rooted in prayer.

Does the good news of Jesus feel dull and familiar to you, or is it something that is always new and amazing?

Do you feel that through Jesus, you belong to God's people now? Do you have sense that you have been brought close, made alive in Christ, and that he stands in our midst?

What more could the church do to show this amazing new reality to the world?