

God's Plan Made Known

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Ephesians chapter 3, starting in verse 1, we read, For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly, 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.

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.

Of this gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the things, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God may now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus, our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. This is the word of God. Great. Thank you for stepping in, Tess.

[2 : 13] Why don't we pray together so we can, yeah, that God will speak to us. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you that it speaks deep to our hearts. Thank you that you reveal, that you make known your plan, your purposes, that you make known the meaning of life, meaning of our life.

Father, please speak to us today. Would each of us, yeah, in our hearts hear you speak to us? And, yeah, draw near to us and give us grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Great. All right. Now, I don't know if you're on the MTR, they always advertise movies. I don't know if you saw the advertisement for Avatar, the movie from, I don't know, 15 years ago back in the cinema.

It's because the sequel's coming out in December, and so they thought, let's release it again. And I thought maybe that'd be nice to go and see it. But then I also thought, actually, I've got Disney Plus. I can just see it at home. Right? I mean, cinemas, I think they've taken quite a beating over the years, right? I mean, why go to the cinema? You know, at home, you don't need to travel.

[3 : 24] You can watch it at your convenience. You can watch it without a mask. Isn't that nice? You know, it's, okay, sometimes it's nice if there's a big crowd of people and you're watching this blockbuster together.

But sometimes other people are really annoying, right? They're on their phones. They cough. Or you're one of those small Hong Kong girls, and you're sitting behind me, and I'm blocking your view, right? That kind of thing.

You know, why go to the cinema? Why not just stay at home? But isn't it exactly the same thing that we've been having over the past few years with church? Why go to church?

Right? You can just watch it online at home. Isn't that, you know, so much easier? You don't need to travel. You can see it. You can have a coffee. You can sing without a mask.

Isn't that so much nicer? Right? I mean, of course, it's nice to sing together with other people. But some of them can't sing very well, and it's quite distracting. They might give you COVID, right?

[4 : 25] No, actually, we've all had that issue, right? Actually, online church, is that church? Or is there something about us coming here together? I mean, I'm so glad to see many of you here.

If you're watching at home, really great that you're here as well. But why go to church? I think today's passage is going to be really helpful for that. It's really a passage that goes to the heart of, you know, who we are as a church, who we are as Christians, who we are as Watermark. And, yeah, it's going to be hopefully eye-opening for us. Actually, what is the church? What is God's plan for us? That is what this passage is about.

Although, if you hear it, you might wonder, is that really what it's about? Because it seems to be just Paul talking about his job, right? You know, he's just been, for two chapters, he's been explaining what an amazing thing God is doing, right?

He's got this plan for the whole creation to bring everything together under Christ. I know he's made Christ head over everything, brought us from death to life, brought us all together under Christ in the church.

[5 : 31] And now he, well, he turns to pray, all right? 3 verse 1, for this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles. But then he stops.

And he, okay, assuming you've heard about me, let me tell you a bit about my job. And then 3 verse 14, he starts again. Well, for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father. Why is he talking about his job?

Well, actually, this passage kind of connects what we've seen before with the rest of the letter, which is more about what we need to do.

Because so far, we've been seeing what God has achieved, what God has done in Christ, the amazing riches of grace in Christ. But today, as you've heard, with a, you know, look at the repeated words.

What is today about? It's about God's plan made known. Verse 3, the mystery was made known to me by revelation. Verse 5, which was not made known to the sons of men and other generations, as it's now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets.

[6 : 38] Verse 9, to bring to light for everyone. Verse 10, so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known. You've heard that, right? Made known, made known, revealed, brought to light.

God's plan, it's amazing, but it's invisible. But today, well, God's plan has come into the world. It's been revealed. It's been made known.

That's where we're going. And, yeah, that goes right to who we are. But this making known, it happens in three stages. So, with three different prepositions. So, first of all, God's plan was made known for us.

To Paul, for us. All right, that's what he says in verse 3. How the mystery was made known to me. No, verse 2. The stewardship of God's grace that was given me for you.

And what is that? Well, you know, Dave, God has made known to me the mystery. Paul was in prison for preaching the gospel. But he says, yeah, he's talking about, okay, well, what is my role?

[7 : 44] Well, I've been, God has revealed to me the gospel. Now, it says mystery. There's different kinds of mysteries. Some mysteries are just things we can't understand, right? Like the trinity. The trinity.

How can God be free persons in one nature? That's something that I can't understand. Maybe you're smarter than me. I don't think any of us can understand it, right? But other things, it's a mystery because, well, it was hidden, but it's now revealed.

And Paul says, well, God made known to me this mystery, right? And it wasn't made known before, but now it has to the apostles. God has made the mystery known.

And what is that mystery? Mystery, verse 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.

And what we saw last week, this amazing thing that Gentiles can be part of the people of God. The world was divided into two groups. Here's the Jews. They're God's people.

[8 : 44] They've got the law, and they're close to him. But then the Gentiles is the rest of the world. Dirty, immoral, idolatrous pagans like me and you. And we were far from God.

We had no hope. And without hope and without God, that's how Paul described us. But the wonderful news is, you know, you can be included. We heard that last week. We can, well, verse 12, you can have boldness and access with confidence.

The God of the universe, the king of the universe, he invites us in, all of us. And we can have boldness. We, you know, we can just waltz in and speak to the creator of the universe.

Isn't that amazing? That wasn't there before, right? That was, you know, in the Old Testament, yeah, God seemed close to the Jews. They had a temple and stuff. But Gentiles were very far from God.

And maybe the only thing you could do is kind of get closer and look in from the outside. And, you know, maybe, you know, you can be a second-class citizen. But not anymore.

[9 : 50] You can now be in. And how? Well, as we heard last week, 2.13. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

It's through Jesus' death on the cross that washed us totally clean, as we heard earlier, right?

Totally. Our sins were like scarlet, but now white as snow. And we can come to God.

Amazing. Your background doesn't matter. Your performance doesn't matter. It's just through Jesus that each of us can come to God. That's the gospel. That is the great news. That's the wonderful thing God has done.

But can you imagine not knowing that? Can you imagine if God sent Jesus but then just didn't tell anyone? I mean, that wouldn't work, right? Now, of course, God kept it hidden for a while.

Maybe you think, why didn't God just make it known straight away? Why didn't he always say, just everyone, come on in? I think we'd have a very warped view of God's standards then, right?

[10 : 49] If all these dirty Gentiles could just walk into God's presence, you might think, well, God doesn't have any standards. Actually, God has the higher standards there are. You know, God is so holy.

Now, it's only when Jesus died and rose, that's when, yeah, the curtain was torn, right? That is when, when Jesus died, now we can come in. That's why now it's been made known.

But, yeah, God had to make it known, right? Otherwise, how would anyone know? I don't know.

Silly example. Imagine you want to see the White House.

And not just on the outside. You want to go into the White House to see it inside. How would you, how could you ever get into the White House? Maybe you can break in with some James Bond equipment and some serious ninja skills, kind of try to get in.

It's a lot of work, right? Or there was this sports team that was, got an award in the White House. So maybe I can move to the U.S. and join that sports team and then we win the national championship and we get invited to the White House and then I can see the inside.

[11 : 52] Actually, there's just a tour. You could just go to a website and sign up. Hey, I want to join the tour. You can just go in, right? Imagine, you know, but you need to know that. And the wonderful thing is God has made it known.

Again, imagine not knowing the gospel and you want to get close to God. What do I do? How do I get to this holy God?

How would I ever have a chance? And then you read the Old Testament. Well, okay, I need to get circumcised and there's 613 laws that I need to keep perfectly. And maybe that's when I can kind of come a little bit closer to God.

No. There's the gospel. God has revealed it. You know, you can just trust in Jesus and come in.

That's wonderful. And, yeah, that had to be made known.

But God has made it known and it's wonderful. I hope if you're a Christian you feel, yeah, this is so wonderful. And I'm so glad I was lost. You know, I didn't know this. I was away from God or I was religious and I tried to, you know, get my way to God and I couldn't.

[12 : 56] And then the gospel. Wonderful. Wonderful. And if you don't know this yet, if you're not yet trusting in Jesus, come and talk to me. This is such wonderful news. God's plan made known, well, yeah, for us.

But, of course, if only Paul knows it's not enough, right? So, step two, God's plan made known to us. Paul's job was not just that God revealed it.

What did he do? Well, verse 8, to me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. You know, Paul had to go and preach it.

He had to tell it to people. If just Paul knew it and, wow, that's really cool, and then just keeps making tents. Of course, again, the gospel wouldn't get to us, right? The gospel needs to be proclaimed.

It needs to be made known. After all, it's not automatic, right? It's very clear, you know, when you believe. Verse 12, boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

[13 : 59] People need to hear the gospel. And so, Paul went around and preached the gospel, and the other apostles and other people preached the gospel, and so on. And, you know, people believed, and that's how they got in, right?

We need to believe. Yeah, I mean, I think that's an obvious point, right? But it's worth saying.

People need to hear the gospel. Because most of us weren't there, right?

None of us were there when Jesus died. You need to hear it from others. I mean, the quarantine stuff, right? The best news in ages, zero plus three. Now, most of us weren't at the press conference, right?

How many of you were there when John Lee announced it? None of us. No, we heard it, you know, because they published it in the newspapers, and you texted your friends, hey, we can travel, right? News needs to spread.

Good news. And people were dying for good news. So, you, yeah, great news. Well, here is even better news, right? The gospel. Of course, people don't know they need it.

[14 : 58] Maybe why we don't text it to everyone. But, you know, good news needs to be made known. And so, let's make sure we tell people, right? Paul puts it so well in Romans, Romans 10.

How will they call on the one whom they have not believed? And how can they believe him whom they've never heard? How can they hear without someone preaching to them?

How can they preach if they're not sent? As it is written, how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who preach good news. Right? If people want to believe, they need to hear. And therefore, Paul preached the gospel.

In a way, that's why we should preach the gospel, right? Churches, we preach the gospel. But it's not the main thing here in Ephesians. I mean, it's important.

But Paul has something more. It's not just that churches just go and evangelize, even though important as it is. No, Paul is now in prison. He's done his job.

[15 : 58] Maybe the churches are worried. What now? Well, actually, there's a step three, Paul says. He's preached the gospel. Jews have believed. Gentiles have believed.

The church is now here. What now? Well, it leads to the climax of this section, verse 10. So that, right? So that this was God's plan. God's plan made known through us.

Through us. All right? So, verse 10 and 11. So that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Now, after Paul's done, it's time for the church. That through the church, the wisdom of God might be made known. Now, wisdom of God, the manifold, it's Joseph's code.

The many colors. The rich, varied wisdom of God, which he shows. In Ephesians, it's always about his plan. Like, how he saved us in all wisdom and insight.

[16 : 59] So, God's plan revealed through the church. In a way, just showing how amazing God is through his plan. As we put it in chapter 1, to the praise of his glory.

The church is to show God's glory, God's plan to the world. But what kind of making known? To whom? Is this about evangelism? No. Because it says, well, to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

My guess is we don't really know what that means or are confused about it. Chapter 6 makes it quite clear. So, 6, verse 12. Now, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers. Against the authorities. Against the cosmic powers over this present darkness. Against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. That's the rulers and authorities.

And that is to whom the church makes known God's plan. And then now, how does that work? I mean, I assume this is not a gospel conversation. Any of you have done two ways to live with a demon?

[18 : 04] I don't think so. Right? No. Just think about, you know, God is bringing the whole universe together. Why does it need to be brought together? How did it ever get broken?

Well, Genesis 3, right? Genesis 3. God made this beautiful world. And Adam and Eve lived together with God. And everything was great. And then Satan made his way into the garden.

Tempted Adam and Eve. They turned away from God. They fell out with each other. They fell out with creation. It was broken. And the result is the mess we see in the world today.

Right? In a way, it's all due to Satan. He kind of messed up God's plan. Of course, God knew it was going to happen. That's another point. But in a way, God's plan was messed up.

But God has this plan to make it all right. To everything back together under Christ. Right? And how is he? But where do you see that in action? You see it in the church.

[19 : 06] Because what has he been doing? He's put Christ over all. And made his people from death to life. And then brought people back together. Under Christ.

But where is that? Here in the church. And so, the church displays God's plan. It displays what God has done. Right? Because, as Kevin said, the church is like a trophy.

It is the sign that God has won. Right? And Satan has lost. Because, you know, Satan divided everything. But now, here, here's a Jew and a Gentile.

And they are worshiping God together. And they love each other. They're family. It's back together. The church is, yeah, it's God's plan in action.

It's seen here in the world. As kind of people get back together under Christ. And so, the church, it shows the plan. And it shows to Satan that he's lost. Right?

[20 : 04] That's kind of what Paul is getting at here. The church, yeah, it's a trophy. It shows what God has done. Because, yeah, it's back together.

I hope you see that. So, it's not about evangelism. It's about displaying. We display God's glory through us being together. You know, different people, Chinese, Western, Filipina, you know, coming together, being community, loving each other.

That is what God is doing. That is God's plan. And that's what he made. Right? And not just the rulers and authorities. As we heard last week. That was always the point of the temple.

Well, we are the temple. The whole world should be able to see what an amazing thing God is doing in the church. They should see that God is doing something real here in church as people love each other.

And like we see in other places in the Bible. John 13. By this all men will know you are my disciples if you love one another. Right? It's through our community life that people can see Jesus.

[21 : 12] In this case, they can see God's plan. So, it's like a billboard, as Kevin said last week. The church is this huge billboard. Now, that's how significant the church is. But the church, this is God's plan for you now.

What does God want from us? He's done everything in a way in Christ. But he wants to display his glory through the church, through our community, through our life together.

That is what he is doing. And I think a billboard, it's a great illustration. But it's not even strong enough language. The thing about a billboard is that the billboard doesn't have much to do with the thing.

Right? You have a billboard about a car. But that billboard, that's not the car. Right? The billboard says go over there. The church is not pointing a way. The church is actually part of God's plan. It's funny that Kevin used an iceberg this morning. I've got an iceberg. I think the church is like the tip of the iceberg. Here is God with this huge plan for all creation.

[22 : 15] But most of it is spiritual. It's in a heavenly place. You can't see it. Ninety percent of the plan you can't see. But ten percent of God's plan is visible. It's the church. Ten percent of God's amazing plan is right here, right now, here in this building.

So we don't say, oh, go to God over there. No. Come to God here in church. Go to experience heaven over there. No. Experience heaven on earth right here.

Right? That is what Paul is saying. And it's amazing, right? Just the default of church here. This is the future coming to the present. This is heaven come to earth.

This is God's plan here in action. This is such a, yeah, just pause it, right? What a huge vision of the church. For many of us, you know, church is easily just a spiritual discipline or even a hobby.

You know, read the Bible, it's a good thing to do. Praying is a good thing to do. Coming to church, it's a good thing to do. But if you don't find it helpful, it's okay. No, right?

[23 : 20] But us being together, that's the whole purpose for why God saved us. Church is not something you do. Church is who you are. Community is not something you do.

It's something you are. We are God's family. We are God's people. God's new humanity. Right? That's how we should see ourselves. Not as a social club.

Let me come back to, you know, if you're watching this online, I know there's many of you and you've got an Amber health code. Right? Or you're in isolation because you're a close contact or you've got COVID and all that stuff and you want to be here.

And I'm so glad you can join us online. There's others of you. Actually, you know, it's just much easier to watch online. I hope you see from today's passage, that's just not church, right? Church is us being together. And, you know, there's not much glory to be seen if we're just at home on the sofa watching YouTube. Right? We need to be here together.

[24 : 18] And not just come in and, you know, attend the service and as soon as we said to Benediction, rush out. It's like a cinema. We're not a cinema. We're a family.

So we hang out and we love each other and we have real community and we're committed to each other. And, you know, membership, being members of one family. Right?

That is what church should be. That's what spiritually we are. We are united. When it says here, gospel community mission, that's not something that, you know, people thought.

Oh, that's a great unique selling point. You know what? There's all these churches, we're going to be a community church. No. Right? Community is God's idea. Every church should be gospel community mission, we think.

I hope that's clear, right? It's so exciting. Right? I mean, do you want, we want to be in heaven, right? We want to, what God is doing for all eternity.

[25 : 18] I hope we want to go there. Well, we can experience it here. And if we don't like church, well, you're going to be very disappointed for all eternity, I think. Because that's when we're all going to be together under Christ for all eternity.

Right? Now, what a wonderful vision. I hope that's something that touches our hearts. I hope it's something that people can see.

If you're here and you're not a Christian, I hope. Spend enough time with us that you can see something real. Something supernatural. I mean, I can tell you about God. I can tell you about his plan.

But you probably think, well, I can't see it. Why should I believe it? Well, come to church. Spend time with these people. And hopefully you can see, wow, the way they love each other.

The way they, people who shouldn't get on, they try to make it work. And they sacrifice for each other. That's something real. Maybe there is something to the gospel.

[26 : 15] I hope you can see that here. Now, I know churches sometimes fall short of it. We fall short of it. Watermark isn't perfect. Mainly because of me, right?

And all our sin, right? All our problems. Now, it's very clear that, okay, this is a spiritual unity. Well, we need to realize it in practice, right?

You know, if you feel like, okay, church isn't great. And maybe you've been hurt by a church in the past. Now, this is something God has done. But we need to work it out in practice.

And some churches are not very good at it, right? I mean, chapter 4, what does Paul say in chapter 4 we should do? 4 verses 1 to 3. I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

Live this out. Live in a worthy way. With all humility and gentleness. With patience. Bearing with one another in love. Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[27 : 19] And clearly, it's not automatic, right? He calls on people, okay, be gentle. Bear with one another. Forgive one another. You know, try to maintain this unity.

It's something we need to work out. And sadly, Satan isn't gone yet. I mean, as we've heard before, you know, Satan really hates the church.

When he sees the church, he sees that he's failed, that he's doomed. And so, what Satan loves to do is just divide and sow conflict and all that stuff. And sadly, some churches, he's very successful. And that's partly why chapter 6 we're going to talk about spiritual warfare. You know, because Satan wants to destroy the church. He wants to destroy this billboard because he doesn't want anyone else to see it. So, yeah, those reasons, yeah, the church often doesn't live up to what it should be.

And yet, if you look in a true church closely, I hope you can see something. But what if we're Christians? You know, isn't this exciting?

[28 : 26] We did Ecclesiastes over the summer, and the universe has no meaning, and your life has no meaning. It was so depressing. I hope you see the universe is not meaningless, right?

It's going somewhere. God is bringing everything under Christ. But your life has meaning. You are part of that. By his grace, he's included you, chosen you, blessed you. But also now, he wants you to display his glory.

He wants us together to display his glory, right? That's what life is now about. This is the big thing. You're playing a part in something so much bigger than your job or whatever, right? Think about the big thing God is doing. Isn't it so exciting? You know, you are the tip. We are the tip of the iceberg. God's plan is here. It can be seen. Church, also individually. I mean, chapter 5, he talks a lot about how we just live in the world. You know, God's glory is seen here as we love each other. God's glory is also seen when you just, you're at work and you honor Christ.

[29 : 32] Because it shows you've been brought from death to life and you're now under Christ. And all your friends are sleeping around, but you don't. It shows God's glory. It shows that God is doing something. And even when no one else sees it, Satan sees it.

And he grinds his teeth, right? Because he can see that you, I mean, I talk a lot about Satan because the passage does, right? Because the Ephesians, they were really, it was a city full of the occult.

They were much more aware with it than we are. But actually, we should realize that. And that means that, you know, whatever we do in church, it matters. Even if there's no visitors, God's glory is still revealed to the spiritual forces.

But it's so exciting, right? I hope you see that. Individually, together. And so, yeah, let's live it out. I hope we feel encouraged, right? I hope you are excited to be a Christian, excited to be part of the church.

And here is God's plan. Let's live this out. Let's walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Let's maintain our unity. Let's walk in a way that shows who God is, that shows what a great thing he's doing.

[30 : 41] What a, yeah, that is God's plan for us. I know what you're feeling now. I mean, this sounds all great, but then it's very daunting, right?

I mean, I know my heart. I know my sin. My brokenness. I know, like you. How are we ever going to display God's glory? That's a great question.

You know, and it's very, there's a passage that we jumped over. Before we go to chapter four, there's a prayer. We really need God's help. That's what we're going to look at in two weeks' time. You know, we can't do this without God's help. But I hope you catch the vision. I hope you're excited about what God is doing and that we want to live that out. So, why don't we pray together? Father, thank you so much for the gospel. Thank you for sending Jesus and, yeah, bringing us back to you, bringing us to each other as your new family.

[31 : 46] Yeah, making Christ's head over everything, it's, it blows our minds. And it's wonderful that, by grace, you've included such sinners as us in this.

Father, we want to show this. We want everyone to know this good news, everyone to see your glory. And we want to live this out. But we also confess that, yeah, we are broken sinners and we need your help, Father.

Please do that. But give us this vision. And when we are at work and it sucks and we are just feeling like nothing matters, no. We are part of your plan.

We live here for your glory. And it's beautiful. And, yeah, you will glorify yourself through us. Give us that vision. Give us meaning and hope and purpose that we may live for you here in Hong Kong. In Jesus' name. Amen.