

January 7, 2018 **Epiphany, Now the World Knows!**

Ephesians 3:1-12

INTRO:

January 6th is always Epiphany. Epiphany is when we think about the the wise men, the Magi, the Astrologers. **What is an epiphany?**

*We've all been asked the question: "If you had the chance to talk to your hero, who would it be and what would you say?" Washington, D.C. cab driver Sam Snow didn't have much of a chance to prepare for a conversation with his hero, though, because it took him by surprise. While driving his taxi recently, Snow mentioned to his passengers that even though he was a Pittsburgh Steelers fan, his all-time favorite player was Broncos legend John Elway. The passengers then asked him if he thought he could recognize Elway if he ever met him. Snow then turned around to realize that the famous former quarterback, who was in Washington, D.C. for the presidential inauguration, was in fact riding in his own backseat. **The two snapped a quick picture, but only after Snow chastised Elway for beating his Steelers so many times in the playoffs.***

Sam Snow had an epiphany!

ME:

I had an epiphany about "**Epiphany**" early in my ministry. I had heard it, but I never really thought about what it meant.

YOU:

Do you understand what Epiphany is, or have you not had such an epiphany yet? Get it? *If not, oh well!* Let's see if Paul can help us understand the meaning of all this in his letter to the Ephesians:

GOD:

Ephesians 3:1 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — 2 for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, 3 and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, 4 a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. 5 In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: 6 that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

7 Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. 8 Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; 10 so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

12 in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

WE:

They say the best way to understand the importance of “**the mystery**” in Paul’s life is to focus on the two descriptions he gives of himself in this section. He first calls himself “**a prisoner**,” and then he calls himself “**a minister**.” Paul was a prisoner because he believed in God’s desire to unite believing Jews and Gentiles into one body, the Church. The orthodox Jews in Paul’s day considered the Gentiles “**dogs**,” and many Jewish Christians did not had a similar attitude toward the Gentiles.

Paul was a Pharisee when Christ appeared to him and his conversion uprooted his life’s goal. Paul began his ministry in a church in Antioch that was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. When the council was held at Jerusalem to determine the status of believing Gentiles, Paul courageously defended the **grace** of God and the **unity** of the church.

Paul knew from the very beginning that God had called him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, and so he did. Wherever Paul went, he began local churches of believing Jews and Gentiles, all “**one in Christ Jesus**.”

Paul was not only a “**prisoner**” because of “**the mystery**,” but he was also a “**minister**.” God gave him a vision that he might go to the Gentiles, not only with the Good News of salvation through Christ, but also with the message that Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ.

Paul was a steward of “**the mystery**” with the responsibility of sharing it with the Gentiles. It was not enough simply to introduce them to Christ and form them into local groups. He was to teach them about their equality with the Jews in the body of believers. This truth had not been revealed in Hebrew Scripture. It was revealed to the New Testament Apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit. God revealed it personally to Paul, and it was his job to share it with the Gentile Christians.

Gentiles are fellow-heirs with the Jews and share in the spiritual riches God gave them because of the covenant with Abraham. In Christ, being a Jew or a Gentile is neither good or bad, together we share the riches of Christ. The Gentiles are also fellow-members of the body of Christ, the Church. Christ is the Head of this body, and each member shares in the ministry.

The Gentiles are partakers of God’s promises. Once they were outside the covenant, with no claims on the promises of God; but now, in Christ, they share the promises of God with all other believers.

“**The mystery**” also reveals that there is a new power available to them. This power is illustrated in the life of Paul. God grabbed him by grace and gave him a special ministry to the Gentiles. But God also gave Paul the power and energy needed to do the job.

New riches are available to the Gentiles new:

“the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

Paul called them “**exceeding riches**” but here he describes them as “**un-fathomable.**” This can also be translated “**untraceable,**” or so vast you never find their end.

Are these riches available to every believer? Yes! Even you? YES! Even me? YEP! Even me! Paul makes it clear that he himself had no special claim on God’s wealth, for he considered himself “**less than the least of all the saints.**” The name “**Paul**” even means “**little**” in Latin. Here he calls himself, “**less than the least of all saints,**” and he later calls himself the “**chief of sinners.**”

The more we know of God, the more humble we should be.

Epiphany: Now the World knows!

God's grace is available, is free, is undeserved, is lavished upon all, not just the Chosen People of Israel. This grace is for sinners just like you . . . and me. Jews and Gentiles and every one who believes.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

Epiphany: Now the World knows God's love and grace are for us all!

YOU:

Is this news to you? Did you just have an epiphany? If so, *great! God loves you! God's grace is for you too!*

CLOSE:

God reveals that the Gospel was always meant to be for both those of Jews and Gentiles alike. Throughout the New Testament, we find multiple references to Peter and Paul debating what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. **Can you imagine what that was like for the early Christian churches at this time?** Comparing the résumés of Paul and Peter was an exercise in comparing polar opposites. Peter was one of Jesus's closest friends and confidants, yet he also denied him when things got bad. Paul was outspoken about his storied history of viciously attacking early Christians, yet everything changed with his dramatic meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus. **How did the followers of The Way know whom to believe and how to live as faithful disciples?** In the Common English

Bible translation of this passage in Ephesians, the Apostle Paul shares God's secret plan about Jesus the Christ. Another way of translating the words secret plan is **mystery**. In these action-packed verses, Paul reveals an epiphany, an a-ha moment, that would change the trajectory of the good news of Jesus for all of humanity. *And that is the Good News!*

Let's pray for an epiphany of grace together now . . .