

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Riches of Grace For All Peoples

by Dan Trygg

“...you have heard of the stewardship (*oikonomia*) of God's grace which was given to me for you; ³ that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. ⁴ And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; ⁶ to be specific, that the Gentiles (non-Jewish nations) are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, ⁷ of which I was made a minister (servant), according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the in-working of His power. ⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach (declare good news) to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light what is the administration (*oikonomia*) of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; ¹⁰ in order that the manifold (diverse, many-sided, multi-faceted, much-varied) wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”
Ephesians 3:2-10

This book of Ephesians is *amazing*! There are so many incredible, positive messages conveyed by Paul, ...statements of completed facts, and inspirational possibilities! Before the foundation of the world, God determined that those who would be in Christ would be holy and blameless, would be adopted into His family as full heirs, and would come to be to the praise of His glory. We have been redeemed by Christ's blood on our behalf, forgiven and set free from its bondage in our lives. Having heard the gospel, and responded in faith, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance. Paul encouraged us to seek to know God, and come to know the hope of His calling for our lives, the abundance of what He has for us in Christ, and the power that is available for us, as we live out our lives in and with Him.

This was not due to anything we had done. We had been living according to the enemy's influence and propaganda, and were spiritually dead. **God, however, took the initiative to show us His grace.** He made us alive in Christ. By His grace we have been saved through faith. He has formed and fashioned us for good works, which He will bring into our lives. **Although we had been outsiders, God removed every barrier, and reconciled us through Christ, even bringing us into His household, and making us members of His family.** We, along with others, are being built into a spiritual house, with Christ as the Cornerstone, ...to be a temple, a dwelling place for God's Spirit.

There is much more in the details, but the description above is enough to get a glimpse of the expansive nature of the vistas of grace and opportunity that Paul is describing. Chapter 3 is no less amazing. **Most of the Ephesian Christians were not from a Jewish background. What exposure they probably had emphasized that the Jews considered themselves to be “the people of God”, and that people from other nations (Gentiles) were outsiders, ...unclean and unacceptable to God.** Although God had intended that the Jews would be a light to other nations, because of pride, legalism and exclusivism, the message most non-Jews perceived was that Jews were a strange lot, and that they thought they were superior to everyone else.

Paul himself had been of this mindset. In fact, he supported the execution of Stephen, because he thought he was promoting ideas that would open the way for Gentiles. **It took a revelation from Jesus Christ, ...a “stop dead in your tracks” visitation from the risen Jesus..., to convince him that his religious understanding was wrong (Acts 9).** Here, in Ephesians 3, Paul explained that through this revelation from Jesus, **he came to realize that there had been a hidden purpose, ...a “mystery”..., that had been unperceived for ages and generations.** It has now been revealed to Jesus' apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit. **This mystery was that it was God's intent to make non-Jewish people to be co-heirs with Jewish people of faith, fellow-members of the same body, and joint sharers of the promise in Jesus by means of the gospel.** It was to this very gospel Paul became a servant, according to the gift of God's grace. God's power was operating (lit., “inworking”) in Paul's life to make him especially effective in proclaiming the good news to these non-Jewish people. **Look at God! This hyper-religious, hyper-nationalistic Jewish Pharisee was confronted by Jesus, given revelation that blew apart his prejudices, and was given the assignment of proclaiming to the very people he had once despised the unfathomable abundance that is in Christ!** In fact, it was his calling to “bring to light” the plan or purpose of God, ...the mystery that had been hidden from view (and understanding) from ages past. This became one of the things that Paul was especially known for. **Wherever he went, he proclaimed this previously-hidden purpose, both to the Jews and also to the non-Jewish people who were interested in the message of God's love through Jesus Christ.**

Most translations render verse 8 as “unfathomable *riches* of Christ”. This is actually the fourth time this word is used in this letter (cf. 1:7,18; 2:7). In each case, **it is translated as “riches”, even though it is in the singular form in all of these passages. To translate it as “riches” is a bit misleading, since it is not about material things in any**

of these contexts. It is “the riches/abundance of His grace” (1:7), “the riches/abundance of the glory” of what we receive in Christ (1:18), the “thrown-above-and-beyond riches/abundance of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ” (2:7), and now “the unfathomable riches/abundance of the Christ” (3:8). **The point is the full and magnanimous provision of God made available to us through Jesus Christ.** The word “unfathomable” is a reasonable translation. It implies that the abundance that is in Jesus is more than we could possibly comprehend. The Greek word, however, is literally, “untrackable”. It is saying that it **there is so much more in Jesus than we could ever follow or discover.**

Paul’s assignment was to proclaim the good news of this incredible, inexhaustible, unlimited fulness that is available to us in Christ, because of God’s grace and love, ...and to bring to light the master plan of God, which had been hidden for ages in God, who had created all things, **which was to extend this wonderful grace beyond the Jewish nation to reach people all around the world.** Because of his calling, and the inworking of God in his life, Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles, just as God had called and empowered Peter to be an effective apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7,8).

There was an even larger dimension to this amazing plan of God. Beyond proclaiming and demonstrating God’s grace to the Jews first, and then to reach beyond them to declare the message and invitation of God’s grace to the other people groups around the world, **God intended to display His wisdom, grace and character to yet another audience. It was His intent to do all of this in full view of the angelic hosts in heaven.**

We often are unaware and unmindful of this area of God’s concern and interest. We know that angels were also created with free will, because Satan and those who followed him, chose to rebel against God. **It appears that possibly up to a third of the angels were caught up in this rebellion** (Rev. 12:4). Although this revolt was put down, and the enemy and his mutinous host have been banished from the presence of the Almighty, **the Lord chose to demonstrate the superiority of not only His power, but also of His wisdom and benevolent character. He is not only the strongest, but also the best!** So, along with God patiently working in history to prepare the way for the redemption of humanity, He was also revealing His wise, long-suffering, love and grace. **He allowed the cancer of sin to continue to spread, clearly exposing its poisonous and destructive fruit,** ...so that it would be clearly evident that sin produces emptiness, imbalance, oppression, suffering and death. **At the same time, He chose to patiently work with weak, imperfect people to prepare the way for a dramatic, powerful redemption,** ...a redemption of *His* doing, by *His* grace, that would restore balance, promote humility, heal brokenness and disease, and bring life, renewal and a new creation where there is no more death, no more sorrow, no more mourning or pain (Rev. 21:1-5). The former things will be gone, and a new world in which righteousness dwells will be established. **Again, this had been a “mystery”, a hidden plan which God had meticulously prepared for, and even spoken of** through angelic messengers and prophetic spokespeople over the centuries. Now, through Jesus Christ, God had fulfilled many of those prophetic “hints”, “glimpses” and “declarations”, and **He is now at work to make known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies the diverse, many-sided, multi-faceted, much-varied wisdom of God.**

What is the vehicle He is going to use to do this? The “called-out people” of God, the *ekklēsia*, the church. It was by God’s design that Jesus, by His shed blood, would ransom people for God from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, and make them to be a kingdom and priests to God, that they might reign upon the earth with Him (Rev. 5:9,10). Throughout the centuries, prophets had spoken of these things, but did not understand them (1 Pet. 1:10-11). **Even the angels did not understand what God was doing, until it had been accomplished** (1 Pet. 1:12), ...and this “mystery of God” is *still* unfolding!

At the time Jesus left, there were only the 120 disciples waiting in the upper room (with possibly another 400 more elsewhere – cf. 1 Cor. 15:6). Ten days later, at Pentecost, over 3,000 gave their allegiance to Christ (Acts 2:41). **A short time later, the number of believers had increased to 5,000.** After the martyrdom of Stephen, the believers were scattered, and spread the gospel wherever they went. Philip proclaimed the message to the Samaritans. The Ethiopian eunuch brought the gospel to Africa (Acts 8). **Peter was directed to share the message with a Roman centurion and his associates, the first Gentile converts** (Acts 10). Others brought the message to Antioch of Syria, the third largest city in the Roman empire, and the church grew and flourished there. After the destruction of Jerusalem, this city became the center of Christianity for some time. Paul and Barnabas brought the gospel to Cyprus, and to the area we think of as Turkey. Paul and his team planted churches there, and also in Macedonia, Achaia, and eventually in Rome itself. **By the end of the first century, it is estimated that over a million people were professed believers in Jesus Christ, or about 1 out of every 300 people. Now, nearly 1 out of 3 name Jesus as Lord.**

Beyond the numerical increase has been the influence on morality, law, science, medicine, care for the weak, poor or orphaned. Jesus’ people have spawned the abolition of slavery, reform of prisons, and workplaces. They have fostered human dignity, the sanctity of life, and compassion for the oppressed. **Wherever there has been the darkness, degradation and oppression of satanic evil, the *ekklēsia* of Jesus has brought the light of God’s love and grace to bring forgiveness, freedom, hope and restoration. The wisdom of God through His church has truly been inspirational in its breadth and the variety of areas it has touched.** Even the angels watch and give Him praise for what He is doing.