

**Ephesians 3:1-13**  
**The Story is Jesus!**

**Reading: Ephesians 3:1-13**

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles –*

*2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

*7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

When we last met, we looked at the second part of Ephesians chapter 2 and God's plan to build a family. It would be a diverse family, because some were Jews and others were coming from all sorts of other nations., many nations summed up by the word "Gentiles". God's plan was to create a whole new family of people who would love Him and worship Him; these people, coming from all sorts of places and backgrounds would all come to God in the same way, through Jesus Christ. All the old enmities and hatreds would be swept away, and they would be this one new family, united in Jesus and united by their love for one another. Jesus would be the cornerstone of this new family: Jesus has loved all of them and has saved all of them and His grace is at work in all of them.

Today, Paul is writing a little of his autobiography, telling us a little bit of his own story, and his part in this family. There's not much autobiography, just a snippet, but enough to help us understand something of how big God's plan for the world is. Paul tells us of his place in that plan: he is called to be a preacher, telling the story of Jesus, helping people both understand Jesus and trust in Him. For Paul the story is never about Paul; the story is always about Jesus, because Jesus is the One who saves and it is in Jesus that people need to put their trust. I know that today, for you, the story of this service is about me being here; you will tell someone that I was back and you will also make some comment about how I seem; ultimately, however, the story is never about me; the story always needs to be about Jesus and that's what I'm going to try to do this morning, tell you something about Jesus that will make your faith in Him stronger and deeper.

There's a mystery! Now, that mystery is nothing to do with the body in the library and Agatha Christie or Ian Rankin creating the story of whodunnit with Poirot or Rebus. There's a mystery and it has been revealed. It was a mystery because before it was hidden and now it has been made clear. The mystery being revealed is that God's plan is to make Jews and Gentiles heirs together in God's kingdom, sharers together in the promises of God. Before, this was true only of the Jews; they were supposed to share these privileges, but they never did; they kept them all to themselves. Now God's plan has been revealed; the mystery is open and everyone, no matter who they are or where they come from, can

enjoy the promises of God in Jesus. Paul is one of those to whom this has been made clear; the church is this multi-layered family of people who belong to God, built on the grace of God in Jesus. Paul is to tell the world.

*"I became a servant of this gospel... although I am less than the least of God's people, this grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery..." (3:7-9a)* A preacher: how do you value your preachers? I'm not sure how the world values preachers: for some they are figures of fun; for others they are figures of hate because there are preachers who peddle hatred; for the church we hope that our preachers are a valuable asset, though in Scotland the number of preachers today is probably smaller than it has been for about 500 years. I have been asked often how I make up my sermons; I have known others who have claimed their preaching as a way of expressing their own opinions about the stories in the news. For the Bible, the preacher is someone who tells people the story of Jesus, who shares good news about the grace of God and who points people over and over again to Jesus.

Paul comes to a place like Corinth. It was a dreadful place, a seaport and a real den of iniquity, the name "Corinth" had become a by-word for all kinds of evil. There is a small Jewish community in Corinth when Paul gets there and he spends time with them, explaining Jesus to them. But they reject him and his message and so he turns next door to speak to people who were Gentiles, people from other places, other nations; in Corinth that was probably quite a cosmopolitan group, a mixed social group. What does he tell them? He tells them that they are loved, that they matter, that though they seem unimportant, God loves them and Jesus died for them. For people who are probably seen as the dregs of human life, who maybe even thought of themselves as the dregs, all of a sudden here is a man who wants to lift them up and change the way they think; Paul tells them about Jesus and they are changed; they belong, they are loved, God cares for them; they are new people in Christ. The *"unsearchable riches"* are shared.

About 15 years ago, Jean and I visited Russia on holiday. One of the trips we took as part of that holiday was to the Catherine Palace outside St Petersburg. What a place! When you visit, you start with the amazing blue and gold front of the palace, outside, and that takes your breath away. Then you go inside and must wear protective covers on your shoes! There is a fantastic marble staircase, with more gold. Then you visit the portrait room, the dining room, the ballroom, the amber room, the throne room – each room is magnificent, glorious; each room takes your breath away one after the other; all you can do is marvel at the splendour of the place, riches upon riches! It was even more memorable for the musical group in one of the rooms, one of whom had the deepest voice I have ever heard; the sound was simply amazing.

Have a look at the diamond: the light that shines through the stone sets it off in so many ways. That is the skill of the diamond cutter. An uncut diamond will show off none of its properties and beauty, but the skill of the diamond cutter is to create a stone that reflects the light in so many different ways. Look at the diamond in one way and you will see something of one of its facets and marvel at the light that shines through it; turn it around and you will see a different light coming from a different face. There is almost something different to see every time that you look, riches upon riches in the beauty of the diamond.

These are 2 pictures of the gospel. Paul talks about the *"unsearchable riches of Christ"* in the gospel. There is something new to see every time you look; there is another facet of the gospel to explore and enjoy every time you read the Bible; the preacher has something new to tell you every time that he

or she preaches. I have been preaching for over 40 years and at times feel as if I have only just scratched the surface of the gospel and its blessings and its implications. We are loved; we are adopted children; we are forgiven our sins; we have a sense of freedom, redemption; we are reconciled to our previously estranged father; we have God with us always and everywhere; God lives in us by His Spirit; we have the promise of being with Jesus forever and sharing His glory... And so much more! Jesus is Lord and we are called to live our lives in Jesus' ways. It blows my mind to think that the gospel is "*Unsearchable riches*", so much more than we will ever know; it gives us every reason to trust Jesus.

*"In Jesus and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."* (3:12) Are you scared of God? Do you need to be sure of wearing the right clothes when you pray or saying the right words? There are 2 words here to give us hope, to reassure us, words filled with love: "*freedom and confidence*" are the qualities with which we are able to come to God. We come to God as we are without any mask, any pretence, and knowing that God will welcome us with open arms. We come to God with the freedom that comes from knowing He loves us, from knowing His grace, and with the confidence that knows Jesus has died for us.

The story is all about Jesus. We never know what life has in store for us; the future of the church in Scotland is more uncertain than it has ever been; but always Jesus is Lord, always Jesus loves us. The name of Jesus runs through life more strongly than Blackpool runs through a stick of rock! The story is not about me, not about the preacher; the story is not about the church and the way we do things in Juniper Green Church. The story must always be about Jesus: it is in Jesus we trust; it is Jesus whose story we tell; it is Jesus who saves and forgives us; it is Jesus who is the cornerstone of our faith and in whose ways we try to live our lives; it is Jesus who is Lord. Love the Lord Jesus Christ heart and soul; trust Him completely.

Our job is to tell the story of Jesus to our community: to our families, to our friends, to the people we meet in the groups we are involved with. We have opportunities to tell the story using words and tell people something that is important. But we also tell the story by the kind of people we are: loving, kind, patient, compassionate, forgiving people, qualities that tell the world that we follow Jesus; we show Jesus to the world by the kind of people that we are, especially by our love. God's plan was that this new church family He is creating will tell the world, will tell the powers that be, will tell anyone who listens, that God is wise and gracious and loving, and that Jesus is Lord. What story do people hear from us? What story do people see in us? Is the story about Jesus? Is it a rich story? Is it a story that gives freedom and confidence?