

“Through the Church” (Ephesians 3:2–12)(11.6.22)

Ephesians 3:2–12 (NIV84)

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 men 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 God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable 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 which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: “Through the Church”

INTRODUCTION:

Last week, we began to look at the Christian Church. As the Jerusalem Temple was Chosen and Consecrated by God, so is the Church. We read several pieces of scripture by the Apostle Peter. Here we are looking at the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians where he is proclaiming that the Church plays a central role in bringing the mystery of the gospel to the world.

Before we get into that, I want to further connect last week’s message with this week’s message with a few verses from Ephesians 2:19–22 (NIV84); the ones immediately preceding today’s text.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with **God’s people and members of God’s household**,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. Yes, the Church is God’s chosen and consecrated temple.

I decided on this scripture and message today for two related reasons. This week, November 1st, was All Saints Day, when we remember the Saints that have gone before us, the Universal Church. And, I deliberately scheduled the reception of new church members for today to make a nice tie-in.

After I had planned today's worship service and sent the draft into Hannah, I got in my car to go play pickleball. I turned on the radio to a Christian station and guess what scripture was being preached? Ephesians 3, the first twelve verses. I thought to myself, thank you Lord for your confirmation.

BODY:

Four times here, Paul uses the term "mystery:" The mystery made know to me by revelation – the mystery of Christ – This mystery that through the gospel – and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery.

Warren Wiersbe, pastor and scholar, explains that this mystery is "a sacred secret that is unknown to unbelievers, but understood and treasured by the people of God." The mystery of Christ could not have been conceived by human beings. Even the Devil himself was caught completely off guard; but, we will come back to that in a minute.

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. The plan that everyone understood was that the Jews were The Chosen People of God and that they were a special people set apart for God's purposes. Somehow everyone missed the crucial hint in Genesis 12:3 (ESV) "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

If you were not a Jew, you were segregated to the outer most court of the Jerusalem Temple by a threat of death. Jewish men thanked God in their prayers that they were not Gentiles. It was the ultimate us versus them. It was You are on the Outside and I am on the inside. But, Jesus changed all that when He died for ALL. 1 John 2:2 (NIV84) He [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. NO ONE saw that coming.

One commentary explains the crucial element of the Body of Christ: "Believers in Christ are actually a living organism by the Spirit of God. Believers are actually indwelt by the Spirit of God who energizes and empowers the spirit of believers. He creates a spiritual union by melting and molding the heart of the Christian believer to the hearts of other believers. He attaches the life of one believer to the lives of other believers. Through the Spirit of God, believers become one in life and purpose. They have a joint life sharing their blessings and needs and gifts together."

In the 2nd verse, our NIV says administration, but other translations say stewardship, the commission, or the dispensation of God's grace. Then in the 9th verse our NIV says the

administration of the mystery while others say what is the plan of this mystery or the fellowship of the mystery.

Part of Paul's stewardship was to write letters to the churches he planted. Here he explicitly says his writing the Ephesians is to give them understanding and insight into the mystery of Christ. That is teaching, right? Some of his letters were to admonish and correct doctrine and behaviors. He wrote letters to younger pastors he was mentoring. He truly believed in teaching.

Then Paul says that his commission includes preaching the riches of Christ and to make the stewardship of the mystery plain and easy to comprehend. He started preaching Jesus days after his conversion on the Damascus Road. He preached in front of kings and governors even when he was on trial. He preached wherever he went; even in Athens in front of Greek philosophers. He even preached while in chains.

We are able to discern several things about Paul in these verses. He considers himself a servant of the gospel – not a highfalutin person of privilege. He considers the calling on his life by God as grace, a gift and not a burden. And in the 12th verse, he says that we, you and I and Paul, have access to God with freedom and confidence. He knows, and teaches, and preaches, that he was saved by grace, not by works, so there was no ground for boasting. And in 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV84) Paul proclaims, "Follow my example, **as I follow the example of Christ.**" Paul modeled a life-giving gospel.

So, Paul preaches, teaches, and models a life-giving gospel. That sounds kind of familiar. Check out page 2 of our bulletin. What does it say? Preach, Teach and Model a Life-Giving Gospel. That statement is there every week. Why? It is the mission statement for Emmaus Church of Smithville. As members of this church, you are guided by that mission statement.

After Paul explains his part in this stewardship of the mystery, which is likely the best way to understand the responsibility – as stewardship – he then goes on to explain that it is through the church that this stewardship continues. He repeats this teaching in 1 Corinthians 4:1–2 (ESV) This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

And, how do we demonstrate faithfulness? By living out our mission statement.

Paul is telling us in this text that there is a COSMIC CONNECTION within God's eternal purposes for the Church. The "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" are the angels. They are God's angels. They are the fallen angels who serve Satan. They had no clue what God was doing through this mystery. They marvel and amaze as they witness the continuing unfolding of Jesus' Christ's Church, His Body, His Bride.

You cannot separate Jesus Christ from the Church. He is the glorious head. His purposes are our purposes. His mission is our mission. His agenda is our agenda. Many people spend a good part

of their lives wanting to be part of something bigger than themselves. My fellow Christians, in being part of the Universal Church, there is no higher calling.

When any Christian fails to participate in the life of the Church, they are in rebellion against God's eternal purposes. They are also failing themselves. Our health, wholeness, peace, and well-being are intimately tied to our identity in Christ. We find that identity in the Church.

CONCLUSION:

J.D. Greear, megachurch pastor, uses this illustration about church membership:

“Why must we be a part of the church?”

- Analogy: Church members are like a pile of bricks that, when put together is a temple where God's Spirit dwells. No brick by itself is the whole temple; all the bricks together are the temple.
- No brick is complete without all the others. It's just a brick. In the same way, none of us are complete in Christ without one another, and in one sense, the Spirit of Jesus doesn't dwell fully in any one of us, He dwells fully only in all of us! The Spirit inhabits the whole building! Thus, only by being a part of the body of Christ will I experience the fullness of Christ.

If you want to *know* Christ, you must be intimately connected to His body:

- The Spirit dwells in the whole body, not in any one part. That means there is so much of Christ you're going to miss out on if you aren't connected to the body.
- Check this out Paul says in **3:10**: so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known. Think about manifold as Many folds or multi-faceted. There's a part of God's wisdom and beauty revealed in you that is not revealed in me. [That's a reference to the gifts of the Spirit, which are used to edify the whole Body of Christ.]

Greear continues...But let me just say this here ... the church is like a Mosaic: Each of us is revealing a part of Christ. What we see of Christ in us together is more complete than what we see alone. There are some things about Christ which I can only know by knowing you ... There are some of you who have had Jesus reveal Himself in you and through you in a way that I haven't experienced (maybe he walked you through pain, maybe there's a part of his character revealed in you), and if I want to know Jesus more fully, I've got to know you. Jesus did not give Himself to any one person fully. **You've got a role to play in me coming to know God.**"

I pray with Paul: Ephesians 1:18–23 (NIV84)

¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty

strength,²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.