

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Part 11

In my last lesson I put forth the idea that in what the Scriptures call “the mystery of God,” or “the gospel,” that not only were there plenty of clues that pointed to the cross of Christ, there are also some things that are a part of that mystery that flow from the cross. We talked about one of those last week, which was the beginning of the Church, which is His body. Acts 20:28 tell us that with the blood shed at the cross, God purchased the church. That is, the church owes its origin to Jesus’ death on the cross, and if we are going to be thankful and dedicated to the message of the cross, we also have to be faithful in proclaiming the message of the church.

I want to talk about a second thing this morning and that is, that God’s intention from before the creation was to make salvation possible for all men, and not just a select few. If you brought your Bibles this morning, please open to **Genesis 22:15-18**, and read along with me (context and reading)...

If I may this morning, I would like to draw your attention to that part of this reading, where in **verse 18** the angel, speaking for God, says to Abraham, *“...and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”*

Of course, this was a promise God had already made at an earlier time Abraham, and it was repeated a number of times.

- In **chapter 12**, we find the original promise, where in **verses 2 & 3**, we find God saying to the great patriarch: *“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3) 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.”*
- It gets repeated again in **chapter 18**, when three angels make a visit with Abraham to tell him that in a year he will have a son, and also that God has plans to destroy both Sodom and Gomorrah. In **verse 18**, the angel of the Lord says, *“seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.”*
- And then we have the repeating of that promise in the text I read a few minutes ago from Genesis 22. We hear the same promise again made to Isaac, in **26:4**. God says, *“I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”*
- It certainly seems to be hinted at in the prophetic words of Psalm 72:17. You hear it in Peter’s sermon found in **Acts 3**. There Peter, explaining why Christ was sent first to the

Jews, told them in **verse 25**: *"You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed."*

- In **Galatians 3**, Paul is writing to the Gentiles, trying to help them understand that the hope one has in God is based, not on keeping the Law of Moses, but on the basis of faith in God's son. In **verse 8**, he writes, *"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.'"*

Now, what do these many scriptures tell us? What was God saying when he said that all the families of the earth would be blessed? What He was saying is that the gospel is intended for all the people in all the world. We know that, don't we? Jesus made that abundantly clear when He gave what we call the great commission.

- In **Matthew's account**, it goes like this: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*
- In **Mark's account**, we read: *"And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. 16) Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*
- In **Luke 24**, we read: *"Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46) and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47) and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."*
- **Acts 1:8** *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

One cannot read those verses without being impressed with the fact that clearly, from the beginning of the gospel age, it was God's intention that all men be given the opportunity of hearing and knowing the truth, and being saved. I think that is why we find it so amazing that for some period of time after the church began on Pentecost, most of the first Christians, including the apostles didn't get it. You can read the book of Acts and see that for the first few years at least, preaching was pretty well limited to the Jews, and about the only converts were Jews, or some proselytes to Judaism. Peter had preached on Pentecost that *"...the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself;"* but it seems that even he didn't fully grasp the implications of what he preached by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In the sermon Peter preached which we read about in Acts 3 (the passage I read just a few minutes ago), Peter again preached the truth, that it was God's intention that *"all the families of the earth be blessed."* He was saying the right things, but he wasn't understanding them. It

wasn't until Peter received a vision that prompted him to go and preach to the household of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion that he began to understand that the gospel was for all men, and not just the Jews. Listen to what Peter confess to Cornelius—**Acts 10:34 & 35**: *“So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35) but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”* Following the trip to Caesarea to preach to Cornelius, Peter returned to Jerusalem where he felt it necessary to explain why he had gone and preached the Gentiles. This is described in **chapter 11**, and beginning in **verse 15**, we read:

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. 16) And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17) If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" 18) When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

I think it is interesting that the apostle Paul found this fact to be absolutely incredible! Remember, he was the self-appointed sheriff of Judaism. Before he became a Christian, he wanted nothing to do with Jesus the Christ, or the gospel message. But in becoming a Christian, and especially in Christ's choosing him to become the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul's eyes were opened.

- **Acts 9:15** *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.*
- **Acts 26:15-18** *And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16) But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17) delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles--to whom I am sending you 18) to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*
- I read this last week, but listen again to his words found in **Ephesians 3:1-9**:

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles-- 2) assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3) how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4) When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5) 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. 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. 7) 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. 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, 9) and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,

Do you understand good people? I'm asking you, do you understand? I'm not asking if you agree with it, or if you like it, or if you think that is cool, or something. I'm asking if you understand! We say we do, but I think the truth is, we don't.

We don't understand what God was doing through the cross! We don't understand what God wants from us! As long as we don't see and embrace God's vision for the gospel, we don't understand. Instead, we have this sort of pitiful, self-serving understanding that has us falling all over ourselves with praise because He died for our sins. We are willing to come and worship Him because He made salvation possible each of us. That's true of course, and we ought to be thankful for that, but there's more to it than that. The mystery of God is bigger and greater than that! And if you don't see it, then clearly you don't understand.

Turn if you will to **2 Peter 3:9**. I want you to listen to this, and listen closely. Listen to what Peter tells you about the Lord. He said, "*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*" What did you learn about the Lord in that verse? There are several things you can learn about the Lord, but let me cut to the chase: according to this verse, how many people does the Lord wish to see perish? Now think about that before you answer; how many people does the Lord wish to see perish? He doesn't want to see even one perish, does He? Is that how you feel? Now think about it!

Turn over to **1 Timothy 2:3-6**. Paul was urging Timothy to be praying for rulers so that the Christians could lead a peaceful and quiet life. He says, "*This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4) who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5) For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6) who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.* According to Paul, in this passage, who does God desire to be saved? He desires all people to be saved, doesn't He? Paul said, Christ gave himself as a ransom for whom? He gave himself as a ransom for ALL!

It is easy for us to criticize the early Christians for not understanding and taking the gospel to every person, Jew and Gentile, but somehow, we give ourselves a pass for not understanding and taking the gospel to anyone! Some people have been Christians for thirty, forty, fifty years and have yet to make any serious attempt to share the gospel with one person. Some make a feeble attempt but give up when it proves to be inconvenient and embarrassing. We have even come up with all kinds of ways to get ourselves excused from that work.

- It's not my gift!
- You teach people by the way you live as well as by what you say!
- I don't know any lost people!
- I plan on trying someday!
- That's what we pay the preacher for!

Good people! You know that the only way...the only way...that all the families of the earth can be blessed is if they begin to seek God and find Him through the gospel of Christ. You know that. You know that Christ and Him crucified is the only hope this world has. You therefore also know that Christ and Him crucified is the only hope your husband or wife has, or child, or parent, or grandparent, or neighbor, or friend, or co-worker, or fellow-student, or person who waits on you at McDonalds.

- If you don't tell them, who will?
- If they don't hear it from you, who will they hear it from?
- If Christ and Him crucified is not on your lips, what is?

I want to do two things in bringing this lesson to a close this morning. First of all, I want to ask you to please, please go home and read [Ezekiel 33:1-11](#) this afternoon. Read that passage and meditate on it, pray about it and let it help motivate you to action.

Second, I want to ask you to turn to **1 Timothy 3**, and read with me from **verse 14** through the end of that chapter, just 3 verses. Paul was writing to Timothy, giving him instructions about how to carry on his work, and he said:

*I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15) if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. 16) Great indeed, we confess, is **the mystery of godliness:***

*He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations.
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.*

Good people, this is for us. This is our job, to proclaim Him among the nations. How else will the nations be blessed? God is not willing that anyone should perish. He wants all men to come to a knowledge of the truth. God didn't just think about these things. He went to incredible lengths to make forgiveness and salvation possible, "for all the nations!" But what about us? Does it matter to us if any one person perishes? Do we want all men to come to a knowledge of the truth? What are we doing to make the message of Christ and Him crucified know to everyone we can?

The lesson is yours. The challenge is ours. If anyone needs or wants to respond to the invitation this morning, for any reason, the opportunity is now. Will you come while we stand and sing!