

## **Open the Eyes of My Heart (Part 12)**

Ephesians 3:1-6

Pastor Edward Cheng

March 22, 2020

During these strange times we can find comfort in the fact that God continues to speak to us through His word with timeless truth. In today's passage the main theme is His "mysterious" ways. When we think of this word, we often think of the phrase, "God works in mysterious ways," which is actually not from the Bible, but from an old hymn. This idea that God will unexpectedly turn our situation around for our benefit is not the kind of mystery Paul is talking about here. Instead, it's the idea of a secret intention or plan that God has, which He has not revealed yet. Paul mentions this mystery in the context of his calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1-2). While the other 12 apostles were preaching mainly to the Jews, Paul was called to preach to the rest of the world. And in vv. 3-5 we see that it is to Paul that God fully reveals this mystery, which He hid from the people for ages past. The revelation of this mystery to prophets in the Old Testament was not complete, but rather it was in the form of breadcrumbs, hints here and there, which the prophets themselves likely didn't understand, but were inspired to deliver by the Spirit. Even the disciples didn't understand when Jesus perhaps more than hinted at this mystery. But now God fully reveals the mystery to Paul.

This mystery is that the Gentiles are now heirs together with Israel, members of one body, and sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ (v. 6). We have gotten so used to this pretty mind-blowing revelation that we take it for granted. But during these strange times when we are reminded to appreciate the things we once took for granted, let us also appreciate the fact that we as Gentiles are included in God's kingdom. This is a big deal. That's why Paul spends five verses building up the suspense before revealing the mystery. To appreciate just how big of a deal this is we must be reminded of how things were before we were included.

In Matthew 15:22-28 a Canaanite woman begs Jesus to heal her daughter, but Jesus tells her first that He was sent to Israel and second that it would not be right for a Gentile dog to receive what belongs to Israel, God's children. Israel was Jesus' first priority. Jesus was Israel's king. But the woman says that even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the table. So the third time Jesus responds by extolling her great faith and granting her request. What was so great about her faith? It was the fact that she understood her place as an outsider, yet believed that Jesus was so abundantly good to Israel that the leftovers of His goodness would be more than sufficient for

her. We see this idea of the original exclusion of Gentiles again in Matthew 20:1-16. The master hires workers throughout the day, even at the eleventh hour. At the end he pays them all a full day's wages, and those who were hired first are angry because of the master's generosity to those hired last. We Gentiles are those hired at the eleventh hour. We were last and Israel was first. But the mystery is that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. We didn't deserve what was rightfully Israel's, but by God's grace we were included as co-heirs. Finally in Matthew 22:1-10 we see a parable of a wedding banquet, in which those first invited rejected the invitation leading to the invitation of people off the street. Israel was invited first, but only because they refused to come were the Gentiles included. We were not on the original guest list, but God is so loving that He invited us anyway. This is the mystery that God hid from Israel and the rest of the world until He revealed it to Paul.

There are three points we can reflect on with respect to this mystery. First is that we have it better than we deserve. We must constantly remind ourselves that we have much more than we deserve because God is gracious. Don't take His grace to us as Gentiles for granted. Second, God doesn't owe us an explanation. Just as He didn't fully reveal His grand plan in Israel's history, so He doesn't have to tell us when or why things happen to us. It's tempting for us to try to work out God's master plan, to try to figure out why we suffered certain tragedies in our lives and how these events led to positive outcomes. For example if I hadn't been rejected to my top choices for college I wouldn't have met my wife or had my kids. But I could have been rejected simply because I wasn't good enough. We may never know exactly why God allows bad things happen to us, but we don't need to know His plan. We just have to trust Him. He doesn't owe us an explanation. He is sovereign. He does what He pleases according to His wisdom. Third, God's love is always on display. This should be enough for us. Gentiles were included because of God's love. Knowing His loving character should be enough for us to trust Him, without knowing His plan. Let His love be enough for you.