

THE BIG IDEA: We are in the parentheses because we explain the mystery.

The Take-Off

Everyone loves a good mystery.

It's what has made Sherlock Holmes the best selling mystery series of all time and what brings crazy people out of the woodwork to try and find Bigfoot.

Something about mysteries captivates us, and while the search for clues can be exciting, the real electricity comes from solving the mystery.

In our house, it's almost a game. We'll watch mystery dramas like *The Mentalist* or movies and Wendy and I will each try to figure out "whodunnit" before the other one. Sometimes we'll pause the show and talk through theories or clues, and the best mysteries are the ones that take a surprising twist at the last minute and neither one of us were even close.

But unsolved mysteries? Those can nag at us. Mysteries with no proof, no evidence, no clues? Those can haunt us. We weren't made for that.

This morning, Paul is going to let his readers off the hook.

Remember, Ephesians was a letter written to the believers in Ephesus, and it would have been read to them in one sitting.

We've been taking our time walking through it, and so here - in week 6 - we find that Paul explains a mystery that he first mentioned back in chapter 1.

Now you and I probably haven't been struggling to sleep for the last month or so because Paul mentioned a mystery in Ephesians 1:9 but hasn't mentioned it again until chapter 3.

But the original hearers? They heard an elder stand up in front of them and read "and God made known to us the mystery of his will" and has been wondering ever since what that mystery is? What does it do? Why does it matter?

And now, in Ephesians 3, Paul does something crazy.

He interrupts himself in order to explain the mystery, and so let me explain a few things before we jump into the text:

1. In the first verse, Paul starts to explain that he's a prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles and then he stops
2. In the original Greek, verses 2-13 are all one long parenthetical statement (that's fancy talk for words in parentheses)
3. Now, the teachers in the room know what parentheses do, but I had to look it up
4. I found out that typically they are used to explain something, to give an example of something
5. So what we're about to study is going to provide us with an example, some clues to help us understand the mystery that Paul had first mentioned back in chapter 1, the "mystery of God's will"

So, let's take a look at what the mystery is and what the mystery does:

1. What the mystery is (vv. 2-6)

- a. There's a lot of language here in the first 6 verses of Ephesians 3 that can seem very intimidating, so let's try to walk through carefully and see what we can learn about the mystery.
- b. First, the mystery is revealed to us
 - this seems like a small thing, but it isn't
 - unlike the mysteries we know, we didn't go hunting for clues on this one
 - people like to use the phrase "I found God" but that's bad theology
 - We never found God. He found us.
 - Even back in the garden when Adam sinned, he hid from God and God went looking for him. it was God who asked "where are you?"
 - That's the whole story of the Gospel. We sinned, we hid, and God sought us out.
 - God is a better hunter than any of the Duck Commanders, and he sent Jesus on a mission to find us (Luke 19:10)
 - So the mystery is a revelation
- c. Second, the mystery is us
 - It's easy for this simple truth to get lost in all the words Paul uses, but the mystery is that the Gentiles are one with the Jews

- Remember last week when we talked about the dividing wall of hostility that God wrecked in Jesus?
 - I learned this week that it wasn't a wall so high that the Gentiles couldn't see past it.
 - It was actually much worse than that. It was about 4.5 feet high and so the Gentiles could actually see what they couldn't have
 - It would be like being at a party and seeing the cake, the presents, the games and the fun but not being able to be a part of it
 - Insiders and outsiders in the worst type of way!
 - But Jesus destroyed that. He brought the Gentiles who were far away near to him like the Jews had been.
 - But that isn't the mystery! The mystery is that they were made ONE.
 - I want to make sure we get this, and I've been trying to think all week of the perfect way to explain it, and as I was watching the opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics, I saw it
 - Every 4 years the world comes together and they hold the Winter Games
 - They look unified, but really it's just all the countries that may or may not get along sharing space for 16 days
 - But the mystery of the Gospel isn't that people who are different can now share space, but that different people can now be ONE
 - Not that I dislike Doug or Justin less, but that I love them more than I ever could have apart from the saving grace of Jesus
- d. Before we move on to see what the mystery does, let me explain one more huge truth: remember that this is all being shared in parentheses.
- e. What that means is that when God talks about the mystery of the Gospel and how it unites very different people into one very unified body, when he wants to give an example of that, he wants to use us as that example!
- f. It's like God is saying, "Listen everybody! I'm going to do bring together people who would normally hate one another and I'm going to give them love for each other. And not just any kind of love, but the kind of love that I have for them: grace-filled, sacrificial, a serving kind of love. And it's going to be so unheard of, so seemingly impossible that people are going to call it a mystery. But I'm going to tell them to look at The Gathering as a real-life example of what this mystery looks like."
- g. Wow! What an honor and what a responsibility we have as a local expression of the mystery of God's will to include ALL people in his plan to save.

2. What the mystery does (vv. 7-13)

- a. Basically, the last few verses that we'll be looking at say that the mystery sends a message.
- b. First, it sends a message to the world.
- Paul knew that he had been chosen by grace to show grace
 - He was called to preach the endless riches in Christ to outsiders
 - To make plain the mystery ("You're outside, but God's bringing you in!")
 - The message to the world? "You're wanted."
- c. Second, it sends a message to the enemy.
- Verse 10 says something very interesting
 - Somehow, our unity in the church sends a message to the enemy
 - And the message is that our God is wiser than any plan the enemy thought he had
 - The message to the enemy? "You're defeated."
- d. Finally, it sends a message to the believer.
- The mystery of being made one in Christ gives us the confidence to know that we have access to God
 - Jesus means that God does not play favorites
 - No red-headed step-children in the kingdom
 - And so the mystery of grace given to all of us in Christ sends a strong message to the believer
 - "You're accepted."

We see what the mystery is - the revealed grace of God in Christ that makes ONE body out of many different people.

And we've seen what the mystery does - it sends a message to the world that they're wanted, to our enemy that he is defeated and to the believer that we are accepted.

See, the Gospel of grace to sinners will always be a mystery - why would God give such an immeasurable gift? - but it isn't intended to be mysterious - something so vague we can't see it.

The Big Idea sums it up perfectly: **We are in the parentheses because we explain the mystery.**

But here's the sobering thought that we need to wrestle with as we land this: we know what we have in common with Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster, because we're part of a mystery just like they are.

But that's where the similarity HAS to end, because while they are mysterious (mainly because they aren't real - hate to break that to you), unity in the church isn't.

If we don't have it and live it, then the world has no example of the mystery of the Gospel, and so it starts to seem like a myth, too.

We aren't ONE so that we can feel good all the time. We're ONE so that the world will have a living, breathing, real-life example of this mystery: Jesus came to bring those far together with those near to make one family.

No more outsiders. Only followers of Jesus who are all inside together truly loving one another.

It's crazy, it's unprecedented, and to the world it's a mystery.

And when they look for an example, my prayer is that our unity explains the mystery of grace.

Let's pray.