

Jon High. 2nd March 2008. Ephesians 3:2-9.

## Searching the Unsearchable

### Introduction

#### Explain Ephesians series

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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. 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.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 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, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Ephesians 3 v 2 - 9 (NIV)

Focus today on verses 8 and 9.

Explain use of things around to illustrate points. Example of Bullring = regeneration

Paul's style of argument - old life (life in the world) vs. new life (life in Christ).



#### Temple of Artemis:

- One of seven wonders of the world
- Size of a football pitch - one of largest buildings in the world.
- Centre of worship in Ephesus

- Syncretism - attempt to join different (often contradictory) beliefs. Artemis was fusion of Cybele, Diana and Artemis.
  - Syncretism in modern day - life will be fine if we all learn to be the same
- Brought division between Jews and Gentiles

Paul explains the old vs. the new - old way brought separation between Jews and Gentiles, Christ's way brought unity. He was saying that the world's attempts to unite would fail, but in Christ the impossible was possible.

### Worshipping idols

After all this had come to a head, Paul decided it was time to move on to Macedonia and Achaia provinces, and from there to Jerusalem. "Then," he said, "I'm off to Rome. I've got to see Rome!" He sent two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, on to Macedonia and then stayed for a while and wrapped things up in Asia.

But before he got away, a huge ruckus occurred over what was now being referred to as "the Way." A certain silversmith, Demetrius, conducted a brisk trade in the manufacture of shrines to the goddess Artemis, employing a number of artisans in his business. He rounded up his workers and others similarly employed and said, "Men, you well know that we have a good thing going here—and you've seen how Paul has barged in and discredited what we're doing by telling people that there's no such thing as a god made with hands. A lot of people are going along with him, not only here in Ephesus but all through Asia province.

"Not only is our little business in danger of falling apart, but the temple of our famous goddess Artemis will certainly end up a pile of rubble as her glorious reputation fades to nothing. And this is no mere local matter—the whole world worships our Artemis!

That set them off in a frenzy. They ran into the street yelling, "Great Artemis of the Ephesians! Great Artemis of the Ephesians!" They put the whole city in an uproar, stampeding into the stadium, and grabbing two of Paul's associates on the way, the Macedonians Gaius and Aristarchus. Paul wanted to go in, too, but the disciples wouldn't let him. Prominent religious leaders in the city who had become friendly to Paul concurred: "By no means go near that mob!"

Some were yelling one thing, some another. Most of them had no idea what was going on or why they were there. As the Jews pushed

Alexander to the front to try to gain control, different factions clamoured to get him on their side. But he brushed them off and quieted the mob with an impressive sweep of his arms. But the moment he opened his mouth and they knew he was a Jew, they shouted him down: "Great Artemis of the Ephesians! Great Artemis of the Ephesians!"—on and on and on, for over two hours.

Acts 19 v 23 - 34 (The Message)

One of the problems associated with false religion is that of idol worship. An idol can be anything that we substitute for God, anything that we believe can bring salvation. An idol is normally something that is created (in this case a statue), but it can be anything that isn't God - money, a person, a political idea, a house, a career...

Paul chooses in the main passage to refer to God as he who 'created of all things', and by that statement alone he is contrasting the old with the new:

Old life - worship of created things

New life - worship of the creator of all things

By contrasting these two states, Paul is suggesting that the new life is better!

## The unsearchable riches of Christ.

Unsearchable riches of Christ is a key 'standout' phrase in this passage.

What does 'unsearchable' mean?!

Translated as:

- unsearchable
- inexplorable
- inscrutable
- untraceable
- inexhaustable
- illimitable
- unfathomable
- incalculable
- infinite

Difficult to grasp in a literary sense. One thing for sure - it's big.

Doesn't mean we can't understand it in some way: not like reading War and Peace in Russian. More that Christ is so big that we'll never get near to understanding him.

...what is certain about the wealth Christ has and gives us is that we shall never come to an end of it.

John Stott

Why does Paul not explain the unsearchable riches of Christ? He's tried to start in chapters one and two. In it he says life in Christ is great because it is:

- Resurrection from the death of sin
- Enthronement with Christ in the heavens
- Reconciliation with God
- Incorporation with Jesus into a new society
- End of hostility and beginning of peace
- Access to the Father through Christ and the Holy Spirit
- Membership of God's Kingdom and household
- Being a part of God's dwelling before men
- ...all seen as a taste of what is to come.

Paul obviously thinks being in Christ is pretty good! Part of the contrast with the old life:

- Ephesus - trading port
- Large city (pop c. 500,000)
- Important politically and financially
- Because of the trade and location, was relatively wealthy
- Dominated by temple of Artemis (made of marble!)

Paul contrasts the old life with the new:

Old life - visible, tangible wealth

New life - unsearchable riches

You'd think that Paul, who had been arrested, beaten, tortured and thrown into prison on a number of occasions would talk more about what life would be like in heaven, when the current struggles are over. Actually, he wrote about the riches of Christ whilst in prison. Why? he understood that the gospel wasn't just good news for the future, but it was good news for now. The understanding of who Christ is, and the benefits of being in relationship with him can be enjoyed in part now.

Paul would rather be with Christ in prison than on his own outside!

Do you sometimes wish for the life you left behind? Do you sometimes feel like you're missing out on life because you chose to follow Christ? If you do, you're missing the point - the old way led to death, to self harm, to division. The new way leads to life, to wholeness, love and to peace.

## The hidden is revealed

It was soon news all over Ephesus among both Jews and Greeks. The realisation spread that God was in and behind this. Curiosity about Paul developed into reverence for the Master Jesus. Many of those who thus believed came out of the closet and made a clean break with their secret sorceries. All kinds of witches and warlocks came out of the woodwork with their books of spells and incantations and made a huge bonfire of them. Someone estimated their worth at fifty thousand silver coins. In such ways it became evident that the Word of the Master was now sovereign and prevailed in Ephesus. Acts 19 v 17 - 20 (The Message)

Amelie's birthday - reminded me of birthday parties as a child. Loved the illusionist. Still do!

'Breaking the magician's code' TV programme. The thing about illusions is that once you know how they're done, they're not that interesting anymore.

Paul's contrasts again:

Old life - simple things kept hidden

New life - unsearchable riches revealed

The difference is that with the world when we find something out we move on to something else, with Christ as we see and taste of the riches that he has in store, so we hunger to know more and more of him.

The word Paul uses is interesting - photizo which means to enlighten, to illuminate. He used it elsewhere in Ephesians:

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe according to the working of his great might...Ephesians 1 v 17 - 19 (ESV)

Paul understands that part of the conversion experience is that God reveals something of his identity, his love, his personality to us. Paul's testimony was of

God breaking in and speaking to him, but he knew that no-one who had come to God had done so without God taking steps toward showing them who he was.

Man does not elicit knowledge from God as he does from other objects of study, but God conveys knowledge of Himself to man, a knowledge which man can only accept and appropriate.

Louis Berkhof

Berkhof's point is that we learn about God from God himself. We can read books and hear sermons and go to conferences and everything else without really knowing the true nature of who God is, and what impact his person and action on the cross has for our lives.

It is humbling for me to realise that I can know God only if he chooses to make himself known to me! The fact that he chooses me, reveals himself, and initiates our relationship continues to astound me.

John Wimber

These people understood that their relationship with God was a two-way thing. They realised that their quest for understanding who God was and what he was like was not like trying to uncover a big mystery (as it had been prior to Christ!). Rather, God is willing and able to demonstrate his nature and identity to us.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1 v 5 (ESV)

That's not to say that reading books, hearing sermons and going to conferences are bad things! BUT we must acknowledge the role God plays in our understanding of what he is like. So when you come to read the bible, or another book, pray first that God would teach you through it. Ditto sermons.

Finally - if God is active in showing what he like to people, how does that affect the way we tell people about him, and how we judge our effectiveness?

The great commission tells us to preach the gospel and make disciples. There's a bit in the middle of those two things that we don't do - the big bang! the reveal! when God shows up. We often judge our evangelistic performance on the numbers of people that become Christians. Actually, if we live our lives in a way that gives glory to him, and clearly communicate the good news of life changed for the better because of relationship with Jesus Christ, we've done our bit. There comes a point when God shows people what he's like and then it's up to them to make a decision.

## Conclusion

Paul was convinced that life in Christ was better than life without Christ. He was also able to make that statement humbly because he knew that he wouldn't have life in Christ if it wasn't for God revealing his plan and his love to him in the first place.

What would you write about in your life that is better because of Christ? do you tell your story to people? do you thank God for who he has made you to be, and that he initiated your relationship.

Story of friend hanging out with 'wrong crowd', 'that's what I would have been like'.