

The Marvellous Mystery

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Date: 12 April 2015

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone. So it's a pleasure to be here with you again at Brentsfield.

I normally get invited twice to most churches, the second time once to apologise, but I keep getting back invited. So it is a pleasure, but it's also a privilege and a responsibility to share God's Word with you.

So will you join me as we just pray and ask God to help us to understand it, and more importantly to put it into practice. So let's just bow in a moment's prayer. Gracious God, as we focus on the greatness of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, we pray that by your Holy Spirit you might make it clear to us the greatness of your love and grace, and that we might respond with hearts full of thanksgiving, and if we've never before grasped it for ourselves, that you might help us to do that also, that we might know what it is to be born again of the Spirit of God.

And we ask it in Jesus' name of your glory. Amen. A few outlines on the screen, hopefully, that will help you to follow.

I discover in preaching, as most of you know now, since I stepped down from Charlotte Chapel in 2009, I spent most of my time listening to sermons instead of preaching them. In fact, I don't exaggerate, in the last five years I've probably listened to hundreds of sermons, and it's a great privilege and also a great responsibility.

[1 : 39] And some people like PowerPoint, other people can't stand it, so if you can't stand it, don't look at it, alright? If you do find it helpful, then just follow along, okay? So, as many of you will know, at midnight last Sunday, April the 5th, some sweeping changes came into place to allow people over the age of 55 to access all their pension funds without limit.

This is great news if you're over 55. And I should say, by the way, that if you see me in the future driving around a Ferrari instead of my Ford Focus, you'll know the reason why.

This plan was a closely guarded secret. And it caught everyone by surprise when George Osborne, the Chancellor, announced it a year ago in his budget. Now, important though this is, for those who qualify, I want to say this morning, it is nothing.

This plan pales into insignificance in comparison with a wonderful plan which is described in this next section of this letter written to Christians in the Greek city of Ephesus by the Apostle Paul, which you've been studying, I understand, over the past few weeks.

In the new international, in the new, new international version of the Bible, this is the 1988 version, and it's pretty much the same as the new one which came out in 2011.

[3 : 04] That's about 6% of changes, nothing too substantial. But if you've got a Bible, you might want to turn to it, it's page 1174, or one of the Pew Bibles. The words will be on the screen, but in the new version, you'll see the Pew Bibles, the section beginning Ephesians 3, this is page 1174, 1174.

All right, we'll help to have a Bible for other reasons in a moment. But in this version, this section is entitled, Pull the Preacher to the Gentiles. In the new version, I like the new heading.

The new heading is, God's marvelous plan for the Gentiles. God's marvelous plan for the Gentiles.

Now, when George gave his pension plan, you may have switched up. Those who switched off, those who was over 55 sat up and smiled. My pension advisor sent me an email and said, this is good news for you.

I thank you very much. So when we read this, I simply want to say, this is good news for the over 55s here, but it's good news for the under 55s. In fact, it's good news, it says, for Gentiles.

[4 : 15] So if you're a Gentile, that is, you weren't born as a Jew, then pay attention because this is good news for you. And if you are a Jew, if you were born a Jew, a privileged position, then it also applies to you as well, as we'll see together.

It's quite a complex passage, so let's read together. I've put it on the screen and let's read together. For this reason, I pull the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.

Surely you've 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've 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 people 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 share us together in the promise of Christ.

[5 : 19] That's quite a tightly packed, complex passage, but it's a bit like, have you ever got a copy of your pension plan? All those legal details and everything. You need to study it carefully to work out what the details mean for you in reality.

So, with God's help, I want to try and unpack this to help us to understand. And the first thing I want you to notice, here it is again, will you notice the key word in this section is the word mystery.

It occurs three times. In fact, in the original text, it only occurs twice. The third time it's given to make it clear what it's talking about. Now, this letter was written to people living in the Greek city of Ephesus, and lo and behold, the people in the Greek city of Ephesus spoke Greek.

Okay, everybody got that? Yep. And the Greeks had a word for mystery. And the Greek word for mystery is *mysterion*, from which we get the English word mystery.

In other words, our word mystery comes from the Greek word *mysterion*, but it doesn't mean the same in English as it did in Greek. Okay, you still with me? Lod your heads, look intelligent. All right. Yeah, you all still there?

[6 : 27] Right. Okay. In English, in my dictionary, a mystery is defined as an unexplained or inexplicable event or phenomenon. But in Greek, a mystery, a *mysterion*, in the Greek language, was a secret that had been revealed to someone.

in ancient Greek, in ancient Greek, they actually had religions. They were called mystery religions. And they told people, if you paid enough or did all the right things, you got let in on the mystery, what the secret was, this wonderful divine secret that had been revealed.

Now, Paul uses this word here to describe the Christian faith. And he says it's a mystery. That doesn't mean you can't understand it.

It means it's truth from God that has been revealed. So, here's a title. It's not the greatest title, but I kind of like it. So, here we go. I'm going to call this The Marvelous Mystery.

All right? The Marvelous Mystery. Now, if you've been following this series in Ephesians, you will know that Paul actually, in the opening section of his letter, after giving the greetings, he gives this fantastic hymn of praise.

[7 : 46] It lasts from chapter 1, verse, after the greeting, verses 1 and 2, from verse 3 right through to verse 14. Greek is a funny language because it adds things together.

So, from verse 3 to verse 14 is all one sentence in Greek. It doesn't make any sense in English because you've lost track by the time you get to the third line. It's such a wonderful thing.

And in it, he introduces the theme of mystery. Listen carefully. Ephesians 1, 9 to 10. He says, And he, that is God, made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ.

One writer has compared that opening section with the overture before an opera. Have you ever been to an opera? Or you've listened to some great piece of music? What they do in the overture, they play all the basic themes very briefly and then as it develops, the music focuses on each of those themes in more detail.

So here's Paul introducing mystery at this point in the opening chapter and then when he comes to chapter 3 he says, This is the mystery known to me by Revelation, verse 3, as I've already written briefly.

[9 : 05] In other words, he said, I told you I was going to talk about it in the opening bit, now I've come to it in chapter 3. And he impacts it in detail. So let me give you an overview of where these six verses go and then we'll try and follow it together, okay?

So in Ephesians 3, 1 to 6, in the first two verses he talks about, and I'll try and explain what this means, he talks about what he calls the administration of the mystery. Then in verses 3 to 5 he talks about the revelation of the mystery.

And then in the last bit, in verse 6, he talks about the description of the mystery. Now maybe for dramatic effect that we have to wait until verse 6 to find out what the mystery actually is.

So I think it makes more sense, I'm not rewriting Paul here just to make it intelligible, I think it makes more sense if we go backwards way around and start with the description, then the revelation, and then the administration.

Okay? This is hard stuff, okay, so stay with me, alright, it's really important, alright? So let's start with the description, the mystery. What is the mystery? This mystery, he says, is that through the gospel, the Gentiles, the heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

[10 : 21] Now I just read that and there was not a flicker of reaction from anybody here. If I had read this to first century Jews, there would have been a riot.

In fact, we're going to look in a moment at a story that precipitated this that actually caused a riot. a riot. Why? Because of the feeling of absolute superiority that the Jewish people had towards anyone who wasn't Jewish, i.e.

what we call a Gentile. Here's what William Barclay, a New Testament scholar, says. The Jews had an immense contempt for the Gentile. They said that Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell.

that God left only Israel of all the nations he'd made, that the best of serpents crushed, the best of Gentiles killed. It was not lawful to render help to a Gentile woman in childbirth, for that would be to bring another Gentile into the world.

The barrier between Jew and Gentile was absolute. If a Jew married a Gentile, the funeral of that Jew was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death even to go into a Gentile house rendered a Jew unclean.

[11 : 38] Now, here is this man writing this letter. His name is Paul. By background, he's a Jew and not just a Jew, he's a Jew from the strictest group of Jews called the Pharisees.

He's a former member of the ruling council of the Jewish nation and he says, I've got a secret to share with the world. And the secret is this, Gentiles are on an equal footing with Jews.

And he describes what this means. He kind of, if you like, this is the, keep going back to the pension, this is the pension portfolio. He unpacks what this means in detail. He uses three compound words together.

They're translating the NIV with the word with. He says, Gentiles are, look at the text, heirs together, members together, and sharers together with the Jews in all the privileges that were once only exclusive to the people of Israel.

Look at them, look at them more closely with me, very briefly. Because, let me say again, this is of an estimable value to us. Because without this, you wouldn't be here, Brentsfield Evangelical Church wouldn't be here, there wouldn't be a church in Edinburgh or anywhere else.

[12 : 55] they'd just be Jewish people in Israel and scattered around in Diaspora and other parts of the world, alright? So, first of all, he says, we're heirs together with Israel. The people of Israel were God's chosen people.

They belonged to him personally, intimately, as his people. As his family, they were the children of Israel. Other people and races didn't belong.

And even among the Jews themselves, if you trace the history of the Jewish people, not everybody born into the family of Jews was an heir. If you know the Old Testament story, the two sons of Abraham, the father of Israel, Isaac and Ishmael.

Isaac was the chosen one. Ishmael was not, contrary to what the Quran rewrites, by the way, but we won't even go there. Jacob and Esau, twin boys.

The older one, Esau, was not chosen, but Jacob was chosen. So, belonging to Israel means inheriting all the privileges and wealth of God's own chosen people.

[14 : 08] But now, Paul says, as it were, Gentiles have been adopted in and they are heirs, they share together with all those privileges. What are the blessings they inherit? Well, they're the ones that we looked at in the opening section, chapter 1.

I haven't got time to read it all again, but if you're a Christian and you want to know what a wonderful thing it is to be a Christian, then sit down regularly and read Ephesians 1, 3 to 14, where he says, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

And then he lists all the blessings that belong to the people of Israel, that now belong to Gentiles, to each one of us, through faith in Jesus Christ. Christ. Not only are they heirs together, he says, we are members together of one body.

See, it's not as though Gentiles were kind of let in as second class citizens. It was not even that Gentiles had to become Jews to belong. That was a big battle the early church wrestled with.

It took a vision to the Apostle Peter, the conversion of a Gentile Roman centurion to convince him that Gentiles were accepted by God. No, Gentiles didn't have to become Jews and Jews didn't have to become Gentiles.

[15 : 23] Rather, they became one new family, one new people of God. I didn't have a chance to listen to the previous sermon because it's not posted on your website yet, but last time, I assume, in the last time when we looked at chapter 2 together, it's all about this, about how God has reconciled these former enemies together.

It says, for he himself is our peace who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

So Jews and Gentiles are members of one body, the body of Christ. Our great privilege, if we belong to Christ, if you are a Christian, that is, if you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit, you know God's forgiveness in your life, you are a member, it's not just Jesus and me.

When I grew up, it was a long time ago, in my church, there were lots of really popular songs all about Jesus and me. There's one actually, the chorus was, now it's just Jesus and me.

No, it isn't. It's Jesus and me and you and you and you and you and you and you and you. We belong together. We're part of God's people. I travel around a lot now, visiting different churches, talking to different people, telling one of my greatest concerns is that people today are giving up on the local church.

[16 : 46] And you talk to them, you say, which church are you going to now? Well, I don't go anywhere really. I've just been hurt so badly by these Christians and I've just had enough really. I go along from time to time but I don't really want to get involved.

Listen, you cannot afford not to be involved because you belong to God's people. This is not a plug from the pastor, I mention it to him but if you worship here regularly then make yourself part of this body.

Get intimately involved because you belong to God's people. So, heirs together, members together and he says, share us together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

You see, the promise in Christ Jesus, the promise of the Messiah Jesus was one that every Jew looked forward to over many generations in fulfillment of all the promises of the prophets.

and these had all been fulfilled now in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior, the Christ. So Gentiles who were ignorant of such promises were now sharers with the Jews in the same promise and the culmination of that promise was on the day that we call the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the people when the Apostle Peter preached the first great sermon on the day of Pentecost and at the end of it people said, what do we have to do then?

[18 : 04] Here's what Peter said. He said, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The promise, notice the word, the promise is for you and your children for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call. He says, you Jews, it's mostly a Jewish audience or Jewish converts listening, he said, this promise is for you and successive generations but it's also for people who are far off whom the Lord our God will call.

Gentile people. And they're the people of subsequent generations down to our own day. And the mystery is, says Paul, that through the gospel, the good news of Jesus, any Gentile becomes an heir together with God's people, sharing in the promise, part of one body.

Now let me pause at this point because I don't know many of you and this is really important. Do you belong? Have you repented?

That is, have you turned from your sin? Here's the promise, if you turn from your sin, you put your faith in Jesus Christ, God promises two things, he will forgive you and he will give you his Holy Spirit and you'll walk out of this door as a member of God's people because Gentiles are now included in something that was exclusive only to Jews up to this point.

[19 : 30] Now, I realize most of us probably know that but I can't communicate just how dramatic and how incredible this is. But it's God's great plan.

You see, God so loved the world that he gave his son. Not just Jews. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, it's the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

First for the Jew, then for the Gentile, Romans 1 verse 16. So, this is the secret that's now out into the open. Gentiles as well as Jews are included in God's plan.

That's the description of the mystery. Okay, point two. Now we return to the second matter which is the revelation of the mystery. How was this mystery revealed? Again, look at the verses together.

The mystery made known to me by revelation as I've 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.

[20 : 33] Two things Paul says here about this revelation of this news that Jews, Gentiles as well as Jews are included. First of all, he says, it was not revealed in the past.

He said, it was not made known to men in other generations. Now, if you know the Bible, you will know that when God made his promise to Abraham and made an agreement to covenant with him. In Genesis chapter 12, he said, through you, all nations on earth will be blessed.

The prophets look forward, the Hebrew prophets look forward to people being welcomed from all over the world. But the details of the plan, the amazement, the enormity of the detail of this plan was not revealed until this present moment.

But Paul says, it's now been revealed in the present. And Paul says, it's been revealed, first of all, he says, it was revealed to me personally, made known to me by revelation.

Again, it's hard to grasp how revolutionary and radical and offensive it was that Jews, that Gentiles as well as Jews, were equally loved by God.

[21 : 37] How radical this would have been to a first century Jew. So in order to make it known, God chose the least likely candidate to convince him that it was true so he could convince other people.

And that man was Saul of Tarsus. And in order to convince him, a direct revelation was necessary. If you think about it, it's probably the only way you could convince a man like Saul of Tarsus, convince Pharisee, believe that Jesus was a heretic, crucified by the Romans.

How could he possibly have been the Messiah? Imagine the Apostle Peter, an unlearned fisherman, trying to persuade Paul that Jesus was the Messiah. He'd have probably out-thought him, out-quoted him and everything else.

But it took an amazing revelation, if you know the Bible, as Paul, Saul of Tarsus, was on his way to Damascus to round up more Christians, put them in prison, execute them.

A light shone from heaven, a voice said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he recognized it was the voice of God and he said, who are you, Lord? And he said, I'm Jesus, whom you're persecuting. Interestingly, when Paul relates this story to a Jewish king, this is later on in the book of Acts, chapter 26, when he tells his story, he says, God then said to him, now get up, stand on your feet, I've appointed you as a servant and as a witness to what you've seen of me and what I will show you.

[22 : 58] You're going to tell people about this and I'm sending you to them, to the Gentiles. I will rescue you from your own people, from the Gentiles, I'm sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God so they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

So Paul says, this was revealed to me personally. But the question you need to then ask and which Paul anticipates is, was this some kind of personal delusion on his part? No, for Paul tells the Ephesians, it was also revealed to other church leaders.

It has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. If you go back one book from Ephesians, you come to another letter written to, again, to Greek Christians in the Roman province of Galatia.

And Paul relates how after his conversion on the road to Damascus, 14 years later, he's preparing for this great ministry to the Gentiles. But 14 years later, he decides to go up to Jerusalem to visit the apostles, the leaders of the church there.

Why does he go? He says, I went there in response, this is Galatians 2 verse 2, I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles.

[24 : 18] I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. In other words, he said, I wanted to check this out to make sure I got this right.

And he shared with them what God had revealed to him that the gospel was also for Gentiles as well as Jews. Here's the conclusion, Galatians 2 verse 7. They saw that I had been interested with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles just as Peter had been interested with the task of preaching to the Jews.

James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas, his colleague, the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles and they should go to the Jews.

So Paul says his insight into the mystery of Christ is the same as the apostles. Now again, you may say, well, why is this important? Well, it's really important for one reason. With the regularity of Halley's Comet, but unfortunately much more frequently, around about every 20 years in my experience, people start to propagate an interesting story and the story is this.

Jesus was a simple teacher who taught this simple message and then along came Paul who was a really bright guy and he confused everything by developing a different kind of gospel. So the gospel of Jesus and the gospels is different to what Paul preached.

[25 : 46] No, it isn't. Paul says we were in absolute harmony. We agreed together that this revelation was a revelation from God because if it doesn't include Gentiles, we're not included.

If you're a Christian, it's that gospel on which you stake your life and your eternal destiny. So, we're the most privileged people of all for we live in the day when the mystery of God's plan, the marvelous mystery has now been revealed.

But great privileges bring with them great responsibilities. So we're working backwards, you'll be glad to know, we now come to the opening verse and what Paul calls the administration of the mystery.

Look again at verse 1. It's kind of, if you look in the NIV, it says, for this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles. And then, did you notice, he breaks off.

He gets diverted and he comes back in, way back, further down in verse 14, he comes back to his, for this reason. For this reason I kneel before the Father. And he talks about what he prays.

[26 : 48] He's diverted because what interrupts his thought is his present circumstances. He says, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.

The reason he says, I'm in prison is for the sake of you Gentiles. And then he says, surely you've 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've already written briefly. Now he uses an interesting word here. He uses the word translated administration. Some versions translate it stewardship.

It's a word that was originally used for a steward or a person in charge of a rich man's wealth who was responsible for administering his wealth and his property and his assets.

In fact, I think, Derek, you're into finances. Do you not have pension fund administrators? Are you a pension fund administrator? You're not? No. He just tells you how to spend your money.

[27 : 49] That's a different thing altogether. A pension fund administrator is someone who looks after the wealth in the pension fund and makes sure it gets to the right people.

Are you not tired of picking up your phone and someone says, Are you aware of PPI? My wife has done everything to stop these calls.

She's written all these things, tried to block the phone. Every evening she goes mad. Just as you start your tea, you pick up the phone and someone says, Are you aware that the bank has set aside millions of pounds for PPI?

I'd never heard of PPI. I'd do until the last few years. But apparently, and I've hardly ever met anyone who got anything out of it, but presumably there are people here who are living on the proceeds, but their role is, probably not these con people who are ringing you up and trying to get a share of it, but the role is that the banks have set aside certain funds for people who are mis-sold PPI.

That's my understanding of it. You can correct me afterwards if I'm wrong. But the responsibility of the people in the banks is to make sure those who are eligible get what is due to them.

[28 : 57] And Paul says, My role, I'm the administrator of God's grace. All the riches that are in Christ, all the wonderful things that we focus on in chapter 1, he says, All those wonderful things, I've got the responsibility of making sure the Gentiles know that they qualify.

He says, Paul's administration is to share God's grace with the Gentiles. That's his responsibility, that administration. But notice what he says.

He says, It is a costly calling. For whenever Paul carried out this responsibility, if you read the book of Acts, which is the story of, second half at least, of Paul's journeys when he went around the Mediterranean world telling Gentiles and Jews about the good news of Jesus, if you read that account, whenever he carried out those responsibilities, it provoked an extreme reaction on the part of the people who heard it, in particular the Jews.

Whenever he said, Gentiles are included as well as Jews, it caused a riot. Because the Jews thought they were the only recipients who qualified. And that's why Paul is writing this letter.

He says, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles. Now, he's probably referring here to a specific story. How did Paul, Paul is writing this from a prison cell in Rome.

[30 : 24] He's awaiting trial before the Emperor Nero. How did he get there? It's an interesting story. If you go back again to the book of Acts, Paul was visiting the city of Jerusalem, and he got with him some companions who were Gentile by background, and among them was one of the, probably a man who was one of the church members from the church in Ephesus.

The man named Trophimus. A man named Trophimus. And he was in Jerusalem with these Gentiles. This man called Trophimus, he was visiting Jerusalem, and the Jewish people heard about it, and they raised a rumor and they said, Paul has broken Jewish law, he's taken this Gentile into the inner courts that are forbidden to Gentiles.

And literally, a riot ensued. They dragged Paul and his companions out of the temple area to stone him and kill him. And it caused an absolute riot.

If you picture Jerusalem in those days, there's this riot in the streets. Now the Romans knew that this was the kind of thing that often happened among the Jews. So right in the middle of the complex in Jerusalem, they had a fortress called the Fortress of Antonia, and the Jews put a squadron of soldiers up there who sat on a tower looking down, watching out for riots.

And when they saw this riot ensuing, the commander of the forces dashed down the stairs, out into the streets, and ran into the middle of the crowd to rescue Paul and to find out what was happening.

[31 : 55] It's a fantastic story. You can read it in Acts chapter 21 and 22. And they literally have to carry Paul out because he's being literally torn apart by the Jews. And as they're carrying him into the fortress entrance, Paul says to him, can I just have a word with them before you take me in?

You might be glad to get out of there, wouldn't you? And he said, please, could I just say something? And the commander said, okay. And Paul turns around, and if you read the book in Acts, he speaks in Aramaic, which is the mother tongue of the Jewish crowd.

And the book of Acts says as soon as he spoke in Aramaic, they all were absolutely silent because they recognized he was one of them. And Paul then told his story of how he became a Christian.

And everybody's listening with rapt attention until Acts 22, verse 21, he finally says, then the Lord said to me, go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

And as soon as he said this, the crowd turns ugly, the crowd listened to Paul, Acts 22, verse 22, the crowd listened to Paul until he said this, then they raised their voices and shouted, rid the earth of him, he's not fit to live.

[33 : 14] And they had to bodily lift him up and carry him to safety. And the outcome of this is that Paul appeals to the emperor Nero, and so he's carted off to Rome awaiting trial, and so he writes to the Christians in Ephesus and says, you know, I'm here in prison for the sake of you Gentiles.

Probably, for the sake specifically of your church member Trophimus, who's the focus of this riot. You see, sharing the marvellous mystery, in fact, here's a test of whether you really are into gospel preaching.

It always provokes a reaction. It always provokes hostility. That's why Christians today are suffering. Why are Christians so hated?

That's the politicians who finally got on board with this. You see last week that David Cameron and I think Nick Clegg and David, yeah, Ed Miliband, get the right, Miliband here, they all mentioned about Christians suffering.

Why do people go into school in Kenya and isolate the Christian students and kill 147 of them? Why do they take Egyptian Coptic Christians down to a beach and behead them?

[34 : 25] What have they done? They're Christians. There is a cost to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and to speaking for Christ.

But Paul knows that all of this is under God's sovereign control and we need that assurance. They need that assurance for at the sharp end of this. We may need it increasingly in our society the way things are going.

And Paul says, I'm a prisoner of Christ Jesus. John Stott in the Bible Speaks Today Comanche and Ephesians writes, Humanly speaking, Paul was not Christ's prisoner but Nero's.

But Paul never did speak or think in purely human terms. He believed in the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men. Therefore, he called himself literally a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

So convinced was he that the whole of his life, including his wearisome imprisonment, was under the lordship of Christ. See, there is a cost to administering the gospel.

[35 : 30] There's a cost to administering the gospel. But all of that is under God's sovereign control. I wonder, do you and I have that same conviction as well? Or do we look and think, this is just terrible.

It's happening all over the world to Christians. It's terrible how even in our society Christians are being discriminated against. But it's under God's sovereign control.

Paul has this responsibility to share this marvelous mystery. The administration of God's grace, the good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel. That is our mandate as Christians.

We have this amazing portfolio of everything that is offered to us in Christ. All these wonderful promises. Read them again in Ephesians 1. And as a church, we have the responsibility of sharing this good news for everybody out there.

That you're included in this. You may say, people don't want to listen. People don't want to listen to people telling you about PPI, but it isn't stopping, does it? But this really is true.

[36 : 32] It is for everyone who will believe. That is our mandate. Almost finished. Midnight last Sunday, the 5th of April, sweeping changes came into effect to allow people to use their pension funds as they pleased.

It's good news, especially for over 55s. 2,000 years ago, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, on the day we call Good Friday, an infinitely more important change took place when Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem.

Mark tells us in his Gospel, with a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The temple, the curtain that separated sinners from a holy God, was torn in two.

The door to heaven was open wide for all. And Mark tells us something quite amazing. At that moment, the first guy to step through the door was a Roman centurion.

when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, Surely, this man was the Son of God, the first of an innumerable company of Gentiles who through faith in Christ enter into God's presence and know in person for their sins forgiven with the hope of eternal life and all the promises of God.

[38 : 07] I hope we're among that company, each one of us, if not, make this your day. And if we are, it's good news that we need to share with other people, with the Gentiles out there in Edinburgh and to the ends of the earth until Christ returns.

It's a marvellous mystery now been revealed. Let's rejoice in it. Let's just pray briefly and then I'll hand back to Paul. Let's be bound in quietness just for a moment.

Perhaps you've not yet entered into all these wonderful privileges that are offered in the gospel. Never really repented of your sin. Put your faith in Jesus.

Take this opportunity today. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the day of God's grace. God's grace.

And for those of us who have, let's rejoice in all that it means. All the privileges that are ours in Christ.

[39 : 26] Gracious Father, thank you for the good news of the gospel. That is good news for all people, Jews and Gentiles. May we rejoice in it.

May we live in it. May we not live as spiritual purpose when we have all the resources and riches of Christ available to us. May we rejoice in it and as a church, may we share this good news, this mystery, with the watching world outside.

And we ask it in Jesus' name for your glory. Amen. Thank you.