

"I WAS MADE A MINISTER"

Eph. 3:1-9

Our text is taken from the Apostle Paul. This same text was used by Bishop Edwin Holt Hughes who wrote the life story of his life. He said, I was always thrilled by the words and he said, I could imagine Paul looking up to his listeners from his manuscript - and saying, "I was made a minister." The words took me captive, he says, and touched my deeper nature.

Paul could have said, "I am now doing my part in making a minister." Oh Paul, could have said, "I was made one, myself." As the Bishop said, he, through all of his life - was led in that direction. But he had thoughts of the ministry that were almost "torture." He said I do not sympathize with the idea and council - "do not enter the ministry if you can help it."

He said my life has been run in that (sacred) groove and I have certainly been a man of one work. Even though on Sunday evenings, I have gone home feeling that I am an unfruitful servant. But still, filled with solemn joy.

V. 1 - The prisoner, in prison here, about four years. When he wrote this letter - he was at Rome awaiting trial before Nero. He is there in behalf of the Gentiles, as it was his firmness for their salvation that made him a prisoner. And Paul may have had certain privileges -- (friends) may have been allowed to come to see him. But day and night he was chained by a length of chain, and there were guards. Paul would never escape. He calls himself the prisoner of Christ. He is the prisoner of the Roman Government to be sure. But he always thought of himself

as a prisoner of Christ.

A point of view makes all of the difference in the world. There is a famous story about the day Sir Christopher Wren was building St. Paul's Cathedral. He was making a tour of the work in progress. He came upon a man at work and asked him what are you doing. The man said, I am cutting this stone to a certain size and shape. He came to a second man, asked him what he was doing. He said, I am earning so much money at my work. He came to a third man, and asked him the same question. The man straightened himself, and answered - I am helping Sir Christopher Wren to build St. Paul's Cathedral. There was all the difference in the world in the point of view of these three men.

If a man is in prison for some great cause, he may grumble regarding himself, as a poor wretched creature. He may regard himself as a standard bearer. Oft times when we undergo hardships or unpopularity, it may be for the sake of Christ.

Paul's life was there confined because this was the plan of God for a special ministry regarding God's people. It was an appointed ministry of the Gentiles. And Paul was made a minister. So, we read in these verses, about two different things. The "stewardship" of the mystery - V. 2-6. The "distributorship" of some riches - V. 7-9.

As a minister, he will have a part in these two things. One of the major oil fields lies on the North slope of Alaska. They built a great pipeline to the South.

But when the pipeline was opened, in the midst of the great oil shortage - the substance was brought as far as California. There was no way to send it across the country. Some people suggested sending it to Japan. And use the money to buy imported oil. So there are plans to build a pipeline from California to Texas. Meanwhile, the nation waits for oil.

Now this is the position that Paul saw himself in. Regarding the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Here he has a mystery, and here he has some riches. But he is unable to get the pipeline to deliver them.

I. STEWARDSHIP OF THE MYSTERY - V. 2-6

V. 2 V. 2 - First, stewardship. If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given to me, to you. Paul was confident that his people were aware of his mission. Now according to the reading here, his work as a dispensation - the word denotes an arrangement or a plan. Not that God had changed his dealing with men through the ages. It was not of his own choosing. But he employs a word here - the best interpretation, is that of stewardship. The office and the function of a trusted steward. Of a house, the law of the house. The stewardship. And three things are said about this stewardship. First, it is concerned with the grace of God. That is a spiritual privilege. It has God's favor - and that it is to be shared with others.

Second, this stewardship, Paul says is to you ward. That is, to the Gentiles.

v.3 ³ And ~~third~~, Paul says in V. 3 - that it involves a great mystery of redemption. It is given to me on its way to you - by way of Revelation. How that by Revelation, he made known unto me the mystery. Paul regarded himself - that a secret here had been revealed to him. The great secret of God's mercy and grace. That on the way to Damascus, he had his eyes opened. Acts 26:18. Here is a mystery that Paul says - that has been made known. And it is unsearchable. As it is used in the New Testament - it is called the mystery of religion. That was covered, only those who were inducted into a mystery, understood it. As today, in the Masonic Lodge, one is inducted into its mysteries -- things about it one learns when he is initiated in it. Now that is the word, mystery, that was used in the days of the Roman Empire. And that is the way that Paul uses it here - referring to secrets made known only to those whom they were revealed. Here is a secret that God kept in his heart. Even the angels did not know it. The prophets did not see it.

What is that mystery - what is that secret that was kept in God's heart. Is it the kingdom of God, that he would include the Gentiles. That is not it. Is it the Old Testament Covenant - no. Is it the mystery of the sufferings of Christ. No. The prophets predicted that very clearly. Isaiah 53 - 750 years before it came to pass. Isaiah described the passion of our Lord. In Isaiah 9 - he called his name wonderful. The mighty God, the prince of peace.

v.4 What is the mystery that was kept secret in the heart of God. Until the day it was revealed. The secret was that between the sufferings of our Lord, and the Kingdom appearance of our Lord, there would be a long period of time, and age of grace. A dispensation of mercy. That was, it would be made up of Jews and Gentiles alike. And they would belong to the same family, the same body, and the same faith. The angels did not know this. I Peter 1:12. They desired to look into these things. That he shall come down. And this secret, Jesus Christ, is the head of the church.

And the church is his body. And, I belong to the church. But what is the church. The church is the called-out people of God. They are a new something - for several hundred years after Christ, the church was called the ecclesia. But when Constantine was converted, he built gorgeous temples. They changed it to the Lordly house. The name then moved through the languages and became known as the kirk of the church. But the Bible does not know anything about that. Because, the ecclesia, the called-out people of God, the church, can be anywhere - at any place. For the church is you - it is the people of the Lord.

The church is not the building, it is God's people. And what a glory that he calls us God's chosen. And he put it in our hearts to respond.

V. 4 - Paul said, toward us, facing which - you can when reading, understand my comprehension in the mystery of Christ. Which had, not been made known in previous generations. There is newness in this revelation and mystery.

V. 5 In V. 5 - Which in other ages was not made known, unto the sons of men. He says, it was a definite act, it has not been revealed to his holy Apostles, and prophets in the Spirit. And set apart in the interests of the new Gospel function. God moves in the Spirit, to lay there his inner purpose. This can only be received in the Spirit. God and man meet - and men come to understand God. This is one of the greatest of all secrets and mysteries. That it is in the spirit, the measure of his comprehension of God's greatest secret. And come to know that the Gentiles were inconcluded in God's purpose.

V. 6 - The content of the mystery of Christ, fellow heirs and fellow members

of the body. They are co-heirs with his body and they are partners. The term fellowship is, the key to the meaning of the significance of this verse.

V. 6 - Paul tells us what the mystery is - of this stewardship which he has. In V. 6 - He tells us about this secret. The content of the mystery of Christ. That Gentiles are fellow-heirs, fellow-members, of the body. This is the key term to the meaning of this verse. That is, that the body of Christ, and fellow partakers in relationship to the promises of God.

Do we understand this great secret that the Gentiles are - and this tells us what the secret is. It is God's simple, open secret. Now, this is not easy to put in the English. It is a figure of speech - and there are three words that are here which means co-heirs, co-body, and co-partners. They are jointly God's inheritance, with the Jews. And if we say that the Gospel secret for us is that the Chinese, the Russians, the Africans are in God's grace included - with Britians, Americans, Indians. All of this comes through the Gospel. And Paul says it has been his honor to render the stewardship -- to take the stewardship of this mystery. To become a herald of it.

II. DISTRIBUTORSHIP OF SOME RICHES

V.7 In V. 7 - We read that Paul says, I became a ministering servant. Now, this deals with his place in the stewardship. This is a way by which he was to initiate this gift. And this position here which he has given, that God had called him in Christ to track in the footsteps of Christ. And that I was made a minister he said. According to the gift of the grace of God.

Now this explains why Paul was so earnest. He left the home mission work with the original twelve. But Paul goes out on a foreign mission work, with the mystery to the Gentiles. And this mystery was something that he was going to have the distributorship of. What a great thought this is -- that he had received a special revelation, of this mystery. And that even the angels, though they knew many things, they did not know about this mystery. And this mystery, which Paul is talking about had moved to Ephesus. And here perhaps, a hundred thousand people were converted there. And these things have been committed unto him, and Paul says he is a prisoner. The chain on his hands clank with every line he writes. The Word of God is not chained. And the Spirit of God is not chained. And the prayer of the man of God is not chained. And Paul says, I was made a minister. This was something that was basic. Paul knew what his task was. He knows that he is inadequate. He knows that when he comes to administer this grace of God, that he is very small indeed.

And Paul denotes that he served in the interest of and the benefit of another. When he says, I was made a minister. He indicates he did not take this honor to himself. That he was divinely appointed. And first, it was a great favor. And he considered not that he was worthy of it. But rather, that only according to the grace. Another thing that he understood was, that it involved an exercise. He was made a minister. Paul never ceased to wonder, that one such as he, once so destructive in the movement of Christianity - should now become an Apostle to the Gentiles.

And as a minister, he described his lot. We find that he had high regard for his place.

V.S.
In V. 8 - Paul says, I am less than the least of all the saints. That I should preach. This is a most unusual passage. Ending - the word here reads that it is not

enough for Paul to use a word that means least. He wants to place beneath the least. One thinks of the old Puritan - I do not quarrel with Paul but I dispute the right for him to push me out of my place. Least than least, said he, is my place.

And this is the expression that Paul leaves - no shadow of doubt in their minds, that his goodness (is in) Christ. And his strength in God. Paul, this Pharisee, met Christ on the Damascus Road, and it meant that he was an outlaw fleeing and searching for those who were bound to Christ. But after that experience, he, himself was an outlaw. He was fleeing for his life. Let over the city wall in a basket. Shipwrecked. He had other disasters. And Paul carried on his full-time work teaching.

My, how the world today is divided among those who think that a minister works one hour a week. And then, there are others who realize, that maybe he puts in longer hours. Then when you gather in the diversity of tasks, then people begin to think that they would rather have any other job in the community than that of minister. When laymen sometime join in with the pastor in some of the unusual experiences, they say, I don't see how you keep it up. Is every day this bad. The answer is, no, many of them are much worse.

Now Paul, as a minister said, I was made a minister. And Paul knows his weakness. And he knows the Saviour. The more you recognize the Saviour, the more you recognize your own inadequacy. Now this is something that Paul says, that he had the privilege of coming and preaching. The unsearchable riches of Christ - V. 8. If he is to have the distributorship - he looks upon himself as the transmitter of the grace. And we find that the deeper the vessel goes, and the deeper the vessel is - the heavier it is. The true man of God. Many years ago Joseph Parker, asked

Spurgeon why did the Lord chose Judas, one of the twelve to betray him. The humble preacher replied, I am not able to answer. But the great mystery to me is, not why he chose Judas, but why should the Lord have chosen me. And that great preacher one time explained in a sermon, in the wonder of the elective grace of God, my heart cries out - why me, oh Lord, why me. Paul's personal attitude toward the ministry was one of splendor and wonder. And the goodness of God. One time, he said, oh the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgements and his ways of finding out. Rom. 11:33.

So here is a man standing, and in all the splendor, in the unspeakable, unsearchable riches.

All that he had to do was think about the riches of Christ as to his person. We know that the wind knew Christ - and was still at his voice. The waves recognized him and kissed his feet. The angels knew him, and ministered to him. The demons knew him and fled from him. And disease turned to health.

Paul knew about the riches of the atoning power. The grace of God. Did you ever think of this. Before the Lord came, before he died on the cross, that there he promised and pledged to die for our sins. And the suffering he went through as he was there.

Then think about the riches of his ascension. He is in Heaven making intercession for us. This is unspeakable. No wonder Paul quoted Isaiah. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of men, the

things which God have prepared for them that love Him. I Cor. 2:9.

And then there are the riches of his presence. Paul knew this. He says, I am obligated to the stewardship of this mystery. I have the distributorship of these unsearchable riches of his presence.

✓
✓
How Christ's presence helps. Think about that lovely Christian woman who works in the house. Who sings as she washes the dishes, who sings as she cooks at the stove, or as she sweeps the house. She always sings the sweet songs of zion, the hymns of the church, the songs about Jesus. The Lord's presence is like that - in all of the common everyday chores of our life. Even in our sorrows, disappointments, in the storm clouds that fall. We will see the April showers mixed with sun beams.

✓
✓
A couple had a little business. They both worked hard. They were sweet and precious. On Christmas Day, the husband had a heart seizure and died. The preacher made his way to the home. Of all days for a tragedy, on Christmas Day. He, the preacher had gone to the home, to bring some comfort and encouragement to the poor wife. The husband lying dead. But someone had been there before him. For she said, when I was saved - I experienced God's saving grace. For the years of my life, I have known his love and grace, and now that my husband is gone, God has given my dying grace. Then she added, it was God's Christmas present to my husband. For today, Christmas Day, God introduced him to the saints and to the angels in Glory. When the preacher left that house, he left exalted and lifted up. Christmas Day brought death and separation to her - but in Christ, it brought a Christmas present for him.

(end)

Today, he was presented to the angels and the saints in Glory. Think what God has done for us. These unsearchable riches, Paul said, I am distributing them to you.

V. 9
And Paul mentioned the wonderful thing, V. 9. And to make all men see, what is the fellowship of this mystery. Which from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God.

A young adult once asked a question - I am so troubled. I am afraid of the coming of the Lord. It strikes terror in my heart. The counsellor said, dear child, afraid. Afraid of the coming of Jesus. Tell me, have you lived in the days of his flesh. Have you knocked on his door - have you gone to his door to open it. And there stood the lovely Jesus - would you have been afraid. That the son of God through immortal flesh stood at the door - would you have been afraid. Would you not have been overcome with gladness.

When Jesus came into a house, one could not get near to him because of the blind, the lame, the poor. They wanted to touch him. Or they wanted him to touch them and bless them. Mothers brought little babies that he might pray for them. And Jesus is still the same. God's book is still the same. This same Jesus shall come back in like manner. It will be the Lord himself. And he is a friend of mine and I am not afraid. And I do not dread his coming. It will be a blessed face. The same precious hands and the same loving heart.

This wonderful stewardship and distributorship includes some unending riches, that will never end. And countless numbers have partaken of these. And they will

X
receive a white robe. You do not need to bring a crust of bread. He has the manna of life. You do not need to wash a single stain out of your soul, his blood cleanses you from all sin. You might as well take a candle and hold it up to the sun. As to bring your own righteousness to Jesus. Who is to come just as you are. There is grace, and there is forgiveness.

No one had ever dreamed that God's grace and God's love was for all people. But Paul made that great discovery, God revealed that mystery to him. And tonight, I am offering that mystery to you.

Chester Quarles was executive secretary of Mississippi Baptist Convention. He illustrates this truth for us. He had suffered from polio in his youth. Before any vaccine was available. And he was paralyzed in one arm. On a mission tour to South America, he was asked by a missionary family, to bring a supply of new discovered polio vaccine for their children. He obtained it, and he carefully guarded it on the trip. He took great pains to deliver that medicine. He said, because he knew so well the difference that it would make,

Now this is the spirit in which Paul began a prayer and then talked about the stewardship of this mystery, and the distributorship of it - of the riches. He said, because it is important and we need to share it because we care. And the supply is unlimited. No one must be left out, of the distribution of these riches.