

Ephesians 3:1–6 | “A Great & Gracious Mystery”
Preached on June 29, 2025 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 3, verses 1–6 today. *[pause]*

It’s a blessing to get back at it, preaching God’s Word to you after a time away.

And I truly do find it a joy, honor, and privilege to proclaim God’s Word to you, and so we pick up, right back where we left off in Ephesians. *[pauseeee]*

Many times, we do not realize our great need for the grace of God, not just for salvation, but for everything. [pause]

Like, do you realize that you need the grace of God to live another day? *[pause]*

Do you acknowledge that you need the grace of God to be able to do some good work for Him? [pause]

Do you recognize that you need the grace of God in every area of your life, and in every single moment? *[pauseeee]*

An old English table prayer went like this...

“Lord, give me grace to feel my need of grace, and give me grace to ask for grace and give me grace to receive grace, and O Lord, when grace is given, give me grace to use it.”¹ *[pause]*

Now that’s someone who understands that they are wholly dependent on grace. [pause]

Well in the passage before today, we see grace running throughout the whole thing.

And so, this passage may be about Paul’s ministry role and the message that he shared, but it’s ultimately about the grace of God. [pause]

Let’s look at it, shall we? *[READ]*

The first point that I want to bring to your attention this morning is...

I. God’s grace shown through God’s messengers.

God seems to love to use means to bless us. *[pause]*

That is, He loves to show us grace using various things. [pause]

So He blesses us through the sun, which gives us light and heat.

He gives all mankind the common grace of rain in order for plants to grow.

¹ John Stott, *The Preacher’s Notebook: The Collected Quotes, Illustrations, and Prayers of John Stott*, ed. Mark Meynell (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

Or most pertinent to our passage today, He loves to show us grace *through* other people.
[pauseeee]

Think of all of the times in your life that God has shown you grace through the blessing of other people. [pause]

He used someone to encourage you when you were so utterly discouraged, or maybe the presence of someone with you during your hardest days was just what you needed. [pause]

Well what we find in our passage is that God shows us great grace through people that He sends and uses. [pauseeee]

Just consider how Paul writes to the Ephesians...

He talks in verse 1 of how he is a prisoner of Christ “on behalf of you Gentiles.” [pause]

He goes on in verse 2 to speak about how he received a stewardship of God’s grace that was given to him *for* the Ephesians. [pause]

Basically, God used Paul to show grace to the Gentile Ephesians. [pauseeee]

Let’s break this down a little bit, shall we? [pause]

First, Paul talks about his current position or status—he is “a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles.” [pause]

What a statement!

Imagine that you were in prison for sharing the gospel—would that really be what you said about your status? [pause]

How many of us would rather be complaining, grumbling, and just plain downcast?

I’m sure we would all have lots more *different* and *negative* words than Paul does, if we were in the same spot, and yet, just listen to the words he uses about his own imprisonment...

“A prisoner.” [pause]

Yes, that’s a word we would use for sure, but would we ever say, “A prisoner of Christ Jesus”? [pause]

Paul could have said, “a prisoner of Rome,” or “a prisoner, though I really shouldn’t be,” yet he intentionally says, “a prisoner of Christ.” [pauseeee]

He also purposefully points out that this confinement was on their behalf. [pause]

You see, Paul was looking at his imprisonment not from a mere earthly way, but from a theological perspective. [pause]

He really did this with everything, and it should rebuke us for how we think and talk, for I find that we often think and talk like atheists. *[pauseee]*

From a mere earthly standpoint, Paul was in prison unjustly, and it's miserable, and hopeless-looking, yet looking at it theologically, Paul saw it differently. *[pause]*

He was not merely a prisoner of Rome, but ultimately a prisoner of Christ. *[pause]*

The Lord was in control, and he knew that.

He knew that he belonged to Christ and in that he could find comfort. *[pause]*

Christ was not in Heaven, sweating, and thinking, “Oh no, Paul's in prison, I wasn't expecting that, what do we do now?”

No, Christ is King, and Paul belonged to Christ, so Paul always saw himself as belonging to Him, even in prison. *[pauseeee]*

Do you think and talk that way about yourself? *[pause]*

Do you think, “No matter where I'm at, or what I'm doing, or what position I have, I belong to Christ Jesus”? *[pause]*

Prison does not take me out of the reach of Christ.

Criticism from others does not push me beyond the bounds of belonging to Him.

Since nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,² then not even prison can change our status from being Christ's. *[pauseee]*

Consider another way that Paul saw his imprisonment through the eyes of faith—he says that he was there, “on behalf of you Gentiles.” *[pause]*

Now what does Paul mean by that?...

Well think about *why* Paul was often jailed. *[pause]*

He went forth into Gentile regions, preaching the Gospel, and this either made the Gentile residents mad for various reasons...

Or the Jewish residents were mad because they saw it as departing from their faith.

And that's why he can say that he's a prisoner on their behalf. *[pause]*

He was a chosen instrument of Christ to carry Christ's name before the Gentiles, and as a result, was in prison for it.³ *[pauseee]*

² A reference to Romans 8:38–39.

³ A reference to Acts 9:15–16.

He wanted people to know that both Jews and Gentiles could be saved through Christ, and was thrown into prison for that simple, yet powerful message...

No wonder he's there on the Gentiles' behalf. *[pauseeee]*

Once again, how Paul views his prison time is significant. *[pause]*

He doesn't see it as worthless, but he was there for the sake of others. *[pause]*

He could have avoided prison by not sharing this message to the Gentiles, but he was there for them. *[pause]*

He was most definitely there for and because of Christ, but it was also for the sake and benefit of others.

Now that's love! *[pause]*

He sacrificed his comforts for the sake of the Gentiles, so that they would hear about Christ. *[pause]*

He was sitting in a jail cell because he wanted them to know Christ, and be impacted for eternity. *[pauseeeee]*

I wonder if we love Christ and others so much that we are willing to sacrifice in order for them to know Christ more. *[pause]*

Sometimes we can't even sacrifice a little time to reach out with some encouraging words to another person, yet Paul was in prison for the sake of others! *[pauseeeee]*

What if we saw our hardships for others in this way, where...

I may lose some time out of my schedule on things I want to do, but I lose that time in love for the sake of others. *[pause]*

I may be inconvenienced, but it's for the benefit of another person, and in that I can rejoice. *[pause]*

I may have a harder day or week, but hard doesn't always equal bad, especially if it's for the benefit of another to know Christ more. *[pauseeee]*

Let's get our mindsets back to where they should be...

For what if we continually thought of ourselves as those who belong to Christ, and who are used by Him for the sake of others? *[pauseeee]*

In that great and glorious way, God's grace is shown to others *through us*. *[pause]*

Our sacrificial love is God's way of blessing others.

Our laying down of our comforts for others is God's way of showing them grace.

Our sharing of the Gospel with those who don't know, even if it means ridicule, is God's grace being shown to that person. *[pauseeee]*

And all the glory goes back to Him, who shed His grace on us first, and gave us the positions we have and the words to speak. *[pauseeeee]*

Speaking of the words to speak—that's what we see next, as Paul continues...

He says in verse 2, "assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you." *[pauseeee]*

Now the question to first tackle is, what is this stewardship? *[pause]*

Well the word 'stewardship' points to that which is under the oversight and administration of someone who is employed to manage another person's property or possessions.

So it's something belonging ultimately to God, but Paul is called to be a good steward or manager of it. *[pause]*

It's like it's Paul's responsibility to utilize it well, and what we find is that this stewardship is a responsibility to share a message—that both Jews and Gentiles are fellow heirs in Christ. *[pause]*

Put succinctly, Paul's stewardship was to proclaim to the Gentiles that they can be saved through Christ. *[pause]*

Talk about a stewardship of grace! *[pause]*

The message itself is grace, and Paul was given this message by grace. *[pauseeee]*

Paul knows that he did not seek out this blessed responsibility—he certainly didn't grasp it in any sort of selfish ambition.

Rather, he was *given* this stewardship by God—God chose him to be his messenger to the Gentiles. *[pauseeee]*

The truth is that God graciously gives each of us responsibilities and roles that we are to be good stewards of...

As Paul says in Galatians, he "had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised."⁴ *[pause]*

So we are all stewards of His grace, but not always stewards of the same exact things. *[pause]*

⁴ Galatians 2:7.

Paul was primarily focused on the Gentiles, and Peter was primarily focused on the Jews—each was a stewardship of grace given to them by God. *[pauseeee]*

So then how should we view ourselves and what should we do?...

Well as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4...

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”⁵ *[pause]*

We are servants and stewards, who ought to be faithful! *[pause]*

So yes, we are definitely not an apostle, but we were each given things to steward. *[pauseeee]*

We are graciously given spiritual gifts, do we steward them well or leave them sitting on the shelf of our lives? *[pause]*

We were given the message of the gospel to share with others, do we steward that message well by speaking it? *[pause]*

We are given money and resources, do we steward those well for the Lord, or hoard them for ourselves? *[pause]*

These things are really the Lord’s, given to us to faithfully use—may we always remember that. *[pause]*

We do not abuse or misuse them, but neither do we neglect them, but we use them purposefully for the Lord’s work and glory. *[pauseeeee]*

Paul saw his ministry as a task given to him by God—do we have that mindset when it comes to the tasks that God has given to us? *[pause]*

Are we willing to carry out the tasks that God has given to us, even if it involves suffering, like imprisonment? *[pauseeeee]*

So Paul says that this stewardship was given to him, but what was the purpose of Paul being given this responsibility to share the Gospel with the Gentiles?...

He says that it “was given to me for you.” *[pause]*

Paul was not given this amazing responsibility to sit on and do nothing with. *[pause]*

He was not given this role to gloat in how he received such an amazing position...

This grace was given to be shared. *[pauseeeee]*

⁵ 1 Corinthians 4:1–2.

Have you ever given someone something to give to someone else? *[pause]*

You gave it to that first person not so that it stays with that person, but so that they could give it to someone else.

So also, that's what Paul is saying here—he was given something to give to others. *[pauseee]*

Unlike some people in ministry, who lord their authority over people, Paul saw himself as a steward sharing God's grace with others. *[pause]*

Paul understood that he doesn't just exist for himself, but for Christ and His church. *[pause]*

He wasn't there for the church to attend to his needs and wants, but for him to sacrificially serve them by being faithful to the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

So often people come to church with a “what's in it for me” mindset, but that's not how we are called to approach one another or to approach church.

Rather, we are to see ourselves as servants of the Lord, who serve Him by serving others. *[pauseeeee]*

Do you serve the Lord by using what He has given you to serve other people? *[pause]*

Most of us, if not all of us, would never slack off at work and not carry out our duties and responsibilities...

Yet when it comes to church, why do so many not even bat an eye about not carrying out what God has called them to do? *[pauseeee]*

What if you gave to someone else saying, “This was given to me by God to give to you.”? *[pause]*

What if we used our spiritual gifts to help others and so displayed the truth that it was given to us to use for others? *[pause]*

And especially the gospel message—we were given it to not only believe it and be saved ourselves, but also, to give it to others, so that they can experience the grace of God, too. *[pauseeee]*

To think that God delights in using us in the lives of others is an amazing truth. *[pause]*

To think that He uses us for such amazing purposes that can have an eternal impact is a wonder. *[pause]*

There is grace in how God chooses to use ‘little us’ in the lives of others, in order to do His ‘big work’ in the world. *[pauseeee]*

Not only do we see God's grace through God's messengers, but we also see in this passage...

II. God's grace shown through God's mystery.

Do you like mysteries? *[pause]*

Many of us enjoy mysteries because they are so interesting, due to being very unusual and unique. *[pause]*

Some of you might like a good mystery book, or a show all about mysteries.

They baffle us and challenge us to think, for we don't know the outcome until usually the end of the book or show. *[pauseeeee]*

Now many of you may like a mystery book or show, where the mystery is finally revealed at the end, but you don't like it if the mystery continually *remains* a mystery. *[pause]*

I think of that long-running show, "Unsolved Mysteries," where they present these cases that are not yet solved, and the show ends with the mystery still lingering as a mystery. *[pause]*

That can be sort of frustrating to many of us because we like to have everything solved, understood, and tidied up in our minds. *[pause]*

Well whether you like mysteries or not, this morning we are going to hear about a mystery.

And thankfully, this is no "unsolved mystery" though, for it's a mystery that has been revealed by God. *[pause]*

It may have been a mystery before, but it's now a mystery *revealed*. *[pauseeee]*

So Paul just talked about how he received a stewardship, and then he explains in further detail what that stewardship involves—it involves a mystery. *[pause]*

In verse 3 he says that, "the mystery was made known to me by revelation." *[pause]*

Verse 4 is about how you can perceive his insight into this mystery by what he wrote earlier in Ephesians.

And then verses 5 and 6 say, "which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit..."

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." *[pauseeee]*

So what is this mystery that Paul is talking about?

He's talking about how both Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ, and as a result, they are on equal standing. *[pauseeeee]*

You need to realize that that truth was a radical, newly revealed truth in Paul's day. *[pause]*

In the Old Covenant, Israel was seen as the people of God, and those who were outside of Israel were not considered a part of the people of God.

And even those Gentiles who were proselytes or God-fearers were sort of kept at a distance still in the Old Covenant time period. *[pause]*

But now Paul is showing us that there has been a new truth, freshly revealed—Gentiles can be fully “in” and have the same exact privileges and blessings as Jews, who trust in Christ. *[pauseeee]*

So now why would I call this point, “God’s grace shown through God’s mystery”?

We’ll think about it this way—there’s grace in truth being revealed to us. *[pause]*

Paul says that prior generations weren’t made aware of this reality, but now it was revealed to the apostles and prophets of the early church. *[pause]*

This grand truth was a *hidden* truth before—it was a mystery before, but through the Spirit, God has revealed it *now*. *[pauseeee]*

This shows us some very important things...

First, it shows us that truth must be revealed to us by God. *[pause]*

We are fully dependent on God to know what’s true and what’s not.

We can’t just know or even grasp things, unless God grants it to us. *[pauseeee]*

When most people think of how they gain knowledge of something, they think that they just need to study harder or research longer.

And so, too often people think that if only they were just smarter or wiser, then they would know everything—but that’s not true. *[pause]*

We cannot gain all that we need to know through our own intelligence or wisdom, for we can only know the things of God through the Spirit of God.⁶ *[pause]*

Truth must be *revealed* to us, and Paul is saying *that it has!* *[pauseeee]*

Doesn’t that just point to God’s grace once again?!

We are dependent on Him to know the things of Him, and He graciously reveals them to us. *[pause]*

He doesn’t hold them to His chest, and say, “I’m never telling! You aren’t good enough for it.”

⁶ A reference to 1 Corinthians 2:6–16.

But though we are unworthy and undeserving, He graciously reaches down and gifts us with more knowledge of Himself and His ways. *[pause]*

He *wants* us to know Him and His plan for the world, so that we would know Him and love Him and glorify Him and be blessed forever. *[pauseeee]*

Aren't you thankful to God, who in grace reveals truth to us? *[pauseeeee]*

So when we think about this mystery revealed, there's grace in truth being revealed to us, but there's also grace in the truth itself. *[pause]*

God's love for all kinds of people is displayed in this mystery, for Jew and Gentiles can together be a part of His blessed people. *[pauseeee]*

Being New Testament Christians, we are very used to this truth, so it's easy to overlook how monumental this was for those in the early days of the church. *[pause]*

They were so used to God working mostly to, through, and for Israel, and now that was all changing to be something more global and all-encompassing. *[pause]*

Both Jews and Gentiles, and that means all people with different ethnicities and backgrounds, can be a part of the body of Christ together. *[pauseeee]*

Now the question remains though—how are they considered “in”? *[pause]*

Well in verse 6, it talks about how they are fellow heirs, a part of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus *through the gospel*. *[pause]*

Through simply hearing and believing the good news of Jesus Christ and what He has done, we receive these amazing blessings. *[pause]*

It is by grace through faith that we become “in Christ” and so we receive these things. *[pause]*

It's not by our own works, but by Christ's work on our behalf, whereby He came, died for our sins, and then rose again, so that we could have forgiveness and eternal life. *[pause]*

We merely acknowledge our need, repent of our sins, and trust in Him.

And that message is for all people—both Jews and Gentiles, male or female, Asian or American, old or young, intelligent or unintelligent, good background or bad background...

Through faith in Christ, we are made fellow heirs with one another, and that means that we become recipients of God's eternal blessings. *[pause]*

We get to enjoy Heaven and all of its eternal blessings, the blessings reserved for us by God forever. *[pauseeee]*

Not just Jewish people can experience this glorious truth, but Gentiles, too!

All who believe the gospel message, and are in Christ are fellow heirs of God. *[pauseeee]*

Being fellow heirs isn't the only blessing received, though, for we also get to be members of the same body. *[pause]*

When a person trusts in Christ, they are added to the body of Christ, and so we belong to Christ, and we belong to Christ *together*. *[pauseeee]*

There is now a certain unity and oneness that we can have together in Christ.

So though we look and sound different, though we have different backgrounds and earthly families, we can be one together in Christ as His body. *[pauseeee]*

And lastly, both Jews and Gentiles who trust in Christ are partakers of the promise. *[pause]*

We each share together in the promises found in Christ, that is, in the promise of life and salvation through Him. *[pause]*

There are no second class citizens in the faith, but we are all fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise of life and salvation found in Him. *[pause]*

What a monumental truth!

It shows that the eternal blessings in Christ are not limited to a select ethnicity or anything like that, but it's available to all kinds of people through grace.

And that should encourage us to share the Gospel with anyone, and to see the grace of God that He extends His reach to all people—people like us. *[pauseeeee]*

This also means that we should treat each other with equal dignity. *[pause]*

We ought never to look down on another Christian, as if they weren't a part of the "elite," but we should see them as fellow heirs, and a part of the same body. *[pause]*

Even if a person looks a little rough, or has a different skin color than you—if they are a Christian, you ought to view them as a fellow heir, and on the same level as you.

For we are all really on the same level, and that level is—recipient of grace. *[pauseeee]*

What grace of God shown through God's mystery revealed. *[pause]*

He has graciously revealed to us this truth, and the truth itself is pure grace—*anyone* who trusts in Christ is an undeserving recipient of eternal blessings in Him. *[pauseeee]*

You see...

By grace, God has revealed an amazing mystery—Jews and Gentiles are one blessed body in Christ!

There is grace in that God has chosen to reveal this amazing truth to us. *[pause]*

We don't deserve anything, let alone this amazing truth, so just being able to *know it* is the grace of God on display. *[pause]*

The Lord has graciously chosen to use people, like Paul, to share His truth with us. *[pause]*

Let's be thankful to the Lord that He doesn't keep us in the dark, but has chosen to reveal Himself and His ways. *[pauseeee]*

Realize, too, that the Lord also wants to use *you* in the lives of others. *[pause]*

You aren't an apostle, like Paul, but He still does want you to steward what He has given to you for the sake of others.

So will you steward the spiritual gifts, roles, resources, and truths that you have for the benefit of others? *[pause]*

Do you see those things as grace given to be shared? *[pauseeee]*

And lastly, what a great and gracious mystery that has been revealed to us. *[pause]*

This is no small mystery, nor trivial mystery, but a great one. *[pause]*

This is no mystery found in a paperback book that you pick up at the airport, read through once, and never read again...

This is a mystery that impacts not just one little family or community, but a mystery that has universal ramifications for all people. *[pause]*

It is for sure a great mystery, but it's also a gracious mystery that has been revealed—all kinds of people can find life and grace in Christ as one blessed body. *[pause]*

What else could we say, but what that hymn proclaims...

“Wonderful grace of Jesus, reaching the most defiled, by its transforming power making him God's dear child...

Purchasing peace and heaven for all eternity—and the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.”⁷

⁷ “Wonderful Grace of Jesus,” by Haldor Lillenas, 1918.