

There is one day in all of history when the plan of God for mankind was unveiled. Man has always, and will until the last day, been saved by grace alone through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8,9ⁱ). The grace of God moves our wicked hearts to seek an answer to our condition. That grace causes us to ask why we are doing the things we hate (Romans 7:15ⁱⁱ). God's grace causes us to ask why we cannot control our behavior and thoughts and convicts us of our actions. That same grace that is part of God's nature and in union with His desire that none perish reached out to those heroes in the hall of faith (2 Peter 3:9ⁱⁱⁱ). Hebrews chapter 11 tells us of the Old Testament believers who were saved by faith. Romans 4 tells us that Abraham and David were saved by faith. To this day and until the last day people will be saved by grace through faith. But how that is possible was only made clear 2000 years ago early one Sunday morning.

The Apostle Paul called it a mystery. ⁴ *...the mystery of Christ,* ⁵ *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.* ⁶ *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.* Paul tells us that ⁸ *To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,* ⁹ *and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,* ¹⁰ *so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.* ¹¹ *This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,* Ephesians 3:8-11 Though the wonder of a Savior coming to die for us is clearly seen in Isaiah and the Psalms and foreshadowed in the sacrifices and feasts of Israel, Paul is telling us that what it all meant was revealed to him, the least of the saints, and to the apostles and prophets of that day (see verse 5 above).

The mystery is multifaceted, and to understand it, we must first understand who God considers to be the people of God. God made promises to the physical descendants of Abraham, promises of land and a great number of descendants. He also promised that through Abraham's seed the world would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3^{iv}; 17:8^v). These are two very different promises. One is physical in nature for all descendants of Abraham. The other is of one descendant who would bless the world (Galatians 3:16^{vi}). God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision as a seal of the covenant God made with him. Later, during the time of Moses, God explained that what was meant by the sign of the covenant was a heart that was tender toward God. He called it circumcision of the heart.

¹⁶ *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.*

Deuteronomy 10:16 ⁶ *And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.* Deuteronomy 30:6 (emphasis mine) Notice that to truly live they needed God to circumcise their hearts and love God with all their heart and soul (John 6:63^{vii}). That goes beyond rules and genealogy to a loving relationship. They understood that the life from God was more than a beating heart and breathing lungs. They were physically alive, but to truly live we need a heart change. They knew that the physical is a picture of spiritual realities (Romans 1:20^{viii}).

Numerous times the Old Testament prophets predicted the coming of a new covenant that would be different from the one made with their forefathers. The covenant included changing hearts of stone to hearts of flesh and writing the law upon those tender hearts (Jeremiah 31:33^{ix}; Ezekiel 11:19^x). The Laws of Moses were so demanding and the history of the nation so rebellious that the psalmist said there were none that do good and seek God (Psalm 14:2,3^{xi}). And yet we read in the hall of faith of those who were people of faith. Of course, it began in their hearts by the grace of God and not their own initiative. The faithful steadfast love of God reaches out to us and convicts of sin. Though they had faith in God making a just way for them to be forgiven, they had to accept by faith that God would provide that way, a way that would be revealed in the future (1 Corinthians 2:9^{xii}).

That is part of the mystery that Paul was referring to. Paul was writing about the Gentiles becoming part of Israel, but by Israel he meant those who had faith that God would provide a means for their atonement, those who had life. In Romans 11 Paul writes of us on this side of the cross, as being grafted into those people of faith. This is how he put it. ²⁸ *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.* ²⁹ *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.* Romans 2:28,29 We who have entered that new covenant of the blood of Jesus spilled out for our sins and are grafted into those people of faith whose hearts were circumcised by faith in what God would provide in the future. That is the mystery that Paul was proclaiming. Gentiles (non-Jews) could become joined to the people of faith. That is why Paul declared that we have been made one. He writes, ¹¹ *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—* ¹² *remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.* ¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* ¹⁴ *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility* Ephesians 2:11-14

In the Old Testament we have numerous examples of Gentiles being made one with Israel, the people of God. They even include women who were Gentiles in the lineage of Jesus. It has been there all along, this reality of being saved by grace through faith, but it remained a mystery until Jesus died and rose from the grave. It was only then that the apostles, which are the twelve with Paul replacing Judas, and the prophets could see it clearly (1 Corinthians 2:10a^{xiii}). That is because they could not see the answer to the power of death, and yet some wrote of the victory over death. Job spoke of the resurrection when he said that after worms destroyed his body, yet in his flesh he would see God (Job 19:26^{xiv}). The psalmist spoke of sleeping the sleep of death and yet awakening in righteousness to see the face of God (Psalm 17:15^{xv}). Psalm 49:15 tells us, ¹⁵ *But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah*

Jesus made it very clear to the Sadducees when they tried to confound Him about an afterlife. They asked about a woman who had one husband die after another and had a total of seven husbands. Then they asked which one would be her husband in heaven (Matthew 22:24-28^{xvi}). He told them that we are not married in heaven, but their whole

philosophy of no afterlife was in error for God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living (Luke 20:38^{xvii})! Here again, “living” means eternal life in Christ.

That brings us to why we are celebrating the resurrection this morning. What the people of faith before Christ were looking forward to was the solution to their sin debt. That was dealt with on the cross, but **the victory was made evident in the resurrection**. If Jesus did not physically rise from the grave, how would we know that what He declared was true? The apostles referred to Psalm 16:10 as a proof text for the righteousness of Christ on our behalf. ¹⁰ *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.* Psalm 16:10 (Acts 13:34-39^{xviii}).

When Peter wanted to replace Judas as one of the twelve, he said they had to choose a man who *must become with us a witness to his resurrection* (Acts 1:22^{xix}). The resurrection was the sign the victory over sin and death had been accomplished. It proved Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. And it showed that the greatest victory of all came through the One who through death destroyed the one who had the power of death and in doing so set us free from a lifetime of the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14,15^{xx}). We might fear the process, the pain that may be involved, but we do not need to fear what comes after. In fact, we look forward to it. Paul was in a quandary when he was faced with possible execution. He wanted to depart and be in the physical presence of Christ which he said compared to living longer here was better by far (Philippians 1:21-23^{xxi}).

In chapter one of the letter to the Ephesians Paul reminds us of some of the things that the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplished for us. He tells us that we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (1:3). He says we were chosen before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless and to be adopted as sons and daughters of God (1:4,5). He writes ⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,* ⁸ *which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight* ⁹ *making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ* ¹⁰ *as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.* Ephesians 1:7-10 He goes on to say that we have obtained an inheritance and that our salvation was sealed with the Holy Spirit guaranteeing that inheritance (1:11-14^{xxii}).

Resurrection also has another message for every believer. It is one that we celebrated recently with baptisms. Paul wrote of it in his letter to the Ephesians. ¹⁹ *... the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might* ²⁰ *that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,* Ephesians 1:19,20 The immeasurable power that raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him to God’s right hand is at work in us. It has liberated us from the bondage of sin (John 8:34^{xxiii}). That victory of Jesus over death means that power is available to us to change our behavior. We just need to be willing to apply it to our weaknesses.

I have seen it at work here in our lives. We were driven to do things we did not want to do, but we have been set free. Some of us thought there was pleasure in the things that were destroying us, but resurrection power set us free. Some of us were trying to do what we thought was good, but resurrection power showed us it was about our ego, and that it is better for us when Jesus gets all the glory. Perhaps the greatest change is that

resurrection power can liberate us from our selfishness and enable us to serve one another in love, just as Christ came not to be served but to serve (Mathew 20:28^{xxiv}).

Resurrection power is what makes us a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xxv}). We die to who we once were and are raised to life as people indwelt with Christ who is our life. Jesus told His friends in Bethany, *“I am the resurrection and the life!”* (John 11:25,26^{xxvi}). To live is to be in the One who is the life.

Recently we had a man visit who claims to be just like Jesus. I know there was some ignorance of the meaning of Scripture involved, but when we look at these expressions of Jesus, they look so ridiculous in anyone else’s mouth. Jesus in you is resurrection and life! Realize it! Know that His resurrection verifies it. Who else would dare to say, ³⁹ *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.* ⁴⁰ *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*”? John 6:39,40

Why should we believe such an outlandish statement from Jesus? Because He walked out of His grave and was seen by hundreds to be alive after that torturous death on the cross (1 Corinthians 15:6^{xxvii}). All the ridiculous theories of how that was not a miracle have been soundly debunked. His enemies knew that His body was gone despite the Roman guards in front of the tomb (Matthew 28:12,13^{xxviii}). Rome would have wanted to squelch any rumor of a risen Messiah by finding the dead body, but they could not. The disciples died martyrs’ deaths declaring Jesus had risen because they walked and talked and ate with Him after the resurrection. The Christian killer Saul was converted by the sight of the risen Lord Jesus (Acts 9:3-6^{xxix}).

Skeptics have no plausible answer to the resurrection of Jesus, so now it is simply ignored. And when we try to bring it up, people just get angry or walk away, *or* they yield to the Holy Spirit bringing conviction to their hearts and giving them a desire to know the truth. If you are a skeptic here this morning, which will it be for you?

Jesus was raised up on a pole like that bronze snake Moses raised in the wilderness (John 3:14,15^{xxx}), so that all who look to Him might be saved from the poisonous bite of the ol’ serpent’s lies of being our own god (Genesis 3:5^{xxxi}). Jesus was raised from death so that death would not be the final word. He took back the keys of death and hell so that man could come to God by grace through faith (Revelation 1:18^{xxxii}).

Resurrection also guarantees that whether we die or are here for Jesus’ return we have the promise of immortal heavenly bodies. ⁵¹ *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,* ⁵² *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.* ⁵³ *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.* ⁵⁴ *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”* ⁵⁵ *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 The victory was won by Christ, but the Victor gives us the victory. One of the most wonderful things about resurrection is that sin will be no more!

The psalmist asks, ⁴⁸ *What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah* Psalm 89:48 The answer is the Son of Man, the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, our Wonderful Counselor, our Everlasting Father, our Prince of Peace, Immanuel (Isaiah 9:6^{xxxiii}). He delivered His soul from the power of the grave, and He can deliver your soul and mine if we will just receive His grace by faith. Let His resurrection life free you from the bondage of your selfish pleasure seeking. Let Him give you a life of meaning and eternal purpose for His glory. That is what you were created for (Isaiah 43:7^{xxxiv}).

As the disciples hid behind locked doors fearing that they would be the next to be arrested and crucified, the women came back from the tomb with news that the stone was rolled away and the body was gone. Peter and John ran to the tomb and found it as the women said. John began to believe Jesus' promise to rise in three days. Back in the hideout, two disciples showed up with news that they had met Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Some of them doubted, not wanting their hopes to be dashed again. ³⁶ *As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"* ⁷ *But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.* ³⁸ *And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"* ³⁹ *See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."* ⁴⁰ *And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.* ⁴¹ *And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"* ⁴² *They gave him a piece of broiled fish,* ⁴³ *and he took it and ate before them.* ⁴⁴ *Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."* ⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,* ⁴⁶ *and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,* ⁴⁷ *and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.* Luke 24:36-47 Then their minds were open to understand the Scriptures. That was the one day in all of history when the plan of God for mankind was unveiled. God provided a way for us to be restored from the fall. Anyone, anywhere, anytime who comes to God by faith and asks to receive mercy finds grace because of the victory Jesus won for us. Our hearts are circumcised, and we are grafted in to the people of God. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit. How then shall we live?

Questions:

- 1 What is the only way for man to come to God?
- 2 What is the mystery hidden for the ages?
- 3 How does Paul define a Jew?
- 4 What was the main message of the apostles?
- 5 What does Eph. 1 say we gain from the death and resurrection of Jesus?
- 6 What kind of power is at work in us?
- 7 Have you seen that power at work?
- 8 What does resurrection promise for our bodies?
- 9 Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?
- 10 Describe the scene when the ultimate victory was revealed.

ⁱ Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

ⁱⁱ Romans 7:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

^{iv} Genesis 12:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

^v Genesis 17:8 (ESV)

⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

^{vi} Galatians 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

^{vii} John 6:63 (ESV)

⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

^{viii} Romans 1:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

^{ix} Jeremiah 31:33 (ESV)

³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

^x Ezekiel 11:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

^{xi} Psalm 14:2-3 (ESV)

² The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^{xii} 1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—

^{xiii} 1 Corinthians 2:10a (ESV)

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

^{xiv} Job 19:26 (ESV)

²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,

^{xv} Psalm 17:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

^{xvi} Matthew 22:24-28 (ESV)

²⁴ saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.' ⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ After them all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."

^{xvii} Luke 20:38 (ESV)

³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."

^{xviii} Acts 13:34-39 (ESV)

³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David." ³⁵ Therefore he says also in another psalm, "You will not let your Holy One see corruption." ³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own

generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption,⁷ but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,³⁹ and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

^{xix} **Acts 1:22 (ESV)**

²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”

^{xx} **Hebrews 2:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

^{xxi} **Philippians 1:21-23 (ESV)**

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

^{xxii} **Ephesians 1:11-14 (ESV)**

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

^{xxiii} **John 8:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

^{xxiv} **Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

^{xxv} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^{xxvi} **John 11:25-26 (ESV)**

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

^{xxvii} **1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

^{xxviii} **Matthew 28:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers¹³ and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’”

^{xxix} **Acts 9:3-6 (ESV)**

³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.

⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

^{xxx} **John 3:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

^{xxxi} **Genesis 3:5 (ESV)**

⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

^{xxxii} **Revelation 1:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

^{xxxiii} **Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)**

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

^{xxxiv} **Isaiah 43:7 (ESV)**

⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”