A Displayed People

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Date: 01 November 2026

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[0:00] We are coming to God's word, so let's seek his help as we come to sit under it. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace and your kindness to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

! Thank you that as we put our faith and trust in him, as we rely on his death and resurrection, thank you that we are forgiven, we are adopted as your children, we are welcomed to your family.
And with Christ as our Lord, as we come to sit under your word now, please by your Holy Spirit give us understanding that together we might appreciate the wondrous mystery of Christ that's been revealed and that we might together also be a people who will display your wisdom and your grace.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. When I was young, my parents once took us to a show house, a house that a developer opened up for potential buyers.
Show houses in those days were basic, no furniture, only some basic lighting so that you can see inside. But what's the purpose of a show house?
[1:22] Well, if there's no show house, then the inside will be a bit of a mystery, isn't it? You wouldn't know what it's like. You wouldn't know much about it from just the outside.

But a show house, a show house can display all the features of the house so that you can imagine how good life will be if you live in it. Well, my parents didn't end up buying it, but life was still good. God is kind to us. Our passage today is about a mystery made known, a mystery of Christ once hidden, but now made known.
It's the gospel of grace, the good news that Christ died to redeem and save us, died for our sins to be forgiven. But it doesn't stop there.
Together, we're also being made like a show house. What's our purpose as a show house? Well, as the church, as God's dwelling place, we are to display God, to display his infinite wisdom.
[2:30] This passage will show us what an immense privilege that is to receive God's revelation and grace and to be at the center of God's cosmic purpose.

So let's see where we're up to in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We're in the first half of the letter, chapters 1 to 3, which has mainly been about what God has done for us in Christ.
In chapter 1, in Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing of election, of adoption, redemption, forgiveness, inheritance, all in Christ.
And then in chapter 2, God has saved us by grace, through faith, not by our works, so that none of us can boast. It is through the cross of Jesus that we've been brought near and reconciled to God. And we Gentiles have also been peacefully united with God's people, the commonwealth of Israel, to receive all that God had promised in the covenants.
[3:36] And so in light of all that God has done, what does Paul do? We see him bless and praise God. At the same time, we also see him throughout the first two chapters, that he prays for the Ephesians.

Now as we come to chapter 3, Paul is about to pray again for them. But just as he begins, he goes on a little sidetrack.
A sidetrack that considers his special relationship with the Ephesians. His relationship as the apostle for them, as Gentiles. And it's a sidetrack that shows the mystery of Christ and the wisdom of God made known.
Well, come now to the first point in your outlines, the mystery of Christ made known. First, look at me at verse 1, at the prisoner of Christ for the nations. So verse 1.
For this reason, I, Paul, are the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles. Then the sidetrack begins, but we'll look at that a little bit later.

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[4:44] It begins here, for this reason. For this reason flows from what Paul has said previously, in chapter 2, verses 19 to 22. Because the Gentile, because the Gentile or non-Jewish Ephesians, because they are being built to be a dwelling place for God, so Paul wants to pray.

He wants to pray that God will strengthen them so that they may be filled with all God's fullness. You'll see that prayer next week a bit more, from verse 14 onwards.
But here in this sidetrack, he addresses the discouragement. The discouragement that Ephesians are feeling about Paul being in prison. Paul had spent two precious years with them in Acts chapter 19, but now he's under house arrest in Rome, in Acts 28.
And so the Ephesians, having known Paul and loved him and lived with him, and he served them, the Ephesians are genuinely and naturally concerned for him.
They are worried about him. But Paul wants to assure them. He wants to assure them by helping them to zoom out, to see God's overarching purpose that is currently at work.
[6:07] So he begins in verse 1 by saying that he's not so much a prisoner of Rome, he's a prisoner of Christ Jesus. It's a positive prisoner.

A prisoner for a worthy cause. So a bit like Nelson Mandela in South Africa, he was fighting against apartheid. A bit like Aung San Suu Kyi, fighting for democracy in Myanmar many years ago.
Paul here is a prisoner for the sake of Gentiles like the Ephesians. He's a positive prisoner. But what is Paul's worthy purpose?
How was he enlisted? Well, look now at verses 2 and 3. Verse 2, Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you.
That is, the mystery made known to me by revelation as I have already written briefly. Here, Paul has been given a job.
[7:19] The job of an apostle. It's a job of administering God's grace. Of telling people this mystery that Paul has written about briefly so far in chapters 1 and 2.

And that's the mystery of grace. But this mystery, it needed to be revealed first to Paul. So Paul alludes to this in his conversion in Acts chapter 9, when Jesus revealed himself to him.
And there also in Acts chapter 9 is where we find him being appointed as an apostle. So in Acts 9, Jesus said Paul is to be his chosen instrument to proclaim his name to the Gentiles.
And he must suffer much for it. And Paul's house arrest here is part of that suffering. And well, next, Paul adds why his job as an apostle was created.
Why was this job available? Well, it's because the hidden mystery of Christ is now revealed. And he's to announce it to others, to everyone.
[8:31] So look with me, verses 4 and 5. Verse 4, There's a specialness, isn't it?

a privilege to the present time compared to the past. We know things that people in the past don't know, even if they saw it every day.
So take for example, people used to think that the sun goes around the earth. But now we know that it's the earth that goes around the sun.
Or that the heavier objects naturally fall faster than lighter ones. But that's not real, isn't it? We now know that it's the same.
They fall just as fast simply because of gravity. Well, it's the same with this mystery of Christ. There was a time where people couldn't work out how the salvation that Christ was bringing would fit with the suffering servant and would fit with how the nations will come.
[9:49] Even though all these things were available in the Old Testament. But it's only after Jesus suffered on the cross, after Jesus rose again and explained it to his disciples, that they understood.

This is something that wasn't clear before. It was a mystery hidden, but now revealed with the coming of Christ. The Holy Spirit also went on to reveal more to the apostles and early prophets. As they searched the scriptures until the New Testament was written. And the great privilege for us today is that we get to understand this mystery.
We get to understand this mystery in its revealed form, in its fulfillment in Christ Jesus. We are not left looking at glimpses or shadows. We are not left looking at small pieces of puzzle, but not sure how they fit together.
No, with Jesus coming, we have the full picture of God's revelation, of God's salvation plan accomplished. All so that we are able to better trust God, better trust the Lord Jesus, and praise him.

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[11:01] The mystery is revealed to us. What a special privilege that is. But it's easy to miss the key, the key to this revelation.

In verse 5, the mystery of Christ is revealed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the key. Without him, we would have no way of understanding, no matter how much Pastor Brian or anybody else explains it to you.
The Holy Spirit is the key for us to understand. Paul explains why this Holy Spirit is key in 1 Corinthians chapter 2.
There he says, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. And we've received the Spirit from God so that we may understand what God has freely given us.
It's the Holy Spirit who explains the spiritual realities of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit who explains to the apostles and to us so that we might understand and believe.
[12:13] And so friends, let's not presume on our wisdom. Let's not presume that just because someone explained it well or we can explain it well to others, that people will get it. People will understand and believe the Gospel.

No, thank God for giving us his Spirit that we can come to faith and we can preach the Gospel to others. One aspect of that mystery of Christ, one aspect of that Gospel, is that we are sharers of the promise.
Verse 6. Look at verse 6. It says there, This mystery is that through the Gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus.
This looks back to last week's passage, doesn't it? That through the Gospel, through the cross of Christ, Jewish and Gentile believers are peacefully united as one body of Christ, as one family of God.
And together, both are heirs, they are inheritors, inheritors of God's promise in Christ. The promise that was given, that was first given to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12.
[13:33] Well, in that covenant promise, God was to make Abraham into a great nation and bless them, and all the peoples of the earth was to be blessed through Abraham.

And so ultimately, this is fulfilled in Christ, and Jews and Gentiles like us who put their faith in him, we also receive every spiritual blessing that's come from God, promised by God.
Friends, can you see here that now the privileges have doubled for us, haven't they? Double privilege. Not only do we get the mystery unveiled, we even now benefit from the mystery itself. That through this Gospel of Christ, we have been blessed by God, blessed with election and adoption, redemption, forgiveness, inheritance. We've been the focus of God's steadfast love. We've been recipients of his undeserved mercy and the glorious riches of his grace. Friends, the double privilege is that not only is the mystery unveiled to us, the privilege is that we have all these blessings in Christ.
[14:50] And if you're here, and if you're exploring what Christianity is about, and you haven't believed in Jesus before, I hope you see the great privilege that's on offer here, a privilege that can be yours.

Here's an offer of love and mercy, an offer of forgiveness and reconciliation, from the very God of the universe, from the very God of the universe, from the only God who made you.
And so despite, all despite how undeserving you and I are, despite how long we've lived without him, or even lived in opposition to him, this offer is available.
Of forgiveness, reconciliation, love and mercy. So friends, if you're here and you're exploring Christianity, you haven't believed in Jesus yet, can I ask you, will you accept this offer from God by trusting in Jesus, his son, who died in your place, who paid the price of this offer for you?
Let me urge you not to reject this gift from God, but to accept it by believing in Jesus. Well, the prisoner of Christ makes known the mystery of Christ, but it doesn't stop there.
[16:12] As the church, we are also being made like a show house to make known and display the wisdom of God. So the second half of this passage, flows like the first half of the passage, beginning with who Paul is, what's being made known, and then an aspect of the gospel.

So look with me now, verses 7 and 8, at Paul, the servant of the gospel. Verse 7, I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me. So adding to his prisoner role earlier, Paul here is also a servant, a minister of the gospel, whose role is to proclaim

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the good news.
Again, this is not a job that Paul simply applied for. It's not a job that he earned because he was very well qualified. Here, this is a job given by God and it's a gift of God's grace.
It's completely because of God's generosity. Friends, notice also how unqualified Paul was and why the working of God was needed to make him an apostle.
[17:42] So in verse 8, Paul says of himself that he is less than the least, that he is lower than the lowliest, he is smaller than the smallest of all God's people.

Why? Why does he say that? Well, because originally, Paul was the biggest persecutor of the church. So in the background, in Acts chapter 8, he was the one that approved the persecution of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.
He approved of it. He says, well done. In Acts chapter 9, he breathed threats and murders against Jesus' disciples. In effect, Jesus says that Paul was persecuting Jesus himself.
And so when Jesus sent Ananias to Paul, Ananias even had to say to Jesus, Lord, are you sure you want this guy? This guy did so much evil against your people.
In other words, Paul was dead in his transgressions and sins. Just like Paul wrote in chapter 2. But what did it take?
[18:58] What did it take to do a 180 degree change of Paul into an apostle of Jesus? How did he make that 180 degree turn?

Well, it took the mighty power of God. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 20, is the same power that made Paul alive in Christ.
God made Paul alive in Christ by his great power. God made Paul alive in Christ. God made Paul alive in Christ. God made Paul alive in Christ. Friends, for all our modern advances in technology, none can make anyone alive again.
Yes, we have those AEDs, those automated external defibrillators to jumpstart someone's heart if it stops. But when someone is declared dead, no one can resurrect him back to life physically.
How much less can we resurrect him spiritually unless God powerfully does his work for the miraculous 180 degree change?
[20:13] Well, that's precisely what God has done in Paul. God's great and gracious power transformed Paul, the chief sinner and persecutor of the church, to become the apostle of Christ for the nations.

God has done a wonderful miracle, a powerful miracle in Paul to do that 180 degree change. So what's Paul's job now?
Paul's job is to proclaim Christ. But God has a further purpose for that. And it's so that his wisdom can be made known.
God's purpose is for his wisdom to be made known. Look with me again from verse 8. Verse 8, I'll read through to verse 11. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord.
[21:45] Now what's going on here? Some of this is similar to the earlier section in verses 4 and 5. The gospel mystery is hidden, but now revealed and preached.

Paul adds here also that he's preaching the boundless riches of Christ, the riches of every spiritual blessing that we have in the Lord Jesus. But the next big purpose is in verse 10.
In verse 10, as God unites his people in Christ, God wants to make them his show house. God wants to display his infinite wisdom through the church.
In particular, he wants to display his wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. But who are these rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms?
Are they good or are they bad? Well, it's possible that they may be the good guys, but it's more likely that they're evil forces. So later in chapter 6, our spiritual warfare is against Satan, against the rulers and authorities, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
[23:06] But you might be thinking, hey, how can they even be in the heavenly places? Well, the early chapters of the book of Job show Satan having to present himself before God.

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There, God is sovereign even over Satan and his forces. God is sovereign over them in the spiritual, heavenly places. But why does God want to show his wisdom through the church to these evil forces, evil spiritual forces?
Well, we're not entirely sure. Paul doesn't explain it here. Perhaps it's to shame them or to declare his sovereignty. Perhaps it's to display the greatness of his power to rescue and transform a whole people 180 degrees.
Perhaps it's to show the failure of Satan's schemes and to show God's wisdom prevailing. After all, all believers used to follow Satan, but now they follow Christ.
Whatever the reason is, we at least know how God displays his wisdom through the church. How does he do it? Well, we see it in the way that the church lives.
[24:29] You see more of that when you come to chapters 4 to 6, when the church lives out the realities of chapters 1 to 3. For example, the church is to be eager for its unity.

Why? Because it shows the oneness of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Believers also are to put on the new self.
Why? Because we are created after God's likeness. We are imitators of God. And we are also to graciously forgive each other.
Why? Because we are to display God's gracious forgiveness to us through Christ. We are to display God's wisdom when we husbands love our wives.
Why? Because Christ loved us, the church, by giving himself up for us. Many more, whether it's children obeying parents, whether it's workers obeying masters, whether it's masters looking after their servants, in all these ways that we live out, we display God's infinite wisdom at work in us.
[25:43] Can you see here, friends, our privileges have now tripled. Tripled in that we are now God's showhouse at the center of God's cosmic purposes to show to the spiritual forces of evil God's wisdom, the change that he does in us, his power to do that.

Paul comes back to Jesus and the gospel again in verse 12. In verse 12, Paul says, in him, that means in Christ, and through faith in him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence.
So in Jesus, by trusting in his peacemaking, a perfect sacrifice on the cross, we can freely and confidently come to God, come to God of the universe who created everything.
We can come to him without fear of any more condemnation because Jesus took all the punishment we deserve, past, present, future.
It doesn't mean we can continue to sin. Grace teaches us to live exactly the opposite, to live God's way. But it does mean that we have a perfect relationship with the Almighty God, a reconciled relationship that we can come to him with freedom and confidence.
[27:15] It's a bit like how we would relate to a king. In West Malaysia, where I'm from, we have a few sultans, but none of them will ever grant me an audience.

I'm already too intimidated even as I approach the guards at the gate. I don't have to say, hey, can I go and see the sultan? But it's different if I'm the crown prince, isn't it?
It's different if I'm the tenku makota. If I'm that, surely I can come to my father. Why? Because we have the right kind of relationship for me to freely and confidently go to him.
Friends, how much greater it is, the relationship that we have with God. We have precisely the right kind of relationship to approach the creator of the universe.
Because of Jesus, we are adopted as God's children in him. We can come to God confidently, saying that I'm your child, you're my father, I want to come to you.
[28:26] Come to him in prayer, confidently, asking for what we need. we can come confidently to face his appointed judge, Jesus, on the judgment day, knowing that we'll be saved from God's wrath.

We can confidently come to him and live in his presence forever, in the new heaven and the new earth. Because of what Jesus has done, he's put out in a right kind of relationship, the perfect kind of relationship, relationship, where we are God's children, and he is our father.
That's the beauty of the gospel, the beauty of having a relationship with God. So having zoomed out to see God's overarching purpose at work, Paul now zooms back in to the discouragement that the Ephesians are feeling about him being in prison.
So he says in verse 13, I ask you therefore not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are for your glory, which are your glory.

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Paul says don't worry, take heart, everything is going exactly how it's supposed to go. God revealed the mystery of Christ, God saved Paul to proclaim but suffer for it, the church believes and is blessed, the church displays God's infinite wisdom.
[30:00] Everything is going to exactly according to God's eternal purpose. So Paul says to them, don't worry, take heart, don't be discouraged by my suffering.

As we conclude, let me spotlight a few implications in the conclusion. first, as the church, let's make the gospel known. The privilege that we have is that that mystery was once hidden, has now been revealed, even to small people like you and me.
Other people brought this good news to us by God's grace, and God has saved us, and Christ is now our Lord, God. And so we must bring this good news to others, so that God can save them too. Christ must also be their Lord. But making the gospel known will no doubt involve suffering and rejection, whether it's a polite refusal to come to Christianity Explored, or silence, or no shows to your evangelistic events, maybe even persecution.
But despite all this, friends, don't be discouraged. Everything is going according to plan. These are still within God's eternal purpose.
[31:32] And so will you make the gospel known? Will you be equipped and be bold? Will you keep persevering with your family members, with your next-door neighbors, with your work colleagues or retiree friends?

Will you tell them about Jesus? Will you make the gospel known now that it's been revealed?
Finally, as a church, let's also make God's manifold wisdom known to many as well.
Show who he is and what he has done. We work hard at staying united with his spirit. oneness, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
Friends, put on our new self because we are created after his likeness. Will you graciously forgive each other? Forgive those who have hurt you as you speak to them and seek forgiveness from others because God graciously forgave us.
husband and husband are to love our wives sacrificially because it displays Christ's love for the church. Christ who sacrificed himself for us.
[32:48] Will you live all these ways? Because as you do this, what you're going to do is you're displaying God's infinite wisdom. You're God's show house.

You're displaying God's goodness and righteousness. And what an enormous privilege that is to be God's show house. And as you do this, not only will the watching world see and be drawn to it, Satan and all his spiritual forces of evil will also see, Satan will see that his schemes have failed and he see God's perfect wisdom prevail.
We'll display, we'll be God's display house, God's show house, a display people. As we stand firm and await our glory that's to come.
Let's ask for God's help to do these things. Let's pray together. Our creator of all universe, our heavenly father, we praise you.
Although we are undeserving, you have saved us by your grace. We praise you that you welcome us into your presence as our heavenly father. We thank you that you've blessed us with every spiritual blessing promised to your people.
[34:12] We thank you for your kindness and love. Thank you for uniting us as one church, the body of Christ. Thank you also for the privilege of being your show house love.

In our everyday living. Please, by your spirit, help us to be your people who display your wisdom, grace, and love. Help us to keep persevering in the faith, to stand firm as the world and the cosmic world watches us.
May your eternal purpose prevail, and will you bring us out to your eternal glory. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.

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