

w/b 17th May 2020

the next step

stepping out and following where He leads

Jesus' summons is simple - 'Follow Me!'

As His disciples, those who have responded to His call, the church is, by definition, a people on the move.

As Ruth said to Naomi, so His church says to Jesus, 'Where you go, I will go.' We are bold, therefore, both as individuals and as a local fellowship of believers, to step out in faith and to follow where He leads. 'The next step' is always the most important one and it's what that 'next step' looks like for ourselves that this series of studies addresses.



You can find the background to this short series here.

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11. Heirs together

(Ephesians 3.1-13)

[w/b Sunday 17th May 2020]

“.. the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel ..”

The bulk of this passage is a tangent (the grammar of v.1 is picked up in v.14ff): but the tangent is still very much to the point! It flows out of what he'd said in the latter part of chapter 2, where he declared that the 'hostility' (between God and humanity, and between Jew and Gentile) had been 'put to death' by Jesus' death on the cross.

In this 'digression' Paul elaborates on the **mystery** of God's purpose in Jesus, and explains how the **ministry** entrusted to him (Paul) is being used by God to fulfil that eternal purpose.

[There are 7 questions as ever, all important - but your Community Group may well choose to concentrate on just some of them. Key questions in this study are probably 2, 5 and 6. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]

There should be, as usual, a video introduction to this study, available under 'Resources/Live streams and videos' on the website.

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1. Read Eph.3.1-13. These verses help you see the 'wood' of God's great purpose in and through His church, rather than just the 'trees' of the 'here-and-now' practicalities of local church life.

What in our present circumstances is liable to leave believers a bit discouraged?

How would what Paul wrote in this passage have helped ease any discouragement on the part of the Ephesians?

2. Read Eph.3.1. Paul begins to launch into another prayer for the believers in Ephesus (picked up in v.14) by referring to himself as 'the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles'.

In Paul's case this was literally true: in what sense might you use that terminology about yourself in relation to Christ?

Paul was the quintessential Jew – yet committed to Gentile ministry! What similar, 'unlikely' scenarios have you found yourself in as a follower/'prisoner' of Jesus?

3. Read Eph.3.2-3. The call of God upon Paul's life to bring the message to the Gentiles came in the immediate aftermath of his conversion (see Acts 9.15 and 26.16-18).

Read **Rom.12.1-8**: what would you say was 'the grace given' to you by God?

Read **Gal.1.11-17**: what did Paul mean by saying that he 'received (the gospel he preached) by revelation from Jesus Christ'?

Why did he want the Galatians to be clear about that?

4. Read Eph.3.4-5. The message proclaimed by Paul is what he calls a 'mystery': he explains here what he means by that – not so much something baffling, as a truth which has to be revealed.

Why do you think Paul speaks of the 'mystery' as 'the mystery of Christ'?

What aspects of the gospel were less clear to God's people prior to the coming of Jesus?

5. Read Eph.3.6. Paul at last pinpoints what it is about the gospel which makes it 'mystery' – what could never be figured out by reason, but could only be grasped by God revealing it to us.

What is 'the mystery' according to Paul?

What would you say were the implications of this for us in our life as a fellowship of God's people?

6. Read Eph.3.7-9. The 'mystery' having been revealed to Paul by God, the ministry to which he was thus called was one which saw him go to the Gentile world to make that 'mystery' known.

Read **1 Tim.1.12-14**: in what ways are *you* 'a servant of the gospel' by the grace given to you?

How might you proclaim 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' to those today who have little or no church connection?

7. Read Eph.3.10-13. This section concludes with a statement from Paul as to what lay behind this glorious 'mystery' on the part of God – namely 'His eternal purpose'.

If it's God's intent that His wisdom should be made known in the heavenly realms *through the church*, how does that happen, and what will that entail for us?

Why does it follow that, once we understand this 'mystery', we will pray more and fret less (vv.12-13)?