

Theme: How God reveals his mystery  
Text: **Romans 16:25-27**

**<sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, <sup>26</sup> but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— <sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.**

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**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ** (Romans 1:7b). The Word of God which we will focus on this morning is the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson from Paul's letter to the Romans. Let us pray:

*Speak, O Lord, as we come to you to receive the food of your holy Word. Take your truth, plant it deep in us, shape and fashion us in your likeness that the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith. Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us all your purposes for your glory. Amen.*

The murderer stood there soaked in his own sweat and sprayed with blood. He held his weapon of choice in his trembling hand as his victim's blood dripped off of it and onto the old books he had knocked off the shelf during the struggle. If he cleaned himself up quickly he could probably get away with it... but the problem was... he was trapped in the house, and the other houseguests would figure it out sooner or later... yeah, it was only a matter of time until he heard those chilling words: Colonel Mustard... in the library... with the candlestick.

Some of you know what I'm talking about don't you? This is no real murder story. It's a board game called Clue. You play the game trying to figure out who killed the owner of house, in which room of the house using which weapon. I'm guessing a lot of you have played this game, right?

What is it about a mystery that people like so much? And it's not just a game like Clue... think about all the different mysteries we use to entertain ourselves. Some people enjoy watching magicians and trying to figure out their secrets. We watch TV shows like CSI and NCIS, or maybe, like me, you remember Murder She Wrote and Columbo. I mean, why does an old character like Sherlock Holmes remain so popular even today? What is it about a mystery that attracts people? I guess when you think about it you can understand why people are so fascinated with mysteries. It's very satisfying to uncover an intricate and detailed plot, to have that "Aha!" moment when the light bulb comes on and you can finally know the unknown.

Of course when it comes to the greatest mystery of all – the meaning and purpose of life – some people have spent their whole lives trying to find illumination. Many are bothered by the problems they see in the world, the evil and suffering. People get frustrated by the limitations we have as humans because of sickness and death. And so what do people do? Well, they search for clues. Some study philosophy seeking the secrets of life. Others turn to science to try to understand the meaning of it all. Still others look to cults or secret societies. Somewhere, someone *has* to know the secret, the reason for it all, the great mystery.

Well... someone does. God has the answer to the mystery of why we are here, but he also has the answer to the greater mystery of how we can be "right" with him. And he has not kept it hidden. He has revealed the mystery, the intricate and unfathomable rescue plan that he crafted in his own mind. We heard clues in our 1<sup>st</sup> lesson this morning and in the Gospel. As we focus our attention on Paul's words from his letter to the Romans let's piece together the clues and uncover: How God reveals his mystery.

Paul tells us the good news about Jesus Christ was in keeping with **the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past**. And so like any good detective we need to start our investigation by going all the way back to the beginning. And there we find God starting to pull back the curtain, starting to uncover his plan, as soon as Adam and Eve rebelled against him. In Genesis 3:15 God speaks to Satan, in front of Adam and Eve, who the devil had just led into sin, and he says to him: **I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel**. It was here in this very first promise that God began to reveal his rescue plan... there would be one of the offspring of the woman who would destroy Satan.

Fast forward to the time of Abraham, around 2100 B.C., and we hear God speaking again, renewing the promise, pulling back the veil just a little bit more. In Genesis chapter 12 God told Abraham: **I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you**. Here we see God's rescue mission really start to take shape. It would be through the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, that this "Offspring of the woman", would come... through that one nation, Israel, all nations on earth would be blessed.

And God continued to speak to the people of Israel after Abraham died. In fact about 1100 years later God revealed more of the mystery to Israel's king, David. We heard this in our 1<sup>st</sup> lesson this morning. David told God he wanted to build him a house, a temple, so that God could live among his people. But God had other plans. And the message he relayed to David through the prophet Nathan uncovered those plans, both for David's son Solomon, but also for the "Offspring of the woman", who would come from David's line. **The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son**. David wanted to build a house for God to dwell in, so he would be with his people. The thing was, God did want to dwell with his people, but not in a temple made by men. And although some might point to David's son Solomon, who would build a temple, as the fulfillment of this promise... we notice, don't we, what God said here...? **I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever**. Solomon did not reign forever. And the throne of David has not had a king sitting on it for thousands of years now. So Solomon could not be the ultimate fulfillment of this promise... and so the mystery continued.

The prophet Isaiah who lived about 300 years after David added some key clues to the investigation. God had told him that there would be a sign to mark the coming rescue God had promised mankind... to mark the time when God would truly come to live with his people and dwell with them in a way he never could in some man-made temple. In Isaiah chapter 7 we read: **The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel**. Immanuel is Hebrew for "God with us." The offspring of the woman would not only be a man, he would be God. And so the mystery became even clearer.

The answer to God's mystery, God's rescue plan for the world, was promised by prophets in the Old Testament. But it would be announced by an angel in the New Testament. In the Gospel this morning we heard the angel Gabriel speak to a virgin girl named Mary, fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah. **You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.**"

How does God reveal his mystery? His eternal rescue mission? He reveals it through his Word, which points to the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. It was promised by the prophets, announced by angels, and is given to us... God's Word reveals this good news, this message which details our way back into God's good graces, it always has told us what we needed to know to be saved... and it always will.

Can you see now why Paul was so excited as he wrote those last verses of his letter to the Romans? Listen again to his doxology of praise: **Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.**

God had come up with the perfect plan. He covered every detail. He knew the purpose for all of this: To live in perfect fellowship with him forever. And he knew the perfect solution for the broken relationship humanity had created with him. And he revealed it all in his Word. His Word is where we see Jesus. Jesus – the answer to how God, the wise and powerful, perfect and just ruler of all could ever allow humanity to come back into his presence after their rebellion, after our rebellion? In his Word we see Jesus fix our broken relationship with God through his cross... his cross where God's hatred for sinners and his love for sinners met, with Jesus in the middle. Where Jesus was condemned and we were set free. Where his life ended and ours began. This is the mystery that has been revealed in God's written Word, and accomplished by Jesus, the Word made flesh! This is God's rescue plan! This is the message that was promised by the prophets, announced by the angel, given to you when you heard the good news.

And this is the message God calls on you to proclaim to all people. In our text we read that God wants all nations to **believe and obey him**. The Greek words there actually say something a little different than what is in the NIV's English translation. The Greek says that God wants all people to come to **the obedience that is faith**. This is just another way of saying God wants all people to believe his message, to trust in Jesus and the rescue that he has accomplished. And the only way people are going to hear this message is for us to tell others when we leave this church.

Now I know that is not always the easiest thing to do. We have a sinful nature that wants to ignore God's Word in our own lives to say nothing of sharing it with others. And so, yeah, we're not always as joyful as the apostle Paul was when he wrote the words of our text. Even during the Christmas season we find many things that can crowd the joy out of our hearts, and crowd God's Word out of our lives. And you know the things that keep you from reading and hearing God's Word... those things that seem so important, more important than studying or meditating on God's Word, more important than thirsting after the Bible and searching it so we can better know our God and find the answers we crave for life in a fallen world.

But as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ once more this year, let's renew our efforts to make his Word a part of our daily lives, to uncover again the mystery of God's rescue plan. We can do that by coming here regularly to be built up in faith. We can do it by finding a quiet time in the day to study and meditate upon a chapter of the Bible, or by joining with family or friends for devotions that increase our knowledge of God's Word and show us again the mystery that God has revealed, that show us again Christ shining out on us, bringing us faith and forgiveness and eternal life.

And when our minds and hearts are filled with God's Word, then that's what will occupy our thoughts and that's what will be on our lips. And we will gladly share with others, what has been shared with us: The mystery of God revealed in Christ. This is the good news that was promised by prophets, announced by angels, and given to YOU as a gift of God's grace. God calls on you to proclaim it to all people! To announce it to all nations, so that they too, like us, might receive the obedience that is faith. So that they too might be ready for our Lord to return, so that they too might rejoice and cry out with Paul and with us as we sing: **to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.**