

God's Marvelous Plan Ephesians 3:1-13

The Mystery Thriller Bible

How many of you enjoy mystery thriller novels or movies? What's your favorite? I'm not a huge fan of mystery thrillers myself, but I do know one great mystery thriller book. Do you know what it is? It's the Bible. The Bible is full of stories with mystery and suspense. For example, in Genesis 4, you can read about the first murder mystery. It's the story of Cain, who, in his anger over God not accepting his offering, kills his brother Abel. And yet, God knew what Cain had done. God told him he would be a restless wanderer, but when Cain complained that the punishment was too much to bear and that others would kill him, God did something surprising. Instead of letting Cain die, God put a mark on him to protect him. Why would God do that? It's a mystery.

If you're looking for a gripping crime thriller, the story of David in 2 Samuel delivers all the twists and turns of a high-stakes drama. Picture this: It's wartime, and while kings should be leading their armies, David, for reasons unknown, stays behind in the comfort of his palace. One evening, as the city sleeps, David steps onto his rooftop and spots Bathsheba—stunning, vulnerable, beautiful, and bathing in the moonlight. His desire overtakes him, and despite knowing she's married to Uriah, one of his own soldiers, David orders her to his palace. They share a night together, and soon after, Bathsheba sends him the chilling message: she's pregnant.

Panicked, David moves quickly to cover his tracks. He summons Uriah from the battlefield, hoping he'll sleep with Bathsheba, making the child appear to be Uriah's. But Uriah, a man of honor, refuses to enjoy the comforts of home while his fellow soldiers are fighting. David's cover-up plan is crumbling, so he escalates his scheme. He arranges for Uriah to be sent to the front lines of the fiercest battle—a silent death sentence. As expected, Uriah is killed, and David wastes no time bringing Bathsheba into his home as his wife. To the outside world, it seems like David has gotten away with it. But here's where the plot thickens. The prophet Nathan enters the scene, confronting David with the cold truth of his sins. In a dramatic moment, David's darkest secrets are exposed. He is guilty of adultery, deceit, and murder. Just when you expect justice to fall swiftly on him, something unexpected happens—David repents, and God forgives him. It doesn't make sense. Why does David, after committing such heinous acts, escape with his life? Yet, the story takes another tragic twist. The child born to Bathsheba falls ill and dies. David lives, but the innocent child pays the price. It's a mystery that leaves us with more questions than answers. Why was David spared? Why did the child die instead? In the end, we're left wrestling with the depth of God's mercy, justice, and the unexplainable twists of life. Sound exciting? If you enjoy mysteries or thrillers, I encourage you to take a closer look at the Bible.

When we encounter mystery of God...

The Bible is full of mystery—mysteries of creation, sin, suffering, and death, the mystery of resurrection and eternal life, and most importantly, the mystery of God's love and salvation through Jesus Christ. Today, the Apostle Paul touches on this. Faith in Jesus Christ often goes beyond what makes sense or seems logical—it's something much deeper. There's a mysterious reality to God's love and grace that we can't always explain or fully understand. In today's scripture, Paul talks about this as "the mystery." In verse 3, he says, "By revelation, the mystery

was made known to me.” The word “mystery” comes from the Greek word *mysterion*, which means something hidden that’s now revealed.

By its very nature, mystery is something we can’t fully explain or understand. Take this verse: In verse 1, he said, “This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you gentiles,” Paul is writing this while imprisoned. He’s in jail, awaiting execution by beheading. Yet, from that prison cell, he speaks of the greatest joy and the secret of God’s blessing to the believers. A joy in the prison. Can we really understand that? No, we can’t. His testimony points to a mystery we’ll never fully comprehend.

While we are often tempted to seek a logical explanation for things we cannot understand, mystery isn’t necessarily something to be explained. Rather, it’s something that awakens us—stirring awe, wonder, and deeper reflection. Mysteries invite us to engage with God in ways that go beyond intellectual understanding, leading to transformation and spiritual growth.

Paul is a decisive example. Before knowing Jesus, Paul was a man of great success. He came from a respected family, had the highest education, and held an esteemed social status among the Jews. But after his mysterious, life-changing encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, none of those things mattered anymore. He became willing to give his life to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, testifying that Jesus is the Christ to the Gentiles. What was the mystery he heard? “That is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (v. 6).

With this transformation, Paul’s perspective on life and the world completely shifted. He no longer saw gentiles as the unclean or being imprisoned for Christ as a setback but as the greatest opportunity to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ. That’s why he didn’t view his imprisonment as shameful or something to lament. Instead, he saw it as a source of glory and joy. In verse 13, he says, “So I ask you not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.” Through the mystery of Christ, Paul was awakened to the reality of God, and that transformed him.

The Mystery Challenges Our Biases

We often get trapped by our own stereotypes, judging others—and even ourselves—through narrow lenses. When our minds become set in these ways, we start to see people who don’t agree with us, or who don’t fit our mold, as unworthy or difficult to be around. A clear example of this is the hatred directed at immigrants and racial minorities.

In a recent presidential debate, former President Trump spread a harmful lie, claiming that Haitian immigrants were catching and eating people’s cats and dogs. Now, we may have different opinions about immigration policies. But to demonize people just because they’re immigrants? To treat them as less than human? That is simply wrong. And yet, many people remain deeply stuck in this harmful way of thinking.

But here’s the good news: the mystery of God, who created each one of us in God’s image, shakes and challenges these harmful beliefs. God’s truth wakes us up from the slumber of sin and leads us into a new way of seeing. This divine mystery invites us into a world we may have never imagined, a world we might think is impossible—God’s kingdom.

It’s a world where we share a table with people of different skin colors, where we call one another brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s a world where we stop pointing guns at each other over differences in race or religion and instead sing songs of peace together. This is the true and beautiful world that God invites us into.

We may not fully understand it. It might even make us uncomfortable. But when we open ourselves to this mystery, we begin to grasp God's hidden plan—and that's when transformation happens.

Living in the Mystery of God's Plan

So, what do we do with this great mystery of God's marvelous plan? How do we respond to something so vast, so beyond our understanding? The truth is, we don't need all the answers. God's mystery isn't something we're meant to solve like a puzzle. It's something that calls us into wonder, into awe, and into transformation.

The mystery of God's love, revealed through Jesus Christ, shows us that no one is beyond God's grace. It challenges the way we see others and the way we see ourselves. In a world that tries to divide us by race, nationality, and status, the gospel tells us we are all one in Christ. We are all heirs of the promise.

Paul's life was transformed by this mystery, and that same mystery invites us into a new way of living, a new way of seeing the world. It's a world where love, mercy, and grace break down walls of division, and where we're called to be instruments of reconciliation, just as Paul was.

As we leave today, I want us to reflect on this: How might the mystery of God's love be calling you to see others differently? How might it be inviting you to let go of judgment, fear, or division? Remember, the mystery of God's plan is not just for some—it's for all of us. And as we embrace that truth, we step into the wonder of God's kingdom, where transformation begins. Amen.