

Prayer for Proclaiming the Mystery (How to Have a Heart Attack)

Ephesians 6:18b-20

#42 in our Ephesians Series

February 9, 2014

Peter Hiatt

Message

In Ephesians 6, Paul teaches about our struggle against the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness, and he tells us to take up the armor of God and then to pray at all times.

Ephesians 6:18b-20 To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel (mysterion tou evangeliou—"secret of the Good News"), for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

What is the mystery of the gospel?

A mystery is something we can't fully comprehend or control.¹ Eugene Peterson writes, "The secularized mind is terrorized by mysteries. Thus it makes lists, labels people, assigns roles, and solves problems." Eugene Lowry writes, "God is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be evoked."

Well, what is the "mystery of the gospel?" Is it bad, or is it good?

When I think of mystery, I think of "Mystery Science Theater" (Hopefully you watched that show in the 90s).

Mystery is like a monster reigning down judgment upon the earth.

Mystery is like a power, alien to our world.

Mystery is like a head with no body.

Mystery is like a she-creature.

But mystery doesn't always have to be bad.

I think my favorite Christmas was one we had eight years ago. Our kids were mostly teenagers so they pretty much had Christmas figured out, but this Christmas was a mystery. One of them opened a present, it was a swimsuit; she smiled said, "Thanks," and silently thought: "That was a stupid present; Mom must've found a sale." Another opened a present. It was a beach towel. He thought, "Nice, but I hope she didn't spend all the money on this stupid sale." It went on like that for about half an hour, towels, swimsuits, swim goggles, cover-ups,

¹ Mystery is not the absence of meaning but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend – Dennis Covington.

and I could see the disappointment and confusion on their faces. They wondered: “What were Mom and Dad thinking?”

A sale on swim gear was certainly a possibility, anything more was too much to believe. After all the presents were opened, we handed each of them an envelope that contained an airline ticket to Kona Hawaii. At first, the kids were incredulous; they didn’t believe. But now, they’ll tell you, “It was the best Christmas ever—the best family vacation ever.”



Every gift that Christmas morning was a mystery that at first appeared very bad but that turned into the greatest good, redeemed at the cost of one ticket to paradise.



Toward the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf says to Frodo and Pippin, “*Many folks like to know beforehand what is to be set on the table; but those who have labored to prepare the feast like to keep their secret; for wonder makes the words of praise louder.*”

In Proverbs 25:2, King Solomon writes, “*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter but the glory of kings to search out a matter.*”

Judgment and wrath, alien powers, severed bodies and women, this world is full of mysteries.

So, what’s the mystery of the gospel?

Well for all Ephesians, Paul has been telling us...

Ephesians 1:7-12

In him (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, (It's all about the flow of His blood) the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite (anakephalaioo - bring together under one head) all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 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, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

So that wonder...would make the words of praise louder. "The *mystery* of His will."

That is the *mystery* of God's judgment—the mystery of this alien power we call God. The mystery is to unite all things under one wounded head...giving meaning to each and every event in your life. And actually, He is the life; He is Jesus.

Paul writes, "*ALL things*" united in Him, and we're incredulous. We can't conceive of how that's possible. We say, "What about the outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth? What about the eternal and consuming fire? What about *Gehenna*, where the fire is not quenched and the worm doesn't die?"

We can't conceive of how all these things could be true and how God could "reconcile all things to himself in Christ making peace by the blood of His cross." We think, "It's impossible." So our judgment of God's judgment is: "Impossible, what about Adolph Hitler? We say, "What about those Arab, terrorists?" What about my worst enemy—the last and least of these?" What about Gentiles—the heathen—the unbelievers?"²

In Ephesians 3, Paul expands on the mystery:

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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. 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.

In chapter four, Paul refers to unbelievers as "Gentiles," and here he calls them "fellow heirs." That means: "unbelievers will believe," whether it's after eons of gnashing teeth in the outer darkness or right now, upon hearing the Word. Whether it's after destruction in the Valley of *Gehenna* or right now in surrender at the cross: "*Every knee will bow, and every tongue will give praise.*" "*The Gentiles are fellow heirs.*"

Ephesians 4:6 "*There is one God and Father of all...*" "*Fellow heirs, members of the same body (Christ's body)!*" And He is the Head.

² That's what Gentile means, the "not chosen" people of God—the "not believers." To the Jews, they were the Greeks and Romans who occupied their land and renounced Yahweh. Well, Paul refers to Greeks and Romans who trust in Christ as Jews grafted into God's family, and in Ephesians 4:17, Paul refers to unbelievers as Gentiles.

It is the mystery revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and yet it's a secret that's been on display from Genesis chapter one: God said, "Let's make man in our image," not: "SOME men in our image and others a gross distortion of our image." And in Genesis twelve, God said to Abraham, "I bless you...and you will be a blessing to all the families of the earth."

Paul continues in Ephesians 3:7-9

Of this gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 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, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created (or "creates") all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

The job of the church is to make the mystery known even to "The principalities and powers." You see, the powers of this world do not comprehend or believe the mystery. In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes that we, the church, have been given the ministry of reconciliation, where as others were given the ministry of condemnation.

You see, there can be no proclamation of reconciliation unless there was first a proclamation of condemnation.

People can't experience the joy of being saved,
unless they first taste the horror of being lost.

People can't know the Revelation of Mercy,
unless they first taste the pain of disobedience.

All things cannot be united in Christ unless they were first separated from Christ. The separation is temporal and the reconciliation is eternal. In Ephesians 2:6, Paul told us we are "already seated in the heavenly places with God in Christ Jesus." The separation is temporal and the reconciliation is eternal, and we've been given the ministry of reconciliation. It's a proclamation—a Word—"God is Salvation." In Hebrew, it is a name—Joshua—Jesus. He is the Revelation of the mystery...written into every cell of your body. The next place Paul mentions "the mystery" is in Ephesians 5, where Paul quotes Genesis.

Ephesians 5:31

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

He is saying, "Look, you know that mystery you call a woman, the mystery you call a man? You know that longing, that desire, all that drama, trauma, sorrow, joy, sin, and grace,

communion, and babies? It's all about Jesus and you. So you see, this isn't some obscure egghead theology that makes no difference in our lives. This means that I can say, with conviction and certainty: "The way God feels about you is the way a bridegroom feels about his bride. It's the way the world's very best father feels about his own beloved children. At times, he may get angry. At times, he may conceal his intentions. At times, the children may wonder as to the purposes hidden in his heart."

Well, the mystery of your Father's will, just exactly what He is thinking, the very intention of His heart is Jesus the Christ...*from the bosom of the Father,*" He has made Him known: God is Love, and God is almighty, and God conquers all in Jesus the Christ. That's the mystery of the gospel. Gospel means "Good News."

And we all wonder: "Was Paul maybe smokin' dope in that prison cell, when he wrote to the Ephesians?" So I looked at all the instances of the Greek word: *mysterion* in the New Testament. Jesus mentions the "mystery of the Kingdom." It refers to the sovereignty and power of God's will—God's choice—God's Word...who is Jesus. In Romans, it refers to how God hardens people and how God creates faith in people.

Then Paul writes, "*He consigned all to disobedience that He may have mercy on all.*" In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wrote: "*I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we shall all be changed...at the last trumpet; for this perishable body must put on the imperishable, this immortal body must put on immortality.*"

Paul uses the word just a few more times in similar ways. Then in Revelation 10, John sees an angel that looks like Jesus, who swears to God that "*Chronos (chronological time) will be no more and that in the days of the seventh trumpet, the mystery of God would be finished—teleo.*" It's the same word that Jesus uses on the cross when He cries, "*It is finished.*"

You see, the mystery stands at the boundary of our time and God's eternity. So, Paul refers to Christ as "*the end of the ages,*" and "*the revelation of the mystery hidden for ages:*" God is love, and God is almighty, and every moment is like the unwrapping of the greatest present ever conceived: Perfect communion with God. And the island of Hawaii is thrown in just for kicks.

That's not a bad mystery; that's a good mystery; that's the mystery of the gospel.

Ephesians 6:19 "*The mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains.*" Why would Paul be imprisoned for proclaiming such a wonderful mystery?

Well, imagine if last week on Sunday evening at Met Life Stadium, with about five minutes left in the game, a referee ran onto the playing field, blew his whistle and said, "I have an announcement from NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell. He says, 'I love you all and so I hereby declare: You are all winners, and you will each inherit a Super Bowl ring. Game over. It's time to party. This is my final judgment.'"

Well, a few Bronco fans might like that (but not really) by then, they would've judged themselves losers and couldn't really believe that they were winners. They might sing, "Hallelujah," but they wouldn't really mean it. But Seahawk fans or Bronco fans who still

hoped to win the game...they'd storm the field, beat the referee, and crucify him on the goal post.

The only people who wouldn't be offended would be people that never hoped in the game, and maybe some little kids. You know, when I was a kid we played football in the back yard and didn't even keep score. We just loved tackling each other and getting tackled. We loved passing the ball and catching the ball. The last were first and the first were last because beating your neighbor wasn't the name of the game, in fact, that's why we called it a game. The name of the game was enjoying your friends...like a party.

Now, imagine if while the Seahawk fans were crucifying the referee they ripped off his shirt and found a Bronco jersey, or better yet, since we're in Denver, imagine if we ripped off his shirt and found a Green Bay Packer jersey or an Oakland Raider jersey. Then imagine someone notices that the referee is wearing a rubber mask! So, we rip off the mask and realize it's really Roger Goodell, the commissioner of the NFL, the big boss himself.

Jesus said, that's basically, exactly what will happen on judgment day.

Matthew 25 *"On that day, the Lord will say, 'Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me.'" That cuts...like a knife...it judges: "...to the division of soul and spirit."* Whatever is love in you is the work of Christ's Spirit in you. And did you know? He is the spotless Lamb of God offered to the Father. And whatever is not love in you, He bears in His body, for He is the sacrifice for sin. He is the Scapegoat.

Sociologists tell us that groups unite through the designation of a scapegoat so all of Denver unites by designating the Seattle Seahawks the scapegoat: "United in Orange!"

Some Arabs make Americans their scapegoats. Some Americans make Arabs their scapegoats. Jews made Gentiles their scapegoats. Christians make non-Christians their scapegoat, and Jesus said, "You need a scapegoat? Look, I'm your *damned* scapegoat!" And *"Whatever you do to the least of these...you did it unto me."* That's final judgment.

Now, if you digest that awhile and you say to yourself: "I'm the least of these." Then behold, Jesus says, "I'm in the least of these; I'm in you; I'm calling you...to lose yourself, and come dance with me."

Last week, after the service, before the big game, Trey grabbed me after the service and said, Hey Peter, I was thinking: We Christians tend to think that it's all about how you play the game. As if Jesus came to give us better strategies and better plays, for playing the game and winning the game. But it's not about the game; it's about the party after the game. In fact, none of us wins the game. Jesus wins the game.

That's so true... Jesus wins the game, and Jesus won the game. And yet, He wasn't even playing the same game. We were playing "Beat Your Neighbor", and Jesus was playing "Save Your Neighbor," and beat the old game of beating your neighbor. In fact, turn that old game of beating your neighbor into a dance.

And now, this illustration gets a wee bit mysterious: Imagine if the commissioner dies on the goal post, rising from the dead, and his spirit breaks the space-time continuum and invades

Well, perhaps, he's scared of getting crucified like the referee. In chapter three he said, "*I don't want you to lose heart over what I am suffering for you.*" He was worried about giving the Ephesians a heart attack with all his suffering. Maybe, he was scared to suffer. Maybe he was scared to die. Through the fear of death, the powers that be were trying to shut Paul up. But Paul wrote, "*To live is Christ, and to die is gain, and my imprisonment has really served to advance the gospel.*"

So, maybe he was scared to proclaim the mystery.

Maybe he's scared to do it.

Maybe he thinks that he can't do it.

When Martin Luther gave his first Mass, he barely made it. He was utterly terrified at the mystery. He thought: "Who am I to offer the blood of Christ, the blood that is the judgment of this world, and the life of this world? Who am I to offer the blood that flows from the throne? Who is sufficient for these things?" Thankfully, Martin Luther discovered Saint Paul.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul asks, "*Who is sufficient for these things?*" (2 Corinthians 2:16) Then he writes, "*Therefore, having received this ministry, by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.*" (2 Corinthians 4:1)

If we thought we had to be sufficient for these things, we'd have a heart attack. So, why did Paul need prayer? Because he really couldn't do it. He really needed to trust that God does do it. And even that is a gift of Grace. He needed faith.

So, maybe he was scared to do it; maybe he thought he couldn't do it; maybe he thought he shouldn't do it. I bet, more than anything, the devil whispered to old Rabbi Saul, "Who are you to preach this gospel of grace? You're least of all the saints. Paul, you're the chief of sinners." I imagine Satan worked overtime to remind Paul of the faces of men, women, and children he had drug off to condemnation and death, all in the name of orthodox religion.

Satan reminded him of his past sins and his current propensity to sin.

In Romans 7, Paul writes,

I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Oh wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus our Lord.

Paul knew that to preach grace to others, he needed to trust grace for himself and that itself was a work of God, or it wouldn't be grace. So, Paul implores them: "*Pray for me! Pray for me...that I preach the mystery boldly and that I don't lose heart.*" And you, people have been asking me, "Peter, how's your heart?" So, right now, I'd like to share with you...my heart.



This is an actual video of my heart on December 4th, some time around 11PM.

The doctors had run a tube up my femoral artery from the groin into my left coronary artery (That's the thing you see in the upper left hand corner). Every few seconds, they'd pump dye through the tube, which would move with the blood and show up on this Xray. There are two coronary arteries, and I'm pretty sure this is my left one, and it looks pretty good.



Now the view changes. You'll notice that my spine, which I do have, is on the right side of the picture, and the catheter is in my right coronary artery, but the blood is not going where it's supposed to go. The artery is clogged; I'm having a heart attack.

You know the heart is a pump, and it runs on the very thing it pumps. The blood flows through the heart, but it must also feed the heart.

In November, a friend was praying for me, and she told me that she heard the Lord say, "Peter doesn't believe the lies the evil one tells about me, but he believes the lies the evil one tells about him." [Now, you shouldn't believe every prophetic word but should test each one. I did, and that sounded right. But...I didn't know how to fix it.] Then, I had a heart attack (It was like miracle bad and miracle good...all at once). I asked the same friend to pray...wondering what the heck it was all about. She heard the Lord say, "Peter speaks the truth, but he doesn't live in the truth. There is no truth but My Truth."

I think that was a more forceful way of saying what He said about listening to the devil's lies. It's not that I have secretly become a Muslim terrorist, or lead a life of crime on the side, BUT...that I preach grace and don't always believe grace for myself. And then the Lord reminded her of how He sees me, as a rock, even though I don't feel like a rock; as a man after His own heart, even though I feel guilty like David.

He said, "Peter has great compassion and a huge capacity to love. He loves his children like I love my children, but Peter loves from *his* heart. That is why he feels worn out, depleted and empty. he needs to learn to love from MY heart, for I am love and my love is endless."

Now, I don't quite know what to make of all of that. But...for a long time, my wife has told me, "Peter, the Lord calls you His heart." And I believe I'm called to pump His blood, that is, preach the mystery of the gospel. But I can't pump the river of Life...unless I drink from the river of Life. I can't preach Grace unless I believe Grace. And let me say, I think I'm ready to die for the proclamation of Grace. In fact, I think I believe Grace for all creation. I think I really believe Grace for each of you, but only kinda....sort of...sometimes...believe it for myself.⁴

I mean, I really believe God loves you and forgives you. I even believe God loves Hitler and forgives Hitler; I believe that if somewhere in Adolph is the breath of God...then God, in Christ Jesus, descends into Hell to preach to Adolph the mystery of the gospel, purify him with eternal fire, and make him new.

I mean, I really believe the mystery that God loves all, forgives all, and reconciles all. But I really struggle to believe the mystery that God loves me, and forgives me, or even likes me, and that sounds really humble of me, but it's extremely arrogant of me.

Why do I believe the Grace of God and blood of Christ is good enough for Hitler, good enough for other people, yet not good enough for me? Why? Because I'm not proud of Hitler, not really that proud of other people, but I am proud of me. And the principalities and powers encourage me to play that game of being proud of me and then condemning me, until I'm finally trapped in me.

Why am I so hard on myself? Because I'm so proud of myself. But now...if I condemn myself it's just more of myself...damning the flow of God's Grace into myself: *Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?*"

Well, like I was saying, I was having a heart attack. There was a part of my heart, not all of my heart...but a part of my heart, that was trying to pump the blood without drinking the blood, And I think there's a part of me (my old me) that tries to preach Grace without drinking Grace. And I suspect that's true of you as well. We try to love without drinking God, who is Love. We try to be graceful without believing Grace. And of our own will, we can't just decide to drink grace or it's not grace. Grace is a miracle. And so, Paul wrote, *"Please pray for me."* Well, like I was saying,

⁴ I mean, I really believe God loves you, but then I feel responsible for that love, and then it's not His love...but my love, and it runs out, and I condemn myself...I've stopped drinking from the River.



I was having a heart attack, and I couldn't just decide to not have a heart attack. I needed a Savior, so Dr. Patasnick poked a wire through the blockage in my artery. He undamned the damnation, and my heart drank the Life that it pumped. Immediately, I turned to the nurse and said, "I'm OK." And now, I'm gonna declare to you, the mystery of the gospel: "In 33 AD, at the boundary of time and eternity, God in Christ Jesus undamned the damnation. He condemned sin in the flesh and gave you Life.

You are eternally OK, and seated in the heavenly places in Christ. And God is revealing the wonder of that mystery in space and time...that the words of praise would be even louder. Even your sin reveals the wonder of His Grace. Even your unbelief will reveal the wonder of God's redemption. It's not a bad mystery; it's the very best mystery. See? I think the greatest mystery is not that God redeems all...but that God redeems me, and for you...that God redeems you.

When you believe it, you'll start dancing, and you'll want everyone to join the dance.

Communion

On the night that the Word of God was betrayed, Jesus, from the bosom of the Father took bread and He broke it saying, "*This is my body given to you; take it; eat it; do it in remembrance of me.*" And in the same way, after supper, having given thanks, He took the cup and He said, "*This cup is the new covenant (also called the eternal covenant) in my blood; drink it.*" Now, think about that...His body....His blood. And you are His body, and you need His blood. And I'm giving it to you. Drink it...or you're dead. That's God's judgment. In Jesus' name, believe the gospel. Amen. After you receive the body and blood...may the words of your praise grow ever louder.

(Two worship songs)

I think God wants me to ask *you* to pray for me, like Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him. I'm not asking that you pray for this heart. I think it's working just fine. I'm asking that you pray for *this* heart. [Peter makes a gesture referencing his whole self.] that it would be unclogged of myself and that I would believe and trust God's judgment rather than the world's judgment or my own judgment.

I'm asking you to pray because I can decide to take fish oil pills for my heart...this heart...but this one, that choice to believe God's Grace, I believe, is a miracle, and I have to make the

choice and yet, I can only make it because God makes it within me because He, Jesus, is the good will of the Father. So, I'd love it if...right now, you could just pray.

Prayer

So, Lord God, that is our prayer. And Father, I want to publicly thank you for the people in this room and the incredible gift that they are to me because they are ambassadors of you, your temple, your sanctuary, your body. So, if I'm somehow a heart or something, well, I thank you for the body because hearts just don't do well on tables, in the sunlight, by themselves. Lord God, I thank you that you ask all of us to proclaim your word, and I thank you for how they have just proclaimed it to me, and Lord God, I pray for them, for each person in this room. May they receive your Word of relentless Grace and then that they would be free to speak your Word of relentless grace to this world that is just starving for Grace.

Lord, thank you that you choose to use each person in this room as a testimony. Lord, I shared a testimony this morning, and I pray everyone here would share a testimony, like, why they like you, why they want you. And God, as people were praying I realized this is the heart of spiritual warfare; this is what Paul was talking about. Lord God, I pray that as the people in this room, which includes me, would receive your mercy and your grace, that we would see you crush the head of the ancient serpent, the accuser, for all his accusations have been broken. They've been nailed to a tree with you Lord Jesus.

I was wondering yesterday, is Jesus harder on Himself than He is on us? At first, I wanted to say no but then I thought that's weird because I don't know if Jesus is harder on himself than He is on us because He make us...Himself. So Jesus, thank you for descending into our dark hearts, and in that place, taking upon yourself our sin, our sorrow, or failure... and then rising from the dead and bringing us with you. You are good Jesus and we have every reason to sing, to dance, every reason to party...even now, in Your name, Amen.

Disclaimer: The following document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.