

Mystery3

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[0 : 0 0] It's sunny this morning. I do not know if when you stepped outside you took a look behind you, but you might have had a shadow. And I don't really know how a groundhog can predict, but supposedly it's going to be an early spring. And if you check the weather, it's going to be close to 60 tomorrow, so he may be right.

The title of the message this morning is Mystery and Its Content. I would like you to please turn to Paul's writing to the Ephesians.

And we'll be in Ephesians chapter 3, taking a look at verses 1 through 13 in Ephesians chapter 3.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace, which was given to me for you, that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

By referring to this, when you read, you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.

[2 : 0 7] To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the grace of the Son of God.

According to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me, according to the working of his power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery, which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things, so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in him.

Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

I asked Gary to read that portion of scripture because I started with it last week, but I got so excited about the content I didn't get very far through it.

[4 : 0 5] So we need to revisit that. And in connection with that, we are investigating what the Bible calls the mystery. And there are a number of mysteries in the scriptures, but the one that we are talking about is the one that he identifies in verse 6 when he says, to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Some have suggested, and I cannot disagree with it, that a better word than the word mystery for the sake of understanding would be the word secret.

A secret is something that is known only when it is divulged. There are people who, if two people have a secret between them, they are the only ones who know it.

And no one else can know anything about that except those who are in on the secret. And that is exactly what is taking place here, except the only one who was in on the secret was the one who originated the secret.

And he obviously kept it to himself for thousands and thousands of years.

[5 : 32] And then when the strategic time came, he revealed that well-kept, well-hidden secret. It was a secret that was tucked away in the heart and mind of God, ready to be revealed at the precise time.

And only he would know when that time would come. What the Apostle Paul is saying is the time has come. And God revealed that innermost secret that had not been divulged to anyone, not to Moses, not to Jeremiah, not to Isaiah, not to David, not to anyone, until it was strategically revealed to, well, probably the least likely person on the planet, one who at the time would have been described as his worst enemy.

I'm talking about God's worst enemy. And that man was Saul of Tarsus. And here he is giving an explanation of this. And I am embarrassed to tell you, and I just, I guess I just need to say it, make me feel better to get it off my chest.

But I read this passage for years. As a Christian, read this passage for years. It never connected. I never really understood exactly what it was saying.

But when I came to the place where I actually grasped it, it was a, oh, me, wow, this is really something. How is it that I just read over it and it didn't register?

[7 : 22] And do you know something? That's the way a lot of people read the Bible. They feel an obligation to read the Bible, and they just, well, I got that out of the way, you know.

But to read it without understanding, which I've done my share of, is not helpful at all. There is no spiritual osmosis that jumps off the page and gets into your soul just by going over the words.

You've got to be able to understand what is written and the significance of it so that you can properly process it and make a decision about it because you can't decide on something that you don't understand.

So in this passage, we are looking at the subject of the mystery, and let me just reiterate this again, if I may, in this little pamphlet that we've got. And the reason I have chosen this is because it is so brief, so succinct, and so yet comprehensive in what it states that I'm confident everybody can see the distinctions that are made here.

And as I mentioned to the 9 o'clock hour, and by the way, let me explain this, if I may. So you'll get used to it after a while, but we're in the early stages of it now. What we are doing at 9 o'clock is dealing with the subject of prophecy.

[8 : 53] You see that on the left-hand column of this little brochure that you've got. And then at the 10-15 hour, we are devoting our time to the mystery.

And as we cycle back and forth, it is intended for those, especially for those who are able to be at both services, they are going to be able to grasp the distinctions that exist between the prophecy and mystery and understand why they are so important.

I'm happy to say, by the way, both of these sessions are recorded, so if you're one who's unable to be here at the 9 o'clock hour and you want to get the session on CD, you can.

They are available or will be available the week after on the table in the rear. And they are all, excuse me, they are all clearly marked by the date, the time and the date, whether it's the 9 o'clock service or the 10-15.

And at the 9 o'clock, we will be emphasizing prophecy. Now, it is impossible to emphasize prophecy without mystery making its way into that somewhat by way of comparison.

[10 : 06] And the same thing, when we are studying and focusing on mystery, it's going to be inevitable that some of the prophecy is going to leak over into that for comparative purposes.

That's just inevitable. But I trust you will be able to make sense of it as we go along. And the goal of this whole thing, the goal of this whole thing is to get each and every one of us on the same page as regards these issues and why they are so important.

And I must confess, there are a lot of people who just do not see that importance at all. They just don't understand it. And they say, well, I just take the whole Bible.

I don't make any distinctions, but it's all God's word and whatever it says, wherever it says, that's what I'm supposed to do and I just want to be obedient to everything. But do you realize where that leaves you?

It leaves you in chaos. When you do not rightly divide the word and you think that you are supposed to engulf it all and act it all out, you're going to have some real problems.

[11 : 11] You're going to have some real problems. In the first place, animals are expensive today and you've got to find the right ones to sacrifice. And well, you know, this just goes on and on.

So what we've got, what we've got is a movement in the Bible, a movement from the emphasis on prophecy to the emphasis on mystery.

And the prophecy came first and the mystery came out of nowhere, like a bolt out of the blue.

Prophecy had been around for thousands of years. It started way back in Genesis, but mystery, nobody had even thought of it or imagined it until God sprung it on the apostle Paul.

And you know what? It just absolutely floored him. He couldn't get over it. He said, not only was I wrong about Jesus of Nazareth and persecuting him and his followers, but I was wrong about a whole lot of things.

[12 : 20] And I, and to me, who am the less, least of the apostles, to me is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

man, I can't get over it. Do you realize what an incredible about face had to take place in the mind of this man to move from the chief persecutor to the chief proclaimer?

You can't get a more radical 180 than this. And he goes on and tells us when he writes to Timothy, he says, but I did it ignorantly and in unbelief.

You know, I really thought I was doing the right thing. I thought these fellow Jews of mine were just so blinded and so stupid as to believe that Jesus really was the Messiah.

I took it upon myself to just stamp these people out. They were a cancer. They were a spiritual cancer growing on Judaism. And I took it upon myself to eliminate them.

[13 : 29] And then, after that Damascus Road experience, everything changes. And this is all recorded. This is all recorded in what is referred to as the Acts of the Apostles.

It simply means what the Apostles accomplished, what the Apostles did. After Christ ascended in Acts chapter 1, it is as if he just turned everything over to the Apostles and he told them you're going to be endued with power many days hence and you will preach in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the most parts of the world and everything.

And he kind of left the store in their charge. And they are responsible for proclaiming, beginning with, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And that coupled with the fact that he really was the Messiah and Israel crucified the Messiah, this was the news that in this day, in early Acts, just hit like a thunderclap.

And it was still the most controversial issue on the planet in the Middle East. And it all had to do with, number one, was Jesus of Nazareth the one promised by Moses and the prophets?

[14 : 46] Did he come from God? And by the way, you realize that acknowledging that didn't save anybody? No one was put in a right position with God simply because they believed Jesus was the Messiah.

This thing is going to be revealed in increments. And that's just the first. And what comes along later is not only was he the Messiah, but he was crucified.

And not only was he crucified, but something else comes along later. And that is, in his death, burial, and resurrection, he succeeded in reconciling the entire world to himself.

That is just an utterly unimaginable concept. But that's what this business of redemption is really all about. And it is set forth in the book of Acts, which we eventually will get to, but we're not.

And by the way, I'm going to have a Q&A; this morning. And Marie, a quarter after. Okay? So I want to make sure that I get that in. And what we're talking about, these things where they took place in the book of Acts, let me remind you, and no, I'm not apologizing for the repetition because it's the mother of learning.

[16 : 04] Okay? The book of Acts encompasses three decades of material. When you get into these 28 chapters in Acts, depending on how fast you read, you can read the 28 chapters in just a couple of hours.

No problem. But as you read, you've got to remember it took 30 years for these things to take place. So we've got a time of what is called transition.

And it is moving from an old order to a new order. But the problem is for part of this time, you've got both orders operating side by side.

Now you talk about confusion. That was confusion with a capital C. And it is that reality that creates so much disagreement and differences among Christians today, depending on how you interpret and approach the Acts of the Apostles.

this book is the bridge, is the bridge between the Gospels and the book of Romans. And if you read the four Gospels and skip Acts, just skip it like it doesn't even exist, you read the four Gospels and go immediately into Paul's letter to the Romans, you're going to scratch your head and say, whoa, what is this?

[17 : 38] So how did we get here? Something's missing. Well, something is missing. 30 years of valuable content is missing. It's the Acts of the Apostles. And it is this book, Acts, that causes more dissension, more disagreement, more division in the body of Christ than any other book in the New Testament.

So my trust is when we finish with this series, and I don't know how long it'll be, but it'll be a while. When we finish with this series, my goal is that you will see the Bible, its meaning, and your specific role and purpose in being who you are, where you are, when you are, will make more sense than it ever has in your whole life.

That's what it has done for me, and I'm telling you. I get such a bang out of this, I want everybody to enjoy it. And that's why we're doing this.

So, let's look at this mystery. Across the page, we've got prophecy that concerns a kingdom, but the mystery is not concerned with the kingdom.

The mystery concerns a body, a living organism. And the scriptures are in, and we'll not take time to look at these now, but we'll look at some of them, but the references are here and you can look them up at your leisure.

[19 : 12] The body is a living organism as opposed to a kingdom under prophecy. And secondly, the body is given a position in heaven.

This, under prophecy, completely unimagined. Never thought of it all. As you read the Old Testament, if you go from Genesis to Malachi, you will not find one verse where any of the people involved are planning on dying and going to heaven.

Not one. That's not an Old Testament concept. That idea never entered their mind. They talk about Sheol, they talk about Hades, but the idea of being absent from the body and present with the Lord, hey, that's mystery stuff.

That's not prophecy. That's got nothing to do with prophecy. That is never prophesied in the Old Testament at all. There's no promise of that. But it looms large when you get into the new.

And under this new material that we'll be bringing that is referred to as the mystery, there are all kinds of things that are revealed that were never even imagined in the Old Testament.

[20 : 29] And you look at this and you go, well, where did that come from? That wasn't revealed before. No, because it's under an entirely different program. Now, don't misunderstand.

The Bible is a comprehensive, complete whole, but it has to be understood in its parts, in order to have a full appreciation of the whole.

That requires certain things in the Bible have to be divided. They have to be segregated. They have to be separated. Because if they aren't, you're not going to understand.

And one of the most principal separations that I think just about everybody would agree with is Jew and Gentile. These are really different. I mean, these are radically different.

Jews comprise not 1%. Jews comprise two-tenths of 1% of the whole world's population.

[21 : 37] And I don't know that it's probably much different from that in the Old Testament times thousands of years ago. And the Jew all throughout his life from the time Abraham was called by God given these promises, they were reiterated to Isaac and the Jacob and the twelve sons.

From that time on, Israel had distinguished itself as being a peculiar people separate from everybody else designated that way by God.

You shall not be like everybody else. I'm going to give you people a different diet. I'm going to give you a different day of worship. I'm going to give you different this, different that. And it's going to be radically separated from the way Gentiles operate.

That was the characteristic that was true of the Jew ever since Moses came on the scene and came down from the mountain with the tables of the law, said this is what God says, what do you think?

Have we got a deal? And people said, you go back up there and tell God all that the Lord has said will we do. You tell him he's got a deal. Moses ratified that old covenant and he did it with animal blood and Israel was off and running and they were the special, peculiar, chosen people of God.

[22 : 56] Nobody else on the face of the earth was like them. Now, when we come into this new content that Paul is talking about here, that doesn't count for anything.

are you kidding me? You mean there isn't anything really special, extraordinary about being a Jew anymore?

But God's the one that established that. Next thing, next thing I know you'll be telling me that the law isn't in effect anymore. That's right. It isn't.

We're not under law, we're under grace. This does not mean that Christians are lawless, it just means we function under what Paul called in Romans 8 the law of liberty of life in Christ Jesus that has set us free from the law of sin and death.

We have an entirely different methodology under which we operate that is so radically different from the Jew, why, we don't even have to keep the Sabbath. we don't even have to refrain from ham sandwiches.

[24 : 08] All kinds of things are different and you know where all of this comes about? In the book of Acts. And the difficulty and the confusion arises because for a period of time and I can't tell you exactly how long, with this old system being in place, the Mosaic covenant, the law of Moses, everything involving it, being rigorously practiced by the Jews, that was entrenched in the mind and heart of the Jews and lo and behold here comes this new thing that seems so contrary to everything about the old, no wonder they had difficulty accepting it.

No wonder they said, well, except you be circumcised after the law of Moses, you cannot be saved. These people were understandably, just like you and I would be, entrenched in that law of Moses, and they regarded the law to be as eternal as the God who gave it.

But you know what? That was a faulty assumption that the Jews made. And Jeremiah clarified that for them because Jeremiah said, the time is coming.

And he didn't say when, he just said the time is coming. Actually, from the time Jeremiah said it, it would be another 500 years before it came. Time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Judah and the house of Israel.

And then he says, not like the covenant I made with them before, with their fathers, which they broke. They fractured the old covenant.

[25 : 58] In other words, they didn't keep the law of Moses. And they went a whoring after other gods and idolatry and followed this god and followed that god and all that superstitious nonsense that God warned them about and they fell for it.

And he says, but I will make a new covenant and I will put my law in their hearts and they will be a renewed people. Now, if there's going to be a new covenant, what's wrong with the old one?

The answer is simple. Didn't work. Why didn't it work? Was there something wrong with the law? Nope. Paul says the law was just and holy and good.

The problem is the people to whom it was given weren't. And for what the law, Paul says, for what the law could not do, in that it was weak or the law was made to be weak through the flesh.

Whose flesh? Yours. Well, the Jews. Because we are all creatures of this flesh of ours. And the thing that most characterizes us in our flesh is our self-centeredness.

[27 : 23] And most people have no problem at all removing God from the center place of their life and placing themselves in the center. Comes natural.

We all fight that. That's called the old sinful nature. So, the fact that there is going to be a new law, as Jeremiah promised, prophesied, doesn't that suggest something is going to happen regarding the old law?

Yes, it does. And the whole book of Hebrews deals with that. It talks about the law that came through Moses, has been set aside, has been replaced with the new and living way, and Christ the sacrifice, and the veil was torn, and he is the veil, and the veil is his flesh, and we come to God now through Christ and so on.

It's just an absolute beautiful thing. Well, let's get into Ephesians. Last time I was here, we didn't get into Ephesians 3 like we should have, but let's do it now. Ephesians 3. If indeed you have heard, well, again, he's for the sake of you Gentiles.

Now, remember, he's not talking to Jews. He's talking about non-Jews, and he's talking to Gentiles for the sake of you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the stewardship.

[28 : 36] That word means the administration. Some translations dispensation, stewardship, administration of God's grace, which was given to me for you.

Well, now, wait a moment. Wasn't God's grace available before? Well, of course it was. We know that Moses was a recipient of God's grace, and we certainly know that Noah was.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. It isn't that there's no grace in the Old Testament, but do you know what it is that principally characterizes the Old Testament? It's the law.

The law. For the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. And it doesn't mean that there wasn't any grace before Christ came on the scene, but what it means is, based upon what Jesus Christ did, he has made grace available wholesale.

It is splashed everywhere. It is everywhere, and it is extended to everyone, and there is no way you can escape it. It is everywhere. This is the coin of the realm.

[29 : 49] It's the grace of God, the unmerited favor of man, and the kindness and benevolence of God poured out on utterly undeserving people. That's grace.

That is going to be the Apostle Paul's calling card, and let me tell you something. He's going to have a hard sell, because there is something in our old nature that repels against pure, unadulterated grace.

You don't get any credit there, but we want some credit, don't we? We want to make a contribution. We want to do something. We want to be circumcised.

We want to be baptized. We want to tithe. We want to do something to earn this thing. But that's the whole negation of grace.

Grace stands alone, pure and powerful, accepting of nothing, demanding nothing. It's just there, and it is free. And someone says, I remember reading an article not too long ago, it says, don't let these people with their cheap grace confuse you.

[31 : 09] Hmm. My answer to that is, we don't have any cheap grace. We've got free grace.

Free grace. Cheap means you can buy it at a bargain price. That's crummy grace.

That's not the real thing. free grace is free. And it is free because Jesus paid it all.

And to whatever extent you can contribute to that, can be attributed to nothing but an inadequate price that Jesus paid on the cross.

He paid it all. He left absolutely nothing for you to pay makes no demands upon you except that you put your faith and your trust in him as your substitute.

[32 : 16] That's free grace. And on that basis, on that basis, the spirit of God moves into the life of the individual, does a work of regeneration that we do not understand in the human heart and makes you a new person on the inside.

And when I say the human heart, I'm not talking about the blood pump with its four chambers. I'm talking about the essence and core of your being. That's what he changes.

and he makes you spiritually alive to himself on the inside so that you are a brand new person inwardly.

Now you're in a position to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Now that you've got life, spiritual life, you can grow. So, by Revelation verse 3, there was made known to me the mystery, that's the secret, as I wrote before in brief, and I've mentioned that as being verse 9 of chapter 1, and by referring to this, when you read, you can understand my insight into the secret or the mystery of Christ, which, in other generations, I think that means in all the time past and previous to this, other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now, so we've got a huge contrast here, other generations past, now present, been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the spirit.

And what am I talking about? Let's nail it down, all right, to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body.

[34 : 27] This is not a nation. With the prophecy, the focus is on the nation.

It's the nation of Israel. With the mystery, the focus is on the spiritual body of Christ. Now, how can a body be spiritual?

We tend to think in terms of a body as being physical, but he's talking about a spiritual body. It almost sounds like a contradiction in terms. And what it is that comprises, and actually some kind of term has to be used, because we're talking about some kind of a closed system that consists of these spirits, and why it is called a spiritual body, and why it is called the spiritual body, and Christ is the spiritual head.

In both of these cases, we are talking about immateriality. Please understand up front, because we're going to be talking about this throughout this whole session, that which has to do with spirit is not physical.

not material, but it is just as real as the physical and the material. So when you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, it did nothing for your body, but it did something for your immaterial part, your spirit.

[36 : 07] It made that new, and that spirit, along with the spirits of all other people who are in Christ, when they pass from physical life, our human spirit exits the body and goes to be with the Lord.

God and he is the spiritual head of that body. So what we have in heaven is the spirits of all believers who have died and passed on and they comprise this spiritual entity that is called a body, and I think it's called a body for lack of another term, but it is an entity.

It is a composition and it is made up of all who are in Christ. And Christ is the spiritual head, but there isn't any materiality about it.

Now if you can really understand that, then please explain it to me, because this is exactly what's involved. And how does that affect the body, the physical body?

It doesn't affect the physical body at all. If you have a serious illness, before you come to faith in Christ, when you come to faith in Christ, the illness is not gone.

[37 : 29] It's still there. Now there might have been a time when it could have been and would have been gone, but that's different. And you know what that was? That was prophecy. That was in that sphere.

This is in this sphere. This is different. And this too creates the complexity because in the interim of this transition of moving from the physical to the spiritual, from the Jewish to the mystery, there is a transition that is taking place and it involves a whole host of things, just one of which is the physicality part.

This is why in the Old Testament and in the Gospels, so much emphasis, in fact, all of the emphasis is placed on the material.

And it is this world and this earth that Israel has promised. The heaven thing is for believers under this new dispensation.

The emphasis is on the physical and the material. And when Jesus was here on earth for those three and a half years of his earthly ministry, how did he distinguish himself?

[38 : 46] miracles. And what was the crowning achievement of these miracles? They were all physical. They were all physical.

They involved physical sight and physical hearing and physical limbs and physical bodies and physical everything, demonstrable things that you could look at and see and there was no argument that this person couldn't walk for 40 years and now they're up there jumping up and down.

That's about as physical as you can get. And all of the emphasis in this old prophecy section, Old Testament and Gospels, is on the physical and the earthly and the material.

Everything is concrete. Really. When you get into the New Testament, the emphasis shifts and it is on the spiritual.

But here's the problem. What do you have in between? Both. You have both.

[39 : 49] You have one fading out and the other fading in. And there is a time period where both of these are operative and that creates a lot of confusion in the understanding.

That's with the transition part. When you get into the New Testament, all of the emphasis is on the spiritual, the immaterial, not the physical.

This is exactly what Paul meant when he said, the Jews require a sign.

What does that mean? What's the word sign mean? It means a miracle. Show us a sign, they ask him. Show us a sign. And after he had shown them so many signs and they still wouldn't believe, he came to the conclusion the problem was not that these people have a lack of evidence.

The problem is these people have a lack of will. They don't want to believe because they don't want to believe and it doesn't make any difference how many miracles I do. Therefore, there shall no sign be given, any more signs, except the sign of Jonah, the prophet.

[41 : 02] And he, of course, was referring to his resurrection from the dead. On two different occasions, he chastened them by saying, woe unto you, Chorazin, Bethsaida.

If the mighty miracles that have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, and these were not even Jewish communities, they were Gentile communities, they would have repented long ago in sack cloth and ashes, but it wasn't good enough for you.

So there will be no more signs given. And now we've got a moving into the spiritual, and Paul places the emphasis on the spiritual, and this is what he means when he says, for we walk by faith, not by sight.

The Jew under prophecy walked by sight. That's why they required miracles. We are not to require miracles, we are to walk by faith, and all that means is we are to take God at his word, and we don't demand that he do this, that he provide that, he's something else.

So, wow. Well, I'm, yeah, I am, I get it. My sweet little wife is about to sever her head with this.

[42 : 21] Okay, okay. I'm not finished, but I quit. Comment or question, we got a pair of young legs back there for the microphone. Okay. Who has questions?

We've got time. Okay, Roger in the back. I've got in discussions with people about can there be a salvation like we know today in the Old Testament just by knowing the Testament because I get into a lot of discussions with people that's just happy to stay in the four Gospels.

Do you have a humble opinion about that? Well, all I can say is this, Roger, I really wish I had a much better handle on what we would call Old Testament salvation.

question. But I unfortunately don't. I'm still looking for it. And I just, the only thing I've been able to process thus far is that statement that Paul made when he was talking to the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts 17.

1813. And he knew that these people, these polished philosophers, probably represented the intelligentsia of the nation of Greece at the time.

[43 : 56] These were a bunch of philosophers, you know, guys with big IQs. And Paul made a statement when he said that the times before, and he's talking about before Christ and the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

He says, which in times past, and the King James uses a term, winked at. In times past, God winked at the behavior of everyone because this was a time before there were any Jews.

You realize that Judaism as such didn't even come into being until you can't even begin to identify it until Abraham, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the 12 tribes.

But prior to that time, what was everybody? What was everybody prior to Genesis 12 and Abraham? Everybody was Gentiles. Everybody was, I guess you could say, nothing.

Everybody was nothing. They weren't Jew or Gentile. They were just people. And the distinction wasn't made until the peculiarity of the Jews was established.

[45 : 17] So whatever it was, and the text says there in Acts 17 that God winked at in the times before. And then he goes on to say, but now, and what does that imply?

there's a change. There's a change from the time God winked at. And what does God winked at? What does that mean? I don't know unless it bears some connotation that God was willing to overlook a lot, or to cut them some slack, or to not hold them as accountable.

people. And then he goes on to say, but now, now God has appointed a time wherein he will judge man by this one Jesus Christ.

And he's saying, what Paul is saying to the Athenian philosophers is that with the cross of Jesus Christ and what happened on that cross, that changed everything.

God has an entirely different demand now because now something has been done to remedy the situation. And men have to come in line with that.

[46 : 34] And that has to do with the person of Christ and what he did. And like I said, I wish I had a better understanding. Let me put it this way. Today, when we give the gospel to someone, it is rather easy for us to say, and it is rather simple to understand, that Jesus Christ died on that cross for the sins of the entire world.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. And Jesus died for your sin. And you can experience and enjoy his forgiveness and his peace and his eternal life if you will acknowledge your sin and put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Now, we've just given someone the simple plan of salvation. But before Jesus died on that cross 2,000 years ago, if you were talking to anyone, whether it was a Jew or a Gentile, what would your plan of salvation be?

After the cross, it's simple. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, but what about before he died? what about before the cross? What about a thousand years before?

If you met a perfect stranger on the road and wanted to give him the plan of salvation, what would you give him? What would you tell him? I don't know. I don't know.

[48 : 02] I wish I had better understanding of that. Can anybody help us? Mike? Okay, Mike, here comes the answer. The concept of growing in grace really can't be found in the four gospels, can it?

It really what? The concept of growing in grace really cannot be found in the four gospels. Well, as such, that is true. Yeah, that is true, because the growing in grace begins with life, begins with a position, and you cannot grow in grace until you're in grace, and you are placed in grace, you are a recipient of God's grace when you come to the point of salvation, and you receive Christ as your Savior, then, as is the case for every baby that's born, the thing that a newborn baby needs more than anything else is nourishment.

Got to grow, got to survive. You cannot survive without thriving, and as Paul, Peter put it in his epistle, as newborn babes, just like a newborn baby, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby.

And the milk of the word has to do with those simpler, more basic elemental truths of Christianity that you need to muster and get under your belt and grow and develop, and as you live the Christian life, and as you continue on with the Lord, you will be in a constant learning mode.

You will be picking up things, learning things all the way, and you'll be scrapping some things, and throwing some things over that you discovered were not valid, and that's growth. And the goal is that we may be conformed to the image of Christ.

[50 : 05] One of the saddest things in the world is a true born-again Christian who is retarded in their spiritual growth.

There are a lot of 60-year-old baby brethren running around who have never grown up in Christ. Oh, they're saved, they're going to be in heaven, yet so snatched as brands from the burning.

But folks, there is nothing more satisfying, more fulfilling, more exciting than coming to an appreciation of who you are in Christ and what was done to make you there that way, and the path that God has laid out for you.

It is absolutely incredible, and it's a shame that so many Christians don't enjoy it. You know, one of the basic things God wants you to do with your eternal life is enjoy it to the hilt.

Boy, you've got something to really rejoice about. Who else has a question? Other? John, over here. I'm going to take a stab at Old Testament saints.

[51 : 19] Okay. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now, there's only one righteousness that counts, and that's Jesus' righteousness.

righteousness, and it was imputed to Abraham because he believed God by faith, and so I think those Old Testament saints had Jesus' righteousness imputed to them by faith.

That's my best. Okay. Okay. Well, I appreciate that. When the text says in Genesis 15, 15, 6, a great verse, that Abraham believed God and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Now, let me just spell that out a little bit. It says, Abraham believed God, and God counted Abraham's belief as though it were righteousness and he put that on Abraham's account, and all Abraham did was he just believed God.

He believed what God told him, and what the deal was is that Abraham did not have, none of us have, the righteousness that God can accept.

[52 : 47] God so, God told Abraham, if you will believe me and trust me, I will treat your belief and trust in me as though it were the righteousness that I would accept.

Now, such a deal. That is a deal, I'm telling. And all he did was he believed what God told him. But God didn't tell others in the Old Testament that.

He told that to Abraham. What would someone else have believed? What would Abraham's next door neighbor have believed? The plot thickens and gets kind of murky, doesn't it?

Somebody else with a comment or question? I've never come across the satisfactory answer yet to the Old Testament salvation. And I know, it's clear, okay, Joe, and then in the back, and we'll have to probably close in.

Just want to comment, I really agree with John's comments, very good. They're saved, and when they died, they went to paradise. They didn't go straight to heaven because the cross hadn't occurred yet.

[54 : 00] They went to paradise and wait to go to heaven. They went to hell. Hell is an area where there's hell and there's paradise there, and now there's no longer paradise there after Christ, and that's in the Bible.

So that means that those people had to have some kind of credibility with God for them to go to paradise. Yeah, okay, well, you're thinking primarily in Luke 16, and I appreciate your comments.

Okay, in the back, Gary? I always come up with a lot of questions and things that we don't really know, and that always takes me back to Deuteronomy 29-29, and although this is the New Living Translation, it explains it well to me.

It says, the Lord our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us.

Amen. Amen. Yeah. God and God alone is able to take into consideration everyone's individual status and what it is and what you did with what you knew, and he is able to hold each one absolutely perfectly accountable in a way that I'm convinced even the individual will have no complaint.

[55 : 27] And I call this the divine appropriateness, and I don't know what else to call it, but whatever state everyone ends up in, wherever they end up, whatever they are experiencing will be precisely, exactly what it ought to be.

And then the question comes, well, according to whose standards of oughtness, according to the standards of the only one who really matters, according to God's standards, and it will be absolutely as it ought to be.

That's the divine appropriateness. So, with those who, with the heathen, with the pagans, with the Old Testament people, I don't know, but I do know this, God does all things well, and no one, no one, in whatever state they end up, wherever they end up, no one will ever be able to say, it's not fair, it's not right, I shouldn't be here, I got a raw deal, nobody will be able to say that.

Everyone knows they will be receiving exactly what they are entitled to, whether it's good or bad. It will be absolutely perfect, and I wish I knew more about what I'm talking about.

We'll take one more comment or question, and we'll dismiss. Anybody? Okay, then we'll dismiss without it.

[56 : 54] Would you stand, please? Father, we stand once again in awe of your nature and character, and we'll take great comfort in it, and we thank you that you do really and we'll do that.

And we're grateful that you do nothing and you permit nothing without taking everything into consideration, and we have no idea how you're able to do that, but that's part of what makes you who and what you are, and we take great comfort in it, and we thank you that you do really do all things well.

Thank you for that incredible measure of grace that you mete out, on which no human being has any claim, but out of your loving, generous, benevolent heart, you provide not what we deserve, but what we don't deserve, and it's all because of what Jesus did for us.

No wonder he's called Savior. No one else has the right to wear that name. Our prayer is for anyone who may be here today without assurance and a knowledge of sins forgiven and being able to rejoice in Christ.

We pray that you'll give them no peace and no rest until they find it in the only one who can give it. In his name we pray. Amen.