



Eph 3:1-12

TOP SECRET

At this time of the year we get an insight into the workings of Government, when it releases hitherto secret papers under the 30 year rule. As you know, part of the workings of Government means that they don't always tell us the inner workings of things – they are kept secret or classified for whatever reason.

JAMES BOND

Only certain people can see classified documents. They are not all people like James Bond who work for the secret service. It's not all skulduggery either. Usually papers are kept secret so the enemy doesn't know what we are doing or thinking. Sometimes it is just because too much knowledge may be a bad thing.

DECLASSIFIED - FALKLANDS

This year papers from the Falklands War were declassified. We know quite a lot about the Falklands War. Many of us lived through it. We saw the news, we hear the discussion. There was an Enquiry afterwards, but this year the declassified Government papers show us behind the scenes and help us fill in the picture of what the Government was thinking, and what our relationship with the Americans really was.

DECLASSIFIED

Epiphany – marks the end of Christmas. Up until Christ, God had revealed His will through His dealings with Israel. We have that recorded in the OT. But it was only when Jesus appeared did the world fully understand what He was all about.

MAGI

Today in the church calendar is Epiphany. In Greek epiphanea means appearing. Christmas marks the appearing of the Son of God to redeem His people. He is the Son of David. He is the one who would redeem His people Israel. But we learn that the redemption was going to mean more than just Israel. God had a bigger plan. The Magi are a mark of that greater plan. Here were Magi, wise men – astrologers, gentiles – and God had spoken to them. Something new was happening.

THE MYSTERY

As Paul puts it in the passage we read this morning. Something that seemed once to be only for an earthly people – Israel – was something that was for everybody. Paul describes this as a musterion – a mystery, a secret. Although the translation we use has it as a secret, mystery is quite a good word. The reason that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews wasn't that God was keeping something secret from people, it was because there was a lack of understanding by Jews as to what the extent of God's grace was – it was a mystery to them and even more of a mystery to gentiles who didn't understand it at all.

Actually, the coming of Christ and the drawing of the nations to God was right there in the OT. God had chosen Israel to be the vehicle for it, but Jews were so fixed on the idea they were chosen, that most ignored the bit about being the vehicle. There were many Jews that did take notice and even by the time of Jesus, there were those that proselytized gentiles.

They didn't really understand that God had a much better way for redeeming the Gentiles, and this was in Christ. So up until Jesus, the full extend of God's plans were a mystery – not really known in their fullness. In Christ, the whole thing has become declassified. This is how Paul puts it:

VERSE

The secret is that by means of the gospel the Gentiles have a part with the Jews in God's blessings; they are members of the same body and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus.

Of course, we know that, but in Paul's day it was big news, it was controversial. Even to Jewish Christians, the notion that Gentiles could become God's people through faith rather than proselytization was a scandal. Yet this was revealed to be true. 12 In union with Christ and through our faith in him we have the boldness to go into God's presence with all confidence.

VERSE

The appearing of Christ and His work on the cross changed everything. Here's how Paul puts it in 2 Timothy:

2 Tim 1: (C) So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 (C) who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 (C) but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

This is the beginning of a New Year. I believe that this year we should understand afresh and confirm just what God has brought us into. It is easy in the context of the economic problems of the world to be depressed, particularly when they are reflected in the church.

WE ARE A BLESSED PEOPLE – IN CHRIST

As His people we were made to be more than that. Look at the consequences of being part of the promise of God: **VERSE** *I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ, 9 and of making all people see how God's secret plan is to be put into effect.*

Even if things are tight in the world, God has made His people infinitely rich in Christ. We need to understand that. Through Christ – through His broken body and shed blood – we are infinitely blessed. We so often don't feel like that do we? But that doesn't take away the fact that we are just because we don't feel it.

We are, and that should make a difference to our lives – and what we want God to shape us to become. For Paul, having something of infinite value, meant that it should be given away to as many as possible. If it's of infinite worth, sharing it means we'll never run out of it ourselves.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE BLESSING?

Actually it can take us two ways. The Jews basked, and those who don't know Christ still do, in the knowledge that they are a chosen race. They never shared it – even

though they only got it themselves through grace. Some understood the other way, realised what the prophets had said about the nations and tried to share it.

GIVE IT AWAY!

We are God's people. Through His grace we are the inheritors of grace. Like Paul, if we truly understand how blessed we are, we should share it because God's riches are so infinite, they will never run out, so we can spread them around pretty liberally.

It isn't something we can or should keep to ourselves.

ENTER THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH CONFIDENCE - VERSE

I pray that as we enter another year, that God will give us a fresh insight in to who He is , what He has done in Christ – and that will propel us into sharing Good News in a fresh way to our community.

However, most of all, the Gentiles, who were excluded from the most holy part of the Temple can now enter into the very presence of God. We're Gentiles. As we come around the Lord's table, we know we are entering into the very presence of God. Paul said this: 12 In union with Christ and through our faith in him we have the boldness to go into God's presence with all confidence.

By grace and through the finished work of Jesus, we are God's people. We are fit to be in His presence. We are fit not just to be in the temple as it were, but fit to be where only one person had the right to go – into the holiest place. In Christ, we are that righteous.

VERSE

The writer to the Hebrews amplifies this when He says: Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Who we are should characterise how we live. It should result in the desire to honour Him in the way we live and draw us together to worship and serve Him. May that be so in the coming year.

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