Ephesians 3:8b-9 To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to enlighten everyone about the administration of this mystery.

You have to pay attention to what is being said at the beginning of this section. Here is the Apostle Paul speaking of his ministry, speaking of the call he received from God not only to be a believer in Jesus but also to be a proclaimer of Jesus. Where you have to pay attention is to how the Apostle Paul uses the word “mystery.” He uses it to mean basically “something hidden that is now revealed” but as he goes on it is clear that this mystery is deeper and bigger than most people would grasp. Let me show you what I mean.

Take what he says in verse 3. **“Namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation.”** Here is Paul speaking of his call to faith, of the wonder and marvel of God’s plan of salvation becoming known to him and personal to him. That mystery for Paul began to unravel when the Risen Lord and Savior Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Remember Paul was on his way to persecute, imprison and harm those who had come to faith in Jesus. Paul, then called Saul, was quite sure, quite positive and certain that Jesus was a fraud and that what he had been taught of the true God was the truth. That appearance of Jesus was the beginning of his awakening.

From that point forward Saul, the Jewish believer, became Paul the Christ Jesus believer. The scriptures were opened to him. The scope of God’s plan of salvation became known to him. What became clear is that salvation by grace through faith was always the plan of God, a plan brought to fruition by Jesus Christ and proved by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. So at this point Paul is speaking of how the plan of God for salvation became a personal reality for him.

Then comes verses 4-5. We read, **“When you read this you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. This mystery was not made known to people in past generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostle and prophets.”** With these words Paul is telling us how the complexity and wonder of God’s salvation became clearer and clearer to him and the other apostles. Even though the Old Testament contained promises and shadows of what the Savior would be, past generations were not able to grasp it, mostly because they paid no attention to what God revealed and more or less read scripture as they saw fit. It is with the sending of Jesus, who opened the eyes of the world to the truth and it is with the sending of the Holy Spirit who leads all people into the depths of God’s Word and into the right understanding of God’s Word that all of this happens. Here we begin to see the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit.

That importance is clear. Without the Holy Spirit the Word of God and the mystery of Christ will and does remain closed. It is the Spirit who testifies to and of Jesus. Who lets the light of Jesus shine in our dark world, who takes away the veil that covers the truth, who gives life to the dead soul, and causes the glorious victory of Jesus to be our victory! In Jesus, because of Jesus, through Jesus and his completed work of salvation the purpose and plan of God even from the beginning is made clear and certain for everyone who believes. The foundation is Jesus, and the Holy Spirit builds on that foundation through the work of the apostles and prophets. In other words, the very Word of God is being pointed to. The Father and Son send the Holy Spirit to call, gather, enlighten, strengthen and keep in the faith through the means of grace: the Gospel in Word and sacrament.

But this mystery has one more level, also revealed of old but not grasped. That’s where verse 6 comes in. The Holy Spirit writes: **“This mystery is that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and people who also share in the promise through the gospel.”** God’s salvation in Jesus is for everyone! Somewhere along the line the Jews had decided that God was only for the descendants of Abraham. Occasionally, if someone pursued it, they allowed a gentile in but that believing gentile was treated as a second class believer. Truth is, the plan of salvation was always for the whole world. Every soul has had their sin paid for by Jesus and has sure and certain access to God’s eternal life…but it is dependent on faith. Paul is telling us, telling the whole world that the gentiles of the world by faith are “fellow heirs, members of the same body (the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.) All of this through the Gospel. Paul is ecstatic that he is one who has been chosen to share this Gospel of Jesus with the gentile world and welcome them to the glorious promises of eternal life and salvation in Jesus. Now the mystery is fully revealed!

In the next paragraph, where our highlighted words are from, Paul then speaks of the very point of his job, of his ministry in Christ. It is those words we will contemplate that we might grasp the complete awe of God’s goodness and grace. Our theme will be: **THE RICHES OF CHRIST.**

What does Paul say through the Holy Spirit that was now his point in life? He puts it this way: **“I became a servant of this gospel, in keeping with the gift of God’s grace that was given to me by the working of his power. To me—even though I am the very least of all the saints—was given this grace: to preach to the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”**

There are a few things that I want to say quickly about these words, especially the “**I am the least of all the saints.”** I don’t know of a Pastor in our WELS circles who does not feel this way. Feel that we are completely unworthy, completely unequal to the task of the ministry. Yet we do it. Why? Because of God’s grace. Because God’s grace caused us to be servants of his Word. Because even though we are the least, God’s power, the Holy Spirit’s power is and has been working in our lives and ministries to accomplish exactly what God wants done. Done not because of us, but in spite of us. Done not by our cleverness or insight but because of the grace found in Jesus, because we rely on and trust absolutely the wonder and marvel of the Gospel of Jesus.

That is the point of every Gospel ministry. I will break it down this way. What does God’s grace cause? Answer: It causes us to preach. That means we publicly and to the best of our ability stand before people of this world and tell them what we know. Notice this doesn’t say anything about being dynamic or being good or anything else like that. It doesn’t say we are slick and cool, that we are exciting and always spot on. What it says is that we preach. We are the least…and even though we are the least God uses us to be his voice. Even in the least of sermons God’s power and working will be done.

What do we preach? Answer: We preach Christ. Christ is a very specific term. It is referring to the One who has come and fulfilled all the promises of the Father for the salvation of the world. Again, there are some 350 promises that most can identify as direct promises of the Christ and Jesus did them all. To be called the Christ means that everything about God’s Word is fulfilled, totally and completely, especially the promise of rising from the dead and living and ruling for all eternity at God’s right hand. Jesus is the Christ because he has risen from the dead. That’s the heart and core of what Christ means. It is God’s Son who has come to atone for our sins, yes, the sins of the whole world.

Note that in connection with this word is the word, “riches.” We preach the “riches of Christ.” Yes, that means the riches, wealth, extreme generosity and abundance of what is found in Jesus. Christ Jesus is our true treasure. His precious blood paid the depth of our sins. I don’t know about you, but I know that the cesspool of my sins in thought, word and deed is a lake of embarrassing size. To get to heaven that lake needs to be drained. All I have is a stick. I can dip the stick in and flick stuff away. Not very helpful and not ever going to get the job done. Worse yet, I get upset and angry because I think God is unfair with me and much more than I ever took out is put in. Such is the life of every sinner of this world.

The riches of Jesus is more than enough to pay to drain my lake of sin. And yours…and yours and yours! Jesus’ riches are extreme, an abundance to drain, cover and level every lake of sin. And there is also where the other word comes in “unsearchable”. That means “impossible to understand by the human mind, not to be tracked out, infinite, beyond human ability to imagine.” In another section of Scripture this truth is put this way: **“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how untraceable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his adviser?”** We have to grasp that all we can do is stick to what God has revealed in His word about Himself, His Son and our salvation. On our own, it is impossible for us to grasp, get, fathom, comprehend, know, understand, apply or even have a clue of the grace and love of God. When we do get it, it is because God through his Holy Spirit has revealed it to us. Revealed it in his Word, the written, solid, clear and precise Word of God, given by the Apostles and prophets by His Holy Spirit. What I am most sure of and absolutely certain of is that the minute, the second you think your salvation is about you and what you want, how you see it, how you think God should be you are going to be in deep trouble. Because such thinking eliminates God’s grace and you just end up being the least!

What else is the ministry about? Consider yet verse 9. **“And to enlighten everyone about the administration of this mystery.”** Here is the first thing to know, Pastors, servants of the Lord are to enlighten. Make sure you grasp this term. It means we are to shine forth. It means we are the light of this world, the imitated light of Christ. It is not my light I am to shine, but the light of my Savior Jesus. When it is my ideas, my view, my insight rather than the light of Jesus it not enlightening but rather shadow casting. I can only reflect that light of Jesus when what is taught and preached is in absolute accord with the Word and truth of God. I have no right to bend, twist or ignore any point of God’s Word, the entire Word at any time! If it is not in keeping with the truth and wonder of God then I am not serving the Lord but my own selfish self.

Not only am I to enlighten, but I am to administrate the mystery of Jesus. That word “administrate” can also be translated “be a steward.” Yep this is the word “stewardship.” A steward is the chief servant of a household. The steward did everything in exact accord with the desires and wishes of the Master. Now I can tell you, the Master may leave the steward in charge, but that steward will still answer to God for all that he does in his Lord’s house. That’s why most of God’s stewards will work hard to do it exactly the way God says. Make sure the emphasis is on Jesus and his work, never on man and his workings.

That tells you the steward of the church has a big responsibility. I need to administer both Law and Gospel. I need to use the Law to reveal your sins, to call you to repentance and to warn you of the consequences of rejecting the sovereignty of Jesus as God, Lord and Savior. I need to share with you the gospel, the sweet and true message that God’s Son died for you, for all of our sins and that He rose again to show that He is the heart and core of everything. His Gospel is about his love for us. A love so deep that he paid for our sins and offers us eternal life and salvation in his name.

But be careful. I ran across this the other day and it just stuck with me. I was reading up on this section of God’s Word and one of the things I read took a bit of time to speak of the word “grace.” That fellow pastor said, “I don’t like it when we say that grace is the “unconditional love” of God. That sounds good initially, but it is not true. In fact, God’s love is conditional. You and I only get the benefits of God’s love when we have faith, when we believe in Jesus.” How true his words. God does grant his love on condition…that you believe…and you have faith only and because of God’s Holy Spirit who called you to faith and gave you the wisdom of the wonder and knowledge of God in Jesus. You get that, and then you grasp all the more the wonder and marvel of God.

And when you get all of this, then we grasp all the more the hope, comfort and sureness of eternal life revealed in the last verses: **“This was done according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him we can freely approach God with confidence through faith in him.”** Amen.