Ephesians 3:8 To me…was given this grace: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to enlighten everyone about the administration of this mystery.

We are going to begin this sermon by talking about the life of Saul. Saul was the name of the man who would later become Paul the Apostle. We are actually looking at what he has been moved to write by the power of the Holy Spirit. Please note what he says of himself. He says, **“I am the very least of all the saints.”** What does he mean by that?

Let’s review what we know. Paul was a rising star in the Jewish world. He sat at the feet of their great Rabbi Gemaliel, which in itself was reserved for only the best of the best. We are told he was an intense student, an adamant follower of the law, who honestly and sincerely believed that he was saved because he so wonderfully and carefully obeyed the law of God. So much so, that Saul, in the name of God (seriously think about this)…in the name of God began to round up believers in Christ and with the backing of the Jewish leadership arrested them. Where possible, even put them to death! Here is what Scripture says of him. Acts 8:3 **“But Saul was trying to destroy the church by going into one house after another, dragging off both men and women, and putting them in prison.”** And again here is the testimony of God’s Word on Saul. Acts 9:1-2 **“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest and asked him for letter to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any men or women belonging to the Way, he might bring them to Jerusalem as prisoners.”**

I think you can gather that a man like this, an intense man, an adamant Jew who had vowed to destroy these Christian believers, was greatly feared. It is this man that the Lord has chosen to be his instrument of salvation to the Gentiles. This hater of Jesus was going to be changed, going to become exactly the opposite of what he had been. All of this by the grace of God. The Lord Jesus himself was going to appear to this man on his way to Damascus and after that it was all a new and different history.

I want you to grasp that fact. It was a new and different history. Saul did not continue in his murderous ways. Saul did not insist that he still go out to teach a salvation by the Law and strict obedience. His life is completely turned around. Saul becomes Paul, a teacher of Jesus. A promoter of the power and wonder of the Gospel of salvation and of God’s love and grace for the souls of the world.

Notice that our text repeatedly calls this wonder of Jesus, “a mystery.” That’s what we will delve into today. We will consider just what this “mystery” of God is that is revealed in and through Jesus. Our theme will be: **GOD’S MYSTERY REVEALED.**

We are going to start by taking a real good look at the word “mystery” itself. The word means: ***“that which a human being cannot know but which is revealed by God.”*** You have to let that definition sink in. A mystery, the mystery being spoken of in the context of this section of God’s Word is something that we cannot know on our own but rather it must be revealed to us by and through the Lord our God. 1 Corinthians 12:3 adequately proclaims this truth for us when it says, **“No one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.”**

Please reflect on this truth of God. We are not children of God because we decided, we accepted, or because we have studied ourselves into God’s goodness. Has it ever dawned on you that the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day studied the Scriptures to measure the life of Jesus? The same was true of Paul, he was a man who had made the study of God’s Word, the study of Scripture his life and motivation and yet, like the Jewish leadership around him could not grasp and see the truth of Jesus. 2 Corinthians tells us these Jewish, men because of the hardness of their hearts, had a veil over their hearts that prevented them from seeing the truth. It is for this reason that we Lutherans clearly confess in the explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed: *“I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.”* We go on, *“But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel…”*

There is the truth for us, the very same truth that existed for the Apostle Paul and all who believe. Without God’s help and wisdom, we cannot grasp and fathom the wonder of this mystery of God. Because in truth, this wonder is indeed a mystery, a truth that only the Lord our God can reveal to us.

Look at how this term is used progressively in our text. Verses 2-3, **“Surely you have heard of the administration of God’s grace given to me for you, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation.”** Notice what Paul is confessing. He did not come up with this truth, this ministry, this teaching about the grace and wonder of God on his own. God had to make it known to him by revelation. Before that revelation it just wasn’t seen and grasped. Even though Saul was a student of the Scripture, he could not see how Jesus so completely fulfilled God’s Word. Every aspect of Jesus’ life was laid out in the Old Testament and yet Saul could not see it. Here is Jesus, the Son of God, doing miracle after miracle and yet clearly Saul had to believe that all of this was the work of Satan. I personally have no doubt that Saul was one of many Jewish men, sent out by the Jewish religious leadership to spy on Jesus and report what he said and taught. But instead of hearing the wonder of the voice of God, Saul heard only words that proved to him Jesus was a fake and a false teacher. How different it was now. The mystery was made known.

Look at verses 4-5. **“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 the past generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.”** Do you know what you have read so far in Ephesians? You have read how God in grace and love has saved both the Jew and the Gentile from their sins. Surely you know some of the great words of chapters 1 and 2! Ephesians 1:3 **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”** Verse 7, **“In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace.”** Chapter 2:1, **“You were dead in your trespasses and sins.”** Verse 4-5, **“But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved!”**

There is no doubt as you read what Paul is moved by the Holy Spirit to write and preach that the message is about the Savior Jesus and his full and free redemption. Paul emphasizes that this redemption is for both Jew and Gentile. He stresses that we are one in Christ, united together into the Holy Christian Church to serve and bring glory to our God and Lord for his grace and mercy. In our chapter Paul is helping us to grasp the nature of this Gospel of Jesus. He speaks of the ministry of God, the call of the Holy Spirit so that people might be made aware of and brought to faith by this gospel of Jesus. Trust me, there is a great mystery here. Why does God use us lowly humans to convey his message? The denier Peter, the doubter Thomas, the hater Saul, the flunky Terry and so on and so forth?

In truth all of this is done by the grace of God, by this great mystery that God has sent a Savior to atone for us, for each and every sin of our hearts and lives. God had his Son pay the price of redemption just so we could be recipients of his love and heirs of eternal life. All God asks is that we believe and trust in Him. That we grasp that it is all about Jesus and not about the goodness of our lives. But that is revelation yet to come in our words.

Verses 6-7. **“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 of the gospel. 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.”** You know, I have no doubt that if you would have asked the young Saul what he would be doing as a middle aged man the last thing he would have ever thought of was him being a preacher of Jesus Christ to Gentiles a people he had been taught to hate! Such is the power of God’s Word and Spirit. We are no longer what we thought we would be, but new creatures created to do the wonders and marvels of God.

Then come our words that we highlighted. The highlight of those words is the phrase: **“To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”** It is that truth that drives every Pastor I know. They have this call, this divine call to serve the Lord God. It is not to be self-serving, but rather a call to help souls grasp and understand the riches of Christ, here called, **“the unsearchable riches of Christ.”** There is a word that means we can’t really grasp its depth or true wonder. Even when we are a part of it, we still have trouble tracing its lines and realizing the full picture of Jesus. But here is a marvel. I get to be a servant of Jesus. I can tell you I am not worthy. I am a sinner, yes, still a sinner who deserves nothing good and right from my Lord. The same with you, all of us are sinners. Lost creatures, condemned before the majesty and awe of God. And yet God grants us his riches. The true and only treasure that counts. God grants us the wonder and joy of Jesus.

To this day I cannot fathom the total wonder of God. How God created out of nothing. How God established and put into working order all that is. How God, understanding our inability to be holy, promised and then sent his Son into our world to save us. All of this planned and laid out even before the foundations of this world were laid. God knew, knows and grasps all. God sent Jesus. And what a total marvel Jesus is.

Need I tell you what Jesus has done? How he endured every temptation you and I do and yet was without sin. How Jesus willingly went to the cross to endure the agony of eternal damnation because He is the holy and perfect Lamb of God sent to redeem the world. So we would never have any doubt about this wonder of Jesus, He rose from the dead and with that resurrection changed it all. Eternal life can be ours. Eternal life is there for us, there because Jesus won the victory, because Jesus lives and reigns with His Father forever and ever. Jesus says, “Just believe.”

I want you to think for a moment about the Magi who came to see Jesus. I don’t know what they knew or how they knew it, but these men traveled, what all agree, was a considerable distance to see this “**king of the Jews.”** They are prepared with wonderful gifts for this king. Yet when they get to the land of Israel, there is no buzz about this king. There are no celebrations or exaltations going on for this king. A king so important that these Magi knew somehow about his birth, some sign had been given and a star had appeared that alerted them to this. Think about it, the very heavens proclaimed the birth of Jesus. But they get to Jerusalem and nothing. They go to the palace and inquire. Everyone seems puzzled and the scholars and religious leaders are consulted. The answer the Magi got? Along the lines of “Well, if he is here, he is somewhere in Bethlehem!

And when they get out of Jerusalem, there is that star again, only this time that star leads them right to the house where Jesus is at. Nothing grandiose about the house, probably a rental home in the poorer part of town. But there is Jesus. Perhaps at this point 2 years old. He looks just like every two year old you and I have ever seen. Probably clinging to his Momma’s leg as these strangers gazed at, admired, yes, worshipped him, bowed down to Jesus. And though they saw nothing of “kingliness” in Jesus or majesty and power, they left their gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Even though there was nothing notable about this child, they still acted and believed that Jesus was a King, the true King of the Jews, an extraordinary King that they bowed down and worshipped.

You and I have tons of greater information about this Jesus. But we so take this mystery for granted. On any given worship weekend only about half of us actually seek to give him worship and praise. We give Jesus plenty of lip service on our media pages but apart from some nice meme we don’t really see anything in your everyday life that says, “Here is a servant of Jesus!” We have been given some awesome gifts of God to keep our faith firm and strong but right now there is a good portion of the congregation that didn’t even commune once in the past year. This gift from God, his gift to us, a gift reflecting the wonder and awe of this mystery of life and we don’t bother.

Dear Redeemed and saved children of God. God has done this marvelous thing. God has saved us from our sins and made us his children and heirs of eternal life. It truly is a mystery, this depth of the riches of God, that God should so love us and care for us that He came to be our atoning sacrifice. As you go home today, please, spend more time today thinking about this wonder and awe of the Savior, this mystery proclaimed to us for our eternal life. Truly Jesus is a wonder! Amen.