

Theme: GOD'S PLAN MADE PLAIN

- I. God reveals worldwide salvation through Jesus in the Word
- II. God reveals his wisdom through the Church

Assuming you have heard about the administration of God's grace that he gave me for you. ³ The mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have briefly written above. ⁴ By reading this you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. ⁵ This was not made known to people in other generations as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶ The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷ I was made a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power.

⁸ This grace was given to me—the least of all the saints—to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. ¹⁰ This is so that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens. ¹¹ This is according to his eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him” (CSB).

God makes his love clear to you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He resolved to quit smoking. Confident he could kick the habit, the man promised each of his three children \$100 if he failed to give it up. A couple months later, he had to pay up \$300. Statistically speaking, within two weeks one of every three of you who made New Year's resolutions will quit. We won't dive into the ins and outs of just why today, although a lack of motivation and accountability often make it difficult to follow through on our promises. Maybe some of you have resolved not to make resolutions so you don't set yourself up for failure!

We're making a New Year's resolution at church this year, too. Our goal? Make 2021 better than 2020. How? Read the entire Bible beginning Monday, January 11. We are confident spending time in God's Word will make life better,

because it's there that God tells us his love for us. That love illumines us in God's Word today, as we see **GOD'S PLAN MADE PLAIN**.

“Assuming you have heard about the administration of God's grace that he gave me for you.” Whether you've heard the story of God's grace given to Paul or if you don't know what “grace” is, **GOD MAKES HIS PLAN PLAIN** to you today. That isn't the way it's always been, though. **“The mystery is made known to you by revelation...This was not made known to people in other generations.”** What does all that mean? God's mystery, kept tightly under wraps for generations, has come to light in the days after Jesus. The mystery is that the Gentiles, people of all races, are included in God's plan.

We aren't talking about a spiritual “whodunnit.” Just the opposite. You can't figure out God's mysteries on your own, because they cannot be known unless he shows them to you. By nature, God's mystery is hidden from us. Not like hide-and-seek hidden, but like germs. Unassisted, you'll never see them. Unassisted, you'll never figure out God's mysteries. You need a microscope to see germs. You need a tool to understand God's mystery. You'll never figure out God's mystery by looking at nature. From nature you can figure out that God is wise and powerful. Your conscience tells you, naturally, you need to get on God's good side. So we do something about it. People try to behave better than the bad guys to get close to God. That only drives us farther away. God is not pleased by your New Year's resolutions to be better than the next guy. God is not pleased at our sinful comparisons that artificially put us a cut above the rest.

That hasn't always been clear to people. Throughout history, many people have thought their birth, whether into wealth or the right skin color, determined their standing with God. Our nation's wrestle racism is nothing new. Throughout history, many ethnicities have tried to claim superiority.

Not God. He revealed the mystery to us. He reveals his secret to us in his Word: **“By reading this you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.”** **“It is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”** As God the Holy Spirit guided the apostles and prophets to write down the Word of God, he guides us in his Word to understand the mystery. In this way, **GOD'S PLAN is MADE PLAIN**.

It places us all, every human, on the same level. We're all sinful. We've all wronged God. None of us has better standing before God than another by nature. So God revealed his mystery to us. He reveals the mystery to us in the Word of God,

“in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” The gospel, the good news about Jesus, makes plain the secret God had been hiding for the perfect moment, like the best of Christmas presents. The secret’s out, the PLAN MADE PLAIN: **“The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus.”** The secret is that God’s family spreads across the globe as this good news of Jesus illumines hearts to understand GOD’S PLAN MADE PLAIN. His plan was to save all nations, including you.

The good news came to Paul. Paul didn’t know God’s plan naturally, either. He didn’t figure it out, as smart as he was. He wrote these words, but he needed Jesus to explain it. That’s how Paul can honestly call himself **“the least of all the saints.”** Maybe that seems like some humble hyperbole—surely the greatest missionary of all time, which Paul may have been, deserves to be counted as greater than the least! But when Paul includes himself in the saints, he isn’t saying he’s some superhero who did more good than bad or who was born into the right circumstances. The saints are people made holy, washed clean, by the blood of Jesus. Paul didn’t get God’s plan on his own; he got it dead wrong. Paul murdered Christians for worshiping Jesus. Jesus revealed himself to Paul on his way to persecute more believers. Jesus saved Paul, the least of all the saints, so we would understand: if God can save a man like *that*, he can save *me*. That’s exactly what Paul told people. He went around using the gifts God had given him to MAKE GOD’S PLAN PLAIN, so people would know God loves them.

Paul calls his role “grace.” Grace, gift from God that Paul proclaimed God’s good news, the greatest mystery, to Gentiles, people of every race and nationality. So what’s grace? Put simply, grace is: G.R.A.C.E. God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. God gives you his riches, and Jesus pays for it. It’s not about your behavior or what you can give him, but what Jesus gives you. Jesus goes to the cross to pay for the crimes of humanity; you go to heaven, full trip funded by Jesus. In Jesus, God’s PLAN is MADE PLAIN. He planned to save you himself; his plan brings you to heaven at his own expense.

One of the most common new year’s resolutions is to lose weight. Many, most, fail. It requires meticulous tracking—you’ve got to count calories, watch what you eat, exercise energetically, and balance it all. You practically need a score card to keep track of it all.

Spiritually, we can’t keep track with God. First, our own sins are too many. They get in the way. Thank God you can’t keep score of his love, either! That’s

what it means that the “**riches of Christ**” are “**incalculable.**” Quite literally, the word means you can’t keep track. Christ’s riches, his grace, his love, cannot be counted. There’s too much—more than enough for your sins, more than enough for mine, more than enough for Paul’s, more than enough for the whole world. God’s love truly is the greatest mystery, but he has chosen to MAKE it PLAIN to you.

He PLANS to MAKE his love PLAIN *through* you, as he used Paul. “**This is so that God’s multi-faceted wisdom may be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens.**” God’s wisdom has many facets, literally many colors. Each and every one of us received gifts from God. First, faith to believe it. Then, many more. If you have a voice, you have a gift. Got two hands? That’s two gifts! Eyes, ears, mind, body. All gifts. In his wisdom God, who created all things, crafted you with gifts unique to you. Gifts like encouragement. Gifts like listening, speaking, generosity, and many many more. God put that wisdom, that skill, into you, so through you his PLAN would be MADE PLAIN even to the angels in heaven. You, the Church, through various God-given gifts, serve God by MAKING HIS PLAN PLAIN and demonstrating God’s love to the world. Then, even the angels wonder at God’s wisdom in love so amazing. They marvel as that love of God lives and acts through us.

Sometimes that’s as simple as inviting a friend. Mailing a card to remind them God loves them. Telling people *why* you give offerings to church—not because you’re keeping track with God or because you’re desperate to be burn a whole in your pocket—because God loves you so much you want to give back to him. Giving God the glory in work well done. Going to work and doing a good job because God made you to serve him and his people this way; not because you made your own resolution to be better, but because God made his resolution for you.

What resolution is that? “**This is according to his eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” Before God created you, he resolved to love you, to save you. He set his plan in motion from the beginning. What he planned in eternity, Jesus accomplished at just the right time. Jesus paid for our sins. Jesus MAKES PLAIN God’s love for us. While we may resolve to love God better this year, the resolution that matters into eternity is God’s. He resolved to love you, even when it cost him his life.

That gives us confidence. “**In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him.**” “I want my snack,” the child cried out boldly to mom and dad and anyone else within a ten-foot radius. “I want my snack, and I want my

bottle.” The little girl was so confident mom and dad would provide for her needs, she boldly and loudly declared what she wanted. That’s the kind of boldness and confidence with which we can approach God. The girl got what she asked for, though she had to wait a while. God answers our needs, too, just not always when we want. In this way, faith takes hold of God’s promises. It cries out to God and tells him we need what he promised us. Because GOD’S PLAIN has been MADE PLAIN to us, we know God loves us. We know God, like a loving mother and father, will give us everything good. That’s why we go to him with our needs, wants, and cares. That’s also why we know our giving back to him isn’t frivolous. God has made his love plain to us, so we know he’ll give us more than we need. When we give to him, we simply give back what he’s given to us.

Many people will fail their New Year’s resolutions in the next month. Some have probably already failed. God didn’t fail in his resolution. His resolution to love you will never fail. So take some time this year to read the Word of God, where he makes his love to us plain and clear. We, your pastors, will do everything we can in 2021 to make God’s love clear. That’s our resolution. But ultimately only God the Holy Spirit can make his Word clear to you. Without him, our explanations do nothing. But with him, GOD’S PLAN is MADE PLAIN: Jesus loves you. Jesus lived, died, and rose for you. Jesus paid for all people’s sins; he makes his love plain as day. God loves you and wants you in heaven forever with him. He will get you there, on his timing. Until we make it there, spread God’s love. Make it clear to others in everything you think, say, and do. Amen.