

The Mystery of God:
January 4, 2025

Beside all the miscellaneous...
Children's books...

There were two complete sets of books...
We had in our house...
When I was growing up.

And I suspect... most of you...
Had this first one... **[1 World Book]**
The 1966 World Book Encyclopedia.

I think why so many of us had it because...
They did door to door sales...
And you could pay in installments...

And there was no internet... of course...
So you didn't have 24/7 access...
To any information you wanted...
You had to read...

The World Book Encyclopedia cost about \$100-200...
Way back in 1966.
In today's money...
That would be about \$1000-2000...

It was a major investment.
I'm not sure... how my family...
Afforded that set of books...
But I was thankful...
Because I loved it.

As a child... I read the encyclopedia...
From beginning to end...
But there were a couple sections...
That captured my childhood imagination. **[2 Cellophane Pages]**

First... the cellophane pages of the human body.
Are you kidding me...
You could actually see...
What was going on... inside...
The guts.

It was miraculous.
Someone would say... liver...
And I would look up...
To find out...
Where the liver was...
What the liver did...
All things liver related.

The other section I loved...
Was the part... **[3 Dog Pages]**
With images of dogs.
I loved dogs.
I was going to be a veterinarian...
When I grew up.
Didn't quite work out... did it now.
Suppose it's not too late.

But I would spend hours and hours...
Reading the details about dogs...
Drawing the images of dogs...
That were in the encyclopedia.

The other set of books we had...
Were the Time Life books... entitled...
Mysteries of the Unknown...

And in the same vein...
There was this book... **[4 Last Mysteries]**
Reader's Digest...
The World's Last Mysteries.

And I loved that stuff...
I carried that book around with me... all the time...
I loved reading and thinking about...
The mysterious things...
Of the world.

Maybe I watched too much Scooby Doo...
But mysteries were good to me.
I still love... a good mystery...
Not knowing how a story will end.

I love to be surprised.

So. I spent a lot of time...
Reading about the 7 Ancient Wonders of the World...
Like the Great Pyramids of Giza...
The Hanging Garden of Babylon...
The Colossus of Rhodes...

And the Nazca Lines. You know the Nazca Lines?
They are located on the plains of Peru.
These lines date back....
To 200 years before Jesus was born.

And if you're walking on the ground... right next to them...
The lines seem insignificant...
They look like irrigation ditches...
Or dirt roads... going nowhere...

But from the air... it's a different story. **[5 Nazca Lines]**

There are over 800 straight lines...
Some that are over 30 miles long...
Over 300 geometric shapes... like triangles and squares...

And there are about 70 animals and plants...
Some that are 1,200 feet long...
You know... like four footballs fields...
Put end to end.
Big and astounding.

Here are some of the images...
A Monkey. **[6 Monkey]**
A Spider. **[7 Spider]**
A Hummingbird. **[8 Hummingbird]**

An astronaut... for those who believe... **[9 Astronaut]**
In Ancient Aliens!

So. When I look at these lines...
I have two big questions...

First... how... did they make these images...
Without having the advantage of GPS...
Or drones... or any aerial perspective...

And secondly... why... why did they make...
All of these lines... and images...
What were they trying to do?

And here's the best part.
We don't know.
It's a mystery.
It's currently beyond...
Our understanding.

Maybe... just maybe...
One day... someone will decipher...
The secrets... of the Nazca lines...

But I hope not.
I like a little mystery.
I like not knowing.

But regardless of what happens...
I think we can all agree...
These lines were created for a reason.
They had meaning.
They had purpose.
They had design.

Sometimes... we assume... **[10 The Plan]**
That since we can't see...
The purpose of something...

That since we don't understand... God's plan...

From our perspective... we think...
There is no purpose.
No rhyme or reason...
To the pattern around us.

We look at the chaos...
The pain... the difficulties...
War... hatred... anger.. division...
All the hard stuff we encounter...

And we begin to question...
Whether or not...
God is really there...
Or if God has a plan...

Or even worse...
We begin to wonder...
If God has abandoned us...

But from God's perspective...
Which by the way...
Is something we can't know or understand...
But from God's perspective...
As revealed to us...
Through God's Holy Word...

There is an order and a design and a purpose.

If we believe...
What we have been given...
In God's Word...

We know... certain things...
That God is working for our good.
For the good of the world...
For the salvation of all people...
For the sake of God's creation.
For everything and everyone.

In the Ephesians lesson... **[11 Mystery Revealed]**
We have today...
Paul writes...

With all wisdom and insight...
God has made known... to us...
The mystery of God's will....
According to God's good pleasure...
That God set forth in Christ...

As a plan...
For the fullness of time.

To gather up all things into him.
Things of heaven. And things of earth.

See... that's the purpose.
That's the plan.
That God sent Christ into this world...
In order to draw all things...
Into God.

But here's the problem...
It's a voluntary system.

Some people...
Don't want to know God.
Don't want to be drawn up into God.

Some people...
Don't want to make their life...
Conform to the will of a god...
Whom they do not know.

And some people... worship... other things...
Like money... technology... looking young...
They just aren't interested in knowing God.

So. What are we supposed to do?

This whole topic reminds me of Acts 17...
Where Paul is in Athens...
And he was greatly distressed...
That the city of Athens was....
Full of Idols.

People believing in anything...
And everything...

So... he was standing... up there...
On top of Mars Hill...
Also know as the Areopagus...
And he began to speak...

He said...
You know Athenians...
I can see how extremely religious...
Y'all are.

I went through the city...
And looked carefully at your objects of worship... **[12 Altar]**

Among them... I found an altar...
With the inscription...
"To an unknown god."

So what you worship as unknown...
I am going proclaim to you.

And then he told them...
About everything God had done...
And then he told them...
About the history of Israel...
And then... he told them...
About a man...
Whom God had appointed...
And raised from the dead.

He told them about Jesus.
Now... some people scoffed about the resurrection...

But others said...
We will hear you again about this.
And they began to follow him.

So that was the apostle Paul.
And I don't know if you know this....
But he was pretty awesome.
Paul was a powerful spirit-filled speaker.

And even after he speaks...
Some believe and some don't.
It's that lack of universal acceptance...
Of God's good news...
That bugs us sometimes... doesn't it?

Faith is important to us... because we believe...
But we also know... that...
Christ... is the source of all life.

We want to proclaim the truth...
But we know... we need to speak...
The truth in love.

Still in the gospel lesson...
It bothers me every time...
We read the words...

He was in the world...
And the world came into being through him.
Yet the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own...
And his own people...
Did not accept him.

And that bothers me...
because how could they not see...
That all the questions they had...
About the mysterious nature of God...

Had been answered...
In Christ. The Messiah.

And how can people...
Not see the truth...
Even today?

Well let's go back to the gospel lesson... **[13 Light in Darkness]**
John talks about light coming into the darkness.

If we think of the darkness...
As a place...where we can't see...
The way we are going.
We can't see...
The plan... the purpose... the design.

We can't see...
That God is in control...
That God is working for us...
That God is alive and well...

If we live in the darkness....
WE NEED TO HAVE SOME LIGHT.
To find our way...

And when it's completely dark...
Just a little light... makes all the difference.

John says... Jesus is the light...
That has come into the world.

And I know it's still Christmas...
But it's not just the birth of Jesus...
That brings light into the world.

I mean... sure. There is some light...
In the way he was born...
Jesus fulfilled a countless number of prophecies...
And God was making it clear that something NEW...
Was happening.

But we didn't fully understand...
We couldn't fully understand...

UNTIL...
He lived his life.

UNTIL...
He began his work.

UNTIL...
He was preaching and teaching...
And healing and doing his miracles.

We couldn't fully understand...
UNTIL... he died.

And the curtain in the temple...
Was torn from top to bottom...
Indicating that there was...
No more division... between God...
And God's people.

And we couldn't truly fully understand...
UNTIL... Jesus was raised from the dead.
And sin and death and the devil...
Were defeated once and for all.

See... what I'm saying is...
You and I have an incredible advantage...
We have been made privy...
To the greatest mystery of God.

And we can't possibly understand...
How it all works...
Or what it all means.

But what we can understand is...
All who receive him...
Who believe in his name...
God gives the power...
To become children of God.

Who are born...
Not of blood.
Not of the will of the flesh...
Or the will of humans...
But born of God.

See... that's what Paul told the Athenians...
That's what God revealed...
When the Word became flesh.
That's the truth...
That God has given us...
To hold in our hearts.

But there are still others...
Who as of yet... walk in darkness.

So... what do we do? Well...
We can make some choices...

We can become a light.
We can speak the truth.
We can live out God's love.
In the world around us.

We can follow Christ...
Not just in words...
But in truth and action...

And we can hold that metaphorical door open...
With all of our strength...
With all of our faith...
With all of our hope...

That others will see a little light...
Emanating from us...
And find their way home.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.