

The Mystery Found in Jesus Christ
Colossians 1:24-2:5

Introduction

1. As you've heard me state in our first two weeks in Colossians, the over-arching theme throughout Paul's letter to the Colossians is the sufficiency of Christ
2. The recipients of the letter were mostly gentiles, and like most of the gentile world during the 1st century, prior to coming to faith in Jesus they would have been steeped in Greco-Roman philosophy and religion
 - a. Greco-Roman religion was both polytheistic and inclusive which means that they not only worshipped many gods but incorporated other religions into their own; this made their religion(s) a mix or hodgepodge of concepts, ideas, and religious practices
 - b. They had their primary Greek and Roman gods which made up the pantheon and most of what we know as Greek Mythology, but they were also fascinated by mystery religions
 - c. These mystery religions often promised to provide deeper, more profound wisdom, knowledge, and experiences and seeking after such things was highly prized and considered a noble pursuit, especially by the educated elite like philosophers and the religious elite
 - d. Many of these mystery religions were secret societies and the only way to gain access to such wonderful knowledge and wisdom was by becoming members (think Free Masons)
3. The reason this is important is because Greco-Roman religion was very eclectic, deriving itself from a wide range of diverse sources, including the pursuit of mysterious and secret knowledge, so the Colossians were probably used to this approach to religion
 - a. This may explain why they were being tempted to add all sorts of legalistic beliefs and religious and mystical practices to their faith in Jesus
 - b. They somehow believed such things would give them access to secret and mysterious knowledge of God and spiritual matters
4. In our passage today, Paul is going to take advantage of their desire for such things and turn it on its head to point them back to the greatest mystery of all, Jesus Christ:
 - a. He's going to use language and words they were accustomed to
 - 1) He repeats the word mystery multiple times
 - 2) He refers to things that have been hidden or kept secret
 - 3) He talks of not just of knowledge but **"all the wealth"**, the **"full assurance of understanding"**, and **"treasures of wisdom and knowledge"**
 - b. In essence, Paul says, "Since you are fascinated with mysteries, and enamored by great wisdom and knowledge, then look no further than the greatest mystery of all, Jesus Christ, in whom are found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge!"
5. One of the things that stands out in our passage this morning is the lengths to which Paul suffered, labored and struggled to reveal the mystery of Christ to Gentiles; so with this in mind I've titled this teaching session, "The Mystery Found in Jesus Christ":
 - a. Paul suffered for the mystery of Christ because in Christ all mankind has the hope of glory (1:24-27)
 - b. Paul labored for the mystery of Christ because in Christ we are made perfect (1:28-29)

- c. Paul struggled mightily for the mystery of Christ because in Christ are found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:1-5)

A. Paul suffered for the mystery of Christ because in Christ all mankind has the hope of glory (1:24-27)

1. Paul began by reminding the Colossians of the suffering he endured on their behalf (READ 1:24):
 - a. As all of us know, Paul was no stranger to suffering because what he endured as a servant of Christ is well documented in the Bible (READ 2 Corinthians 11:23-28)
 - b. Here, Paul refers to his sufferings as **“fill[ing] up what is lacking of Christ’s afflictions in my flesh...”**
 - 1) This is another one of those challenging and controversial verses because it’s not entirely clear what Paul means
 - 2) This phrase **“that which is lacking”** refers to something that is essential or needed; it’s not suggesting here that Christ’s suffering was somehow incomplete or insufficient
 - 3) Rather, Paul was keenly aware of what Jesus declared to him through Ananias at his conversion, **“I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”** (Acts 9:16)
 - 4) In fact, Paul took it to heart and believed that his sufferings were a necessary part of knowing Christ (READ Philippians 3:8-11)
2. Paul endured suffering in order to fulfill the Word of God (READ 1:25):
 - a. A stewardship is a mission or task, and one that generally requires oversight, organization, and responsibility
 - b. Paul’s stewardship was that he had been made a minister (e.g. servant) by God in order to **“fulfill the word of God”**:
 - 1) I’m going to diverge from most English translations here
 - 2) With the exception of the NET, most render this last phrase as **“fully preaching”** or **“making known”** the word of God
 - 3) However, the words **“preaching”** and **“making known”** are supplied; the phrase is more literally **“so that I might fulfil the word of God”**
 - 4) I think this distinction is important because Paul’s mission wasn’t simply to preach the Word of God; it was to help bring about the FULFILLMENT of God’s Word
- c. So, what does it mean for Paul to fulfill God’s Word? He tells us in vs. 26-27 (READ):
 - 1) Paul describes God’s Word here as **“the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints”**
 - a. Later, in 2:2 and 4:3 Paul refers to this mystery as **“Christ Himself”** and **“the mystery of Christ”**
 - b. So, from a technical sense, Jesus is the Word of God, the mystery hidden from the past ages (this is supported by John 1:1)
 - 2) However, there is another aspect to this mystery, and it’s found in v. 27 (NIV): **“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”**
 - a. Paul was God’s chosen instrument to reveal the mystery of Christ to Gentiles thus revealing that God’s redemptive plan included ALL of mankind, not just the Jews (READ Ephesians 3:1-21)

- b. Paul had a unique part in fulfilling God's Word by doing just what Jesus commanded His disciples—to preach the Gospel first in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and finally to Gentiles and the end of the earth
 - a) As a result of their faith, the Colossians now had the hope of someday being glorified because Jesus Christ now dwelt within them
 - b) Often, when asked to summarize the Gospel we cite passages like John 3:16 ("**for God so loved the world...**") or Ephesians 2:8 ("**for by grace you have been saved through faith...**")
 - c) However, the core of the Gospel is best summarized in these seven words: "**Christ in you, the hope of glory**"
- 3. The last phrase in v. 27 is probably the most important: "**Christ in you, the hope of glory.**":
 - a. Paul refers to this as the NIV renders it, "**the glorious riches**" of the mystery of Christ
 - b. He uses some word play here—the most GLORIOUS part (e.g. the best, most magnificent part) of the mystery of Jesus is Him dwelling in us so that we have the hope of glory
 - c. Our greatest hope as Christians is that one day we will be raised up to eternal glory (READ Romans 8:9-11, 16-21, 28-30)
 - d. It is precisely because Christ dwells in us that we will one day be raised up in glory with Him:
 - 1) Colossians 3:3-4: "**For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**"
 - 2) 1 Peter 5:4: "**And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.**"
 - 3) Romans 8:16-18: "**The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**"
- 4. Takeaway: Paul was willing to suffer the horrendous things he did for the mystery of Christ because our hope of glory is found in Christ and Him alone

B. Paul labored for the mystery of Christ because in Christ we are made perfect (1:28-29)

- 1. One of the great pursuits of man-made religion is the hope and desire to overcome the material world and ascend to a form of perfection, completeness, or even salvation

Illustration from Cousin

- 2. This desire to escape the sin and corruption of the world and imperfections or limitations of the flesh was apparently behind the Colossians temptation to add to their faith in Christ (READ 2:20-23):
 - a. We'll spend more time on this passage in a few weeks, but the Colossians were subjecting themselves to a list of rules, regulations, and religious rites in the hope of overcoming "**fleshly indulgence**" (e.g. satisfying the flesh or giving into sinful desires)
 - b. In essence, they were looking for spiritual maturity through religious practices

- c. However, as Paul clearly states that spiritual maturity doesn't result from such things because they **"are of no value against fleshly indulgence"**

Question to Old Older Amish man at Times Union: did all their rules and regulations prevent sin? His response, "Nope, we just find other areas in which to sin." In fact, at each year's convention, there was always "another sin" to address—one year it was the brims on hats, another year whether or not women could water ski

3. So, while no man-made religious rites or practices can make us spiritually mature, there is something—SOMEONE—who can: Jesus Christ (READ 1:28-29):
 - a. Paul proclaimed Christ, not by merely preaching the Gospel, but by **"admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom"**
 - b. Paul wasn't satisfied with people just getting saved, but growing and maturing in their faith in Christ
 - c. His goal was to **"present every man complete in Christ"**:
 - 1) The word Paul uses here, teleios, refers to something which is perfect, whole, complete, and lacking in nothing
 - 2) Some suggest that Paul has spiritual maturity in mind here since the word is used in this way repeatedly in the NT:
 - a) 1 Corinthians 14:20: **"Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature."**
 - b) Philippians 3:15 (ESV): **"Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you."**
 - c) Hebrews 5:14: **"But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."**
 - 3) However, Paul refers to **"presenting"** every man and that brings to mind the day that we will be presented before God and Jesus not just spiritually mature, but completely perfect, holy and righteous:
 - a) Ephesians 1:4 says God **"chose us in Him [Jesus] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love"**
 - b) Colossians 1:22: **"yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach"**
 - c) Ephesians 5:27: **"that He [Jesus] might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."**
4. Takeway: Paul was willing to make his life's purpose and labor the mystery of Christ because it is the only thing that makes it possible for us to stand perfect before God
 - a. READ 1:29
 - b. The author of the book of Hebrews declares the inability of the Law, with all of its sacrifices and practices, **"can never...make perfect those who draw near"** (Hebrews 10:1)
 - c. However, he concludes by declaring that God, **"by one offering...has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."** (Hebrews 10:14)
 - d. So, what religion cannot do—make us perfect and able to stand before God—God did through the mystery of Christ

C. Paul struggled mightily for the mystery of Christ because in Christ are found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:1-5)

1. Paul endured great struggling with two goals in mind
 - a. The first was that others would be encouraged
 - b. The second was that they would attain **“all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding”** and the **“true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is Christ Himself”**
 - c. That’s a mouthful, but essentially what Paul was saying is that he labored so that they would have complete understanding and a true knowledge of God’s mystery, Jesus Christ
 - d. Their longing and pursuit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding could only be satisfied in a complete understanding of Christ because in Him (v. 3) **“are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”**
2. Paul felt the need to remind them of this because they were in danger of being deceived and led astray (READ 2:4-5)
3. Takeaway: Paul was willing to struggle greatly for the mystery of Christ because true wisdom, knowledge and understanding are only found in Christ:
 - a. Proverbs 9:10 says, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”**
 - b. This is why Romans 1:21-22 says that men become futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts become darkened when they no longer glorify God or give thanks to Him
 - c. People always try to separate spiritual knowledge from non-spiritual knowledge (like the sciences—biology, chemistry, physics, medicine, psychology, etc.) thinking that there is no connection between the two
 - d. But, history has proven that’s not the case; some of the greatest scientific discoveries and advances in history in these fields have been made by Christian men and women, and likewise some of the most outlandish, foolish and dangerous claims in these fields have been made by those who reject God and a knowledge of Him
 - e. If we want to be wise, if we want knowledge and understanding—not just in spiritual matters, but all things—it begins with faith in Christ and a true knowledge of Him

Illustration from Mary

I have a cousin who has dedicated her life to this. She calls herself a “World-Renowned Master Sacred Shaman, and a messenger for the Ascended Masters, the Beings of Light...” By utilizing the ancient ways of the Incas and the Tibetan Buddhists, she “works with the masterful Celestial Beings on the other side” to “teach people how to work with [these beings] to super-charge their own journey into their Authentic Self.” She was raised Catholic but soon “found that there are MORE THAN JESUS and MARY; there are masterful beings like angels and archangels, and Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas and Celestial Beings who are available to help us get out of the mess and the chaos on Earth. Many of these beings of Light had lived on this planet and found their way out, and are here to teach us how we can find our way out to...these masterful beings provide a road map to get out of the craziness on this planet by teaching you who you really are, where you came from, how you got into the mess you are in and how to get out of it...in order to truly become free.” In addition to specializing in the “energy medicine traditions of the Incas”, she has deepened her shamanic skills and healing abilities with modern avant-garde methods like matrix Energetics, Yeun Method and Innergetics, ThetaHealing, and Relational Life Therapy. Through the “celestial beings of pure light” she “learned that Earth is a school room and we get tested on what we learn. Every time you pass a test, instead of earning a grade...you receive more light or energy to work with...then you get tested again and the process continues until you graduate from this planet.”