

Title: The Mystery is No Longer a Mystery
Date: February 24, 2019
Subject: The incalculable treasure believers have in Christ
Scripture: Colossians 1:24 – 2:5

Call some people up front and form a circle. Talk to them so only they can hear. “Thanks for coming up. I want you to nod your heads like you’re hearing something profound and deep. In a moment you’ll go back to your seats. It would help if you can look smug, like you know something they don’t know. Thanks again for coming up. You can go back to your seats.”

Now wouldn’t you like to know what I told them? What was so important to give to a select few? What secret I divulged? That was the situation in Colossae and many places today. Someone says they have secret knowledge for a limited few, a wisdom that isn’t for everyone, but only the initiated, the elite, the privileged and if people play their cards right, they can become one of them.

The message from God is that everyone can be on the inside. He wants everyone to know though many people don’t take advantage of his generous offer.

READ Colossians 1:24 – 2:5

I. Jesus Christ is the core 1:26 – 28

Biblical Christianity is different from all other belief systems. It has a person at the center. Christianity rises or falls around the person of Jesus. He unequivocally proclaimed he is the one and only way to the Father (John 14:6), he is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), that he is God Himself (John 8:58). When Jesus is taken out of the equation, those statements are nonsense. Gone is the basis for belief and life. In contrast, take Buddha out of Buddhism and a person is still left with a series of principles and teachings by which they can govern their lives.

Let’s approach the matter a second way. There were false teachers in Paul’s day and in our time that proclaim there is more knowledge that has been revealed to them and they would be glad to share the secrets. Sometimes it’s with hands held out for a fee. But they profess to be more enlightened, to give a correct view.

Distorted views of Jesus and the Gospel are attractive to some. They want to be in on the secret knowledge as it appeals to pride, invests more importance and power to people. They look for something that makes Christ not so different from the rest of us and downplays sin. They want to feel good about what they can offer and that biblical Christianity is just too simple.

God counters by having Paul write that the “word of God in its fullness” has already been completely disclosed. Nothing else is needed as there is nothing else. It had previously been a mystery hidden for hundreds and hundreds of years. Now the secret has been revealed in all of its glorious splendor. Jesus Christ is for all people whether Jew or non-Jew, rich or poor, old or young, man or woman. He is repository of all spiritual wealth, the hope of glory, the hope of heaven.

It seems Paul is getting a little Christmassy. I started having Christmas songs go through my mind. I searched and found this one by Big Daddy Weave says “Christ is Come. The word of the prophets, centuries old. The birth of Messiah has been long foretold That unto you, now unto you Christ is come, The word made flesh, now dwells among us...Prince of Peace, Yeshua, Messiah, the Son of Man, Holy One, King of kings, Lord of lords, the Great I Am, Comforter, Counselor, Author and Finisher, Divine Truth Revealer, Deliverer, Healer. You are God, Jesus, You are God.”

Paul speaks similarly in other places. “The mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:4-6).

It’s not some secret society where a person is admitted by having the password, knowing the ritualistic handshake. It’s Jesus. He’s the one that is proclaimed. Not a system of do’s and don’ts. Not a seven step process to higher enlightenments. Not a bunch of spiritual sounding snippets. Not a philosophy. Not a morality. It’s a person. Jesus -- who he is, what he’s done, that people can have a relationship with him.

The goal is to present people perfect in Christ (v. 28). There are a couple nuances to this. One is the positional. False teachings and cults and mystical religions had an inner circle where the person would be initiated into. Paul counters that people have been initiated into Christ from the moment they place their trust in Christ to save them. There’s nothing else needed to qualify them as one belonging to him.

To be presented perfect also has an ongoing aspect of being fully developed, mature, complete. Many translations emphasize the aspect of maturity. While we are positionally perfect in Christ, we can be perfected as we grow in our knowledge of him. This isn’t the same as the false teachers’ new knowledge. It’s learning more about Jesus.

“More about Jesus would I know. More about Jesus let me learn. More about Jesus in His Word, Holding communion with my Lord; Hearing his voice in ev’ry line, Making each faithful saying mine. More, more about Jesus, More, more about Jesus; More of His saving fullness see, More of His love who died for me” (E. E. Hewitt).

II. Paul’s effort made possible by God’s power 1:29 – 2:1; 1:24

As we go through this section, we’ll notice an interplay between the divine and human. Labor pictures manual toil to the point of weariness. It’s like the farmer who milks the cows, cleans the barn, plows the back 40, milks the cows again, fixes machinery, and 25 other things before can call it a day. Struggling is mentioned twice, here and in 2:1. It’s also translated “agonizing” and is a word picture of an athlete’s stress and strain. I’m amazed at what gymnasts can do. I remember in PE when we came to that part. We were to perform the Iron Cross – on the rings with arms straight out from the shoulders. Not pretty. No style points. Olympic gymnasts make it look easy as they do swings, press into handstands. You can see their muscles strain to hold position.

Many connect Paul’s striving to the effort he’s putting in in the area of prayer. It could be. It could also

be his defense of the faith against false teachers. It could be the expenditure of emotional energies, mental focus, physical, intellectual. He worked to supplement how the churches supported him. He went to prison. Paul sets an example of straining and laboring for the cause of Christ.

Need to back up to v. 24 to see how Paul categorizes his labor. REREAD. Some hold Christ's sacrificial atonement wasn't sufficient as they teach people should pray to saints for their help and to pass on merit from them.

That's not what Paul has in mind. Christ's suffering on the cross, his payment for sins, is totally sufficient for our salvation. We don't need to seek assistance from some other human, ourselves or the angels. The wording "Christ's afflictions" isn't the same term used to describe Christ's suffering on the cross. It applies to the trials and difficulties of life.

Another wording of the verse is "and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body" (NAS). Since Christ is risen and ascended to the Father in heaven, he is no longer physically present on earth. However, he is physically present through his body the church. He is the head. We are the rest of the body. What we suffer for his cause to spread the Good News is to be considered part of Christ's afflictions.

"Jesus died to save his Church; but the Church must be upbuilt and extended; it must be kept strong and pure and true; therefore, anyone who serves the Church by widening her borders, establishing her faith, saving her from errors, is doing the work of Christ. And if such service involves suffering and sacrifice, that affliction is filling up and sharing the very suffering of Christ. To suffer in the service of Christ is not a penalty but a privilege, for it is sharing in his work" (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, p. 126).

Joanie Yoder recalls, "One day during my devotional time, this thought came to my mind: "Don't let life happen to you. Let life happen through you." The first phrase described me to a T, for I tended to see life as something coming at me. I felt like a worn-out dartboard. I was using all my energies to shield myself from the darts of life's trials. But the second phrase, "Let life happen through you," presented a different approach. Instead of dodging life's fiery darts, I was to let God's life and love be channeled through me, blessing me on its way to blessing others. Instead of being life's dartboard, I chose that day to become God's pipeline. Then I could begin living more effectively for Him. Some days I revert to being a dartboard, but I soon run out of the love and power to bless others. Then through confession, faith, and obedience, I reconnect myself to my heavenly supply center and resume pipeline living. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul mentioned the many troubles he was facing. Yet he was determined to be a channel of blessing by allowing God to work through him" (Our Daily Bread, 1/2/96).

Paul rejoices in the amount of what he suffered for the church. This is because he declares himself a servant to the church. He was commissioned by God to the task. Paul presents the Word but it's God who chooses. Paul serves, suffers, labors and struggles for people he knows and those he's never met but it's God

who gives the power to do so. All of his energy was really God's energy. Paul depended on the Lord for strength. The Lord is the one gets the credit.

III. The purpose of life is to know Christ 2:2, 3

Circle back around to Christ being central. Verses 2 & 3 provide a purpose statement. The bottom line is for people to know Christ. Here's how he gets there in his upward progression. The beginning of v. 2 "that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love." That sounds good in and of itself. Shouldn't people be encouraged rather than discouraged? Shouldn't there be more love? We hear it in the aftermath of shootings and hate crimes that people just need to love each other, that love for our fellow man will solve all the problems. They may be chasing after the rabbit but they've gone down the rabbit hole and can't see the daylight as the kind of love they're talking about is divorced from a real relationship with Jesus. It's just human love.

Paul is writing to Christ followers. They need to be encouraged in heart, not just so aren't discouraged, but so can meet situations with confidence and bravery. The church needs to be united in love because there are loud and hostile voices in opposition.

On Friday, Jean and I visited Ed. He seemed to be doing pretty well. He looked more full of life but he had a hard time sitting still and wanted to go to the dining room real early. He kind of dismissed us by thanking us for coming. Then we went shopping and out to eat. While in Walmart we got a call from Bonnie. A friend of hers had called her to say someone had hung a sign on our outdoor sign. She called Cliff so that he could take it off. (Lift up sign). It reads, "The church is forcing you to lie to your children!" On the back, "My parents swore to me Santa was real. They lied!" Obviously, the person doesn't like what churches teach. My first response was "Who would do such a thing? Why are they mad at us?" Then on Saturday I started thinking this was a person in need, someone with maybe deep hurt and began praying he/she would come to Christ.

Encouragement in heart and unity in love lead to having full riches of complete understanding. That's a mouthful. "Full riches of complete understanding." There's nothing left to possess as already have it all.

This leads to the ability to know Christ. He's again referred to as God's mystery, one that has been revealed. Paul quadruples down on what Christ offers. REREAD 2:3. When you know Jesus, you have it all – all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. There's no need to search for some other treasure map and follow its clues to who knows where.

The Mount Morgan gold mine in Queensland, Australia was one of the richest in the world. The original owners weren't aware of the immense amount of gold, silver and copper that was under their feet. It was only later that the value of what was underground was revealed. In the same way, God through Christ reveals his riches and treasures.

IV. Preventing being deceived 2:4, 5

The alarm bells are ringing. There are people who want to deceive Christ-followers away from faith in Christ. They themselves are not the enemy. They're manipulated and duped by the devil.

Knowing Christ enables a person to know right from wrong teaching. They won't be wishy washy as to whether what to believe is true. Paul expresses his delight in two aspects of stability in v. 5. The first is the orderliness of behavior. They are well disciplined because they are well disciplined. They are firm in their faith in Christ. They aren't looking for some other answer to life's questions and situation.

They are like soldiers who close ranks to repel the enemy. They are like athletes who keep their head in the game rather than thinking about their investments or eating chili dogs with the fans.

We shore up firmness in the faith as we study together this morning or in Bible Study groups and Sunday School as well as individually digging into the riches of God's Word.

More from Barclay. "The fact is that the only thing in this world which is for every man is Christ. It is not every man who can be a thinker. There are gifts which are not granted to every man. Not every man can master every craft, or even every game. There are those who are color-blind and to whom the loveliness of art means nothing. There are those who are tone-deaf and for whom the glory of music does not exist. Not every man can be a writer or a student or a preacher or a singer. Even human love at its highest is not granted to all men. There are gifts a man will never possess; there are privileges a man will never enjoy; there are heights of this world's attainment which a man will never scale; but to every man there is open the good news of the gospel, the love of God in Christ Jesus and the transforming power which can bring holiness into life" (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, p. 127).