

Lesson 8: “The Great Mystery Revealed”

1:24-29

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Colossians 1:24-29 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

What if I asked you, “What is the most important truth that God wants believers to know?” And if you are a believing follower of Christ as your Lord, you could personalize the question to be, “What is the most important truth that God wants *you* to know?” I think you would agree that knowing the answer to this question is critically important. So how would you respond? Here are some possible good answers:

- √ I love you and will help you overcome all obstacles, that you might be with Me forever
- √ Be spiritually prepared, for Jesus is returning soon
- √ Be vigilant in sharing the gospel with unbelievers, for the time is short
- √ Be not afraid of death or disaster – your present and future is secure in Me

God surely wants us to know and embrace all of the above. But I believe our passage today gives us the best answer to my question, AND the key to how it is that we are “complete” in Christ as believers, which is the theme of this important book of Colossians. This is what God wants us believers to know above all else:

“Christ in you is your hope of glory.”

Now let us test this premise from the passage before us, and let us discover, as best we can, what this critically important truth means.

PAUL'S SACRED MINISTRY

I see in this passage four aspects to Paul's sacred calling by God. Each was a stewardship that was “bestowed” on Paul for the benefit of the Church – not just the church of Colossae, but for the universal Church that was then growing by leaps and bounds and has now grown today to be a world-wide phenomena. He relates in this passage that his God-ordained ministry is:

1. To suffer as necessary for the sake of the Church (v. 24)
2. To teach the Word of God in its fulness (v. 25)
3. To reveal God's great mystery: Christ in you, the hope of glory (v. 26-27)
4. To present everyone mature in Christ (v. 28)

And I would suggest that these four callings belong to each of God's children, at least to some degree. Our gifting and calling may not be the same as Paul's, but nonetheless he wants and expects us to play a part in the fulfillment of each of these in our generation.

OUR MINISTRY OF SUFFERING FOR THE CHURCH

There is a sense in which Jesus still suffers. Paul said it this way in our passage: I am “*filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.*” Do you remember Jesus saying to Saul of Tarsus

when he was struck to the ground on the road to Tarsus: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” Clearly, Jesus was being persecuted when Saul was persecuting the early Christians. And this was after He had already rose from the grave and ascended to heaven.

And when we hurt in any way for the church of God we serve, we are identifying with Jesus’ continuing hurt for His Church. We are to “suffer with those who suffer” (1 Corinthians 12:26). And when we do so, we are identifying in a small way with the sufferings of Jesus. Paul, in wanting to know Jesus above all else, said this:

Philippians 3:10 *That I may know Him ... and the fellowship of His sufferings ...*

Yes, part of our ministry is to suffer with others. And at times, we are to suffer in being persecuted for the Christ we love and serve. This is our expectation, and God’s promise.

2 Timothy 3:12 *Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

So this is a part of the ministry that we must share with Paul and with all others who are Christ-followers. We must suffer with Christ over His church, and for His cause in the world. And when we do so, Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, we will be “blessed” with a great “reward in heaven.” (Matthew 5:11-12)

OUR MINISTRY OF TEACHING GOD’S WORD

You may not be a church-planter such as Paul, or a pastor-teacher, or even a Sunday School teacher or leader. But as a child of God, you are called to teach the truth of God to those under your care. And as you contribute in your tithes and offerings to the work of this church, you are a part in supporting the teaching of God’s Word that goes forth from your leaders. Like Paul, whose commission from God was to present “the Word of God in it’s fulness,” so we at Oaks strive to do the same as we teach verse by verse through the Bible. We are all involved in this ministry as a church body together – supporting and encouraging the faithful teaching of God’s Word always.

OUR MINISTRY OF REVEALING GOD’S GREAT MYSTERY

And now we come to the specific part of carrying out “*the preaching of the word of God.*” Paul calls it “the mystery.” Now this mystery is not an Agatha Christie type of “who-done-it” mystery, but something that was withheld from the saints up until the day of Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection, when the Holy Spirit came upon and in all believers from that day forward. But it is a mystery now revealed to all saints, that is, to all followers of Christ. And specifically, it is a mystery among the Gentiles, who formerly were outcasts from being the chosen of God. Paul described the specificity of this mystery in Ephesians 3:6.

Ephesians 3:6 *To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

This would have been a mind-blowing revelation to Jews. Now in our Colossian passage, Paul mentions the mystery once again. He again references the mystery to being “among the Gentiles” but phrases the mystery in much more practical and applicable terms when he describes it as: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The “you” are the Colossian Christians, who were primarily Gentile. The “Christ in you” is referring to the Holy Spirit living in those believers, and all who have followed them until the present day, as a result of Pentecost. Christ is us and the Holy Spirit in us are considered as equivalent, since both are God.

You remember Jesus promised this to His disciples in the upper room, the night before He was crucified.

John 14:16-20 *I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world*

will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

So “Jesus in you” is the Spirit in them, the other “Helper” that Jesus promised, who would be the equivalent of Jesus in them – and in us. That this could actually happen – Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, living in the lives of every believer, and particularly in Gentile believers - is the “mystery of the ages.” And teaching this “mystery” now revealed, is the central teaching of Paul’s mission. And thus, it follows that it is “the most important truth that God wants believers to know.” And, it is the key element to why we are “complete in Christ.”

So what does “the hope of glory” mean? It is the hope we have when Christ lives in us. Let me give you a multiple choice of answers. Which do you think comes the closest to what it must mean?

- √ The hope of shining brightly
- √ The hope of being with the Lord in heaven
- √ The hope of displaying the nature and character of God
- √ The hope of being praised and thought of as something great

Certainly the last of the above is not it! And yes, with Christ in us we do have the blessed hope of being with the Lord in heaven someday. But I believe that the third is the closest to the Biblical meaning – that with Christ living in us we have the sure hope of displaying the nature and character of God to our world. After all, to “glorify” God is to reveal God. Anytime I suffer in any way for your sake, I am content to know that I am in a small way sharing in the suffering of Jesus that he experienced on behalf of the church.

I was commissioned by God to be a servant of this church body, with a unique gifting and responsibility, all for your benefit. Basically, my work among you is to proclaim and teach the word of God. Specifically, it is to reveal the truth that God mysteriously hid from His chosen people for so many ages, but now has made known uniquely to His church, which is now largely non-Jewish. This wondrous, glorious mystery is that Jesus lives in you, His people, in the person of the Holy Spirit. And His living in and through you is God’s blessed means by which you have the hope of revealing the glorious nature and character of God to others.

We continue to tell people about Jesus, challenging and teaching each one by God’s wisdom, with the goal that each one might grow to spiritual maturity, fully equipped for life through Christ. This is the goal for which I work and strive, strengthened by the inner power that Christ richly provides.

This would be impossible without Christ in us, but very possible with Christ in us. We need only to get ourselves out of the way, and God will be displayed in and through us! That, in my estimation is our “hope of glory” and the most important thing that God wants all believers to know! God wants His glory displayed through each of our lives!

OUR MINISTRY OF PRESENTING EVERYONE MATURE IN CHRIST

We are to endure suffering, teach God’s Word and display God’s glory in our lives – why? – that we might have a part in helping others to become mature in Christ. Yes, we are our “brother’s keeper.” Yes, my maturity is to be an inspiration to your maturity in Christ, just as your maturity is to be an inspiration to me. We are all to help one another to the “finish line” of life as mature and “complete” in Christ. What a high calling we all have as believers! It is NOT about us, but about HIM and OTHERS first.

In conclusion to our lesson, let me offer my humble translation/paraphrase of our passage. And note the final challenge of verse 29. It was Paul’s purpose of ministry, and should be ours.

Colossians 1:24-29 [CUV – Craig’s Unauthorized Version]

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