

The Mystery Hidden for Generations

Series: Seeing the Invisible

Colossians 1:24-29

OPEN: One of the greatest scientists was Albert Einstein. He was a man who was so focused on his scientific theories, he often neglected even the simplest things of life, such as personal appearance (as evidenced by his hair). One time, Albert Einstein was taking a train out of town for a speaking engagement. As he sat in his seat engrossed in his work, the conductor stopped by to punch his ticket. Looking up in shock, Einstein realized he didn't know what he had done with his ticket.

Frantically, he began to search his coat pockets, and then his briefcase. Gently, the conductor said, 'We all know who you are, Dr. Einstein. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.' But, as the conductor moved along, he looked back to see Einstein on his hands and knees searching under the seats for his ticket. The conductor walked back, 'Dr. Einstein, please, don't worry about it. I know who you are.' Exasperated, Einstein looked up and said, 'I, too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going.'

The Christians at Colossae had gotten to the point that they weren't sure where they were going either. False teachers had slipped into their midst and begun to tell them they weren't acceptable to God. Somebody was confusing them so much that they weren't even sure what was expected of them anymore. They had gotten to the point where they not only didn't know where they were going. They weren't even sure WHO they were.

Colossians 1:24-29; Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 27 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.

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I

strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.” [NIV]

Let's PRAY

ILLUSTRATION: Oliver Wendell Holmes, Senior, was a doctor. As such he was very interested in the use of ether. The only problem was - it was a mystery as to how ether affected the patient and often, they could not recall the experience when they came to. To know how his patients felt under its influence, he once had a dose administered to himself.

As he was going under, in a dreamy state, a profound thought came to him. He believed that he had suddenly grasped the key to all the mysteries of the universe. When he regained consciousness, however, he was unable to remember what the insight was.

Because of the great importance this thought would have on mankind, Holmes arranged to have himself given ether again. This time he had a stenographer present to take down the great thought. The ether was administered, and sure enough, just before passing out the insight reappeared. He mumbled the words, the stenographer wrote them down, and he went to sleep confident in the knowledge that he had succeeded.

Upon awakening, he turned eagerly to the stenographer and asked her to read what he had uttered. This is what she read: ***'The entire universe is permeated with a strong odor of turpentine.'***

There is nothing better than solving a good mystery. This is what Paul is doing in Col. 1: 24-27. The title of my message this morning is: **The Mystery Hidden for Generations**

Remember, Paul is sitting in a Roman prison writing a letter to a church he had never visited in person, full of believers he had never met. The Colossian church had been overwhelmed by a variety of heresies and Paul is writing to help them get back on track.

I mentioned as we began this study that **the book of Colossians gives us the most complete picture of the person and work of Christ anywhere in the NT.**

Paul has already explained the supremacy of Christ in creation, in the church, and in redemption and now he says God is taking a mystery hidden for ages and generations, and now making it fully known.

The Colossian Gnostics believed that they had access to a special hidden knowledge that could not be attained through the scriptures or the Gospel - it had to be conveyed by them. At the same time Jewish believers were saying they had to add to their faith in Jesus by following the Jewish laws and customs.

Paul says, ***26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery,***

The verse begins with the profound statement that ***"God chose to make known."*** This underscores the initiative of God in unveiling His grand plan to humanity. This choice to reveal the mystery was not limited to a select group but extended "among the Gentiles," emphasizing the inclusive nature of God's salvation, transcending cultural and ethnic boundaries.

I want to focus our attention on the substance of what Paul called a Mystery - the last 6 words - **Christ in you the hope of glory.**

So, note first,

1. The ESSENCE of the Mystery is Christ

The clues to this mystery began in the Garden of Eden, as Christ declares to the serpent - the day is coming where I will crush your head and in the process of defeating you, I will bruise my heel.

We see it even in the gracious covering God gave the disgraced first couple. The blood of a substitute (an animal) was shed in Eden for the first time so that the shame and disgrace of sinners might be covered.

Then we see God's wrath pour out on the world in the form of a flood - yet even then, there is an ark, and it's open to any who would enter by faith! Noah preached, pleaded and invited, yet only his family was saved.

The next clue is found in Ur of the Chaldees, modern day Iraq with a man named Abram. God tells Abram that he will give him a land he knew not of, and he would bless him, and through him all the world will be blessed. Does that mean the first JEW was an IRAQI. Think about that for a while.

Then that fateful day came when Abram was asked to do the impossible - sacrifice his only, beloved, miracle son Isaac. There upon the mount, Abram lifted his dagger preparing to thrust it into his son, believing that God would be able to raise him from the dead – but at the final moment God said, "stop - I will provide a sacrifice".

We find the next clue with Moses, as he leads God's people for 40 years in the wilderness on the way to the land of promise. During their sin and complaints, the people are attacked by venomous serpents. They are in the throes of death when God speaks to Moses and gives him a remedy. Form a brass serpent and place it on a staff, lift the staff high in the air and those who look to it by faith will be healed.

There in the wilderness God gives them a law to reveal who He is and to make a peculiar people on the earth. Knowing they would not be able to keep his law perfectly, God gave them a system of sacrifice - where through the shedding of blood could atone for their sins.

Then God gave them His presence in a large tent called, "the Tabernacle" which ultimately became the temple that Solomon built. And over the next 2,000 years God interacts with man through law, sacrifice, and His presence in the temple.

Then there are no clues for 600 years, complete silence from heaven, until there is a voice crying in the wilderness, "**make straight the way, clear the path**" it was the forerunner of the Messiah - John the Baptizer.

- God does not delight in keeping truth hidden from His children. By His Spirit He "has revealed it to us" (1 Corinthians 2:10).
- Revelation in Scripture moves from mystery to clarity, showing God's desire for relationship rather than obscurity (Matthew 16:17).

- The mystery is not merely information; it is a Person living within His people.

God's sovereign choice is the ultimate source of this revelation, ensuring that the Gospel reaches people based on His grace rather than human merit or works.

CHRIST IS THE ESSENCE OF THIS MYSTERY

Can you imagine Christianity without Christ? A church without Christ? Worship without Christ? I hope you can't, but the fact is - some would be perfectly happy to attend a church that does not point them to Christ.

ILLUSTRATION: Picture the parable of the prodigal son when he went home. Suppose when he reached the house, the elder brother, not his father, had come to meet him? "What are you doing here?" The Prodigal says - 'where's dad. I must tell him that I have sinned and done evil in his sight.'

A servant whispers, 'I am glad to see you back. Be happy, for all the servants are rejoiced to hear your voice. Your father has ordered the fatted calf to be killed for you. And here is the best robe, a ring, and shoes for your feet, and we are told to put them on you.'

I think I hear him say, 'I do not despise anything my father gives me, but what is all this unless I see his face, and know that he forgives me? There is no taste in the feast, no glitter in the ring, no fitness in the shoes, no beauty in the robe unless I can see my father and can be reconciled with him.'

IN THE SAME WAY - ALL OF THE BENEFITS OF CHRISTIANITY ARE NOTHING WITHOUT CHRIST HIMSELF! He is the cornerstone, He is the crown jewel, He is the essence of this mystery.

Colossians 1:27 unfolds a divine secret now fully disclosed: God sovereignly reveals to all believers—Jew and Gentile alike—the immeasurable wealth of having Christ Himself dwell within us.

But notice secondly,

2. The EXPERIENCE of the Mystery is "Christ in You"

Paul is saying that the essence of Christ is far greater to us when we experience it personally, internally. When we invite Jesus into our hearts and allow His spirit to dwell in us, we are connected to a source of eternal hope and divine purpose.

ILLUSTRATION: I'm not a fisherman, but I know that fish in the lake can fill your mind with imagination, but fish in the boat can eventually fill your stomach with satisfaction.

- It is good to learn of Christ
 - It is good to worship Christ
 - It is good think of the Christ of history.
- But better than all that is Christ IN YOU.

Having Christ live in you signifies a closeness and intimacy with Him that empowers you to bear fruits of righteousness, exhibit love, and experience inner peace and joy that surpasses all understanding. It is a life marked by dependency on Him, as you allow Christ to guide your thoughts, words, and actions, leading to a life that brings glory to God.

It is then that the shadow becomes substance. Is Christ in you? I don't mean the information about Christ, but I mean Christ himself.

GOD wants to take you - your temperament, your talent, your personality, and fill every part of you with Christ.

Paul said it this way in Galatians 2:20 (ESV); ***'I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'***

When a man or woman realize the reality of their sin, and in repentance looks to the person and work of Christ for remedy. At that moment Christ comes, in the person of the Holy Spirit, to dwell in that man or woman.

Our true identity becomes grounded in Christ, who lives within us rather than in human tradition. The message of this passage shifts the focus from hidden wisdom to a manifested secret that has been revealed to us by God. By describing Christ as the hope of glory, Paul clarifies that the riches of God's grace are not

earned through personal effort or works but are a sovereign gift of God.

Personal relationship with Jesus replaces the need for secret knowledge, countering philosophies, or external rituals.

The essence of the mystery Christ.

The experience of the mystery - Christ in you.

Thirdly,

3. The EXPECTATION of the Mystery - "Christ in you, the hope of Glory"

Imagine Christ as your guiding compass in the hustle of work and the warmth of family. Recognize that His spirit lives within you, lighting your path. Let this awareness transform your daily grind, making every gesture a reflection of His love. Consider how your actions, from the classroom or workplace to the dinner table, can mirror His presence.

This is perhaps the most amazing aspect of the mystery. It speaks of Glory - but not the glory of God exalted in the heavens. **It's glory that is a hope for you.**

Hope biblically speaking is not something of which we say, well I hope it will happen.' NO! **Biblical hope is a present confidence of a future experience, not wishful thinking.** It rests on Christ's resurrection and promised return (Titus 2:13).

- Glory points ahead to the believer's ultimate perfection and presence with God (Romans 5:2; 1 Peter 5:1).
- Because Christ is already within, future glory is certain; the down payment guarantees the inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14).

This verse invites us to consider the profound impact of our faith and the assurance that we are never alone, for Christ is with us, offering us hope and the promise of a glorious future.

"The riches of the glory of this mystery" allude to the immeasurable value and splendor of the unveiled truth. It is a treasure beyond compare, accessible to all who seek to understand. **"Christ in you, the hope of glory," captures the central theme that Christ's indwelling presence within believers is the anchor of their**

hope for future glory and redemption.

For Christ to live in believers signifies a deep spiritual union with Christ where He dwells in our hearts through faith. This indwelling presence of Christ brings about a transformation.

Think about how our daily life's challenges can be navigated in a meaningful way, because our strength comes from a living, indwelling Savior.

Ultimately, this passage stands as a powerful reminder that the mystery of faith is neither hidden nor distant, but present within the life of every believer.

In John 17:22 (ESV) Jesus says ***'The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one...'***

Christ comes to give, never to take.

ILLUSTRATION: I've read that there is a garbage dump in Honduras. It is perhaps the closest thing to hell on earth. People fight over garbage with vultures. Hundreds of people live across heaps of trash. But occasionally vans, and trucks filled with coolers drive onto the scene. Little kids begin to yell, 'The gringos are coming, the gringos are coming!' A line forms at the back of one of the trucks, because they have learned from experience that when the gringos come in their vans and trucks, they aren't coming to get from them but to give to them. And you see on their faces - HOPE.

When Christ comes to dwell in a person's heart by faith - he came to give! He gives grace...He gives forgiveness...He gives love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness...If Christ is in you - you will experience His glory.

Closing: This verse serves as a central point in Paul's letter to the Colossian church, emphasizing that the essence of Christian faith is not found in external rituals, but in a deep, personal relationship with Jesus.

So, you and I are the beneficiaries of a wonderful mystery that was hidden for

millennia that is now not only revealed but experienced. Christ has taken residence in those of you who know him by faith, and that residency has produced a marvelous hope that the same glory he has experienced you will experience for eternity.

Abundant grace is the primary message conveyed by the phrase "riches of the glory," representing the spiritual inheritance given to those who accept Christ.

You see, the mystery wasn't just that God would accept the Gentiles

The mystery wasn't just that God had changed the rules so that circumcision and Jewish tradition was no longer a vital part of His covenant with His people.

The mystery was this: That God would let anybody be acceptable to Him.

The mystery was that God would allow those who had been His enemies to now be called His friends.

The mystery was that God would accept anyone, and everyone, and allow us to become His children.

Paul says to the church in Corinth in I Corinthians 6:9-10, ***"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God"***

These people have no right to get into heaven, but that's the mystery. They can now get into heaven. Paul continues telling them in the next verse ***'that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.'*** [1Cor 6:11]

And Paul tells the Colossian Christians the same thing in verse 21 of this first chapter: ***ONCE you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*** Colossians 1:21

What did they DO to be acceptable to God? What acts or sacrifices were sufficient to make God change His mind and forgive them? The answer: NOTHING! They

could do nothing to make God change His mind.

Then, what changed God's mind. What made them acceptable to God. What changed them from being enemies to being His children?

Look again at Colossians 1:21-22; ***"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-"***

Note...nothing you have done has merited your salvation. Neither your faith, nor your repentance, nor confessing Him as Lord, nor your baptism - none of that has EARNED you a place in heaven.

Those things are how we respond to God's gift, but those responses didn't do one single thing to "purchase" your salvation. It is Christ's death and resurrection that gives you your salvation

AND He is the only one who will ever get you into God's presence, BECAUSE, He is the only one who has died to take your place. He is the only one who has shed His blood so that your sins could be removed.

Don't let anybody rob you of your faith and your hope by getting you to accept the lie that your salvation must somehow be earned. If Jesus' death on the cross for you isn't enough for you - then nothing will be.

That's why Paul continues, ***"he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation - if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel."*** Colossians 1:22-23

In other words, you will only be without blemish in His presence. You will only be free from the guilt and accusation of your past sins by Christ finished work.

IF you continue in your faith

IF you are firm in your belief

IF you refuse to be moved from the hope that's yours in Christ.

STORY: I read this account of a bible school student's experience in his youth ministry class. He says, "I left work early so I could have some uninterrupted study time right before the final of my final exam.

When I got to class, everybody was doing their last-minute studying. The teacher came in and said he would review with us for just a little bit before the test. We went through the review, most of it on the study guide, but there were some things he was reviewing that I had never heard of. When questioned about it, he said that they were in the book and we were responsible for everything in the book. We couldn't really argue about that.

Finally, it was time to take the test. The professor passed out the exam with these instructions: '**Leave them face down on the desk until everyone has one and I'll tell you to start.**' When he gave the order, we turned them over, and every answer on the test was filled in! At the bottom of the last page, we read the following words:"

'This is the end of the Final Exam. All the answers on your test are correct. You will receive an 'A' on the final exam. The reason you passed the test is because the creator of the test took it for you. All the work you did to prepare for this test didn't help you get an A. You have just experienced grace.'

He then went around the room and asked each student individually, 'What is your grade? Do you deserve the grade you are receiving? How much did all your studying for this exam help you achieve your final grade?'

Discussion afterward went like this: 'I have tried to teach you all semester that you are a recipient of grace. I've tried to communicate to you that you need to demonstrate this gift as you work with young people.

Don't hammer them; they are not the enemy. Help them, and they will carry on with the ministry if it is full of GRACE!"

Conclusion: Very often life seems like a Mystery we just can't solve, a game we just can't win - but Christ stands above life and he exclaims to all of us the only

winning move we can possibly make is to place our lives in His hands.

Some of you today have drifted from Christ, some of you are failing to appropriate by faith the indwelling presence of Christ, living in disobedience, as such your life isn't experiencing much glory. It's a drudgery, something you must do, rather than something you get to do.

Don't be fooled into believing that there is something else that can make you acceptable to God. There is no other way to be saved - Jesus' death, burial and resurrection is it!!!

Paul is telling the Colossians (and us) Accept it! Believe it! Live like it!