

Mystery Revealed

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[0 : 00] Now, if you've ever been to morning church or been to church where the kids ministry, then you'd probably be familiar with this scene. The kids minister, let's say Jeff or Michelle, is up the front doing the kids talk.

Things are going well when Jeff or Michelle asks a question. And then you look at the children's faces and you realize that no one knows the answer. Now, everyone's looking around to see who will actually answer the question.

And then suddenly, up shoots Johnny's hand. He'll have a go. Now, can anyone guess what his answer might be?

Yes. It's obviously not Johnny, but Andrew that was there. Yes, Jesus, because that's what his parents taught him. So, when in doubt, Jesus is the answer to every question in life.

Well, is Johnny right? Is Jesus really the answer to every question? And if so, what are the questions anyway? Well, over the last two Sundays, that's what Paul seems to be saying.

[1 : 08] He's proclaimed the gospel about Jesus, saying how it's been spreading through the world. He's claimed that Jesus is the hope of the world and that he's supreme over all creation.

And now, Paul goes on to reveal to the Colossians that Jesus is also the answer to the questions the Jews have been asking, given what's been contained or written in the Old Testament.

So, in our passage today, Paul talks of a mystery. Let's listen along as Paul writes in verse 24. Twice more, Paul will use this word mystery.

Each time, Paul says the mystery is now revealed to be Christ, meaning the Messiah, the Chosen One.

And we know that he's now the Christ because of what the apostles have recorded for us in the New Testament. Thus, on the slide, Augustine said that the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed.

[2 : 34] And the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed. The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed. The Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.

And if you want to understand the Bible, this is actually an important insight to keep in mind as you read. Because in the Old Testament, God gave promises and shadows of what will happen.

And these are finally disclosed in the New Testament. They're like two halves of the puzzle. And Paul, as a Pharisee, would have known all this.

He would have studied the Scriptures diligently. That is, the Old Testament. And so, when finally Christ is revealed to him, he's super excited.

At last, all the mysteries in the Old Testament now make sense. And one such mystery is the prophecy of Daniel. You see, this word mystery, which Paul uses in Colossians, is also used in Daniel chapter 2, which we read tonight.

[3 : 39] And actually, only in Daniel chapter 2, in the entire Old Testament. Five times, which I put on the slide, that word is used.

So, Daniel chapter 2, verse 18 and 19. Daniel urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

During the night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. And then, if you jump to verse 30. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that your majesty may know the interpretation, and that you may understand what went through your mind.

And then, finally, in verse 47, after the dream was interpreted, the king said to Daniel, Surely your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of lords, and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.

And so, while Christ, of course, fulfills all of the Old Testament, I think Paul has the prophecy of Daniel in mind, in the back of his mind, as he's writing to the Colossians.

[4 : 49] That's why, actually, we have many words and ideas in Colossians that bear a striking resemblance to what's in Daniel. We don't have time to cover all of that today, but I've given you an extra handout for today, with some more of them written on it.

Words like God's holy people, which I'll get to in a while, mystery, and the references to powers, rulers, kingdoms in heaven and on earth, all have a corresponding treatment in Daniel.

So I encourage you to take it home, read Daniel and Colossians together in tandem, and see how this sort of unfolds. But in Daniel chapter 2, although we didn't read it, the dream in question was of a rock coming from heaven, which crushed all the other kingdoms.

This rock then becomes a mountain and fills the whole earth. And so for hundreds of years, the Jews would have been wondering how this would have been fulfilled. Well, Paul says that this is now fulfilled in Christ and in His kingdom, and is now revealed to us in the gospel.

Furthermore, the Son in Colossians 1, which we saw last week, also fulfills the Son of Man, the vision of the Son of Man in Daniel chapter 7. That's why Paul uses language about dominion over rulers and authorities in heaven and on earth here in Colossians, because it is an allusion back to Daniel, and in particular to Daniel chapter 7.

[6 : 21] And there's also another detail in Daniel 7, which helps us to understand Colossians. And this is the reference to the suffering of God's holy people. So for example, in Daniel chapter 7 and verse 21, Paul says that God's holy people, or rather Daniel says that Paul's, Daniel says that God's holy people will suffer.

So he says, As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people, of the Most High.

And the time came when they possessed the kingdom. And if you read through Colossians, you will notice that Paul's frequent use of this same phrase, God's holy people, he uses it to describe Christians.

So chapter 1, verse 2, he does that. Chapter 1, verse 12, he does the same. And he does the same with verse 4 as well, and verse 26 of chapter 1. The NIV translates it as God's people and the Lord's people, respectively.

But actually, it's the same word. God's holy ones, or the holy ones. In other words, Paul is describing the fulfillment of Daniel 7 to the Colossians.

[7 : 40] And in particular, he sees any suffering that is happening and which he is enduring as part of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

As the gospel is preached and there is suffering, it brings to pass Daniel chapter 7. It's a bit like what doctors sometimes call healing pain.

Have you ever heard of that? Even some of the doctors might not have heard of that. It's pain that accompanies the body when it heals. Sometimes it's a dull ache around the wound or internally after you've had the surgery.

And doctors often say it's a good sign. It actually shows that the body is healing. Likewise, Paul sees his suffering and the suffering of the church as almost like a healing pain to show that God's prophecy is actually being fulfilled.

As God's kingdom grows, persecution, affliction is the healing pain. And that is why Paul rejoices at his own suffering. Not because he's sadistic, but because he sees that in his suffering, God is bringing his plan of salvation to pass, the gospel proclamation to pass.

[8 : 56] Now for Paul though, I think his suffering is even more significant than that because at his conversion, God had told him by Ananias that he would suffer for the gospel.

So in Acts chapter 9 and verse 15, the Lord said to Ananias, Go, this man that is Paul is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. And so for Paul, his suffering is unique in that he is the apostle to the Gentiles.

He's the one that suffers for the sake of the gospel going to them. In verse 25, he calls it the commission that God gave him. So you see, Christ's death was enough for the atonement of the whole world.

Paul's not adding to that. Okay? So don't mistake that Paul still needs to do more in order for people to be saved. No, that's not true. But as far as Christ's earthly ministry was concerned, the gospel, according to God's plan, was only preached to the Jews.

[10 : 03] Jesus didn't go to the Gentiles. Instead, Christ is now completing his mission of proclamation to the Gentiles through Paul's ministry.

And so that's what Paul means when he says he's filling up in his flesh what is still lacking in regards to Christ's affliction. It's the afflictions that go with preaching to the Gentiles, which Christ didn't do in the flesh because that was not part of God's plan.

So it doesn't mean, as some people think, that Christ's affliction was somehow deficient and Paul has to add to it for people to be saved. Rather, the suffering and affliction is the lot of God's holy people that was prophesied in Daniel 7 that God said would occur as part of the growing of the kingdom of God.

And so, even though this particular verse doesn't refer to us specifically but just to Paul, the same principle still applies to us. That is, wherever there is gospel proclamation, we should expect there to be affliction.

It's not going to be easy when we proclaim the gospel because we're asking people to repent. We're asking people to say that they are wrong, they're sinful, that they need to swallow their pride and turn to God.

[11 : 26] And all this while the heavenly and earthly authorities as was said in Daniel 7 are arrayed against us. So friends, when we see persecution, whether in our own lives or in, for example, places like China, we should not be discouraged.

If we want to serve the Lord, and I hope and pray that you do, because we're involved in God's mighty plan of salvation, then we should expect affliction.

That should be our norm, as it were, not the exception. In fact, as Paul does, we ought to rejoice in it because these are healing pains, as it were.

These are things that show that actually God's plan is at work. It's being fulfilled. Now, Paul rejoices not just for his suffering, but I think also because of the great blessing that will come.

For he sees how in the gospel the Gentiles are now also included as God's holy people. And that's point two. So in verse 26, as I continue, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations is now disclosed to the Lord's people or the holy people.

[12 : 46] To them, God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, that is the Colossians who are largely Gentile, the hope of glory.

Paul is excited for them because the Gentiles now have an answer to their own questions, to their own longing for hope of glory. You see, like the Jews, the Gentiles were also searching for meaning in life.

If you look at all the major religions around today, you know, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, at the heart of them, it's all really about the search for hope, isn't it?

Even in the Western world, when more and more people are turning to secularism or being atheists, there is still a longing for answers to life's questions. Just look at all the self-help books in the bookstores.

Look at what are on the blogs of the so-called influencers or the angst over climate change or social justice. They all come from a very deep dissatisfaction with simply the material things in life.

[13 : 55] They're all looking for something more, aren't they? Something deeper. And Paul says to the Colossians and to all of us, you can find that in Christ.

Yes, this Jewish Messiah is also the Savior of the world. And such is Paul's excitement that he's driven by passion when he now articulates this more in verse 28.

So let's keep going. He, that is Christ, is the one we proclaim, Paul says, admonishing and teaching everyone that is Jew and Gentile with all wisdom that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

to this end, I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how hard I'm contending for you and for those at Laodicea, which is a nearby city to the Colossians, and for all who have not met me personally.

Now, I don't mean to be demeaning to Paul, but he reminds me of the passion of a candidate and a federal election. You know the one, he's tirelessly door-knocking every household.

[15 : 05] Every morning at the first train, he's at the train station handing out leaflets. He's standing on street corners talking to local residents. Anything to try and get his message out to the community.

If Facebook or Twitter was a thing in Paul's day, I'm sure Paul would have used it because he says that he wants to contend even for those he's not met personally. He wants everyone to know Christ, doesn't he?

To put their faith in Him and to ultimately be mature in Christ. For Paul, he just doesn't want us through Christ's death to be presented holy and blameless, which is what we saw last week.

He now also wants God's people to be presented mature in Christ as well. Not just blameless, but maturing and growing in Christ.

And so Paul puts it another way in verse 2. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[16 : 19] I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Having answered the mystery for the Jews and the longings of the Gentiles, Paul now wants them to mature because thirdly, Jesus is also the answer for every question, for every Christian as to what he or she is to do with their life as a Christian.

And the answer to that question is that they are to mature in Christ, not just individually but as part of Christ's body as well, which is why he talks about being united in love.

Paul wants them to grow in wisdom and knowledge and understanding and incidentally all these words are used of God's people as well in Daniel because that's how they mature in Christ.

It's not just by being a Christian for a long time that you mature. No, it's by growing in wisdom and knowledge and understanding. And they do that so that they will not be deceived by fine sounding but ultimately false arguments which will rob them of the hope of glory.

[17 : 40] And so that's why in proclaiming Christ, Paul also admonishes them, that is, corrects them, teaches them with all God's energy in him. Now friends, I don't want you to be mistaken when Paul talks of the mystery of God.

It's not like there's still some secret hidden from you that you need to unearth that by meditation or some other spiritual means you're going to attain a higher experience.

No, when Paul talks about the secrets of the mystery of Christ, it's already been revealed when Christ was revealed. Paul talks about presenting the word of God in its fullness, verse 25, that is, presenting the gospel.

He talks about wanting us to know the hidden treasure of wisdom and knowledge, verse 3, but that is to actually simply be unpacking and unfolding what it means to live in the light of the gospel.

The coming of Jesus has brought everything to light. There's nothing hidden anymore as it were, more than what's already been revealed in God's word. Instead, to grow in wisdom and knowledge means we need to allow the gospel to keep shaping and informing our lives more and more and more until it covers every aspect of our lives.

[19 : 04] Another way of thinking about it is that the gospel is all we need because it's the gift that keeps giving. You see, when you first became a Christian, probably, all you realized was that Jesus died for your sin, you're forgiven and you're going to heaven.

Hooray! And that's great. You became a Christian because of that. You probably weren't thinking, oh, if I became a Christian, that's actually a fulfillment of all these Old Testament prophecies for me.

This is part of all God's cosmic plan for salvation. You just wanted peace and joy in your life. And that's okay. But then, as you read more of the Bible, God's plan for creation and the significance of the gospel become clearer to you, doesn't it?

You see how the gospel answers many of the problems in life, many of the problems in this world. You understand a bit better the purpose of suffering, why there's still evil, but God is sovereign, and how God's going to deal with it in the cross, through the gospel.

You see, through the gospel, how all things will be renewed and restored in the new creation. creation. And then, as you live with others in church, you learn through the gospel how to relate to each other, don't you?

[20 : 23] You know that because of what Jesus did, laying down his life for you, that's the gospel, that you too are to lay down your life for others.

The gospel becomes the pattern for your life as well, for your marriage if you're married, for you as parents if your parents of children. And so, in this and many other aspects of life, it's the gospel that starts shaping our response to everything that we do.

It's also the same when we have ethical questions in life. So, if you think about things like abortion or euthanasia, the gospel is the thing that teaches us what to do, what's right and what's wrong.

It shows us how God looks at life, how God redeems life. And so, do you see, Johnny was right, wasn't he?

Or Andrew? Jesus is the answer to every question. But not in the superficial way that four-year-old Johnny might think, but in a more profound way. And that should be our goal as Christians as well.

[21 : 30] You know, I think there's sometimes a tendency that we think, okay, we've got a problem, we should pray, yes, we do, and that's the right thing to do. You know, when we're afraid or anxious, we pray, and then we expect that, okay, the way God is going to answer it is to come to our aid in some supernatural way, you know, bring some unexplained peace into our life or intervene unexpectedly.

Now, God can and often does work that way. But part of God's Spirit's way of working actually is to help us to grow in wisdom and understanding as well.

That is to give us answers to the questions and fears and anxieties that we have. That as our knowledge of the gospel increases, we begin to understand what God is doing in every and any situation.

We may not always get the answer straight away, but having that perspective helps us to look at our life in that way. And so, friends, it's actually important to keep growing, isn't it, in the knowledge of God's word.

No matter how long we've been Christians for, we need to keep digging deeper and deeper in the treasures of the gospel because it's got everything we need and more to live our life.

[22 : 45] Now, I know it doesn't sound very spectacular, you know, you want to pray and then God give you that direct answer, but no, faithfully studying and applying God's word to gain in wisdom, to gain the treasures of Christ, that's how God does his work.

Christ is all that we need. The gospel is all that we need. God's word is all that we need. He's not just, Christ is not just all supreme as we saw last week, he's all sufficient as well.

And when he's all sufficient, that means we don't look elsewhere to find answers to life. Now, it's a bit like being invited to this lavish feast, a bit like this on the screen, all you can eat in the world.

And you know, it's got every dish imaginable from every cuisine in the world. Now, if this was the place you were going to, would you then go out and bring an entree to this?

Or bring your own dessert? Because you don't think that's enough and you need something else? You wouldn't, wouldn't you? You'd just go and you'd feast and just eat from there, go empty handed, and leave too full.

[24 : 04] And that's the same with Jesus and the gospel. If you do anything else, you're actually diluting what Jesus has to offer. No, what we need to do is to keep coming back to Christ, to His Word, to keep feasting on it and be totally satisfied from Him because He's all sufficient.

in Christ, the mystery has been revealed. We don't need anything else. We just need to come and dig deeper and deeper into the treasure that is Jesus.

Let me pray for us to keep doing that. Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus. Not only is He all supreme, He's also all sufficient. Please continue to admonish and teach us so that we may be presented fully mature in Christ.

Help us to proclaim the good news of Jesus to all, whether Jew or Gentile, so that they may find their hope of glory and the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Jesus Christ.

Help us as we serve to endure suffering so that Your gospel plan may be fulfilled in all of us. Help us indeed to rejoice, for we see that Your purposes are coming to pass.

[25 : 24] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Laughter Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.