



**Col. 1:24-29**

***The Answer to the Mystery***

**24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,**

**25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,**

**26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.**

**27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

**28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.**

**29 To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.**

Last week we specifically looked at Paul's words in verse 24, but this week I want to look at verses 25 through 27, and talk about what the "mystery" is that Paul speaks of in verse 27.

When Paul sent this letter to the Colossian church he gave specific instructions in 4:16 that it be read in their worship assembly and then sent on up the road to the nearby city of Laodicea to be read in their worship. This helps us to realize that the writings of the Apostles were recognized as scripture. Peter for instance mentions the letters of Paul in 2 Peter 3:16 saying noting that in them "are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." So I hope you can imagine the eagerness with which the Colossians received these letters and the scene when they were read for the first time ever in worship.

But I imagine that when the minister reached verse 26 and used the word "mystery" many of the listeners suddenly leaned forward, mystery (or *mysterion* in the Greek) was a word that they would have been familiar with. In Greek society it usually referred to secret teachings and ceremonies that were hidden from ordinary people but revealed to exclusive groups. By the end of the first century Greek and Roman culture had many *mystery religions*. These religions claimed they had access to the hidden secrets of the universe and that they could reveal them only to the initiated. You had to learn the passwords, and the handshake, and go through the initiation ceremony, and of course pay your dues, and then gradually you could progress in this secret knowledge from initiate to master.

The false teachers in the Colossian church were following that approach themselves. They came in and told the Christians that they had access to secrets that their minister Epaphras and the Apostle Paul, just didn't have. They weren't initiated, they didn't know how to access the power of Angels, or what special days to observe, or what things should and shouldn't be touched. If they had known, they'd be teaching about them. But they didn't, and that showed they weren't enlightened. And if he didn't know this stuff Paul couldn't really be an Apostle.

So when Paul mentioned "Mystery" many no doubt were thinking, "ah finally the Apostle Paul is going to teach us HIS secret teaching." And he says this is a mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages, and has now been revealed, and that because of it, the saints, that is the hagioi the set-apart ones, the holy ones of God, those called out of the world and joined to Christ, are going to inherit the riches of God's glory!

**What is the answer to the mystery?** Is it an angelic language, a secret diet, a second blessing, the number 42? Should we lock the doors? Cover the windows? Surely we don't want everyone to know, so they all lean in. And here is the mystery, the key to eternal life and God's riches, the answer to life, the universe, and everything: **Christ in you, the hope of glory!**

Wait a minute! But that's what Epaphras has been teaching us from the very beginning! There has to be something else, something about Angels, right? *NO!*

The real mystery of the gospel is incomparably greater than all this angels and works stuff – it is Emmanuel, God with us. Not just Christ briefly tabernacling with His people during his earthly ministry, but indwelling them remaining with them throughout the ages.

I mean think about this, after his Creation Man had perfect communion with God in the Garden of Eden, there was nothing to separate them. But then Adam and Eve had rebelled against God and that communion was broken, now all their descendants were fallen and sinful. How would they be restored to fellowship with God. Well God had told them right after the Fall in Genesis 3:15 that it would be via the Seed of the Woman. He was raise up a redeemer to Save His People. And then the process of God's redemption had moved forward. HE had set apart a people for Himself, the Jews, and had brought them into Egypt and made them into a nation, and then by His mighty Right Hand he had lead them out and He gave them his Revelation at Sinai through Moses, and he had lead them into the promised land. They had seen the sign that God was with them via the Pillar of Smoke during the day and the Pillar of Fire amongst us. Later when He had settled them in the promised land His presence would be noted again by the Glory Cloud Descending upon and filling the Temple.

His people had sinned again and again, and they had been sent into exile, but He had restored them and brought them back and restored the Temple worship, and the bloody sacrifices that pointed forward to the sin atoning work that the Redeemer would do. But what about the Redeemer? And what about the

Gentiles? They didn't have his word, they hadn't had any sign of God's presence in their midst. Oh some of them had been united to His people, but for centuries if you had been born anywhere on earth apart from Israel, it was almost assured that you wouldn't worship the True God, you'd remain in darkness, and worship **"images made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."**

How could they be saved? It was a mystery. Then the answer came, in a way that not even the angels were expecting. As Paul write in *Gal. 4:4* ***But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,***

***5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.***

***6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"***

***7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.***

Jesus the Eternal Son of God, took on our nature, and suffered and died on the cross, and now through Faith in Him, the Gentiles were being saved. This is the Gospel, and as Paul wrote to the Romans.

***Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.***

***17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."***

Who would have thought it, not only Jesus, the lamb of God, whose sacrifice takes away our sins, being preached to the Gentiles who were once far off and strangers from the people of God. But also God with us. Jesus, the Son of God, dwelling in them and sanctifying them conforming them to His own Glorious image. And never leaving them, giving them assurance and hope of eternal life. ***Matthew 28:20 "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."***

But how could that happen, how could Christ be in them? The answer is through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the Hearts of Believers! That too was the fulfillment of what God had promised:

***Ezek. 36: 25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.***

***26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.***

***27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.***

And Paul said, to be given the gift of the Holy Spirit was to Have Put on Christ, to Have Christ in YOU.

***Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.***

***Romans 8:10 And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.***

***11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.***

If you have Christ in You, says Paul, you already have everything you need. That's why I'm not going to peddle silly superstitions about angels and food like the false teachers as if you needed anything else. Don't you see? The true gospel that Epaphras preached and you believed is so much better than the mystery religions they are not even worthy to be compared with it!

I was reminded of that yesterday morning. The doorbell rang and there were Shirley and Sondra, who represented an organization they believed to be the sole guardians of God's revelation. They were members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a group founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a bible study leader named Charles Taze Russell. Russell claimed that he had discovered that the Christian churches had all become corrupt, Russell taught that doctrines like the Deity of Jesus and the existence of the Trinity, were false he taught that there was no Hell, that salvation was not by faith alone, and that there would be no salvation for anybody outside of his own Watchtower Organization. He taught that Jesus had invisibly returned in 1874 and would bring the world to an end in 1914 at which time he and his followers would be vindicated. Therefore they must be careful not to read the writings of Christians or even the bible by itself, but must read only the materials the Watchtower society printed in Brooklyn. Needless to say it didn't happen, but no matter, the Watchtower came up with explanations and chugged on.

And so 131 years after the founding of the Watchtower, here were these well-meaning ladies telling me that Jesus is the archangel Michael, that He was not God the Son, that the Holy Spirit is an active force, not a person, that he doesn't indwell people. You can't have God's Spirit dwelling in you, You can't have Christ in you, I was told, you can't put him on like a garment. Also, since only 144,000 JW's were going to go to heaven and the witnesses had already filled up that number by the 1930s, I couldn't be born again, observe the Lord's Supper go to heaven, but if I believed what they said, I could be resurrected on a new earth that would be ruled by the 144,000 after the end of the present world.

This I was told by Shirley and Sondra was the real secret truth, and I must turn away from these crazy ideas that I was born again, that I had Christ in me, that I was being conformed to his image, and that because of that I was looking forward to being with Him in heaven when I died. No glory, no riches. Instead, I had to sign up for their works based program and read their books and deny that the Son of God had come in the flesh.

I can't tell you how much I pitied them. And I tried to show them the so much better news of the gospel. But they kept coming back to their mystery religion. And I kept thinking "*That's it, that's all you have to offer? This pitiful antichrist message?*" Antichrist? That's harsh isn't it? No. That's the Apostle John:

***1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,***

***3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.***

Know these three things then:

**First:** When people tell you that you need something else other than Christ in You to be saved, or that they tell that the gospel is much less than this Christ in You, you know that you have a false Gospel and you need to flee from it!:

***"In these words, then, the Apostle marks the distinction between his doctrine and that of false Apostles. They were joining angels with Christ, and the works of the law with faith, in the business of salvation : but Paul was teaching that Christ alone was competent to fulfil every part of the office of a Mediator and Redeemer; and that faith in Christ, not obedience to the law of Moses, procured our salvation. The doctrine, therefore, of this passage is this; That they only preach Christ aright and as they ought to do, who teach that all hope of salvation for mankind is laid up in him alone, and who acknowledge that we receive the riches of divine grace through him alone."*** – Davenant

**Second:** Christians we are prone to doubt prone to worry, but remember if you have Christ in you you have a sure Hope and *eschatological* hope, a hope utterly different from the world:

1 Thess. 4:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

**Third:** How can you know you have Christ in you? By the way in which you are being conformed to His glorious image. Because If you have Christ in you, then it is his desire "to present you holy, and

blameless, and above reproach in His sight” (Col 1:22) You have that new spirit, those new desires. And what an indescribable privilege that is!

Robert Murray McCheyne put it this way - *“For this Jesus died; for this He chose you; for this He converted you, to make you holy men—living epistles of Christ—monuments of what God can do in a sinner’s heart. You know what true holiness is. It is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Let Him dwell in you, and so all His features will shine in your hearts and faces. Oh, to be like Jesus! This is heaven, wherever it be. I think I could be happy among devils, if only the old man were slain in me, and I was made altogether like Jesus! But, blessed be God, we shall not be called to such a trial, for we shall not only be like Jesus, but be with Him to behold His glory.”*