Revealing the Hidden Mystery

Colossians 1:24-29

I. Context.

A. The world is a mess and has been since Genesis 3.

1. All men and women have been disfellowshipped from God.

2. All creation is out of sorts with the "Almighty".

B. God's ultimate plan for the universe is to reconcile it to Himself.

C. Review (For context)—Colossians 1:15-18.

1. Jesus is the perfect image of God, the exact, manifestation of God--- God Himself.

2. Creator of all things.

3. The One over all things

4. The pre-existent One…He never began He aways has been

5. The One who holds all things together--- the sustainer of the universe.

6. The head of the body—the church

7. Firstborn of the dead—First to die then live, never to die again, everlasting life!

D. Jesus is the great "reconciler" (1:20-22).

1. Make us holy.

2. Make us blameless.

3. Make us beyond reproach.

E. Context helps us understand why Paul proceeds in verses 23-29.

1. His is a proper response for one who embraces the magnitude of who Jesus is and what He has done, does and will do.

2. It helps explain to the Colossian church who Paul is.

II. Six considerations for a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A. Paul was "made" a minister.

1. What is a "minister"?—Diakonos.

2. Paul was “appointed by God”—He did not choose to be a minister.

    a. The road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-15).

B. Ministry involves suffering (1:24-25).

1. Christians WILL have tribulation (John 16:33).

2. Paul’s life after salvation—2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

3. *You rejoice in suffering when what you gain through suffering is greater than what you are giving up through suffering.*

4. “I fill up what is lacking of Christ’s afflictions in my flesh…”

    a. Not speaking of Christ being incomplete in His atonement for our sins.

    b. Speaking about the afflictions the believer receives because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

When you/we suffer for Christ… that affliction was intended for Him!

C. Ministry is a stewardship (1:25).

1. Stewardship—taking care of someone else’s property or possessions.

2. We are stewards of God’s word (His possession).

D. The subject of ministry (1:25-26).

1. “The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages which has now been made known.”

    a. Past ages = Old Testament.

    b. Now = New Testament revelation.

2. This mystery—"Christ in you”. (1:27)

    a. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ resides in all believers.

E. Ministry is proclamation (1:28).

1. Admonishing—correction.

2. Teaching—Delivering God’s absolute truth—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

F. The goal of ministry—Paul’s “Great Commission” (1:28-29).

1. “So that we may present every man complete in Christ…”.

Revealing the Hidden Mystery

Colossians 1:24-29

Please turn to Colossians chapter 1 and put your finger there.

This week I did something wonderful… I turned off my phone for 24 hours… which means I didn't talk *anyone*…I also didn't turn on the TV and only used my computer for word processing… which means for 24 hours I was disconnected from the world… no news…no commentary… no podcasts, no YouTube, absolutely no social media.

Why is that so wonderful?...I didn't hear anything negative… for 24 hours I didn't hear anything about how messed up the world is…I didn't hear anything about how wretched the other party is…or anything about the wars and conflicts going on all over the world…. Or the rising diesel prices…

It was wonderful… I thought *maybe if I just kept all electronic devices off… the world would be a better place…* that's ignorant… turning off our devices does not change the fact that the world is a mess!...the world IS broken and has been from the beginning… Genesis 1.

God created the world and **it was good**…that was chapter 1…In chapter 2 He created man and woman and they were good… they were in complete wonderful fellowship with their creator God… only a chapters later… it is all messed up…Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— but not just to all men,… **all of creation was marred.**

Adam's sin didn't just affect the entire human race… removing man from fellowship with God…it affected ALL of creation… Sin destroyed the perfect harmony between ALL of creation and the creator!

Man has fallen… all the earth is fallen… all creation is fallen… All things are "out of sorts" with the Almighty!... But God has a plan… **His ultimate plan for the universe is to reconcile it to Himself…**

Reconcile—to restore fellowship… to "*cause to make harmony*"… to reconcile is to bring back together two parties who WERE in fellowship with each other…but something happened to break that fellowship… Christian reconciliation is the work of God through Christ by which He restores mankind to a favorable relationship with Himself….but again… not just man… but the entire universe.

GOD'S ULTIMATE PLAN FOR THE UNIVERSE IS TO RECONCILE ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF…hold that thought:

Last week we looked at what is arguably the greatest passage in the Bible concerning the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ…Colossians 1:15-20

- Jesus is the *perfect* image of God… the exact, manifestation of God--- God Himself.
- Creator of all things.
- The One over all things
- The pre-existent One…He never began He aways has been
- The One who holds all things together--- the sustainer of the universe.
- The head of the body—the church
- Firstborn of the dead—First to die then live, never to die again…everlasting life!

The apostle planed Colossians carefully… He first identified himself… an apostle… he breaks in this magnum opus on who Jesus is… and now what Jesus did for us… verse 20:

Read verse 20

RECONCILE ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF! He is the great reconciler!...Through His work on the cross.. Paul again in Romans 5 emphasizes the cross… and Christ shedding His blood for our atonement for our sins… reaching back to Genesis 3 and setting things right.

[8]But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.[9]Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath *of God* through Him.[10]For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.[11]And not only this, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Paul echoes this in our passage this morning:

Read Colossians 1:21-22

Holy—Separated from sin and set apart to God—God sees the sinner Christian as one as holy as His Son!

Blameless—means without blemish… "a spotless lamb" as Jesus was the spotless sacrificial lamb…. Reconciliation with God gives us a spotless character!

Beyond reproach—Goes beyond blameless… not only are we blameless, but no one… Satan the great accuser included… cannot bring a charge against us!...let that sink in…

Now why did I go into all that?... With all that truth… all who Jesus is and what He has done and does… when realized…. When one truly grasps the magnitude of all that… there has to be a response…If you embrace this truth… if you understand it… you can't just go on day to day la-

di-dah, la-di-da! *Maybe I'll go to church on Sunday*…you can't if you have blood flowing through your veins!

It helps us understand why Paul goes where he does in the next nine verses…. Paul back in his persecuting Christians days gets a jolt (understatement) on a road to Damascus… and what followed were eyes opened to the truth of Jesus….*I was blind but now I see!...* And his life changed radically, drastically till the day he died…

What he now shows us is a life response to the magnitude of who Jesus is… when Paul realized the truth of Jesus… living life as usual was not an option… another reason he goes into what we will see in these verses is to clarify who he is to this church in Colossae that has never met him.

Think about what they know of Paul… they heard he was an apostle who started many churches… but they also have heard about him… he is in prison… house arrest…he has many enemies and they claim he is a trouble maker…he's on trial for his life…so…he needs to explain to them his calling… and the price of a calling to be a minister for Jesus Christ.

This church at Colossae must have heard all these things about the apostle Paul… so he connects **the magnitude of who Jesus is**… to the **ministry that Paul has been doing….** since the day of his conversion to Christ… now he details his view of ***what a minister is***.

Read verse 23

We toss that word "minister and ministry" around so much we have lost its true meaning…the word we've translated as minister here is "*diakonos*" which means "servant"… we get the word deacon from that…….

I like what MacArthur said about deacons… *deacons are servers of tables… no… actually they are busboys… of tables…* just think about deacons as busboys… one of the most glamorous jobs one can have!...cleaning up the scraps of food and deal with dirty plates…

Paul is not saying *I'm a minister… one with great privileges and comfort!...*a minister viewed as a busboy brings it down to where God designed it…

[how many of you desire or plan on going into the ministry of Jesus Christ?... ALL OF YOU should be in the ministry of Jesus Christ!...
1 Corinthians 4:1–2"**This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ**…"] all of us are called to be servants for Jesus Christ…let's look at this passage together…

Read Colossians 1:24-29

Two things differentiated by pronouns "I"; "My"; and "You"; "We"…" I" and "Me" refers specifically to Paul… much of what he says is unique to his experience as a minister of Jesus Christ… not all of us will have a road to Damascus experience…

"You"; refers to all of us… "We" refers to Paul and us…So this passage reveals things unique to Paul… but connects ministry with all of us… I come up with no less than six important considerations regarding **ministry…servanthood in a messed up world**…At the end of verse 23 Paul said **I Paul was *made* a minister….**

1. Paul was "made" a minister.

The source of his ministry was not desiring a job… wanting to have an easy kickback life only having to work a few hours on Sunday… it certainly wasn't for fame and fortune as we will see… for Paul… the source of his ministry was God.

Paul did not plan on becoming a minister of God… He didn't volunteer to become a minister of God… ***He was appointed to be a minister by God Himself!***

Let's see this… familiar to most of you… turn to Acts 9…Paul, then Saul… his conversion and I would call it his ordination into the ministry:

Read Acts 9:1-15

Paul was chosen for ministry by God… the road to Damascus was Paul's unique experience…I believe even though there hasn't been a Damascus Road experience since… God still chooses His instruments in ministry…having said that… I also think there are people in ministry God did not select… just as there were false teachers in Paul's day

The Lord then says to Ananias… get Paul my chosen instrument for a very specific ministry… but adds (16) **For I will show him** (Paul) **how much he must suffer for My name….** which takes us to the second characteristic of Paul's ministry:

2. Ministry involves suffering

Ever since Paul became a believer in Christ… a Christian… his life circumstances were bad… very bad…

Read verse 24

I don't hear any tone suggesting complaining here… suffering and affliction… comes with the territory…*I expected this… this is par for the course… I used to inflict suffering on Christians myself…*Paul used to be the inflictor of Christians… how many Christians suffered at Paul's command!!!

No doubt Paul didn't think things would change once he became a Christian… Jesus made a promise to us… He said in John 16:33 **In this world you WILL have tribulation…** Tribulation **= distress or suffering resulting from oppression or persecution.**

Most of us have not experienced great oppression or suffering for our Christian convictions… one reason is most of us play it safe… and we can because, even though our country is rapidly

becoming more hostile to Christian beliefs… overall we still have our Christian autonomy… but there is a rapid uptick in:

Suffering through social rejection, workplace conflicts, threats and violence, family tensions, legal disputes, spiritual abuse, and the ordinary hardships of life….it's amping up… we are to expect tribulation!

I think we can see a pretty good summery of Paul's life and circumstances AFTER he became a believer in 2 Corinthians 11… so much for the wealth and prosperity gospel!

I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, in beatings without number, in frequent danger of death.

24Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes less one.

25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned from rocks! **three times I was shipwrecked—a night and a day I have spent in the deep.**

26I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the desolate places, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brothers.

27I have been in labor and hardship, in many sleepless nights, in starvation and thirst, often hungry, in cold and without enough clothing.

28Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. *Anyone want to sign up for ministry?*

Paul understood that serving Christ involves suffering… but Paul says here in verse 24 that he **rejoices in** his **suffering…** that sounds masochistic!... how does one get joy out of their suffering? Study Paul and we can see at least five reasons he could rejoice in suffering:

1. His Love for Christ

When Christ becomes our greatest treasure, our joy is no longer entirely dependent on comfort, health, success, or approval.

2. Relying on God's sustaining grace

We receive strength beyond our own resources through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 5:22).

3. A redemptive perspective

We trust that God can use suffering to produce endurance, character, and hope (Romans 5:3–5).

4. A purpose beyond ourselves

Serving others and participating in God's work can give meaning to hardships we would never choose for ourselves.

5. Hope in eternity

We know that present suffering is temporary and that the glory Christ promises will ultimately outweigh it.

Let me summarize these in a sentence…

Joyful sacrifice is giving up something you love for something you love more!

No doubt Paul loved his freedom…. He loved his creature comforts… but Paul loved to see people come to Christ MORE than he loved his freedom and comfort… another way to put this:

You rejoice in suffering when what you gain through suffering is greater than what you are giving up through siffering.

We've had many babies arrive here over the last year… every prospective mother has said the same thing around eight months in… *I'm so done with this…* some if not most of them said things like *I'm never doing this again!...* 12 months in… baby has arrived and is a couple months old… *I might have another one….*

How's that?... the baby arrived… *the mother rejoiced in her suffering because what she gained through that suffering* a (precious baby) *was greater than what she gave up through suffering*!... that's Paul!...and that can be our perspective as well!

Now the verse goes on saying something that has caused a lot of confusion…(24) **Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and I fill up what is lacking of Christ's afflictions in my flesh, on behalf of His body, which is the church,**

Is Paul saying that he is adding to the atonement of Jesus Christ?...he can't mean that because Jesus on the cross said what?_____ **it is finished…**what was finished?... His work on the cross resulting in atonement for the believer… He did it all… it is finished… there is nothing lacking in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ….

So if you hear someone say that Christ's suffering on the cross was not enough to purge us completely from our sins… that we Christians must make up what's lacking in Christ's suffering on our behalf by suffering ourselves…. There are denominations that think that.

Paul just said in verses 20-23 that through Christ all things have been reconciled to Himself… His work on the cross was sufficient and complete…

So what does **I fill up what is lacking of Christ's affliction in my flesh…?** He's not talking about Christ's affliction… he's talking about his own afflictions for the cause of Christ…Jesus

paid the price 100%... but now He's in heaven… Paul is left on earth, so now he, Paul, recieves affliction that was intended for Jesus Christ….

Paul is saying he now is taking on the affliction that was intended for Jesus… Christ suffered to accomplish salvation—and was 100% successful…. And now WE SUFFER TO SPREAD THAT SALVATION.

We suffer because the hatred the world has for Jesus will be transferred to us… His representatives…. **When you/we suffer for Christ… that affliction was intended for Him!**

The early church always saw that suffering and affliction was a badge of honor for being in Christ… Acts chapter 5 the apostles of Jesus were beaten by the Sanhedrin, when released verse 41 says **So they went on their way from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for the Name.**

3. Ministry is a stewardship

Read verse 25

What is a steward?...*A person responsible to take care of someone else's property*…It could be a slave or an employee… someone hired to take care of the household…Paul is saying here that he was "commissioned" by God… hired by God so to speak… to do a task… handling His word…to steward His word… the word of God….*and I must carry out that task.*

God's system of spreading the word is detailed right here… Paul was made a minister by God calling him… he was **made a minister**… God entrusts His word to Paul… Paul is to take care of handling the word the way in which God desires it to be handled… stewardship.

God entrusted His word to me to give FOR YOU… so that I might fully carry out the preaching if the word of God. *Fulfilling my stewardship… handling God's property*…. This is a model for all Christians…

Once you receive the word… and embrace the word… YOU are to be a steward of God's word… it becomes YOUR responsibility to take care of His word and to do what God wants you to do with it…which results in preaching or teaching the word to others…

If you are in Christ, **you are STILL on this earth for a reason**… otherwise God would just take you to heaven… but you're here!... you have a purpose in His kingdom… Ephesians 2:10 **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**

All of us has a sphere of influence… a destiny to fulfill… *God saved you on purpose for a purpose*...it is our job to discover that purpose and be faithful in it…. As one of God's stewards.

1 Corinthians 4:2 **In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found faithful.**

4. The subject of ministry

Read verses 25-26

Paul defines what the preaching of the word of God is**… it is the hidden mystery from past ages that has since been revealed to His saints**… remember what saints are?... all redeemed believers in Christ… *I appreciate all of you who address me as Saint Dan since that sermon… my wife still resists!...but thank you!*

Things that were a mystery in the Old Testament… **past ages and generations…** that through Christ… His gospel… has been revealed in the New Testament believers… 1 Corinthians 2:7-16

7 But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the *wisdom* which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages to our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And *which* have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him."

10 But to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the *depths* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *depths* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the *depths* graciously given to us by God, 13 of which *depths* we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *depths* with spiritual *words.*

14 But a natural man does not accept the *depths* of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually examined. 15 But he who is spiritual examines all things, yet he himself is examined by no one. 16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will direct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Now… there are many mysteries in the Old Testament that have been revealed in the New Testament… one of the greatest revealed mystery is ***the incarnate God…*** revealed in Jesus Christ… God in the flesh.

Another one is called the mystery of lawlessness… ever heard of that?... 2 Thessalonians 2:7

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way.

The mystery of lawlessness refers to the hidden, progressive, and restrained spiritual power of evil that operates in the world, culminating in the rise of the Antichrist and ultimate rebellion against God.

The mystery of the rapture… still a mystery to many…1 Corinthians 15: **51Behold, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed…**but the greatest mystery that has been made known is found in verse 27:

Read verses 26- 27

Christ IN you…what does that mean?...in the Old Testament… the Jews were awaiting the Messiah… but they had no idea that the Messiah would, through the Holy Spirit take up residency in all believers… Jews AND gentiles!

A few weeks ago we talked about the Holy Spirit residing in all believers… but Jesus resides in all believers by way of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8

9However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

John 14:23

23Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him.

2 Corinthians 6:16

16Or what agreement has a sanctuary of God with idols? For we are a sanctuary of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. A quote from the O.T but they didn't get it… They heard *I will dwell WITH them…not in them.*

5. Ministry is proclamation

If you are a busboy for Jesus you have to open your mouth!....I want you to notice… in verse 28… the pronoun is not "I" or "my"… this is not for Paul only… it is for "we"… which includes Paul and you and me…

Read verse 28

We are to "proclaim"… proclaim means to publicly declare something that has happened or some truth that has come to fruition…. Here there are two parts, two aspects of proclaiming…

1. Admonishing

Means to counsel someone to stop doing something that is improper conduct… it may be a warning… *you're on your way to disaster, turn around!...* or just a plain STOP DOING THAT, ITS WRONG!

If we are proclaiming Christ but neglecting to counsel someone headed for disaster form their sin… is irresponsible ministry!... so in love we admonish… and

2. Teaching

Delivering truth…God's absolute truth…His word… to others… but we are to do it using wisdom… having discernment on our delivery of the truth… not using it as a club to beat over their heads but as a light to guide them….

6. The goal of ministry

In my Bible I wrote this is Paul's Great Commission…it should be our great commission as well… we are to go into all the world NOT TO MAKE CONVERTS… but to make disciples… people who are complete in Christ…

Read verse 28-29

So that we may present every man complete in Christ….

Complete in Christ means to be made like Christ…"Complete" is the idea of "perfect"… our goal for ourselves and for others should be… for all to be made complete in Christ…

For this I labor…striving…I labor to the point of weariness… to the point of exhaustion… I am engaged in a very strenuous contest… so that we may present every man, every woman, every person… complete in Christ!!!