The Mystery Revealed — Delivery Transcript

Colossians 1:24–2:3 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, November 28, 2021 · *The Mystery of God*

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Well, last— yesterday, last week, yesterday, last Sunday, last time we were together, feels like yesterday. I said it was a cause for celebration because we are finally halfway through the book of the Revelation. That was a big deal for me anyway. And because we are at a natural stopping point in the book of the Revelation, and because we're at a natural transition point in our year with kicking off of Advent, I thought it might be good to press pause on the book of the Revelation for the season of Advent and pull a thread from the book of Revelation that is in a sentence in chapter 10 that I just cannot get off my mind and it presents a theme that I think is worthy of investigation especially on a day like today kicking off a season like Advent.

As I said earlier, the word Advent just means to come. And we celebrate it traditionally. You think of the coming of the Lord, you think of it at Christmas time in the manger with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. But Advent is traditionally not just anticipating, or not just celebrating, that first coming, but anticipating the second coming. And there's a little phrase in the book of the Revelation chapter 10, that the mighty angel says, in Revelation chapter 10, verses 6 and 7. If you haven't been with us in the book of the Revelation, many people think it's a picture of Jesus as this mighty angel.

Some think it's just a powerful angel. He's got one foot on the sea, one foot on the land. And he says to John, who sees him in this vision, in the days of the seventh trumpet, there will no longer be a delay, but in the days when the seventh angel will blow his trumpet, then the mystery of God will be completed, as he announced to his servants the prophets. Now that phrase, the mystery of God, is what I want us to think about over the next couple of weeks as we celebrate Advent.

What is the mystery of God? What does it mean that it is not yet completed? What does it mean that it will be completed? To what prophets was this mystery told, and when, and how, and what is all of that about? And so this morning we're going to start a series entitled The Mystery of God. And today our main text is not in the book of the Revelation, but it's in Colossians chapter one. So if you have your Bible, you can turn to Colossians chapter 1 as we look at the mystery of God revealed.

And it's really a key text of this theme, this little phrase, the mystery of God. It's a fascinating study that you can do in the Scriptures on your own time. But I want us to begin our study here in Colossians chapter 1, starting in verse 24. For those of you who are not familiar with the book of Colossians or the Bible in general, Colossians was written by an apostle named Paul. He had planted churches all over Asia Minor at this point. But he had not planted this church. He was familiar with it.

He had a love for this church because he had an affinity with all the brothers and sisters that were in the Lord. But he writes to them to instruct them and warn them against some false teaching that was going on in their church. And here's what he says of his own experience and his love for them as he is sitting in prison for preaching the gospel there where he was. He says in verse 24 of Colossians chapter 1, Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, And I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for his body, that is, the church.

I have become its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his saints. God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. So Paul comes out and says, I'm in prison, I'm suffering, but I'm rejoicing in my suffering. Why? Because my suffering is not meaningless, because I've been made an apostle. I've been made a servant of the gospel by God Himself.

He has commissioned me. And he didn't just commission me to do good deeds or to feed the hungry or to do X, Y, or Z thing. He commissioned me to preach the mystery. This Greek word mystērion. And this mystery is the mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory. And so what does that mean, the mystery? Mystērion is the Greek word that's used there. It's not used in the Bible the same way we use it in our English translations. Same was true in the book of Revelation when it talks about the mystery of God being completed.

He's not talking about that thing he had to seal up that nobody knows about. But he's talking about something that was hidden in the past, now revealed in the present. He actually defines the word mystery in our text. He says it was hidden for ages and generations. And I think by that he means to those people, men and women of God in the Old Testament. There were little hints, there were little drops that God was going to do something new, something

different was going to come down, but it was hidden from them, and now it is revealed to us, to the saints.

And that means me and you. You may not feel like a saint, but if you're in the Lord Jesus Christ, then the Bible says you are a saint. You're set apart as holy. And so a mystery is something that was hidden in the past, but it's revealed in the present. It was covered up back then, but now it's uncovered for all to see. And Paul says, I have been commissioned to proclaim this mystery. Now, there's a lot of ways to illustrate this word, but one of the best ones that I came across was actually the other day when me and Blaze were at the movie theater and we were watching a movie.

And really, it was a superhero movie. There should not have been too much of a romance scene in there. I was hoping there wouldn't be too much of that anyway. But, you know, these days they smuggle everything in. So they smuggled in this romance scene between this guy and this girl and they had the dramatic ooey gooey music going and everything and it all culminated in this man kissing this woman. And I'm sitting there eating my popcorn. I look over at Blaze. He has his eyes covered, his tongue sticking out, and he's making this grotesque look on his face.

Ugh. Why would they do that? And I thought to myself, it's a mystery. You can't see it now, Blaze, but one of these days the light'll come on, brother, and you'll wake up and smell the coffee and you'll understand. It was hidden in the past, it's hidden at this point in time in his life. But a little bit later in his life it's going to become revealed and exposed for everybody to see, because everybody sees at a certain point in time. That's what this mystery is that Paul says, I've been commissioned to proclaim.

And the essence of this mystery, Paul says, is the hope of glory. And that's such a powerful phrase. Actually, all five of those words. Christ in you, the hope of glory. If you could understand those five or six words, that would dramatically transform the way you live all of your life. But that catchphrase there, the hope of glory, I think really paints a picture of why this mystery is so profound and so transformative. The word that's translated glory in the Greek New Testament really stems from an Old Testament word for glory, kavod.

It was used, it's a kind of a derivative of a word that means heaviness, or weightiness. And so when you think of the glory of a thing, you think of the weightiness or the significance of a thing. And when you talk about glory in life, what people are after when they're looking for glory is a sense of greatness, a sense of heft, of significance and worthiness, and that is what Paul is saying, this mystery is making available, that there is a hope— not hope, wishful thinking, I hope it might come, you know, maybe if I'm lucky it might get here.

No, a firm confidence, a certainty that you can capture significance and greatness in life through receiving this mystery. When you're in the presence of a really amazing athlete, or

you watch it on TV, you might think to yourself, man, that is glorious. Or when you hear an amazing piece of music that is just compelling internally, it moves you emotionally and spiritually in every way, you think that is a glorious piece of music. Or when you take a choice morsel of Wes's grilled chicken. You think to yourself, that is a glorious piece of grilled chicken.

We use this word glory in our common parlance this way, it's significance. It's heft. In the Old Testament, the word glory was used to communicate the presence of God, that the Shekinah glory would dwell in the ark of the covenant. We saw this in Revelation last week, the ark of the covenant coming out of heaven down to earth. The glory of the presence of God, the heft, the significance, the greatness, the brightness. This is something that the Old Testament Jews spent their entire lives searching for, looking after. How can I have that heft?

How can I have that glory? How can I take what I see in the Lord, the greatness of the Lord, and receive it into my own life? If you're taking notes, human beings have been craving glory from the very beginning. We have a craving for glory. It is God given. It is created by God. All glory belongs to God, but we were created in the image of God. So not only do we have a God given need to see his glory and be transformed by his glory, but we also have a God-wired propensity to want to reflect that glory, to be glorious ourselves, because we were created to mirror and image and reflect God.

We have been craving glory. Psalm chapter 8, verse 5 says that God made man a little less than God, or a little lower than the angels. And then God crowned him with glory and honor. And so before sin entered into this world, the world was a place of great glory. The grass was greener than any grass you've ever seen, the fruit was sweeter than any fruit you've ever tasted. It was glory-given. But then what happened is our first parents, Adam and Eve, took the glory that they had been given. Did anybody else hear that?

Was that just in my ear? Okay. Wow. All right. I don't know what that was. Adam and Eve took the glory that they had been given, and they sinned, and that glory was lost. The glory was removed. And some people think this, Psalm 8 talked about Adam and Eve being clothed with glory, and then that's why they didn't have to wear any clothes. But as soon as sin entered into the world, they were aware of their nakedness. And so they tried to cover it up with these fig leaves because the glory was lost.

Romans 3:23 says, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There's a little word in the Old Testament, 1 Samuel chapter 4, where Phinehas's son was born, and the ark of the covenant had been stolen, and that was the place in which the glory of God dwelled. And so when the son was born, they gave that son the name Ichabod, because it meant the glory has departed. And that's the problem with humanity. We were made for glory, we crave glory, but the glory has departed. And so since we no longer have the glory that we know we're

supposed to have, because we're no longer seeing the glory that we know we were made to see, we spend our entire lives chasing after glory.

And we spend our entire lives covering up the lack of glory that we have in our life, and we try to make up for it by doing all these crazy sorts of things. That's why people work insane hours at jobs that they don't really like, thinking, oh, if I work hard, then I'll get the promotion, then I'll finally get enough money, then I'll finally have the right kind of car, I'll finally have the right kind of house, I'll finally wear the right kind of clothes, then I'll finally have the glory.

This is why we spend money we don't have to buy things we don't need to impress people we don't like or know. We're chasing after glory. We know we're supposed to have glory, but we don't have it. Blaise Pascal, the philosopher after whom I named my first son, he described this condition of humanity. He described it as deposed royalty. That human beings are deposed kings and we're deposed queens. Because when we were created in the garden, we were created perfect, and we were created to not only have communion with God, but to image God, to mirror him.

And so there was this greatness to man, a royalty that we possessed. And we know it. We feel it deep in our bones because that image is still in us. But sin marred that image, it distorted it, and so now that glory has departed to such a degree that we're in this miserable condition of knowing that we are kings and queens, but being miserable to the fact that we were dethroned and that it's our fault, and that there's something we're not yet possessing that we need to possess. And we spend our entire life trying to fix that problem.

I mean, you feel it deep in your bones if you're honest about it. The glory departed, and so we spend our entire lives chasing and covering up its absence. I heard somebody this week say it's like cotton candy, existential cotton candy. When you look at cotton candy, it's this big, fluffy, wonderfully attractive sweetness. And you bite into it and that big fluffy cloud turns into just a tiny itty bitty bit of sugar. It's a rip-off. You know, I paid $17 for this cotton candy and it just melted in my mouth like that.

That's our pursuit of glory in the human condition. Existential cotton candy. I got to have it. That'll fix it. That'll make me better. And it just dissolves in your mouth. Paul says, I've been appointed a messenger to proclaim the message that glory you need, that glory you were created to possess, that glory you're chasing and covering up its absence in your life, I'm here to tell you, you can have certainty that glory can be regained in your life. You can have that angst fixed, you can have that longing finally satisfied, those cravings finally satisfied and quenched, but it's through the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the mystery. It's Christ in you, the hope of glory. Not hope as I wish it might happen or if I'm lucky it might happen, but a biblical certainty, a firm expectation it will happen. The

baby will be born. I will regain the glory. I will find meaning and purpose in life. I will finally be able to rest and stop chasing after the wind. So how do I possess it? How do I receive it? Paul says it's Christ in you. Not just Christ with you. We celebrate that at Christmas, but it's Christ in you that there's an inner reality that you can receive into your life, that the very life of God will dwell in your body.

And we kind of just grow accustomed to it because we talk about it all the time, but in the original audience that would have been a mind blowing concept. If you put yourself in the context of a first century Jew or even an Old Testament Jew, you knew that reconciliation with God was something that you needed to have. You knew that there was sin that separated you from God. All of the Old Testament rituals, all the Old Testament sacrifices, blood, bulls, goats on the altar being sacrificed, that was all to atone for sin because there was a separation between mankind and God.

And even the sacrifices didn't necessarily fix the problem; they just kind of postponed the judgment so that maybe one day we could possess this inner reality of God in us, this reconciliation with this God we were made to image and reflect and desire to have communion with. Paul says that's all available to you now, not just externally but internally, the very life of God can live in you. And they had little hints of it in the Old Testament. Like I said, it was a mystery back then, but there were little sprinkles of what God was going to do.

One of the key texts is Jeremiah chapter 31. If you don't have this text in your familiar list, you should probably put it in there. Jeremiah chapter 31. I just want to read verses 31 to 34 that communicate this idea that Paul is saying, I've been commissioned to proclaim. Jeremiah the prophet says, look, the days are coming. This is the Lord's declaration. I didn't come up with this on my own. This is something God gave me, when God says, I'm going to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, even though I am their master. The Lord's declaration. Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, the Lord's declaration. I will put my teaching within them, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will one teach his neighbor or brother, saying, Know the Lord, because they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them.

This is the Lord's declaration. For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin. That was pointing to the mystery being revealed. It's hidden now, but it's going to be revealed. After those days, the Lord's going to make a new covenant, and this new covenant is available to us today through the Lord Jesus Christ. The mystery that was hidden is now revealed and it's been revealed through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. His

death, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, all of that contains the mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Because of what Christ has done, because he has defeated sin, because he lived the life none of us could live, because he did what Adam and Eve could not do, and because he paid the price for what they did do, for what we do, our sin, your sin. The world's sin, he received it into his own body on the cross. He absorbed the wrath of God for us. He who knew no sin, as Paul says later in 2 Corinthians, he who knew no sin became sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

He received it into his body. He was buried. And three days later God raised him from the dead, putting a stamp of approval: paid in full. The price has been paid. Redemption has been made and God raised him from the dead. And about forty days after that, the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven. And when he ascended into heaven, he poured out his spirit on the earth. And now his spirit can live in us. And we don't have to push one another, know the Lord. We can all know the Lord because his spirit can dwell within us.

Paul says when you understand that reality, when you embrace that reality into your own life, it will absolutely change everything. There's a transition from this external, cold-hearted, legalistic hypocrisy to a warm-blooded, relational, spirit-driven sincerity. No longer is your obedience based out of fear and duty. Now your obedience to the Lord can be based out of delight and love. And when you embrace that reality, everything in your life is going to be different. So what I want to do with the time we have left is to show you how it changed Paul and show you how it can change you and me.

I think we all know that Christ can be in us. We maybe miss out on the significance of that reality because we're so accustomed to it. Familiarity breeds contempt, but it absolutely will revolutionize the way you live your life when you actually live as if Christ is in me. The first difference that it makes is it gives you a different perspective on your suffering. Gives you a different perspective on your suffering. Paul starts out of the gate in verse 24. He says, I rejoice in my sufferings. I rejoice in my sufferings.

Why? Because I'm completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for his body, that is the church. So why would Paul say, I rejoice in my sufferings? And he's not talking about suffering for Jesus like we sometimes joke when you're on the beach, you know, mission trip at Galveston, suffering for Jesus or whatever. He's not saying it in that way. He's actually suffering for the Lord Jesus Christ. He's in prison. He's being beaten. He's having probably not even that many visitors, if this is the same point in time as later on, where everybody kind of gave up on him and said, I don't want to touch him with a 10-foot pole.

He had been canceled. You know, in our culture, people get canceled. You don't want to touch them. This is what was happening to the apostle Paul. And even so he says, no, I

rejoice in my suffering. It's like what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. When people persecute you, speak evil against you, say all kinds of false things about you, rejoice and be glad, because that's how they persecuted the prophets who came before you. That's what Paul's doing. I rejoice in my suffering. Why? Well, in his words, he says, I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, which is a really interesting way to put it and no small amount of ink has been spilled on that phrase filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

I think all that Paul is trying to communicate is Christ suffered in his body for the church. He died for his bride, and God took that suffering and worked good through it. He took that incredible evil act of sin against God's anointed when he didn't deserve to die, and he took it and he turned it for good and for the good of his church, he takes what people intended for evil and he works it for good. And Paul's saying he's doing the same thing in me. What God did through Christ and in his suffering, he's now doing in my suffering.

So I'm kind of propagating, or I'm filling up what was lacking in his. He died for the church, he suffered for the church, now I'm suffering for the church, and I'm kind of filling it up. So what does that say to us and our suffering? Especially suffering in which we're suffering for the cause of Christ or out of obedience to Christ. It's a reminder not only that God is with us in our suffering, but that He's actually working through our suffering. And he's using your suffering to bring about good for his redemptive purposes.

You see this in the church all the time that the suffering of people, especially suffering when we see people who are being obedient to Christ and they're receiving persecution for their faith. It does something in you, it stirs you up to a new level of boldness, a new level of obedience, a new level of commitment to the Great Commission. So it gives you a different perspective on your pain, a different perspective on your suffering. The second thing it does is it gives you a different purpose for your life. A different purpose for your life.

Jesus told his disciples in John 20:21, as the Father has sent me, so also am I sending you. We all know Acts 1:8. We're an Acts 1:8 church. You'll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. When Christ is in you, you're going to have a new power, but you're also going to be my witnesses. You have a new purpose for your existence. And you're going to proclaim the good news of the gospel in your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. The Great Commission. Paul says, right out of the gate, there in Colossians chapter 1, I think it's verse 25, I've been commissioned by God to go and make known this mystery.

But it wasn't just Paul who was commissioned to do that. Jesus told all of his disciples to go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, teaching them to observe everything that I've commanded you. So when Christ is in you, your purpose changes. No longer do you exist to make a bunch of money, what's the old saying? To— I don't know, I

forget. I'm not going to botch it, but you no longer exist for the American dream. I no longer exist to have the nicest clothes and drive the nicest car and live in the nicest house.

My sole purpose in life is now to proclaim the good news of the gospel, to join Jesus in his mission to not only make a name for himself, but to make a church on earth, to make a bride that is holy, radiant, and pure to dedicate myself that the local church becomes an important part of my life now. The mission of God becomes an important, maybe the most important part of my life now. I filtered my house through that, I filtered my family through that, I filtered all my finances through that.

I have a new purpose for living. That's what happens when Christ is in you. His loves become your loves. His mission becomes your mission. It changed Paul, it should change us. And in fact, a convicting question. If Christ is in you is his love your love? Is his mission your mission? Do you have a beating heart or a bleeding heart for the Great Commission? Because if you don't— and really, to whatever degree that you don't is the degree to which the Spirit of Christ is not animating your life. And I'm not saying if you don't love missions, you're not a Christian, necessarily, but I am saying the degree to which you love the Great Commission is the degree to which you've been captured and animated by the Spirit of Christ, because the Spirit of Christ that lives in you gives you his loves, his passion, his joys, which means he's going to animate you to go and make disciples.

Now we all have different gifts and we all do it in different ways. Not everybody's a preacher or a great evangelist. But I'm just saying your perspective, not only on your suffering, but on your purpose in life is changed when Christ is in you. And then the last thing we see is a different power for obedience. John says it this way in 1 John chapter 4. We love because he first loved us. In our text, Paul says it this way in chapter 1, verse 29, I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me.

And as he said to the Philippians, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Why? Because it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good pleasure. And so when you receive and when you embrace the reality of Christ in you, no longer is your obedience duty-driven and fear-based. Now your obedience is delight-driven, love-based, because there's a new power in you. There's a new spirit in you. It's no longer even your spirit. Christ's Spirit has now come and overtaken your spirit and he's animating your wants and your desires and so you have a whole new perspective on suffering, a whole new perspective on your purpose in life, and a whole new power to animate what you do and why you do the things that you do.

That's the mystery. That is the hope of glory. And that is what Paul was commissioned to proclaim, and that is what if we receive and embrace can change everything else in our life.