

The Book of Colossians

Lesson 5: Paul's Ministry of the Mystery -- Colossians 1:24-2:5

There is a secret at the heart of the universe, and for long ages it was hidden. Generation after generation lived and died without knowing it. Prophets caught glimpses and strained to see more. Angels longed to look into it. And then, in the fullness of time, the curtain was pulled back and the secret was told. That is the language Paul reaches for in this passage: a mystery hidden for ages and generations, now at last revealed to God's people. You can feel his wonder. He has been let in on the greatest secret there is, and he cannot stop talking about it.

And what is the mystery? Brace yourself, because it is more personal than you might expect. The mystery is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Not a hidden formula, not a secret password, not a higher tier of knowledge reserved for the spiritual elite. The mystery is that the living Christ takes up residence in ordinary people, in Gentiles as well as Jews, in shopkeepers and slaves and mothers and fishermen, and becomes their hope of glory. The treasure the whole world was waiting for turns out to live in the hearts of plain believers.

This is exactly the opposite of what the false teachers at Colossae were selling. They whispered about secret knowledge, special insights, hidden truths you could only reach through them. Paul will have none of it. He says the mystery has been openly proclaimed, and that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Not some treasures, with the rest available elsewhere. All of them. You do not need to climb past Jesus to find something deeper. There is nothing deeper. He is the depth.

So Paul pours out his life to make this Christ known. He suffers for it, toils for it, struggles for it, and he says he does it gladly. His aim is not to gather admirers but to present everyone mature in Christ, every believer brought to fullness. And he longs for these Colossians, most of whom he has never met, to have hearts encouraged, knit together in love, anchored in the full assurance that comes from knowing Christ. Read these verses and watch a man who has found the only treasure worth having, spending himself to put it into your hands.

Group Discussion: Paul says the great mystery, hidden for ages, is Christ in you, the hope of glory (1:27). Why do you think God's deepest secret turns out to be so personal, the indwelling of Christ in ordinary believers, rather than some grand piece of hidden information? What does that reveal about what God is after?

Personal Reflection: Paul labors, suffers, and struggles so that he might present everyone mature in Christ (1:28). If maturity in Christ, not comfort or success, were truly your goal this year, what would you do differently starting this week?

Read Colossians 1:24-2:5

Study Questions

1. Paul describes the gospel as a mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed, and he sums it up as Christ in you, the hope of glory (1:26–27). What is this mystery, why was it such good news that it included the Gentiles, and what does it mean that Christ Himself dwells in His people as their hope of glory?
2. Paul says Christ in you is the hope of glory. Be honest about where your hope of glory actually rests. Is it in the indwelling Christ, or have you quietly pinned your hope of a good future on your circumstances, your achievements, or your own goodness? What difference would it make to relocate your hope onto Christ within you?
3. Paul says he rejoices in his sufferings and is filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of the church (1:24). Since the New Testament is clear that Christ's death for sin was complete and sufficient, what does Paul mean here, and what does it teach about the suffering that comes with carrying the gospel for others?
4. Paul suffered gladly for the sake of others, for the church. When has serving others cost you something, and how did you respond? Where might Christ be inviting you to accept some cost or discomfort this week for the good of someone else in His body?
5. Paul says the goal of his ministry is to proclaim Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ (1:28). Why does Paul include warning as well as teaching, and what does it tell us that the goal of all this labor is maturity in Christ rather than mere conversion or mere knowledge?
6. Paul's aim was to help people grow up into maturity in Christ. Where do you see real spiritual maturity growing in your own life, and where are you still settling for spiritual childhood? Who in your life might God be calling you to help move toward maturity?
7. Paul longs for the believers' hearts to be encouraged, knit together in love, reaching all the riches of full assurance and the knowledge of Christ (2:2). What does it tell us that Paul connects assurance and understanding so closely to being knit together with other believers in love?
8. Paul assumes Christians grow strong together, knit together in love, not in isolation. How connected are you, really, to the body of Christ right now? What tends to pull you toward isolation, and what would it look like to let yourself be more truly knit together with this congregation?
9. Paul says all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ, and he says this so that no one may delude the Colossians with plausible arguments (2:3–4). What is Paul claiming about the sufficiency of Christ, and how does the truth that everything we need is found in Him protect us from being talked out of the faith by persuasive but false teaching?
10. Look back across this passage. Paul unveils the mystery of Christ in us, spends himself to bring believers to maturity, and points us to Christ as the place where all treasures are found. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Colossians 1:24–2:5 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Ephesians 3:1–13, the mystery of Christ revealed and the Gentiles included; Romans 16:25–27, the mystery kept secret for long ages but now disclosed; 1 Corinthians 1:24–31, Christ the wisdom of God; 2 Corinthians 11:3–4, the danger of being led astray from sincere devotion to Christ; Galatians 1:6–9, refusing any other gospel.