

PREFACE

We stopped in mid-sentence last week—something not hard to do with the long-winded apostle. So let's read the complete passage again.

Read Colossians 1:24-27.

In our last session we resolved the controversy of v24—that Paul is *not* saying that there was any deficiency in Christ's *redemptive* suffering on the cross, but that His *ministerial* suffering continues on in the lives of those who serve Him. We also considered the various translations of v25; my choice for the translation expressing it best was the NIV:

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

That is, *the word of God is full to overflowing, and I (Paul) am called to present it to you as fully as I can.*

In the next two verses Paul expands on what he means by "the word of God in its fullness."

v26

The NASB smooths the transition by inserting the helpful, "*that is,*": *This is what I am talking about*, Paul says.

...the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

How do I illustrate the NT concept of "mystery"—Greek, *mysterion*? I can think of two illustrations—one very familiar to me, one far less so; one I know firsthand; one I know only secondhand. Both, I believe, are apt.

Marriage

- the single person cherishes his or her freedom
- the ol' ball and chain
- but the God-ordained union of two souls changes everything—the mystery is revealed

Child-bearing

- the couple cherish their freedom
- there is the pain of childbirth itself; then there are diapers, teenage rebellion—why bother?
- but once the child arrives, everything changes, and the mystery is revealed.

In each of these situations there is a mystery sitting out there—a secret—undiscoverable save for the experience itself. The secret is not revealed by reading a book about it, or by having an elder who has experienced it describe it. That does not take. It must be revealed by the experience itself. [Thus, the mystery of marriage has been revealed to me, but the mystery of child-bearing and child-rearing remains just that—a mystery.]

Turn please to Daniel 2.

The story is familiar. Early on during his time serving Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Daniel is given the opportunity to not just interpret the king's dream, but to reveal the content of the dream itself. The wise men at court ("Chaldeans" or magi) had said to the king, *Just tell us the dream and we'll be happy to interpret it for you.* Nebuchadnezzar said, *Oh no. That's too easy. I want you to first tell me what the dream was.* Their reply to that was, *Gimme a break! No one can do that.* The king's response to that was, naturally, *Off with their heads!*

The king decides to let the Hebrews—Daniel and his buds—conduct the executions of his not-so-smart wise men. This piques Daniel's interest: *Why does the king want these men dead?* When the situation is explained to him, he says to king, *Hey, let me have a shot at it.* So Daniel gets the gig. Now note:

Read Daniel 2:17-18.

("request compassion from the God of heaven")

Read Daniel 2:19-20.

Read Daniel 2:26-28.

From the outset, Daniel takes no credit for the revelation of the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The God of heaven revealed it to him, and when the king asked him, "Are you able...?" Daniel's reply was, *No, but the God of heaven is.*

Most commentators agree that the use of the key words in this OT account forms the basis for the apostle Paul's idea of "mystery" in Colossians and other places in his letters. Look at v19 in Daniel 2.

*Then the **mystery** was revealed to Daniel in a night vision.*

Curtis Vaughan writes that the Greek *mysterion* "is used in the NT of truth undiscoverable except by divine revelation." And this is precisely what occurs in this story from Daniel. The magi were helpless to reveal the mystery; *Daniel* was likewise helpless—until he received the revelation from God.

The Greek *mysterion* translates the Hebrew *raz* [raws] in the Septuagint. Both are translated "mystery" or "secret" (KJVs) in English. The choice of "secret" in the KJVs hearkens back to the original secular Greek idea of the root word from which *mysterion* stems—*myo* [moo-oh], "which means to shut the mouth; that which must not or cannot be said" (Brown).

The root concept of this word goes back to the mystery cults associated with pagan gods and, later, philosophies—the secret ceremonies, the cultic feasts and sacrifices—all closely guarded secrets revealed only to the initiated.

As Paul translates this into the Christian faith, a mystery is something undiscoverable except to those who are in Christ. We could also say these mysteries are revealed by the indwelling Spirit. Both are true; in Paul's writings, they are interchangeable. What does Paul write in 1 Corinthians?

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

This mystery was conceived by the Godhead back before time even began, but remained hidden—*apokrypto* (ap-ok-roop'-to): concealed away, kept secret—until in the fullness of time God sent His Son. Christ Jesus was the mystery “manifested”—not just disclosed or revealed, as someone might verbally explain a riddle, but “rendered apparent”; the mystery was disclosed in the *person* of Christ, to those who have placed their trust in Him.

v27

So track this, beginning in v25:

- v25: God through Christ makes Paul a **minister** of the church (“Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God”).
[What is his ministry?](#)
- v25: To deliver in its fullness the **word** of God (“so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God”).
[What is the word of God?](#)
- v26: The **mystery** heretofore kept hidden, but now revealed, made real to **believers**. (“the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints”).
[Tell us more about these saints.](#)
- v27: “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this **mystery** among the Gentiles...”
[There's that mystery again; tell us more about that.](#)

Now, up to this point we have looked at how Paul uses the *concept* of mystery, but not this mystery itself. What *is* the mystery? We have it in the second part of v27.

- This mystery is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Read v27.

Paul loves the idea of “in Christ” (and so do I); he uses that exact term 170 times in his epistles. Here the essential idea of that intimate relationship is turned around and rendered “Christ in you.” Both are true: We are in Christ, and Christ is in us.

Sidebar: This text brings out how the Christian faith is not based on a philosophy or heritage; it is not based on the text of the Bible alone. Our faith is based on the *person* of Christ! It is a uniquely personal, *visceral* faith. Note:

- v24: the church is **His body**
- v24: our afflictions are an extension, or continuation of **Christ's afflictions**
- v25: **Christ personally** made Paul a minister of the gospel
- v27: God personally opened up the riches of glory; and what is that? **Christ in you**
- v28: do we proclaim a philosophy? no, we proclaim **Him—Christ**
- v28: to the end that “every man [will be] complete **in Christ**”
- v29: how does Paul mean to accomplish this? according to **the power of Christ at work within him.**

Paul speaks of this again in the second chapter.

Read Colossians 2:2.

Let us never forget the profound intimacy we enjoy with our Maker and Lord.

What is Paul saying here in this context of “mystery”?

Some commentators think the mystery of v27 is about how God extended the gospel of salvation in Christ to the Gentiles. That is, they would translate it,

“...this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ *among* you...”

That is, in your midst. But most commentators, even while mentioning the above possibility, agree with the translations common to us:

“...this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ *in* you...”

That is, in the first part Paul does note that the “riches of the glory of this mystery” have been extended to the Gentiles. But then he narrows the focus to identify the *core*, as it were, of this mystery as “Christ in you,” Christ personally in every believer.

In v26 he writes that this mystery has been historically “hidden”—*apokrypto* (ap-ok-roop'-to). In Galatians 1 Paul uses the flip-side of this word to describe the personal revelation of Christ in him.

Read Galatians 1:15-16.

reveal = *apokalypso* = to take off the cover; to reveal.

*God willed to make known what is **the riches of the glory** of this mystery among the Gentiles,*

Whenever I stop to ponder this incredible statement, and ones like it elsewhere, I long for the mind and knowledge I will have in heaven, rather than the feeble fleshly mind and understanding I have now. Here is something few of us appreciate; we nod our heads and say, “Ah yes, how wonderful: the riches of His glory. Very nice.” Whereas if we truly grasped the *immensity* of that statement we would fall to our knees in probably a catatonic state.

Psalms 16 tells us that all of the heavens declare the glory of God. And all the riches of this glory are contained in Christ—and Christ is in us (and we are in Him). How can pitiful flesh process such information! The answer is that it can't. Thank God that our salvation does not depend on that. And we can also thank God's patience for that.

Read Romans 9:22-24

No ABF next week (Quarterly Congregational Meeting)