

Colossians 2

Part 1

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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:00] Let's read the first ten verses.

For I would that ye know what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for many that have not seen my face and flesh.

Their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding and acknowledgement of the mystery of God. Verse three, in whom or in which I hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, [00:01:05] joying and beholding your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him. Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality. Now, I wish tonight to interest you a little in certain aspects of the mystery.

[00:02:19] You will remember that when the great apostle was commending Timothy in the epistle to the Philippians, he said that he had no man like-minded who would naturally care for your estate.

How the saints are getting on, a matter of genuine feeling. And if the apostle commends the young Timothy for this feature, we can be sure that he himself exhibited the same feature. Now in this particular chapter, we find the apostle Paul in conflict. [00:03:02] And he said, I would have you know what great conflict I have for you.

This word conflict is agony in another scripture, it's a fight in another scripture, it's how to run in another scripture. It all supposes that the great apostle Paul is in a great state as to how these Corinthians are getting on.

Now, this is a very interesting assembly.

Remember, he is able to commend them for their faith in Christ Jesus and their love for all saints.

They weren't just beginners. He was able to make mention of the fact that they walked in order. He couldn't speak of the Corinthians in these terms. He could also speak of the steadfastness of their faith. [00:04:04] He couldn't have said that to the Galatians or even to the Thessalonians. But here they are, having made considerable progress in the history of their souls, that they have reached a point where the apostle Paul is concerned about them. If I may say so, by extension he is concerned about us all. Now it came home to me just in recent days that a Christian can't stand still. Either he goes forward or he goes back.

And it's because there are certain dangers threatening this assembly, they come out in the second chapter, that the apostle Paul approaches the problem by bringing before them positive aspects of the truth. Now, I believe this is a great moment for us. [00:05:04] The thing that will keep us going is not an exhortation, but positive aspects of the truth. And I would like tonight to speak a little bit about the mystery of God. Here we come to this expression, in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the wisdom of God, the secret of the thoughts and counsels of God.

And under this heading we can include the mystery of Christ, the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ as Son and as Head. The mystery of the Christ.

The assembly has brought in a union with Christ.

The mystery of the gospel.

The secrets of God enshrined in God's glad tidings for man.

[00:06:11] Now, in opening up this subject tonight, we have to consider this word mystery.

This word is a New Testament word that never occurred once in the Old Testament. The word mystery means a secret, in contrast to that which is manifest.

It's a secret known to the initiated.

And presently that secret is going to come into manifestation. Now it might seem strange, but for figure I'm going to turn to an Old Testament passage to describe it. You remember when Ataliah ruled in the land, she slew all the seed royal.

[00:07:08] But there was one, little Joash, who was taken from among the dead and hidden with his nurse in the bedchamber. And there was a message went out from Jehoiada, the king's son shall reign. And there was a company in Jerusalem that were in the secret that the king's son will reign. And this is the position of the Christian company today. Consequent upon the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, his glory, the spirit here, there's a secret in this world that the king's son shall reign. And the marvelous thing is that you and I are in the knowledge of this secret, and this is what I would like to develop and deliver tonight. [00:08:02] Now the first thing in regard to this mystery, as I'm going to speak about it tonight, the first thing to learn is that it's a secret that's been hidden God from the foundation of the world. And in order that you might have these scriptures, and I didn't want to goad my own mind too much, I'm just going to read them out to you. The mystery which was kept secret since the world began, Romans 16, 25.

Even the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, that now is made manifest

to the saints, Colossians 1, 26. The mystery which from the beginning of the world has been hidden God, Ephesians 3, 9. Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles in prophecy, Ephesians 3, 9. [00:09:01] The point I want to put over is that this secret, into which you and I have been initiated, it contains God's very best thoughts. And it isn't the subject of Old Testament revelation, it's the subject of New Testament revelation. Now I'd like to try and get over the preciousness of what I'm saying. In the 28th chapter of Job, the question is raised, where is wisdom to be found?

You may remember in that interesting chapter, mining operations, many aspects of man's world are explored, and it's quite clear that wisdom is not found in the realm of nature. Man by searching cannot find out God. When you turn over to 1 Peter chapter 1, [00:10:03] you learn that the mystery of which I'm now speaking was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets. So we learn that it was neither to men, the best of men, prophets, angels, or to Israel, the subject that we're going to speak of tonight is essentially a New Testament theme. And I'd just like to develop it a little bit further along these lines. When did it come out?

Then you might say to me, in the 11th chapter in Matthew, when the Lord Jesus is presented as rejected, in the 13th chapter, when Sower goes forth to settle, in that chapter we learn the mysteries of the kingdom. But even the mysteries of the kingdom aren't the mysteries about which I'm speaking tonight. [00:11:04] Nevertheless, it was very wonderful because we read that many righteous men, many prophets, many kings, have desired to see the things which he sees, and they have not seen them. So wonderful as Matthew 13 is, it isn't quite the mystery that I'm speaking of tonight. In Matthew chapter 16, Peter makes his affirmation, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, and the Lord Jesus says to him, Blessed art thou, son of Bartholomew, flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven, a wonderful step forward in the ways of God. But Peter in his ministry, either oral or written, never rises to the height of the revelation that was made to him in Matthew chapter 16. [00:12:01] In the second chapter of Acts, the church is formed, and we read in that chapter, they even broke bread, but the truth of the mystery wasn't revealed when the church was formed. That aspect of the truth awaited the ninth chapter of Acts when the Lord, speaking to Paul, says, Saul, Saul, why have you doubted me?

So I think we would learn from this little historical review that the truth of the mystery, that which concerns God and Christ, the Christ and the gospel, really awaits the ministry of the apostle Paul.

And I will spend a little moment just to exalt our apostle, the apostle of the uncircumcision, [00:13:09] the apostle of the Gentiles, because he has brought to us the secret in relation to our head in heaven and our body in heaven. Now, just before I finish this, you will remember that the apostle Paul said in Acts 20, I have not come to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. And in Colossians chapter 1, he uses a remarkable expression to complete the word of God.

In the Bible, the range of subjects is completed with the apostle Paul's ministry. Until he appears on the scene, we have the law, and we have the kingdom. [00:14:02] We have the person of Christ, we have the subject of redemption, we are introduced to the time waves of God, but the superstructure, the keystone to the arch, is when the apostle Paul brings forth the truth of the mystery. Now, what I would like to do is to just develop two aspects of the mystery, and then develop a little bit the conflict of which the apostle speaks.

The two aspects of the mystery that you and I have to get a hold of are first, the particular

presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the mystery.

[00:15:01] In the 16th chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul says, unto him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, on the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the mystery. Now, what is the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the mystery? If I were to give you one verse that I think answers that question, it would be the verse in 2 Corinthians where we read the light of the glory of God shining in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ. And if you wanted a more particular answer, I would say it's the presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ that comes before us in the epistle to the Colossians. [00:16:02] Now, I'd just like to dwell on that a little bit. Those of you who in your minds can call up the first chapter of Colossians will remember that in this particular chapter we have the double preeminence of Christ. We have the double reconciliation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we get the double ministry of the apostle Paul. And if you can't call it up, I'll try and refresh your memory. Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, we read that he is the image of the invisible God.

This is a figure that perhaps will turn our minds back to Adam, who is a figure of him that was to come.

As a creature, he is set up as the administrative head over a subdued creation, [00:17:08] and he is described as the image and likeness of God. Now, in that particular scene, in those early chapters in Genesis, he represents God. Now, clearly, the Lord Jesus Christ fills out all these types in a very full way.

You couldn't say of him that he is the image and likeness of God, because he is God. But he is the image of the invisible God. And coming into the creation which he made, necessarily, he takes the first place.

In this particular section, where we get the creation brought before us, the Lord Jesus Christ as the creator is seen as the inventive genius, [00:18:06] as the instrumental agent, and the end in view in creation. It's a little section where we may say we see the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ shine out. He is God. He creates all, and coming into manhood, necessarily, he takes the first place. He is the firstborn of every creature. Now, in the second part of this verse, we see that he is the head of the body, who is, in the beginning, the first begotten brother of the living. Coming into manhood, entering into the realm of death, he takes a place in supremacy about every force that could be ranged against him. In this particular aspect of the verse, we distinguish now not his deity, but his manhood. [00:19:05] He takes a place in supremacy, as a man.

But the interesting thing for you and me is that if he's taken that position as a man, he's taken it as a representative man. And his double preeminence, there he is in the glory, is in respect of his deity, in respect of his manhood, a double preeminence which brings before us his nature, a feature that I'd like you to hold on to for a moment. And then we come to the double preeminence, which is a very fine statement here, in regard to his deity. All the fullness of the glory of his deity, there he is, in the dignity of his person, able to bring in a new sin which is suitable to God.

[00:20:06] He not only deals with the sin question negatively, but he positively brings in a sin which is in accord with God. And it's things on earth, and things in heaven. That's one aspect of his reconciliation. But then it goes on to say, and you happen that yourself, in the body of his fleshly death, presents you holy and unblameable and unimprovable in his presence. Double preeminence.

And if I may say so, we're the first ones to be reconciled. And the fact that you and I have been reconciled is a certain proof that God is going to bring in a whole creation to be reconciled. Now, this is the point that the apostle labors at in Colossians. He says to these Colossians, [00:21:01] now do please try and get a hold of the dignity of God's Christ in the position that he now occupies. You remember how Israel will get their eyes open to Christ?

You remember how Nathanael, in the first chapter of John, would say, Thou art the Christ, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel. Jewish.

When Thomas makes his affirmation, he says, My Lord and my God. Excellent testimonies of Christ. The Lord said, Blessed are they who have not sinned and yet have believed. And this is what the apostle is laboring at, that we might learn the blessedness of not sinning and yet have believed. May I try and make it a little clearer? Remember when the disciples went up the Mount of Transfiguration. [00:22:06] He was angry before them.

Got that?

In 2 Corinthians 3, we learn that a company looking up for holding the glory of God in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, they're changed, transfigured. And I don't believe that any others can be really occupied with the Lord Jesus Christ in the position that he now occupies in all the glory that it is and the place that it is without undergoing a moral transformation.

Now in the Colossian epistle, you remember this is brought out. When Christ who is your life shall appear, Christ is presented as our life. And in the third chapter, you find brought out in the Christian company [00:23:01] the features of Christ. Blessedness at the electing of God, holy and beloved, put on bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. These are not features that are found in a naturalist, but they are features that are found in the Christian company as they are found holding fast the head.

That is the Colossian aspect of the mystery. But when it comes to the Ephesian aspect of the mystery, the Apostle Paul said, to make known among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

[00:24:06] Now when God is teaching us some of these New Testament truths, he gives us the credit for knowing the Old Testament background.

And I take this unsearchable riches of the Christ in intended contrast with Solomon.

Solomon had his searchable riches.

But the one who is far above principalities and powers as on the heavenly side, and above thrones and dominions on the earthly side, he is not only a king, he is a king of kings, as the Lord has asked. And if Solomon had his searchable riches, the Lord Jesus Christ had his unsearchable riches. [00:25:01] The Lord said concerning Solomon that consider the Lord.

Solomon in all his glory. Yes, Solomon had his glory. So when you come to the Lord Jesus Christ, you find a glory that excels.

And if in Solomon's kingdom there was peace, neither evil nor enemy occurred, with the Christian people, Jesus Christ was part of all understanding. If it's a question of joy with Solomon, every man had his own vine and his own fig tree. With the Christian it's joy unspeakable, full of the glory.

If there is love with Solomon, if there is love for Pharaoh's daughter, when you come to Christ's love for his family, it's a love of Christ which is unsearchable.

[00:26:03] Now the glory of the divine paradigm that I think gives us to understand the excellence of the preaching of Jesus Christ according to him.

Now the second aspect that I'd like to dwell on in connection with the mystery is the church's place in connection with the mystery.

Of old, with the patriarchs, they were the depositories of promise. But they were also walking in separation. Get here, Genesis chapter 12.

Separation of the depository of promise. This was Israel's position. They were also in separation. God's commandments contained in ordinances. They were walled off.

[00:27:03] But with the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, he has broken down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. And now we find brought into being a company composed of both Jew and Gentile for whom God has mapped out the most marvelous passage.

If I were asked for one verse in connection with the offending blessing, in connection with the mystery, the verse I would give you is Ephesians 3, verse 6, and we have a good opportunity.

Jew and Gentile, joint heirs, joint body, and joint partakers of the promise.

[00:28:04] Jew and Gentile, joint.

Now what do these three mean?

Joint heirs.

What is the heirship in relation to?

Is it the Garden of Eden, like Adam? No. Is it Canaan, like Israel? No.

The inheritance is nothing less than the universe.

There's a lot, may I say, of woolly thinking in regard to the universe, and I'd like us all to try and understand it. The universe pertains to the, the inheritance belongs to the world to come, not the eternal state.

[00:29:03] In the dispensation of the fullness of time, that's the world to come, God is going to head up all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth.

Now it's God's inheritance, but the Lord Jesus Christ is the appointed heir. And when God takes

possession of the universe, he's going to take possession of it in Christ and through the body as associated with him.

When God took possession of Canaan of old, he took possession of it in the children of Israel. In the coming day, when God takes possession of the earth, he'll take possession of it in the princes of Israel. They'll be the head, not the tail. [00:30:02] And when God takes possession of the universe, it does not mean that the man should be alone. The earth was associated with Christ, and he's going to take possession of the universe in himself.

Now is this the inheritance that Peter speaks of? Undefined?

Made it not away?

Reserved in heaven for your sinning?

Is this the inheritance of Colossians, the inheritance of the saint Elijah, unscathed in holiness, that the angel presents that inheritance in company with him who is the heir?

Who's going to do it?

The offender is going to do it.

[00:31:03] Now the second point is that there is a joint body.

We have seen the body aspect in Colossians in the setting forth of the Lord Jesus Christ here and now. Moral transformation. In Ephesians, the body aspect looks on to the coming day of glory.

At the end of the first chapter of Ephesians, far above the principalities and powers, the Lord is made head, head over all things, for the assembly. But he's also Lord. He's put all things under his feet. And then it goes on to say, concerning the body, the fullness of him that filleth all things.

You know, we're going to look wonderful in that day, if I may say so.

And if I may quote a piece of poetry, [00:32:02] and I may fall down in it, but somebody will help me out in it. You remember, the poet has put it this way, that heavens shall glow with splendor, but brighter far than they, the saints shall shine in glory, as Christ with them arrayed.

The beauty of the Savior shall dazzle every eye in the crowning day that's coming, by and by.

That's the day when this body feature comes to life, when he comes to be admired in all man of belief, when he's glorified, as I say.

And now the third aspect.

Joint heirs, joint body, and joint partakers of the promise. [00:33:06] Now I would have liked to have asked the brethren, quietly and privately, what they think this promise is.

Is it the promise given in Eden?

A woman's seed crushing a serpent's head?

Are they the promises given to Abraham? Or to Isaac or Jacob? Or the promises given to David? No, I don't think so. This is a New Testament promise. And I wonder if your mind's running ahead as quickly as mine is, what is the New Testament promise of Timothy? Well, I'm going to tell you what I think it is. And you put me right afterwards if you disagree. 2 Timothy 1.1 The promise of life in Christ Jesus.

[00:34:05] Titus 1.2 In hope of eternal life, which God, which cannot lie, promised before the foundation of the world. This promise, I venture to believe, is nothing more or less than eternal life. This is one of those delightful touches where Paul and John touch. The top note, if you like, of John's writings. A life that was counseled in eternity. Existed before time began.

Manifested here by the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a view God isn't going to allow. A heavenly life. A life that will be enjoyed in the glory. That's Paul. It's a life that's enjoyed now. That's John.

And John himself says, doesn't he, 1 John 2.25 [00:35:06] This is the promise which he has promised us in eternal life.

So I venture to say to you that this promise is eternal life.

Now I don't think I need dwell more on those two points except to perhaps just underline the wonderful magic of what I'm considering. Although the mystery was hidden, God, many of those types in the Old Testament set forth the truth of Christ and the ascender. Adam went into a deep sleep.

From out of his side was taken a rib. God built it a woman.

She was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. But she was united to him. Got it?

[00:36:01] When you come to Jerusalem in the 45th of Psalm, you get the king's daughter. Obviously she is derived from the king. But at his right hand stands the queen. The dominator.

United.

And you find in his Old Testament scripture time and again this wonderful truth of his shrine.

Now as I draw to the close, I think it's necessary to say in relation to the mystery that there is a conflict.

The devil isn't very well pleased.

He thought he'd got rid of the Lord Jesus Christ at the cross. When will he die and his name perish? [00:37:03] And then, lo and behold, they had to take account of the disciples that they were with Jesus. There was Stephen coming out in the features of his monster. I thought we got rid of him. Here he is again. Stephen. And the Christians, there were therefore Christians of Antioch. Evidently a continuation of the life of Christ. In a sense, the devil wasn't very well pleased. And nor is he. And may I say that there is a conflict today.

When Mr. Darby brought out the truth of the headship of Christ and the body upon earth in the very same year that he was born, Dr. Pusey was born. And the pure stream of truth that came out in the past century [00:38:01] found a challenge from the high church movement.

In 1844, we have little idea as to the dimensions of what was going on in Plymouth.

There was a great upsurge of interest in prophecy. I'm afraid it was weakening the links that the saints had with one another. And when a test came out in 1848 and 1849, I'm afraid the brethren parted from it. And then in 1859, as you probably know, there was a tremendous evangelical revival swept America as well as Ireland and this country. And in the seventies, it's sad to say, in the ranks of brethren, [00:39:05] there was an emphasis upon the gospel that had no room for the ministry. Now you might say to me, you can read Dr. Pusey. I've got him on the mind of prophecy. He says a lot of good things. You're not going to say he's a heretic, are you? Prophecy, Benjamin Wills Newton will teach you a thing or two on prophecy. The evangelical movement, thank God for them.

But make sure in all these features that we don't lose the truth of the ministry.

Largely, I'm afraid, the difficulty was ignorance.

You and I probably value more than any other volume in our life, at least I do, the book on the sufferings of Christ, James, in 1857. [00:40:05] That came out against the background of the most important ignorance amongst brethren in relation to the sufferings of Christ. In 1870, in Reading, the truth of new creation was challenged, and you can read the writings of this particular teacher of your life, and if you can find anything about new creation in it, I'll be very thankful. Others better than I can't find it. Ignorance.

And in 1888, in the Whitley difficulties, I think that the real problem was ignorance in relation to the truth of God.

And I believe that's where we are today. The only thing that objects the Christian community's conviction [00:41:01] in relation to the subject that I'm handling is not a word of exhortation, but the truth coming home in part of us all, so that we realize what a priceless possession we have enshrined in the ministry. ...heart's compasses, mystic... ...have left me.

And again, what trials he suffered from the Jews, you know very well.

But then he goes on to say, I put my trust on sir, no man stood with me. I put my trust on him.

Nevertheless, he said, the Lord stood with me. I was a Christian, fully known, and I was delivered from the mouth of the lion. He was sustained, and what for? He had God's blessing upon him [00:42:01] all day of Caesar's household salutations.

And although he was in prison and bound with a chain, he was able to say, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me, and not to me only, but to all them that love me. He wants to really go in for these things. There is a price to be paid. There's a sense of his presence of Jesus. And may I say to you, you shall be warned, that it is to make known what has been our subject tonight, this wonderful subject.

May the Lord help us along this line. Now, rest the saint above, Jerusalem of God, [00:43:02] who in thy palaces of love thy golden tree hath crowned.