

The Mystery of God

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Are we doing okay? Yeah, great to see you this morning. Thank you so much to Fiona and band and everyone who's contributed to our service thus far. Maybe you want to grab your Bibles and turn back to those verses that Kat read for us in Colossians chapter 1.

And God has so much to teach us this morning through his word. I've been so blessed just to study this passage this week. And it's my prayer that God, by his spirit, would speak to us and challenge our own hearts as we come to hear what he has to say to us this morning.

So with that thought in our minds, let's turn to the Lord and let's pray and ask that he would help us this morning. In Psalm 119, the psalmist writes this.

Your statutes are wonderful, therefore I obey them. The unfolding of your words, it gives light. It gives understanding to the simple.

And so, Heavenly Father, we would want to make it our prayer this morning at the outset of our time together that that would be our experience, that we would know how wonderful your word to us is.

[1 : 10] And Father, would we leave here this morning with a greater picture of your son, Jesus Christ. We can only do that if your spirit comes and helps us. And so we pray that he would come now and be with us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, to get us thinking this afternoon, here's a quiz question for you. What do Charles Dickens, Woody Allen, Muhammad Ali and Prince Charles have in common?

Anybody? Anybody? So just when you... Anybody? They're all the four. They're all the four. Okay, no, not that one.

Just when you thought Prince Charles couldn't get any cooler, all four of them were or are registered amateur magicians. Did you know that?

Registered amateur magicians. And what do they say about a good magician? Never reveals his or her secrets. Ironically, I went on Google this week and I asked Google who the first person was to coin that phrase and it would appear that it is a mystery.

[2 : 16] Well, with those verses in Colossians in our minds, turn there, what we're going to see is that there is a mystery that's right at the heart of these verses.

Now, you'll see Paul mention it three times, verse 26 and 27 of chapter 1 and verse 2 of chapter 2.

There's a mystery right at the heart of these verses. But here's the difference. Unlike our magician friends, when Paul talks about a mystery, he's not talking about something that will be forever kept from us, something that only a certain level of person will be allowed into.

He's talking about something that has been once kept hidden and has now been disclosed for the world to see. You see, in English, a mystery, and I looked this up, the Collins English Dictionary, a mystery is something that is difficult or impossible to understand.

That's what a mystery is, is we understand it. So you think about the secret recipe to Coke. It's a mystery. You think about what goes on in Area 51 out in the desert in Nevada.

[3 : 30] That is a mystery, despite what Independence Day the film would teach us. It's a mystery. Remember, as a child being fascinated, anyone else do this, by the mystery machine in Scooby-Doo.

Do you remember that? The mystery machine in Scooby-Doo. The van that somehow had everything that the gang would ever need in it for any given occasion and any given challenge, but no one quite knew how it all fitted in that tiny little machine.

It was a mystery. But in Greek, you see, a mystery is something quite different. The Greek word *mysterion*, which you can see how we got our word *mystery*, is a secret that was once kept hidden and now has been revealed to the world.

Something that was once hidden, now it's out there for everyone to see. So this is a lot more like the Apple XS launch in September that's just gone.

Okay? Plans that were once hidden from public view, plans that only a certain amount of people were being let into, but now they've gone public. Now it's on show for the world to see, and it's on show for the world to see so that they can get in on this.

[4 : 33] There's a mystery that's right at the heart of these verses today. Now it would appear that Paul has chosen his word quite deliberately there, because what's most likely going on in the background to these verses is that these false teachers, remember we saw them in our first couple of sermons, they claim to have access to some kind of spiritual secret knowledge, they claim to be in on a mystery that the rest of you ordinary Christians in Colossae that you're not in on, you're missing out.

And Paul says that's nonsense, because God's put his mysteries on show for the world to see. And what he wants them to see in these verses, Paul, is that this mystery is the reason for his ministry.

This mystery is the reason why he does what he does. If you look at it there, this is why he endures suffering. Do you see it? He rejoices in it.

Not that he enjoys hardship, but he rejoices in the why he's going through what he's going through, and the what it means, and that he's in chains. The only reason he's in chains is because he's proclaiming Christ, and because he's proclaiming Christ, more and more people are coming to know Christ, and so he says, I rejoice in what I'm going through.

And boy, did Paul suffer for proclaiming Christ. Shipwreck, imprisonment, abandonment, beatings, all because he proclaimed Jesus Christ. Just look how he presses it home in these verses here, filling up in the afflictions of Christ.

[6 : 11] That's what he says. Do you see it? Not that there's anything lacking in what Jesus has done on the cross. Let's be very clear about what he's not saying there. It's most likely, I think, a reference to the truth, that if Jesus has given his life for his people, if that's what he's done for his church, then why would the servant of God expect anything less for his or her life?

This is the reason why he toils. This is the reason he struggles with all the energy that God gives him. It's the reason why he prays. It's the reason why he gets up in the morning.

It's the reason why he speaks. It's the reason why he lives. Because this mystery is so life-transformingly good that it's become the very reason that Paul does what he does.

And that's probably the point, to stop and to ask you to consider why you do what you do in life. Why do you do what you do in life?

You know, as I see it, if the events of the last few weeks have taught us anything, it's that life is vapor.

[7 : 24] Life is here today and it is gone tomorrow. It is short. It's not true that death is the great taboo subject of our generation.

Oh, sure, we try and cover up in language, but there's something of the sobering reality of it that we're faced with every time it happens, that we are here today and gone tomorrow.

That life really is like a game of Monopoly, if you remember playing that when you were young. I don't know, maybe you still play it. You can own all the hotels on the board, or you can own one little house on Old Kent Road.

But at the end of the day, all those pieces are going to go back in the box. And we're all the same. Now, we were down at Burrow Muir SU Group on Wednesday and we were looking at the parable of the rich young fool as we find it in Luke chapter 12.

And we were looking at it together and somebody piped up at my table and said, come on, Jesus, that's a very morbid thought. And somebody on the other side of the table pipes up and says, yeah, but isn't that reality?

[8 : 31] Reality. Love it when somebody else does a lesson for you. It's great, isn't it? But isn't that reality so true? Friends, why do you do what you do in life? Why do you do it?

What's going on? Here's my favorite news story from this week. Anybody see this guy in the news? Pumpkin Man, as I like to call him.

Did you see him this week? He sailed down the river Ouse in a giant pumpkin that he'd hollowed out. Do you know why he did it? Because he wanted the Guinness World Record and how this mind works, I don't understand, right?

How he looked at the Guinness World Records and thought there's a record there to be had, right? He looks at the Guinness World Records and he thinks there's not somebody in there who's got a record for the largest pumpkin boat. Friends, why do you do what you do in life?

Surely a big reason why Paul tells these Colossian Christians what he's doing is not just so that they'll understand what's going on in his mind.

[9 : 34] Surely he wants them to see that this mystery, if you get it, if you see Jesus Christ here, then this is the only thing that's worth living for. This is the only thing that's going to endure. This is the only thing that gives you purpose in life and meaning.

And so simply as we try and wrestle with what Paul is saying here, I've got two questions for us this morning. Two questions I want us all to think about. Okay, two questions. Here's the first one.

Have you grasped the heart of the mystery? Come with me to verse 26. Paul writes this.

The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

C.S. Lewis once said of the Bible, I have been reading poems, romances, vision, literature, legends and myths my whole life. I know what they are like. And I know that none of them are like the Bible.

[10 : 45] See, Lewis recognized that there is no story quite like the story that the Bible tells. It's why if you look closely, and we can talk about this afterwards if you want, you'll find that many of the most loved stories that we love as a people, they actually have echoes of the Bible story in them.

God created the world. He created it good. He created Adam and Eve, the very first few beings in his image, beautifully and wonderfully made. And it was very good.

The creatures were living in harmony with their creator, but Adam and Eve, they rebelled against God. They sinned against him. And sin entered the human equation.

I remember being young, growing up in Sunday school, I remember, somebody explaining to sin to me as, sorry God, I'm in charge, no to your rules. Sorry God, I'm in charge, no to your rules.

Sin entered the human equation. Adam and Eve sinned, it separated them from God. Separated them from God. And their sin, if you like, didn't just cause upward chaos.

[11 : 50] Their sin caused inward chaos. I mean, if you read Genesis, Genesis 3, 4, the Bible begins to use words that it never used before, like shame, and fear, and guilt.

As if to show us that sin has broken their very core beings. It's broken it. And it's caused outward chaos as well.

The relationships with one another, the relationships between human beings are broken. And since then, sin has affected and infected the entire human race.

Friends, I've been a Christian for about 16, going on 17, 18 years, something like that. One of the reasons I became a Christian is because the Bible, when I read it, began to make too much sense. Too much sense.

That what this was telling me, and of course, that's what you'd expect from the Creator's Word, isn't it? Something of what this was telling me was resonating with what I was seeing in here, and what I was seeing out there. I remember studying Macbeth at school.

[12 : 52] If you grew up in Scotland, that was kind of what we always did. And there's that scene, isn't there, where Lady Macbeth, after she's committed murder, she's sleepwalking through the castle. What she's doing is she's rubbing her hands together.

Do you remember that scene? She's rubbing her hands together, trying to get that spot, trying to get that stain out of her hands. And she just can't do it. She keeps on rubbing. She keeps on rubbing. She cannot get the stain out. That's what the Bible is saying about sin.

It's done in our lives. That's a problem. Do you see it summed up in that world that Paul brought out last week in verse 21?

In our natural state, we are alienated from God. All of us, alienated from God. But, God's plan, gloriously, was to make a way to reconcile us to himself.

You see, God's mystery, and this is where we begin to get into the mystery, is not an if. It's a how. How is God going to achieve that? Because he certainly can't do it through mankind's efforts.

[13 : 52] Well, the Bible's a wonderful story about how he chose a people through whom he would accomplish it. He raised up servants. He raised up prophets. He raised up kings who spoke about how God was going to do this in part.

God's plan to win for himself a worshipping people, not just of Jews who are privileged to the works of God, but of Gentiles, that is, non-Jewish people.

That's us. They were strangers from the promises of God and about how God was going to take this people and not just watch over them, but dwell with them.

Live with them. And by consequence, make the impossible, make the two become one. See, the mystery of the Old Testament is how is God going to do that?

And remember, these Colossian Christians, Paul's writing here something like only 30 years or so after Jesus has died, has risen, and has ascended into heaven. Paul says this mystery is one that is not hidden anymore.

[14 : 52] It is out in the open for all to see. How has God done it? Do you see in the verses? Christ. One word. Christ. He is the center of this mystery.

He is the one through whom God is going to reconcile all things in heaven and on earth to himself. He is the one who has come to reconcile sinful people to God, to cleanse us, to make us whole, to forgive us.

Friends, I wonder if you need to remember the forgiveness that is offered through the blood of Jesus Christ this morning. Isn't it wonderful that our sins are many, but his mercy is more?

that my sins are abounding, but his grace super abounds? And Christ is going to present us to God wholly in his sight. The heart of this mystery, friends, is that you and I can know God.

The lyrics of that song we'll sing later on. Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you. The Father's wrath, that's his anger against my sin, completely satisfied, Jesus, thank you.

[15 : 55] once your enemy, now seated at your table, Jesus, thank you. Thank you. And as if that were not mind-blowing enough, see what he says next at the end of verse 27.

And this is where all those hours doing prepositions at school will come and pay dividends. Remember doing prepositions in French class at school? Here's the only thing I remember in French class, right? Le chien est sous le tableau.

Yeah? Dog is under the table. Prepositions really matter. Here is where those finally pay off. Where is Christ? Do you see? He's not over you.

He's not beside you. He's not behind you. He's not under you. Where is he? He's in you. Do you see it? God in Christ and through his spirit lives, dwells, occupies the hearts of his people.

The same Christ, and I think this is where the flow of the letter goes who Paul has described for them at verses 15 to 20. That Christ, the Christ who blew our minds, the Christ who's bigger than we think he is.

[17 : 09] He lives in us. Now. Today. Here. Now. What a glorious foretaste you see of what will one day we will know in full when we stand in glory.

Verse 28. Paul gives himself to what? To telling others this whole mystery about Christ. This whole mystery. Friends, let me ask you, how are you doing today at proclaiming, at telling others about Jesus Christ?

Big challenge, isn't it, when we see something like this? The man who's made it his mission to tell others about Jesus Christ. Because it's only through faith in him that we can know God. What a privilege. It's hard, is that everybody would hear about and put their faith in Jesus Christ and go on to what?

Do you see? Maturity. Maturity. Nourished on the truths of the faith. This is what he wants for these believers. Growing in their love for the Lord.

Delighting him with every word and deed. That's the goal for every Christian. Maturity. That we would grow. And I've had the privilege over the past few weeks of being involved in two Thanksgiving services for the lives of dear sisters here at the church.

[18 : 22] And let me just tell you what a joy and privilege that was. See, to research the lives of two seasoned saints who I only knew for a couple of years was tremendously thrilling.

And I read about their lives and man, had they gone through some stuff that I had no idea about. Losing husbands, caring for children, dealing with physical pain in their own bodies to the extent I'm reading this thinking I have hardly lived through anything in my life.

But what struck me most about both of them, I'm talking about Elma and Margo, dear sisters here, both of them, was their unwavering love for the Lord, their service of his people, and the focus on the future.

As I was at the graveside with the family on Monday, someone, as he reflected on Margo's life, read the words of Psalm 112. Surely the righteous will never be shaken. They will remember forever.

They will be remembered forever. They will have no fear of bad news. Their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Friends, that is Christian maturity. It's not about age.

[19 : 33] It's not about the number of rings that are on the tree. It's not about the things that you've lived through. Christian maturity is about being about being fully persuaded that throughout every storm, throughout every trial, throughout every tear, pain, and question that God is good.

And he's good for his word. We can trust him. And it's why I'm so grateful for a wide church family. And it's why I'd encourage those in a younger generation, trying not to look at anyone on here, to get to know the older generation.

Because you will learn so much about what a life of Christian maturity looks like. And it's why I'd encourage the older generation to get to know the younger generation because you have so much wisdom.

Experiences that you can pass on to help others in that battle for maturity. Isn't it not incredible that God in his almighty wisdom has given us each other to walk this Christian life with?

That we can minister to one another, friends, because his spirit lives in us. Verse 29, For this I struggle and toil with all the energy that God so powerfully works in me.

[20 : 41] Do you see? He loves doing this. It's a privilege. God has called them to this role and God will give them the power to carry out this role to present these Colossian Christians mature in Christ.

I wonder, you're here today and you would describe yourself inwardly, maybe not outwardly, but as a maturing Christian. Are you growing by God's grace? Friends, have you grasped the heart of the mystery?

Have you grasped the heart of the mystery? And here's the second question that's a lot shorter, okay? Second question. Has this mystery grasped your heart? Verse 1 of chapter 2, why does Paul struggle for those at Colossae and those Christians nine miles down the road in Laodicea who clearly they have got a relationship with?

Why does Paul work so hard for these Christians who he has never just seen his own words? He'd never met them face to face. Because he loves them, that's why he loves them. Now he's not conjured that up by himself.

Something of God's heart for his people is in Paul. Paul's kingdom heart for brothers and sisters the world over really shines through in this little section, doesn't it?

[21 : 54] He just loves them. He loves them. As brothers and sisters in Christ, he loves them. So I'd encourage you to get stuck into that prayer card.

Come to the prayer meeting on Wednesday night and get stuck into that prayer card. It's a wonderful chance to pray for brothers and sisters around the world who we will never meet face to face. Now I've been praying for the last couple of months. I don't know about some of you guys in here, but I've been praying for that lady in Pakistan.

All over the news this week, hasn't it? I've been praying for Asia Bibi facing the death penalty in Pakistan because she stood tall for Jesus Christ. And boy, did my soul rejoice the other day when the news came out that the Supreme Court in Pakistan had found her not guilty.

Joyous occasion, wasn't it? Just felt that joy inside of my soul for her because I've been praying for her. She's my sister in Christ. It's incredible. And the news in the last few days that she's still greatly in need of her prayers and so are all the Christians that live in Pakistan.

Paul loves these Christians. He loves them who he's never met face to face. He's got a kingdom heart and he labors for three things. Do you see? First, that they'd be encouraged in heart. Encouraged in heart.

[23 : 00] Remember, the heart in this culture is not so much about emotions as it is in ours. It's about the very core of a person, the thing that drives them, their will. In other words, the heart is not just about how one feels, it's about how one thinks and acts and wills.

Paul works that these people would be strengthened in the deepest part of their inner being. Friends, oh that that would be why we come to church on a Sunday.

To encourage one another deep in our souls and hearts. Secondly, they would be knit together in love. It's a wonderful metaphor, isn't it?

Picturing their unity in Christ. Knit together. Remember when our first little girl was born, Chloe, the first thing they put on them, don't they, in the hostels, is they put on a wee knitted hat.

A wee knitted hat. Remember thinking, looking at it thinking, that looks flimsy. And then I took it off and I tried to pull it. Boy, is that not flimsy. Because it's been knit together really well.

[24 : 02] It holds, it keeps the heat in. That's what Paul's picturing here, isn't it? Knit together. You're not going to come apart. Knit together. I remember singing in church when I was young, bind us together, Lord, bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, bind us together in love. That's his heart, isn't it, for this church. Was the false teaching in the background here, was it putting the unity of this church in jeopardy, perhaps?

Or could it just be that the devil would love to disrupt the unity of any gathering of believers? Paul strives, he works hard, he prays, he gives it his all for the unity of the church.

And it's a great challenge to think about, isn't it? And I asked myself this week in my own heart whether I am doing the same. I can so often get lazy, can't we, with our words and with our thoughts, we can get careless with our moods and our actions.

So much so, the little loose threads begin to emerge in terms of our relationships with one another. Let's be on our guard against that. Don Carson, New Testament commentator, writes this, we will see profound spiritual renovation if by God's grace we make it our commitment not to put anyone down except on our prayer list.

[25 : 16] Paul labors that they would be knit together in love and thirdly, that they would get to know Christ better. To get a greater appreciation of what he's done, to get a greater grasp of their identity in him, to get a bigger picture of God's cosmic purposes that he's working out through Christ and to understand the enormity, the grandeur of what is ahead of them.

Notice the words he uses there, riches, wisdom, knowledge, treasure, as if to say, guys, get your head around how good this is. If you remember, and this is just the stage of life we're at and the things that we watch on TV, do you remember Abu's face in Aladdin when he sees the cave of wonders?

That's what he's picturing here, isn't it? Just so good. He wants our souls to be so satisfied with Christ. He wants them to be convinced beyond any shadow of a doubt that Christ is everything that they will ever need.

And so don't be deluded. Do you see the warning? Don't be deluded by those who would seek to derail you in your pursuit of Jesus Christ by claiming in plausible arguments.

Do you see that? Plausible? That there's something beyond Christ to see and experience and know. People trying to convince you that somehow you are missing out. What does he say? Remain firm. Maintain your good order.

[26 : 34] Stay rooted in Christ. Friends, as we close, a good magician may never reveal their secrets. But God's mystery is not something that's hidden and it's not something that's difficult to understand.

In fact, it's out in the open for all to see. Jesus Christ. Here is the mystery that explains my ministry, says Paul. Here is the reason why Paul does what he does.

Let me take you back as we close to Pumpkin Man. I was trying to picture him this week sitting in his armchair with his Guinness World Record in his hand. He's slurping some pumpkin soup and he's tucking into some pumpkin pie and he's sloshing it all down with a pumpkin spice latte.

And he's looking at his pumpkin. Give it a week, friends. That pumpkin, his life's best achievement, will be rotting, decomposing in front of his eyes and like it was this week at our street, he will simply take it and put it on the curb.

Friends, why do you do what you do in life? Contrast Pumpkin Man with the words of Christian Missionary C.T. Studd and with this we close, who wrote a prayer for his life and it went like this.

[27 : 49] Give me, Father, a purpose deep. In joy or sorrow thy word to keep, faithful and true whatever the strife pleasing thee in my daily life.

Only one life till soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Friends, have you grasped the heart of the mystery?

And has the mystery grasped your heart? Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we would thank you so much for today.

Thank you, dear Father, that you are a God who speaks. and we pray that your spirit would be working amongst us even now as we reflect on what your word has challenged us with this morning.

Father, we know our own hearts, we know our own proneness to wander and so it's our prayer that you would bind us to yourself, that you would teach us wonderful things from your word, that you would help us grant something more of the all-surpassing promise of Jesus better than anything else that this world could offer us and that you would help us have our eyes fixed on him.

[28 : 59] Father, thank you so much that you love us. Thank you that your spirit lives in us and we pray that you would help us now as we continue on in this service. In Jesus' name, Amen.