

Christ in You the Hope of Glory

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[0 : 00] We'll read a few verses around that point in the chapter from verse 24. Colossians 1 at verse 24. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, that is, the church, which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God 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.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

It's really significant to note during the early centuries of the New Testament church how some of the great statements of faith were in response to heresy.

If you take the creeds of the church, for example, back in the first few centuries, such as the Nicene Creed in 325, where the church council came to formulate that great creed, along with others that you find in these early centuries, what you'll find is that they were in response to particular heresies, heresies of the time, whether it was to do with the Trinity or with the person of Christ or with the Holy Spirit.

The response was that the church at the time, they came together in these councils and formulated these great statements of theology of faith to form the creeds that we have since then.

[1 : 42] And of course, that led on in later years to statements such as confessions of faith that you have in the Westminster Confession of Faith and other confessions of faith that came to be formulated as statements of the, or a summary of the truth of scripture itself in a more comprehensive way than the early creeds did.

And you find the same thing in Paul's letters as well, because what we're looking at this evening as part of the letter to the Colossians is something that is Paul's response to the heresy or the false teaching that was current in his own day, because he was here encouraging or assuring the Colossians as they faced that false teaching, especially when they were facing the kind of ideas that taught that there were upper levels of Christian experience that they as Christians in Colossae had not yet reached, and that they would have to go through various degrees of advancement using certain rituals or whatever in order to come to a more full and comprehensive understanding of the truth and of Christian experience as well.

So, of course, that's been something the church has faced down through the years since then as well. And what Paul is doing, knowing that these false teachers could very easily discourage and perplex and cause Christians in the church in Colossae, all these places, to defect or to just become wearied in the faith or be so perplexed with the false teaching that they would begin to fall in with what was taught there, Paul is emphasizing, especially in Colossians here, two things that are really important for ourselves.

They're not going to be our two headings for the sermon tonight, but there are two things that run right through the letter to the Colossians. The first is the completeness of Christ.

How Christ is complete as the Savior of sinners. Through all that he has done, through his person and work, he is complete.

[4 : 01] There is nothing required other than Christ has done. There is nothing to be taken back from what Christ has done. He is absolutely complete in addressing the needs and providing for the needs of lost sinners like ourselves.

And the second thing alongside of that is the completeness of believers in Christ. That's to say that when we are in Christ, we are complete or made complete by God.

Not that there isn't still a stage of redemption to be experienced, to be finalized in glory. But nevertheless, in terms of our acceptance with God, in terms of God treating us and regarding us as

his people, we are complete in Christ.

We don't need to work ourselves into any higher levels of acceptance with God. Everything is in Christ, and in Christ we are already complete as far as God is concerned.

And that goes a great way towards countering the kind of false teaching that the Colossians faced, that the apostles faced, that you face in your own experience in this present day as well.

[5 : 18] Every time you meet with something that appears to be false teaching, different to what you find in the New Testament or in the Bible, ask yourself the question, is this presenting a complete Christ to me?

Is this teaching, does it entail the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as my Savior? And as well as that, ask, well, is this actually saying to me I need something or need to be something other than what I am in Christ?

Do I need to have something added to my identity in Christ as somebody that God has accepted and brought into sonship by adoption and become part of his believing family?

These are the two great issues that we always need to confront, and you'll always come to Paul's letters especially, and you'll find the answer in the completeness of Christ and your completeness in Christ.

So now he comes to assure these Christians in Colossae that this, in fact, is what is already true of them. He says, Well, there's, a whole lot of things woven together there, and there are so many things that you need to open up and would really bear study just to have a couple of these phrases themselves opened up.

[7 : 03] But let's try and keep them together. He's talking here about this mystery, the mystery hidden for ages, the mystery of the riches of the glory of this mystery, how great it is among the Gentiles.

He's obviously concerned that these Gentiles, these non-Hebrew Christians who, in Colossae, came to know the gospel and to know Jesus through the gospel. They're not in any way behind those of Israel, those of the Jewish people who had come from a long history of God's revelation to them to actually come to now know Christ as the Messiah.

But he's now saying these Colossian, former Colossian Gentiles, non-Jews, have exactly the same level of acceptance with God as the Jews did, as the Christian Jews did.

And he talks here about this mystery. What does he mean by this mystery? The word Paul uses elsewhere as well. We use the word mystery nowadays in the ordinary sense of it to indicate something that is unknowable.

It's a mystery. You just can't understand it. The word mystery has that meaning to it as we normally use it. But the word mystery in Paul's theology, in Paul's letters, the word mystery doesn't mean something unknowable, but something that was unrevealed, but has now been revealed in Christ.

[8 : 29] The mystery really essentially is God's saving purpose, God's plan of salvation, which incorporated the Gentiles. That's really so much an integral part of what Paul calls the mystery, the plan of God, that the Gentiles were always included in the plan.

Though in the process of time, only after Christ and after the Holy Spirit had come into the church, only then were the Gentiles incorporated through the gospel, but it was always within God's plan. That is the mystery. That is the previously unknown, but now known and made known, revealed by God. In other words, Christ himself really is the center of that mystery, that now revealed plan of God.

And you see, it's important that he says here that he chose to make known to the saints, the mystery hidden for ages, but now revealed to his saints.

When you go back to the Old Testament and look at the book of Jonah, a great question there. Why did Jonah run away from God's command to go to Nineveh and preach repentance to them?

[9 : 46] Why did he turn away, find a ship going in the opposite direction? Why did he not obey that command of God there and then? Well, the answer to that really basically is that for Jonah at that time in God's revelation, way back in those times, Jonah could not get his head around the fact that these heathens in Nineveh were going to be part or could possibly be part of God's plan of salvation.

How could they be? They were enemies of Israel. They weren't within the covenant that God made with Israel. How could it possibly be that he was being asked, that Jonah was being asked by this covenant God of Israel to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, these cruel heathen people and

preach repentance to them?

But that's really the key to God's teaching of Jonah that the likes of Ninevites, heathen people, Gentile people, were also part of God's great plan of salvation.

And as we come to Colossians, Paul is actually here saying it's to his saints that God has now revealed this. That's important.

By saints, he doesn't mean, of course, as we've seen already different times, he doesn't mean perfect people, he doesn't mean unblemished Christians, he doesn't mean people who are just now at the point of going to glory and have been made perfect.

[11 : 22] By saints, he means those sanctified in Christ, those who are in Christ, therefore set apart to be God's people in him. and God has made known to them this mystery hidden for ages but now revealed to his saints.

Why is he saying that? Because these false teachers are saying, you know, you're not yet amongst the elite. You haven't actually come to graduate into the kind of mysticism, the kind of mystical understanding that we have of what salvation is, of how we actually proceed into the knowledge of God.

That's for a small elite group. You have to work your way towards that. You have to graduate into this small group. No, Paul is saying, don't listen to that because every single Christian, everybody in Christ, all the saints of God, God has revealed this mystery to them.

They're already incorporated into the church of God in this life and all those have the spirit of God, are the saints of God, they have this privilege.

And then he moves on to speak about the mystery that's now revealed but he now goes on to speak about the riches of the glory of this revealed mystery and that's really adding another layer of teaching for us.

[12 : 51] Here he is and he's saying God has already revealed this to his saints. There are people who were Gentiles who did not belong to Israel but now have the same privileges and indeed now understand more fully than ever before the plan of God and how it involved Jew and Gentile alike.

One church, one salvation, one God, one saviour. But what does he mean here by the glory of this mystery? He's not just saying he has revealed this mystery and he's saying to them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory.

Christ in you is the heart of this mystery, this revealed will and plan of God but there are riches to that, riches of the glory of this mystery, a glory to this mystery, there's a glory to it because Christ is central to it because it's the person of Jesus that stands absolutely foursquare in the middle of all of this, everything revolves around him, everything's based upon him but he's now saying the riches of this glory is Christ in you the hope of glory.

Now Paul as you know more often than not uses to be in Christ is a more frequent phrase in his usage than for Christ to be in his people.

To be in Christ is to be saved. But here he's talking about the other side of things, Christ in you. You go to the likes of Galatians, remember that wonderful passage where Paul deals similarly with Christ in you or Christ in him, Galatians 2 and verse 20 where he says there through the law I died to the law that I might live to God, I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[15 : 08] It's no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me. whatever else that means, it means that the life, the spiritual life that Paul possesses that has come about through the knowledge of Christ, through Christ's blessing of him is now Christ in him is at the center of this spiritual life that he possesses.

That's through everyone here tonight and it's an amazing thing, it's an astounding thing in itself. You'll find that Paul also prays for example to the Ephesians for the Ephesians rather in chapter 3 verse 17 of the letter to the Ephesians and it's praying that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God but you notice there he's saying that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

This is what he's praying for for these Ephesians same for the Colossians here he's saying this is the mystery this is the glory of this mystery how great among the Gentiles is are the riches of this

glory which is Christ in you.

which is the greater privilege do you think that we should be found in Christ or that Christ should live in us well they're both I would think on the same level the one's impossible without the other isn't it it can't be in Christ without through the Holy Spirit Christ taking up residence in us in his heart in each of us believing people not just amongst his people as a gathered group or as a church this is talking about Christ in us Christ in each one of us Christ actually occupying the life of his people the soul of his people that's the astounding truth that's set before us similar to the way that Jesus himself taught in John 14 that the father and himself would come and take up residence or make their abode with the person who believed in Christ who kept his word and that's one of the things I for one fail really so often even to think about properly to dwell my mind upon properly the great privilege that it is both to be found in Christ and to have Christ in us to have Jesus occupying your own life as a place in which he dwells as a home that he has made for himself that's really what he's saying to these Colossians you know he's saying don't feel in any way inferior to the false teachers don't feel inferior or as if something is absent from your life when they say you've not yet quite made it however much you feel about yourself however much you're still aware of your sins how much you're aware of your failings how much you're aware of how far you have to go as far as you can see in terms of your holiness of life Paul is saying to you think about this from the moment that you're in Christ by faith

[18:35] Christ in you is the hope of glory his home is in your heart you're not inferior to any false teacher or any heretic that's out there that suggests you haven't yet made it you're complete in him and the complete Jesus is in you it's so important to hang on to that against all that would tend to contradict it or want to contradict it in your own experience as well and you know he's saying here the riches of the glory of this mystery well this mystery this plan of salvation has a glory to it and a glory of course is Christ himself Christ in you the hope of glory Christ himself is central to the glory of this salvation as something glorious and something in which glory has such a basic part the Old Testament you remember had its own presence of God above the mercy seat within the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle in the sanctuary in the temple then afterwards and the privilege was given to the high priest alone to go into the Holy of Holies once a year the folks on the outside couldn't see the cloud the shekinah cloud the glory cloud above the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies they knew it was there they were meant to value that presence as the very indication of God being amongst them

God in you you might say in the Old Testament the hope of glory the hope anticipating the coming of the Lord well here it is it is Christ in you the hope of glory the one who came and tabernacled among us and we beheld as glorious John said the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth that's the glory that's the glory centrally in the New Testament church that's the glory centrally in the plan and the scheme of God's salvation but you see it's in you it is in you this Christ is in you and as Christ is in you so in you is the hope of glory and I think Paul is counteracting an idea that may have been we can't be sure exactly what the form of this false teaching was but it looks as if there was some kind of perfectionism about it that they've already made it and we're saying to these genuine Christians in Colossae you really haven't quite made it yet you're not like us but Paul is saying well it's not yet glory for those who are in Christ yes they are complete in him they're accepted in him but it's not yet glory for them glory is still to come and it doesn't belong to this world belongs to the state of glory to the next world to heaven and Paul is saying the hope of that the hope of glory is Christ in you and the Christ in you is the one in whom all the riches of God's salvation already dwell and he's in you he's in your heart he's in your soul you have him he resides there no one can take him from you how rich are Christians how rich is your very special salvation how rich are you in Christ well you are as rich as Paul is saying here the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory it's not yet possession of glory but it very much is a promise of it that's secure because as Christ is already in the hearts of his people so that itself is the guarantee that his people will yet be fully with him glorified together with him but you see thirdly I want to just mention this before we finish it's not just the mystery that's now revealed that had been hidden and it's not just the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory he also talks about this glory being presently active in our present sufferings because all the way through here in this epistle he talks about the sufferings that are being endured by those Christians in Colossae and it's important that that hope that we possess the hope of glory Christ in us is active now in this world in which we face tribulations and it's right to say that the sufferings of

God's people of the saints of God are unique now that doesn't mean that other people don't go through the same kind of sufferings but it does mean no other people have these sufferings given such a place in their experience as God gives to them because he uses them towards their final glory and that's not true of anyone that isn't a saint in Christ and a saved sinner in Christ and that's why Paul is saying that he's rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake and in verse 24 we already saw in

in Philippians for example how Paul can rejoice even in prison as he's writing to the Philippians you have the same here in the epistle to the Colossians as well how can he say he's rejoicing what does rejoicing mean in those circumstances well it does mean an element of gladness or happiness if you like but you must never leave it at that level because when Paul uses this word rejoicing as he is here there is built into it an element of confidence an element of a sense of security in Christ if you like I rejoice in my suffering for you sake he's able to say I have a sense of security through these sufferings because they're part of the sufferings of God's people and as I belong to that group of God's people I understand he's saying that my sufferings and your sufferings are not different in many respects to what God's people have always gone through and you see this amazing phrase he's using

I rejoice in my sufferings I have confidence in my sufferings and in my flesh I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body that is the church now how can he say I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions what is lacking in Christ's affliction how can he mean something is lacking when he's talking about the afflictions the suffering of Jesus himself but you see he's saying here he's taking Christ and the church to be one entity his body he's the head his people are his body spiritually and what he's saying here is that that one entity that one a body and a head together have if you like a totality of suffering allocated to them over the course of time in other words you can't take the sufferings of Christ out of the sufferings of his people altogether neither can you take the suffering of his people as detached from the sufferings of Jesus so what he's saying is there are still some afflictions and will be to the end of time that will be added to what the church along with

[26 : 59] Christ the head has already suffered and experienced and when that totality is complete the sufferings of Christ and his people together the sufferings of what is lacking in Christ's affliction that is to say the church will be complete in other words Paul is using the word Christ really essentially for the church itself as connected to Jesus and all through the course of time there are certain afflictions that belong to the church as united to Christ joined to his afflictions as well and Paul is saying that's why I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake because I recognize this is what the sufferings belong to this is the entity that these sufferings are part of and therefore I can say that I rejoice in them that I'm confident that they belong to the saved people of

God so there's the mystery it's been revealed we know what it is it is that the Gentiles along with Jews make up the church of God it's not the church of the Jews and the church of the Gentiles it's God's church of Jew and Gentile together Ephesians 2 has that even more graphically portrayed but the riches of the glory of this mystery the wonderful riches that belong to being in Christ to being the people of God and how that is experienced presently in our present sufferings and through them we come to rejoice to have confidence that as far as God is concerned and what God is doing it's all part of his great plan of redemption God bless these thoughts on his word now let's conclude this evening we're singing