

# The Revelation of Mystery

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Date: 23 October 2016

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[ 0 : 00 ] First of all, I build it in the bulletin as the revelation of the mystery. But it could be that in your version, perhaps the NIV, you will find the word mystery isn't there.

And that is because there are two readings in the first verse. The one reading has the Greek word *marturion*, which means testimony, and it's from that word that we get the English word martyr. And the other reading is the word *musturion*, which means mystery. So there are two different readings. It just so happens that I've decided on the second of those.

Now, what we've been looking at over the last week or two is the fact that when Paul writes his letters, he starts a theme and then goes off on a sub-theme.

Now, the main theme of the first four chapters is the division and dissensions of the church at Corinth. Not only mentioned in chapter 1, but also in chapter 11, there are divisions among you in the context of the Lord's table.

[ 1 : 17 ] And in chapter 15, he says, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? So that theme starts at chapter 1, verses 10 to 17, after which he goes off a tangent to consider the preaching of the gospel.

Where we are in chapter 2 is continuing what he said in verse 17 of chapter 1.

Christ did not send me to baptize, to preach the gospel, not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

So think first of all, if you will, the proclamation of the mystery. Now, these words that I've given you from chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, when I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming to you the mystery of God in lofty words of wisdom.

For I decided to know nothing amongst you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. They are in reality a continuation of what he's already said in verse 17.

[ 2 : 29 ] So here he is now talking to the Corinthians.

This divided church. And what he wants to remind them in the first place is how it was when he was with them.

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come to you proclaiming the mystery of God in lofty words or wisdom.

In other words, what he's saying is unlike these Stoic and Epicurean philosophers that we found in Acts chapter 17, he is not acting like one of them.

He's not interested in intellectual arguments. He's not interested in winning the argument of the day. Because what we found in verse 20 of chapter 1 is this statement.

[ 3 : 39 ] Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in Jewish law? Where is the skillful debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

I already mentioned last time that for those living in the first century, there were two sources of information for truths that were outside the scope of the human mind.

It was first of all a great tradition of philosophers named in Acts chapter 17. An example of one of them is Aristotle. He lived from 384 BC to 322 BC.

And what he said about God is that God is the first unmoved mover. Now that's quite a profound statement because what he's saying is if you think of all the things that are in the then world, such as human beings, the creation itself, animals, birds, everything, God is there first of all.

But it's not a statement that would lead you to faith in God. Other philosophers are those like Socrates and Plato. And the point of these individuals is, it is not that they produce an answer to the deep philosophical questions, but the manner in which they did so.

[ 5 : 10 ] They used eloquent words. And it's picked up by the apostle in the statement, where is the skillful debater of this age? Go back to Acts 17 and 21.

Now all the Athenians and foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. This refers to the eloquent speeches of the philosophers in Athens as they plied their trade, as we've seen in Acts 17.

But there's another source. And that source is in the phrase, where is the expert in Jewish law? That phrase, skillful debaters of the age, also refers to them. In some of the English versions in this text, it uses the word scribe.

And that word scribe you also pick up in the Gospels. Under the titles of scribe lawyers and doctors of the law. They're all the one division.

[ 6 : 22 ] They were non-ordained members of the Pharisees who were experts in the minutiae of the Jewish law. Yet, he's also thinking here of the Jewish rabbi.

If you've ever seen any films such as The Chosen about rabbis arguing over a series of texts, they're not quoting or arguing about the Old Testament.

They're arguing about a commentary on what Jesus called the traditions of the elders. And they're arguing about what one rabbi has said in preference to another.

Now, there are two names of these individuals who are still with us. Their names are Hillel and Shammai. They're still quoted today in Judaism.

And their names are quoted on the question of when divorce is allowable. Shammai and his followers were Orthodox. Not under any circumstances.

[ 7 : 36 ] Doesn't matter how many times the wife's been beaten up, kicked into the street, brought into poverty, made ill, or even, well, not dying, obviously.

Divorce is not possible. Hillel, they were a bit more gracious and kind, and they were prepared to grant it under certain circumstances.

So where is the skillful debater of the age refers to them. And it refers to them because he is now saying, I'm not acting like one of them.

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom.

Because he's not there to promote himself. He's not there to promote a group. He's there to promote a person.

[ 8 : 43 ] I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. That is the point of this proclamation of the mystery.

It takes its center in this great person who has dominated all of history and is here tonight in our presence, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We think, secondly, about the revelation of the mystery. I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified, and I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling.

Now, what he's saying here is this revelation of the mystery takes place in and through me.

I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Now, you see, unlike the philosophers who had to learn their trade by sitting at the feet of another philosopher, or unlike the Jewish experts in law who learned their trade by going to what the Jews called the Shiva, the place where you sit and are taught.

[ 10 : 14 ] Now, what Paul is saying is, unlike them, what I have to offer is based on my experience.

Listen to what he says in Galatians. When he who set me apart before I was born and had called me through his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood.

Now, what he's saying here is this. This grace of God has been revealed to me and in me. Because the preposition that's used, translated in, can also be translated to.

I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified, and I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling. So when he considers what he has done, when he considers the sins that he's committed against the people of God, he marvels that God has anything to do with him at all.

So what he's saying is this. That in the same way as Jesus Christ, his Lord and Savior, is the suffering servant, as portrayed in such passages as Isaiah 53, we did not recognize him, the man of sorrows, acquainted with sin.

[ 12 : 03 ] So he also is a suffering servant. And this is what he says to the Philippians. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse, in order that I might gain Christ and

be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own based on the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings become like him in his death, that if possible, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Here is his ambition. It's his most personal ambition of the apostle that you can read. I want to know him better.

It's a hymn that's written, O loveliness unknown, O that I knew thee as you are.

It just so happens that I know the author of that hymn, well, he's dead now, he was a very holy man. And here he's saying if what he wants is a better knowledge of God.

And the apostle Paul has spelt it out here. How you attain this is by a profound knowledge of his sufferings.

[14:02] the way to the knowledge of the power of the resurrection is to share in the sufferings of Jesus.

What kind of suffering servant was Jesus? There are two groups of people that Jesus identified with that the Pharisees, the rabbis, the scribes, the whole lot of them wouldn't have anything to do with. And these were firstly the women of the street and secondly lepers. lepers. Now as far as lepers are concerned if you went to a Pharisee and said what is the word that you can give to a leper to give him hope?

He would have said there isn't one. Nothing can be done. That's the way they are. But Jesus not only identified with them and spoke to them he touched them.

That's the kind of suffering servant that Jesus was. And I tell you in God's name there is indeed a challenge there for us.

[15:38] Because we might not literally have lepers anymore but we do certainly have people that ordinary people will not have anything to do with and the gospel is for them.

Paul goes on to talk about his sufferings in this two verses from Colossians 1 24 to 25. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you and in my flesh complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body that is the church of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known.

It is a very difficult text because it seems to suggest that in some way he thinks he can add to the value of the atonement.

When you consider what he's got to say about the atonement elsewhere it's clear that that's not what he intends. Now listen to this 2 Corinthians 5 8-19 18-19 All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Nothing in that text suggests that anything that Jesus did on the cross needs any addition to it. So what's he saying in Colossians?

[17:36] He's saying this Christ continues to suffer in the suffering of his people.

It's unfortunate that in the verse I read the word lacking is used because what it means is it's only lacking until the process of redemption is finished.

then Christ's sufferings in his people and his people's sufferings will be over. But that is what God has called us to do.

We're not called to sit in an ivory palace. We're called to get down in the dirt beside humanity and lift them up.

trade unions house which was in London but now is in Yorkshire there's a statue outside it and the statue is of one man bending down to help the other man up.

[18:52] Thus this is the symbol and message of the trade union movement. it is also the symbol and message of the Christian gospel. We're called to get down in the dirt.

The vindication of the mystery. My speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

So this revelation of the mystery has taken place through the apostle Paul as a suffering servant so that they might be brought to a true knowledge of God.

And the way that this is going to be achieved is through the personality and ministry and power of the Holy Spirit.

So the final verse says that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of God but in the power of God. I've translated that wrongly.

[ 20 : 06 ] It should be that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. When we examine the record of the Corinthian church, as far as the Christian life was concerned, it's clear this is something they didn't really know very much about.

Oh, they knew about arguing. They knew about having opinions about preachers. But this, no, they didn't know about this.

They were lacking in this knowledge. church. So how is this power to be released? My speech and my message were in the demonstration of the spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

So this power is to be released. And there is a power in the word of God. There's a power in the Holy Spirit.

And this is the reaction that he makes upon the report to them by Chloe's Christian slaves that divisions and quarrelings were part and parcel of the life of this church.

[ 21 : 29 ] I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and there be no dissensions among you, but that you may be united in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Now he can only do this because his faith is solely based on the word of God. His message is solely based on his true experience of meeting Jesus Christ on the Damascus road.

He can only do this because he's not using eloquent words like the philosopher or the expert in Jewish law. He's interested in presenting the gospel and its demands on the people at Corinth, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

So, what is it that he says about his own ministry? In 2 Corinthians chapter 1, he says, it is God who has established us and given us the seal of his Holy Spirit.

then he goes on to say, he has God, he has made us competent ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter by which he means the written code.

[ 23 : 09 ] He's not a legalist, but of the spirit, for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.

These are the resources that are available to meet us, to help us meet the challenge of the age. And so he says in chapter 1 and 21, it pleased God through the folly of what is preached to save those that believe.

This is the true and tested method. There is no other method, no other way, we read in Acts 18.5 that when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

If you look at that phrase, Paul was occupied with preaching, there are in fact two tenses in the Greek language that describe the past. One is called the aorist to describe things that only happen once.

Thus, Christ died for our sins. Never happened again. It's an aorist tense. That's not used here. The tense that's used here is the imperfect, which is like continued action in the past.

[ 24 : 34 ] So when he was there in Acts 18, and he's occupied with preaching, he's fully absorbed in it, not just today, but every day, every chance that he's got, he's there preaching the gospel.

And so he says in chapter 9, woe is me that if I do not preach the gospel. This is the driving power that's in the apostle.

Because we read from Mark 16, where Jesus said, go into all the world. And what has happened to the apostle Paul is that the go of the gospel is in his heart, his soul, and his ministry.

For the Corinthians, he wants this. He wants the power of God to be released. Once they have tasted it, they will never ever look back.

This is why he now says, my speech and my message were, in demonstration of the spirit and of power, your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

[ 25 : 54 ] So there we are. Is this something just for the first century? Or is it that we can learn from this as far as our own ministry, evangelism, and calling is concerned?

I believe it is. I believe that we can learn from this perhaps in a way that we have never learned from it, and I include myself in that. So the challenge is there.

And the challenge continues in the hymn that we now sing, which is a prayer. Lord, speak to me that I may speak.

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