

**SUPREME – The Christ of Colossians**  
**Colossians 1:24 -2:5**  
**Maturity**  
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I'm sure you've all heard of the book of by Robert Louis Stevenson, Treasure Island, or of more recent vintage the movie Pirates of the Caribbean. These stories both involve the mystery of hidden buried treasure and the adventure of finding it.

There is first of all the mystery of finding the map and then the mystery of being able to interpret the map so that it leads you to the treasure. Of course along the way there are many dangers and pitfalls that have to be avoided. You have to work out the mystery of the map. You have to persevere in the face opposition trying to stop you getting the treasure. He who dares wins the prize of the treasure.

We are now in our third week in Colossians and today looking at Chapter 1 verse 24 through to Chapter 2 verse 5. If you don't have your own Bible with you, it is on page 1,183 in your Pew Bible.

Paul talks here in a couple of places about mystery.

Ch1 v26 *"The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people."*

Ch 2 v2 *"My goal is that they may be encouraged... In order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."*

In terms of our analogy it seems to me these passages are saying that Christ is both the map and the treasure.

**Firstly The Map**

The 'ages and the generations' in v26 are the Old Testament story. This is like the map leading us to Christ. There is a mystery about the map. Some parts of it clearly point to Christ others are more obscure.

And Christ is **The Treasure**.

2:2 The mystery of God is Christ, and in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is the prize, he is the goal, he is the treasure.

**Life is a mystery isn't it.**

There are some things which are straightforward,

-If you eat the right foods you've got a better chance of staying healthy,

-If you put money into savings rather than spend it all immediately you will have a much better long-term future,

-Be kind to others and there is more chance they'll be kind to you.

Yet there are some things which are a great mystery and very difficult to fathom.

-People on very healthy diets can still get cancer.

-The righteous can suffer great injustice and the wicked can prosper.

-Relationships in general can be confusing, why do some close friends have a falling out and end up bitter enemies, and at other times people work through their differences and become even closer friends.

Life has the potential for great joy and happiness but also the possibility of agonising pain and disappointment. There is a great mystery about life.

In the midst of life's unanswerable questions the only thing that in the end makes sense is Christ.

The **teaching of Christ** provides keys that unlock this mystery.

-There are the parables which tease us to look beyond immediate problems and consider Godly options.

-There is the dogmatic teaching of Christ which assures us that he has come from the Father and he is making known to us what the Father wants us to know.

-There is the **life of Christ** which doesn't just teach about loving and serving but takes a towel and washes his disciples feet.

He doesn't just teach that *"unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit."* Wonderful teaching; but Jesus puts it into practice at the cross, where his death will be the seed that produces much Godly fruit in all who will follow him down through the centuries.

The answer to the mystery is Christ. Ch2 v2 My goal is ... that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ! Christ is the treasure.

What about the map. The Bible is the map. Look at v25. Paul says he has been given *"a Commission by God to present the word of God in its fullness – the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people."*

The *'ages and generations'* here are the Israelites - the People of God in the Old Testament. They received the word of God, over many ages and generations. And there was always a great mystery about how it would unfold and where it was leading. Paul is saying that his commission is to help people see, that the mystery which has been kept hidden for ages and generations, was all leading to Christ.

In some parts of the Old Testament Christ leaps off every page and it is obviously about him. In other parts the meaning is more difficult to see. Nevertheless, the whole of the Bible is a coherent story which is pointing to Christ.

Let me recall for you just a few of the great Old Testament characters.

There is **Abraham** the father of the Israelite nation. In Genesis 12:1-3 when he is called he is told that through him all peoples on earth will be blessed. He is the father of the chosen nation Israel but it is for the purpose of blessing all the nations.

This is what Paul picks up in the New Testament time and again, and here in Colossians he does it in 1:27; he is saying that God has chosen the Israelite nation, *"to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery which is, Christ in you the hope of glory."*

Then there is **Moses**. There is so much in Moses and the Exodus which points us to Christ, but think about Moses call at the burning bush. God identifies himself there as *"I am who I am"*. *"I am"* is sending you to rescue the people from slavery in Egypt.

And how does Jesus identify himself? In John 8:58 he says, *“Before Abraham was born, I am!”* Jesus identifies himself as the eternal God who has always existed and who was present at the calling of Moses.

Then we have **King David**. Here is a passage you might be familiar with. *“For unto us a child is born unto us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called wonderful counsellor, mighty God everlasting Father, Prince of peace... He will reign on David's throne and over his Kingdom...”* Despite his many failings, David was seen as the ideal king and a prototype of the Messiah. He is the figure in Israel's history pointing us to Jesus as King.

Then of course we have **the prophets** who look back to Abraham and Moses and call the Israelites to covenant faithfulness; but who also looked to the future and the promise of the Messiah. This Messiah would be a suffering servant, and do we ever get a clearer picture of Jesus than in Isaiah 53. *“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”*

The Israelites couldn't possibly have pictured the glory of Christ from simply reading their scriptures but there is no doubt Christ is there. So Paul can say in Colossians 1:26 *“The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, is now disclosed to the Lord's people.”* And in 2:2 Paul's goal is that the Colossians might have complete understanding through knowing this mystery which is Christ.

I remember a holiday we had in Canberra many years ago staying with some friends. They had a young boy who played soccer and it was a cold winter morning that we went down to the field to watch him play. There was a complete fog over Canberra that morning and as we stood on the sideline you could barely see 10 metres ahead of you. We stood there watching the boys disappear into the fog at the either end of the ground not able to see a thing. It's quite a vivid memory because I remember watching my own boy playing soccer in QLD and we actually got to see the game.

Well for some people life is like living in a fog. They just go from one thing to another never asking the deeper questions and making lots of poor decisions as a result. They have no way of understanding the problems of life or a framework for working through them too some sense of resolution.

People have cut themselves off from the possibility of external help and therefore have only their own resources to help them get through the challenges of life. All they have are the catch-cries of our day, ‘look for the hero within’, ‘the power of positive thinking’, and ‘self-help techniques’ in a multitude of books. These all work fine while life is going along well or the problems are just little ones, but when the going gets really tough, lives crumble. So life can be a fog, a great mystery and sometimes people reach a dead end where they think there is no way out.

Paul speaks into this predicament by pointing people to Christ and the practical encouragement He brings. He says in Chapter 2:2 that his goal for the Colossians and the Laodiceans is, *“...that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they might know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*

Back in 1:28 he says his goal is *“to present everyone fully mature in Christ”* and to this end he, *“strenuously contends with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in him.”*

My friends the apostle Paul faced so much suffering in his life yet he didn't live life in a fog. He had clear purpose and direction in his life explaining the mystery of God to people. He wanted them to find that same purpose in their lives and come to full maturity in Christ. It is maturity in Christ which helps us to face suffering well. Look at how Paul understood suffering.

His understanding comes to us in that difficult verse at the start of our reading 1:24, *"Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."* It's a strange verse, because what could be lacking in regard to Christ afflictions? In so many other passages Paul is clear that Christ sacrifice is perfect and sufficient to save us.

The best explanation I've found for this is that 'Christ's afflictions' are the ongoing suffering that happens in the world as the church seeks to minister to the pains of our world. Any person who has suffered injustice, any person who does not know the love of the Saviour, any situation which is unredeemed by his love becomes part of the mission of the church.

All mission, all ministry involves some level of suffering as we involve ourselves sacrificially in other's lives. This is what is lacking and unfinished in Christ's afflictions. It is the ongoing ministry of the Body of Christ on earth, the church.

Paul is saying that he can face this suffering with joy. He says in verse 24, "Now I rejoice in what I'm suffering for you." How strange that sounds in our contemporary world!

-He can rejoice because of the purpose he has in Christ.

-He can rejoice because he knows however thick the fog, there is a way through with Christ.

-He can rejoice because he knows the answer to the mystery is Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

My friends realign your hearts to where true treasure is found. The mystery which has been kept hidden for ages and generations is now made known, it is Christ. The glorious riches of this mystery is Christ in you, the hope of glory.