

## Week 3 Colossians 1:24 – 2:5 The Mystery of God

### Recap from last week

Jesus reigns supreme over all creation. We live under his supremacy. His rule changes everything for us. We now live in His kingdom—the kingdom of light. We've been freed from sin and death and have been presented as holy before God. We owe our lives to Jesus for what He's done for us.

We took away possible actions for the week ahead.

**Pray:** Asking God to reveal the areas of your life that need to submit to Jesus's authority.

**List:** Reading back through Colossians 1:1–23 and list all the attributes of Christ mentioned in these verses.

**Share:** Writing out our testimony, focusing on what life was like before we knew Christ and how He's changed our lives since, sharing our story with someone during the week.

**Create:** Making something to remind ourselves that Jesus is supreme over all creation.

**Worship:** Choosing a praise song that exalts Jesus, reminding us of His supremacy over all things.

Remember that each of you can access the participant's guide via our website. Also my transcript of this bible study will be available on the website for you to download. If you go into Latest News, you will see a Category for the Colossians Bible Study.

Straight after the study, before you do anything else, it would be great if you could take 10 mins to stop and using the reflection space to consider how it has impacted you today. And then into this week ahead to do something about it, so the final section called 'Live it out' gives you ideas on how you can live out the passage we have studied.

### Introduction

So today we are going to consider the mystery of God. The good news is we don't have to look far to figure out the mystery—it's already been revealed to us through Jesus Christ. So today, like other weeks, our study should change how we think about this topic, it should change our hearts, and it should change our lives :

**Head Change:** That we know what it means to have Christ in us and how that truth impacts our lives.

**Heart Change:** That we feel encouraged to pursue Christian maturity.

**Life Change:** That we should act in a way that reflects that Christ is in us.

**Read Colossians 1:24–2:5.**

So let's remember context. Paul is writing this letter from a particular place and for a particular purpose. He is in prison and he wants to ensure that the Church knew it needed nothing other than God through Jesus Christ. We know that this was a problem in the Church at that time. There was a heresy, where some people were suggesting there was an inner knowledge or secret message that only certain people had access to.

Remember also that Paul was a Jew. He had been brought up in the Jewish faith, he was well trained in the Jewish faith, he was out persecuting Christians, but Paul had a transforming experience and encounter with Jesus and his whole life has changed. So now Paul, a Jew who follows Jesus Christ is proclaiming the fullness of who is Jesus is.

And so we come today to this text which is not just being proclaimed for the Jews but for everyone. Paul has a big theological lesson in this text today. He is saying that everything God has promised (through the history of God's people in the OT) God has been making a way so that he can have a relationship with them (in the wilderness there was a tent of meeting, eventually in the city of Jerusalem there they built a temple, but in every place there is human sin, and there has to be a place to make sacrifices. There was always a gap between humanity and God). In the temple there was a curtain which divided the presence of a Holy God from a sinful people. Only the High Priest could enter through the curtain into the Holy of Holies; a rare opportunity for a human to step into the holy place of God.

And so Paul speaks about how to close that gap, so he points us back to Jesus and only Jesus; to the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. This idea that Jesus is in the centre of everything in time and eternity. That our fullest potential is when Christ is in the centre of all we do. So Paul describes the mystery; something that no one was able to access until Christ comes. Let's watch Louie Giglio explain the main points of our scripture passage today.

Watch video from 05:10 to end

At the opening of our reading today (verse 24) we see that Paul's attitude to his current suffering is to rejoice because he is doing it for his fellow brothers & sisters, **but what empowers him to be able to rejoice in prison?**

He realises how much Christ has suffered for him. When he says the afflictions of Christ were "lacking," he doesn't mean Jesus's suffering on the cross wasn't enough to save us. Instead, he's talking about the suffering of the Church—we endure tribulation until the suffering of believers ends when Christ returns. It is drawing on an ancient Jewish belief that a time of great suffering would come and this would be the prelude to the age of the Messiah. Paul is therefore content to take his share of suffering for the sake of the gospel.

**How does Jesus's return bring you hope in times of suffering?**

As we move on through verse 25, Paul has a firm foundation in the gospel truth and his calling from God. With this foundation and conviction, he was able to look past his current situation to focus on God. **Describe an instance where the gospel helped you look to God in the midst of a difficult time.**

Paul knew God had called him to take the gospel to the Gentiles—to those who were outside the Jewish faith. Verses 26 and 27 remind us that the gospel isn't for an elite group of people. It's for all people who put their faith in Jesus no matter who they are, or what their background is. If we read from Acts 10:44-45, *“<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. <sup>45</sup> The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles”*, we see here how the Gentiles were brought into the family of God.

Paul writes to the Galatians in Chapter 3:26-28, *“<sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”*.

Let's also read from Ephesians 3:1-6 as Paul writes, *“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— <sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus”*.

**What difference does it make in your life knowing that God chose to bring you into His family? How could that truth impact the way you treat believers you don't naturally click with?**

God desires a unified and diverse people. As members of His family, we should strive to be unified as one. Paul says in verse 27 that “To them (God's people) God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”. So each of us partakes in the mystery—Christ is in each of us.

The mystery of God is that Christ now unifies God's people—both Jews and Gentiles—by being in them. Christ in us is the hope of glory—the hope that we will one day share in Jesus's glory when He returns. We heard earlier about the difference between Christ and us and Christ in us. **How would you describe the difference between the two?**

So verse 27 talks about 'the mystery'. The Greek word translated as “mystery” is *mysterion*. Our English word, mystery, implies there's a secret that people have been trying to uncover but failed to do so. The Greek word *mysterion* speaks of something previously unknown but God has disclosed it to His people. Through Jesus's death

and resurrection, God revealed the mystery of His redemptive plan that involves both Jews and Gentiles.

So having a Christ-and-us mentality makes us think we have to do all the work to be the perfect Christian. It's like the illustration of a joint wrestling match where we have a tag team. Sometimes we think we have to fight through life on our own and tag Jesus in when we're spent. **What is it like when you live out the Christ-and-you mentality? How does it impact your thoughts and actions? And why does it fall short of the true gospel?**

We heard described that living as Christ-in-you as letting go of a rope. We sometimes strain to hold our faith in our own hands. But the reality is God is the one who's done all the work and He is the one to sustain us to follow Him every day. **How would you describe your attitude towards your relationships with God? Do you have an "and" mentality or an "in" attitude?**

Read verses 28–29.

**What's Paul's goal for those he leads?** He wants them to be fully mature in Christ, and so he finds his energy to accomplish this through Jesus.

**How does Paul's goal and source of energy prove that Christians aren't supposed to simply sit back and be lazy?**

The video took us to these two verses to show that just because Christ is in us doesn't mean we stop obeying and following Him. Our obedient actions shouldn't change a lot when we realize Christ is in us. Instead, our attitude changes: we obey because we know and love Christ and realize He is in us, not because we want to earn His favour or follow Him in our own power.

**Stop for a moment and think about someone who best represents a mature follower of Jesus. What is it about them that shows they are mature?**

It is possible to be in Christ and be immature, not understanding fully what it means. In order to walk a road to maturity we need to seek to learn more about God's purposes for us, we need to seek out instruction from the Holy Spirit, we need to be part of a church community where the teaching is inspiring through what God is doing in your leaders and teachers, and that Jesus is supreme in their own lives. As we now move into Chapter 2, we realise, for Paul, Christian maturity is a big deal. He's already talked about how he prays the Colossians would grow in their faith in Colossians 1:9–12. He begins chapter two by explaining further how he hopes the Colossians will grow.

Read Colossians 2:1–5 again

*"I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. <sup>2</sup> My goal 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 may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. <sup>5</sup> For though I am absent from*

*you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is”.*

Even though Paul never met the Colossians (and the Laodiceans were church members from a neighbouring town), he wanted them to know he cared about them and their spiritual growth. His ultimate goal was that they would not be deceived by arguments that sounded good but were actually lies.

Verses 2 and 3 talk about the love, understanding, wisdom, knowledge, and unity that come with knowing Christ. I have had experiences with new Christians who have found it difficult to discern where things are true or not. **How might each of those things listed in verse 2 & 3 help someone stand up against false teaching? What do you do to discern if something is true?**

Paul is describing the need to have a firm faith and that followers must be disciplined. NT Wright describes that followers of Jesus are like those riding a bike; unless you go forward, you will fall off. And going forward means nothing more nor less than going forward in Christ. This means being rooted in good soil To have firm foundations. Do not become distracted by fine sounding arguments. Our lives also, NT Wright says, will be full of thanksgiving as was shown in Paul, whatever trials we face. Our lives will be attractive and delightful to people outside, not because we try to stay happy in any situation, but rather that everything we are and do is rooted in Christ. People will look in puzzlement, Wright says, at how people in Christ live a whole new sort of life. That is how the gospel is likely to spread.

As we grow in these truths—that there’s hope beyond suffering, Christ is in us, and we should be discerning—we will become mature followers of Jesus. **What are some practical ways you could pursue growth in your faith?**

## **Conclusion**

Paul’s words in this passage remind us of the hope found in the gospel message. In Jesus, we know there’s an end to suffering—one day He will return and renew all things. Through Jesus, we’ve been given understanding to the mystery of God. People of all nations can put their trust in Him and He lives in every believer.

With these truths in mind, we can embrace the challenge Paul gives to the Colossians to pursue maturity. We can stand firm in our faith and grow in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. We can begin by internalizing the truth that Jesus is in us—we don’t have to strive to earn salvation or God’s approval. Instead, we obey from a place of love and an intimate relationship with God.

Ask God to empower you to pursue maturity in Him.

## **Live it out**

**Pray:** Pray the truth of this scripture passage this week, that Christ is in you and that this truth would settle into your heart and mind this week.

**Write:** Make two columns on a sheet of paper. On one side, write what it's like to live with the Christ-and-me. On the other side, write what it means that Christ is in you. Reflect on those differences this week.

**Ask:** Talk to someone you consider a mature Christian this week. Ask them what God has used to mature them as they've followed Christ.

**Study:** Read John 15 this week (the Vine and the branches) and take note of the attributes of Christ that appear in the text. As you study, pray God would grow you in the characteristics of Jesus.

**Encourage:** Share the truths discussed in this section of Colossians with another Christian this week. Encourage them that Christ is in them by talking about the mystery of God.