**KNOWING CHRIST, THE MYSTERY OF GOD**

Colossians 1:24–2:5 (Key Verse: 2:2)

*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*

What does it mean to know Christ? What is it a mystery of God? Why is all this relevant to me and you? Last week shd Desmond delivered a message on the supremacy of Christ Jesus. We shall see in this passage that the secret to successful living and serving Jesus body, the church lies in knowing Christ, the mystery of God. The first part of this message reveals the qualities of Jesus in Paul and what was Paul’s motivation and goal? Part II of the message is about how could Paul, a mere human being, like me and you, have Jesus qualities and spiritual goals in serving the Colossian believers. It is my prayer that God plant his one word in our hearts, to desire all the more to know Christ Jesus, the mystery of God. Amen!

**Part I: Paul’s Life of suffering for the church**

Look at verse 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’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”* As we learned before, Paul was probably In prison when he wrote this letter. His suffering was not made up, but a lived experience for Christ Jesus. He was suffering for the believers and the church, he says it was for the sake of the body, which is the church. Look again at verse 24, Paul says, I am suffering for you…for the sake of his body, which is the church. This is not the suffering Christ suffered for our salvation. He is now suffering for the church. This means that, these sufferings are ongoing for the servants of God. However, he mentions something unthinkable. He says, I now rejoice in what I am suffering for you. How could Paul rejoice in suffering. We generally do not find joy in suffering. We in fact run away from suffering. We try by all means to avoid suffering. However, He could rejoice because he was not suffering because of things, he was suffering in order to participate in the sufferings of Christ Jesus for the sake of the church. This life purpose was not meaningless but gave him joy.

In fact, God's servants are all called to participate in Jesus’ suffering, in one way or another. That is why Jesus told us, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34). Jesus suffered and endured great pain for us. He was wounded and crushed because of our sins and by taking our punishment. Jesus made us completely well. (Isa 53:4-5) Here we discover a fundamental truth by which God works among people, even today. For one person to grow, another person must die, for one person to receive, another person must sacrifice! Just like Jesus did for us. Raising children is another practical example of this. It does not matter what you feel is important to you at any time, when they want your attention they want it, when they need food. This is also how God blessed the Colossian believers, through Paul suffered many hardships in prison and sacrifices so much for the sake of Christ’s body (which is the church) the Colossian believers could receive the powerful words of God from him. And come to know Christ more personally and deeply! Indeed, to rejoice in our suffering is not easy to do! We may ask ourselves, is this even possible? Yes, it is possible if we know Christ, as we will see in part two of the message.

Look at verse 25, “*I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness*”, the New Living Translation says, “God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you.” There are all kinds of ways we could serve within the Church, recently because we are having a growing number kids in the ministry, we have been praying for a kids ministry leader. Marriages are also starting to grow in ministry we will need marriage councillors and so on. However, the main service that nourishes the body of Christ, the church is the word of God. So Paul a servant of God was given the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming the fullness of the word of God. Honestly speaking, this is not an easy task, as shepherds of God’s ministry, we are lay people, Monday to Friday we are confronted with our stressful jobs, we have families and so on. Preparing messages is done in short time, sometimes in a rush. Barely even having time to think about each person’s needs. As leader of our ministry I fall short, in spending time with the word of God so that I may present its fulness to you. And this posses a danger that we miss out on the word of God. I remember some time back we used to pray for a full time staff shepherd. Somone whose main role is looking into the word of God, preparing our bible study material, with clear discernment of our spiritual needs. Missionary Daniel Rhee for example was a full time staff shd in Namsang UBF before he became director leader. Even when he came to South Africa, we could enjoy his presence and teaching of the word of God. He used to even say, his Sunday messages are usually prepared two weeks in advance. As a ministry, we need someone who has the time and spiritual training, to present to us the word of God in its fullness! May the lord raise up a fulltime shepherd in our ministry, who can study and share the fullness of God’s word with us. Amen!

Does this then mean we should stop teaching the bible since we are unable to present God’s word in its fullness? Not at all! Let’s look at verse 28 and see how Paul and his young co-workers carried out their responsibility to present the word of God. Verse 28 reads, “*28****He is the one we proclaim****, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ”*. There are some few things we can see on this verse, firstly, Jesus Christ is central to Paul’s message. Verse 28 says, **he is the one we proclaim**. The focus is Christ, not doctrines, morals, or religious rules. When we study the book of Acts, the Apostles preached Christ himself. Though they referred to Old Testament Scriptures, they always pointed to Christ, especially his death on the cross and resurrection. In John 5:39 Jesus told the religious leaders, *"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me...."* All Scripture points to Christ (Lk 24:44; Jn 5:39). Christ is the center of the Bible. Wherever we go, whatever passage we teach, we should simply proclaim Christ. When we do so, people can meet Christ who can live in them and transform them. Shepherd Desmond last week also said, we must have a relationship with Jesus Christ, the purpose of church is mainly to have relationship with Jesus Christ, it is not a social gathering.

Proclaiming Jesus is the first step to presenting the word of God to others. There are other two more steps, Look again at verse 28, we proclaim him, then he continues saying….(2) admonishing (warning) and (3) teaching everyone with all wisdom. When we read Paul’s letters, we see that he meticulously followed these three steps. Then what was his goal? To what end did he proclaim Jesus, admonish and teach people? Look again at verse 28b. Paul says, ***so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ****. What a monumental task,* ***to present everyone fully mature in Christ***. Can you also feel the weight of this responsibility? What a high standard, Paul set for himself and for us. However, what exactly does it mean to present everyone fully mature in Christ. It simply means to help those who are under our care to grow in the likeness of Jesus: to be as humble as Jesus, as loving as Jesus, as compassionate as Jesus, as patient as Jesus as obedient as Jesus! Is this even possible? Yes! if we know Christ as we will see in part two of the message.

Remember that Paul had never even met anyone in the Colossian church. Consequently, it is quite natural to think, then why should Paul be concerned about them? However, when we look carefully, we surprisingly find that Paul was very concerned about them. Look at chp 2:1, *I want you to know how much I am struggling for you…*at the time of writing this letter, Paul was in prison and could not do anything for them physically. But upon hearing of them from Epaphras, Paul’s heart immediately went out to them. And he was truly and genuinely concerned about them so much so that Paul was struggling in his heart because of them! Can you imagine, struggling for someone you have never even met? The KJV says that…. Paul experienced great conflict within himself for the wellbeing of the Colossian believers and not only for them but also for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met [him] personally. This is truly amazing!! Generally, we are so occupied with our own wellbeing and or problems, that it is very difficult to struggle with other people’s problems. Then what about people we have not even met! Frankly speaking, humanly it is impossible to even think about their problems. On the contrary, that is exactly what Paul did! Again, what a high standard Paul set to serve Jesus’ body; which is the church! Again, is this even possible? Yes, if we know Christ, Paul’s life reveals that it is possible. Let’s now look at part two of today’s message and see what does it mean to know Christ.

**Part II: Knowing Crist the Mystery of God**

Paul’s ability to rejoice in his suffering, struggle to present everyone fully mature in Christ and be concerned for people he has not even met – seems to be a mystery! Think about it….how is it possible for any sinful man to behave in such Christ-like manner? Paul’s behaviour really goes beyond our human limitations and is indeed the mystery of God that only He can explain. Fortunately for us, this is exactly what God does, as we shall see in the remaining parts of today’s passage.

Let us all read verse 2:2, “2My 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,” Paul calls Christ, "the mystery of God." Why? How was this mystery revealed? What are its contents? What is the impact on those who know it?

First, how was the mystery of God revealed (26). Verse 26 says, *"...the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people."* In this verse we can find God's way of working. In the beginning, right after the first man and woman sinned, God promised to send a Savior.

Although God revealed his plan to Abraham to make his offspring a blessing to all nations on earth (Gen 12:3, this offspring referred to Christ Jesus Gal 3:16). And although many prophets referred to the coming of Christ and what He would come and do, God did not completely reveal Christ, the mystery of God, until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This meant, that unlike us today. People could not personally know Christ until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that now discloses and reveals Christ to the Lord's people.

Interestingly Paul describes Christ in you as, the hope of glory (27; 2:3). Let's read verse 27. "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." In this verse, "them" refers to the Lord's people. Among them are both Jews and Gentiles. The fact that Gentiles had become the Lord's people is amazing. The Gentiles were alienated from God, and foreigners to the covenants and promises, without hope and without God in the world (Eph 2:12). They were regarded as scum by the Israelites. But God chose to reveal to them the glorious riches of his mystery. Why did Paul call Christ "the glorious riches"? It is because in Christ there are all kinds of treasures, such as forgiveness of sins, adoption as God's children, inheritance in his eternal kingdom, provision for all our needs, protection from evil, wisdom and knowledge (2:3), membership in the body of Christ and fellowship with God's children, a glorious mission, the gift of the Holy Spirit who makes us fruitful, and so much more. Christ is the source of all these things. And whoever knows Christ, suddenly have access to these glorious riches! Now we really begin to understand why Paul behaved in such a Christ-like manner!!

The question is, where is Christ? Look at verse 27b. It says “Christ in you.” Now we completely understand, how Paul could behave in such a Christ-like manner. Christ with all His glorious riches, dwelled powerfully and richly within Paul. Supplying Him with the ability to rejoice in his suffering labour to present everyone fully mature in Christ. He could also struggle to take care of people he never even met. It was the powerful working of Christ – in Paul! As he was always full of the Christ’s Spirit dwelling in his heart.

But if Christ’s Spirit with all the glorious riches worked so powerfully in Paul, why is it that it is not the same for you and me? Look again at the key verse, verse 2. Paul uses the phrase know the mystery of God, namely, Christ. This is key point of today’s passage to know the mystery of God, namely Christ. Here it is important to mention that knowing Christ is quite different than knowing About Christ. Knowing about Christ is to have information about him in one's mind. Yet, it has absolutely no effect on our lifestyle or our being!!! In contrast, knowing Christ is very personal. It is to have a personal relationship with Christ. And over time to get to know him closer and deeper and so to experience His presence in a way that transforms the way we think, the way we behave, the way we serve all according to His glorious riches! This is why Paul behaved in such an exceptional manner. He truly knew Christ, very deeply and very personally!

I must confess that, I have not been in pursuit of knowing Christ, my pursuit has been getting things done. Weekly bible studies, needs to be done. I would strive to get them done. Sunday message preparation, I would strive to get it done. In in my marriage, managing conflict, needs to be resolved. Rasing our children, needs to be done. Loving and serving my wife, needs to be done. Whereas looking at our key verse, Paul strived for believers to know the mystery of God, Christ Jesus. This is why Paul could go beyond what was expected. He could care for people he had not even met. My religious activities should become means by which I can know Christ. I can know Christ, the mystery of God, through my role as a father and husband. By relying on Jesus to lead my family. How I conduct myself on my secular job, I can know Christ Jesus. And so am realizing that, knowing Christ, this mystery of God, means to have Jesus live in me. This is how I can truly know him. As long as he is outside of me, I will know about him. And so It is my prayer that I may know Christ. So that Jesus who lives in me may use this one life he has given me to proclaim the fullness of his word. Verse 3 says, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. These are the treasures i need in roles the lord has called me into, leader of God’s ministry, father and husband. And it is clear that I can only access these treasure by knowing Christ Jesus, because these treasures are hidden in him. It is indeed amazing that, and I suppose mysterious that, a sinner like me, has full access to these through knowing Jesus. May Jesus live in me and may I grow in knowing him so God’s church and family life may receive what is of Christ Jesus and less of me. So that one day I may present the church and my family mature in Christ Jesus. Amen!

**In conclusion**, While we are living in this world, we seek many things. What are they? Are they the most valuable things which cannot be exchanged for anything else? Christ, the mystery of God, is the glorious treasure and the source of everything we need. Christ is the one we should seek. When we have Christ in our hearts, we are the most blessed persons and the richest persons in the world, even though our worldly treasures may be few. On the other hand, even if we have many worldly treasures, this could be….good job, family, friends, even children and so on. if we do not have Christ in our hearts, we are very poor people. It is no wonder that there is a lot of people who rely on others and things for fulfilment, resulting in all kinds of issues and troubles. Many times what we longing for only Jesus Christ can fulfil. All the things we have will disappear, along with our bodies when we die. Let's know Christ. Let's hold on to Christ as our treasure in our hearts. Let's hold on to Christ as the treasure in our community. Amen!