**KNOWING CHRIST, THE MYSTERY OF GOD**

Colossians 2:24-2:5 (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” (2:2)

In today’s passage we will learn that the secret to successfully living and serving Jesus’ body, which is the church, is to know Christ, the mystery of God. Today’s message is divided into two parts. In the first part, we will see the Christ-like qualities with which Paul served the Colossian believers; even though he was locked up in prison. In the second part of the message, we will learn how Paul, a mere human like you and me, could serve the LORD’s people in such an exceptional way. I pray the word of the LORD encourages you today, to truly want to know Christ, the mystery of God.

**PART 1. PAUL'S SUFFERING FOR THE CHURCH**

Last week, shepherd Lesedi told us that Paul was imprisoned, when he wrote this letter to the Colossians. As we can imagine, being in prison could not be easy for Paul. He surely must have experienced so much suffering. Then how did he respond to his suffering? Look at verse 24. Paul says; “Now I rejoice in what I am suffering. This is quite surprising, right?! Humanly speaking, we would expect Paul to be discouraged…….depressed……..and self-absorbed; right? For generally, that is how we all react to suffering. Yet, Paul rejoiced in his suffering! Every time the Roman guards walked passed Paul’s cell, they heard him whistling **delightful** hymns ……and singing **joyful** songs. Indeed Paul was not crushed…….he was not **grumpy** or short tempered…….or worried……because of his suffering in prison……but rather full of joy and delight! This is most interesting, don’t you think?

But that is not the only interesting thing. Look again at verse 24. While in prison, Paul filled up in his flesh what was still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions. This really sounds strange; right? Was Paul some sort of masochist who enjoyed inflicting pain on himself? NOT AT ALL!!! Instead, this was Paul’s unique way of saying, that he viewed his suffering within the context of Christ’s suffering and afflictions. Now we must know, that there are two kinds of afflictions or sufferings of Christ. Indeed, when it comes to our redemption, Jesus’ suffering was sufficient, once for all. (1 Pe 2:24). Yet, the sufferings and afflictions Paul mentions here in verse 24…….that he fills up in his flesh….. is a second kind of suffering that is not related to redemption…….but rather related to ministry, and is suffering that servants of God experience while serving the church. Look again at verse 24….First Paul says… I rejoice in what I am suffering…...FOR YOU……… then he continues by saying …….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. Unlike Jesus’ suffering and afflictions on the cross, this suffering and afflictions are ongoing…..and unavoidable for servants whom God appoints for his purpose in the church. (25)

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 and 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. This is also how God blessed the Colossian believers ……….through Paul…...Though 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 will read from both the NLT and NIV. Paul says, God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by presenting God’s word in its fullness! Indeed, there are many ways that we can serve Jesus’ church…….but our main responsibility collectively as a ministry……… will always be to present the word of God……. **in its fullness**……… to each other and then to the broader universal church. **Honestly speaking, as a ministry we have to deeply pray about this responsibility. We are all so very busy……and our leaders are all lay servants of God. This poses a danger, that we miss out on the fullness of God’s word, as we hurriedly prepare messages and testimonies and bible studies. As a ministry, we need someone who has the time and spiritual training, to present to us the word of God in its fullness! Someone who can replace missionary Daniel, who has returned to Korea. Let’s earnestly pray for God to 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. (Read verse 28) Paul firstly says, we proclaim him….in other words proclaim Jesus. **Here we learn a very important truth about presenting the Word of God.** 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. Amen!

We should know, however, that proclaiming Jesus is only the first step in presenting the word of God to others. There is a second and third step. Look again at verse 28. Paul says, 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……and no doubt whenever he presenting God’s word to someone. 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. Wow!!…….what a massive 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. But 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.

Another interesting fact that shepherd Lesedi shared with us last week, was that Paul had never been to Colosse. Moreover, that at the time of writing this letter to the Colossians, 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 2:1. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you… As we said earlier, 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…. like a mother’s heart going out to her vulnerable children. 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 remarkable!! 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. Yet 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. Let’s now look at part two of today’s message and see what does it mean to know Christ.

**PART 2. KNOWING CHRIST, 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 explains.** Fortunately for us, this is exactly what God does, in the remaining parts of today’s passage.

Look at our key verse, verse 2. Paul calls Christ, "the mystery of God." A mystery that…….during the period of the Old Testament……has been kept hidden for ages and generations.(26) Although in the beginning, right after Adam and Eve sinned, God promised to send a Savior (Gen 3:15) and……. 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.

Now interestingly, when Paul describes Christ as the mystery of God – he used phrases like glorious riches of this mystery, (27a) …………and the full riches of complete understanding (2a) and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (3) Wow! But why does Paul refer to Christ as “glorious riches?” It is because in Christ there are all kinds of treasures, such as……….the ability to rejoice in our suffering……….struggle for the spiritual benefit of other people……..ability to present everyone fully mature in Christ…… understanding (2:2a)…….wisdom and knowledge (2:3)… 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 and……..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. As Pastor Ron in Chicago said; even computers can store information about Christ. 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!

Personally, I stand both ashamed yet also encouraged before this word of God. I am ashamed, because my behaviour at the end of last year testified that I did not know Christ deeply and intimately as I thought. I know this because instead of rejoicing in my suffering for God’s ministry, I was complaining……short tempered……and discouraged. This made me to lack capacity to struggle with other people’s problems and shortcomings, as my own problems and shortcomings occupied my heart. Also, I must shamefully admit that presenting those under my care as fully mature in Christ was as far removed from me as I myself fell way short in the LORD. Indeed, I have nowhere to hide. And pray that the LORD forgive me for not reaching out to HIM and so know Him more……...and experience the relief that all His treasures could bring me. In the absence of Christ’s presence in me, I sinned much against the LORD. I pray the LORD may have mercy on me and forgive me. At the same time, I am encouraged through this passage. Because at the end of last year and up to this week, I really did not know how I am going to get through this year, with all the challenges and responsibilities on my shoulders. Yet, I have learned through today’s passage that the only way is to personally and deeply know Christ, the mystery of God. I am at a point in my life where I either know Christ and move forward…….or I know …..ABOUT……Christ and I collapse. I no longer have the luxury to just go my way. For this, I deeply thank God! Indeed, it is time for me to grow in spiritual maturity as a servant of the LORD. And at least try to follow in the big footsteps Paul has left behind. Humanly speaking, I know I can never make it. That I can honestly confess based on how last year ended. Yet, I accept that glorious riches of Christ…..can and will supply me with everything I need to serve the body of Christ; which is the church, while also working to provide for my family’s financial needs. Please, pray for me to deeply know Christ in 2021.

In conclusion: Unless we know Christ, the mystery of God, we will never ever be able to serve in God’s church according to His purpose…….This is exactly why Paul laboured and struggled so hard for the Colossian believers……..because he knew unless they knew Christ……their faith would be very weak and their ability to serve the LORD non-existent. It is no different for all of us. We cannot sit here and say to each other that we are going to serve the LORD and His church in 2021, yet our hearts are void of the glorious riches of Christ. The truth is, unless we know Christ……..and our hearts flows over with His glorious riches………we will most certainly collapse and this ministry come to nothing. Yet, if we truly and sincerely reach out to Christ…….and seek after Him with all our hearts……..we can pray to serve Jesus’ body just like Paul…..we will be able to rejoice in our sufferings, struggle for the wellbeing of complete strangers and labour to present everyone fully mature in Christ. Please…let’s all sincerely pray to know Christ! Amen.