

No More Secrets

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Date: 21 June 2020

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[0 : 0 0] well we're going to return now to God's word to that passage I wondered what you think of this question does God have secrets does God have secrets well in a sense that he does Moses writes in Deuteronomy 29 29 that the secret things belong to the Lord our God but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may do all the works of his law in other words we know what we need to know but there are other things that are not ours to know at all it's simple maths in a way God is infinite his mind stretches in every direction without beginning and without end and even on our good days our minds are not like that so if God poured all his wisdom and knowledge into our minds they would overflow endlessly there's lots that even if God told us we simply wouldn't understand God wouldn't be God otherwise but secrets can also make us feel uncomfortable can't they sometimes we can become anxious and kind of spiritually paranoid about the secrets that we think God might be keeping from us what does God secretly want me to do with my life if only I knew his will for me then maybe things would be okay what does God secretly think of me I know he says that he loves me but can I really know whether that's true these kinds of secrets are like rust in our relationships over the years they eat away at the trust that we have in God we can quietly come to see God as someone to be suspicious of or to hide from here in this passage that we just read Paul says no more secrets the secret is out we see here that God only has one secret that we need to know one secret that clears up all the questions and doubts that might ever plague our minds about who God is and what he wants for us

Paul talks here about a mystery from God and he says that God's mystery is laid open to us through gospel ministry and Paul says that it's as we come to terms with this one secret that God has told us openly in his gospel that we grow in security with him we settle into our relationship with God we grow satisfied day by day by the riches and treasures that God has given us in his son in the gospel God says to us no more secrets so firstly then Paul calls us simply to know God's secret to know God's secret now Paul I'm sure you notice gets very personal in this section of his letter doesn't he but you read me from verse 25 where he writes I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints Paul's talking here about his own ministry where it came from what it's for what it's really about but why does he do that in a letter that is so much about how great

Christ is remember in Colossae some false teachers have come in claiming to offer something that goes beyond Christ Christ plus a bit of ritual and a lot of rules so the question for this young church was was the gospel that they had heard only half the story was Paul keeping secrets holding them back from the full life with God that they could have if they were in the know or put more simply was the gospel true your faith isn't wishful thinking or a shot in the dark it was based on the facts of Jesus life death and resurrection so truth matters and if there's more to God's plan than we've been told then that's a problem so is there more to God than we have in the gospel that's the myth that Paul is keen to dispel by describing himself here as a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you that word stewardship is a picture that describes what happens when a king would put his servant in charge of running his household so he's given the keys to every room his special access to the king's store store room and his treasures and the job of the servant was to distribute the goods to the household at the time and in the way that the king had specified that's what stewardship is and Paul says that's the position that God has put him in as a manager of his household the church that's a huge responsibility responsibility so what is God's specific ask of Paul he says in verse 25 this responsibility was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known in other words God has given Paul his treasure his word and Paul's task is to give it all out to the whole household he is not to hold back anything from anyone of everything that God has spoken including this mystery now when we say things like it's a mystery normally we mean something like well we really can't know or perhaps we have to go and do some digging around to find out for ourselves but that's clearly not what Paul has in mind here yes he says it was a mystery that was hidden for ages and generations but now it's revealed to his saints that's something that only God can do with his own secrets a mystery from God is not something we can find out on our own it's a secret that only God can share and what Paul wants us to know is that God has shared his secret it's right here on this page in his word in his bible it wasn't like these false teachers were saying we don't need secret rituals that bring us to know secrets we don't need special rules that get us closer to the truth because God has spoken and all the good news from God has been fully shared by Paul with God's whole household his church after this secret there are no more secrets so what is it well would you read it with me from verse 27 Paul writes God chose to make known how great among the

Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory. God's secret is Jesus Christ; he doesn't want us to miss that. He says it again in chapter 2 verse 2 just to make sure that we get that God's mystery which is Christ. Christ is God's final word. It's as if Paul says he's emptied God's store cupboards; he shared the fullness of what God has to give to his church; there's nothing left, uh, trickling around in a corner. It's in the good news of Jesus; the full value of God's royal riches have been poured out into his church, which means that the full value of God's gift lives in you, Christ in you. There is no closer that we can get to God than to have Christ in us by his spirit. Back when we could travel, I got to visit Budapest in Hungary, and one of the highlights of that trip was a tour around the Hungarian parliament. That's a seriously impressive building; the ceilings are covered in gold leaf, the floors are made of marble, and there's unique artworks that you couldn't find anywhere else. But the greatest treasure in there is actually an incredible crown full of jewels and gold that was used to crown the kings of Hungary for 700 years. It's priceless, it's unique, and they keep it there on display with two armed guards right next to it at all times. Now on our tour, one of the visitors was inching closer and closer just to get a really good snapshot of this crown, and suddenly these guards, they let forward, drew out these massive swords, and shouted at this guy, and they shouted so loud I didn't actually hear what they said, but clearly this poor guy had gone too close to the royal treasure, and you know sometimes we can feel that way with God; we have to keep at a distance from him, or that he'll be angry if we come too near. But God has given us not only a crown, but his king, not only for us to see, not only for us to hold, but for him to live in us. Christ in you, we can't get any closer to God than that. So what about those secrets that we sometimes think might bring us closer to the heart of God? Well, here's God's answer: does God really love you? Christ is in you. Does God really want what is best for you? Christ is in you. The hope of glory if Christ lives in you by his spirit; these things are not secrets anymore. In Christ, you have the best God has to give now and forever. Do you want to know God's secret? It's as simple as knowing his son, so how then do we know him? Or Paul goes on to say that God's secret is revealed through gospel service. So secondly, then we're called to recognize gospel service.

I'm sure most of you in your lives have had the joy of writing a CV; you painfully set out the qualities you think it will make you right for the job, and that's a little bit like we see Paul doing here in this letter. You know how could the church of Colossae know that Paul was a true and trustworthy servant of God and the gospel? Well, Paul simply invites him to examine his life of gospel service. What we see is that it is profoundly centered on Christ in three ways: firstly, Christ is the content of gospel service. See that in verse 28 Paul writes, "we proclaim him." We proclaim famous words with an important point: that preaching Christ is the heart of all authentic gospel service. You yourselves have had superb examples of this in your faithful ministers over the years, so much so that I'm sure it is easy to take it for granted, or simply to skim over this point. But that gospel ministry is centered on God's word, and that the substance of God's word is Christ. These two things are not obvious to everyone. Preaching Christ was not obvious in Colossae where a more eye-catching, insider style of ministry was being pushed on the church. But Paul is clear that to preach Christ sums up the content of gospel service. Notice he switches from talking only about himself to a wider group: probably himself, Timothy, along with Apatras and others that he partnered with. But Paul is clear that he's not just his personal preference or his personal style; though preaching Christ is what gospel ministry is.

[12 : 52] God's secret is only being shared when Christ is being preached so that is what our churches need to hear that is what our friends and neighbors and colleagues the city of Aberdeen needs to have Christ preached it's something to be so thankful for that as a church you have such a hunger for the word so do you keep the preaching and teaching of Christ as the staple diet of your life together keep that appetite up but remember too that you also share in this gospel service as a church body you Paul clearly expects that the good news of Jesus will be spoken even when there's no full-time gospel minister so each of us is called to be part of this gospel service to speak of Christ to one another speaking the truth in love so that the body builds itself up in love to speak of Christ to those who don't know him to gossip the gospel in our everyday lives so that others too can know the wonder that is Christ in you him we proclaim the content of true gospel service is Christ but secondly we see that Christ is also the pattern of gospel service you do notice how often Paul brings up suffering and struggling here verse 24 I rejoice in my sufferings verse 29 I want

I toil struggling with all his energy chapter 2 verse 1 I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you the Greek word that's used for struggle there is the word where we get the word agony Paul is saying I agonize over you but he's not ashamed of that though so often we find Paul boasting in his sufferings because suffering for the gospel shows off Christ to the church and to the world verse 24 Paul writes I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body that is the church now clearly he's not saying there that he needs to add his own suffering to Christ's suffering to save the church you Christ plus suffering is the same error as Christ plus rituals and rules it's saying that Christ is not enough on his own to bring us to God so when Paul says he is filling up what's lacking in Christ's afflictions it's simply underlining that his suffering is not an accident it's not a disgrace no he is sharing in Christ's sufferings just as Christ suffered to serve his church

Paul is getting more of the same as he serves the church because true gospel service follows the pattern of Christ in his sufferings the false teachers in Colossae would have pointed at Paul's suffering to discredit him where is God's power in his life where is God's blessing in his life but Paul says that God's power is actually seen in his own struggle verse 29 he says but this I toil struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works in me God's power isn't given to us to give us the best life now though it enables us to suffer and struggle on and persevere in the service of the gospel even when it's really tough Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness and so brothers and sisters don't be surprised when gospel service is really hard when sharing the gospel is a struggle when opening God's word feels weak even ministers are not immune from this struggle quite the opposite is a daily reality of real gospel service because that suffering is exactly where God's power power is seen because Christ is the pattern of gospel service thirdly the third mark of gospel service that Paul unfolds is that Christ is the goal of gospel service he was Paul's number one aim what is he working for we see it at the end of verse 28 that we may present everyone mature in Christ

Paul's whole being is bent on presenting every single one of God's people mature in Christ you included often we can think of being mature in Christ as about being clever perhaps only people with an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible are mature often we can think of it as being busy so maybe people who do lots of stuff in our churches are mature and they may well be knowledge and service are important but that's not Paul's vision of maturity here he explains in verse 2 I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you that their hearts may be encouraged knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ to Paul maturity is coming to a more and more intimate personal knowledge of Christ notice that it's a collective goal that our hearts may be knit together in love so that together we reach the riches of full assurance in Christ the goal of the gospel is not that some of us get beyond Christ onto other things it's that we all grow fully confident in Christ to know that we are safe with him lots of Christians can struggle with assurance sometimes they doubt whether they are really secure in Christ are they really saved does God really love them and care for them perhaps you know those doubts personally it's not uncommon but in a way it shouldn't be to be secure settled satisfied in Christ is the goal of gospel service this is for everyone says Paul everyone mature in Christ that is what your leaders want for you that is what God wants for you that you would be confident and be able to rest in the security you have in Christ because he is the goal of gospel service so in those three areas you Paul is simply calling us to recognize real gospel service

Christ the content the pattern and the goal because the point is we can trust the message of a ministry like that this is the kind of service that doesn't hold back any secrets that shows Christ for all he is to everyone all the time because he is put at the heart of every detail this is so important for yourselves as you seek a new minister when you weigh up who to call the question should be does this guy love Christ is his speaking living and his purpose defined by Christ because your city needs to know Christ even without a minister during this time recognizing gospel service is also vital for yourselves as you keep going with this same kind of gospel ministry in your lives to keep speaking of Christ to keep living for Christ through thick and thin to keep building each other up in Christ because that is what God wants for every church and each person in each church that we would grow mature in Christ finally then we grow in God's son this is the point that Paul lands this teaching why does Paul want us to know all these things well he says it in verse 4 when you read with me he says

[21 : 41] I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments Paul doesn't want us to live under any illusions at this point he doesn't give much away about what's troubling the church in Colossae but he does warn us that we need to know Christ and to recognize gospel service to keep us from being blown off center by lies Paul calls them plausible arguments the things that sound right and convincing but ultimately there's a hidden twist when we're led to think our life with God is Christ plus our feelings Christ plus works Christ plus rules Christ plus experiences Christ plus success Christ plus Christ plus that is the kind of lie that was going around in Colossae and it is still going around today and those kinds of lies seem possible to us not because they deny

Christ outright but because they want to sell us more than Christ they offer what we think we might need but Paul is so clear that Christ plus anything equals nothing those lies try to take us in with fancy packaging but as soon as you open them up you just find emptiness and the irony of what Paul is saying here is that the real thing the true gospel is the exact opposite it doesn't come in fancy packaging it comes with sufferings it comes with plain words it comes with struggle but in it says Paul are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge a priceless Christ is found in this gospel and he is the complete package that is why Paul longs for our churches to know God's secret and recognize gospel service so that we would not be drawn away by fine sounding lies so that instead we be convinced of where our only hope is truly found

God's secret is Christ alone and so therefore he writes as you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in him rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving don't drift away from him don't wander off into half truths that only lead to emptiness and despair but instead walk with him and grow up in him Paul uses a strange picture doesn't he to paint a portrait of the Christian life be rooted like a tree and built up like a building rooted down and built up in our garden we have a pretty tall hawthorn tree at least two or three times my height but it's strange to look at because around the bottom is a pot probably about this size that it seems to grow out of and our gut instinct says when we see that kind of thing your tree that big needs a bigger pot it must have more roots than that and indeed

I think if we took the pot away we'd find the roots had long broken through the bottom and are growing deep into the ground tall trees need deep roots and that's exactly the same in the Christian life no Christian grows strong in their faith who only has shallow roots planted in Christ it simply doesn't happen so to grow up in Christ we need to settle down in him we saw this earlier Paul's longing that everyone would be able to rest secure and confidently in Christ one of the things you need to do for plants when you put them in a new bed is to firm them down you press the roots down into the soil and that's the kind of image Paul's using we have found a new home in Christ and maturity means laying down day by day deeper and deeper roots of trust in him settling down into our union with him enjoying him deepening our trust in him this is vital for new

Christians at the start of their walk to be firmly rooted in Christ but it's also possible to have been walking with Christ for years and years and sadly still not know the deep security that we have in him the depths of the riches that we find in him so we need to root ourselves deeply into Christ because by doing that we also grow up in him rooted down and built up in this building image the metaphor shifts doesn't it now Christ is the foundation on which God builds his church but if the foundation is weak then the building is not going to stand for long that's why Paul doesn't want anything mixed into that foundation which is going to weaken it Christ alone is the sure foundation for our spiritual growth so don't add anything in which will stop you from growing be built up in Christ alone because as it's as we walk with

[27 : 26] Christ and grow in him that we come to be satisfied in him our thanksgiving will grow and overflow as we see day by day his wisdom his knowledge his power his beauty his fullness as we see that he is enough for us that is Christian maturity that is what the gospel is for not only to bring us to Christ but to keep us in Christ to grow us in Christ to keep us knit together in love to keep us deepening our trust in Christ so that we will reach full confidence in him to be for us all that we truly need God has no more to give than Christ in ye the hope of glory no more secrets so let us give ourselves to growing in Christ hoping in him and making him known as he is given to us in the gospel let's pray together our gracious heavenly father we thank you that you have spoken and revealed

Jesus Christ to us we thank you that when we were far from you and in the dark about you that you sought us out that you gave us the very trust that we needed to hold on to Christ we thank you for the gift of Christ in us the hope of glory and we pray that you would teach us to treasure him to see his value and each day to trust him ever more deeply thank you father that nothing can ever separate us from you if we are in Christ Jesus nothing in all creation and so we pray that you would help us to know our security in him and help us to you to make him known father we long to see Christ known and pray for fruitful ministry that is faithful to your word and we ask in Jesus name amen to you brother and pay all