

God's Big Surprise

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[0:00] Turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1. And our scripture reading for tonight is chapter 1, verses 24 through chapter 2, verse 5.

Now I rejoice in what was suffered 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.

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.

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. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.

[1:12] My purpose 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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

What do you like better, getting a surprise or being in on the surprise? I think both are really exciting, aren't they? But for me, I like being in on the surprise and watching their face as they're looking around stunned and not knowing what's going on.

You just can't beat that feeling. It's delicious. If you understand that feeling of being in on a surprise and getting to see someone experience that surprise for the first time, then you understand where Paul is coming from in this little section of Colossians.

From verse 24 all the way to verse 29, so from verse 24 to the end of the chapter, Paul is nearly breathless. This is all one big, long sentence in Greek.

[2:52] Now, our English translations have cut it up into a lot of little sentences, but Paul is excited and he's worked up, and so he's just stacking, clause on clause and phrase on phrase, hardly taking a pause.

So you can imagine a child running in all excited, ready to tell his mom or dad something, and flings open the door, and out it comes, and sentence structure is not a high concern.

You just got to get it out. Well, that's Paul. He is super excited about God's big surprise. And he's excited because he gets to play a part in the party, in the big surprise, in the unveiling of it.

And I think best of all for us, God invites us to be in on the surprise as well. And so tonight we're going to see three things from verses 24 through 27, and it's God's big surprise, and then our part, and then four lessons.

And so, first of all, God's big surprise. You see that in verse 26 and 27. Paul uses a word two times. He uses mystery. Paul calls it the mystery.

[4:16] The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed. That word mystery, Paul uses it 20 times in his epistles, 10 of those times.

Half of them are in Colossians and Ephesians. And he doesn't mean something mysterious that we can't understand, that, you know, is a big mystery, and you're not sure of what it means.

He practically defines what he means by mystery in this little verse here in Colossians. He says it's something hidden. It was hidden, but now it's revealed.

It's something once hidden, but now revealed. It was hidden before Christ came, but now that Christ has come, and the end of the ages has come upon us, now that the Messiah is here, the mystery is revealed.

That's how he uses that word in his letters. Now, he's probably taking that idea from the book of Daniel, and you can see, we studied that book not too long ago, but if you remember that book, he talks a lot about things that were going to happen at the end.

[5 : 28] God reveals things that are going to happen in the future. Things unknown, but soon revealed. Things that God is going to do among the Gentiles that people wouldn't have known or expected.

Things about God and his kingdom. And it's those hidden, but soon to be revealed things that Paul, or that Daniel, the book of Daniel calls a mystery.

So you can read in Daniel 2, don't turn there now, but Daniel prays, and God reveals the mystery of the dream.

He reveals to him the mystery. And so now Paul says, he's taking this word, and he's saying, God has been working on a mystery for some time now. Ages and generations, it's been hidden.

It's quite a while, he's kept it hidden. It's been brewing in the heart of God. So you can feel something of that when you think, okay, I'm going to throw a surprise party for my wife, and you start planning months and months ahead of time, and the tension builds.

[6 : 33] That's what's going on here. This mystery has been brewing in the heart of God. He's been thinking about it. He's been planning it. He's been preparing it. The big surprise, a surprise that no one could see coming.

There were hints of it. There were foreshadowings of it. There were even a few foretastes of it. But the mystery, for the most part, has been pent up in the heart of God.

God has hidden it in his heart, treasured it there. You remember Mary. When she saw everything that was happening, she became pregnant with our Lord, and the things that happened around his birth.

And it says that she treasured it in her heart. Well, how do we know that she was treasuring it in her heart? Well, Luke must have done an interview of Mary.

And Mary tells to Luke, Luke, this is what I was thinking about. I was treasuring these things, these words in my heart. She didn't tell people about them, but she pondered them.

[7 : 45] She kept them there. And it wasn't until Christ died and then rose again and ascended that everything that Mary had been pondering came out for everyone to know.

Well, the mystery is like that. It's been a long time in God's heart. He's been thinking about it. And he's been planning it. And he's been working toward it. And finally, now that our Lord has come, he has died, he has risen again, he has ascended on high, the mystery now is revealed, the long-hidden mystery.

And it's this, that God is gracious. He's being gracious. He's reaching out with Christ for the Gentiles, for the nations, for the peoples, for the ethnos, the ethnic groups.

And that's the big surprise. God is going to save the Gentiles. And we say, hmm.

That's what it was? That's old news to us. But brothers and sisters, we're talking about God's grace to us, to you, to your people, to your families.

[9 : 03] Where were your ancestors at the time of Christ when Paul was, or when Paul was writing this? Where were your people 2,000 years ago? Mine were probably stuck in some woods up in northern Europe, sacrificing humans, throwing their bodies in a swamp, hanging their bodies from trees, worshiping idols.

Who knows? But we were without God and without hope. No chance of salvation in the northern woods of Europe. But what was God's heart toward those people?

Toward those people? Those people way away, far away, not anywhere near Jerusalem, not anywhere where they could read God's word. Well, it was mercy.

It was grace. God was looking upon them and he was having mercy upon them. This is his long-held hidden secret that's now revealed that God in Jesus Christ is now going to reach out to those people groups and bring them in and save them.

So he's going to give to them, the ethnos, the ethnic groups, the peoples, the Gentiles, our grandparents, our ancestors. He's coming to them with riches in his hands.

[10:24] They hadn't done anything to deserve it and he's coming with riches in his hands. And the Jews, you can read Acts, you can read Galatians, they never saw it coming.

It was a head-scratcher. It was grace that was even troubling for Jewish Christians. How could this be? It was shocking. It just can't be.

But that was the grace that was bubbling in God's heart. He's going to save those lost people way out there, far away. He's going to reveal the mystery of Jesus Christ to his saints, to his holy ones. And lo and behold, some of those saints were going to be way out there, a part of the Gentiles. Not the Israelites, not the people of God, not those who now knew the word of God, but to the Gentiles. Jesus said, other sheep I have not of this pasture and I must bring them also. Jesus' heart was God's heart. Jesus' heart was God's heart.

[11:37] Why must you save them? Why must you bring them? Oh, I have to. This is something I have to do. It's in my heart. Nothing's constraining him from the outside. This is what he has to do from the inside.

This is God's big surprise. He is going to give them his greatest treasure. He is going to give to the nations his son and save them.

So Israel's Messiah was going to be their savior king. Israel's forever king, forever salvation king. He was going to give to the Gentiles.

He was going to give to rule and to reign over the blind, the once blind, the once dead, the once completely idolatrous and wicked. So long lay the world in sin and error pining till he appeared. And you notice in verse 27, it's these glorious riches of this mystery. It's not only Jesus Christ, but it's everything in Jesus Christ. It's the hope of glory.

[12:36] Ephesians talks about these riches. You read Ephesians chapter 1. Every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ. And I don't think Paul lists every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ in Ephesians 1.

He just starts to give some examples. But every spiritual blessing that can be imagined is in Jesus Christ. And now God is going to pour them out onto the lost.

Now all of them are ours. Do you see the love of God for the nations? For the lost nations?

See the love of God for the lost out there. Out there. We can't think that God's only means of growing his church is from within.

Growing from within. From our children. Just from our children. Church growth. The growth of God's people comes from without. From within, certainly, but from without.

[13:44] We can't talk and we can't think like it's all about our children. About the next generation. Of course we want to put importance on that. I'm not belittling that at all. But if they aren't saved, God will add to his church through other ways.

Have you heard about these Yazidis? These people on this mountain in Iraq and these terrorists are harassing them and surrounding them. Do you know anything about these poor people?

Their religion is some sort of confusing combination of Islam and other things. But in this religion, you can't convert into it.

You can't become a Yazidi. You couldn't go over there and say, I want to be one of you. You have to be born into it. The only way they grow is from within.

So all the growth comes from within. But that's not how it is with us. That's not how it is with the church. There is a world of possible disciples out there.

[14:48] That's what Paul is seeing. There is a world of possible disciples out there. And Paul is saying, this is why I am so excited. And this is why I'm willing to suffer in order to tell others about Jesus Christ.

I'm glad to suffer to tell others about Christ's afflictions because God is growing his church. He's doing it. Not just from within. Not just our children.

But he says to, Paul would say to us, look up. Look out. The fields are white under harvest. They're ready. Jesus is saying, I've got to have them.

And God is revealing Christ to them. God is at work in this mission. God is seeking and finding. God is revealing.

So verse 27, to them, God has chosen to make known who? The saints. The holy ones who are among the Gentiles.

[15:46] To them, God has chosen to make known the glorious riches of this mystery. God is making Christ known. And so God is giving the riches to the poor.

He's giving sight to the blind. He's giving the hopeless the hope of glory. So what do they need? They need forgiveness.

Well, in Jesus Christ, there is redemption, the forgiveness of sins. They need adoption. They need reconciled to the father. Well, the sinful, the prodigals, the heathen are coming home and they're finding a home in God's family.

And so the one sitting in the street crying all alone is brought into the family. And then the hardened teenager, the cynical teenager, he's being brought into the family.

And then the old, the past, the washed up, they're out of their prime. He's saying, forget your past. Come into my family. You're mine now.

[16:45] They need new life. He gives them new life. They need new direction. He teaches them. They need a new future. He gives them hope. They need love, joy, peace, patience. All of that comes to them in Christ.

God has all of these riches for them. And it all culminates, it all climaxes and finishes in glory. Do not fear.

It's been my father's pleasure to give you the kingdom. And so when will God be done having mercy upon these nations? Well, the long answer or the short answer is never.

But when all the people, all of his people from all the nations, when all of them are all called out of their sin and they're sitting down at the feast of God and he's showing his kindness to them forever. So this is God's big surprise. He's showing grace to people who weren't looking for it. He's showing grace to the nations, to the lost, to those who are outside the community of God.

[17:49] He's showing grace to us and to our neighbors. And so now is the day of salvation. And we have to shut our mouths and say, wow, it's coming to the people that I would least expect it.

The last one's on my list. That's who God is going to. So that's God's big surprise. Now second, what's our part? What's our part? Because you notice Paul is saying, I play a part in doing this. And I think by extension, we as the church of God, as the apostolic church, have a part to play. Paul says, I'm a servant of the church by the commission, by the stewardship God gave me to present to you, to you Gentiles, the word of God in its fullness.

So what is Paul's role? And what is our role now as God's witnesses? So God is revealing, but we also have a part to play.

And so what is our part? Paul says, in the NIV, it says, I present the word of God in its fullness. The ESV has it to make the word of God fully known.

[19:03] It's literally to fulfill the word of God. To fulfill the word of God. To carry it out. To make it fully known. Well, that's our role.

Now, what does that mean? Well, what really are we, how do you do that? How do you fulfill the word of God? Well, the best commentary on scripture is scripture.

And so Paul, in Romans 15, and I'm going to ask you to turn there, Romans 15, verse 17, Paul uses this very same language and it's in the very same sort of situation.

He's talking about the Gentiles. He's talking about his ministry to the Gentiles. And so, Romans 15, 17, he uses the same terminology. Now, in this case, he doesn't say, I'm going to fulfill the word of God.

He says, I'm going to fulfill the gospel of Christ. So, in the NIV, this is how it reads, Romans 15, 17, therefore, I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.

[20:11] I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done, by the power of signs and miracles through the power of the Spirit.

So, so in this way, from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. That's our language.

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written, those who were not told about him will see.

and those who have not heard will understand. So, right there in the middle of verse 19, he says, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ or I have fulfilled the gospel of Christ.

So, so what is Paul saying here in Romans? What is Paul saying in Colossians? Well, he shows us, he says, by what I've said and done, by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the spirit.

[21:22] So, as in, in this way, from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum, I have fulfilled the gospel. So, what does it mean to fulfill the word of God?

What's our part? Well, if we take from Paul, it means in the power of the spirit to do and to speak so that others can come to know Jesus Christ.

It's in the power of the spirit that we help others by our words and by our deeds, by what has been said and by what we have done, that we help others to see Christ.

And it's through the spirit-empowered witness, it's through the spirit-empowered witness that God is revealing this mystery. He's making Christ known.

Now, that was Paul's special calling in a certain sense. He had a stewardship, a commission as an apostle to the Gentiles.

[22:28] But, this is all of our calling as the apostolic church, as the church built on the apostles, and as Jesus' disciples.

As Jesus' disciples. So, Paul was this great icebreaker. You've seen those ships that go through the ice and they break them up. But, we're in ships and we're coming behind him.

And we follow in his wake. So, Jesus said to his disciples, come, follow me, and I'll make you fishers of men.

A disciple of Jesus is a fisher of men. To follow after Jesus is to be a fisher. Why?

Because Jesus himself came to seek and save the lost. And if we walk where he walked, and if we are supposed to do what he did, then we should be out there fishing.

[23:36] So, Jesus says, come, you want to live with me, you want to be my disciple, I'll teach you to be a fisher of men. Not just with our words, but with our lives.

And it's as we live and as we speak through the power of the Spirit that we fish, we go fishing for men. And that's what Christ did. He was always fishing for men.

And that's what Paul did. And that's what God calls us to do. So, turn over to 1 Corinthians 10. We looked at this passage actually in Sunday school.

1 Corinthians 10, verse 31. It begins with something very famous, a very well-known verse, and it ends with a very well-known verse, but I don't know if we understand what's sandwiched in between.

So, 1 Corinthians 10, 31. So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God, even as I try to please everybody in every way.

[24:46] For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many so that they may be saved. Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.

Paul ties our eating and drinking and whatever we do to the glory of God so that many may be saved. The purpose of the first is the second.

And I wonder if sometimes we think we can separate them. Like, I can live and whatever I do glorify God and not care about the lost.

Whether people are saved, whether we can win them. See, those two ideas always live together in Paul's mind. Where one was, there was the other. One was right behind it.

And so, eating and drinking to the glory of God was for the sake of winning, of saving many. And then he says, that's what Christ did.

[25:50] that's what I do. Now that's what you should do too. Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. So we're all fishers of men.

We're all fishers of men. The only question is, are we fishing for Jesus? Or are we trying to win people to some other position?

Are we fishing for men to live for lawns and 401ks and our favorite sports teams? And maybe a political position or a diet and exercise routine?

I watched some TV show just the other night and this girl was evangelizing her diet and exercise program. She's so happy to tell others and she wants to win them to the truth.

Well, the question is, are we winning people for Jesus? I think everyone is fishing. Are we fishing for Jesus? Well, that's the glory of this passage and what God is doing.

[26:59] God has this big surprise. He's saving the lost. He's saving those on the outside. Not just the church, not just the people who grew up in the community. You know, Paul didn't run into a synagogue and was thrown out and then said, well, I'm going home.

That's it. No, he went to the Gentiles. And he's joining, God is joining these people to Jesus.

He set the gospel feast and now he's told us, now go out and fill up my house. My house is going to be full. It's going to be a big party. And so he says, go into the streets, go into the alleyways, go into the countryside, go wherever you can find people.

My house will be filled. My party is going to be big. Now go get them. Go get them. So God's grace is coming like a hurricane. It's coming across to the people, to the wicked, to the defiled, and he's washing them and he's turning their lives upside down and he's giving Christ to the world and he says to us, now tell everyone about it.

Tell what I'm doing. Fill up my house. Win them. That's our part. So God has a big surprise and he's inviting us in to participate in the big surprise.

[28:19] Well, next week we're going to see verse 28. And so what do we do? We proclaim him. We proclaim him. So what's our message? It's Jesus Christ. How do we do it?

We do it struggling with all of his energy. That's what we're going to see next week. But this week, four lessons to take away.

Four lessons to go into your week with. Four lessons to go home with. Four lessons to look out your window with. And it's this. Number one, put away despair.

Put away despair. The biggest obstacle to joyful, expectant witness is not the condition of the lost person. It is the condition of our own hearts.

Our own hopelessness or sometimes hopelessness. Maybe we're hopeless about God. Maybe somewhere along the lines the wires have gotten crossed and we've turned the good gospel into the good law and God, the gospel isn't so sweet to us and we can't imagine it being sweet to others or it's not sweet to us so we don't present it sweetly to others.

[29:36] And so we see God as this looming cloud instead of this bright sunshine. Well, we need to put the despair away. Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners, is risen and reigning.

the day of salvation is here. Maybe we're majoring on total depravity and acting like that's the whole truth or the only truth and acting like God's grace is not strong enough for those people.

We look at them and we say, what chance do they have? What hope do they have? Well, we need to put away despair. There is, where sin abounded, grace much more abounded.

There is something called super abounding grace that can crash into a person's life and save them. And so look at your neighbors. Look at your coworkers.

And don't just see spiritually dead people. See potential disciples because that's what they are. God is doing something. So you have to ask, why can't he work in their lives?

[30:48] Why can't he? He's revealing Christ to the nations and why not to them? We need to put away our despair, that hopelessness. Two, be bold.

Be bold. God is doing something. Speak in love so others can embrace Christ. We saw this last week. This is worth suffering for.

This is really worth suffering for. So we need to be bold and cutting things off. Maybe legitimate things, maybe fine things, but we need to be bold and realigning our life to see the lost saved, to reach the lost.

God is building his kingdom and he's taking people out of very bad situations and he's adding them to his kingdom. God's building his kingdom. He's not building your kingdom. God's building his kingdom.

And so the question is, is why wouldn't you boldly throw away the things that don't fit into his kingdom building projects? Why not boldly throw away everything that keeps you from joining God in what he's doing?

[32:01] So boldly speak. Be winsome. Be kind. We looked at this this morning. Be genuine. Show them your love by your deeds and by your words.

We are called to win them. So not harsh, but bold in love. Daring and outrageous and brave in loving them.

Win them. I've coached first and second grade girls soccer and it's enough to try any man. And half the problem is the girls, at least on my team, which explains our record, at least the ones I coached, they were afraid to play to win.

They were like, okay with not winning. The other team was after it. And my team is saying, they're so mean. They pushed us.

This isn't fair. And meanwhile, they're running like a bunch of grandmas. No offense to the grandmas. And so I would pull them over and I'd say, do you want to win?

[33:16] Do we want to win the lost? The lost are not going to land in our laps.

They're not going to roll over and die and surrender. Fish don't jump into the boat. You know, every now and then maybe a fish does jump into a boat. You see that sometimes, don't you?

But that's remarkable. Amazing. Most of the time, fish need to be lured and reeled in and then landed. They have to be one.

So be bold. Three, proclaim him. We'll see this next week. The message is not you. The message is not Grace Fellowship Church. The message is not your family. And so if you see problems here, if you have problems in your family, if you have problems in you, you know what?

That's okay because you aren't the message. Jesus Christ is the message. It's not your life. It's him. So you can tell others about him. And if you don't have all the answers to all their questions, that's okay.

[34:20] You know him. And you can at least begin to tell them about him and what he's done for you. And you can tell others what Christ can do for them. God is unleashing this big surprise and it's Christ.

And so Paul says, we proclaim him. And finally, fourth, lean on him. This could feel so like heavy. And you're saying, oh, oh, I can't do this and this is so hard. It was hard for Paul struggling with all of his strength. It's hard. Running a marathon is hard.

It's hard. But we don't run alone. We don't do this alone. We're not sending you out without supplies of your own.

Jesus says, go and make disciples of all the nations and surely I am with you to the very end of the age. He's with you. Jesus is with you at work.

[35:25] Jesus is with you at your home. He's with you when you're planning, when you're thinking, okay, I'm going to run into that person. What do I need to say? He's with you. When you're planning on, how can I reach these people?

When you're thinking strategically, your Lord knows how to think strategically. He's with you with your speaking and with your hospitality.

He's with you, so lean on him. Trust him. Be courageous in faith because Jesus is with you. The Holy Spirit is with you.

John 20, 21, as the Father sent me, I am sending you the very next sentence. And with that, he breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. this being sent, we don't go in our own strength. Jesus beforehand gives us the Holy Spirit. So we don't go alone. We go with the Holy Spirit. And our task is his task.

[36:28] Our mission is his mission. You read Acts 13. And it says, Paul and Barnabas sent on their way by the Holy Spirit.

He lifted them up. He picked them and he pushed them out and he went with them. You aren't doing this alone. The Spirit of God is with you.

So trust and obey. Trust and obey. Let's pray. our Heavenly Father, everywhere we look, there are lost people.

Everywhere we look, we see potential disciples. We see people not worshipping that could be worshipping. And sometimes it's very discouraging.

I pray that you would give us your eyes to see them. Give us your heart to love them. Thank you that we are not dragging a kicking and screaming God to the lost.

[37:29] But you are out in front of us saying, come, let's win these sinners. You're the God that sins and saves. You're the God who takes initiative and you're the one with the plan.

Will you forgive us for lagging behind and missing what's really going on? Will you please help us? Will you help us to see our lost neighbors and our lost co-workers and the people that we run into, our customers and our employers and people on our street that help us to see them the way you see them and help us to see them with the eye of faith that doesn't say they're dead and that's the end of the story but says there is a grace for them.

Pray that you would please teach us and show us help us to walk in your footsteps Lord Jesus. Help us to walk and learn what it means to be fishers of men.

Help us to put these things into practice. We've learned so much we know so much. Help us drive us prod us and poke us until we get moving in our lives.

I pray that you would even save some here tonight that they would hear of your gracious heart ready to receive sinners they would hear and you would win them tonight.

[39:05] It's in Jesus' name I pray Amen. Amen. Amen.