

Today is Part B of a 2-part message.

So, a couple of weeks ago, (when we were last together), we encountered the secret – the mystery of the ages, which is our hope of glory. It’s a mystery that has not been revealed to every person in the world, and so not everyone can grasp this. It’s something that has only been revealed to the Saints/Christians/Disciples of Jesus Christ.

And this is the mystery: Our hope of glory, is Christ in us...

Through faith in Lord Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, Christ isn’t just somewhere near us – He **lives in** us... And because Christ **lives** in us, we know that we will be raised from the dead. We know that we will participate in glory. It’s something that is guaranteed.

For many generations, men and women had striven to keep all of the religious rules and regulations, to try and get themselves a little bit closer to God, in the hope of attaining glory...

But this is the mystery that’s now been revealed to the Disciples of Jesus: Christ in us. And Paul has been:

- proclaiming it;
- defending it (warning about alternative messages);
- teaching it

But he’s also told us, that there has been a very real cost for him to be preaching this Gospel truth.

“For this purpose”, he tells us, he struggles and he toils... And to “toil” means he’s been doing some long hours and it’s

not easy work (to be preaching the Gospel). But the **struggle** that Paul has, is a very **costly** struggle indeed: persecution and suffering...

In V²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, (Isn't that interesting: he's suffering for a church, that he's possibly never even met) and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church

Now, that is a peculiar statement. And we finished off last week by clearing the decks, to be ready to build on it today. And we confirmed that Christ's death is 100% sufficient to save us from our sins, and so Paul is **not** saying, that Christ's death is, in any way, deficient.

What he **is** saying, is: Christ continues to suffer today. He suffers, for the sake of His church. And the suffering of Christ, is through the suffering of His disciples (particularly the suffering of those who suffer because they preach and teach the Gospel truth), as they serve Christ.

Stick with me, and this will become more clear as we unpack it:

In V²⁵, Paul describes himself as a servant διάκονος (diakonos) – (ESV-minister) (practical servant). But who's he a servant of? He's a servant of the Church. And he serves the

church as a steward. That means that something has been entrusted to him, and in this case, it's the word of God.

You see, my role as a preacher and a teacher, is not to 'make something up' (topic that's fashionable and appealing) and then to astound you all at my oratory ability, or to bore you all with my poor communication skills. ... God has entrusted to us, the Word of God. And I'm **not** to be creative – I'm **not** to 'make something up'. To serve God, we serve Him by being stewards. Paul leaves us no doubt about this.

To serve, is to make the Word of God fully known.... And by doing this, the church benefits... *And I give glory to God, because we see this happening today... It continually amazes me, that the Bible teaching, coming out of our little church here (BD) is benefiting the church, across the state/nation... It was not something we set out to do, but by simply being stewards of the Word of God, and by teaching the **whole** Word of God without changing it, – by making it **fully** known (we don't just skip over the bits that people don't like to hear), the church (not just locally, but further afield), is growing through it.*

But let's come back to Paul. By Paul making the Word of God fully known, the wider church was benefitting, but he was suffering.

Paul was locked up in prison as he wrote this letter. Why was he in prison? He was in prison for unashamedly preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

But how is it, that when a Christian suffers, it's **Christ** who suffers?

Well firstly (to be clear), we're not talking about normal everyday suffering that's due for whatever reason... We're not talking about suffering because:

- I've gotten really old and I have arthritis;
- I've been a bad husband and my wife has left me;
- I've said something nasty and he's punched me in the nose...

We're talking about suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

And when a disciple of Jesus suffers because they've:

- preached the Gospel;
- held true to the Gospel;
- rejected an **untrue** Gospel and they've been uncompromising in the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ,,

When a disciple of Jesus suffers for that, in some way, it's Christ Himself, who suffers.

Paul understood this, even before he became a Christian, because at one time, he used to be a persecutor of Christians. He was zealous for the Lord, but he was on the wrong side.. As a good Jewish pharisee, he was appalled at those Christians. And he was strutting out, on his way to Damascus, to arrest those pesky Christians, and bring them back for trial and possible execution...

And on that road to Damascus, he was blinded by a bright light, and Paul tells the story:

Acts 22: (ESV) ⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, '**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**' ⁸ And I answered, 'Who are you,

Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'

Paul thought he was persecuting Christians, but as he did this, it was Christ who was suffering....

You see, he's already told us, that our hope of glory, is Christ in us... If Christ is in you, when you suffer for the sake of the Gospel, it is Christ who suffers for the sake of the Gospel.

He also tells us, that we **are** the body of Christ. And we know that when one part of the body suffers, all of the body suffers (1Cor 12) – which includes Christ, the head of the body...

This very day, there are Christians in this world, who truly are suffering for Christ.

- North Korea;
- Afghanistan;
- China;
- Indonesia;
- Turkey;

We even see Christians beginning to suffer for the sake of the Gospel in our own land...

And when they suffer, **we** suffer, because we are all part of the body. And **Christ** suffers, because he is the head of the body, and Christ is in His saints... *And that's why every week here now, we pray for persecuted Christians. (Open Doors prayer list)*

And so Paul says, “For this I toil/struggle”...

But I think we need to be encouraged here. When we struggle (persecuted), we do not struggle alone. V²⁹ **For this I toil, struggling with all his energy** (Christ's energy/power) that he powerfully works within me.

We're talking about Holy Spirit power... Yes, Paul put every effort in, to proclaim/teach/warn...

But if Paul relied only on his own strength, he wouldn't have gotten very far. He would've burnt out in no time at all... And it's the same for us: when we serve Christ (in whatever capacity), when it's the powerful Holy Spirit energy of Christ in us, God will do His very best work...

God calls us to do what we **cannot** do in our own strength. And we need all His energy.

Isaiah 40: (ESV)

²⁹ He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases
strength.

³⁰ Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;

³¹ but they who wait for YHWH shall renew their
strength;

they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

That's what the power of God does... And there are many Christians today, who have the attitude, "I'm tired",,, And often, the first thing that drops off, is being a servant of Jesus... But I believe when we get tired, that's the time to serve. That's when we can struggle with all his energy that he powerfully works in us.

Righto: So it's by the power/energy of God that Paul proclaims; warns; and teaches... But why is it so important that he make the word of God fully known??? You know, many Christians feel content with 'a bit of milk' – "*I don't need to know any more – just keep it simple*"... And when it comes to the Word of God, some don't want to go any deeper than the kids story...

Why is it so important to Paul, to make the Word of God fully known? Well, he gives us 3 reasons:

- unity;
- to truly know the truth/Christ ; and
- as a safeguard against deception

He wants the whole church to be knit together in love. He wants us to be encouraged. And how is the Christian church best encouraged? By being one. We don't get encouraged when a church splits, do we... But we do get encouraged when a church comes together. But, what does that look like?

I was talking with a chap a couple of weeks ago, and he expressed something that a lot of people believe – that if we Christians weren't so pedantic about "getting it right", and if

we just accepted different understandings of the Gospel, the churches could be one...

And many people believe that... And that's something the Devil would love us to believe. But the Apostle Paul wouldn't believe that for a minute.

Paul is a servant of the one true Gospel. And his hope and his prayer for the Christian church (even for those that he'd never met), was for them to believe the one truth.

For this:

- he strove;
- he toiled;
- the energy of Christ in Him was harnessed to:
 - proclaim;
 - teach;
 - warn;
 - correct

So that the pure, unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ would be heard; believed; and embraced, so that the church could truly be one...

....

And this,,,, is an act of love...

2 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea (neighbouring town only a few km down the Lycus Valley) and for all who have not seen me face to face, ² that their hearts

may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

When it comes to Christianity and the Gospel, many of us want to avoid confrontation at all costs, and so many people have the attitude, “Live and let live” – “*You have your truth and I'll have my truth, and we'll respect each other for it*”... , and that's their idea of “love”... But, that's not love, and it's not true unity... Love and unity, are only found in shared truth... Anything else is a counterfeit.

You see, if I love you as a Christian, what's my hope for you???

Sadly, many preachers today, are pretty-much motivational speakers, and their aim, is to help people meet their full potential by what the world would class as being a success...

But you know what? I don't care if you're a success by the world's standards..... I don't care if you get the:

- big house;
- prestigious job;
- nice car;
- big happy family;
- famous;
- successful sports-person...

If I love you as a Christian, do you know what my hope for you is???

I want to see you reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

What about you? Do you want 'motivational speak'? or do you want to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ Which sounds most appealing to you?

And if as a preacher/teacher/servant of the Gospel, I do not with every energy of Christ in me, proclaim/teach/warn/correct, I'm not loving you...

And it's important to continue to proclaim/teach/warn/correct, because Satan doesn't want you to know God's word that well... And it's only by knowing the fullness of God's word, that we can continue to stand strong.

V⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.

Paul had a very real concern, because he'd seen it happen in other churches, that these Christians could be led astray – that their faith would shift from the firm foundation that it had begun on... The Greek word here παραλογίζηται (paralogizētai) means to cheat; deceive; delude...

And that's what false teachers do. They use words that (to an untrained ear), sound like a reasonable argument... They bend and twist scriptures to give it an air of Godliness,, But with their plausible-sounding arguments, they deceive... False teachers use words that appeal to the flesh, and **without** Godly correction, disciples of Jesus are in danger of being deluded and led astray...

And even as Paul writes these words, it appears to me, that he's writing them as a warning to watch out in the future. As it stands, Paul has every indication that the saints in Colossae remain 'on track'...

Even though he's not with them physically, he says:
⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Now, we don't know if God revealed that to him in the spirit; or if someone who's been to Colossae has given him a good report – we don't know... But what makes him rejoice, is their good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

These 2 things, always are a sign of a spiritual maturity in a church – good order, and a firmness of faith.

Sadly, often today, “good order” gets equated with rules and traditionalism and religion and they talk it down: blah blah blah... No. Good order is the working of the Spirit. That’s what Paul talks about in 1st Corinthians... Where the Spirit of God is at work, there will be order. A church will not be running amuck (with everybody doing their own thing)...

And a second sign of spiritual unity in a church, is a common firmness of faith in Christ...

And that’s what he’s been talking about here. As a church, to stand firm, in the one faith, that the Apostles taught.

Good order; and a common firmness of faith in Christ – that’s the sign of a spiritually mature church...

Let’s wrap it up:

When I first started preaching, my minister at the time taught me to write a one-sentence-summary of what the passage is about... And the sentence I wrote for this message is:
“Suffering for the ongoing faith of others”...

Paul suffered, as he preached; warned; taught the true gospel. Paul would often suffer and be ridiculed for correcting and warning about delusions that were presented in the form of plausible arguments...

But he was willing to suffer, for the sake of the ongoing faith of others.

I've been challenged by this. Are we as a church today, willing to suffer in the same way? Are we willing to suffer as we teach and correct and warn,, and as we defend the gospel against those who present plausible-sounding alternate versions of the Gospel???

And I think the answer to this is:

If we love the body of Christ, we will... If we love our brothers and sisters in Christ enough, that we want to see them standing strong in the faith, and understanding the amazing mystery of Christ in us... we will suffer for the ongoing faith of others... As we:

- proclaim;
- teach;
- warn;
- correct

because we love...

Let's pray:

Lord, as we prayed last week,
What a privilege it is,
to have this mystery revealed to us, Your saints:
Christ in us...

Lord, help us to cherish this.
And by Your Holy Spirit,
help us to understand the hidden treasures

of wisdom and knowledge of Christ Jesus...

Lord, give us a boldness;
that we would be willing to suffer,
for the ongoing faith of others.

That we would be willing to warn, correct, teach
(as You enable us),

Lord, give us good teaching we pray,
that we would not be deluded with plausible
arguments;
that we could stand, unshifting,
on the firm foundation of Your gospel

And we pray for a unity,
as we unite with our brothers and sisters in Christ,
who stand on the one firm foundation.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.