

INTRODUCTION:

Take your Bibles please and DON'T open them—yet. I normally start every message by saying, “open your Bibles...” But in this message, I want us to talk about a mystery before we read about the solution.

Most people love a good mystery, that's why shows like “Unsolved Mysteries” and “C.S.I.” are popular today. Quite often when books or movies have the word ‘secret’ or ‘mystery’ in the title, people are often fascinated in them. That also applies to stories where you need to figure who did it. *I heard a funny story about a mystery lover who attended the first night of a theatrical performance of a new mystery. Unfortunately, he was seated on the back row in a lousy seat. He called an usher over and said, “I LOVE to figure out mysteries, so if there is any way you could move me to a seat down front, I'll give you a handsome tip.” The usher saw dollar signs and happened to know one of the regular patrons wasn't using his seat that night. He said, “Right this way, sir!” After he was escorted by the usher to seat in the middle of the third row, the mystery-lover handed the usher a 50 cents and said, “Thanks.” The usher frowned at the 50c and then said, “By the way, the butler did it!”*

Today, we are going to examine history's greatest mystery. The word “mystery” is found 27 times in the New Testament. In the Bible, “mystery” doesn't mean something that is permanently hidden, it describes a truth that was secret for a time, but at the proper time it is fully revealed. So, don't worry, we are going to easily discover the secret to this mystery. But I want to start by giving you a few clues to see if you can figure it out for yourself before we read the scripture.

CLUE #1: IT MAKES YOU REJOICE EVEN WHEN YOU SUFFER

The power behind this mystery is so great it can make you smile in the most painful times of your life. The Apostle Paul was a religious terrorist before he was converted to Christ. He worked as a self-proclaimed hit man for the Jewish Mafia in Jerusalem. He arrested Christians, threw them in jail, and even gave his approval to their execution, as in the case of the stoning of Stephen. It just shows the reality of God's sense of humour that Paul would end up being a Christian himself—and spend much of his time in jail.

Paul suffered more than most of us can imagine. By his own admission in 2 Corinthians he had been beaten eight times, shipwrecked three times, and once was stoned so badly they left him for dead. But rather than complaining about all his suffering, he boasted about them—he rejoiced in his suffering! He had uncovered a mystery that enabled him to deal with pain and adversity with a positive attitude.

There is a beautiful painting depicting Paul as an old, emaciated man in prison. But rather than resigning himself to bitterness or simply giving up to his fate, he is seen praying. There are scraps of papyrus seen at his side. Instead of complaining about his suffering in prison, Paul wrote in *Colossians 1:24* “*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you.*” Paul wanted to be free to preach and start churches, but he had discovered a mystery—a secret—that allowed him to see stars through prison bars. While he was sitting in prison, waiting to be executed, he wrote Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. Have you ever heard the saying: when life gives you lemons, make lemonade? *Well, that's what I call turning lemons into lemonade!* That's the first clue. Have you discovered the secret? Have you uncovered the mysterious power that enables you not to just survive the tough times of life, but to thrive during them?

CLUE #2: IT WAS HIDDEN FOR MANY AGES

This mystery was not something that had been known forever. Paul described it this way, “*The mystery that has been hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed.*” (*Colossians 1:26*) In other words, this mystery wasn't revealed to the people who lived during the Old Testament times. Moses never understood it. Elijah was clueless about it. David was a man after God's own heart, but he never was privy to this mystery! The Old Testament is full of promises from God that He will save and deliver His people. What you never find in the Old Testament is HOW God intended to do it. That part was hidden—it was a mystery.

For example, I love the promise of God given in Isaiah 40 where He says, *“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)* That’s an absolute promise of God, but HOW does He actually strengthen His children? Isaiah couldn’t answer that question; it was a mystery. That mystery is fully unveiled in this passage.

David communicated that wonderful promise in the 23rd Psalm that *“goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”* That’s true, of course, but if you asked David, “Okay, I believe the promise, but, oh King, please tell me how does God do that?” David might have stabbed at an answer—but he really couldn’t give the correct answer, because during his time it was still a mystery, hidden for the ages. But now I know how God does it, and you can too, when you learn the mystery. Any guesses yet? Have you figured out the mystery?

CLUE #3: IT WILL MAKE YOU A COMPLETE PERSON

Paul goes on to expose the purpose for which this mystery is revealed—to make someone complete. He wrote, *“so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.” (Colossians 1:28)* The word perfect in this case doesn’t mean without flaw, it means “whole” or “complete.”

During Old Testament times, people lived under the law. The only way to try to be a complete person was to keep the law. They existed with a performance mentality in which righteousness was established by how good or bad they acted. But this mystery offers a new standard.

There are churches that still preach a performance standard. They have simply baptized the Old Testament law. They still preach that salvation is a matter of “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.” People who try to live under this old performance standard beat up on themselves too. Their motto is: TRY HARDER! Trying harder is a formula for failure.

Who remembers watching John McEnroe playing tennis back in the 80’s? Remember how angry he would get either at the other player, the umpire, or simply himself! He would throw the worst temper tantrums it was unbelievably silly to watch, but it often centered around his performance. If he wasn’t performing, and he wasn’t getting the points up on the board as he expected, then he would get extremely frustrated with himself. He is a poster boy for everyone who thinks salvation is about performance. This mystery completely cancels and contradicts the performance standard. This mystery is the only way you can ever become a complete person. Have you figured out the mystery yet? If you haven’t, it’s right here in black and white. All three clues are contained in this passage so now, let’s read it:

Colossians 1:24-29.

So what is history’s greatest mystery? Here it is:

THE MYSTERY >> CHRIST IN YOU

That is profoundly simple, *but it is simply profound.* Christ in you enables you to remain positive during suffering. Christ in you is the way God fulfills all His precious promises; it’s the how that was hidden for many centuries. Christ in you is the only way you can become a complete person.

True community or *koinonia* with one another is realized when the Christ in me connects with the Christ in you. The “you” is plural. It’s like this neat picture I found that is made up of hundreds of tiny photos of individuals and groups who make up the body of Christ. When you see the picture up close, it looks like a jumbled mess. But when you back away from it and gain some perspective you can see the face of Jesus emerge. “Christ in you” doesn’t mean you have your own little personal divine essence, or that you are a ‘little god’ like the new-agers teach. No, it is Christ in me and Christ in you, which makes Christ in US—and that’s the church.

There is a profound book by Major Ian Thomas called, *The Saving Life of Christ*. He speaks about how the NT teaches dual truths of how we are “in Christ” and how Christ is also “in us”. It’s expressed like this and I love it:

“To be in Christ— that makes you fit for heaven; but for Christ to be in you—that makes you fit for earth! To be in Christ—that changes your destination; but for Christ to be in you—that changes your destiny! To be in Christ makes heaven your home; but for Christ to be in you makes this world God’s workshop.”

That’s the mystery—and once you grasp it, it changes the way you understand the Christian life. For example, consider three enormous personal applications of this mystery.

(1) Salvation application: Salvation is not religion, it is Jesus living in you!

Jesus shocked the religious leaders by saying, *“the Kingdom of God is within you.”* He wasn’t talking about some kind of divine spark, or other new age mumbo jumbo. He was talking about a salvation that is activated when the king comes to live inside you.

Robert Boyd Munger wrote a little booklet entitled, *“My heart, Christ’s home.”* It describes how salvation is like inviting Jesus to come into your life as if He is coming into your home. You invite him into the bedroom, the dining room, the kitchen, the lounge room, and even into that hall closet where you keep your skeletons. Then you learn the only way He can make a difference in cleaning up the house is when He becomes the owner, not just a guest. It is at that point you transfer the title deed to Him. He is no longer a resident, He becomes the president. That’s what it means to surrender to the Lordship of Christ.

Jesus died on the cross, so we can die to ourselves and He can live in us. One of my life verses says: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20) The essence of the Christian life is, “Not I, but Christ lives in me.”

Major Ian Thomas says it better than I can:

There are few things quite so boring as being religious, but there is nothing quite so exciting as being a Christian! Most folks have never discovered the difference between the one and the other, so that there are those who sincerely try to live a life they do not have, substituting religion for God, Christianity for Christ, and their own noble endeavours for the energy, joy, and power of the Holy Spirit. They are lamps without oil, cars without fuel, and pens without ink, baffled at their own impotence in the absence of all that alone can make man functional; for man was so engineered by God that the presence of the Creator within the creature is indispensable to His humanity. (foreword to Classic Christianity)

(2) Security application: When your heart is Christ’s home, He doesn’t change addresses!

In the Old Testament there was first a tabernacle and later a couple of temples in which God’s glory was displayed. In the Old Testament, God had a temple for his people, and now He has a people for His temple. The Bible says, *“Didn’t you realize that your body is a sacred place, the home of the Holy Spirit? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.”* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 *The Message*) The temple of God was a place where God displayed His glory and grace. My body, and your body, are the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is Christ in you which is the hope of glory.

If you believe salvation is Jesus coming to dwell in your life, then the only way you could lose your salvation would be for Jesus to leave you. And He promised He would never leave you or forsake you. In the Old Testament time, David prayed, *“Lord, don’t take your Holy Spirit from me!”* That was a possibility then, because the Spirit of God would come on and in people and leave them at times. For instance, in the story of Samson, his strength was not in his hair, but it came from the Spirit of God. *Judges 14:19 said, “Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power”* and he beat up on the Philistines. That phrase recurs several times. But after Delilah cut his hair, which was a symbol of his commitment, the Philistines attacked him again. Samson jumped up to fight them off as he had always done, but we read these sad words in *Judges 16:20, “He did not know that the Lord had left him.”* And they captured him.

In the Old Testament time, God's Spirit would come and go, but when Jesus talked about sending the Holy Spirit, to represent Him, He said, *"The Holy Spirit will be with you forever...he lives with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."* (John 14:15-18) When you are indwelt by the risen Christ, you never need to pray, "Lord don't take your Holy Spirit from me." Christ has come to live in your heart and you are His permanent residence! Christ in you gives you security!

(3) Strength application: FRUSTRATION is trying to DO things FOR Jesus—FULLNESS is allowing Jesus to LIVE His life through you!

Allowing Jesus to live in you doesn't make you a passive person, you will find yourself working harder than ever—but you will be working in His strength and not your own. Notice what Paul wrote about this strength in *Colossians 1:29*, *"To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."* Which do you think will get more done, working in your energy, or in His energy? Paul refers to this secret, mysterious power again when he wrote, *"For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."* (Philippians 2:13)

A frustrated person is someone who tries to obey God or serve God using their own feeble energy. One of my least favourite old hymns said *"Give of your best to the master, give of the strength of your youth. Throw your soul's fresh glowing ardour; Into the battle for truth. Jesus has set the example, dauntless was he young and brave. Give him your loyal devotion; give him the best that you have."* (Words by Howard B. Grose) Now I'm sure Mr. Grose meant well, but the Christian life is not about following the example of Jesus. It's not about giving our best—it's about surrendering our all. My best, even in the strength of my youth, doesn't measure up to his normal in me!

To quote Major Ian Thomas once more: *"Godliness is NOT your capacity to imitate God, but the consequence of His capacity to reproduce Himself in you; not self-righteousness, but Christ-righteousness; It is not inactivity, but Christ-activity; God in action accomplishing His purpose through human personality—never reducing man to the status of a cabbage, but exalting man to the stature of king!"* (from *The Mystery of Godliness*)

CONCLUSION

I became a Christian when I was nine years old, but I didn't truly discover the secret to living the Christian life until I was a college student. Through the writings of people like Ian Thomas and Jack Taylor, I came to understand I couldn't live the Christian life. These seven words literally changed my life: CHRIST IN YOU—THE HOPE OF GLORY.

Once I began to understand that Jesus lives in me and wants to love people through me and forgive people through me, and encourage people through me it made a huge difference. Instead of trying to imitate the life of Jesus, which I found to be impossible, I started learning to simply abide in Jesus and surrender my life to Him. I'm still learning, and there are many times when I still try to operate in my own strength. But if I have ever been a blessing to any of you by what I've said or done, that was not me that was Christ in me, the hope of glory.

One man once said he went through four stages in coming to this understanding.

- (1) When he first became a Christian he said, "Oh, this is easy! All I have to do is to repent and ask Jesus to come into my heart—no problem."
- (2) But then, as he began to learn what Jesus expected of him his second stage was, "Wow, this is difficult!" He found it wasn't as easy as he first thought.
- (3) Stage three was when he admitted, "This is impossible!"
- (4) But after that confession, he discovered the secret of Christ in you—the hope of glory and stage four is, "This is exciting!" What stage are you in now?

So, are you looking for something that enables you to rejoice even when you go through the toughest times of life? The answer is found in seven life changing words: Christ in you—the hope of glory. Are you looking for the greatest secret in all the world? A secret that was hidden for many centuries, and has only been revealed in the last 20 centuries? The mystery is revealed in seven powerful words: Christ in you the hope of glory! Do you desire to be complete in every aspect of your personality? Are you tired of trying to live by "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not?" Here's the secret: Christ in you—the hope of glory.

So, now you know. History's Greatest Mystery Revealed. The secret of the Christian life is NOT trying harder, it is trusting more. It is Christ in you, the hope of glory!