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SPEAKER

Daniel Savage

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4

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The Mystery of Christianity

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:24-2:5



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Good morning, Providence. How are you? Good. Good to see everybody. You keep hearing about the Providence pathway. We are talking about it regularly. You'll continue to hear about it. This is just a good way for you to get plugged in to the church. If you're new, relatively new. If you're watching online, there is a virtual option. So, it's just a good way to find out more about the church and how we do things, how to get plugged in, how to get involved, how to serve this week, they're doing that right now, how to serve. And then next week there'll be how to go. How do we think about going? Both here locally and to the nation. So, I encourage you to do that.

We're going to continue this morning in the book of Colossians. My name is Daniel Savage and I'm one of the pastors here, the pastor of discipleship. And we're going to continue in our rooted series through the book of Colossians. We'll start in Chapter One, Verse 24, and we'll go through the beginning of Chapter Two. And I want to start with a question. And the question is, is the gospel really enough?

Is the gospel really enough?

And if you've been at Providence for a while, or you've been in church for awhile, hopefully your instinct is to say, "Yes, the gospel is enough." But this text is going to invite us to examine our hearts and our lives to see whether or not we live as though we believe that is true, that the gospel really is enough because I think a lot of us are tempted, whether we realize it or not, to add to the gospel. The gospel is good, but I'll just add a little bit of performance to it. I can act a certain way. I can do this and do that. I can serve this amount. And then God will really love me. People will really accept me. The gospel is good, but I need to move on to more advanced things of God. I need to move to the master's level understanding of Christianity.

And Paul is going to challenge us to consider the idea that Christ in us is the hope of glory. He's going to use words like mystery and revealed and known. The title of the sermon is the Mystery of Christianity. And Paul's point in this text is that the mystery has been revealed. It's known. It was his job to come to them and to make the word of God fully known. And that's what he did. The mysteries are all laid out. He's made it all known. It is Christ in you. The hope of glory. I think that's the most important phrase in this text.

I think everything is pointing to that and then everything after it is explaining it. What's going to flow from it? Christ in you. The gospel is the most important thing. It is all that is needed. It is enough.

Read with me, if you will, Colossians chapter one, starting in verse 24. Paul writes:

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. 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 of which 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. To them, 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.

Him we proclaim. Warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this, I toil. Struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face. 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. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments 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." Let's pray together.

"Heavenly father, would you give us eyes to see and ears to hear? God, would you give us hearts that are ready to receive your word? Would you speak clearly to us? As Christ is lifted up, I pray that we would all be drawn to him. God, would you help me? Would you help me to explain clearly what you have put here before us in your word? God and would you use your word to mature us? To grow us up that we might be encouraged, that we might be knit together in love, that we might be given full assurance? God, would you work in these ways? Move through your word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

Paul is writing the Colossians because someone had been telling them that the gospel was good, but they needed more. They needed more. There was another level that they could achieve. There was some secret knowledge that if they just pressed in hard enough or did these things, they could experience more of God. That there was a graduate level. And Paul is writing them to tell them that what they need has been fully revealed to them. The mystery God has been fully made known and it is Christ. Christ is what you need.

In these first few verses, he's going to be talking about how God uses suffering to reveal the mystery of the gospel. How God uses suffering to reveal the mystery of the gospel. Paul begins by saying in verse 24, that he's rejoicing in his sufferings for their sake. Which is an interesting thing for him to say. Paul is saying that he understands his suffering to be serving the church. It's for their sake. It's for their good.

He says, "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." So, in what way is Paul's suffering serving the church? Well look at verse 25. He's a minister or servant of the church, according to the stewardship from God. And what he's been charged to do, the stewardship that he has, is to make the word of God fully known. That's what he's supposed to be doing.

In verse 26 he goes on to describe the word of God, the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed. The mystery has been revealed and it was his job to make it fully known to them. No secrets.

What Paul is saying here is that his suffering is adding to his efforts at making the word of God known. It's confirming his message. The fact that Paul is willing to suffer for the preaching of God's word is evidence to the people that he believes what he's saying, that he's given them all that he has, and he's willing to suffer for it. He has no ulterior motives. He's not getting riches or anything else from the preaching of the gospel, other

than imprisonment and suffering. And he says, “This is the proof. This is the evidence.”

J. Oswald Sanders was leader of a Christian mission organization and he wrote lots of books about missions and Christianity and one of his books has a story in it about Francis Booth Tucker. Francis Booth Tucker was a missionary in India. He was born in India, went to England, came to faith, went back to India to reach some of the people that he grew up around. And he wanted to go to the poorest villages in India and share the gospel. And so he goes back and he's in India and he's traveling around, he's sharing the gospel, and he begins to realize he's not having any success.

And so he starts to think, “What should I do? How do I reach these people?” He decides what he needs to do is live like they live. He needs to dress like they dress and he needs to get rid of all his possessions and he needs to walk barefoot from village to village because that's how they walk. And so he gets rid of everything he has. And he takes on this Indian dress and he begins to walk barefoot village to village. And the hot roads begin to burn and blister his feet because he wasn't used to walking barefoot the way they were.

And so he comes to this village and he's hoping that they will take him in. He has nothing. He's decided live on whatever they will offer him. And he comes to this village and he's hoping to find rest and food there and they won't even allow him to come in. And so he's discouraged. He and his traveling partner, they go a little bit outside the village. They find a tree. They collapsed underneath it and they fall asleep because they're exhausted.

This is what he says in his book. He says while he was asleep, the villagers came out to examine him and they noticed the blisters on his feet and they said, “How much these men must care for us to suffer in this way to bring us their message. They must be good men and we have treated them badly.” When they woke up, they were invited into the village. Their feet were bound. They were given food and invited to share their message. And this started a movement that brought 25,000 of these local villagers to Christ.

This is what Paul means when he says that he's filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Clearly, Paul doesn't think that Christ's afflictions were lacking anything when it comes to bringing us salvation, right? He just said in the previous verses that Christ has reconciled us to God in his body of flesh by his death. So, what is lacking? Well, the only thing that was lacking is that the Colossians hadn't seen the sufferings of Christ. Paul is saying to them that when they see him, Paul, suffered, they're seeing this confirmation of the fact that Christ suffered for them. Paul is willing to suffer. He's testifying that someone suffered for me and so therefore I'm willing and to suffer for you.

His suffering served as evidence of the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection and the same remains true for us. As Christians, we must see our suffering as an opportunity to add to our testimony of an eternal hope. We claim to believe that we have hope that goes beyond this life. We claim to believe that we have eternal hope, kept in heaven with God for us. And so the way that we respond to suffering and circumstances in this life

must reflect that belief. It must reflect the reality that we believe that this life and its temporary circumstances is not all that I have. I have a much greater inheritance waiting for me.

So, when we get a cancer diagnosis, our response should be different. When we experience the pain of losing a loved one, our response should be different. It doesn't mean these things are easy. They're hard. But we should enter into these things as people who have an everlasting hope. When we lose a job or get passed over, or we're mistreated at work, we should respond differently. And when our response is different, it points people to the hope that we have beyond this life. Parents, your response to suffering matters. No matter how big or small the suffering might be, your response reveals to your kids where your hope really rests.

At work, your response to suffering matters, no matter how big or how small the suffering might be. It reveals to your coworkers where your hope really rests. So, let's face suffering with joy, knowing that God can use it to strengthen our faith and advance the gospel. Let's face suffering with joy, knowing that God can use it to strengthen our faith and advance the gospel.

Now, verse 27. Paul moves to explain the nature of his ministry, of making the word of God fully known. He wants them to know how it works. You see this repetition of the same words. Verse 27. He says: "To them, 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."

He's repeating these words. Known and mystery. It's sort of a main idea to this whole passage that he's talking about how he has made known this mystery. There's no secret that's being hidden. The mystery has been made known, and it is this: Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Everything points to that idea, that reality. It's reconciliation with God. It's being made right with him. It's having an inheritance with the saints. Being transferred into the kingdom of the son that he loves. It's Christ in you. It's the gospel. I've already said the word gospel several times and I'm going to say it over and over again. So we should talk about what it means.

The word gospel simply means good news. So when you hear someone say the Gospel of Jesus Christ, what they're saying is the good news of Jesus Christ. And the good news of Jesus Christ is this. That Jesus, God the son, took on flesh and came to live among us. And he did that because you and I were in serious trouble. In fact, we were hopeless. The Bible says we were dead in our trespasses and sins. We had rebelled against God and there was nothing we could do to fix it. And so Jesus came to live among us and came to live the life that you and I have failed to live. He lived his life perfectly without sin. He earned perfect favor with God. He was completely righteous.

And then he went to the cross to die as a sinner. To die the death you and I deserved to die. And then three days later, he was raised from the dead to confirm that he had defeated sin and death. And the good news is that you can put your trust in Jesus, in the work that he has done. And the Bible teaches that there is an exchange that happens, that his righteousness and his perfect favor with God is given to you.

You're clothed in that righteousness so that when God sees you, he says what he said about Jesus. "Here is my beloved son. Here is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased." And it is not dependent upon your performance. You can't add to it in any way. It is a perfect righteousness. And when you gain that righteousness, your sin is removed. Psalm 103 says as far as the East is from the West, because it was placed on him and he died for it. This is good news. Christ in you. It is the hope of glory and it is all of Christianity. There's no advanced lessons that go on after that where we really get into the good stuff. This is it. This is our hope. This is the glory of God revealed. It's the gospel. And so how do we find out about it?

Is it through special rituals or we have to go through all these special classes or we have to do these secret things? That's what they're being told. But Paul says, no, it's proclaimed. It's proclaimed out loud for everyone to hear. Next you'll see God uses proclamation to reveal the mystery of the gospel. God uses proclamation to reveal the mystery of the gospel. He proclaims Christ. Look at verse 28. Him we proclaim. Out in the streets, out in front of everyone, him we proclaim. We make this message known. It includes both warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom. This is what preaching is about. It's proclamation of Christ with both warning and teaching. And we have lots of funny ideas about what preaching should be about.

Some people think that preaching should be entertaining or funny or profound. That it should be novel or new. It's okay for it to be a little bit funny sometimes, but that's not the point. Preaching is about proclaiming Christ. One of my former pastors used to say that preaching isn't about saying something that's new, but it's about reminding people of things that are true.

The preacher, whether it's me or Brian or anyone else who stands up here, is supposed to point you to Christ. He's supposed to warn you not to look to anything else other than Christ and teach you what it means to look to Christ. Look where it says it leads in verse 28, "That we may present every one mature in Christ." It's a really important line. It plays heavily into how we think about preaching. He's just said, the proclamation of Christ leads to the maturity of those who hear it. In other words, preaching is a means of sanctification. Sanctification is a word that just means growing in holiness, growing to look more like God, more like Jesus. And what he's saying is that good Christ centered preaching leads to that kind of spiritual growth.

He tells you how it works in verse 29. He says, for this, their maturity he's talking about, for this, I toil, struggling with all his, that's God, his energy that he, God, powerfully works within me. So Paul is saying, I'm working. I'm toiling. I'm laboring for this, but he's working with God's energy powerfully working within him. What Paul is saying is that gospel proclamation, the preaching of Christ, is a miraculous supernatural thing. When Christ is proclaimed, God is moving. God works. God has chosen to use the proclamation of

this good news to change people. To rescue people from death and to continue to mature those who are already believing in the gospel. Think about what this means for what we're doing right now.

It means that we should approach Sunday mornings with anticipation and expectation. God is going to move. This is a means of grace in your life, that we would get to sit under his word and be built up by it. So, we should anticipate, what is God going to do this Sunday morning? Sunday morning isn't just, "My alarm goes off and, oh, it's Sunday. That's the day I'm supposed to go to church. So, I go and I check that thing off and then I move on to lunch."

No, we should anticipate Sunday. We should be expecting of what God is going to do. He's going to move through his word. He's promised to do it. It should affect our effort in listening. And we digest lots of content all week. We listen to things on the radio. We have the TV on in the background. Content all the time flowing. We cannot treat this content the same as we do everything else. When we come here, we should tune out every distraction. When we watch online, we should tune out every distraction, turn the phone off because God speaks through his word. He changes us. He matures us. We should listen differently.

Last, we should reflect on the word before and after. It's why we tell you what the passage is going to be this coming Sunday. It goes out in an email. It's on the website. You can find questions about it. All of it designed to help you begin to reflect on the word before you get here. Because we believe the word is powerful. That it changes us. It matures us.

First point of application here is let's honor preaching because God plans to use it to build us up. Let's honor preaching because God plans to use it to build us up. Preaching isn't the only time that Christ is proclaimed. I do think that that's what Paul is primarily talking about here, but there are other times we proclaim Christ. You proclaim Christ when you share the gospel. The good news is that you're not alone when you do that. Just like I get up here and I rest in the reality that God has promised to use his word. I read these verses, these particular verses in Colossians chapter one, almost every time I preach.

Because as I prepare to get up here, I know I'm called to do something that I just can't do. I'm supposed to build you up. I'm supposed to help you in the faith. And I can't do that. There's nothing I can say to convince you that these things are true. There's nothing I can say that's winsome enough or funny enough or engaging enough to get you to change. I know that. And so I rest in this reality that it's his energy working powerfully within me. He has promised to use this.

And the same is true of you. If you proclaim the truth about the gospel, you can rest in the idea that God moves through that proclamation, his energy working powerfully within you. All this means is that you don't have to know the answer to every question when you share the gospel. You don't have to argue people into the kingdom of God. You can't do that. You can't convince someone to believe these things. You are simply called to share the truth. Proclaim Christ. God uses his word to do miraculous things, to take out hearts of

stone and replace them with hearts of flesh. To make blind eyes see. This is the work of God, not us. We are called to proclaim. So, let's proclaim Christ with boldness, knowing that God works through the proclamation of his revealed mystery. Let's proclaim Christ with boldness, knowing that God works through the proclamation of his revealed mystery.

Paul has said so far that his suffering and his proclamation are for their growth and maturity. That this mystery has been revealed and it's been revealed through him because he was made a steward of it and he worked with all of his might to make it known and he makes it fully known and this is what he is hoping that it will do.

Next we'll see God uses the revealed mystery of the gospel to give our faith roots. God uses the revealed mystery of the gospel to give our faith roots. This is exactly what Paul is hoping for. He says in chapter two, verse one, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face." This is what he wants. That their hearts might 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 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Again, he's repeating these words over and over again. Paul is saying that he wants them to consider the effort that he's making. Consider the suffering that he is enduring so they'll know that he's not giving them some partial message. He's giving them the whole thing.

All the riches of assurance of understanding of the knowledge of God's mystery, all of it laid before you. This is why I'm struggling. This is my effort. I want you to think about all I have done to make this mystery known to you. And again, you see how Paul's circumstances, God is using them. He's using Paul's effort to confirm the message that God has made him a steward of. It was no accident that Paul experienced the suffering that he did. In fact, it was clear that it was God's plan for him. If you think back to Acts chapter nine, Saul was persecuting the church. He was traveling around. He was going from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute the church there. And he's on the road to Damascus and he has a vision of Christ and he's miraculously converted.

He believes in Jesus, but he's blinded. And he goes to Damascus where he's told to wait. And while he's there in Damascus, God tells Ananias to go and see Saul, who's now Paul. And Ananias says, "No, I've heard of Saul. I know what that guy's about. I don't want to go see him." But God answers him in Acts chapter nine, verse 15. He says, "But the Lord said to him, go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and Kings and the children of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." God's plan for Paul was that he would suffer many things.

And it was in order to confirm the message that he was made a herald. God knew that Paul would break into many new areas where they hadn't seen or heard of the sufferings of Christ and it was his plan that Paul would provide a living visual, an illustration of the sufferings of Christ. And Paul is rejoicing in these

sufferings because he knows that it's adding to his work to make this gospel fully known, which is getting to the main point of all this. This is what Paul is longing for, that they would know the gospel. That they would know that it's all they need and that they would center their lives around it. Paul is so burdened that they do this, that he is rejoicing that he gets to suffer because he thinks his suffering is pointing them back to the gospel.

Look at what he thinks this mystery revealed is going to produce in their lives. Verse two, encouragement. They're going to be knit together in love. They will have full assurance of faith. They're going to have the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ. Verse three, they're going to have the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that come from knowing Christ. Verse four, they won't be diluted with plausible arguments. Verse five, they'll continue in the firmness of their faith. All of this, the fruit of knowing and living and resting in the gospel.

This is what the revealed mystery of the gospel produces in us. It's what Paul was hoping for, for them. And it's what it produces in us. So what should we do? We should seek to live our lives wrapped up in the gospel. We should continue to gather to hear about the mystery that has been revealed. We should continue to come together to be reminded of the good news. To marvel over what God has done. We should sing about the gospel. We should remember the gospel through the Lord's supper. We should remember the gospel through baptism. We should center our church community around the gospel. We should center our community around the gospel and we should send her our personal lives around gospel.

Are you remembering the gospel every day? Do you preach the gospel to yourself every day? Don't think, "Oh, I already know the gospel." That's not how the gospel works. The gospel isn't like your multiplication tables that you learned in the third and fourth grade and then you leave them in a drawer until you need to pull them out again. No. We're supposed to live in and rest in the gospel. Why?

Because you're attacked every day with lies that contradict the gospel. Lies that say, "God, isn't really happy with you. God really doesn't accept you. God doesn't want to be that close to you. You can't overcome that sin. It's too powerful in your life. You can't be on mission for God because you've got all this other stuff in your past." All of these lies are antithetical to the gospel and we need to live in and rest in and meditate on the gospel in order to be free from these things.

You've probably heard the phrase before, "Preach the gospel to yourself every day." And if you're anything like me, the first time I heard that, I thought, "What in the world does that mean?" How are you supposed to preach the gospel to yourself every day? There was a pastor named Milton Vincent who had the exact same question. Milton Vincent, you're going to want to know that name later. A bunch of people asked me afterwards last service. Milton Vincent. He was wrestling with this same question. He read it in a book, preach the gospel to yourself every day. And he thought, "Well, I don't know how to do that. How in the world do you preach the gospel to yourself every day?" And so he started to try to figure it out. He started with a three

by five note card and he started to write “gospel truths” on there and he would keep it in his pocket and he carried around and he would rehearse those truths to himself every day.

And he started to notice a change in the way that he was thinking. He started to notice an increase in the level of peace that he was feeling with God. He started to notice an increase in desire to walk in greater holiness and to say no to more sin. And so his little three by five note card became a sheet of paper. And that sheet of paper became several sheets of paper until it became a book called a Gospel Primmer for Christians. It’s a simple book. It’s divided up into little sections with 30 parts in each. So, you can preach the gospel to yourself everyday.

I’ll read you a quote from it. Maybe it’ll entice you to buy it. He says the gospel serves as the means by which God daily constructs me into what he wants me to be, and also serves as the channel through which he gives me my inheritance every day of my Christian life. Hence, it could be said that the gospel contains all that I need for life and godliness. It is for this reason that God tells me to be steadfastly entrenched in the gospel at all times, and never to allow myself to be moved from there. The mere fact that God tells me to stay inside the gospel at all times must mean that he intends to supply all my needs as long as I am abiding in that place of luxury.

When we think about the gospel, the sinless life of Jesus, his perfection before God, the favor that he was able to gather, his sacrificial death on the cross in our place, his resurrection from the dead that delivered us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son that the loves.

Delivered us from guilt, freed us from shame, restored us to health, life, and hope. Gives us power to say no to sin. When we dwell on and rest in these truths, we are encouraged, knit together in love. We have full assurance. We become rooted and firm in our faith.

So, church, family let’s deepen our roots by preaching the gospel to ourselves every day. Let’s deepen our roots by preaching the gospel to ourselves every day. Paul’s goal was to warn them and teach them. He wanted to warn them not to look to anything else for hope. He wanted to warn them not to look to their religious performance. He wanted to warn them that they shouldn’t look to some secret rituals or some secret knowledge or special knowledge that could be added to the gospel. He wanted them to be firm in their hope in the gospel. And so we must ask ourselves this morning, what challenges the firmness of our faith? What are the things that we are tempted to look to outside of Christ?

You are probably not being attacked by Gnosticism. That’s what this first century heresy was called. No one’s knocking on your door and trying to sell this idea to you, but you are being bombarded by other false hopes. Our culture is pressing us every day to believe that we should hope in leisure or entertainment or things or pleasure or political ideologies. From every direction you’re getting these messages that if you just took a vacation, if you just had a better job, or a bigger house, or more compliant kids, or better retirement, or the

latest iPhone, or more social media followers, or if only this candidate would win or that candidate would win, then you'd be happy. Then you'd be satisfied. Then you'd be safe.

Let me do some warning and teaching. Let me warn you that none of those things are going to satisfy you. Those are vain hopes. Learn from King Solomon. We just studied in the book of Ecclesiastes. He says, "I denied myself nothing my heart desired." And says, "When I surveyed all that my hands had made and all that I had accomplished, nothing was gained under the sun. It was all worthless. A chasing after the wind."

So church, let's forsake every false hope and root ourselves in believing Christ in us, the hope of glory. Let's forsake every false hope and root ourselves in believing Christ in us. The hope of glory. Enjoy the things that God has given you. But don't put your hope in them. Let them instead fuel your appreciation for him and all that he has done for you. Look to Christ. In him are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Christ in you. That's the hope of glory. That's the hope of fulfillment and satisfaction. Christ will escort you into a relationship with God the father. And it is only in that relationship that you will find the satisfaction and joy that you were created for.

So, if you're not a Christian this morning, you're here, or you're joining us online, you've heard the good news. But maybe you're asking what should I do? What do I do now? I've heard this good news. I believe that it's true. What do I do? We use the language here of admit, believe, and confess. ABC. Admit that you are a sinner, that you've fallen short of what God called you to do, and you need a rescuer. Believe in Jesus Christ. In his perfect life and his death in your place and his resurrection from the dead. And confess that he is Lord of your life. That you're turning everything over to him. You've lived your way long enough and it didn't work. That you want to follow him, that he is Lord. If you're a Christian, rejoice in the gospel. Preach it to yourself every day. Christ in you, that is the hope of glory. Let's pray.

Heavenly father., We thank you for this good news. God, I pray that you would help us to live in it, to abide in it, to rest in it. I pray that it would shape the way that we think and the way that we act, the way that we respond to suffering, the way that we proclaim this good news to others, the way that we think about our relationship with you. God, I pray for those who have never believed and now they're hearing this word and they know that it's true. God give them faith to cast themselves upon you, to run to Jesus, put their faith in him to find forgiveness, to be made right with you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.



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