

The Mystery

The mystery [of the word of God] that has been kept hidden for ages and generations . . . is now disclosed to the Lord's people (Colossians 1:26).

Scripture: Colossians 1:24-29

Song: "More About Jesus"

My friend says, "There is nothing like a good mystery." Or is there? I used to like to follow Sherlock Holmes on his adventures or solve a whodunit game. But recently my mysteries come more in the form of "Where are my glasses?" or "What did I come in here for?" I've discovered that the real enjoyment is not in the mystery, but in its revealing!

God kept a secret, a mystery, for ages and generations, but He also gave His chosen people clues about the future. It has been said, "The new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed." There are Old Testament types, shadows, and even God-directed visits that led toward understanding, but still contained the mystery.

Paul rejoiced that he could now present the Word in its fullness. He could share with us the revelation of the mystery, which is Christ in us (v. 27). We can now have assurance of forgiveness and salvation through the Holy Spirit, who indwells each believer. It's no longer a mystery, but an opportunity to praise God!

Father, we praise You for revealing the mystery of Your plan, purpose, and great love. In our Savior's name, amen.

July 27–August 2. **Denny Lynch** has been an Army officer, forest ranger, and professor of forest sciences while also walking with the Lord and his wonderful, encouraging wife, Joyce. The joy of the Lord is his strength.

Mercy

[Our Savior] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy (Titus 3:5).

Scripture: Titus 3:3-7

Song: “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”

I taught a large class required of all majors in the college. When I gave a test, I had to have two versions to ensure that students did their own work. On the front of each version was a special code. At the beginning and end of the test period, I made special efforts (think heroic) to focus students on correct coding, because if they got this wrong they would fail the test. On one occasion, when grades had been posted, a highly distressed young man came to my office saying he didn’t understand why he had failed the test.

Looking at his test we found he had incorrectly coded it. I reviewed with him all the warnings I had made about incorrect coding and the penalty of failing. He admitted he remembered these. I then pointed out that what he was really seeking was not justice, but mercy. So I required that he write a short essay on mercy in exchange for a re-grading of his test!

We have a just God who has repeatedly warned us that we are clearly guilty sinners before Him and that there are penalties. Our goodness doesn’t cover or excuse our sin. It is simply inadequate to dismiss the penalty. God would be totally just if He simply assessed the penalty and went on. But because of His mercy, His great mercy, He saves us by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gracious Father, thank You for Your mercy. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.

Good Gifts

“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children . . .” (Luke 11:13).

Scripture: Luke 11:9-13

Song: “Give Thanks”

What was the best gift you ever received? As the oldest child in my family, I knew my parents were struggling financially and it was difficult for them to buy gifts for us on birthdays and at Christmas. I always marveled at how they could take used items and make them like new, or how they were able to find new things at absolute bargain-basement prices. One Christmas I wanted to learn how to play the guitar, but knew it was probably out of reach and that lessons were beyond possibility. So I resigned myself to reality—it would be a Christmas without music!

On Christmas morning, though, my eyes got as big as baby moon hubcaps! Beneath the tree was a new guitar. It wasn't name-branded or full size, but it made guitar sounds! My friends began to teach me what they knew, and we practiced together. Soon we had a small community singing group that resulted in great times.

God delights in giving us truly good gifts. Things we never expected turn out to be absolute blessings. Without question, the best gift I ever received was not that guitar, but salvation through the work of the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. God's love changed my life! Later He added a special plus, the love and life friendship of the most beautiful girl in the world.

Jehovah Jireh, thank You for blessing us with truly good gifts. In Jesus' name, amen.

Understanding Suffering

We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:3, 4).

Scripture: Romans 5:1-5

Song: “Rejoice, the Lord Is King”

Where I live, it seems that every street corner is being rebuilt into an emergency health facility. Banks are a close second, followed by coffee shops. Why has emergency health care become a profit center? For nonmedical people this is hard to understand, but there are likely several reasons. Among them is simply the huge number of people afflicted with a variety of health issues. All have one thing in common: they are suffering. I am struck by the number of people I meet who suffer health issues.

Suffering is one of the hardest things for a child of God to understand. Often our minds fill with questions. Why me? Why am I suffering, Lord? After all, Your Word is clear—You are the one who heals even the most difficult cases. We know You allow suffering but are not the cause of it, so why are You allowing this?

Perhaps why is the wrong starting point. Maybe the better question is, “Lord, what are You teaching me in my suffering?” Suffering is easier to bear if we understand God has a purpose for us. Today’s Scripture presents a growth process that is at work in our suffering. God intends to move us from suffering to perseverance, then on to character, and then on to hope. The hope of becoming more like Jesus.

Father, lead us to submit to Your total healing of our body, soul, and spirit. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Defeating Evil

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die (Romans 5:7).

Scripture: Romans 5:6-11

Song: “Victory in Jesus”

In 1942, my father coached a college baseball team in southeast Kansas. The players seemed so full of life and fun, they became my heroes. Then things became more serious. Perhaps it was the highly charged atmosphere because the team was close to winning the national championship. But there seemed more to it.

In the evenings my family often went for ice cream to the creamery by the train depot. We began to see the troop trains coming through town. Young men, like my heroes, would jump off the train joking and laughing to get a candy bar before it left. They had willingly decided to volunteer their lives in defense of America at a time of great peril. What we all didn't realize was the price it would take to defeat that evil; some of these young men were not coming back. They didn't intend to die for their country, but the possibility of daring to die was there. They were making a choice of country over self to keep little kids like me safe and free. Their willingness to die sacrificially comes as close to our Scripture verse today as I can envision.

God offers the perfect solution to defeat evil permanently. It too required a great sacrifice of life: “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5: 8). Will you accept His demonstration of love today?

Father, we are overwhelmed by the power of Your love. In Jesus' name, amen.

Preparing the Way

“In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3).

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-8

Song: “Glory Be to the Father”

The Sonoran Desert near Tucson, Arizona, is a favorite place to hike in winter because there is almost always a wildflower in bloom. But with dense areas of saguaro, beavertail, prickly pear, fishhook, and hedgehog cactus among a variety of cholla plants, it is important to stay on a prepared way. Even the slightest side step will often result in, at least, a scratch or a thorn. Cutting across the terrain off a trail results in multiple scratches, which my son refers to as “Arizona pin-striping.” It’s better to stay on the prepared way.

John the Baptist called out to people of his time about preparing a way in the desert and making a straight highway for the Lord (Matthew 3:1-3). His call was in fulfillment of our Scripture reading for today. It was not about building hiking trails or interstates, but about repenting and preparing hearts for the coming Messiah. It was about forsaking a life full of thorns for a life centered in the kingdom of Heaven. With it came a promise to see the glory of the Lord revealed to mankind for all time.

Today we need to point to the way the Lord has prepared. We need to cry out for the world to repent and accept Christ’s offering of salvation. We have the promise spoken by the Lord: He is coming again!

Dear God, we seek to comfort others with the promise of the return of the Lord Jesus. In His name, amen.

Being Renewed

The sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business (James 1: 11).

Scripture: James 1:1-11

Song: “God Made Something Beautiful Out of My Life”

The hillsides were covered by beautiful wildflowers with amazing shapes, sizes, and colors. People kayaked on a small pond as the evening sun set. One could scarcely guess the location of this unusual display that followed a winter of record rainfall. Day by day, however, sun and wind took their toll and flowers appeared less lush and more shriveled. Hillsides turned from green to brown, and the small pond disappeared into dried mud. In just a few days, the landscape had returned to the drought common to Death Valley.

So it is with mankind—some in humble circumstances, some rich and highly placed, some believing, some doubting, some uncertain, but all fading away in the physical sense. Believers who are in testing and trials have reason to rejoice because God is at work through them. They have an opportunity to see that He is using them to make and shape His plan to glorify himself.

It is the seemingly fully satisfied person—the one who is unaware or doesn't care what is happening—who unwittingly fades away, immersed in purposeless routine. God wants to make something unexpectedly beautiful of your life. You may sense that your life is merely fading, but stay alert. He is renewing your heart.

Father, we praise You for Your work in our lives that gives us purpose and meaning for each day. Renew us in Your Word and through Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.