

## Glorious Riches

Shantray grimaced at the menu. “I need to keep my Sluncheon bill under \$20.” She and her new friend, Eva, had finally found time to meet for lunch.

“I really couldn’t afford to eat out today, but I didn’t want to pass up getting together,” said Shantray.

“Girl, we could have had lunch at my house,” chided Eva. “Are you having money problems?”

“My credit card debt is crushing me,” confessed Shantray.

“Ouch,” said Eva. “I got out of credit card debt three years ago.”

“How?” Shantray quickly asked.

“First, I recognized I had a problem. Then I asked God to help me,” said Eva. “I saw a lot of my spending was being consumed by lust.

“It took a while for me to get out of debt. I stopped charging. I consolidated some cards onto one with a lower interest rate. I prayed for and received more self-control, which you know is a fruit of the Spirit. When you ask God to help you live and walk by the Spirit, He will!”

“I need the Lord to help me,” Shantray said.

“He will,” interjected Eva, “but you have to be willing to crucify your flesh. My church teaches a financial literacy class. If you want me to, I will check on the date of the next session.”

“Please do!” said Shantray, perking up.

**1.** *How does our faith encourage us in difficult circumstances?*

**2.** *Why do we have hope in everlasting life?*

**3.** *What does it mean to encourage others with the hope of Christ?*

## The Mystery Revealed

*Colossians 1:24-29, KJV*

24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

*Colossians 1:24-29, NIV*

<sup>24</sup>Now I rejoice in what I am suffering 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. <sup>25</sup>I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— <sup>26</sup>the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. <sup>27</sup>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.

<sup>28</sup>He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup>To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Paul's letter to the Colossians may be short, but it is jam-packed with truths about Jesus—and powerful instructions about how Christians are to live. The first chapter begins with a prayer of thanksgiving, followed by an explosive hymn about Jesus' role as the Lord of all

creation. Paul called the Colossian church to stand firm in this belief.

In verse 24, Paul turned to talk about how following Christ had formed his own life's purpose. The apostle's words may seem strange. What does it mean to "fill up . . . what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions" (vs. 24)? Some have mistaken this to mean that people must accomplish their own works in order to be saved, rather than trusting in Christ alone. But Paul already said that Jesus completed all the work necessary for salvation (1:18-20). The phrase seems to refer to carrying out a mission on someone else's behalf. Jesus set a pattern: He suffered out of love for His people. Paul was following in His footsteps to carry out that love.

Paul knew that God had given him a special role in presenting the Gospel, but it was for the benefit of others—not for his own glory. He spoke of a "mystery" (vs. 26), a way of describing God's plan of salvation. He declared that the glorification of God through the Gospel—that is, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of God's people—is the purpose of all time and history. This purpose was "hidden" for ages, hinted at by prophets and promises of the Scriptures (vs. 26). The mystery is now fully revealed: Jesus has come! Jesus, as Paul claimed, is the one to whom the whole universe has been pointing, from the start of creation until now! The mysteries of the Gospel are open to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to various individuals and groups of people, but verse 27 explains that the riches of the Gospel are now declared "to the Gentiles" (that is, those not even physically descended from Abraham). The church at Colossae probably had a mixture of Jews and Gentiles; Paul proclaimed that the Gospel belongs to both groups.

Christ is not only the ruler of everyone who believes, but He is "in" everyone who believes (vs. 27). Through His Holy Spirit, Jesus lives and reigns in the heart of

every Christian. That fact provides “hope” for future “glory” (rather than condemnation) at His return, no matter a person’s ethnic background (vs. 27). Paul’s goal was not for a specific group to gain special knowledge, but he wished that everyone who believed in Christ might be perfected by His Spirit, and presented as “fully mature” to God at the judgment (vs. 28).

Paul could not accomplish this goal by his own strength. Rather, anything he accomplished was because of Christ working through him. Christ was not only the subject of Paul’s message but also the one who empowered him to give it!

**4.** *What does Paul mean when he says he is “filling up” what is lacking in Christ’s sufferings (vs. 24)?*

**5.** *Who gave Paul the responsibility to preach the Gospel?*

**6.** *What is the “mystery” that God has revealed to the saints?*

**7.** *How does Paul say he finds the strength to do the hard work of preaching the Gospel?*

## Sharing Truth’s Treasures

*Colossians 2:1-3, KJV*

1 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

*Colossians 2:1-3, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. <sup>2</sup>My goal 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, <sup>3</sup>in

3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

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Paul had invested in the Colossian church by praying for them constantly and sending dear friends to assist and encourage them (1:9; 4:8). He also built a relationship with a church in the nearby city of Laodicea (mentioned also in Rev. 3:14-22). Paul described his work on behalf of these churches as a struggle. He defended the truth of the Gospel from false teachers in that area of Asia Minor, even though he had never personally been there.

Paul's zeal to defend God's truth was not an end in itself. In verse 2, he explained that his goal was that the church might be encouraged by their knowledge of the truth and brought together "in love" as they unite in proper worship of Christ. The fight to understand God's Word and the struggle to defend sound doctrine wasn't meant to cause conflict between believers. Rather, it was to be a source of joy as the church shared together in the hope of Jesus, helping one another see Him clearly.

Indeed, seeing Jesus for who He is, is the best sort of "riches" that anyone might receive, for only those who know Him and believe in His name are able to understand the "mystery" of God's purpose for the world (vs. 3).

Although it would be common in the Greek religious world to pray to many gods, Paul declared that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are found in one person: Jesus Christ (vs. 3). Knowing Jesus as the Son of God, the only true ruler and Savior, is the only way to make sense of everything else!

**8.** *What was Paul's relationship with the church in Colossae like?*

**9.** *What was Paul's goal for the Colossians?*

**10.** *In whom are hidden "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (vs. 3)?*

## Truth and Treasure Give Hope

Jesus died in our place on a cross to make atonement for our sins against God. His resurrection from the dead proved His victory over death and opened the way for us to have access to God. When we believe this to be true, and trust and receive the righteousness Jesus offers us, we enter into a personal, saving relationship with Christ.

At times we may feel impoverished in one way or another—financially, physically, or spiritually. Yet Jesus blessed those who are “poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). God offers His people great riches—truth, wisdom, and guidance in this life as we follow Jesus and choose to walk with Him. God’s truth and wisdom will stand against the noise of our world which sees no need for God. God doesn’t promise a perfect life, but He does promise that we can have purpose in life and future glory through a personal relationship with Jesus.

Once we believe and invite Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, Christ lives and reigns in our heart. His Spirit teaches us to dwell in love and unity with fellow believers and to offer God’s love to the world.

There is nothing more important than to strive to know Him. Paul’s words to the Colossians remind us that Jesus Christ is the only source of truth, the answer to every ultimate question. He is our only hope.

Living in the hope of Christ isn’t always easy in this world, but we have access to Christ’s power working through us. God’s strength can help us defend and uphold the truth of the Gospel, if we stand firm in our faith.

**11.** *What does it mean to have a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ?*

**12.** *How might believers feel they are “poor in spirit?”*

**13.** *How does the treasure of the truth of the Gospel give us hope?*

**14.** *How does following Jesus give purpose to our lives?*

## Encourage One Another

Paul wrote to believers to encourage them in their hope in Christ. We have the same hope of future glory with Christ based on His finished work of salvation—His sacrificial death and resurrection. We also have hope in the treasure of receiving wisdom and guidance in life through our belief and knowledge of Jesus, if He lives and reigns in our hearts.

► *How can we encourage others in their faith when they go through hard times? On a note card, write an encouraging note to someone—believer or nonbeliever—to share the hope we have in Christ. Consider new insights you gleaned from the lesson about the hope of Christ and how it applies to your everyday life.*

### KEY VERSES

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.  
—Colossians 2:2-3, KJV

My goal 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.  
—Colossians 2:2-3, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of June 3 through June 9

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Acts 28:23-31—Boldly Proclaiming the Kingdom.
- Tues.** Exodus 19:9-11, 16-25—The Awesome Presence of God.
- Wed.** Hebrews 12:18-29—The Consuming Fire.
- Thurs.** Acts 4:23-31—The Church Prays for Boldness.
- Fri.** Exodus 34:28-35—Transfigured by the Power of God.
- Sat.** Deuteronomy 31:1-8—Be Strong and Courageous.
- Sun.** 2 Corinthians 3:5-18—Ministers of a New Covenant.