

New Life In Christ: The Hidden Treasure

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-4, Col 1:24-2:7

Good morning! Have you ever been talking to someone when they say: “Have you heard about . . . ?” or “Do you want to know the *real* story?” Those kinds of statements make us automatically lean forward, don’t they? We LOVE to hear a secret. We want to be on the inside, to have *knowledge*. Lots of companies even base their business model on our desire to be in on something hush hush. Come learn the secret to—weight loss, a happy marriage, career success, you name it! We are hungry for that.

We see this in all areas of life. I got a message this week promoting some guy’s new prophecies—he had the latest inside line from God, according to him! I’ve also been reading about how political conspiracy theories are getting more and more popular; groups like Q Anon as well as some left-wing groups are happy to peddle any outrageous story. It doesn’t matter how many times they’ve been shown to be wrong or lying, people love to think that they can have the real inside scoop. I think at times like now, when the world seems particularly out of control and confusing, many folks turn to covert theories, even if they are outlandish. None of us like to feel helpless or baffled—so a story that gives us an explanation and even some bad guys to hate is really useful. The problem is that these stories are almost always fake. Christians are called to be people of the truth, not spreaders of lies.

What kind of secret story tempts you the most? Someone’s personal life? Politics? Relationships? Faith? Yes, even with religion lots of people are happy to pitch some hidden knowledge that you can attain, if only you subscribe or join or advance to a certain level.

This isn’t a new issue. Actually this temptation to find some secret knowledge has been with us a long time. Those Christians in Colossae that Paul was writing to were being tempted by it too. They were just like us! Its important to remember when we read the Bible that the people in the stories are not cardboard cut outs, they were real people, just like us. The church in Colossae was tempted by claims of secret knowledge and prophecies. They were hearing

that you needed something more than Jesus to really get the full picture. Paul's response to that is just as relevant to us now as it was to them 2000 years ago.

Paul says that he has been commissioned to present the word of God in its *fullness* – there is no secret extra teaching that you need to access—he is giving us the WHOLE story. There has been a true mystery, Paul says, a mystery kept hidden for ages and generations, but now it has been revealed! Revealed to US-- to God's people! God has chosen to make this mystery known, even to gentiles—to outsiders like us. The mystery is Jesus! Christ IN You!

Last week Pastor Chris led us through the remarkable hymn to Jesus that Paul gave us. Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus! He is the image of the invisible God. And he is first. He is above EVERYTHING! All things in heaven and earth were created through him. He holds everything together. All of God's fullness dwells in him and Jesus came to earth to put everything right again, even if it killed him. There is no higher way of describing Jesus. Jesus is the resurrected Lord who created everything, who holds it all together, and is reconciling everything to himself—even now. He is BOTH the image of God and the pattern of a genuinely human life.

THAT Jesus--creator, savior, king of all—that is who Paul now says lives IN us! Jesus is the head of the church, but not in a far away, bureaucratic sort of way. No, he is with us here. He is living in us—moving through us. It is the closest possible relationship! The true mystery Paul is announcing is about how God is fixing everything. God's solution to all of the problems of the world—all of the hate, the fear, the greed, the backstabbing, all of it—is Jesus. Just Jesus. We don't need any esoteric knowledge or rituals—we need Jesus. And not Jesus as an idea, but the real, living Jesus, living in us! This is the good news, the gospel—that God is rescuing the world through Jesus, and he's doing it through Jesus in us! As each of us turn our little kingdoms of influence over to Jesus, he moves into our lives and His kingdom expands, one life at a time.

Can we just stop there for a moment? God himself has come to rescue us and lives in us! Do you believe that? Friends, if that's true, then everything can be different! If you are the place where God lives—if Jesus is moving and acting in you and through you—what does that

make you? You are not ordinary. You are literally Jesus' hands and feet in the in the world today!

We don't need any extra secret knowledge or conspiracy theories. We already ARE the insiders on God's plan! You see, our faith is fundamentally a relationship! It is not a set of rules. It is not a group of abstract ideas that we decide to agree with. No—our faith leads us into a *relationship*. Not just any relationship, but the intimate give and take of God himself living in us! This is a stunning idea. God does not force his way in—he stands at the door and knocks. Have you invited him in? Maybe you never have really gotten around to asking him to be the Lord of your life. Or maybe you did a while back but you've nudged him off the throne somewhere along the way. Or maybe you just want to recommit yourself to Jesus. Let's pray about that right now—feel free to make this prayer your own:

Lord Jesus—I can't fathom why you love me. But I trust you when you say that you do. I trust you when you suffered and died to open the way for us to be together. I am sorry for all the ways I turn away from you. Please forgive me. Please help me to walk in your ways. Jesus, I invite you into my life. Come in and take charge. I open all of myself up to you. Help me to welcome you into every part of my life. Jesus, I trust you and I love you. Come and make me yours. Amen.

Amen? Amen! I am excited if some of you invited Jesus-- the King of the Universe-- to be the Lord of your life today—whether for the first time or as a recommitment. I'd love to hear about it. There is no more important decision than asking Jesus to be in control of your life.

Paul says that this great mystery—at last revealed—is Christ in Us, the hope of glory. What does that second part mean? We don't really have a good picture of glory in our minds. There is an old song about being “bound for glory”—that is where we are heading. It is a happy song, full of anticipation and joy. That is what Paul is talking about here. Think about glory as an overwhelming sense of awe and joy. It is the feeling of being in the presence of God. That feeling of glory is unfamiliar to us, but we were made for it! God made all of creation so we could live with him! That is the beginning and the end of the Bible story—God living with humans. A loving community with God at the center.

That is a stark contrast from what we see around us, isn't it? Disease, strife, rampant lying, economic pain. We are surrounded by scary things. There is so much uncertainty! Our reopening task force is preparing recommendations for Session about when and how we should return to worshipping together in person—but it is a hard job! There are so many questions with cloudy answers. It is easy in all parts of our lives to give in to fear right now. But Jesus calls us to live by faith, not fear. And he gives us all the resources we need to do it! His Spirit, living in us can lead us, and he can encourage us. If Christ is for us, who can be against us? We have literally nothing to worry about! Our present is safe in Jesus. And our future is glory. Glory is getting to be part of the wondrous work God is doing! Since Jesus is in us now, we can trust that we will share in God's glory too. What a hope!

The goal of our lives here is for us to grow up in Jesus. To open ourselves more and more over time to his presence and action in our lives. I think about some long-time believers I know and they just glow with a peace and love that I can only hope for. That is the fruit of decades of walking with Jesus. Years of turning towards Jesus instead of away. I see that in many of you.

Our former church in Washington sponsored an alternative high school. Almost all of the students at the school were shaking addictions or recovering from abuse they'd endured. This school was their last chance. Many of them didn't have any reliable family members who could come and encourage them and celebrate their victories. But they did have Mike. Mike Standard was a retired member of the church, a widower. He would always show up for their games and cheer them on. Once I heard one of those kids sharing his story in worship. He was a tough kid who had been through hell. But the person who had broken through his shell and connected with him was Mike. The young man shared about how patient and caring Mike was and how he always showed up, no matter what. How Mike made him feel like he was worth something. Mike's last name is Standard, but this young man called him Mike Premium. He was Mike Premium because he was top grade. Mike makes everyone feel special. I love being around him. That is the kind of person we can become too. As Paul put it, he wants to present each of us fully mature in Jesus—fully grown up in our savior.

We are put right with God in an instant thanks to Jesus. We are saved by grace, and we don't need to live in fear. But our life of faith is a lifelong journey-- as we let God start to shape us and mold us and grow us up to become the people he created us to be. So how do we do this? We do it by living it!

We learn by trial and error. Recently our daughter Gracie decided to build a bench for their front porch. She had never done *anything* like this before! I think knitting was the closest she'd come before to building a bench! But she found some plans and got the materials. She watched some videos on YouTube that showed how to do things and what order to do them in—but ultimately she was the one who cut the wood, sanded the pieces, drilled the holes, put it together, took it apart when it wasn't quite right, fixed the holes that were off, put it together again, tightened everything up and stained it. She learned some things watching the videos, but she *really* learned by doing. After actually working and building the bench—she *knows* how to do it! The only way to learn is by doing.

It is the same with us. We are called to live out our faith, not just hold opinions or beliefs about it. The very heart of Colossians are the last two verses we read today. Everything so far leads up to them, and everything afterwards flows out of them. This is the core—listen to these verses again, this time from the Message:

My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you've been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now *live* him. You're deeply rooted in him. You're well constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start *living* it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.

School's out! Start living it! Of course part of living is continuing to learn, but it is learning by doing as well as by more studying, just like Gracie learned to build a bench. As we live into this life with Jesus we can trust him. We are deeply rooted in him, we have a good foundation in him. He is at work in us and at work through us. He is everything we need, even in the middle of a pandemic. Our job is to take a step. To start living and moving and trusting that Jesus will show up.

We can stop holding Jesus at arm's length and embrace this life with Him. Open up your WHOLE life to him. The secret is that Jesus is alive and at work in the world and can be doing that in your life right now. Write down those last two verses and put them up on the refrigerator or your bathroom mirror so you can see them and think about them. Pray about them. Live in Jesus—overflowing with thankfulness. That is the last step—live your life in him, trust him, and then let your living spill out into thanksgiving. I love how I can see you doing that right now—the deacons choosing to help our students with the technology they need for school, people showing up with meals, gathering around with prayers. We aren't living in fear, we are moving in faith!

Friends, this life with Jesus is not a grim, teeth gritted kind of life. Even when life is hard—and it is hard in 2020-- we can still experience an undercurrent of joy and gratitude and hope. We are made for this life. We are made to live with open-hands —ready to share, ready to receive, ready to reach out to help. I know things are uncertain and scary right now. Let's go ahead and trust Jesus anyway! That is the true secret, the only one worth knowing!

Let's pray: Lord Jesus—we love you. Help us to show it. Call us to you and help us to open even those parts of our lives we have been holding back from you. Help us to give it all to you, and live lives spilling over with thanksgiving and joy. In your name we ask it, amen.