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Sermon Notes

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The Glory of Christ Unwrapped and Revealed

Colossians 1-2

Christmas presents:

There is nothing like the thrill of a mystery gift, waiting under the tree with your name on the tag! It is especially exciting if it is really large or some strange shape, with a huge bow on it.

The excitement of the mysteries of Christmas gifts are maximum for kids somewhere between the ages of 5 and 12... old enough to remember last year's excitement and to anticipate this year's revelations... the thrill of tearing off the wrapping paper and discovering the gift underneath. Old enough to remember and anticipate the magic, but not so old to be too cool for all that, like super cool teenager; and certainly not so old as to be responsible to make all those mysteries happen (like moms and dads) or even older, when all you really want out of Christmas Eve is a good night's sleep!

One of the great problems people have when it comes to Christmas gifts is to achieve the surprise... a pleasing surprise... something the person really wants and needs, but had no idea they were getting. It's really hard to do. And it's hard for parents to achieve surprises for their younger kids because they have to come up with HIDING PLACES for all the gifts before they're wrapped. Kids are amazing SNOOPS and can sniff out even the best hiding places.

When I was growing up, my parents were really shrewd. They did all their shopping in late November and early December, then told us exactly where all our gifts were being kept (mostly their bedroom closet) and said "We don't care if you look or not... but if you want to be surprised on Christmas Day, stay out of our closet!" It was like reverse psychology, and it really worked. None of us kids ever snooped! We wanted the thrill of unwrapping the gift on Christmas morning.

Now this morning, I have the privilege of preaching to you a few days before all that excitement. I have the privilege of unfolding the scriptures to you, to feed your faith and build up your souls in the Lord. And the approach I want to take this year is to liken Jesus Christ himself to an Christmas gift of infinite cost, and infinite value, bringing infinite joy... yes, that's all true... but also Christ as a gift that will be unwrapped before our eyes for all eternity. He has infinite dimensions, and we will spend eternity learning all of them. They will never run out!

In this way, I am seeking to fulfill the role Jesus described in

Matthew 13:52 every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Bringing out of the storeroom NEW TREASURES AS WELL AS OLD!

Like a marvelous, glorious show and tell... an unwrapping of Christ's glory a little more for you; some of the treasures of insight will be old for most of you, others may be new

The real "unwrapping" of the gift of Christ is done by the Holy Spirit; his unique role for the last two thousand years has been to unwrap the glories of Christ before the spiritual eyes of every generation of God's people... and we trust he will do that again this morning

"Unwrap" = "Reveal"

I am only using the word “unwrap” this morning to fit into the concept of an infinitely glorious Christmas present, a mysterious box wrapped up, concealed, hidden, and ready to be unwrapped... but here I will abandon the “unwrapping” language because the more biblical word is “reveal” ... that Christ’s glory would be REVEALED, that is the way the Bible speaks of this

Context in Colossians: A Mystery to Be Revealed

Look at the text:

Colossians 2:2-3 My purpose 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, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Note the “hidden” language... in Christ are HIDDEN TREASURES; specifically “wisdom and knowledge”; note that Christ is called the “mystery of God”

He uses that language because of the specific threat the Colossian church was facing... a severe doctrinal threat

The Colossian church was fighting for its life doctrinally... they were under assault from a bizarre mixture of Judaism, Christian theology, human philosophy, mysticism, and asceticism!

What a poisonous mixture Satan had concocted and was throwing at them! Central to the poison was a false conception of salvation as a progressive ascent through higher and higher circles of knowledge by means of personal asceticism. If you denied yourself food and earthly pleasures, then the higher beings (like angels) would gradually reveal the mysteries of the universe to you.

So-called “mystery religions” were all the rage back then; many of them tied to the pagan religions of Egypt and Babylon... some of them tied to Zoroaster; along with that was the esteem for

human wisdom which came from Greece. So the combination implied ascent through locked doors... each of these locked doors could be opened by pious mystical people who found the keys to knowledge. Central to the required piety was a denial of the bodily drives like eating and drinking and sensual pleasure... asceticism. So, the human body was evil.

Paul sweeps all of that away by proclaiming the person of Christ, and salvation in Christ. The incarnation of the eternal Son of God was all the mystery they would need. And the imputed righteousness of the gospel through faith in Christ was all the righteousness they would need. And the growth in holiness through gradual sanctification by the Spirit was all the ascent they would need.

And above all this, the wisdom wrapped up in Christ was all the wisdom in the universe... everything was wrapped up in him like a gift to be unwrapped, gradually unwrapped, eternally unwrapped... or better "revealed" ...

These are the immeasurable treasures of the gospel of Jesus Christ!
Through faith in the gospel of Christ,

- they were rescued from the dominion of darkness (Satan's evil kingdom)
- they were transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son of God
- their sins were all completely forgiven... they were redeemed by Christ's blood
- now what's in front of them is the Christian life: the goal of that life is to please God at every moment, to bear fruit for all eternity;
- it is a life that begins by knowing God's will by the scriptures...

- it is a life in which we can DO God's will by his secret power at work within us
- it is a life of endurance and patience
- it is a life of joyfully giving thanks to God for our present and future salvation
- it is a life that ends with all God's people receiving an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of light – heaven

That is the Christian gospel, the Christian path of salvation... not that weird mix of asceticism (harsh treatment of the body), mysticism (the worship of angels), and secret keys of knowledge by which you unlock ever-ascending doors of wisdom

Central to all this is the person of Christ. If we understand Christ properly, we understand salvation properly

So he has to center their minds on Christology... and Colossians 1-2 gives us some amazing insights into the infinite mysteries of Christ, mysteries that God has been unfolding gradually for six thousand years, and that it will take all eternity for us to understand perfectly

The infinite mystery of Christ... to know him perfectly – that will take all eternity! Let's trace out the unwrapping of the treasure of Christ that God has been doing, is doing, and will continue to do in the future, even out to eternity

Let's discover together the central Christmas gift: the ineffably glorious Son of God, given to the world as Savior

I. Christ Hidden In Ages Past

A. The Mystery of Christ Has Been Kept Hidden by God

Colossians 1:26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.

Paul is very clear what this mystery is:

Colossians 1:27 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.

B. The Existence of the Second Person of the Trinity Was Hidden in the Mind of God

1. The Jewish people were trained in a powerfully clear fierce monotheism
2. They were constantly tempted to think that the true and living God was one of many gods, and they were tempted toward syncretism... harmonizing the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the gods of Egypt or of Canaan or of Babylon
3. God expressly forbade this in his Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:2-3 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before me.

4. God clearly trained the people to understand monotheism

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Isaiah 43:10 "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.

Isaiah 44:8 You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

C. The Concealing of the Son of God

Isaiah 49:2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.

II. Christ Gradually Revealed by the Prophets

A. The Possibility of a Trinity Was Opened by Some Mysterious Passages

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..."

Genesis 3:22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil."

B. The Coming of the Christ Gradually, Progressively Revealed by the Prophets

1. It began in the Garden of Eden... God predicted the “seed of woman” would crush the serpent’s head; but that the “seed of woman” was the Second Person of the Trinity was not so clearly revealed
2. It continued in the Law of Moses... especially with the “angel of the Lord” passages

It was the angel of the Lord who stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac:

Genesis 22:11-12 But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

It was the angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses in the flames of the burning bush and said “I am who I am”

And listen to what God says about the angel of the Lord:

Exodus 23:20-21 "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. ²¹ Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him."

This “angel of the Lord” was in some sense harmonized with God but separate from him... he has God’s name and speaks with God’s authority, but is different than the God who spoke to Moses

3. Christ was revealed more and more clearly by successive prophets... David, the psalmists, Isaiah, Jeremiah...
4. The culmination: the Son of Man vision of Daniel... Daniel sees a vision of the Ancient of Days—Almighty God, seated on a throne of fire judging all the earth; suddenly into his presence comes another person, separate from the Ancient of Days, but receiving from him authority and glory to receive worship from all the people of the earth

Daniel 7:13-14 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

C. BUT All these Revelations Were Far Short of What Was Unveiled...
What we celebrate at Christmas... the incarnation of the Son of God

III. Christ Infinitely Revealed in the Incarnation

A. The Angel’s Words to Mary

Luke 1:30-35 the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

B. The Heavenly Angels' Celebration at Jesus' Birth

Luke 2:8-14 *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

C. God's Words at Jesus' Baptism

Mark 1:9-11 *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

D. John the Baptist's Testimony

John 1:29-34 *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."*

E. Jesus' Amazing Miracles

1. His driving out of demons... many of whom testified that he was the Son of God

Mark 1:24 "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God!"

2. His ability to heal every kind of disease and sickness... remember Colossians 2:3 which says "in Christ are hidden ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"... well, in the medical world, there was no disease he didn't know how to heal; think of all the scientific advances in medicine... the careful pharmaceutical research in dealing with infectious diseases like COVID; the surgical precision in dealing with eye diseases or neurological injuries like paralysis; the specialists who spend their whole lives addressing specific maladies; Jesus already knew how to heal every disease and sickness among the people... there was NOTHING he didn't know how to heal
3. His ability to forgive sins... they asked "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"; Jesus healed a paralyzed man specifically to prove that he had the authority to forgive sins
4. His control over the wind and the waves... only God can do that!!..

Mark 4:37-41 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" ³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. ⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" ⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

5. His power over death... to him Jairus's daughter and Lazarus were only sleeping... he had to merely wake them up; it was no more difficult for Jesus to raise a dead person than to wake someone up from sleeping

All of these powerful signs and wonders proved that Jesus was GOD in the flesh!

Colossians 2:3 in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

F. Peter's Testimony: "You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

G. The Mount of Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-2 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

Matthew 17:5 a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.

H. The Infinite Unveiling at the Cross

1. No work of Christ so proved his deity as his amazing achievement of the cross
2. In the cross all the glory of God was on full display... his power, in that in a single day he atoned for the sins of all God's people in every generation all over the world; his love in that he laid down his life for his Bride; and for our purposes here, his WISDOM, for Christ crucified is the wisdom of God

I. The Eternal Glory of the Resurrection

1. So also Christ's resurrection... by his mighty victory over the grave, Jesus is the perfection of wisdom and knowledge
2. He was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4)
3. All of these works displayed the reality of Christ's infinite majesty

IV. Christ Personally Revealed in Our Salvation

A. Christ is Hidden Until the Spirit Unveils Him

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

1. By the illumination that the Spirit alone can give, we suddenly see the glory of God in Christ:

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

B. Progressive Growth in Knowing Christ: Colossians 1

Though the Colossians already knew Christ, there was much more to learn... so in chapter 1, he lays some staggering truths on them

Colossians 1:15-17 [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

C. Progressive Revelation to the Lost of the World

1. The lost people around the world are walking in darkness
2. Missions and evangelism exist that we can unwrap the gift of Christ before their eyes... that they might hear of Christ's glory and be drawn out of darkness into his wonderful light

V. Christ Eternally Revealed in Heaven

A. Jesus' Statement to Nathaniel... the Greatest is Yet to Come

John 1:49-51 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." ⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." ⁵¹ He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

When it comes to understanding that Jesus is the SON OF GOD, the greatest is yet to come!!

1 Corinthians 13:12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

B. The Unveiling of Christ at the Second Coming

1. The greatest “unveiling” of Christ will be at his second coming

Matthew 24:30 They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

Matthew 25:31-32 When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Then the final education in the infinite greatness of Christ will commence

C. The Eternal Education of Heaven

1. Only an infinite subject can fill our minds for all eternity
2. We will greatly increase in our knowledge of Christ in heaven, but we will never be omniscient... so there will always be more of his glory to learn

D. The Glory of God in Christ Will Illuminate the New Universe

Revelation 21:9-11 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Revelation 21:23-24 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

E. “In Christ are Hidden ALL the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge”

1. Let’s zero in particularly on this one statement by Paul

Colossians 2:3 in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

2. We will spend all eternity studying how incredibly wise and perfect in knowledge is our Savior, Jesus Christ
3. To see in heaven how wisely Christ has worked to save all the elect in every generation
4. To see in heaven how wisely Christ has worked to protect his growing church from all of Satan’s devices and all the demons attacks
5. To see in heaven how wisely Christ filtered all of our trials and temptations and testings... how he used our sufferings to purify our faith and rescue us from every evil attack
6. To see in heaven how wise Christ was in controlling hostile governments as he built his church in every era of human history
7. Christ’s perfect wisdom in all its dimensions will be revealed to us as we look back on human history with perfect eternal perspective
8. And we will be amazed again and again at the mighty works of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit in saving us!!

The thrill of eternal discovery of Christ in heaven will be amazing!!

VI. Applications

A. Find Christ as Treasure Hidden in a Field

B. Set Your Hope Fully on Christ, Not on the Materials Blessings of this World

1. Christmas can be a very worldly holiday, with a tremendous focus on material things... physical gifts you set your hearts on—it is the most important commercial season of the year, and the ad

campaigns are in full swing trying to counter Jesus' statement, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions"

2. Perhaps this year more than any other, with COVID, we have seen a lot of idols torn down... lots of earthly blessings have withered and shriveled and been exposed as the fragile, unstable, disappointing things they really are
3. This is a GOOD THING if we use it properly
4. This Christmas, focus your mind on the treasures of CHRIST, the infinite person of Christ; meditate much on him, that you haven't even begun to scratch the surface of his infinitely majestic person

C. Feed Heavenly Hope

1. Colossians 3 makes it plain:

Colossians 3:1-4 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

2. So, feed your heavenly hope
3. Realize that heaven will be an eternal education in the glory of God in Christ
4. Realize that there will never be a time in heaven in which you will be able to say "I have reached the end of the line when it comes to learning Christ... I know everything there is to know about Christ!"
5. You will spend eternity studying his greatness and his character and his achievements in space and time

D. Kindle Eternal Hope in those Around You

1. Start with your own family... speak often about Christ and the gospel to those in your immediate family

Colossians 4:6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

So much of our time with our family can be so worldly... we talk about sports or politics or worldly affairs, and seem like we don't even know HOW to talk about Christ with our family members... even if they are Christians, we seem to talk about OTHER THINGS

How much more should we speak of Christ to lost relatives... a lost mother or father; a lost son or daughter; a lost uncle, aunt or cousin; a lost son-in-law or daughter-in-law

Fill your conversation with the greatness of Christ... his amazing miracles, his walking on water, his gentleness in dealing with broken-hearted sinners

2. Outside the home: Realize that most people around us in this region are LOST... "without hope and without God in this world" (Eph. 2); "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt. 9); running blindly after the empty promises of this world
3. Fill them with the real spirit of Christmas... the joy of eternal salvation in Christ!