

1 GOD'S SAVING SECRET

(Colossians 1:24-29)

“The church, 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; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: 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: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.”

I am preaching today about “God’s Saving Secret.” Note the special word the Apostle Paul uses — the word “mystery,” or “secret.” He speaks of “the Word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: ... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The New English Bible translates it like this: “the secret hidden for long ages and through many generations, but now disclosed to God’s people” (the ones initiated). So Paul speaks of a “secret” of God, though it’s an *open* secret, a *secret to be disclosed to anyone who is truly eager to share it*. He defines it like this: “The secret is this: Christ in you, the hope of a glory to come.” Look carefully and prayerfully at “God’s Open Secret.”

I. GOD'S SAVING SECRET CENTERS IN A PERSON

First, we see that God’s Saving Secret *centers in a Person*, and depends on a relationship between us and that Person. Here, Paul shows us the *essence* of God’s saving secret. The essence of God’s open secret is *Christ Himself*. According to the Apostle Paul, the *essence*, the *expression*, and the *explanation* of the Christian faith is Christ Himself. In this place, as in every other part of his writings, Paul’s chief emphasis is Christ. Jesus is the sum and the stress of it all! In this most important of all facts, the Christian faith is unique. *It is the only religion in the world that rests entirely on the Person of its Founder*. A man can be a faithful Mohammedan without concerning himself in the least with the person of Mohammed (and this is a very good thing for Islam, because the life of Mohammed was a shambles from a moral standpoint). A man can be a true and faithful Buddhist without knowing anything whatever about Gautama the Buddha as a person. But it is quite different with the Christian faith. The Christian faith involves nothing *less* and can be nothing *more* than a personal relationship with Jesus Christ Himself.

The fundamental and ultimate issue in *everything* is Jesus Christ. The issue is *not* whether you believe a particular *doctrine*. The issue is *not* whether you practice a certain moral *ethic*. This issue is *not* whether you attend or belong to a *church*. All of these things are very important as addendums to a personal relationship with Christ, but the fundamental issue is, *What is your personal relationship right now with Jesus Christ?*

A fellow pastor tells of a recent incident in his ministry which reflects this truth. A lady came one day to his study, obviously restless, eager, longing for reality in faith, but disillusioned by what she had seen of Christians and the institutional church. The problem she identified in her life is not an uncommon one. She explained her problem, then she said to the pastor, "I need help, but I don't want you to talk to me about *Christianity*. What I have seen makes it unreal to me. And I don't want you to talk to me about *Christians*, either. The ones I know seem so inconsistent." Now, those limitations would place many Christian witnesses in a very great predicament. But just listen to his glorious answer. He said, "Ma'am, I wish everyone would come to me like that, saying the things you have just said. It would be a great relief. This world is ignorant at this moment of Jesus Christ, because it wastes its time talking about Christians and Christianity. As if there were anything worth talking about except Jesus Christ Himself! I am overjoyed to say to you that I am only too glad to observe the limits of conversation you have so wisely imposed. Let's forget about *Christians*, and *Christianity*, and let's talk about *Jesus Christ Himself*." And beginning with that introduction, the woman's life began to be changed by a person relationship with Jesus.

Supposes that a certain man realizes that he has a deadly disease. He makes a long trip to a distant city because he has been told that there is a physician there who may be able to cure the disease. When he arrives at the doctor's office, the receptionist tells him, "I'm sorry, but the doctor is out. Would you like to see his assistant?" "No, I want to see the doctor himself." "Would you like to read the latest findings on this disease, published in a recent medical journal?" "No, I would prefer to see the doctor." "May I offer you some medicine which the doctor has prescribed to others with this disease?" "No, thank you, I want to see the doctor first." "Sir, I can introduce you while you wait to a person who was recently cured by the doctor." "Ma'am, I appreciate your interest and offers to help, but *I must see the man himself, for myself*." Dear friend, if you have never known Christ, do not settle for an assistant (a preacher or teacher or Christian), or the book (even though it is the Bible), or reputable medicines (the gifts and blessings of the Christian life), or the testimony of a person who has cured by Him (a happy Christian). You would be wise to carefully observe each one — and then press right around them *to Christ Himself!*

Imagine the prodigal son in Jesus' story (Luke 15:11-34) arriving back home after his tragic stint in the far country. Suppose his brother greets him with the words, "Welcome home! I'm glad you are home, but *Father refuses to see you*." Or suppose one of the faithful household servants says to him, "All the *servants* are rejoicing. Your father told us to kill the fatted calf and prepare a feast. He also told us to bring out the best robe and put it on you, and a ring on your finger, and shoes on your feet. However, he still has some issues unsettled in his heart, and he told us to hold the banquet without him, because *he's not ready to see you yet*." You see, dear friend, the greatest thing Jesus Christ offers, or *has* to offer, is Himself. Without Him, though you have all else, you are desperately poor. But *with Him, though you have little else, you are immeasurably rich in eternity's values*.

God's Saving Secret centers in a Person, and depends entirely on a relationship between

the individual and that Person.

II. GOD'S SAVING SECRET CENTERS IN A POSSESSION AND A POSITION

Second, we see in our text that God's Saving Secret *centers in a possession* (the possession of Christ) *and a position* (Christ *in you*). Here, Paul carries us into the *experience* of God's Saving Secret. "The secret is this: Christ *in you*, the hope of glory." Now, not all who profess and call themselves Christians are *in on* this secret. Many hold firmly to the belief that Christ is *for* them, but they have no experience whatsoever of Christ *in* them. And yet, this is the secret of everything Christian — God's *saving* secret, God's *open* secret — "Christ in you."

This is the secret of *beginning* the Christian life. To *begin* the Christian life, you must *receive* the incoming Christ. The Word of God declares in John 1:12 that "as many as *received* Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God."

It was William Law, a great old English preacher, who said, "A Christ not *in* us is a Christ not *ours*. A Christ not *in* me is a Christ not *mine*." It matters not what you may *believe* with your *head*, or *practice* with your *life*, if Christ is not *withing* you, are no Christian. It is not enough for Christ to be *near* you (indeed, that is always true); He must be *in* you. Not *there*, but *here!* Not *outside*, but *inside!* You see, when Christ lived in the flesh, He lived *among* men; today He wants to live *in* men.

Late one Sunday afternoon in 1921, Dr. Lyman Abbott, the great Christian writer, sat in the pastor's study of a big eastern church. He was to speak in the evening worship service, reviewing his latest book, What Christianity Means to Me. It was forty-five minutes before time for the service and the church was already packed. The pastor came in and laid his copy of Dr. Abbott's book down in front of the great author and said to him, "Would you please autograph it for me, and write in it the ripest thought that has come to you in your sixty years in the ministry." Then the pastor went out. Thirty minutes later he came back. Dr. Abbott still sat, his pen in his hand, the book open in front of him, and deep in thought. He hadn't written a word. The pastor tiptoed out. Fifteen minutes later he returned. It was time for the service to begin. The ink was not yet dry on the flyleaf of the book. This is what Dr. Abbott had written: "The ripest thought that has come to me in sixty years in the ministry is this: the Christian faith is not a *philosophy* that Jesus came to *teach*; it is a *life* that Jesus came to *impart* and to *infuse* into the experience of individuals." This is the secret — God's open secret, God's saving secret — of beginning the Christian life, to receive Christ into your life and heart.

But this is also the secret of *living* and *sharing* the Christian life. "Christ in you." To *live* and *share* the Christian life, you must *acknowledge* the *indwelling* Christ. It is one thing to receive Christ, but quite another to consciously realize and acknowledge His Presence moment by moment. Yet, the Christian life is nothing less than a moment-by-moment miracle, lived by the power of the indwelling Christ. The "open secret" is that God in Christ is able and willing to move right into the heart of His yielded child and live there, looking out of his eyes, feeling with

his hands, talking with his lips, and sharing Himself with others through the believer's life which He occupies.

Captain Reginald Wallis used to define the word "Christian" life this: "Spell out the word C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N. Then take the letter 'A' from the end of the word and put it at the beginning. Now what do you read?" The answer, of course, was — "A Christ in." With great earnestness, he would then add: "A Christian is a man in whom Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit lives, and moves, and has His being."

Every Christmas, I am reminded of Mary's "pattern of incarnation" as a perfect model for our lives. Follow the steps, and you will see the Christian life in miniature. (1) There was an *entrance* of Christ into her. And there must be an entrance of Christ into you that is just as decisive as His entrance into her. His incarnation resulted from the union of two things in her, and His incarnation in us results from the union of Word and Spirit in us. (2) There was an *enlargement* of Christ within her. She carried a growing Jesus in her for nine months, and so we will carry a "growing Jesus" in us throughout our Christian lives. How Mary was stretched and shaped by His Presence in her! She was stretched and shaped personally, socially, mentally, and spiritually (and probably in several other ways as well), and so will we be. You will find that "Christ in you" will do many of the same things to you that Mary's supernatural pregnancy did to her. (3) There was an *expression (exit)* of Christ through (from) her. Even so, when Christ grows sufficiently within us, there will be a regular and growing expression of His Life through us. He will move through us into the world around us just as He moved through Mary into the world around her! (4) There was an *extension* of Christ in an ever-enlarging way around her. After a time, she "lost control" of the One who had come through her. He became "unmanageable"! On occasion, He almost sounded as if He was rebuking her for her attempts to control and restrain Him. Mary suffered some "loss of face" on several occasions because of Him, beginning with His Birth. But she was so visited by Heaven that she never once argued with the negatives of her experience of Him. Even so, He will move into an unhindered expression through us, even if He must rebuke us and discipline us -- and even possibly cause some loss of face on our part -- to "make room" for Himself.

It is a clearly stated rule in the Bible that everything reproduces only *after its own kind*. Thus, only Christ can reproduce Christ. Suppose I suddenly found in my mind a raging desire to reproduce a copy of Raphael's masterpiece painting, "The Transfiguration." You see, when many Christians talk of reproducing Christ, they are speaking of *imitation* instead of *impartation* -- copying Him instead of allowing Him to impart and reproduce Himself in and through them. So I bring out my brushes, my paints, my coloring pencils, my easel, and I set to work. I work for awhile, and realized what a miserable attempt I am making of it. Though I try again and again, I soon become the laughing-stock of all observers. Then I begin to despair of my earlier hope. No matter how well-intentioned I might be, or how hard I might try, the result is always the same — total failure!

But suppose Raphael's spirit and ability could get inside of me! He could gain mastery of my fingers, train my eyes to the delicate perception of proportion and perspective, and he could

more and more employ my faculties to his use, until by and by he would perfectly reproduce the masterpiece. Friends, the true Christian life is a masterpiece which only Christ can produce! *It is only the Christ within who can produce the Christ without.* Once Christ is in you, this is His goal, to so transform you inwardly that He increasingly comes to visibility and activity in the world around — right through you!

A gardener one day rescued a wild briar from the ditch where it had been left to rot and die and he planted it in a flower-bed where he was expecting a crop of flowers in the springtime. An onlooker imagined the briar's reaction in this way: "How foolish," the briar said, "how foolish can a man be? Fancy placing a briar like me in a setting like this! I can produce nothing and I'll be out of place!"

But the gardener knew what he was about. He later returned and made a slit in the briar's stem, grafting into it the stem of a choice rose. Later in the season, as flowers appeared elsewhere, so also were there lovely, perfumed roses on that old briar tree that had been left to rot in the gutter. Addressing the briar with the roses on it, the gardener said quietly, "Now you understand! *I did not plant you there for what you were going to give me, but for what I was going to make out of you! And, even then, I had to invest in you everything that I wanted out of you!*"

This is what Paul means when he states the formula, "Christ in you." Paul never succeeded in explaining it. He frankly called it a "mystery." How one personality can invade another, and live *within* another person, and express Himself through that person, yet preserve that person's essential freedom, is beyond explanation. Yet it happens! This is the *marvelous and mysterious experience* of God's open secret — "Christ in you."

III. GOD'S SAVING SECRET LEADS TO A CERTAIN PRODUCT

Finally, we see that the possession of God's Saving Secret *will lead inevitably to a certain product.* It will always have a certain fixed result. "Christ in you, *the hope of glory.*" Now, I think we have made it clear that the Christian Gospel does not just offer a better land in the future, "far, far away." It is not just "a good time coming." It is no mere message, as is often said, of "pie in the sky by and by." It is also God's Good News of present salvation and present help. But there definitely is a future tense of salvation. There is a very, very important future for a Christian. The Christian Gospel is the message of a future glory for those who have Christ in their lives right now. The Christian faith, which is "Christ in you," not only works in this life, but reaches out to the life beyond.

Let me be as clear as I possibly can at this point. This "hope of glory" has both a *present tense product* and a *future tense prospect.* Now, the stress in that phrase is on the word, "hope," but *then,* it will be on the word, "glory."

Two children were counting their money. "I have five pennies!" exclaimed one little girl. "I have ten," replied the other. "No, you don't!" protested the first one. "You only have five pennies, too." But the second girl calmly replied, "I only have five pennies *here,* but my father

promised me five more *when we are at home together*. So I have ten.” Every Christian has a *present-tense glory* right now, and he has a *promise of prospective glory* hereafter — *when he and Jesus are at home together*.

The *present tense product* may be explained like this. “Glory” in the Bible is the manifestation of God’s character; it is the outshining of God’s radiance. “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.” In other words, we saw the character of God in Jesus. Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Remember, the “glory of God” is God’s own character in demonstration. So, if you are less perfect than God’s character, you are a sinner — and each of us qualifies!

So “Christ in you, the hope of glory” is an entire explanation of God’s great salvation. You see, when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, God’s glory, God’s character, God’s nature — God Himself — departed out of man. In that moment, man died spiritually. In that moment, man also fell back upon his own resources for living. He began to depend on his own body and soul, instead of depending upon God within him. He became “flesh,” which is the Biblical word for man acting out of his body and soul, independently of a relationship with God in his spirit. Thus, he was “dead” toward God “in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

Our text tells us that *the only hope* of God regaining his rightful and proper place within man’s spirit is by means of *Christ in you*. Without Christ within, each man remains dead toward God, and it is virtually impossible to convince a dead man that he is dead! I say, “virtually impossible” — though God can do it through a miracle! And this is precisely what happens in the miracle of conviction (John 16:7-11). God awakens and dead man to the reality of his own death! Then, he will happily consider the other great miracle of salvation, the miracle of “Christ in you.”

But remember that there is also a *future-tense prospect* to the great truth of “Christ in you.” What does a Christian have to look forward to in Heaven? Uncertainty? No! Fear? No! Embarrassment? No! You see, *man’s* ways lead to a *hopeless end*, but *God’s* ways lead to an *endless hope*. According to Ephesians 2:7, every born-again person may expect *eternal kindness* from God. God will never get tired of being kind to me! Why? Because Christ is in me! So God will practice eternal kindness toward His Son and His sons! And I am one of His sons -- a King’s kid! Thus, God will never tire of being kind to me. What a prospect!

“Christ in you” is God’s provision for you for *time* and for *eternity*, for *earth* and for *heaven*, for *now* and for *then*. The indwelling Christian Himself constitutes the pledge of future glory. “The hope of glory.” But is it only a “hope”? Well, even if it is, in the New Testament, the word “hope” has no shadow of doubt, no trace of uncertainty, associated with it. A New Testament hope is “a sure and certain hope.” The word “hope” in the New Testament never refers to something that is uncertain, but only to something that is *future*.

When a baby is in his mother’s womb before birth, he develops eyes, but there are no colors for him to see! He develops ears, but there are no harmonies for him to enjoy! He

develops feet, but there are no paths for him to walk! He develops hands, but there are no deeds of service for him to perform! Just so, man is meant to grow “spiritual organs,” to sharpen “spiritual senses” (Hebrews 5:14), while he is here on earth. Do you see why the enlargement of Christ in you is so important on a daily basis? Each saved person is to be in dynamic daily development for His eternal experience of the “glory” hereafter. Each saved person is in “reigning training” right now for His eternal reign with Christ. “Christ in you” now is your present guarantee of an eternity with Him in His heavenly glory hereafter. Hallelujah!

It has been my personal privilege to travel outside the United States over eighty times. Every time I re-enter my homeland after returning from the country I have visited, I eagerly pass through customs, answering any questions in order to get home again. Entrance into heaven might be like that. At re-entry into the United States, the U. S. citizen must fill out a form which asks, “Do you have anything to declare?” Just as there is a pre-determined entrance exam for readmission into the United States, there is a pre-determined entrance exam for admission into Heaven. When you are asked at the Gate of Heaven, “Do you have anything to declare?” you may be sure that *the Name of Jesus is going to be like honey on your tongue at that moment!* It will be a joy to your heart to declare His Name and announce that His Presence in you is your “hope of glory.” As one old preacher said, “Don’t miss it if you can!”

Do you know anything about this by personal experience? Can you say, “Christ is in me, the hope of glory?” If not, would you not

“Just now, your doubtings give o’er, Just now, reject Him no more;
Just now, throw open the door; Let Jesus come into your heart.”

As God acts upon you with the miracle of His conviction, as you realize your sin and your need, trust Jesus Christ and Him alone as your only “hope of glory.” A foretaste of glory will immediately fill your heart, and the Full Meal in Heaven will be something to experience! *I have a guaranteed advance reservation.* Trust Jesus, and secure your own reservation today.

Perhaps you do not know *how* to trust Jesus to save you. Perhaps you don’t know what prayer to pray. Let me help you. Down in your deepest heart, pray a prayer like this: “Jesus, I have sinned, and I am lost. I cannot help myself; I cannot save myself, any more than I can lift myself by my own shoestrings. But You tell me that You love me, and that You died on the Cross personally for me. You also tell me that You did not stay dead; You arose from the dead. And You tell me that if I will simply trust You — totally depend upon You and You alone to save me — that You will come into my life and forgive my sins and give me Your Gift of Eternal Life. *Jesus, I do now trust You! I trust You, and You only, to save me now and forever.* You arose from the dead to guarantee my salvation as I trust You. I trust You, Jesus, right now. Thank You for saving me. Now, take my life and use it for Your purpose. In Your Name, amen.” Hebrews 7:25 says, “Jesus is able to save unto the uttermost all those who come unto God by Him because He ever lives to intercede for us.” And Romans 10:13 says, “Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.” This is a very, very serious matter. Call upon Jesus today; trust Him to save You right now.

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