Portions: Mystery Meat Memory Verse: Colossians 2:10

Jan. 22nd 2022 Scripture Reading: Proverbs 2:1-8

**SLIDE 1: TITLE**

Today we prepare to take a second look at Paul’s letter to the Colossian church. Last week we discovered that, as a culture we actually have a lot in common with the Colossians. We both have available to us a whole buffet line of religious ideas and moral principles and advice on how to live the best life. The options are endless. And as partakers in this buffet, we approach with our plate, that is our heart, and we have some decisions to make. What looks good today? How much do I want of this and do I want to try some of that? Paul’s solution in the face of all these choices is pretty simple: take Jesus as your portion. Trust in him and in him alone. Nothing else is worthy of your palette or your time or your attention. Nothing else is worthy to take up space in your heart.

**SLIDE 2: Colossians 1:19 “All the fullness of God was pleased to live in him.”**

Colossians 1:19 “All the fullness of God was pleased to live in him.” And in Him, we in turn find fullness, which is the only reason we step up to the buffet in the first place.

 Well, I am sure we can remember back to some of those formative meals of yesteryear. Those times when you had to sit at the table and finish what was on our plate. You would give anything to get up from the table and forget the horror, but no…you not only had to witness the horror, but you had to ingest it as well.

 I remember one meal in particular. My mom had made some sort of stew. I must say it looked like a normal bowl of stew. Not my favorite thing at the time, but something I was sure that I could handle. But sure enough, I was the last one left at the table just chewing and chewing on one hunk of meat. I don’t know what had happened in the kitchen, but my mom, who normally served up a good meal, had an off day. I myself have served up some self-admittedly detestable meals. I myself have forced my children to chew and chew. And If I say, “Sit down and eat your food,” what is the one objection you will always hear… “But I don’t like it…” And sure enough, the adult in the situation is prone to say, “How do you know if you don’t try it?”

**SLIDE 3: Ezra**

When he was younger, my son Ezra made it known to us that he had a superpower that allowed him to know if food was good or not based on sight alone. A gifted child indeed.

 But the truth is, our enjoyment of the food does not determine whether or not we eat the food. Sometimes we have to eat some mystery meat. I challenged us last week to sit down and really partake in and digest this hymn that Paul includes in verses 15-20. If you did that, I hope it wen t down sweetly and the truth of that passage was able to become a part of you.

 In our next section of Colossians, Paul is going to have a lot to say about mystery. And mystery is directly connected to information. The more we know about something, the less mysterious it is. Mystery often has a sense of danger attached to it. We venture of into the unknown in order to collect some information. SO when it comes to our faith, Paul does not want us to be uninformed, but at the same time, this Jesus we follow, the Christ who is our portion is mysterious…So in keeping with our analogy here, we have gone to the buffet, we have chosen Jesus, we have heaped up our plate with him as our portion, but we are not completely sure what that means. What do we do with this plate full of mystery meat? Let’s see what Paul has to say about it.

**SLIDE 4: Colossians 1:24, “Now I’m happy to be suffering for you.” We remember that Paul is incarcerated as he writes this letter. So he talk a bit about his plight, but listen as well for his talk about the mystery of the gospel. “Now I’m happy to be suffering for you. I’m completing what is missing from Christ’s sufferings with my own body. I’m doing this for the sake of his body, which is the church.”**

We are going to be picking up where we left off in 1:24, “Now I’m happy to be suffering for you.” We remember that Paul is incarcerated as he writes this letter. So he talk a bit about his plight, but listen as well for his talk about the mystery of the gospel. “Now I’m happy to be suffering for you. I’m completing what is missing from Christ’s sufferings with my own body. I’m doing this for the sake of his body, which is the church.” So Paul is explaining his motives here and how he sees himself as giving of himself for the sake of the church. This is an important gesture here because remember, Paul did not start the church in Colossae, but he is giving them all the same legitimacy as he would any other church that follows Jesus. He goes on,

**SLIDE 5: Colossians 1:25-27: I became a servant of the church by God’s commission, which was given to me for you, in order to complete God’s word. 26 I’m completing it with a secret plan[a] that has been hidden for ages and generations but which has now been revealed to his holy people. 27 God wanted to make the glorious riches of this secret plan[b] known among the Gentiles, which is Christ living in you, the hope of glory.**

READ 25-27. So the CEB translation here uses the term secret plan, but what is a secret plan? It’s a mystery right? It involves information that is unknown. But Paul is revealing that unknown information. That information includes questions such as, “What is God like? What is salvation and how can I attain it? If I am a new Christian (which they all were at the time) how do I fit in with all this Jewish stuff? In verse 26, the mystery is made known to God’s holy people and in the next verse Paul declares that the mystery has been made known to the Gentiles, that is all non-Jewish people, as well. So information had spread both ways. God is appraising all mankind to the inner workings of His secret plan. The culmination of that plan is “Christ lives in you!” And that reality brings to us the hope of glory.

**SLIDE 6: Colossians 28-29: This is what we preach as we warn and teach every person with all wisdom so that we might present each one mature in Christ. 29 I work hard and struggle for this goal with his energy, which works in me powerfully.**

READ 28-29. Again, Paul highlights preaching and teaching which are the means of providing information. This information, that is knowledge, facts, coupled with wisdom, that is the proper application of knowledge into life, which then creates the ultimate goal…maturity. Jesus tells his disciples this same thing in his sermon on the mount. In Matthew 5:48, he recounts Leviticus 19, going all the way back to the Old Testament Law and says to them, “Be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.” And Paul works toward this goal fueled by what he eats, what he consumes, and what is in him that works so powerfully? Christ Jesus himself. Jesus is our route to maturity and ultimately perfection.

**SLIDE 7: Colossians 2:1-5. I want you to know how much I struggle for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who haven’t known me personally. 2 My goal is that their hearts would be encouraged and united together in love so that they might have all the riches of assurance that come with understanding, so that they might have the knowledge of the secret plan[a] of God, namely Christ. 3 All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him. 4 I’m telling you this so that no one deceives you with convincing arguments, 5 because even though I am absent physically, I’m with you in spirit. I’m happy to see the discipline and stability of your faith in Christ.**

Again, Paul states is goal: that Christians would have knowledge of the mystery that is Christ. He has admonished us not to partake of anything else…Christ might be a mysterious dish, but have faith, fill up on Him…verse 3, “All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him.” All knowledge and wisdom are in Christ, but it is hidden. It is not readily apparent…it is not obvious at first glance. So when you come to the buffet of endless options, and you have filled your plate with Christ, not totally sure what he is or what he will taste like, sure enough you will see that cheesecake out of the corner of your eye. And that cheesecake is going to have a very convincing argument…Hey look at me! I’m a cheesecake.

**SLIDE 8: Cheesecake**

You know what I’m all about. You know how I taste. I am here for you. I tell you what, you can even leave that mystery meat there on your plate, just add a slice of me on to the side. That dish certainly looks like it could use some enhancement. Take me on I’m a sure thing.”

 And sure thing does sound pretty tempting when you are dealing with a mystery doesn’t it? But Paul says, “Don’t listen to the cheesecake arguments! I know they sound convincing, but you have to trust that when you dig into that mystery meat, when you slice it up and carefully consider it, you will find treasure.”

 This choice for the Colossians, is that same choice that we face: Do we delve into the sure thing, or into the mystery. What do you trust more? This same old cheesecake standby that is tasty no doubt, but that leaves you wishing you hadn’t had so much, leaves you with that sick feeling; or the source of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge?

 Paul is adamant…partake of the mystery! Choose Christ! He goes on in verse 6.

**SLIDE 9: Colossians 2:6-10. So live in Christ Jesus the Lord in the same way as you received him. 7 Be rooted and built up in him, be established in faith, and overflow with thanksgiving just as you were taught. 8 See to it that nobody enslaves you with philosophy and foolish deception, which conform to human traditions and the way the world thinks and acts rather than Christ. 9 All the fullness of deity lives in Christ’s body. 10 And you have been filled by him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.**

Paul references human traditions and the way the world thinks. It’s mere cheesecake. It’s only a rehashing of everything you have ever heard before. Human traditions may be well known, but they can only fill us with more philosophy and foolish deception.

**SLIDE 10: Be filled with Christ!**

 Be filled with Christ! He is the head, he is the ruler. And as such no one knows more than him. And this is why the syncretic nature of the buffet line is so dangerous. Because truth mixed with a little lie is no longer truth. Have you ever had a picnic on a beach? You lay out the blanket and set out some paper plates and cutlery and whatnot. And you start to prepare that food. It can be a lovely experience there with the waves and the breeze and the…sand. Now let me ask you, what is the acceptable amount of sand to have in a bag of potato chips? Have you ever had that experience? Any amount of sand mixed in with the chips ruins the whole bag does it not? So it is with the truth. Our perfect portion, Christ, becomes tarnished, twisted and something other than good when we attempt to mix in some human philosophy and tradition. Once that mixing occurs, we are no longer partaking in the fullness of God, we have gone ahead and made something else; a concoction of our own creation.

 But it’s not as though people go around knowingly sprinkling beach sand in their food. No, we add things that sound good, that seem right, that we think go along with or are a part of Christ and his word. Maybe considering another mystery might bring some clarity.

 Something that is mysterious to me is the inside of the hood of a car. I don’t understand what is going on under there. My track record of personal car repair is not successful. I usually cause more damage than there was before and any time I think to tackle some simple repair or maintenance need on our vehicles my next thought is, “Let’s save some money and take it to a shop.” When it comes the inner workings of a car engine, I lack sufficient knowledge. If I want to tinker under the hood, I need to have my owner’s manual with me. I need to have access to information that will explain to me the mystery. But now imagine I wanted to tune up my Toyota Camry, but all I had available was the manual for my Honda Odyssey van.

**SLIDE 11: manual**

How would I fair in that situation? I might be able to get by on some of the major issues. There are certain things that apply to all cars, but if I had a specific question to address, I would not only still be in the dark, but now I would actually be misinformed. I would have to struggle to figure out which information in the manual applied to vehicles universally, and which information was specific to my car.

 To me, this is what makes the buffet so dangerous. All our options about religion and truth and belief systems seem to generally apply. We all agree for example that murder is wrong, just like my manual would affirm that all cars have four wheels. But when we get into more specific questions about why murder is wrong, or about the origins of the universe or about who Jesus really is or about how we might define sin or salvation…we realize very quickly that it is easy to be misinformed. And before too long we start to feel that grit in our teeth, and given enough of that, who can blame us if you just dump our plate and leave the buffet all together.

 Jesus Christ may pose a mystery to us. We may not understand his inner workings, but I think we have all felt the emptiness of our other options. In Christ alone do we find hope. In Christ alone do we find knowledge and wisdom. In Christ alone do we find the fullness of God…a fullness that is meant to fill you and me. A fullness that we can pass on to others.

**SLIDE 12: In Christ alone do we find the fullness of God**

**(Have Sanctify come up.)**

 I want to encourage you to delve into the mystery, to do away with other portions, other manuals, others means of so called knowledge. Let’s take on Christ in his purest form, as he is, the fullness of God. He may be more mysterious that way, maybe a little harder to get onto the plate. But I believe we will find untold treasures of wisdom and knowledge, of hope and peace and joy and all else that we might need. So as we sing together one more song before we dismiss, I want to just encourage you to dig in and let Christ be mysterious. Let him provide for you out of the fullness of who he is.

 Are you anxious? Let him fill you with his peace. Are you fearful? Let him fill you with his boldness. Do you have sin? Let him fill you with his forgiveness. And maybe you’ve never tried Jesus as he truly is…that’s okay…right now is the perfect chance to do just that. As we sing our closing song, just talk to him. Invite him in, tell him you choose him and that you want to be filled with the fullness he offers. Experience his presence here as we worship and reaffirm your decision to choose Jesus and to trust in him alone. Let’s sing together.