Behold a Mystery

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Preacher: Rev. James Macdonald

[0:00] Now we turn to the portion of Scripture that we read there in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and reading at verse 50.

I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, and so on. And at verse 51, behold, I tell you a mystery.
Strange words, especially in the context that we use the word mystery today. But here it wasn't so, because it was a word that was used very often.
Because there was a lot of mystery religions about. And mystery this and mystery that. It shows us that the human being needs that something to focus on.
[1:15] And this is why they did it. They went and performed their own rites and their own initiations and all these things.

And there was a secrecy about it. But there's no secrecy about what Paul is speaking about here. Because he is speaking to the Corinthians here.
A group of people, not a huge church. There's just a small number of people. Who had recently, not that long before that, believed savingly in the Lord Jesus Christ.
And he had a special affiliation with them because of that. As you would have yourself if you were part of a situation where things weren't working the way you thought they should be working.
We have to remember that we are greatly blessed with the knowledge of the scriptures. And all the things that we have in life here. But we look back to these people who had come out of a pagan setup.
[2:29] Pagan setup. And a lot of the pagan things had followed them. And they were falling into that furrow again and again.

And when Paul, he wasn't a person who stayed very long in one place. He went on to plant a church somewhere else. And then move on somewhere else.
A group of people is what he means here. And that is why when this news comes to him about what was going on in the church in Corinth, he felt he had to do something about it.
And that is the way that we have to do. He was addressing this wrong in the church. And because of that, he wrote them this letter.
The first letter to the Corinthians. And he addresses each individual point as we have them in the Bible here. In various ways, whatever it was, he addressed it.
[3:38] Because that is the only way that you can solve any problem. There is no point. Is there a church without a problem?

I don't think there is. But there are things that we can do to address the problem and rectify the situation and let things move on along the way.
Not hiding it under a covering, my friend. Because it's going to come out sometime or another. And Paul was a great man for this.
And he had his share. And more, people would say, more than his share of these things. Of difficulties in the church of Jesus Christ. The problems at Corinth there were such because they were a people.
They had lost their way in a sense. But we can't be too hard on them for that because they were immature. They were a young church. They didn't have the backing of Scripture and the Reformation and all these things that we have as we go forward in our lives.
[4:51] They were full of schisms. Because they fell into the same as the world outside. They called one party was Paul's and one was Apollos, one was Cephas, and so on.

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And they made a mess of things that way. And Paul wrote to rectify this thing. And he puts at the very heart of this, where he spends this large chapter on the resurrection.
This is one of the things that they were baffled with, my friend. The resurrection. How were the dead going to be raised, my friend? And maybe you are yourself, and I am also.
We are not 100% sure of these things. But we have faith in the one who spoke to us regarding this. That the dead in Christ would rise one day.
But they had brought the church into a state of total confusion. They were against each other, tearing each other. But God had, Paul had said in the previous chapter here, chapter 14 and verse 33, God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.
[6:17] See? So the moment you cause a confusion or I cause a confusion, it wouldn't be from God, my friend. Because he is not the author of it.

But he is the author of peace. So what Paul does, he goes back and holds up the cross to them, my friend. The centrality of Christ, my friend.
In the midst of everything. And tried to get them to come round to this way of thinking. Because he did say, when I came to you, brethren, I didn't come in excellency of speech, he said.
I didn't come to prove anything about myself. I determined, actually, not to know anything about myself, save about you. But Jesus Christ and him crucified, my friend.
And he's right at the heart of the situation there. He holds up the cross, grace, the resurrection, eternal life. These are the fundamentals of the Christian faith.
[7:22] That if we don't understand a little bit about these things, my friend, we are a see. The first person who comes to challenge us. Because this is what he wants them, the disbelief of the Corinthians, he wants them challenged.

Because the Sadducees themselves said, there is no resurrection. They didn't believe in a resurrection. Not at all. So they carried on sinning. So that they worked out their own type of formula of sinning.
And receiving more grace as they sinned and went along. Antinomianism, as we call it. But that wasn't the way Paul looked at this at all.
He was addressing those who were sanctified in Christ Jesus. That's what he says in chapter 1 there. In the church, those who were sanctified.
Those he knew himself who had been born again of the Spirit of the Lord. And who had lost their way. And now others were taking advantage of that situation.
[8:31] So he comes in to speak to them regarding these things. The foolishness of preaching, he said, is wiser than man.

At the heart of the preaching was this great mystery. He says, behold, I tell you a mystery. The mystery proclaimed.
The Bible contains a lot of mystery. A lot of things that are blanked out. For the natural man cannot understand the things of God.
The carnal mind is enmity with God. It isn't at enmity. It is enmity. And therefore, because it's not at enmity, there is no chance of reconciliation.
But because it is enmity like that, it cannot. It needs something to turn it back into this way.
[9:35] And that is why Paul knew that this had happened to some of them. And he was very disappointed with it all. And he goes to the mystery of the incarnation.

And the mystery of the salvation. And the mystery of the blessed hope that they are carrying in their hearts. And, of course, the mystery of the resurrection from the dead, my friend.
The resurrection, he says, is real. Because Christ is alive. Christ is alive here tonight, my friend. Christ lives within his own people through the spirit that he has given them to do that. So that we are not to despair in anything like this.
And every born-again Christian, my friend, believer, can take this to heart.
[10:41] Jesus said, because I live, you will live also. There is no doubt. There is no question mark about it. There is no challenge regarding this.

You will live also, he says. Why is that? Well, he said, we need another doctrine. The doctrine of election, my friend.
You have not chosen me, he said. You have not chosen me. Well, we didn't expect the Corinthians to know about all of these things. But this is him going over the situation.

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We are not, he said, the author of our salvation. We, none of us here tonight or in Corinth or anywhere else, has ever, ever come to the point and said, well, I have saved myself.
Because that is a sheer impossibility. It is not my friend. Because the carnal thing was first. And not the spirit.
[11:48] And Jesus is alive. And Christ wasn't alive in them when they were in that situation before they were redeemed.

And that's the difference. That's the two camps. Having Christ. Having the hope. Having all the blessings.
On the other side, not having the hope. Not having the blessings. Not having this. If we have a hope, it will be a false hope.
And we dare not stand in any pulpit and give people a false hope. Because no one is going to thank us when they come to the end of life, my friend.
And they find themselves on the outside if we haven't told them the truth. You will know, he said, the truth. And the truth will set you free.
[12:50] And we cannot live eternally, my friend, without having received this eternal life here in this world.

And he is stressing this in such a way that they get this into their hearts to remember, my friend. Where they have come from, where they are now, my friend.
But where they are going if they follow on, backsliding into the heathendom around them. You see, you hear people saying, well, there's nothing wrong with this.
There's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with anything when it comes to that. But there's a lot wrong here. Because he doesn't want us to fall into this hollow.
That's why he says, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you. But my father. It's a mystery.
[13:54] I know it is. But it becomes believable when the spirit of the Lord enters into our life. When we are spiritually quickened.

And we realize that it is true. Nobody here has a problem so deep regarding the resurrection.
If we have Christ as our Lord and Savior. If we have had that encounter with Christ. Then we know that he is alive.
How much we know of that, that's a different matter. But that's not for us or for anyone else to challenge. But the thing is that there has been an encounter.
Paul encountered many people on the highways of this world here. When he was a student at Gamaliel's University there. Where he passed through with first class honors regarding the law that they had.
[14:55] And he said, no one can challenge me. He says, I know all the answers. He said. And that is what happens. So often we think that we are ever increasing in knowledge.

But never coming to an understanding of the truth. My friend. Never coming to an understanding of the truth. And this is a truth that we dare not miss.
My friend. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. It's central, my friend. To our faith.
It's central to everything that we do here in this world. It is an inner change, my friend. That is worked out outwardly.
It is seen by the world, my friend. The world. The world. The heathens round about there could see that there had been a change in this person's life.
[15:59] This person who was so anti-God and anti-Christian that he would go into the homes and sweep them out of the homes and kill them. That's the extent of wickedness of the heart and having a zeal that is without knowledge, my friend.

We can have a zeal but not have a knowledge to go with that. But in all that, we have to remember that only Jesus changes lives.
And he knew that he had changed their lives there. He knew that also in Galatians when he wrote to them regarding that thing also.
Why they had... He was astonished that they had walked backwards and they weren't following as they had begun. But you see, there are a lot of factors in there that we haven't got time to think about.
But this evening, when we come to being edified and having the milk of the word and then the strong meat, he says to them, there's no point in me coming with strong meat to you, he said.

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[17:13] He said, because, he says, you can barely take the milk. And that is one of the signs. If we stay as underdeveloped Christians, we don't feed upon the nourishment of the word that is life to us.

As we nourish our bodies day by day, we need our food every morning, every dinner time, every tea time, or however we eat it. We need it for our bodily, for our health, and for our calories, and all these things.
But here we are coming to one who says that they haven't done that. And that is why they are sliding back into heathendom, into the idols around about them.
And some of them are even joining into the idol feasts that they had. And some of them were partaking of the meat that was being offered to idols and the likes of that.
And on that, and everything, every factor you could think of, he had touched on here because they didn't understand this. But then he says to them, remember, though we are converted, and those who are converted here, we might have concerns about our life.
[18:33] But for all that, we remember that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. That the excellency of the glory might be of God, not of man.

Not of us. Not of us, says the psalmist. The excellency of the glory. That's one of Satan's ways of deceiving people.
It's exalting people up to the heavens instead of Paul and Apollos and Cephas. And Paul says to them, was Paul crucified for you?
Was Cephas? Was the eloquent Aquila, was he? No. No. Who was crucified for you?
He says, Jesus Christ was crucified for me. And then he goes on to say, well, now we get nearer the problem of how are the dead going to be raised, my friend.
[19:47] In verse 35, we didn't read that, but we could, someone will ask, how are the dead raised? If you have this hope within you, how are the dead going to be raised, he said.

Well, he said in verse 36, it's not, he said, all about that, it's not quickened unless it dies first.
There's another mystery, my friend, at the heart of it.
Unless what you plant in the soil, be it a bulb or be it potatoes or vegetables of any kind, that seed of your potatoes has to die first.
That's the last you see of it, my friend. Until the harvest time comes, and until it produces all its fruit.
And he says, well, that's in a sense what's going to happen with the Christian also. He is going to die, and remember that Paul never uses the word die when it comes to the death of a Christian.
[20:59] We do it, but we shouldn't. It is, he calls it their sleep. They are going to sleep in Christ, he said. And there's a big difference between that, because he doesn't say that about the world.

Because that is why he makes it so clear that there are two resurrections to come. One resurrection of him unto eternal life, and one unto eternal death.
And yet, we have this treasure. We have this, this is a mystery, what we have. What changed your life here in this world, and you can never explain it totally.
Supposing you try to explain it, you fall short of it somewhere or another. Because the person beside you might be different.
But for all that, it comes together as life from the dead. And that's how we were. Dead in trespasses and in sin. Not a breath of life, my friend, regarding spirituality.
[22:15] We didn't want God. We didn't want Christ, my friend. If we are honest, that's how we were. We were without God and without hope in this world.

And that's how we would have left this world if it wasn't for that intervention of Christ, that the world mocks at this. They mock at God, mock at anything except themselves.
But they are to be pitied. They are the ones to be pitied, my friend, because they are short of this.
Their life is short of purpose. Because that is what brings purpose into a person's life, my friend.
Is that he is born anew. Born from above, my friend. Not of flesh and blood, my friend. Not at all.
This parish chapel has to return to the dust.
Yours, mine, every single one of us, everyone who ever died. This church here or any church anywhere, they have all gone, my friend.
[23:22] And the rate at which they go out, my friend, is frightening, isn't it? When you think back of it, how few people, I say to myself, how few people I know today that were around when I started as a Christian about 50 years ago.

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How few are left, my friend. Not many. Because they have gone the way of the earth, my friend. They have gone out of your life.
Your father, she says, where are they? The prophets, do they live forever? Not at all, my friend. But one day, that's imperishable.
It'll be free from impurity and of death and of disease. Fashioned into the glorious body of the Son of God, is why he writes to the Philippians.
That is how they're going to be. A body is going to adapt to this immortal principles of our nature.
[24:32] The Philippians. The Philippians. Verse 49. Verse 49. It's that. Sown in weakness. Raised in power. How is it raised in power?

Well, it's raised through the one power that ever invaded this world and changed the lives of individuals and brought Christ himself back from the dead.
The same power. The same power. And nothing is impossible with our Lord. Nothing is impossible. When the trumpet of God sounds, the word of God and this world hears that voice again. Because the Christian can always say, never did a man speak like this man.
You have never heard anything as glorious as your salvation coming to you when it all came together. And you woke up.
[25:35] You woke up. That's what we call an awakening, isn't it? An awakening. People pray for awakenings. And rightly so. It's to awaken people out of their spiritual death into spiritual life, my friend, in Jesus Christ.

So that when they react to that voice that they have heard, and they have to react to it because it's effectual. It's an effectual calling from God.
And it has to respond to it. I have to respond to it. You have to respond to it. Whether you were an enemy of God or whatever, like Paul was here. And it came to that situation.
And you could say, never spoke a man like this man. And you recognized it was Christ, my friend. That's another mystery. You recognized you had no problem in knowing that it was Christ.
Because it incorporates all. All those who have come to know him. When God returns again, there will be an awareness of who God is.
[26:52] An awareness. Every eye will see. And every tongue will confess. To the glory of God. But to no benefit. To those who have cast him aside and left him out of their lives.

It's a voice of terror, my friend. This will be. A voice of terror. We don't take it in. We don't spend enough time thinking about these things.
Because we are in a mundane world that we think that we can carry on forever in this. But there's no forever in our language, my friend. When it comes to our lives. It is now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation. Because tomorrow is not promised. Oh, we're so good and eloquent at speaking about things like that.
But are we taking it in, my friend? Do we know that our life is but a vapor that appears for a short while? And then it vanishes, my friend.
[27:58] The place that knew it will know it no more. No more. And this is all the scripture being fulfilled.

Isaiah in chapter 25 said the same thing. That death would be swallowed up, he said. Swallowed up, totally. Because of Christ's victory.
It was complete and final. Final. No room for arguing. No room for putting my case across as being different from the other person.
As a tree falls, there it must remain. As a tree falls. Are you seriously awaiting the return of Jesus Christ, my friend?
Because he is coming. And he, Jesus himself said, be you also ready, he said. You ready? For you know not the hour.
[29:02] No, not the hour. No, not the hour. My friend. It will happen that quickly. Like the twinkling of an eye. And the body, this corrupt body, will be changed.

My friend. The believers who have died, their souls have been gone from their body before they are buried. Long before they are buried.
It's gone. But their spiritual body will be made in such a way that it fits them. My friend. It fits them. When Christ returns again.
My friend. So is there not something here then also to be thankful about? Is there not something here that should concern us if we do not know this?

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If we do not know this, that is the saddest picture of all. We can have all the letters in the world after our names, or before our names.
[30:08] It does not matter. It will not follow us when that doubt comes. But in verse 57 he says, thanks be to God, he said.

Thanks be to God, Paul says here. That Jesus has done what no human in this world has ever done. Do you know what that is? You're not likely to do it.
I'm not likely to do it. And that is finish. Leave a world with everything you intended to do having been done. Finished it. Only one came and finished this.
Totally off. At work. He conquered the death. He redeemed his people through his own precious blood. And he disarmed death.
Disarmed death. Or it's still rampant in the life. And it will be until Christ returns again. But if sin is pardoned. If sin is pardoned.
[31:13] Then death is harmless. Yes, we all fear death. If we are real, my friend. If we are real. We don't want to die.

That's the truth of matter. We don't want. No one wants to die. But we know at the back of our mind for all that, it will happen. It will happen. Whether we are young or old or however.
It will happen. But if it has been pardoned. If sin has been pardoned. Then death is harmless. Because the sting has been removed from it.
The sting of death. Sin gives death its sting. And sin must be addressed. And only one can address it.
And that is Jesus Christ, our own Lord and Savior. Because sin refuses to conform to God's law.
[32:19] Totally. Paul says, I wouldn't have known sin without the law. I wouldn't have known what the Bible said. You shall not covet. Except that the Bible said, you shall not covet.

What covet was, it meant nothing to him. But the moment he became alive to this. And saw for himself what this real problem was. It's not what we sin from day to day.
That's not the greatest problem. That is in our nature. We do that. It is our relationship with our God. That is out of joint. And that is the great mystery.
That only he can reinstate us. Rejoin these joints together. And make us to see. To have a hope. That is endless. Death is but a transition for them. From a lower state. To a higher state. And Jesus is the one who dealt with sin.
[33:27] That's why he's precious to you tonight. Isn't it? But that's why he's precious to me. Because he did what I couldn't do.

He fulfilled the law of God. He fulfilled a holy law. My friend. And that is what people spend their life trying to.
Fulfill and be perfect in this, perfect in that. But that has nothing to do with it. It's fine in its own place. But this means that this is the essence of the matter.
My friend. My friend. Is. That this has to be done. That this holy law. It cannot be fulfilled by you. Or me. Or anyone else. But Christ fulfilled it for us. He fulfilled it. He sets the prisoners free. My friend.
[34:30] Destroyed him. He destroyed him. Who has the power of death. The devil. My friend. The devil. Oh he's still lurking around.

Of course he is. Looking for opportunities. Of course. The moment we take our eye. Off the Bible. My friend. He's in with something else. To show us. How glorious it is. Over there. Or somewhere else.
But it doesn't show us. The sting. That is in it. My friend. The end of it all. It was a full time. Full time job. A full time occupation.
To keep. On this road. Because. Of what he did himself. We thank God. My friend. For his victory. For this victory.
That we. Made us. To be. More. Than conquerors. Through Christ. Who died for us. More than conquerors. For Christ.
[35:30] And I want. And I'll finish with this. And the encouragement. That he gives after that. In the last verse. Therefore my beloved brothers. He tells them. To be steadfast.

To go back. And be steadfast. In the work. That he has given them. To press forward. Towards the mark. And the high calling of God.

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In Christ Jesus. Our Lord. Be steadfast. Be fixed in the gospel. My friend. In the gospel. Preaching. Be reading your Bible. My friend.
Be reading your Bible. It's not a supplementary book. It is the very essence of your life. And it's out of your heart. That comes the issues.
Of life. Because. You don't try and build another foundation. Because you can't do it. You cannot save yourself. You have to be saved.
[36:27] By this one. And only. Savior. Be unmovable. He said. These are the words that he uses.

Peter uses it. When he speaks to them. He said. We have an anchor. He said. That is steadfast. And sure. It is fastened. Not in anything.
In time here. If it was. You couldn't depend on it. It is fastened. Within the veil. My friend. Where Christ himself is.
That is why he holds you. In the storms of life. That is why he holds you. When you stray away from him. That there is enough slack.
To bring you back. In again. My friend. Into the fold again. And we are all. All broken people. My friend. None of us. Can say to anyone.
[37:25] That we are better. Because we know. You cannot serve. Two masters. As simple as that. Abounding in the word of the Lord. He said.

To be a builder. My friend. My friend. Not a destroyer. Not a critic. My friend. It is easy to be a critic. It is easy to be a destroyer.
But it is far more difficult. My friend. To be a builder. And build on the rock of ages. Because we are. In the doctrine of. Of preservation. We are here. Being made perfect. You know.
You are not perfect yet. You know. You are not what you want to be. But you know. That you are not what you were. But you long to be something. All the time.
[38:21] To an improvement. And that is what you get. In your word. And your relationship. With your maker. There. And there is far. Far too little of that. In our day and age.

No fellowship. My friend. Very little fellowship. Everyone. In his own. Little corner. Ivory tower. They are building. And on their own.
Foundations there. But that. Will not do. But he says. That he gave you peace.
And if he gave you peace. He won't take that peace. Away from you. He will correct you. And correct me. He will chastise us.
Again and again. But he will not. Cast us off. Because. Of who. He is. And his own nature. My friend. And they could say.
[39:20] And he can say to them. You can do all things. Through Christ. Who strengthens you. He said. Christ. Who strengthens you. If you suffer with him.

Then you will reign with him. Therefore. He said. Oh don't be deceived. My friend. Don't be deceived. By the glamour.
The veneer. Of this world. That looks so attractive. So much beauty in it. Look at the social media. Every day. People appear. With a new photo of themselves. Showing us. How beautiful they are. What about. The next day. There will be something else. You see. But that's just.
A deceiving. Thing. That keeps people. Chasing the wind. Chasing their own tail. Because. They do not know. The saviour.
[40:17] And bad. He said. Watch your company. He said. Watch the company. Keep. The world is very. Very. Very shrewd.

At trying to get your Christians. Into their old mould. But don't let anyone. Put you. Into. Their mould. Because.
You are in Christ. My friend. You are in Christ. Bad company. He said. That is. A destruction. That gives you.
That does all against you. My friend. Bad communications. Throw a good. Good manners. Many. A good person. Has lost his way. By mixing. With the wrong type. Of people. And by the. Before he knows. Where he is.
[41:12] He is up to his neck. In it. You watch. Your company. My friend. And then others. Can see your character. Because he says.

Some. Have not. This. Knowledge. And it is important. If they haven't. Got the knowledge. They will be reading.

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Your bible. They will be reading. You. And me. And everybody else. Except themselves. My friend. And then you will realize.
That. Your labour. Is not. In vain. In the Lord. Vanity. Is said. Of vanities. Everything else. But your vanity. Your labour.
Will not be in vain. In the Lord. In this great mystery. My friend. That has touched. This earth. This earth. This earth. And has gone back.
[42:12] To await the time. When he returns again. To take his own home. To glory. With him. This is our God. He said.

We waited for him. Hallelujah. He said. In the midst of that. Our Lord. Our God. And our God. Don't sell him.
In the marketplace. Don't cheat on him. Because you will be the loser. And I will be the loser. In all that. Amen.
Bless. Our soul. Apply it. Lord. To our hearts. Take our feeble efforts. Lord. And apply it practically. To our sore points. In our hearts. And in our minds. Or wherever we are. In trouble tonight. Let us focus upon him.
[43:11] Who died. That we might live. And having lived. He is risen. In the power of an endless life. And he is coming.

Again. One day. Who knows. What you know. Lord. For Jesus sake. Prepare us. Amen. Now we conclude by singing in Psalm 34.
At verse 17. To the end of the psalter. Psalm 34. The righteous cry unto the Lord.
He unto them gives ear. And they out of their trouble all. By him delivered are. Ill shall be wicked slayed. Lied waste.
Shall be who hate the just. The Lord. Redeems his servant soul. None perish. That in him thrusts. Those verses to God's praise.
[44:18] The righteous cry unto the Lord.

He unto them gives ear. And they out of their trouble.
The righteous cry unto them. The righteous cry unto them. By him delivered are. The Lord is ever nigh to them.
The righteous cry unto them. That be a broken spirit. To them he saved.
He doth afford. That are in heart contrite. The righteous cry.
[45:21] That of us are not. The righteous cry. The righteous cry. In number many be.

The good deeds. And they are done. And I thank the doubt of them all, the Lord hath set them free. He there fully is most of the King, whatever can be found, but not so much as one of them can broken me at all.
Till shall the wicked slay the place, shall we who hate the just, the Lord redeems his servant soul, and perish the just.
And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest upon you, and abide with you now and evermore. Amen.
[47:02] Amen.

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