

## **“The mystery is revealed” Romans 16:25-27**

**Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.**

What a reading we have for our today's meditations! The last few verses from Paul's letter to Romans. The whole letter is like a super-heavy weight among the letters, and these last few verses...

They are like fireworks. In just one sentence Paul has put in so much, it is so rich, that if we could open these words fully they would lighten the skies, indeed, like beautiful fireworks.

Today we will focus mainly on one word and how the rest of what Paul wrote helps to understand this one word. And it is not such a mystery on which word we are going to focus? Can you guess what it is?

That's right, it is the word mystery. Who doesn't like mysteries? Possibly it is the most popular genre for novels. Mystery novels. Or movies. Paul here uses the same word, – mystery. Except when it is used in the Bible, it has a slightly different meaning.

What commonly is called a mystery is better understood with the word secret. Meaning, there is something that you don't know. For example, what do I have in my hand? It is a secret. But once I have showed it to you, the secret is gone.

Mystery is different. It is something that we cannot fully understand even when it is revealed. A good analogy from our human experience would be love. What is love? Can we explain it? Surely, we can say a lot about it.

But there will never be a point where we can say that “okay, now I have said everything, it's clear.” The same way the word mystery is used in the Bible. So, what is the mystery that Paul is talking about in these last verses?

He is talking about the Gospel, or the other way to say is – the preaching of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit calls the revelation of Jesus Christ, or we could say the whole event of Jesus Christ, – a mystery.

“The mystery that was kept secret for long age, but has now been disclosed”. We know so much about Jesus. And we can tell a lot about Him and His life. And we can explain and share everything that we have received.

But can we fully understand it? Remember, in the very beginning, Genesis 3, when our first parents disobeyed their Creator, when they *disobeyed*, God Himself, and we can understand that it was the Eternal Son, He came and proclaimed the Good News, the mystery of God.

That He himself will reverse the evil that has taken place, the He will restore the goodness of God's creation, that it will cost His own life, but He will do it. That was His promise. That was the first time this mystery was announced.

As we can read it recorded in the Bible, the same promise was later proclaimed again, and again. It was foretold that from Abraham's seed will come the One in whom all families of the earth will be blessed.

It was promised that He will be from the tribe of Judah. That He will be a prophet like Moses. That He will be the king David's son, that will be the Suffering Servant, who will carry our sins.

You see, this mystery was foretold and made known since the very beginning of times. But who could picture, who could imagine that God's plan of salvation for His whole creation will look like this!

A little baby, born in a lowly family, somewhere in the middle of nowhere. Make sense, right? How is the Creator going to save His whole creation from sin and death and the power of devil? By being born as a baby, as one of us...

Makes perfect sense, right? The Eternal Word became flesh and dwelled among us. Jesus incarnation, that is, becoming one of us, His birth, life, His death and resurrection is the greatest mystery of all times.

As we already spoke about it, we know quite a bit about the whole Christ event, and we can share it with others, and we can understand a lot about it, but how can you possibly fully understand and explain that God, the Creator of the Universe, was born as a man, lived among us, died, and then rouse again, still in human body?

What a fitting word to describe it, – a mystery. The more we immerse ourselves in the Word of God, the more we can understand about this event. The closer we come to Jesus, the more beautifully God's work is revealed to us.

But the more you know, the closer you get, the better you can see how unsearchable this mystery is for us. Even when we look at it from purely human perspective. God knows us. He knows our hearts. He knows what we carry within. He is the only One who fully knows us.

So, He has the most realistic picture of what we are. And knowing all of that, seeing all the evil that we are capable of, witnessing how much evil human beings do to one another, seeing how foolish, how selfish, how ruthless we can be, after all of this, the holy, pure, eternal God chooses to come and to sacrifice His life for us.

He chooses to come so close to us, that it blows away our minds. He becomes one of us. What a depth of love! How unsearchable affection and faithfulness that is capable of such sacrifice! He did it. He did it for us. He did it for each one of you. Just think about it. How can it be? Are we truly that precious for our

God? Are we truly so loved by someone? And God's answer is, – yes, you are. You are infinitely precious to Him and you are loved much more than you can ever hope for. He did all of that, this whole mystery for you. For you!

Now, how can we know about all this? How can we know for sure that all of this is true? Because, honestly, it sounds far too good to be true. The answer is, - because this mystery has been made known to all nations through the prophetic writings. The Bible. The Word of God.

This is how we know. God is God who speaks. And He doesn't hide His message from us. The most important things He announces long before He fulfills them. Thus, He had revealed His plan to restore the goodness of His creation already to our first parents.

Since ancient times His messengers have come and repeated this message. Bit by bit He revealed what He is going to do, where it will take place, and what the outcome will be. The greatest mystery in the history of humanity has been revealed. It is available to everyone.

More, it is meant for everyone. For our God and Father desires that everyone would know the truth and would embrace it, and would return to where we truly belong, in loving fellowship with our God and Creator.

This is, why we read and study the Word, in the Divine Service and in our Bible studies, in our congregation, and at homes. This is, why Jesus commands us to teach people everything what He has commanded us. For that is how this most wonderful mystery is revealed to the nations.

But what is the purpose of all of this? Why did God do all of this? Why does He want all people to know this? The answer given by the Holy Spirit through Paul the apostle is this, – to bring about the obedience of faith.

Yes, to bring about the obedience of faith. Not what we expected? Not exactly the word that we like to hear? Obedience. Obedience of faith. But this is exactly the purpose of what God did in Jesus.

Remember, we are created to live in loving, trusting and obedient fellowship with our God. Our first parents... what did they do? They – disobeyed. Yes, they disobeyed. They choose to obey someone else more than God.

They were hoping that instead of being obedient to God they could be like gods themselves. That they would be free to decide what to do and how to do, instead of listening to God. They thought that their disobedience will lead them to freedom. O, how wrong they were!

But we have deep in our hearts the same rebellion. The same resistance and hatred towards God. Don't believe me? The evidence is right here. We don't want to hear about obedience to God. It sounds oppressive. It sounds like making us to do something we don't want. It is not for me. I want to do things

my way and no one is going to tell me what to do. This explains why there are so few Christians.

Obedience of faith. What is it? It is the state and relationships for which we were created. That is what true freedom is like. That is what true joy and meaning, true peace and trust looks like. Obedience of faith.

It is the situation, where the Holy Spirit through the Word of God has conformed us to the Image of Jesus. It is when we desire with our whole being the same things that our God desires for us. When our will is in harmony with our Father's will who is in heaven.

It is when He can finally live fully human lives, lives for which we were created. It is when our God and Father and our Lord and Brother Jesus Christ can bless us fully, for we don't resist Him anymore, but live in wonderful and loving harmony. This is what the obedience of faith means.

We need to confess and repent that we have to great extent ignored this part of God's message. We have tried to please people, and telling about obedience cannot possibly be a part of that. It puts people off. And we haven't expected Christians to live in obedience of faith.

Our message has often been: "Do whatever you want, you are forgiven". Jesus didn't say: "I forgive you, go and sin more." He said: "I forgive you, go and sin *no* more". I just recently had a conversation with my good friend, not a Lutheran, and what he said was painfully true.

"You Lutheran's are good with preaching grace and forgiveness. But then you don't expect anyone to live as a Christian, to read the Bible, or to tell others about Jesus. So many use forgiveness as an excuse to do whatever they want, instead of living in obedience."

It hurts to hear. But it is true. And the problem is not our teaching, it is our neglect of our teaching that has led to such situation. Paul's words are a timely reminder for us about the purpose of the Gospel. To lead renewed lives, to live in obedience of faith. Which is, by the way, the most joyful of all lives.

For we live it dwelling in the Word, filled with the Holy Spirit, accompanied by Jesus, guided by the Father's wisdom, being a blessing for our loved ones and many others, and knowing that such life is pleasing to our God.

I pray today, may the joy of knowing what God has done and does for us transform our hearts and help us all to live in obedience of faith, trusting our Father with all our hearts and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

The peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.