
¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. ^{5:7} In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. ⁸ Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered; ⁹ and having been made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9 (NRSV)

Do you enjoy good ‘mystery novels’, such as Dennis Lehane of “Shutter Island”, or Gillian Flynn of “Gone Girl”, or the works of Agatha Christie, or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes, ‘The Hound of the Baskervilles’), or the works of John le Carré, or even Stephen King? Or do you prefer good ‘mystery movies’ such as those made by Alfred Hitchcock, or Christopher Nolan, or Brian De Palma?

A good ‘mystery’ novel or movie is one that captivates you by good ‘story writing’, as you try to work out ‘Whodunit’, as well as enjoying plot twists along the way.

The word ‘mystery’ is important in the New Testament (μυστήριον), but it often has a different meaning to what we often understand in ‘mystery novels or movies’. A Bible ‘mystery’ is not some ‘secret puzzle’ to be solved – rather, it is something that is openly known, and yet has great depths that will occupy minds and hearts.

Now, as an analogy, take as an example a woman who has become pregnant. She is to become a mother. Indeed, from the moment of conception this is her reality (whether she believes it or not). And for the expectant father and mother, there is the joyful ‘mystery’ of waiting for the child’s birth. And along the way, within the mother’s womb, the new life began at conception become a baby who will one day be born. And for most parents, when the child is born, they are overcome with the wonder and miracle of this new person. A person is not ‘unknown’. But there is a life-time of ‘discovery’ and ‘experiences’ to be shared together.

Take also, as an analogy, a groom waiting for his bride on their wedding day. He hasn’t seen her in her dress. And when she enters the church building, there can be a swirl of emotions. He goes ‘Wow’. But then, even after the

emotion of that one day, a relationship can grow and blossom. And even after decades of marriage, there is still great joy in being together. This is the 'mystery' of love – never really being tired of one another, but yearning for the other's presence.

In what ways have you experienced this sense of 'mystery' in your life? Or are there other 'experiences' that occupy your heart and mind that also appear as a 'mystery' to you?

On this day known as 'Good Friday' (and isn't that a 'mystery' – that a day of darkness and death is also known as 'good') – on this day we are remembering an incredible mystery – something that is known, but the more we think and meditate upon it, the deeper that mystery may be. This 'mystery' is spoken of in many hymns such as Charles Wesley's "And can it be, that I should gain?" The second verse of this hymn says, "'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies: who can explore His strange design?" "Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies". And when meditating on this 'mystery', we should also go "Wow!"

As we have been 'journeying to the cross' in this season of Lent, and remembering various events in the life of Jesus, the great mystery is that here God Himself – the Creator of all the heavens and the earth – is one who has taken upon Himself our 'flesh', and suffered death itself.

The writer to the Hebrews says this: "Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.... In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save Him from death..."

The writer to the Hebrews expresses the greatness and deity of Jesus (cf. Hebrews 1:3). But this God is 'of the flesh' (Hebrews 5:7).

To some people today, Jesus seems to be a person of story and 'myth' and 'legend'. He's the great 'hero' for some people. But Jesus is not seen as being 'real'. It is said that it may be OK for some to 'believe in Him', but such 'belief' is relegated to the sphere of private experience. Therefore, Jesus is seen as having no real 'value' in any understanding what is really 'valuable' and 'true'.

In this context, various strands of Christianity have in same ways also conformed to this underlying philosophy – not always realising this. It is said that Jesus becomes real *when you believe in Him*. But if it is only in your *experience* of Jesus that Jesus 'becomes real', then whether Jesus is 'real' or not is really quite irrelevant. The end result of all this is that we will end up with a privatised form of Christianity that has nothing to say that is of 'value' to the world.

The writer to the Hebrews says this: that God has been at work in our world in the person of Jesus. The writer to Hebrew people says this 'that in the days of His flesh Jesus offered up prayers and supplications'.

The words 'In His flesh' reminds us that Jesus is a flesh-and-blood historical person. And He is a flesh-and-blood person who has done wonderful things for us, and indeed that is open to all humankind.

In Hebrews 5:7 we hear that "Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save Him from death." Now whilst it is not directly mentioned, many see this as an allusion to Jesus' prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here, God is praying for us. Here we see that "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered". This 'learning obedience' does not mean that Jesus had been disobedient. Rather, this is a description that reminds us that God Himself has suffered pain and death itself in the person of Jesus Christ. This, indeed, is a profound mystery. It is true that this needs to be 'grasped' (kept hold of) by faith ("Let us hold fast to our confession": Hebrews 4:14).

Our 'confession' is this: "Although He [Jesus] was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered." (5:8). In other words, Jesus is God at work in this world, and He is one with humanity in all its suffering, sickness, sin and death. Jesus is our great high priest, has made an offering on our behalf. Because He had died for us, our sins are taken from us. All our misdeeds, all the times we hurt someone who loved and trusted us, all the times our lives have been shoddy, all the times we have been less than God created us to be... all those sins have been buried in the bottom of the deepest sea because Christ died for us. Today is a day to see God at work in the cross of Jesus. That is paradoxically makes this day 'good'.

A story is told of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a German Lutheran Pastor who was executed by the Nazis just before the end of the Second World War) that on his 'Home Altar' in his prison cell, there was a single word, the Greek word "*hapax*" which means 'once'. This word was used to assert the absolute significance of Jesus. In the midst of a concentration camp this altar word staked a claim. It said that all of reality was changed in the moment of Christ's death. The absolute occurred in time and space. All the rest of human history is made relative to that event. This world is God's, and the cross has now brought a new 'reality' to all of life.

'Good Friday' commemorates perhaps the greatest mystery in the history of the world, that God Himself—the Creator of the Universe—suffers death to give us life! Is there any greater confirmation that God hears us than that He sent us our Saviour, Jesus Christ – to die in our place, to put an end to our suffering and death? Our tears of sorrow are wiped away by Him. For His sake God hears us. As we pray, there is no more waiting or wondering. God has blessed us through His Son. Despite His exalted status as Son, Jesus is able to sympathise with our frailty because of what He experienced in "the days of his flesh" (5:7).

There is a story told of a man who refused to attend a Christmas Eve service with his family because he did not believe in the incarnation. He remained at home, where it began to snow. Minutes later, he heard what he thought was someone throwing snowballs against his window. Going outside to investigate, he found a flock of birds trying to fly through his window as they sought refuge from the storm. He thought they might find shelter in his barn, and he made his way there. He opened the doors and turned on the light, but the birds stayed outside. He created a trail of bread crumbs for them to follow into the barn, but that did not work. He tried to shoo them into the barn, but that effort also proved unsuccessful. "If only I could be a bird myself for a few minutes, perhaps I could lead them to safety." At that moment, the church bells began to ring, and the man sank to his knees in the snow. "Now I do understand," he whispered. "Now I see why You had to do it."

People are constantly searching for peace and happiness in their life. Whether they know it or not, they are searching for fulfilment and the meaning of life. They are searching to fill an emptiness in their life, even if they are not able to recognise that.

God's plan for you is to be saved from this lost world and become a new creation, a brand new person, someone who has been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. Someone who is forgiven and cleansed. He will give you a new name, a new future, a new hope, a new calling. We have been given the greatest of all gifts: eternal salvation. This gift is provided to us through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Our source of eternal salvation is in Jesus alone.

God in Christ Jesus is so full of love and compassion for you. He knows all about you. He knows your deepest sins and struggles... and He longs to embrace you in His arms of love forever, as His precious child. Amen.

Dear Jesus, thank You for Your suffering for our sakes. In Your obedient, willing sacrifice, You are proven to be the source of eternal salvation. Thank You. Amen.

And may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.