

W347_Colossians_7.mp3

[00:00:02] This is a recording made in the chapel of the opened book. And we are dealing with the epistle to the Colossians and this is number seven of the series. We have been looking at the first chapter and have reached the verse 23 with which a new section commences. We have in front of us both those of you who are sitting in this chapel and those of you who are using this tape recording you will have in front of you the structural outline. Shall we just give that a moment or two before we take up any one part? First of all, you will see that there is a balance in this epistle between the doctrine that is enunciated in chapter one and the practice which, as it were, grows out of it in chapter four. That is a character of Paul's epistles and it should be a character of all our teaching and the way in which this word acts within us. The emphasis. Of course, I've missed out on many features. It's not to be taken as a complete literary structure about just a few salient points. The emphasis in chapter one, verse 25, our version says to fulfill the Word of God. Well, that is a bit misleading. Because the word to fulfill would suggest to the mind that Isaiah or the Psalms or something had made a prophecy. And now in this epistle that is being fulfilled. Well, that isn't what he said. That isn't what he said at all.

[00:01:42] This word means to complete, not to fulfill, but to fill up. And it's a question that I think we ought to put to ourselves and put to our friends. Have you a complete Bible? Well, then I say, yes, I have. And they pick up their Bible and they flick it through. Here it is. Genesis. It is revelation. Complete Bible. No pages out? No. Well, shut the book then, and just give me in your own words, what the apostle said in Ephesians one, 1 to 14. Just your own words. As any amount of godly people who could tell you right off what it says in the Sermon on the Mount or what it says in John 14, who were absolutely stumped with regard to what it says in Ephesians, Philippians or Colossians. I say those people have an incomplete Bible. But if you have the law and the prophets and the Psalms, the Gospels, the acts, the earlier epistles and the book of the Revelation, and you do not know the crowning testimony of the mystery epistles. You've got a truncated pyramid. You have a pyramid which doesn't finish. And you haven't put the top stone on. The top stone is a complete little pyramid all to itself. You put it on and the whole thing is complete. All headed up in Christ. So that's what he meant. Will come to its context presently. And then if you will look down into the the corresponding chapter four, verse three, he is still concerned about this word.

[00:03:22] He is a man in prison and he's praying for a door to be opened, but he's not praying for a door to be opened that he may go free. He seems as though he's forgotten that. He says, I'm praying for a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ for which I am also in bodies. So again, you see, his great concern was let the word of God run. Will you turn to two, Timothy, and see the same spirit? It wasn't crushed. After two years imprisonment and even being apprehended and taken back again. He says in chapter two, verse eight, Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel. You say, What do you mean by that, Paul? Well, he was raising the dead according to Peter's gospel. It's the same raising the same Christ. But Peter's gospel says he was raised from the dead to sit upon the throne of his father, David. Paul says he was raising the dead to sit on the right hand of God, far above all. He says, don't forget, it's the same Jesus. It's the same resurrection. But the consequences may change according to the ministry. So you should remember that wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds. But the word of God is not bound. You can almost feel that irrepressible spirit.

[00:04:43] God, you're coming out. Of course, if you read it like this, wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds. But the word of God is not down. It doesn't mean anything, does it? But if he says I'm in bonds, but oh, aren't I glad the Word of God isn't in bound, so I don't mind, is he? That's his point. So here it is, the emphasis upon the word. Now, he says in verse 26, Even the mystery, the mystery manifested. Even the mystery which had been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints. And when you get to the chapter four, that's what he's after again. Verse four, that I may make it manifest. As I ought to speak. It has been manifested by God, and if I'm a faithful servant, I'll make it manifest too. Otherwise, you see, I'll be clouding the truth. I'm putting up a veil instead of taking it away. So both times manifested is the word. And then we come back to chapter one, verse 24. Afflictions for the body's sake. We'll have to look at these in passing presently. But who now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body's sake, which is the church. This man very much concerned that everything should be filled up. He's concerned that the Word of God should be filled up.

[00:06:12] He's even concerned that the quota of afflictions that he must endure should be filled up. He says that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God in chapter three

of if Egypt's there was no half hearted ministry here. So we have the afflictions for the body's sake. And then he says in chapter four, he's in bonds for the sake of the mystery. Those afflictions and bonds are two words. You remember came together in our reading in Acts 20 Bonds and afflictions await me. So Paul wasn't disappointed. He said they were coming and they did. But he had grace to endure. And then we have the ministry and dispensation of God in 125 entrusted to him. And then he speaks about fellow workers to the Kingdom of God in chapter four. And that is a word of warning to us that although we do not believe what we call kingdom truths, that's only a label we've invented because the emphasis upon the King and the kingdom as well is to do with Israel. Nevertheless, it's a solemn fact that you can never get outside the Kingdom of God. It doesn't matter what calling it is heaven or earth, or halfway between the Kingdom of Israel or the mystery which was hidden. It's all a part of the Kingdom of God. And you will find in Acts 28 when he reaches the very last verse, he's still preaching the Kingdom of God, although he has turned his back for the time being on the hope of Israel and they have gone out into their present blindness.

[00:07:39] Well, that is just to be sure that you have got before you a little idea of the next section we're considering. Well, now we come to the second half of this chart, which focuses attention upon chapter one, verses 23 to 28. And we have the hope of the Gospel in verse 23, and we have the hope of glory in verse 27. So it's an emphasis upon hope, the hope of the gospel and the hope of glory. And then we have the emphasis upon ministry. Verses 23 to 26 and the emphasis upon the mystery. Verse 26 alone and all the other features which you see there you could fill in as we go on together. Well, now let's come to verse 23, and it starts with the word if. And it's made some people a little bit hesitant because if raises a doubt if. But if doesn't always raise a doubt. Oh, no, if I go away, said Christ, I will come again. No doubt. There. It's an if of argument, isn't it? We use the word if without a thought of a doubt. If so and so then. So and so. Yes. Now, this particular expression here is translated. If so, be. Would you like to turn the page to Ephesians chapter 421 and see it there in a little different form? So far as our translation is concerned, the same word.

[00:09:09] Ephesians 421. Verse 20 says, But ye have not so learned Christ. If so, be that ye have heard him and have been taught by Him. You see, he's not raising a doubt. He said, If you've learned Christ, then you've heard him and have been taught by him this truth. If so, be Oh, yes. So he says here. If so, be that you continue in the faith. I'm

coming back to Colossians one. Grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel. Of course, he says, if you're moved away from this, there's something radically wrong with you. So we go back to the first verses. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ for the will of God and Timotheus, our brother to the saints and faithful. How the veterinary science friends that were addressed here. They were faithful and faithful ones will not moved away. If a person's all over the place, driven about by every wind of doctrine, is not reached the stage, which is the characteristic of these folks, as Ephesians puts it, that you be no longer children tossed to and fro. You've reached the status of the perfect man in Christ. So there's no thought that these people could be saved today and lost tomorrow. He simply is saying, Well, now, assuming that you've got this position, this is where you are now, he says, on that basis, I can go on and tell you a stage further so that if you want to know the Greek word, it's εἰ γε εἰ is often translated if εἰ is a compound, which means if so, be taking it for granted.

[00:10:48] Being assured that this is so and not raising any doubt as to the possibility that you might be believing today and unbelieving tomorrow. Harry says this hope of the gospel which ye have heard and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven, that was of understanding, hasn't it? Because if you limit it to the human species, every human creature under him. Well, I suppose Paul wouldn't need to say that there wasn't a single exception in the whole Roman Empire and in the Middle East and all the all the countries around the Mediterranean that at that present moment had heard these words. Couldn't be, could it? I suppose he means that so far as he is concerned, he got a parish that had no limits. This wasn't. Caddie at Jerusalem and give the witness there as the first apostles were told. Who says I've got no limit? He planned, as you remember, his itinerary to Rome. And then he said, I want you to help me on my way to Spain. And in the early fathers, one of them who was associated with Paul lived in the very period he said he planned to go to the islands of the West. And there's every likelihood he was very much concerned about Great Britain.

[00:12:20] Did you think that? I don't believe Paul ever came here. But Paul knew that Claudius had named his son Britannicus because Britain had become a part of the Roman Empire in Paul's own very day. While Paul was at Rome and Caratacus, who was taken a prisoner to Rome with his wife, Claudia. His wife, Claudia was a Christian, and she had a little church in her own house in Rome. And it's possible that when Paul went to Rome, they were the Christians that he met. And Claudia had a daughter

named Claudia. Named after the Emperor Claudius. She married a man who was a Roman soldier named Pudens. And believe it or not, Paul, in the last verse of two, Timothy Chapter four sends greetings to Claudia and to Pudens. So there's a bare possibility that into our English Bible has come. The daughter of Caractacus and Pudens her husband. Say it's possible, but we do know this, that they were all agog with regard to the inclusion of Britain at the very time that Paul was ministering in the Acts of the Apostles, for he ministered unto the. During the reign of Claudius. Well, now we have the emphasis there. Every creature. I think it means that there was no limit set to his ministry. Wherever he could go, however far he could penetrate. He had the right. He was intruding on no man's territory. He wasn't building upon another man's foundation.

[00:13:53] He was sent with this ministry. And the only one who had received it to take it to the very ends of the earth or to the extent of his own ability. Now, we are thankful that it has reached unto us, and we are glad that it's reaching unto us. We can say in the same way that the ministry which is being now undertaken in this little chapel is to every creature under heaven. Not that we believe that so many hundred millions will hear it, but there's no limits as far as this tape recording service can penetrate to the ends of the earth so far as we are concerned. There is no limit set and men and women are being called and are being blessed and are being illuminated by the very words that are spoken in this tiny place in what we would call from our point of view, the very ends of the earth. So let's take courage and not despise the day of small things. Just seek to be faithful. Well, then he emphasizes not only that, but he says that whereof I, Paul and made a minister. Now, I think you're conscious when you read the apostle's own statement about himself that he was a sensitive man. He wasn't one of these blustering people who got no sense and no feeling. I think he was a cultured man. He was a courteous man. He was an educated man.

[00:15:20] He was a Roman citizen. And I think it was distasteful personally to keep on saying I. And yet he would be unfaithful if he didn't say I. Because he would be then preventing the person knowing the one channel through which he could receive this truth. So you remember in chapter three of Ephesians, he says that I should illuminate all. But you see how he safeguards it there a little bit. If you'll turn to chapter three for a moment. Verse seven. Whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God, given unto me by the effectual working of His power unto me. Oh, he says, yes,

yes, yes unto me, who am less than the least of all saints. Is this grace, given that I. There he goes again. Oh, he said, I am less than the least of all saints. But I cannot possibly hide the fact that it was unto me all. We'll go on further in Ephesians three, verse nine, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery. He said, If you don't get it from me, you'll get it from nobody else at the moment. For I was the only one to whom it was revealed. And I'm the only one to whom you must come to get the beginnings of it. And we still do have to go to these prison epistles to discover what is the dispensation of the mystery, what is its high calling? What is its peculiar character? But we are glad to see that the Apostle shrunk a little bit from keep saying I.

[00:16:56] I remember all many, many years ago working in a studio in Fleet Street, and the friend who was an artist there designed his own card for the end of the year and quoted a text from Galatians Chapter two Not I, but Christ. And he did what some ignorant people have done. Even in his day. He used a small I with a dot on the top. Well, of course that was wrong, wasn't it? But underneath he got in very small type. Keep the dot on the I. And that was his message for the new year. Keep the dot on the I not I, but Christ and the Apostle Paul would have agreed with him. Yes. He said let's keep the dot on the I. But he said, I can't help myself but emphasize the fact that to me you've got to come, for he revealed it to me and scenarios that I should make it now. So we've got the two sides. So this man could say he'd served the Lord with all humility. That's lovely, I think, because if he wasn't a really humble man, he'd never said that, would he? But he was. But he never bothered. He said, I've served the Lord with all humility, you see. And I believe Moses wrote about himself. He says, Now I'm the man Moses with the meekest man in all the earth when nobody else would have cheek enough to say that about themselves, were they? If it weren't true.

[00:18:09] So there it is. That's the man who is the earthen vessel that says I am made a minister who now rejoice in telling you these glorious truths about all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. He didn't say that he intervened. Something which is rather strange, who now rejoice in my sufferings for you. Sufferings. All we said. Don't misunderstand me. The only sufferings that bring about your redemption. Is that the sufferings of Christ? It's Christ in the body of his flesh through death. Will you acquaint yourselves with the words in Colossians one, verse 22. In the body of his flesh through death. But he says in my flesh. Verse 24, For his body's sake, which is the church something. Isn't this extraordinary? He says, I'm not your redeemer. But I had such

fellowship with Christ and this apostleship that he gave me is no sinecure. He warned me at the very first time I received the call that if I became a chosen vessel unto him to bear his name, he would teach me how great things I must suffer. For his name's sake. Would you like to see that for yourself at the ninth chapter? I think we ought to. The very beginning of his ministry before ever he started. This was revealed to him. Verse 15 of Acts nine.

[00:19:43] But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way. For he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For now. That word for is explanatory. You say, why should this man suffer such a lot? Well, if you if you think what he had to say and what people he had to go to, the Gentiles, they were the they were the Romans and the barbarians. Or the children or children of Israel. They were Romans or barbarians, but they were very bitter foes. For. I will show him how great things he must suffer. For my name's sake. So he said. I now rejoice in my sufferings for you. You rejoice in them? Well, he said, You see, I know that they are not without reason. They're not without a place. I'd like to to compare to other passages while we're dealing with this. One Corinthians, chapter four, verse nine onwards. He is giving them a little insight into the. Sufferings that were accompanying his ministry. So he says in verse nine, after I think. I think that God has set forth us, the apostles last, as it were, appointed to death. Now, you may not know what he is referring to. He's referring to the system that was obtaining in those days when they had the gladiatorial fights in the Colosseum or other buildings of a similar character. They used to have the sham fights for a bit and then they'd have animals for a bit.

[00:21:31] But the whole of the congregation were waiting for the one thing that was going to be the crown of the lot. The poor, miserable persons that were coming out at long last who never would leave that arena alive. They were marked for death. That was the thing they were waiting for. That was the crying out for their blood. He said, I think that God has set forth us, the apostles, the last, as it were, appointed to death, and we are made a theatre for that word. Spectacle is our English word theatre. We are the theatre that they're all looking at unto the world and to angels and to men. We are fools, for Christ's sake. But ye are wise in Christ. We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling place and labour working with our own hands, being reviled. We bless being persecuted, we suffer it being

defamed, we increase, we are entreat. We are made as the filth of the world and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. Can you get lower than that, friends? This is the glorious Apostle Paul speaking about himself. I write. Not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons. I warn you. For though ye have 10,000 instructors in Christ, ye have not many fathers.

[00:22:57] For in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the Gospel. Now I think of the timidity of the next words. Think of giving a summary of afflictions like is given, then say to them. Therefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me. Formulas of me said you couldn't keep that man down. You see, he didn't minimize his sufferings, but he says, I rejoice in them. Now, in chapter three of Philippians, he asks for them. He said that I may know him and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death. But he put one other bit in that I omit it that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. And the fellowship of his sufferings. Oh, the man would have been dead long ago were it not that he knew the power of his resurrection. So he was an exhibition to all men, that the truth he taught had a very practical value as well as sounded very nice. Then there's one other thing that I think we want to keep in mind in mind, and that is found in two Corinthians Chapter 12. And the fact that I'm going to say compare these two, I'm suggesting to you that you can only learn the meaning of a word in one Corinthians if you also discover its use in two Corinthians, because until you do, you haven't got all that he said about it.

[00:24:17] So here he's going to speak about it again. In two Corinthians Chapter 12, verse seven. And lest I should be exalted above measure. Through the abundance of the revelations there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan sent to buffet me. And he says it now a second time, lest I should be exalted above measure. The apostle was conscious. That he himself might possibly. Become a swelled head. The more he thought about the fact that to him had been entrusted this wonderful revelation, the more he dwelt upon the fact that he had to say unto me, who am less than the least of all the saints it's given, it might have made him proud. And it's a shocking thought to think of a proud Apostle Paul, isn't it, friends? It's bad enough to see it among ourselves as a little number, but all to think of that man boasting except boasting in Christ. And so he said, I, the messenger of Satan sent to buffet me, lest he said it twice over in the verse, lest I should be exalted above measure because of the abundance of the revelations that were given to me. So let's sympathize with this man.

He said. I'm telling you, coming back to Colossians, one that I've had given to me this revelation. Now, don't you start envying me, he says, unless you're going to share with the other side. And with that revelation of most glorious truth, I've had a continual reminder that I'm less than the least of all saints.

[00:25:56] And I've been entrusted not because of any worth in myself, but because of his sovereign choice. So now we come back again. Colossians 124, who now rejoice in my sufferings for you. I must leave that again and go back to Ephesians chapter three. He says at the verse 13, chapter three, wherefore I desire that she faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. Extraordinary, isn't it? See, chapter three is all about the fact that he was a prisoner and that he received the dispensation of the mystery and all that to come to him to find it. And at the end he says, wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations. For you, that balance is I'm the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you. Verse one. Oh, he says, Prison is a pleasant place. I tell you it isn't. But it's for you. It's for your glory. It's for your blessing. So he says, I accept it and accepted joyfully. So, he says, who now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up that which is behind. What does he mean by that? Well, in the call that we received in Acts nine, he's told that as an earthen vessel he was going to bear the name of Christ before Gentiles, before the kings and before the children of Israel. And I will show him how great things he must suffer as a consequence, because to go out into the world with that message, with a world as it was then and is now, is to just ask for trouble.

[00:27:45] But now, he said, when I was called on the road to Damascus, the dispensation of the mystery wasn't mentioned. Now, he said, I have to bear a witness which deals with even a closer contact with satanic dominion. I have to say to the epistle, to the Colossians. Who hath delivered us from the authority of darkness. It's turning from Satan to God, as he said in Acts 26. So he said there's no exemption from suffering because I now receive the dispensation of the mystery. There may be even closer and deeper conflict because of the nature of the work I have to give now. Suffering its presence in this world, its purpose and why it should be here has baffled the minds of the best of men. I've got no answer to it. I can only see that the Apostle realized that it was one of those things where you couldn't explain it or not. Was a persistent friend and fellow with him until the end of his days. The only thing I rejoice in is it's under the control of the God of love. And he has assured us that one day he's

going to write the words no more across the lot as we read in the book of the Revelation.

[00:29:02] But neither the three comforters in the Book of Job nor anybody else since has been able to give an adequate reason and a supply. Why the persistent continuance of pain and sorrow and suffering. Except you could just say, of course it's because sin is here. I must leave it at that. So this man didn't as it fall into an easy post. He didn't take upon himself this ministry because he felt he would like to. He was, he said, always said, no, woe is me if I preach, not the gospel. A dispensation has been given unto me with all the consequences which he endured and which, by the grace of God preserved him and his truth down unsullied to us. That I may fill up that which is behind or lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, don't alter that. The afflictions for Christ, it is the afflictions of Christ suffered by His servant. You see? You get Moses. He. What is it? He suffered reproach. Reproach of Christ. And we have a tendency to mean that it meant he suffered the reproach for Christ, which of course is true. But I think we leave it as it stands. Esteeming the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. It wasn't Christ reproaching him, but he wasn't being reproached because he was simply Moses. He was being reproached because he was a picture of Christ.

[00:30:41] As Moses said, the Lord your God shall raise up a prophet like unto me. And so it is little measure. He was being treated as the great one was being must be treated later. And I think it's a word that we ought to remember. Every one of us that in any measure is taking a stand. Anyone that stands for the truth, especially the truth of this epistle. Anyone that's associated with this witness carried on in the Chapel of the Open book. You can't expect you're going to be quite exempt from that, which was an everyday experience of the man who, first of all, received it to pass on to us. We're not going to go out into the outside world and say, please make us martyrs. That's not right. But sometimes we have to remember. That we are dealing with a foe and that foe will do his utmost to spoil our witness and spoil our work. And here it is. As the apostle said, there is an open door. Do you remember how many adversaries wait together? The open door was set before him by the Lord. The many adversaries were there waiting for him by the evil one. Now, you said all this is being suffered for his body's sake. Which is the church. His body site, which is the church. He used the same expression at the end of Ephesians one, where it occurs for the first time in this ministry. And has put all things

under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body.

[00:32:17] His body site, which is the church. He puts it two ways around. Cubs are the same thing. The church, which is his body. The body, which is his church. And now he says whereof I am made a minister. A minister. This word gives us the word Deacon. And there's a big argument among those who deal with etymology as to how the word deacon came to have a meaning, because it can be divided up into two parts and means someone who runs through the dust. He runs through the dust. And it may be a symbol of a very lowly ministry that was sent on a message. And they weren't macadamized roads in those days. And he may have run through the dust many a time to take his message, but that doesn't matter. We've got an example of what this word ministry means by our Savior's own use of it of himself. Before ever. Paul was a minister. Christ was a minister. He said the son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and give his life a ransom for many. And here's his servant, Paul, following closely in his steps. Did you notice when I referred to two Corinthians just now when it spoke about the Minister of Satan sent to buffet him? He said, Concerning this, I prayed three times that it might be taken away.

[00:33:57] Doesn't that take you back to the Garden of Gethsemane? He. This man savior. This man's lord. Three times in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed if it be possible. Oh, how he walked with his savior, didn't he? In his smaller degree. And then he said, most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities. For when I am weak, then am I strong? You see, we make a mistake sometimes when we go through all the things and make a list of the qualifications of the Apostle Paul had for his job. As I said just now, he had the dignity of being a Roman citizen. He was brought up in a university city and in Tarsus he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He spoke Hebrew and he spoke Greek. You remember the Roman soldier says, Dost thou speak Greek? Are you going to speak to them in Hebrew? Who is he? He got all these qualifications. But none of them, or if they were multiplied, would have made him the apostle of Jesus Christ. He needed the grace of God the same as you and I need Him. So he says most gladly will I, therefore glory in my infirmities. For when I am weak, then am I strong? So it was supernatural in that sense. Now, he goes on to say about this church, which is the body of Christ, whereof I made a minister. A minister. That's the word.

[00:35:27] And he uses it several times. According to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you. To complete. If you if you look across the page to chapter two, verse ten, you'll see the word. Ye are complete in him. He had a complete Bible, this man. And he was speaking to those who were complete in Christ. As our savior said you can quote the words, fill them up to the brim. In the gospel, according to John, that's where the Apostle was aiming at to fill up to the brim, a complete Bible and a complete church. Now, he says this was according to a dispensation. This is the end of this little study this afternoon approaching. But I just mentioned that the word dispensation doesn't necessarily mean a period of time, although it must operate in time. We can't have any job to do that is outside of the realm of time. But we sometimes speak of ages and dispensations. But do remember that the first meaning of the word dispensation is a stewardship, and the first occurrence of it comes in the gospel. According to Luke of the unjust steward, who was told to give an account of his stewardship. And that's the word dispensation. And you divide the word dispensing dispensation up into its two parts. I mean, the original, not the English. It's made up of two parts Oikos, a House and Nemo to administer part of the word that gives us a word Nomos.

[00:37:10] The word law. It means the management of a house and Oikonomia has come into English and we spell it economy. Same word now. Economy doesn't mean cheese pairing. It doesn't mean saving money. It means spending it wisely, administering it wisely. So we have domestic economy. We have political economy. We can have all sorts of economies. It means to administer the affairs of a house. And it's a stewardship. And the Apostle said, I have received a stewardship and that stewardship is to do with the church, which is the body of Christ. Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints. So here we have at first hand an emphasis upon the fact that the mystery is something that was hidden. Something that was hidden with the very character of a mystery is something that which is hidden. And it emphasized and it's emphasized in Ephesians three, By the time we're done with it, our Bibles are open, but Ephesians three won't they? It says in verse nine, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God. This is something that was hid in God here. He says that this mystery, which is hidden away from the ages and the generations, so it's hidden in and it's hidden away from two sides. It was so hidden that nobody had a glimpse of it till it was revealed to this man in prison.

[00:38:56] And he says, I am the one to make it known to you. And that's the reason why we have stressed the prison ministry of the Apostle Paul, because we could not help ourselves if we were faithful to the charge to direct every searcher and seeker to that man's ministry. Not because we are magnifying Paul. We stand with Paul and say, Who then is Paul? Was Paul crucified for you? No. He's only an earthen vessel. But it's the blessed truth that was put into him that matters to us. And so we have to accept the Lord's choice. Whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you to complete the Word of God, even the mystery. So as I said earlier, those who do not know the mystery while they possess a Bible that's complete, really do not possess it in the true sense. Which hath been hid from ages and from generations. But now. What is that note of time? Well, we can't put a date on it. We can't say it's a D, whatever it is. Because that was. That's not possible. We can only guess. But we can say this, that here we have a note of time which says now and not before. If if this is true that up to that moment, the mystery was a hidden thing, but now is manifested that it's hopelessly impossible for anyone to say that you can read all about this mystery in the Gospels.

[00:40:23] You can read all about this mystery in the testimony of Peter. You can find it in the Prophet Daniel or in the types and shadows of the tabernacle. That's not handling the word of God as it should. That's not believing what God has said. He says it was hidden until this moment, and it was revealed to this man and is now made manifest. What he said in that case, as we came back to Chapter four in my prison, I pray for a door of utterance that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak. That's the reason why he felt it. Because if he fell down on this, if he failed. Oh, what a responsibility. Earlier in his ministry, he stood alone. You remember, as we read in Galatians chapter two, to whom we yielded subjection? Not for an hour. This man was conscious of the responsibility he had. To be entrusted with such truths. While there, we must stop for a time. We're only half way through the subject. But needs. Must we pick it up? God willing, next time we meet together and take it a stage further. But I trust we've seen enough to make it worth your while to patiently consider the testimony of the Lord's Prisoner. So that is the testimony that belongs to this present time of witness.