

Full Assurance

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Date: 12 February 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Well folks, I'd like us to look for a little while this evening at what you see in chapter 2 of Colossians at verse 2, that our hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mercy, which is Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The riches of full assurance of understanding. Full assurance is something that many of us as Christians might perhaps struggle with, but this evening I'd like us to look at three aspects of that full assurance. Full assurance first of all of understanding, which is mentioned here and how that applies to us. And then the foundation for that, which I would suggest to you is full assurance of faith. And then finally we'll look at the prospect ahead of us, which is full assurance of hope. And between these three I would suggest that we'll have a more rounded picture perhaps of the assurance, which is often such an elusive quality that we want to lay hold of, but an awful lot of Christians are lacking in. So full assurance first of understanding is what we find referred to here, as Paul says to the Colossians.

Remember this is a church which has never seen him physically face to face. Most of the churches that Paul writes to, he has been present in, he may have planted them himself. They know him, at least the early members of the church would know him physically, know him by sight, know him to talk to. Colossians, he says that he is a burden for those of loud I see and of Colossians, and those who have never seen my face. So in other words, he's writing to a church who have never set eyes on him physically, not unlike ourselves.

We have never seen Paul face to face. We've never seen Jesus physically face to face. But what he writes to them, he writes also to us, because this is a living word of a living God, and his truth doesn't change. So their hearts may be encouraged, they need together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding. First of all is full assurance of understanding. What we understand about Christ, now our understanding of Christ of course begins with what we begin to know of him. That might be something that we learned from our mother's knee. It might be something we learned first from a Sunday school teacher or from a friend who was a Christian. It might be a different stage in our lives that we first learned about Christ. But the little more that we come to know about him, the better informed we are about who he was, about what he did during his earthly ministry, who he is now, and who he claims to be. I would suggest to you that full assurance of understanding, as opposed to the other two that we'll also look at, concerns the present.

The full assurance of understanding is where we are now. It's the place that Christ claims and occupies in the world as well as in heaven, and it concerns very much the present. It is where we are now. When I was young, a wee boy on the mainland, if you went to the cinema, you didn't buy a ticket for a particular showing at a particular time. You bought a ticket for the day. All through that day they were showing a main feature and probably a secondary wee film as well, whatever it might be. The idea was you just went in, you took your seats, and you'd be halfway through a film. You'd just accept the fact you were halfway through, and you'd watch to the end of it, and then there'd be a break or whatever, and then maybe there might be the second feature, and then you'd start the main one again, and you'd see it from the beginning, and then you begin to recognise, oh yeah, this is where we came in. And then you had the option that you either sit through on to the end of the film again, and again you could do it as many times as you like once you've paid for your ticket, or most people once you got to where we came in, that's it. We've seen the whole thing now and some people might just go out. As far as the full assurance of understanding is concerned, this is the bit at which we might say this is where we come in. Because if we're looking at the full assurance of faith, which you mentioned was a kind of foundation, faith in many ways you might say comes before a fuller understanding, but people don't come straight to faith. They don't just jump right in, and it's faith right away. They begin to learn about Jesus, first of all. They begin to hear about Jesus, first of all. Like I think it says in Romans 9, you know, how can they call on Him in whom they have never believed?

[5 : 05] How can they believe in Him in whom they have never heard? How can they hear without a preacher? We have to hear about Christ, we have to have understanding about Christ. This is the point of which we come in. And it's from that point that then we go on to decide or to turn, is this someone in whom I can put my faith, my trust? See when Jesus teaches his disciples, and as we know, He uses parables and illustrations of the things that they're familiar with.

At the end of Matthew 13, after He's been using parables about the sower and about the mustard seed and about leaven and the prophecies and parables, and then He says to them, have you understood all these things? They said to Him, yes. And He said, therefore every scribe who's been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. Now, Jesus in many ways taught people in new ways. But what He was saying, what He was actually teaching, and we say this with all reverence, wasn't actually new. The vast majority, in fact almost everything, with maybe one exception, which is probably, you know, by this, oh man, you know, you're my disciples if you love one another as I have loved you, a new commandment I give to you, Jesus said. So that's new, love one another as I have loved you. But everything else that Jesus taught, you can find it in the Old Testament. Almost every teaching that He expounds, it's already there in the Old Testament, which is exactly as you would expect. Jesus is not introducing novelty. He is rather making known the God who has always been there since before the beginning of time and whose desire is to reveal Himself to His people, to reveal

Himself to mankind. And He'd been doing it since the dawn of time with, you know, the sacrifices and with the prophecies and speaking to the patriarch and with circumcision and the Passover and all these other things, gradually making Himself more and more known until finally the appearance of Himself and the person of Jesus Christ appears. And all that the church has built upon that, the apostles and then the message of the gospel since then for 2,000 years afterwards. But the point is that Jesus is not introducing novelty, He's making known what was always there. He's telling it in stories that are readily understandable. He's putting it in illustrations that people can relate to. And so when He says to the disciples, have you understood all this? And they say, yes. Now that's quite unusual for the disciples if you think about it, because when Jesus would ask them about deep things or whatever about, you know, His death and resurrection, I'm going to be given up to the Gentiles and they'll scourge me and crucify me and so on, they didn't understand what He was talking about. When He talked about rising again from the dead, they didn't understand. So often they just didn't understand. But when He expounds these things simply to them and uses the illustrations and the parables and represents the old truths in the new way, they get it. And it's not that He's introducing novelty, He's introducing or rather He's expounding that which was always there. This is why He says that like a master of a house that I'll learn and scribe that brings out of His treasure things both new and old. If you were to ask, what was so special about Jesus? Oh, well, He was brand new. Well, yes, He was. But the message He was bringing out was that He had always been there from all the beginning, all the way back in the

Old Testament. Jesus never says, ah, forget about the law, forget about the prophets. It doesn't really matter. What He says is what you don't get is that it just doesn't apply to the outside alone. It's spiritual, it's deep, it affects the heart, the soul, the conscience, the mind. It's right through you, this new birth and obedience that God wants. And this was revolutionary because people hadn't had that before. And yet this understanding, the disciples get it. They understand it. And likewise, Job, long-suffering Job who goes through all his many difficulties through all the chapters of that book, which is quite possibly the oldest written section of the Old Testament. We read in the final chapter, then Job answered the Lord and said, I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand. Things too wonderful for me which I did not know. Here and I will speak. I will question you and you make it known to me. I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes seize you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. What we've got here at the end of the book of Job is Job encountering God for himself. And as he encounters God personally, the sheer majesty and power and strength and just awesomeness that blows his mind away, this is just way more than Job had ever thought. Who up till then had been, well, he was doing his best, he was trying to be faithful and good to the Lord. And even God said to Satan in the opening chapters, have you seen myself in Job? How faithful and good he is, you know, how diligent he is. And of course Satan tried to deny that there was any actual virtue in him at all. But the point is that however good he was trying to be, that when Job encounters God for himself, all his petty righteousness just seems like nothing. All his just stopping short of actually accusing God of saying, why are you giving me such a hard time when

[10 : 55] I'm trying to be good? Which is what many of us do a lot of the time if we're honest, you know, why is this happening to me? Why am I getting the hard time? I'm trying to be faithful to you Lord, I'm trying to be good. What about the rest of the world? And yet when he encounters God personally, he sees the depth of the holiness or a glimpse of it, the vastness of his power and majesty and all that he has done from the beginning of creation just blows his mind and he feels like nothing in comparison to God. And so he says, look, I'm nothing before you, I just repent and dust and ashes, I can't open my mouth, I can't see anything to you. It's the beginning then of that understanding which if we begin to have the full assurance of understanding, then and only then are we in a position to decide, is this somebody in whom I am prepared to put my faith? Is this somebody in whom I am prepared to actually trust my immortal soul to this Jesus?

To this God? We have to begin with some knowledge, some head knowledge, some basic understanding before we commit to faith. Now part of the difficulty with assurance, of course, is that people think that it is of the substance of their faith and I would suggest to you respectfully that it's not. It is more if we might say to use a little cliché or sound bite, you might say that assurance is the fruit, not the root. The fruit, not the root. It's not what goes deep down into the soil and produces your faith and so on. It's not the sum and substance of it, it's what your faith will ultimately bring forth. People may have a genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because that's what we're looking at now, this foundation of faith and yet they're not confident in it, they're not assured in it and I would suggest to you that one reason for this is because we mistakenly believe that our assurance or the quality of our faith or salvation is dependent on the kind of faith that we are able to exercise. But if my faith is good enough, then I'll be okay. If my faith is weak or wobbly or whatever, well then maybe I won't be okay. It's the Reverend George

McCaskill, I'm sure most of you will know of the APC church in Stormy, used many years ago, a brilliant illustration of somebody about to cross a fast flowing river. He's maybe used it with yourselves, I don't know as well. And two bridges and one of them was safe and the other one wasn't but which one is it? So instead of just trying out tentatively with his feet, so start taking measurements and saying well look at the quality of the wood and that one and is that one stronger and look at the angle on that one and is that one better? There's always calculations and measurements and finally comes to the conclusion, yep this is the right one here so I'm going to cross, I've done all my measurements, I'm absolutely certain this is the right bridge. Total confidence in it, goes across, bridge falls to pieces and he falls in the river. There was nothing wrong with the quality of his faith. The faith was based upon sound measurements and calculations and deductions and conclusions as far as he could see. The only problem was his faith just happened to be in the wrong thing. It was in the wrong bridge. If his faith had been in the correct one that would have been fine. It's not dependent on all the things you do and the quality and ability of the faith you can exercise. The full assurance of faith into which we are now moving now from understanding is dependent upon the finished work of Christ. We said that on the full assurance of understanding deals with the present.

It's where we come in, it's where we are now rather our full assurance of understanding. But the point is that God himself upon whom our salvation depends, not us, is way ahead of us. Just like Job was blown away when he encounters the power of God for himself. So we, the more understanding we have, the greater our full assurance of understanding, the greater our assurance and understanding that God is actually way ahead of us. Long before ever we began to learn about him, he already had accomplished and done everything that was necessary for your salvation if you're believing in him. In other words, his finished work upon the cross is the thing upon which our full assurance depends. It is upon a past event. If our full assurance of understanding is about the present, then we might say that full assurance of faith is dependent on a past and finished work. In other words, what

Christ has done upon the cross. It's not so much about the quality of your faith. It's about in whom your faith is. I'll say that again. It's not about the quality or strength of your individual faith. It's about in whom that faith is placed.

[16:16] To take an example of this, we talk about full assurance of faith. If we look in Hebrews 10, verse 22, we see there what it says. Well, I'll read the context from verse 19.

Therefore, brother, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, but what he has done by the new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh. And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, our bodies washed with pure water, let us hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering. For he who promised is faithful. You see what this full assurance of faith is based on? It's based on the sprinkling with Christ's blood of what he has done upon he himself who is faithful upon the great high priest who has entered already for us within the veil. This is an assurance based, not an, oh, well, I hope my faith is strong enough. Well, I would like to know that I can definitely be assured our assurance is dependent, not upon ourselves and the quality of our faith, but on the one in whom that faith is placed upon Christ. And it's all very well for us to say, oh, well,

I don't know if my faith is strong enough. I don't know if I'm assured enough, but are we doubting Christ? Sometimes people might say, well, how do you know if you're going to heaven? Isn't that presumption on your behalf? Do you think you're good enough to go to heaven? What makes you so special that you're going to heaven? That way, that you can be so assured of it. The assurance of the Christian does not come from the fact that he or she is good. It comes from the fact that Christ is perfect and that his finished work upon the cross is perfect. It is all sufficient for all the sins of all the Lord's people in every age. Fool, assurance of faith rests on Christ's finished work, which is a past completed event. As Paul writes to Timothy, I'm going to find the reference here, 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 12, I suffer as I do for the preaching of the gospel, but

I'm not ashamed for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able to guard until the day, that day, what has been entrusted to me. I know whom I have believed and persuade that he's able to keep what I haven't trusted to him against that day. So Paul is assured, not because he thinks he's a good, strong apostle, but because, as he says, I know whom I have believed. I know upon whom my faith rests. This fool, assurance of faith is based on the past event, which is way ahead of us. Long before you and I were ever conceived or born, Christ had already gone to the cross. That's the assurance of your faith, the one in whom our assurance rests, what Christ himself has done. That's the certainty of faith, which then leads on to, as we said, this is where we came in there. At some point in history, you and I, we are born, we begin to grow up, we begin to hear about Jesus, and at that point we begin then to learn about him and what he has done, and his own claims about himself and what he has done upon the cross and who he claims to be. And we decide whether or not this is somebody we can trust in. And when we put our faith in him, we are tapping back into that foundation that was in fact laid not by us, but by God, centuries ago, that looks past. So with this fool assurance of faith and this fool assurance of understanding, we can then have this fool assurance of hope. And if the fool assurance of faith deals with the past, the finished work of Christ, and the fool assurance of understanding deals with the present, our head knowledge of Jesus and our own personal experience of him, the fool assurance of hope looks to the future. It looks to that which is yet to be completed and consummated, but which we can know for certain, definitely shall be. In Hebrews 6, we read verse 11, we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness, to have the fool assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. It goes on then to talk about later on how by two immutable things, by which it was impossible for God to lie, we can flee for refuge to him. Now those two immutable things are first of all that God made his promise to Abraham, God who is truth itself, Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life, made his promise to Abraham. And secondly, just in case that wasn't enough, he bound it over with an oath. Now ordinary human mortals sometimes are required to use an oath. You know, if you're giving evidence in court, you might have to take the Bible in your right hand and say, I swear by Almighty God, that the evidence I will give be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So we take an oath to bind ourselves more thoroughly to the truth. God doesn't need to give an oath, but nevertheless he binds himself with an oath and because he can't swear by anything greater, he swears by himself. So that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. Hope is by definition not in the past, it's set before us, it is future. We have this, that is this hope, as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. This is this full assurance of hope because the hope that is set before us is by definition future. Peter talks about this in 1 Peter chapter 1 at verse 13, therefore preparing your minds for action and being sober minded,

set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Or is another version, has it hope to the end for the grace that is set before you here. At verse 3 of that same chapter he said, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This living hope is that which is set before us and yet certain. It's not, oh well I hope it will be, you know we tend to use the word hope as as though it dilutes a certainty. You know if you are saying, well you're confident about your exams you might say, oh well I hope so. What that means is, well I'm not really very, if we use the word hope then it almost dilutes our certainty but with God the word hope is like a certainty that simply its time has not yet come to pass. It's not so much, if you use a sporting analogy, it's not like if you're your team you're walking out of the tunnel for the cup final or whatever. It's not like oh well I hope we're going to win this one. It's rather the result is already accomplished, the referee has blown his final whistle. You just haven't been awarded the trophy yet, they're just busy doing all the preparations and organisations to get the trophy presented but the results already have finished, it's done. It's not oh well we hope it will happen, it's already completed, accomplished, the hope is now the looking forward to the certainty.

[24 : 15] Full assurance of hope. Romans puts it this way in chapter 8 verse 24 for in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the spirit helps us in our weakness but we don't know what to pray for as we ought but the spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. So we don't yet see the coming to pass of what we are hoping for yet we are fully assured of it because of our knowledge of Christ, full assurance of our understanding who Jesus is, what he has done and our full assurance of faith because of the finished work of Christ upon the cross. You see the foundation layer that God has himself laid, full assurance of faith which of course we have not of ourselves, it is the gift of God which then builds into the full assurance of understanding. This is where we came in at this point in history, our little lives, our few years span, our learning, our understanding of Jesus and then on the basis of that faith and understanding there is the full assurance of hope that is ahead of us, that the Lord will bring to pass at the appointed time. We might think oh well if only he would come sooner, if only it would come just yet, well that's true up to a point but do you really want him to come right this minute or is there things you'd really like to meet? How annoying would it be if you're halfway through your renovation sort of thing and you're just getting all this lovely work done and then Jesus comes back before it's all quite finished and you don't get to put it into practice, you think well great if he does, we won't need to worry about it anymore but even so you'd like to be able to see the good and get the good of some of what you've done. Why is he wait so long? He waits so long for the very reason that he waited for us. There must have been centuries of believers who said if only the

Lord would come back now but if he had then, then centuries worth of other believers wouldn't have been in existence and wouldn't have been gathered into his kingdom. His timing is always going to be perfect. Now I've got to admit that sometimes what interferes with our life a wee bit if the Lord were to come back. The only time I consciously remember ever hoping and if I can put it this way praying that the Lord would not come back like then was after I had sat my final exams at university and before I'd got the results I thought oh no if the Lord comes back now I'll never know and I said well I suppose I will know technically but you know you almost think well what a waste but of course it's not a waste and you don't want to think anything irreverent but I did think then I've got done the exams now I really want to see what the results will be before he comes back. Well the Lord didn't come back so there's still a lifetime of work ahead of us and so it will be probably for most of us in this generation but we don't know. The point is that our assurance is based on what Christ himself has already done. I love there's a question and answer which I won't quote exactly correctly I'm sure but in the larger catechism where it says with whom was the covenant of grace made and or words to that effect and I'll say oh it was made with us as those who are going to be children of God. The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam and with all his seed as his posterity or words to that effect. See that's the certainty of it. We you and I we fail we falter we slip we sin we make mistakes but because this covenant is made not with us it's made with Christ that's the perfection of it that's the full assurance of it that your assurance depends not on you and me but it depends upon him that's why you can be at peace in your mind that's why you can have full assurance of understanding it's why you can have full assurance of faith it's why you can have full assurance of hope because we know who we have believed and are persuaded that he's able to keep what we even trusted to him against that day whenever he should come whenever he should decide whatever he should want to do with us that's got to be good enough for us because it's good enough for him in whom we have our full assurance all the way to the end so let's pray. Our loving Father we thank thee for thy goodness to us we thank thee for assuring us not of our own virtue or goodness but rather assuring us of what Christ has done assuring us of his perfection and of his glory and grace we want to thank thee for his willingness to go to the cross we want to thank thee for all that he endured and suffered there not just in the torments of his body but in experiencing that separation from thee which really is summed up in the words he descended into hell because to have the Father's face of love turned away from the sin of which he is of purer eyes than to behold even when that sin is being borne by his beloved Son upon the cross he will not look upon iniquity and sin and so he turns away even from his only Son and that sense of devastation that emptiness that experience of lostness if we may put it that way that living death that he went through so that we wouldn't have to that is the basis of our confidence that is the basis of our assurance that Christ having lived the perfect and sinless life has offered up the once and for all sacrifice perfectly upon the cross we have full assurance

in him so Lord grant thy blessing then upon thy word tonight and encourage and assure us and build up our faith and hope and love in thee until thou come hast or until that is called for us whichever it should be it will be perfect in thy time and so we wait upon thee now and pray thy blessing on us each one for Jesus sake. Amen.