

The Full Riches of Knowing Christ

Colossians 1:24-2:5

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Before I bring the message, I want to share with you a specific focus for your prayers for our leaders in regard to the church's future direction. As many of you know we have been anticipating a capital campaign early next year to fund the next phase of the vision including new space for children and youth. We have been in the planning phase for a year and a half. However when you are making major decisions, it is wise after you have prayed and done the hard work of gathering all the facts, to pause and seek God one more time before you step across the bridge. So we have put the timing of the campaign before the Lord with open hands asking Him to convict us if now is the time and to pause us if we should wait. We are genuinely and intensely seeking Him with a true openness as to the outcome. We want His will not ours to be done. We intend to make a final decision the first week of October. Please join us in this specific prayer request: God's timing for our next capital campaign.

Prayer

“What do you do?” That is one of the most common questions in casual conversation. Many of us have business cards that say what we do. But the question can be deeper. What's your life about? Do you have purpose? Do you have passion?

Most people I encounter are just getting through life, and not doing that so well. Suburbia is filled with aimless lives full of quiet desperation. Life is bland, tasteless, and empty. We try to inject passion with sports, Xgames, ultimate fighting and desperate housewives. We can get an adrenaline fix for a short time. Some of you are aware of your purpose-less existence and so to escape you grab a bottle or sexual experience either to stimulate passion or to numb all feeling. Life without purpose and passion is no fun. In fact it is quite depressing. If you're born to gradually die and the trip from cradle to grave is filled with painful struggle, that's worse than empty.

The people in the small town of Colosse had never met the Apostle Paul. They probably wondered, “what do you do, Paul? What's your life about?” The next section of Colossians answers that question. Paul tells the

Colossians what his life is about. In the process Paul gives us a blueprint for our lives. He shows us a life filled with the best passionate purpose.

Do you have anything in your life that you really want to work hard for?
What do you stay up late working on? What keeps you awake at night?
What do you pound the table about? For what are you willing to pay a high price? What is your life about, really?

The answer to what life is about is found in this Book. Open your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1, verse 24. Paul was quite passionate about his life. He was clear about his purpose. Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Colossians 1:24-2:5

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. ¹ I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Not surprisingly Paul's life is all about Jesus Christ. He wants to know Christ fully and to fully make Him known. He is all about helping people follow Christ. Opening shocking comments about suffering are followed by the heart of His commission, all focused on Christ.

Paul's opening sentence in verse 24 unsettles most readers, *²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.*

Suffering itself is an uncomfortable subject but why does Paul rejoice in suffering? What could possibly be lacking in Christ's afflictions? His life purpose is so passionate that Paul rejoices to suffer for Christ(ians)

Rejoice to suffer for Christ(ians)

In today's world we expect people to rejoice in their accomplishments, their blessings, their health and wealth. Paul's rejoicing in his suffering jolts a worldview that values comfort and success as the highest good.

Notice he is talking about suffering for others, *for you and for Christ's body the church*. In some amazing sense Paul's suffering is connected to Christ's suffering. When you know Jesus deeply, you are willing to suffer gladly.

Given that you might be willing to suffer joyfully for others, what does Paul mean when he says, *I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions*. The classic misinterpretation of this verse appeared in the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of a treasury of merits. It is quite clear in the New Testament that Christ's suffering is in no way inadequate. Paul did not help with the salvation; that was Christ's solo work.

It is clear that there is a close identification between Christ's suffering, the church and Paul's suffering. So what is the "lack"? First the word "lack" is better translated "incomplete." There is nothing wrong. I believe the incompleteness is two-fold. First, Christ is not physically present and yet His mission continues. Christ said His followers would do greater works. We are to continue His mission as His body which includes continuing to suffer. He said if the world hated Him, it would certainly hate us. Second, the incompleteness is in Paul. The Greek word order literally reads, "I complete what is incomplete in the afflictions of Christ in my flesh." It is not Christ's sufferings which are being completed but Christ's suffering-in-Paul. What is incomplete is Paul's own experience of Christ's afflictions, not something defective in Christ's suffering.

In suburban Christianity we avoid suffering or do everything we can to overcome it. In fact suffering tells us something is wrong. How radical to consider rejoicing in suffering for fellow Christians as part of following Christ. We know Jesus best when we share His sufferings for His church. We live best when we put the needs of others first at a personal cost to us.

Moms tend to be good models of this. A mom will stay up all night with her sick child at the risk of her own health. A mom will give up what she wants

to do, to play with her little boy. A mom will get up when she is exhausted to clean up the mess and hold her scared little girl. Even when physical pain is constant, moms keep making meals and washing clothes. Why? Because godly moms have a clear passionate purpose: to lovingly raise godly children. God has given moms a commission. He gave Paul a commission and He has given every believer a commission. You need to accept your God-given commission **and accept your commission to:**

The word “commission” means stewardship. Paul says he has become a servant of Christ’s body by the commission God gave him. In the ancient world a steward would be put in charge of the owner’s estate to manage his affairs in the Master’s absence. The Master of all, God, has commissioned Paul.

If you are a Christian, you have a commission from God. Peter says, *⁰ Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.* 1 Peter 4:10 The word for “administering” comes from the same root word as “commission.” We each have a stewardship from God. One day we will give account to Christ of how we handled the stewardship He gave us. While we need not duplicate Paul’s ministry, each of us is called to ministry as the basic theme of our lives.

So what is your commission? Each of us has influence. To whom are you commissioned? The answer is not “no one.” Consider your family. If you are a mom, dad, grandma or granddad, you have a commission for your children or grandchildren. Do you have people you know? You have a commission to influence them. Do you lead a Life Group? Work with children in Promiseland or student ministry? You have a commission. What’s your life about? Paul was about Jesus. What was he commissioned to do? Paul expressed his commission, what his life’s about in three major ways. In short Paul worked hard to know Christ fully and make Him fully known. To do that He worked to

Fully communicate the Word of God

To present to you the word of God in its fullness. Paul aimed to communicate all the Word of God in its fullness. He wanted the believers all over the world to fully understand the whole Word of God. People cannot know Christ better without knowing the Scriptures better.

At McKinney Fellowship we aim to present to you the full Word of God. I want you reading, studying and memorizing God’s Word privately and in

small groups with others. You will not experience Christ without engaging His Word. The more you know the fullness of God's Word the more fully you will experience Christ.

Paul gets more specific about the primary message he wants to deliver. Specifically he is presenting ²⁶ *the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.* ²⁷ The word "mystery" can be confusing. In Greek it does not mean (as the English word 'mystery' often does) something merely puzzling or paradoxical. We are not talking about a genre of novels or movies. In Paul, the term "mystery" refers to God's salvation plan anticipated in visions and symbols by Old Testament prophets, and now at last unveiled before all His people.

What is God disclosing to all people? God's mysterious plan is not, for Paul, a timetable of events, but a person. God is disclosing the *glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of Glory.*

Paul is fully communicating the Word of God

To make known the glorious riches of Christ

In Christ you find glorious riches. The mystery of God's salvation plan in essence is Jesus Christ. Using Paul's metaphor of glorious riches, experiencing Christ is like exploring a palace richly stocked with treasures, each one revealing more fully than the last the majesty of the owner.

Christ is in you. The Christ who is the creator of all that exists, who is before all things, who reconciles all things, He is in you. And He is the hope of glory. For the third time in the book Paul mentions the theme of hope. Christ is our hope. He is our assurance, of glory today and greater glory to come. In dark days, know that Christ is your hope. In days of trouble and shame, know that glory is coming in Christ.

Christ is not in everyone. He is not in every church-goer. Do you know Christ personally? Is Christ in you? You only have the hope of glory in your life by receiving Him through faith. Christ comes to live in those who place their faith in Him as their forgiver and leader.

This is the message we are to make known to others. We are to fully communicate the word of God to make known the glorious riches of Christ. To whom are you commissioned to make Christ known? Do you have a family? Do you have friends? Are you communicating the Word of God to

people you know? Are you making known the riches of Christ, the hope of glory?

The second way Paul expresses what his life is all about comes in verse 28. Paul says, *we proclaim Him*. Who is Him? Christ. The message is simple: Jesus Christ is the message. Paul's commission is to **Fully communicate Christ with all wisdom**

Notice Paul does not communicate a philosophy, religion or system. He communicates Christ. How does he do this? What are his methods? Admonishing and teaching with all wisdom. Who is his audience? Everyone. The word "everyone" appears three times in the Greek text. This is not just for the special people, the smart people or the initiated ones. This is for everyone. What is Paul's goal? *So that we may present everyone perfect in Christ*. As we unpack the meaning of verse 28, think about your setting, your commission. Think about your children, the people you hang around with, the people you influence, your life group. How can you fully communicate Christ with all wisdom to present them mature in Christ?

To admonish means to exhort or instruct in the sense of correction or warning. To teach means to impart knowledge including practical knowledge. "*With wisdom*" modifies both admonishing and teaching. We are to admonish and teach wisely. To what end do we do this?

To present everyone fully mature in Christ

Paul's three-fold repetition of "everyone" emphasizes that every single Christian is capable of the maturity of which Paul speaks. The concept of "presenting" looks back to chapter one verse 22 where we saw last week that Christ reconciled us to present us to God as holy. Paul joins in the work of Christ aiming to present all the Colossian believers fully mature in Christ.

You may have noticed that I am substituting the word "mature" for "perfect." I do that because "mature" is a better translation of the Greek word. The word was used of a person who was complete in their mastery of a subject or craft. It does not mean a mathematically precise perfection with no flaws what so ever. Rather a person is perfect if he fulfills his purpose in Christ.

So in your commission, in your setting, are you aiming to present your children fully mature in Christ? Are you aiming to present the other people

in your Life Group fully mature in Christ? Note that you can be part of this goal without being the leader of the group. With your Christian friends are you helping them to become mature in Christ? Are you admonishing and teaching with all wisdom?

That's hard to do. Even preparing to say it today, I felt the conviction. Too often my conversations stay in the trivial, even with close friends and family. Paul knew it was hard and he said so, but He was committed to his clear passionate purpose: Christ, so in the third expression of his life he says he is commissioned by God to

Fully struggle for others with Christ's power

Paul says he labors, struggling with all God's energy. These are vivid words. Labor means both to work hard and to become weary. Paul wears himself out to help others become mature in Christ. It was a struggle for Paul. At times he worked night and day. He made tents to make ends meet. He was sick. He was beaten. He was imprisoned.

The word "struggle" comes from athletics. It means to give your utmost effort to win the game. It includes the self-disciplined training to get ready for the competition. This is the Greek word "*agon*" from which we derive our English word, "agonize." Paul is agonizing for these people he loves, agonizing for their spiritual growth, to see them know Christ and be mature in Christ. In 2 Corinthians Paul says, "*Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?*" (2 Corinthians 11:29). It hurts to care and there were nights when Paul tossed and turned.

Now what makes all this possible is that Paul does not labor in his strength alone, but he is *struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me*. We carry out our commissions in God's power. Otherwise we could not do it. Notice we do not live in God's power by sitting back in the Lazy-boy recliner. Paul is laboring, struggling, and working really hard. And it is in his hard word that He receives and feels God's energy working in Him. Paul does not say "it's all up to me," but neither does he sit back and say, "God will take care of it." Knowing God's power is at work in us, we can serve God without pride or fear.

My concern with us suburban American Christians is that we are lazy, spiritually lazy. Did I offend you? Did Paul? We retreat from the high demands of the Christian faith. Our day is no different from Paul's in

requiring sweat, and suffering from Christians. No one can successfully serve Jesus Christ without working hard. Lazy believers will never fulfill the ministry the Lord has called them to.

Why would you work this hard? Only if you are clear and passionate about your purpose. What's your life about? Successful athletes play with and through pain. Are you willing to labor, to struggle, to help those in your life become mature in Christ? Success in serving the Lord requires maximum effort. And unlike most other endeavors in life, it is worth it. You can spend huge energy to win the game and get the gold, but in the end, what's it worth? Is that what your life is about? When you work really hard for Jesus, you know true satisfaction and deep joy.

Let's remind ourselves for what Paul is struggling so hard with God's energy. He restates and personalizes his struggle in chapter two verse 1. ¹ *I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.* Paul tells them that he is not just struggling for all Christians generically, but he is personally struggling hard for them. Are you honestly struggling on behalf of those in your life to see them know Christ and grow to maturity in Him? Why was Paul struggling? What's his goal? He says it freshly in verses 2-3, ² *My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,* ³ *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* In short, he wants them **To fully understand Christ**

Paul's purpose is that they will be encouraged in heart and united in love. Are you purposing that for your family, your life group? It would be awesome for your family or your group of friends to be encouraged in heart and united in love. It will not happen without a struggle, without hard labor in God's power, but it is worth it.

Ultimately Paul wants the Christians to fully know Jesus Christ, the full riches of complete understanding. In words that echo back to verse 27, Paul says he wants them to have *the full riches of complete understanding that they might know the mystery of God, namely Christ.* What is the word of God that Paul proclaimed? What is the mystery? What are the gloriously rich treasures which the apostle gives his life to communicate? His answer is extraordinary in its conciseness. The whole matter can be put in a word, or

rather a name; Christ. I want you to know Christ. I want you to experience Him this Fall in our journey through Colossians. I see these verses as expressing the theme of the whole book. I want us to experience the full riches of complete understanding, to know Christ, the hope of glory.

In Christ are *hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. Paul may have been drawing from terms used by false teachers. He shared this message with the Colossians he tells them, *so that no one may deceive you with fine-sounding arguments*.

So we are not deceived

Over and over through the centuries words such as “mystery, wisdom, knowledge and hidden treasure” have been used by those who want to convince people that their group, seminar or workshop will give the secret truth to maturity in Christ. Christ is sufficient. No need to supplement with philosophy or special deep teachings. Christ is as deep as it gets. If you want deep treasures of wisdom and knowledge, look to Christ. He is the source of all true depth in wisdom and knowledge. We have a long way to go to explore all that Christ is.

Thankfully the Colossians were not deceived, but firm in their faith. Paul says to the Colossians that he delights *to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is*
but firm in faith

The word “delight” is the same word translated “rejoice” in verse 24, the start of our passage. Paul begins and ends with joy. He delights to suffer for them and delights to see the results of his labor in their orderly, firm faith.

Both “orderly” and “firm” are military metaphors perhaps suggested by Paul’s imprisonment. “Orderly” refers to a military formation as a “solid front.” “Firm” means thick, solid, like a foundation. As good soldiers they are standing firm and standing together in order.

In your commission, your setting, do you have this clear passionate purpose? Are you working hard to communicate the full riches of Christ so that yours are not deceived, but firm in their faith? Think about your children, grandchildren, friends, co-workers, members of your life group. Will you struggle for others in all Christ’s power so they fully understand Christ?

Paul had a God-given commission that involved the Colossians; your commission does not include the long-gone city of Colosse, nor probably any part of the Roman Empire. But you have a God-given commission as do I. If you are a Christian, you are God's servant commissioned like Paul to know Christ fully and to make Christ fully known. If you fully accept your commission you will rejoice in suffering for Christ's body. You will fully communicate the Word of God to make known the glorious riches of Christ. You will communicate Christ with all wisdom to present everyone fully mature in Christ. And you will struggle for others with all Christ's power so they fully understand Christ. I want you to know Christ fully and fully make Him known.

To whom are you commissioned? The answer is not "no one." I challenge you to accept your commission. I challenge you to move beyond superficial, suburban, comfortable Christianity to a deeper calling to struggle in God's power to present people mature in Christ. You cannot help others well unless you yourself know God's Word and personally experience the glorious riches of Christ. If you are going to mature in Christ, you must know God's Word in its fullness. If you want to go deep in wisdom and knowledge, then you need to know Christ. He must be your purpose and your passion. Life is about Jesus. He has all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is full of glorious riches. He is the hope of glory. He is the mystery. He is my supreme. He is my King. He is my purpose. He is my passion.

What's your life about?

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