

Colossians 1:24 - 2:7

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[0 : 00] Great, please do be seated, and if you've got a Bible, please turn it back open to Colossians chapter 1, verse 24, which we read earlier.

Obviously, we're jumping into Paul's letter to the church in Colossae here. I don't know if you know it or not, but Paul, he's never actually been to this church before, which I think what he writes is all the more striking.

Paul had never been but a man called Epaphras. He's heard the gospel from Paul, and he's gone back and planted a church in Colossae. In this church, they loved Jesus.

In his letter, Paul has been reminding them that he expects Christians to grow. He prays that they grow and keep growing and keep growing, and this growth comes from when they learn more of what they already have in Jesus.

That to grow up in Christ, they dig down deeper into knowing him. But in Colossae, some other teachers had arrived.

[1 : 08] They'd come alongside, begin to teach something a little bit different. They thought, yeah, Jesus, he's great. The gospel, that's great, but that's how you start in the Christian life. You start with Jesus in the gospel, but there's more to experience.

A secret knowledge, greater spiritual things. And what they were doing was undermining Epaphras and Paul and the gospel that they taught.

And so the church was in peril of moving away from Jesus. See, Paul warns the church that they are in danger of being taken captive.

Sometimes when people go abroad on work and a business trip or something like that, perhaps, they sometimes get kidnap training. Things to look out for, things to watch out for, so that they themselves don't get kidnapped.

Kidnap training. And that's what we've got this evening. Kidnap training. Exciting stuff. Better think of that when you came to church this evening. Doing kidnap training. Let me pray.

[2 : 14] And then ask God for his help. And then we'll look at the passage. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule.

May your spirit be our teacher. May your glory be our great desire. Amen.

So Paul walks up to start his seminar on kidnap training. And he's got five Ps for us this evening. Because it's an evening service. He goes a bit wild rather than three. Five Ps for us.

The protection of gospel ministry. The practice of gospel ministry. The purpose of gospel ministry. The pattern of gospel ministry. And finally, the plea of the gospel minister.

Let's look at the first one. The protection of gospel ministry. Knowing the real Christ. Look why Paul writes this section. Look at verse 4 of chapter 2.

[3 : 17] Why he gives this training. I tell you this. I tell you this. So that no one may deceive you. By fine sounding arguments. Or down at verse 8.

Just after where he finished reading. See to it. That no one takes you captive. There are ministries that will enable you and help you to rejoice in the sufficiency of Jesus.

Ministries who will help you and teach us. And you'll listen to them and you'll say yes. Not because they are great. But because they point you to Jesus and he is great. But there's ministries and ministers who will lead you away.

Often disguised very well. Very religious. And we have voices, don't we? Telling us every day nearly about Jesus. I reckon a church like this.

Most of us will read part of a Christian book perhaps. A blog post. An article. Some will listen to something about Jesus. There's a sermon online. A podcast. A YouTube clip.

[4 : 27] Who do we listen to? How do I know what's helpful? How do I know what isn't helpful? Well how does Paul train us in this passage?

He trains us the same way people are trained to support counterfeit money. This is the first thing I got taught in systematic theology ETS. Believe it or not. Here's a quote from Bob Aykroyd. Agents don't learn to spot counterfeit money by studying the counterfeits. They study genuine bills until they master the look of the real thing. Then when they see fake money they recognize it. That same idea is what Paul wants to do here in this passage. He wants to show us the real deal of gospel ministry. So that we can spot the fake. That's applicable to us isn't it? As a congregation we're technically vacant. So who do we call? We don't want a David duplicate. Although great the man is.

[5 : 35] We don't want an either impersonator. We want the real deal. The real them in what they teach. And also in how they labor.

To his language of Colossians we want someone who proclaims the supremacy. The sufficiency of Jesus. Someone who will help us leave delighting in Jesus. Someone who will suffer like Jesus. But doing so strengthened by him. To protect us from being taken captive by fine sounding arguments. This is the protection of gospel ministry. Listening to somebody who gives us Christ. If that's what gospel ministry does. Then what exactly is gospel ministry?

Let's see where Paul goes on in the second session. Look at the practice of gospel ministry. Which is proclaiming Christ. Have a look at verse 25. Of chapter 1.

[6 : 38] I have become a servant by the commission God gave me. To present to you the word of God in its fullness. Verse 28. He that is Jesus is the one we proclaim.

Admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom. So that we may. Lost in place. So that we may present everyone fully mature.

In Christ. So what's the basic work then of gospel ministry? It's presenting the word of God in its fullness. Proclaiming Jesus. Admonishing and teaching.

They're the characteristics of how it happens. See Paul's main work. It's quite simple isn't it? It's to communicate a message. Not to do miracles.

Not to heal. Not to say how much God has seemingly blessed him. Paul says his job is to present Jesus. To proclaim Jesus.

[7 : 35] The true message that produces hope in heaven. And faith in Christ and love for all the saints. The true message of the all sufficient supreme savior. Who loves me.

Who loves you. And I think you can imagine it in Clossie. The false teachers they hear this and they go. It's just classic Paul.

It's just words. Words upon words upon words. Or think that perhaps today. People don't listen to preaching anymore. Why have something where somebody stands up and opens up the Bible. People want more today. We need to offer them more. Yes tell them a guess about Jesus. But people need more. Poor old Paul.

And his pitiful words. Or are they? See Paul's clever here. He's pinching the buzzwords of the false teachers.

[8 : 35] Presenting the word of God in all its fullness. Well what does that mean? Proclaiming Christ in all its fullness is not just repeating the gospel story so to speak week after week.

But it's taking the text. It's wringing it dry. To show the wonders of Christ in that passage. To make them clear and to show them beautifully.

To unfold all that we can know about Jesus from his words. And to bring that to bear in our lives. So that our whole lives can be shaped by the one who fills all things. In preaching Christ in all its fullness it means that there's no shortcut here for people who preach and teach.

Whether that's the person here or the person in Sunday school. There's no shortcut for people who are too busy to prepare well. Or too lazy to be bothered.

You see preaching Christ in all its fullness. It helps us from being tempted to focus on other things. Why not have times when anyone can speak? Why not have six songs back to back with lovely changes between them?

[9 : 48] Why not spend most of our time on social justice issues? These are good things in and of themselves perhaps. But they're not the best things.

They're not the things that cause us to grow as Christians. And to delight in Jesus. Instead we want to listen like Mary at the feet of Jesus.

But not just here in this setting. But in our house groups. In one-to-ones. In those conversations. After service with coffee. See as we proclaim Jesus in all of these.

We are partaking in Jesus' great mission. To give people Christ. That enables them to grow. And look at this mission we've been given. Look at verses 26 and 27.

The glorious riches of this mystery. And in chapter 2 as well. Verse 2 of chapter 2 as well.

[10:51] In order that we know the mystery of God. I don't know if I read that. I'm like, that sounds exciting doesn't it? A mystery of God.

See the gospel. It's not a mystery that it's a secret. Like who's behind the mask and Scooby-Doo. But it's a mystery that it was undiscoverable by man. And needs to be revealed.

And what is this mystery? Well it's God's plan to save the world. And reconcile sinful people to himself. That's God's mystery to us. And that's the message that we hold out to people.

I'm quite, um. Not a film buff. But I enjoy going to see films in cinema.

I've got three young kids. So those days are very, very rare. To say the least. But I love twists in films. I think the best twists in films. Are moments.

[11:49] Which almost become like. Where were you when moments. When you watch them.

Because they impact us so much. Which greatest twist. I think in a film of all time. Those famous four words.

I am your father. I bet you remember now. When you first saw that in Star Wars. Luke, I am your father.

Things like that. They hit us. And we remember them. Where were you when moments. Imagine sitting in Colossae. And you hear. This being read out. The son is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created. Things in heaven and on earth. Visible and invisible. Whether thrones or powers. Or rulers or authorities.

All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things. And in him all things hold together. And then the reader goes on a few more lines.

[12:49] In this letter and says. To them that is you people in Colossae Gentiles. 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. I think when that was first read out. Joel's would have dropped in that place.

You're saying. He. That. The firstborn of all creation. The image of the invisible God. The one who is above all powers.

He's in me. Paul here says. Yes. I bet you'd remember hearing that for the first time.

Perhaps that's you this evening. That if you are a Christian. By the Holy Spirit. This Jesus I read of is in you. Because that's the gospel. God with us.

[13:52] And this mystery. This promise is brought to people. Not by anything secret. Not by a secret way to connect with God. Instead by. A simple proclamation.

Of the word of God. And just think. About that phrase as well. Christ in you. Present privilege. Now. The hope of glory. Future confidence. Is there any wonder. That this is described as. Glorious riches here. Because Paul's saying that we have Christ.

And there is no greater treasure than him. And this isn't something for a few elites. Or the super spiritual. But said in verse 28. We see it's for all believers. So what does that mean for us then? Well it means that because we are. United to Christ. And he is in us. Our future. It's certain. It's secure. It means that we will stand before him.

[14:49] Face to face. And live with him. And know him. And see him. It means that you want to learn. It means that.

When it feels like you're in the pit of darkness. There's always hope amongst the darkness. Because. The risen Christ lives in you. This is the power of gospel proclamation.

This is why we meet together. This is why we want ministry that preaches and proclaims Jesus. Preaching Jesus in his fullness where nothing's hidden back.

So that we may grow in knowing the treasure of wisdom and knowledge that is Christ. This is the practice of gospel ministry.

Proclaiming Christ. What's the purpose of it then? What does Paul say in his third session? The purpose of gospel ministry. Well he says it's to present believers mature in Christ.

[15:48] It was great walking in here this morning and seeing some people used to be involved in Christian unions here in Aberdeen. I used to be a staff worker with UCCF down in Dundee.

And sometimes people might complain that CUs are churches done badly. My response to that sometimes would be well what's the purpose of a CU? CU's have mission statements. They usually use something like. We exist. To provide an opportunity for every student on campus. To hear and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Isn't that brilliant?

Isn't that a great mission? Something to invest your time in while you're at university. Evangelism. Sharing the gospel on campus. The sole purpose of the church. Because the church is a lifelong place for Christian discipleship.

Look at Paul's purpose for the gospel ministry. Look at verse 28. The end of that verse. So that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

[16:55] Paul has the false teachers in Colossians crosshairs here. Paul's saying the gospel of Jesus. That's all you need. Not just once but every day for maturity. I love hearing stories about people being saved.

It's great news isn't it? When we hear about people repenting and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul wants people to be saved. But his desire is for something more than that.

His desire is to see everyone mature. And that's the thing. That's the question for us. Is growth as a Christian a serious concern for us?

It's of the utmost importance of Paul. He's suffering for it. See how does this growth happen?

Perhaps having some rules are helpful.

Certain ways to dress. What to watch on TV. When to pray. Maybe we need a mystical experience. Some sort of vivid dream. Maybe we need to hear God through music.

[18:02] These things they can all seem impressive. Perhaps seem effective. Rules. Well rules are a handy gauge aren't they?

To see how we're doing. We can compare ourselves against them. An experience. Well that's my experience. Who are you to say that I'm wrong? So in verse 28.

Paul says we need to be pointed to Jesus. In the scriptures. The word of God is sufficient for the work of God amongst us. We don't need a special technique but to have the Bible opened up. Read. And the spirit making us more like Christ as we hear his word. We let God's word do God's work. So if that's how I mature then how do I know that I'm growing in maturity?

How many of us here have said or thought something like grow up and stop acting like children? I remember saying that to my three old ones and remembering. You're three.

[19:06] You are a child. What do we mean by that though when we think it? We mean stop bickering. Stop fighting. Stop messing about. In other words.

Be mature. See Paul's goal is maturity and for the Colossians that looks like being united in love.

This is the thing that's going to keep them safe. See Paul says at the start of chapter 2 that his goal 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. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

See these guys they were in danger of splitting apart as a church. Church splits are horrible things. I hope that none of you have ever had to live through one of those before.

But when any new teaching comes in. Unfortunately the result sometimes it's a breach of unity.

Some of us may think back to things like the Toronto blessing perhaps.

[20:19] Or the belief that the Lord is doing a new thing which is contrary to what he says in his words. See any new teaching that comes into a church is bound to cause disunity.

So Paul is concerned, really concerned that they stay united in love. Maturity looks like having the wisdom to know how to handle difficult things. To have unity of love.

That is related to the truth of the word of God. They are to be of one heart. Leading to one mind.

Knowing that all they need to love and grow as a Christian is found in Christ.

Such as Paul is there. Paul steps back. He's been through his first three sessions on his kidnap training. And Paul wants the Colossians to be saved.

And this happens by proclaiming Christ which enables them to be mature. And this maturity, it's a communal thing. It's not a me and God thing. But it's an us together as a church thing.

[21 : 22] Learning how everything we need to live and grow as a Christian is found in Christ. This is why Paul is doing what he's doing in his kidnap training. But this isn't all he's got to say in his training though.

There are things that you can't learn by listening to somebody online. Someone might walk the walk. But can they talk the talk as well?

Let's look at the pattern of gospel ministry. Suffering like Christ and strengthened by Christ. Here's a discussion question for you for your walk home or in the car this evening.

What Christians have most helped you? What Christians in your life have most helped you? I wonder who you might say.

Some of us might think guys perhaps like Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones and his series on Romans. Some of us might go even further back. Guys like Calvin and Luther. Or more modern guys perhaps like John Piper or Tim Keller.

[22 : 31] Great men of God. But I hope high on that list are people that you know personally. Look at verse 24 of chapter 1.

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering 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.

Don't you but you read that and I go what is that about? Let's think about what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean this. Christ's death is full.

It's sufficient. It lacks nothing. We know that is true. It is finished he cried. So what is lacking in his afflictions then? What's lacking?

A personal presentation of that suffering. But more than that I think we see here. There's a connection isn't there between Paul's suffering. And Christ's affliction. What I think this means is that God expects the gospel minister.

[23 : 41] To experience some of the suffering that Christ experienced. When we offer the Christ of the cross. Or as one preacher puts it. The suffering love of Christ for sinners.

Is seen in the suffering love of his people for sinners. Paul is saying here. I will fill up what is lacking. I will take the whippings and the lashings.

I will take the moaning and the mockery. I will take the hit. So that I can present Christ in all his glory to you. And Paul is not buttering himself up here.

He's just showing what authentic ministry looks like. This isn't PastorPaul.tv. This isn't the visions he's had. This isn't a list of rules to obey and you'll be a great Christian.

Paul is saying I will suffer like Christ. As I speak about him. So that you may see Christ's love for you.

[24 : 43] The pattern of gospel ministry. It's suffering. Look at verse 29 as well. Chapter 1. It's also struggling as well.

Everything Paul does is about Jesus. And this is the amazing thing. In some ways. He works this hard for people he's never met before.

I find that immensely challenging. He works this hard for people he's never met. So that they may know Jesus. But notice the end of verse 29.

Paul labors with all his might. Strengthened by Jesus. Relying on Jesus. Prayerfully trusting Jesus. So what does that look like then for us today?

Well as Jonathan Edwards writes. The preacher places the word of God. Before his congregation. In all of its true colors. Not sure how smart. He perhaps is.

[25 : 50] But for them to see what's in front of them. To be helpers. Of joy. And that's a great description for a Christian minister. Somebody who is a helper.

Of our joy. As they give us Christ. I think a good sermon every week. Ends with two things. One is you leave going.

Of course that's what a text means. And the other thing is. That's so simple. I think I could do that as well. But getting to that point.

It's hard work every week. Physically. Spiritually. Emotionally. Praying is hard. Preparing is hard. Speaking is hard. Listening is hard.

Processing is hard. Where does the gospel worker go for help each week? Where do the listeners go for help each week? It's got to be Christ.

[26 : 49] There's no quick fix. See ministers. They aren't. They're not wise Jedi masters who live aloof from everybody else.

But they're servants. Slaves. Slaves. Under the church. Seeking to present Jesus in his glory. Slaves on their knees.

All of the leaders of the church. Seeking to present Jesus every week. So that we may know by the spirit of God. The impact of the greatness of the Jesus we read of in Colossians.

So that means that you need to know who stands behind you. You need to know who it is you're listening to. You need to know who it is that's serving you in the church.

So let's recap what Paul's saying. How do you know you're listening to the real deal? It means that if you're feeling flat.

[27 : 49] You hear about the supremacy of Jesus. And it does nothing. Then the person Paul describes is the sort of person you want to keep listening to. It means that if you feel you've been taken captive by false teaching.

Or watched some stuff. You're not sure it's helpful. What we see in Paul's description is what you need to look for. What does a Christ-centered ministry and ministry look like?

What kind of teaching will feed my need for more of Jesus? We define teaching as exemplified by someone like Paul. Presenting the gospel in all its fullness that we may mature.

Suffering for the church and strengthened by Christ. So that we may not be taken captive. And so it's if Paul closes his kidnap training binder.

And he ends with his final words. The plea of the gospel minister. Continue in Christ Jesus. If you've fallen asleep this evening.

[28 : 54] If you've fallen asleep this evening. A few heads looked up there. If you can't remember anything. Just remember this. Look at verses 6 to 7 of chapter 2.

It's a summary of everything so far in the letter. So then. Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord. Continue to live your lives in him.

Rooted and built up in him. Strengthened in the faith as you were taught. And overflowing with thankfulness. Paul's summary says.

Stick with Jesus. Be built up by digging deeper. Mind the depths of the richness of God's word. He says listen to Jesus proclaimed.

Become ever more established in the faith. And as that happens. Watch thankfulness abound. As we set our eyes on him. Because he is the object of our faith.

[29 : 55] He is the strength of our faith. He is the sustainer of our faith. He is the goal of our faith. Because in Colossians you see he is everything. He is supreme.

And he will keep you. Because he is in you. Let me pray. Lord Jesus we thank you that you are. The head of your church. That you lead your church. By your spirit. Through your word. That all who the father has given you.

You will not let go of. You will not let go of. Yet we thank you that. We are reminded here that we are in danger.

Of being taken captive. Taken captive. Not by things which are obvious. But things which are seductive.

[31 : 07] Things that have. The hint of truth about them. Things which will. Lure us away. You will not let go of. The hint. But thank you that you have given us.

All we need. We have your word. And your spirit. And you have given us your church. To look after us. To protect us.

To help us to grow in you. so keep us safe we ask grant us wisdom to know what to listen to who to listen to protect us we ask as your people here in this period of vacancy may you help us to guard our unity based upon the truth of your words Lord Jesus thank you that you will hold all those who belong to you fast you will not let us go help us to fix our eyes on you because you are everything to us that's in your name we pray Amen