

Colossians Ch1v21-27 - Servants of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] And for the rest of us, if we turn in our Bibles to Colossians chapter 1.

So we're looking together at this very short letter.

And I've got copies of the letter to the Colossians. If any of you want to get a big overall picture of what Colossians is all about.

Some of the key themes, key ideas, practical applications. Then come and ask me. I have a few copies left. It's a good way of just reading every so often.

Just to kind of get the big idea of what's going on. It'll help you in your studies. And of course we're going through the same letter in our home groups.

[1 : 21] So I encourage you to get involved in that. If you're not, it's a great way to meet with others and be encouraged. So we're going to read this morning from Colossians chapter 1, verse 21 to verse 27.

So let's hear God's word to us. Colossians 1, starting at verse 21. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation, if you continue in your faith established and firm and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

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.

[2 : 52] I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

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.

Well, let's pray and we'll ask for God's help to us. Father, you give us so much.

You have given us health and strength to be here. We've eaten, we've had a good rest. We are blessed.

But yet we are completely and utterly dependent on you. And so we pray and ask for the work and the help of your Holy Spirit to be at work in us and in us together as your people, so that the words we hear and the things we look at together would lead to a transformation of our life and a new outlook for our life that will all be built around the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 32] So help us today and encourage us. In Jesus' name we pray this. Amen. Well, Colossians is all about a new church, a brand new church.

They had heard the true message of the gospel. A guy we met at the beginning of the book called Epaphras had come to the town of Colossae and had shared the good news of Jesus and many people in that town had trusted in Jesus.

However, they're under pressure. They're under pressure to turn away from Jesus because just as they had started, other people were coming in and were questioning their faith.

They were bringing other messages, other philosophies, new teachings that said, well, you know, Jesus is good but let me show you something better than that. So they were under pressure.

So Paul the Apostle writes them a letter of encouragement and his whole message to this church can be summarised for us in chapter 2, verse 6.

[5 : 48] So just have a look ahead there at chapter 2, verse 6. This is his big message to the church. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him.

You received Christ, now continue in Christ. You started with Christ, now finish with Christ. Don't move on from the gospel.

Always go back to the gospel. Go back to Christ. Now, what that church faced is no different to Carigalline Baptist Church, is it?

Because we face pressure all the time to move on from the gospel. You know, maybe following Jesus is not that great after all. Perhaps what others are saying is true and I've got it wrong. So to help us and encourage us to keep going in the faith, we need to go back to the gospel. So look at verse 23, the middle of verse 23.

[7 : 02] He reminds the church. He says, This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

So we're going to look at two big ideas from what we read just a moment again. First, we're going to look at what the gospel is. Knowing the gospel. And then second, serving the gospel.

So know the gospel and serve the gospel. First, know the gospel. Gospel simply means good news. And in this context, it's the good news of what God has done for us. So four words, four ideas that summarize for us really well what the gospel is all about.

First, we are alienated from God. Look at verse 21. Once you were, so before you followed Jesus, once you were alienated from God.

[8 : 12] Now you know what that is, don't you? I'm sure you've experienced it to be alienated, where you're left on the outside, where you don't belong. You're shut out.

Well, that's how our relationship with God was. We were excluded, separated, alienated. But why? Why were we shut out?

Well, not because of what God did, but because of how we lived. Look carefully at the structure of verse 21. Look how it reads.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.

Our behaviour, the way we conduct our lives, makes us enemies of God, which in turn leaves us alienated from God. Our choosing to use people selfishly for our gain and our pleasure, our desire to lie and gossip and, well, take revenge and not forgive.

[9 : 23] Our behaviour makes us enemies of God in our minds. That is, we resist God's authority over us and his ownership of us.

It's like we've all built a huge wall, a reinforced concrete wall that says, God, keep out. You're not getting in here.

So rather than enjoying friendship with the God who made us and rather than being at peace with the God who is Lord over my life and Lord over my death, well, we're separated from the God who loves us.

We're alienated. So that's the first word. Alienated. Second, we are reconciled to God.

Look at verse 22. But now, so something wonderful has happened. Something has been done about our exclusion. But now, God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.

[10 : 37] God has wonderfully made it possible for us to be brought back into relationship with God. Rather than his enemies, we can be his friends instead of being shut out.

We're now welcomed in. No longer excluded, but reconciled. And how does all that happen? Well, look at verse 22.

He tells us, by Christ's physical body through death. Yes, it's true. Jesus actually did die.

Through the physical, real death of Jesus Christ, we were reconciled to God. God came to us in Christ and became our substitute, taking our place, taking my sin so that I might receive Christ's status.

He was excluded so that I could be included. He was alienated from God so that I could be reconciled to God. God, from the outside, smashes down that reinforced concrete wall that says, God, keep out.

[11 : 51] And now he reaches out across with a handshake of friendship. He throws his arms around us in an embrace of acceptance.

He opens up the door wide and he prepares a meal of welcome. We are reconciled. But there's more to this wonderful news.

We are transformed by God. Let's read all of verse 22. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from

accusation.

You see, God not only reconciles, he radically transforms us. Rather than treating us as rebellious sinners, he now treats us as his treasured son.

Look at how God now sees us. We are holy in his sight. Holy is to be set apart for God.

[13:03] It means we now belong to God. We're his treasured possession. We live as his special people. We're now, secondly, without blemish.

Our evil behaviour was one big blemish across our life that alienated us from God. But that blemish is now dealt with. It's been covered over, if you like, with Christ's purity.

We've been made clean. And third, we have been freed from accusation. The guilt that was ours has been taken by Christ so that we are now set free.

We're no longer living under God's judgement. We are declared innocent. This is our new status. This is our new identity. We are a transformed people. So we're alienated, we're reconciled, we're transformed, and we are dependent on God.

[14:19] Look at verse 23. We're alienated, but we've been reconciled, we've been transformed. This is all true, verse 23, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

Well, don't you feel deflated? Having been encouraged by all that God has done, that he's reconciled me, he's transformed me, now it seems like it's all back on me again, it's all up to miserable me.

If I continue in the faith, the problem is my faith is so weak. I don't have a strong faith. In fact, I fail all the time.

I might as well give up. I haven't got the ability to keep going. Well, it's not about me and it's not about you.

It's not the quality of our faith, or the amount of our faith, or the strength of our faith, but what our faith is in. Who am I, or what am I depending on?

[15:41] We are dependent on the gospel of God. We throw ourselves on him. That little phrase in verse 23, established and firm, is helpful.

It's creating a picture in our minds. It's telling us that the gospel about Jesus is our foundation. It's established and it's firm.

It's immovable and unbreakable. It's utterly and completely dependable. The gospel is what saves us and it's the gospel that's going to keep us.

So we are encouraged, verse 23, to do not move from the hope held out from the gospel. You see, if the gospel of Jesus Christ is our foundation, if it saves us and it keeps us, why would we move on from the gospel?

In our weakness, we literally fall over in dependence on the gospel of God. We haven't got the strength to stand up and keep going.

[16:53] We fall over in our weakness and our helplessness and we fall on him. We are dependent on God. Well, maybe you're here and you're thinking, you know what, Johnny, I've had an awful week.

I've heard what you've said about the gospel, but I've messed up so much. And somehow we feel, whether we're a Christian or not a Christian, somehow we feel that we've moved from being reconciled, that somehow my messy week and my brokenness has brought me back into a position of being alienated from God.

Well, know the gospel. Learn to apply the gospel to your life. Remember, it's not about our ability, but our dependence on God. God declares you to be, through Christ, holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from accusation.

This is our new status. This is our new identity. When God looks at you, if you are falling in dependence upon him, God looks at you, and when he looks at you, he sees the perfection of his son, Jesus.

Can you get anything better than that? In your mess, and in your failure, sin, God looks at me, and he sees the perfection of his son.

[18:37] So let's together encourage one another to continue in the faith, not move from the hope held out in the gospel. It's not just information to be received for our heads.

The gospel is to be applied to our hearts every single day. Second, let's know the gospel.

Second, we serve the gospel. You see, once we know the gospel, once it's taken effect and taken root in our life and transforms us and changes us, it leads us on to people who now serve the gospel.

That's what Paul tells us. Look at the end of verse 23. He says, this is the gospel that you heard. You were alienated, you were reconciled, you were transformed, you were dependent on him. This is the gospel that you've heard and that is being proclaimed to every creature, every person, of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

[19 : 48] Now, while this is specific to the apostle Paul, I think there are principles here that help us see what it means to serve the gospel for all of us.

So, three things that help us see what serving the gospel looks like. Here's the first one. Suffer with joy. Well, I'm sure you don't feel like that, do you?

Suffer with joy. Look at verse 24. Now, I rejoice in what I'm suffering for you. Well, that can't be right.

How can you be joyful in suffering? Suffering, we know, is hard and painful. Nobody likes to suffer. Nobody chooses suffering. Well, we don't rejoice in the suffering itself, but we rejoice in what the suffering leads to.

There's a difference. We're not rejoicing in the suffering, we're rejoicing in what the suffering ultimately leads to. Now, this is a very difficult verse, and it's hard to get our heads around it.

[21 : 03] So, let me read it again, the full verse, verse 24, and we'll see what we can take from it. Now, I rejoice in what I'm 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.

So, something is lacking here, isn't there? That's clear. Something is lacking, and we need to work out what is lacking. So, two things.

First, this is what it is not saying, okay? This can't be what it means. Look at verse 23 again. He says at verse 24, I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions.

It sounds that Christ's death on the cross was somehow lacking. It seems Paul is saying, you know what, when Jesus died on the cross, it wasn't enough.

I need to add to Christ's suffering so that the work on the cross becomes effective. Well, that can't be right, can it?

[22 : 18] We've already seen that Christ's death on the cross is enough. We saw that in verse 22, that by Christ's physical body, he presents us as holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

The afflictions, the suffering that Christ endured for our sin, is sufficient. There's nothing to add to it. It's not lacking in any way at all.

It's complete, it's finished, it's final. So it can't be saying that. So what is it saying?

Well, let me read verse 24 again. He says, I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh, I'm gladly, I willingly will take on more suffering what is still lacking in regards to Christ's afflictions.

And here's what I think it is saying. That is, the reach of Christ's death is still lacking. In other words, there are loads of people all over the world who do not yet know about Christ who died on the cross, and the reconciliation and the transformation that we can have when we trust him.

[23 : 43] And for that good news of Christ's death to be made known is going to involve suffering. You see, the gospel requires servants who will be prepared to suffer for the gospel.

This is what the risen Lord Jesus said to Paul. You can follow it on screen. When he became a Christian, this is what Jesus said. This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel and I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

You see, that's what's lacking. It's the reach of Christ's death. He has died. His work is sufficient to save people, but it must be made known.

And for it to be made known, it will take suffering. That's what's happening to our mission partner in Kashmir. The note that I sent round on the WhatsApp this week.

Mickey and his wife, Kenneth, and children are facing rejection and hostility today. Their daughter is being ostracized by her classmates.

[25 : 04] Nobody wants to sit with her because she's a Christian. There's tension when he makes it known that he's a Christian. He's suffering for the gospel.

But yet at the same time, they can rejoice in their suffering because through their suffering, the gospel is being made known.

You see, to serve the gospel is not a comfortable life. It will be difficult for you and for me.

We're not always going to be liked or welcomed. It could cost you friendship and it could even cost you your job. Serving the gospel will mean suffering.

But when we suffer, we are expanding the reach of Christ's work. God is at work in you and through you. So let us take heart.

[26 : 04] Don't resist suffering, but rejoice in your suffering because God is at work.

So, how do we serve the gospel? First, we suffer with joy. Second, proclaim to all. it's a follow-on.

So, verse 25. He says, I have become its servant. I have become a servant of the gospel by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

Well, what's that? What's the fullness of the word? What's he been preaching and what's he been telling the church? Well, the answer is in verse 26. The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

Well, that's another strange one, isn't it? What's this secret that he's been keeping from the church?

What's this mystery that's kind of, you know, it's all very suspicious, isn't it?

[27 : 14] Well, the mystery is not something mysterious that we don't know what it is. no, the mystery is God's plan that his gospel would go to all people and all nations.

Look at verse 26. It has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

Well, what could that be? Well, let's go back in our Bibles all the way back to Abraham. Do you remember what God said to Abraham in Genesis?

Here it is on the screen. He said, I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and all nations will be blessed through you.

That was God's plan. That was his promise. When is that promise going to be fulfilled? When is it that all the nations of the world are going to be blessed? Well, again, look at verse 26.

[28 : 21] Over the ages and generations, over progressively, over time, it all began to unfold. It all began to be revealed as we go through scripture that Christ would be the one who would bring the blessing of reconciliation and because of Christ's coming, that now would be made known to all people.

God isn't hiding the blessing. No, it is through the gospel that the promise of blessing goes to all people. Verse 27, to them, God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches. Gentiles, we know, is a term used to describe all the nations of the world. God's. So as a servant of the gospel, Paul now is saying, I am proclaiming the gospel to all people.

And that's God's plan that he has revealed to his church, to his people, that this gospel message is to go out to everybody.

That's the mystery that has been revealed to us. God's. And that's the role of the church today.

That's our purpose. Did you know that?

[29 : 45] That we have been given a responsibility to serve the gospel and by doing that we do everything we possibly can to see that the good news spreads out and goes global.

That's why we as a church are financially committed to support Kinsale. Leticia in Marseille in the south of France.

Christian Unions Ireland, the work amongst the students. Asia Link, people serving across that great area. Mickey and his colleagues in Kashmir.

You know, this is why we've taken it upon ourselves to support Amy in Sheffield reaching the Miripuri women for Jesus. How is any of that going to happen without that financial support and commitment?

Because we've taken on board God's plan, we get it and say, yes, this is our responsibility, this is what we're about, seeing the gospel go to all people so that they too can be reconciled and transformed and brought to God.

[31 : 01] This is God's plan and purpose for his people the church. This is why we've been reconciled so that together we might serve the gospel.

So, how do we serve the gospel? We suffer with joy, we proclaim to all and we reveal the riches. riches. We reveal the riches. Look at verse 27. To then God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles to all peoples and all nations the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the

hope of glory.

As we serve the gospel, we make known the glorious riches. there's two of them, two glistening diamonds.

Here's the first one, Christ in you. Remember what we saw of Christ back in verse 19.

[32 : 12] Look at verse 19 with me. What does it say there? For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

That's Christ. All of God is in Christ. In other words, Jesus Christ is God. So when we say Christ is in you, God in all his fullness is in you.

He doesn't keep a little bit out. No, all of God in all his fullness is in you. Christ makes God a reality in our life.

The God who created us and reconciled us has taken up residence in our life. You see, God isn't remote and distant and uncaring and unkind.

No, he loves us immensely and he's made his home in our life by the person of Jesus Christ. You see, Christ in you means intimacy.

[33 : 19] He is close to you. He will never leave you. He will sustain you and provide for you. What a glorious diamond we have.

First, Christ is in you. And then look at the second diamond that we have. The hope of glory.

Remember what God has done for us?

Look at verse 12. Back to verse 12. Give joyful thanks to the Father who's qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people.

God's qualified us to share in his inheritance the new creation. Well, how can we be sure we're going to get there? Because we have the hope of glory.

our hopes, our dreams, our desires. We say things, I hope I'm going to win the lottery. I hope it's going to get better.

[34 : 22] Our hopes are never guaranteed, but gospel hope is the opposite. Gospel hope is being completely confident and absolutely assured of glory to come.

Not because I think it or say it, but because Christ has guaranteed it for us. Look at chapter 3 verse 4. Look at this with me. Chapter 3 verse 4.

Here's one to Mark. When Christ, chapter 3 verse 4, when Christ who is your life appears, that is when he comes again, what?

Then you also will appear with him in glory. Isn't that tremendous? The hope of glory means security.

What God has promised to you will be fulfilled and nothing and no one can ever take that from you. It is secure forever. These are the glorious riches we have.

[35 : 35] When a woman gets engaged, she's given a ring. Hopefully, a big glistening diamond ring. And it's symbolic, isn't it, of two things, of intimacy and security.

The future husband is saying, I am with you forever and I will keep you forever. And every time she looks at that glistening jewel in her ring, she will be reminded that she is loved.

Well, we need to take time and look at the glorious riches of the gospel and as we do, we are reminded of intimacy and security. Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This is a message that we can know and experience and it is one that we can serve with our whole life. Let's pray.

Father God, we thank you so much for the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. to think that we were alienated but now reconciled and transformed as in our weakness and hopelessness we fall in dependence upon God.

[37 : 14] Thank you for changing us and please encourage us to go on serving this gospel, serving our friends, our neighbours, our families, being willing to suffer with joy, proclaiming it to all and revealing the wonderful riches of Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Thank you God. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.