

The Life We Truly Long to Live - Colossians

1:24-2:5

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[0 : 00] Greetings from Colossians chapter 1, beginning at verse 24 and continuing on into chapter 2, up to verse 5.

And so that starts on page 1182 of the Red Church Bible. So Colossians 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.

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. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not met me personally.

[1 : 26] My 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.

I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Thank you, Chris. Let's pray, if we could, please. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the truths that are contained within. We thank you, Lord, that we have here in front of us the answer to the mysteries, that we have your full treasure trove.

We ask, Lord, that you would open our eyes, that we would see, open our ears, that we would hear. Would the seeds of your truth be sown deeply in our hearts? Would Christ be glorified?

[2 : 44] Amen. Amen. Well, superheroes have taken over Hollywood. Superheroes are invading planet Earth.

Superheroes are smashing box office records. What if we could all be a superhero? Why can't we all be superheroes? These are the headlines from several magazines back in the States a few months ago, as Marvel's Avengers Endgame literally broke global box office records, reaching \$2.5 billion in revenue in 20 days.

To put that in perspective, the next closest or the previous record holder was Avatar, which was 72 days to reach the same amount of profit. Superhero movies, in fact, over the last 10 to 15 years have gained such a following that even psychologists today have begun to weigh in on what is it that's going on?

How come superhero films in particular are reaching more than just comic fans? How are they reaching people of all ages? How are they reaching people from all different walks of life?

And they're starting to zoom in on some things which are unique but common to all of humanity. They say that in superhero movies, we find a person who has a purpose.

[4 : 06] And they're out to fulfill some sort of purpose. And they realize at some point that they can't do it alone. And so then they introduce a love interest or a partner.

Batman gets his Robin. Or in the case of the Avengers, they get a whole team of superheroes. They gather together and then they find this energy that is supernatural to them.

And that this energy through this community helps them to fulfill their purpose, whether it's to overcome evil or save the world. Once again, we've been saved so many times by the superheroes.

We owe them such a debt of gratitude. And in the next movie, I bet you they save the world again. But they fulfill this purpose through their community and this supernatural energy.

And psychologists are saying that that is connecting with humans because we too have these same desires. That we want to have a sense of purpose.

[5 : 03] That we want to belong to a community. And that we need the energy to overcome life's obstacles. Last week, we looked at Colossians 1, 15-23.

And we saw that Jesus Christ, Paul says, is the Lord of all creation and new creation. And that new creation is the church. They are Christians, his people.

And this week, Paul is going to start to say, because of who Jesus Christ is, that's our main idea, because of who Christ is, we can, as new creation, begin to live as we truly long to live.

Because of who Jesus Christ is, we can begin to live as we truly long to live. Specifically, Paul is going to point out to these three things. That we have a purpose, the purpose we desire, Paul is going to speak to.

He is going to speak about the community we crave. And then the energy we need. The purpose we desire, the community we crave, and the energy we need.

[6 : 09] So first, Paul speaks to the purpose we desire. In 2013 article in Psychology Today, they said that the need for purpose, the need for purpose is one of the defining characteristics of human beings.

That human beings desperately desire purpose and suffer serious psychological difficulties when we don't have it. That's part of why we connect with superhero movies, because they've got a sense of purpose.

And to be human means to desire to have some sort of purpose. They say when you have a strong sense of purpose, life is less complicated.

It's less stressful. You become monofocused. You have a singular focus. And like an arrow flying towards its target, you are taught and strong and aimed at an objective.

But often our purposes in this life, they become muddled. They become confused. They become disappointing or they are found to be without purpose when we're honest with ourselves.

[7 : 19] So it's no wonder that in a recent survey, the Barna Group found that two-thirds of people who come to church, they do so for the first time looking to find a sense of purpose.

If you're new here today, you're welcome. We're glad that you're here. Odds are that maybe you're looking for a sense of purpose. And that even people who continue within the church, within the faith, we still struggle with what is my purpose.

It's because we desire to have a purpose in life. Paul speaks to this purpose when he says here in Colossians that as new creation, the purpose that we so desperately desire that God has put in front of us is to be presented fully mature in Christ.

He says in Colossians 1.28, Christ is the one that they proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that they may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

That is our purpose as new creation, to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

[8 : 34] To be as conformed to the image of Jesus as is humanly possible to be presented fully mature in Christ. In fact, there's several catechisms out there.

Many will say, what is the chief end or what is the purpose of mankind? The answer will be to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And we can ask, well, how is God most glorified?

And I would argue, God is most glorified in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. God is most glorified in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the more we are conformed to the image of Christ, the more we are fully mature in Christ, the more God is glorified in who we are. And you say, well, what does that mean to be fully mature in Christ?

Do I need to look like the picture? Do I need to have the long flowing hair? Or should my baby have a halo over their head? What does that mean to be fully mature in Christ? Or to be conformed to the image of Christ?

[9 : 38] Paul speaks to two specific things. There's several, but two Paul speaks to here are to enjoy God's presence in unashamed purity and serve His will and gladness.

It's interesting. Both are purposes which we were originally created for. In Genesis 1 and 2, we see Adam and Eve naked and unashamed. They're unashamed in God's presence in their purity.

And we see them working and keeping the garden. They're serving the Lord. Even before sin, they're serving the Lord. Both are fractured by the fall.

And then both are spoken to by Paul here in Colossians as being possible in this life, on this earth, and then in their fullness in the world to come.

So enjoying God's presence in unashamed purity. Originally, Adam and Eve do that. But then in the fall, we see in Genesis 3, 8-10, that man and his wife, they heard the sound of the Lord coming in the cool of the day.

[10 : 38] They had sinned, and they heard God coming, and so they hid. And the Lord calls out to him. He says, where are you? Adam says, I heard you coming, and I hid.

I was afraid. He had lost his purity. He was ashamed. He was afraid.

And Paul says in Colossians 1, 22, that God has reconciled us back to Christ's body through death to present us wholly in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

And then in Revelation 21, in the new heaven and the new earth, we read that from the throne, they say, look, God is dwelling among his people. He is with them.

They are his people, and God himself is with them and is their God. We return to the state of unashamed and pure in God's presence, restored to the way we were supposed to be.

[11 : 43] There's an interesting little book called Practicing the Presence of God. And in it, the author talks about a man named Brother Lawrence, and he says, this guy, as he goes along his day, any time, any time, he thinks of a sin he's committed, he just stops, and he just prays and confesses that sin, and then he thanks God for his forgiveness in Christ, and he goes right back to whatever he was doing.

Because that's how simple it is for a believer. That any time, no matter what you're doing, when the enemy accuses you of something, you can just stop and go, yeah, that was wrong, I shouldn't have done that. Please forgive me, Lord, and thank you for the forgiveness I have in Christ, and continue right about your business in unashamed purity in the presence of God.

Paul also says that we are to serve God's will and gladness. That's part of what it means to be fully mature in Christ. Again, we see this in original creation.

As Adam and Eve, they work the garden. And then in Genesis 3.17, God curses the land because of sin. And yet, somehow in the midst of that, Paul's able to write in Colossians 1.24-25 that I rejoice in what I am suffering for you.

He says, I rejoice in what I am suffering for you. Somehow, in gladness, he is able to serve God despite the fact that he is still in a fallen world.

[13 : 17] And ultimately, in the world to come, in Revelation 22.3, it still says that we will serve God. It says, no longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him.

We will be fully mature in Christ, serving God in gladness. So what does it mean to have a purpose? It means to be conformed to the image of Christ, to be presented fully mature in Christ, namely, to enjoy God's presence in unashamed purity, and to serve His will in gladness.

This is the purpose we have as Christians. And so let me just pause and ask you, what is your purpose? What is your purpose in life?

Here's the thing about Christianity that I love, is you don't have to change what you're doing or where God has you to fulfill that purpose.

Whatever vocation you're in, whatever your Monday through Saturday looks like, and Sunday too, if you have to work Sunday, wherever God's got you, you can still do those things and serve this purpose.

[14 : 32] You can be fully matured in Christ right where He has you. But we do have to ask, what is our purpose? And oftentimes we have to continually come back to that because we drift.

We drift. I know I spent a lot of time this year even just reflecting on that myself. Sometimes one of the dangers in ministry or in anything you do within the church or within Christianity or even in your workplace and you're working is you start to think, I'm doing this for God.

And we forget about the greatest thing that could ever be done, which has been done in Jesus Christ. When we get tricked into thinking, I'm doing something for God rather than, you know what, God is most glorified in the person and work of Jesus Christ and He's called me to be matured in Him, to be conformed to His image.

And I want you to notice some of the words Paul uses here, striving, contending, suffering towards this image. It's not something that just happens overnight. It takes time.

And I'm not talking about our legal standing. I'm not talking about our justification before God. I'm talking about our progressive sanctification, our maturing in Christ. And we naturally know it takes time to mature.

[15 : 58] You've probably seen my little one-year-old starting to walk around. He's just getting going. And I find it interesting that when he took his first couple steps and fell, nobody yelled at him.

We cheered for him because he took a couple steps. And then even now, he'll take 7, 8, 9, 10 and you see it coming and he's leaning and he's leaning and you're like, oh, Toby, Toby.

And boom, he falls over. And we still, ah, good job, Toby. All right, if an adult, if a 40-year-old came in here and took eight steps and fell over, we probably wouldn't cheer for that person.

But for someone who's young and maturing, we would. And we recognize that it's 8, 9, 10 steps today and next week it might be 11, 12 steps.

It takes time. And Cassie and I will hold his hand while he's walking because we recognize he's maturing. He's just getting into this.

[16:58] And it's the same in our faith. Becoming fully matured in Christ takes time and also takes a community.

Like I said, Cassie and I will hold his hands. We don't say, oh, you've got four steps down. You go ahead. What do we call it? Sidewalk in America. You guys call it pavement. We don't say, you just go right along the street there, Toby.

You got this now. Four or five steps fell over. Ooh, glad he didn't go in the road that time. No, we grab his hands and we guide him along as a family, as a community. And that's what Paul speaks of next.

He speaks to the community we crave. Notice, everything in this passage is in the plural. Everything so far has been in the plural. Even the authorship of Colossians is in the plural.

Paul and Timothy working together. And if you look to the end of Colossians, if you look to chapter 4, you'll see there's a whole bunch of dudes. There's the California right there.

[18:00] There's a whole bunch of dudes at the end. And they're all working together. There's a bunch of people in community working together. And then if you look back in Colossians 1-2, who's he writing to?

God's holy people, plural, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, plural. So everywhere we're reading where Paul says, you, we should interpret that to mean as they say in Texas, y'all.

That's who Paul's writing to. Y'all. I want to see you dudes as we say in California. Or y'all as they say in Texas. We want to see, how do you say the plural in Ireland? Ye.

There we go. We want to see ye fully matured in Christ. It's plural. It's a community of people. And it is the community that we crave.

In Colossians 2-2, Paul says this, he says, my goal is that they, that's all Christians, 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.

[19:14] Paul says that they, that churches, that Christians, are to be encouraged in heart while being knit together in love. And you'll notice in 1-28, he says that this is happening as he's teaching and admonishing in all wisdom.

That's him and the other apostles, the leaders in the church. And if you look at Colossians 3-16, he calls the church in Colossians, in Colossae, to do the same. To teach and admonish in all wisdom.

So he says what, what we, the apostles, are doing is the same thing that y'all, the church, ye, the church should be doing. You dudes are supposed to do what the apostles do because you're in community together.

That's the community we crave. That's the community that God has put His people into as they fulfill His purpose in their life, which is to be matured in Christ.

And he says the way we do this is as a community, we assure each other through our growing understanding of the gospel. That's Paul's next point about the community we crave is that we assure each other, we build each other up, we help fight the doubts that come at us by helping each other grow in our understanding of the gospel.

[20 : 34] So as doubts creep in, as life circumstances get hard, we continue to remind each other who God is, who we are, and what He has accomplished in Christ, in whose image we are being matured into.

That happens as a community. And he says, we continue then to learn about who Jesus is and how redemptive history has been carried out in Him.

Notice several times now that in this letter, Paul has gone out of his way to point out the urgent need that the churches have to be grounded in who Jesus is so that they will not be deceived by false teachings.

And last week, we looked at how Jesus is the author of creation and new creation. And this week, we see Jesus is the answer to the mysteries of God. And He's God's treasure trove of wisdom and knowledge.

And we're going to, over the next few weeks, really dig into the answers of the mysteries of God and how Jesus is God's treasure trove. But think about this.

[21 : 53] If you were to literally ask God, give me your greatest treasure, Lord. If God were to just say, what is it you desire? And you would say, God, give me your greatest treasure.

Give me the greatest thing you have. He would and has given us Jesus. He is the treasure of all of God's wisdom and knowledge.

And in the community that we crave, that God has put us in, we've been uniquely designed so that we can encourage each other while being knit together in love, while pressing each other deeply into the gospel, as we see who Jesus is and how all of redemptive history has been accomplished in Him.

And I'll give you just a couple practical tips, because that can sound like a lot. Here's a... Ralph had this at his house, so if this is heresy, then that's on Ralph.

But this is just called the Jesus Storybook Bible, and it's not. It's wonderful. It's the Bible, we can say for kids, but it's okay.

[23 : 08] Adults can read it. And it takes all the stories of the Bible, the Old Testament stories, and it takes you through them. It's not the same as the Bible. It's an interpretation, but it's going to give you the story, and it's going to tell you how that story points to Jesus.

And sometimes, as big people, we forget that as Christians, we start out as little people. That a new Christian is just like my little Toby walking along, and he needs someone to come along and grab his hand and guide him and just read stories to him.

And that's great. It's fine. It's beautiful. But you can get this on Amazon. If you need help getting it, I'll be more than happy. I would give you this, but it's Ralph's.

Well, I'd still give you this. So if you need one, you just come see me. We'll give you Ralph's. We'll get him a new one. But it's a great tool for just starting to see how Jesus is the answer to all of God's mysteries, how he truly is the treasure, how all of Scripture is about him.

And then secondly, as God's in his providence, he's provided Dr. Wellham right here, and he's doing that this week. They didn't have to pay me to give the advertisement this week.

[24 : 21] It's just Dr. Wellham's here, and he will help you from Hebrews see Christ in all of Scripture. It's a great opportunity. Even if you only make one night, I think it's in the evenings here at the Youth Center, or it's midday this week in Middleton, if I got that right.

Say again? 10 a.m. in Middleton. Joy right here, you can see her. You can see Alex or Johnny. We're happy to help you get there again. Even if it's one day or it's one evening, you will pick up something new about how to encourage someone else in the Gospel.

You will pick up something new about how Jesus is the answer to all of God's mysteries. Now, that's hard work. What we've just said. There's a reason that we like to see superheroes do this.

Because maturing in Christ and doing that with a bunch of sinners is hard work. If we're really honest, and we started looking around this room and don't do it, it'll be awkward for people, but if you start looking around, you'll be like, man, that'd be hard to mature with a whole bunch of sinners.

It'll be hard to propel each other forward. It'll be hard to be a loving community. It'll be hard to accomplish this task. It's not an easy task.

[25 : 47] It's not an uncontested task. It's not even a task being carried out in a stable world. Paul uses the following words to describe this work.

In verse 24 of Colossians 1, he says he is suffering. Suffering and filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. And don't let that throw you off.

He's speaking namely to the fact that Christ died once for all, and now we as humans are called to carry out that message and go and make disciples of all nations. And Paul says as he's doing that, as he's proclaiming the gospel to all people, he is suffering.

And he's not being dramatic. In verse 25 he says he is a servant. And the servant then, in this way, he's carrying a message to all people.

And if you read about Paul's life, being the servant and the way he's a servant is also not an easy task. There's no Uber in Paul's day. He can't just hit the app and have someone pick him up and he goes to Galatia.

[26 : 50] He gets in a ship. He usually gets shipwrecked. One time he's abandoned on an island, has a poisonous snake bite him. Occasionally people throw rocks at him or beat him nearly to death.

When he says he's suffering as a servant, he's not being dramatic. He is suffering. And then in Colossians 1.29 he says, to this end I strenuously contend.

Which means I fight nobly. And he's using the imagery of wrestling or boxing or a soldier who fights. There's the same language used in the first century when a general calls his troops to face the oncoming horde.

And he says, strenuously contend against them. He doesn't mean just give it a good try. He means fight for your life. Paul says, fight as a community to see each other fully matured in Christ.

The great thing is, in verse 29 he says, that this is done with all the energy Christ Himself so powerfully works in us.

[28 : 06] And this is all a part of the Gospel. That as a new creation, God gives us the purpose we desire. He places us within the community we crave.

And then while we within that community strive to be conformed to the image of Christ, it is accomplished by Christ's energy which so powerfully works within us. And that energy, as we saw last week, that energy is what created everything.

That energy is what has fulfilled all of redemptive history. That energy is what enabled Paul to suffer through all the trials that he suffers through to bring people the good news of Jesus' resurrection which was accomplished by that same energy.

Jesus got up out of the tomb by the same energy which Paul calls us to fight through. That's the energy that powerfully works in us, His people.

And in closing, I'll just give you two more very practical ways that we as a church can mature in Christ through His energy. Paul shows us both right here. The first is his primary weapon that he fights in Christ's energy and that's just through prayer.

[29 : 22] It's interesting to note in verse 1 of chapter 2, Paul says that he's never met these Christians personally. And in verse 5 though, he says, though he is absent in body, he's present with them in spirit.

So we say, well, how can he be present with them if he's never even met them? He says it's because he's earnestly and continually praying for the church in Colossae. The words of Paul and his associates are doing the walking and the working that they cannot do.

Because while Paul's writing this letter, he's literally in Rome in prison. And he knows that the best thing he can offer the church in Colossae is to pray for them through the energy that Christ works in him.

And then don't miss that at the end of the letter, Paul says, Epaphras, the one who planted the church, he's right there with Paul in Rome. He says, Epaphras, he's always wrestling in prayer for you that you may stand firm in the will of God, mature, and fully assured.

So even Epaphras, the planter of this church in Colossae, that can't be there. He says, well, what can I do? What can I do for the church? He says, I know I can wrestle. I can wrestle for them in prayer.

[30 : 50] I can continuously, I can fight for them continuously in prayer. We can contend for each other in prayer.

I guarantee you, if you ask someone today, how can I pray for you this week, you could get an answer. I guarantee you. And we don't ask it enough.

We start to think of all the things we could do for someone else within the body, and I think Paul would say the best thing you could do is you could just say, how can I pray for you this week?

I would love to go with all of you throughout your week and do everything I could to make your week better. I can't. But I can't pray for you. Paul says he prays for the church.

And he trusts that that same energy which created heavens and earth and raised Christ from the dead, that that energy of the Holy Spirit of God can work far more than Paul ever could in person.

[31 : 57] And then ironically, Paul says one of the ways in which we can strenuously contend for our fellow believers is through rest.

It sounds ironic, doesn't it? How could my resting in something help somebody else? But don't miss the fact that Paul has gone out of his way in this passage to point out that Jesus is the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages but now revealed.

Jesus is our hope of glory. Jesus is the one whom Paul proclaims. Jesus is the one whose image we are being conformed into.

Jesus is the one we are maturing in and it's Jesus Christ's energy which powerfully works through us so we can rest in the gospel truth that Jesus is doing what he says he will do.

He is building his church. He is working through his people to mature us in Christ. We don't make good superheroes.

[33 : 11] We really don't. If everything is going bad, I can't show up and save the day. We are not superheroes.

We are not the answer to this world's problems. But we know the answer, don't we? We can rest in the answer.

We can tell people about the answer. and we can pray for people that they will deeply come to know the mysteries of God which have been revealed in Christ.

Jesus is the answer to those mysteries. Jesus is the treasure trove of all knowledge and wisdom of God. He's the common bond which holds his people together in the community we crave.

Because of Jesus, we can serve God's will and gladness. Because of Jesus, we can enjoy God's presence in unashamed purity. He is the one we are being fully matured into.

[34 : 23] Let me say it again. He is the one we are being. It is happening for those who are in Christ. We are being fully matured into him. He is the one in whom the fullness of God is pleased to dwell.

And because of who Jesus is, we can live the lives that we truly long to live. Seeking to be matured in him in the community he's placed us in.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we recognize that like all people we have this desire to have a purpose.

And we desire to fulfill that purpose within a community. That we don't want to be lonely. And yet we find ourselves often completely at our wit's end about how to be who you've called us to be within the community you've placed us in.

Father, would you help us to rest assured in the person and work of Jesus Christ? Would you release us from this burden of trying to be the Messiah that you have already provided?

[35 : 56] Would you spur us on to pray for each other? Would you spur us on to point each other to Jesus? Would you drive us deeper into your word through each other, through reading your word, through speaking about your word, through hearing your word proclaimed?

Would you grow us in our understanding of the gospel? Would you encourage us through the scriptures as you knit us together in love? God, we trust that you will continue to fully mature us in Jesus Christ.

We thank you that we get glimpses of that today. That we get to see each other take steps. Lord, will we be the kind of church that when we see a brother or sister stumble, cheers them on, picks them up by the hand, and continues to strive with them.

Lord, we look forward to the day where we, together as one group of people, your people, stand, kneel, sing in your presence, fully pure and unashamed, fully mature in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, serving you with gladness.

It's in Jesus' name we pray and it's through Jesus that we worship. Amen. If you join me in standing, we'll sing another song.