

Colossians 1:28–29, The Gospel at Work in Proclaiming

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[0 : 00] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

! We kick off a wonderful September. And while we wait until the month of October to begin a book series sermon outlook through Daniel, we wanted to sit on the month of September, the three of us as pastors, and preach distinctively toward our own aspirations for this church.

And so if you're visiting, this is a great time to consider what this church believes God has called us to. The convictions that underline our aspirations, our ambitions, and our hopes for godliness.

The outcomes that are going to drive our pursuits as a church family. We've really put it under the banner of the gospel at work.

That's about as shorthand as we can get for our aspirations. We aspire to be a family where the gospel is at work.

[1 : 37] I've read that JK Rowling spent five years writing Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. The first volume of that series. And hers was an elevated ambition.

She aspired to write a great novel. She would not settle for any lesser outcome. And at the time that she commenced a five-year journey, she was not only unknown, but unpublished.

She was, you could say, all aspiration, no acclaim. When the book was completed, she sent it to 12 different publishers, an even dozen.

And she was turned down all 12 times. I'm thinking a bit of menu regret on those who had to read her manuscript. Finally, eventually, Bloomsbury Publishing took a chance on it and on her.

So much for the backstory on the first volume of what would become the greatest selling series in the history of books.

[3 : 07] Rowling's elevated ambition had been actualized. Well, we've been at this little unpublished manuscript called Christ Church Chicago now for some five years.

If I were to catch you in the foyer after the service, let's say, and ask you, what do you think should be the aspirations of Christ Church Chicago?

Do you know how you'd answer? What godly ambition do you think should mark our life together?

Do you know what you'd say?

What outcome should drive our pursuits? I wonder how you might respond. For the next four weeks, we are going to attempt to answer that question from the scriptures and from the bottom of our pastoral collective heart.

And this morning, I want to indicate that the aspiration of Christ Church Chicago is that we would see the gospel at work in proclaiming.

[4 : 26] Now, what does that mean? Well, take a look at 28a. Under the header of the message, our proclamation.

He says here, him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom. For Paul, the apostle, now writing back to the church at Colossae, he indicates that proclamation, a particular kind of proclamation, was central to his ambition.

And this was because he had such an exalted view of Christ. Chapter one, he paints a picture of the supremacy of Christ over all things, over all people.

And it is the supremacy of Christ in chapter one that convinced Paul that the greatest service he could render for Christ was to make him known, to proclaim him.

It governed every decision in his life. It undertook all of his professional labors.

[5 : 51] You know, some people work so they can eat. Paul ate so he could work.

And his work was the proclamation of the gospel, the supremacy of Christ over all things. Therefore, my service to Christ in all things is to make Jesus known. And the service that Paul rendered the church is the aspiration of our own church family. If you were to just get down to the core of our being as a pastoral staff, we would bleed that line. Him we proclaim. And for good reason. Look back at chapter one in verses four and five. He's giving thanks. Since he heard of their faith in Christ and the love they have for the saints. Because, and here it is, of the hope that is laid up for you in heaven.

[7 : 06] Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you and indeed is growing in all the world.

It is the hope of the gospel, the proclamation of Christ that deposits a hope of heaven. An indication that this is not all that there is. In him whom we proclaim, we obtain a hope laid up in heaven. Now, I don't know what you're going through today. I don't know what your life holds. I don't know what your relational habits are. I don't know what your health is. But I do know this. That in him proclaimed, there is a hope beyond your present circumstances. And therefore, him we proclaim. And that's not all. You look down in the same chapter in verses 14 and 15 and you begin to see why proclamation was central to the apostolic calling.

[8 : 10] He says, in whom, that is in Christ, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. There are a lot of things I could say to you today that might help you get on with life.

But in him whom I proclaim, you can have forgiveness of sins. A slate wiped clean. Yes. Justified before the Father. Yes. Against whom you walked and lived and fed every appetite under the sun. This is a church and a family, therefore, that will make proclamation of Christ, the central activity of our life together. This is our proclamation. In fact, our vision statement has this as the centerpiece of our ambition. I don't know if you know our vision statement. To build up a multi-ethnic and cross-cultural church. That's line one, the verb to build up. But right in the middle, that proclaims Jesus.

[9 : 16] That proclaims Jesus. The proclamation of the name of Jesus is the central activity of God's people. In fact, God's people begin to orchestrate their lives around decisions that would permit or promote the proclamation of his name.

Yesterday, I was in a cab talking to somebody from Iraq. All of a sudden, the scriptures came up. It was the book of Daniel that emerged. And suddenly, I knew there was an opportunity to speak to my driver about something that mattered. And I said, well, let me tell you, sir, something about what I know of Jesus. You see, when we make proclamation, the centerpiece of our lives together, we begin to prayerfully see, hopefully, opportunities nearly every day when we can proclaim him. Where we can hold out hope to others who need him. Where we can actually energetically tell them of the forgiveness that we found through him. This is our ambition. This is our highest aspiration to proclaim him. Notice the verbs. Proclaim.

[10 : 41] But beyond that, beyond proclaiming to warning. The significance to warning. Virtue demands that you say hard things to people you love. Even the things that they may not want to hear. You don't love anyone until you actually tell them the full story. The parents know this with children. Teachers know this with students. The laws of the land know this with its citizenry. The warnings are critical to the social fabric of life. And as we proclaim Jesus, we have to understand that he comes with warning. Jesus comes with a label on the bottle called warning. He's not some restorative elixir to be taken as a tonic without implications for those who would abuse the medicine that he has on offer.

[11 : 52] He wants you to know some things. Even here, while we've looked at the verses on the front side of our text, there's some on the backside that you ought to see as well.

Why is it him we proclaim? Verse 28. Because in chapter 2, verse 4, I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. Or verse 8, see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition. The warnings of the gospel message concerning the exalted name of Christ are needed because other people are selling other products whose arguments are plausible, believable.

And they captivate the hearts of men and women and children all over our land. And because the arguments of the enemy are believable, the arguments within the church need to be stronger yet. Our hope as a congregation is that we would grow in our capacity to warn people of the directions in which they're walking.

[13:06] Our own lives, our own homes, our own souls. That we would preach to ourself. That we would not be taken captive. How many, how many, how many, how many are there who've heard the gospel, embraced the gospel, walked in the gospel, become members of churches for the gospel, that have not heeded the own warnings.

They've been led away, taken captive by arguments, which they now find superior to the one that offered forgiveness of sins and salvation of their souls.

We live in a land being led away from the supremacy of Christ. And the warning must be spoken if our love is to be genuine.

Proclaiming, that's our service. Warning, there's something significant. And teaching, the necessity of teaching.

I've been a Christian a long time now. And I have yet to plumb the depths of the glories of the riches of the gospel that are in Christ as they are found in the scripture.

[14:31] It is one thing to be born again. But his desire through teaching is that we would all grow up into maturity in him. So when it comes to our proclamation, I stand here today, the first Sunday of September, to reiterate, to reinforce or to make you aware that your pastors pledged themselves to spending our lives on your behalf, plummeting the inestimable riches of the glories of Christ that are contained in the scriptures.

Because as we do, you are saved. As we do, you are strengthened. As we do, you are warned, guarded, and protected.

This is the aspiration of this church. This ought to be the aspiration of every elder, every community group leader, every Sunday school teacher, to proclaim him in all the fullness of who he is.

Until we grow up into the maturity which is in him. We commit ourselves to this, and it's good just to sit on the first Sunday of fall and remind ourselves of it.

Just as every member of an orchestra tunes their instrument to the sound of a single instrument, so too, every member of the team in this church is committed to tuning our own voice, our own instrument, to the sound of his voice.

[16:04] I'm not a musician. I'm not a musician. You already know that. But I do know that an orchestra tunes itself to a single note played by a single member in the orchestra.

Whether it be an oboe, because of its stability, or a violin, because it has the A string. And as they play the note, a single note, 60 people on a platform come in tune with it.

There is nothing, nothing that will draw us together other than the note of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his fullness.

He is our common denominator. It will not be the diversity of our makeup that will hold our church together. It is the singularity of our ambition to proclaim him who has saved us, drawn us, made us brother and sister, although nothing other is common within us.

Now, I've got to tell you that the scope of that kind of proclamation is grand.

[17:14] And I think more needed today than at any point in the last, well, 15 years at any rate. I want you to see the scope of the proclamation that we will make from this pulpit and this church, not merely the substance of it.

If the substance of it is teaching and warning and proclaiming, look at the threefold reference on the scope. Again, verse 28, him we proclaim warning everyone, there's the word, and teaching everyone two times over with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

The scope of the proclamation that rises from the heart of this church is that it is literally for everyone.

Jesus for everyone, not merely the people that we will encounter along the way, not merely the ones that will be drawn into the doors and sit here on one day.

But Paul's mind in regard to the aspiration of his life is that the gospel that he's proclaiming will get all the way to the ends of the earth.

[18:28] Everyone. Absolutely everyone. The universal reach of our proclamation.

Now I can't tell you how problematic that ambition of the apostle is for the two men that I work with full time here.

They, you'd have to talk to them to learn, to hear, and to listen to how difficult our aspiration is. That this gospel that can be growing this church family is to be for everyone. It's a good reminder. We live in a day in this country where very few churches have everyone in mind. White churches attend to the inclinations of white people.

[19 : 31] Black churches on the cultural likings of a majority of black Americans. Asians and Hispanics on the familial cultural that will keep them on their own.

And truth be told, many in our respective communities, and I speak for the three of us, will deride the undertaking of the vision that we have committed to that this gospel, this church, everyone. Everyone. Everyone. And I will be talking to you in a day where almost anyone is running off to corners of comfort. They know the cost.

You know the cost of the apostolic ambition. For Paul, the scope of his proclamation was for everyone, Jews and Gentiles, people known to him, unknown to him.

And he made it a point in his letters, if you read them carefully, to grow and build local congregations, local congregations that are mixed in makeup, ethnicity, and culture.

[20 : 41] Therefore, our ambition as a church will be to have global intention, ethnic distinction, cultural appreciation.

We're going to be marked by an everyone kind of ambition. And you need to know, not everyone is going to join. But just as ambition needs an object, so too our proclamation requires a purpose.

And for that, you've only got to look at the second half of verse 28. And we proclaim warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom. Here it is, that, so that, in order that, thank you Paul, purpose statement, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Maturity is the aspiration of this family. That we would be made perfect. And I think, in Paul's mind, he doesn't think that's going to happen in one year, two years, three years.

I think what he has in mind here is something like, at the end of time, when you arrive before the throne room of God, in that moment, may you be complete, mature.

[22 : 02] Let me put it differently than as a church family. We are not merely proclaiming a message of salvation, but maturation. I don't merely want for you, your pardon, but your perfection.

There is more to the ministry of this church than forgiveness from iniquity. It actually walks forward into the fullness of intimacy. It is one thing to speak to you about God and the goodness of God. It is another thing to experience God and to know his goodness. And that real thing is the aspiration of our hearts.

Growth, adulthood, not merely birth. Growth, the gospel is at work when people are proclaiming Christ with the purpose of maturity.

Now, the question is, how is that going to happen? I mean, how does it happen? Where do you go for the power? Now, did you notice just the simple way the sermon unfolded?

[23 : 25] The proclamation that is ours, the purpose that is ours. But where do you go for the power that must be ours? Well, for that, verse 29, for this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Let me just break it down in twofold parts. First, our part in God's program is given to us in two words, the word toil and struggle. This is the power that it takes to become the church that aspirations are actualized.

It's going to take physical exertion to the point of exhaustion. That's what toil is here. It's physical exertion to the point of exhaustion.

I know many of you are like, man, I'm already there. Don't put it anymore on me, pastor. Not a bad thing to fall into bed at night exhausted.

When I hear Moody or Spurgeon or one of those old boys sometimes laid down in bed and just said, Lord, I'm tired and fell asleep.

[24 : 44] It's going to take disciplined striving to the point of a dogged struggle. It takes a lot of work to make Christ known to everyone.

It's going to take feeling whipped, like I'm whipped, to the point of being beaten down. It's going to take struggle.

Everyone wants to come to church to alleviate the struggle. Well, not here. We're not going to get where we've got to go without struggle.

The word here, some of you might even be familiar with, it kind of almost sounds like agonizing word. We're going to have to become men and women and children that are like ancient gladiators

in the arena.

We've got to be people who put our lives on the line, hoping against all odds that we might just live to fight another day.

[25 : 53] We have to become a church like athletes who leave everything on the field of contest. That means when we go to work, we're thinking about Christ.

When I look at my own life, I'm pressing toward maturation. When I look to my resources, I want to further the gospel to the ends of the earth.

When I think about quitting or giving up or just not caring anymore, I reinvigorate myself to the toil and the struggle.

But there's another half here, thank God. For this I toil, struggling, here it is, with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

I'm tired. And my perseverance is the produce of the spirit's capacity that is energizing me day by day.

[27 : 07] God with us. Emmanuel. All the while of your working. All the toil of your rehearsals and your playing.

All the labors in your homes to prepare for others who enter. All the classrooms beneath that even now have men and women committed to proclaiming Jesus to little ones.

All the efforts you have at work prayerfully over time, asking for God to open up the door for a conversation where Jesus comes forth from your lips.

All the finances that you storehouse in order to see everyone. All the things you put up with culturally that are distinct from you, but because of Jesus are drawn like barnacles that are supposed to be on you.

All of them. All of them. All of them. By the power that he so energetically works within you.

[28 : 21] The gospel which we proclaim is the fuel for the fight that must be relentless. Our striving, but in God's strength.

If the church is an engine built to propel the gospel forward, then Christ himself is the energizing fuel through his spirit that will keep us running.

Even when you sense that you're on empty. Even when your tire treads are worn. Even when the oil of your life needs changing. Christ in me.

The hope of glory. I hope you see the implication of Paul's logic. Let me get it. If people today want to see where God and his gospel are at work, simply find a church that is relentless about proclaiming Christ to everyone.

That's the logic. Where's God at work? In collective families that are absolutely exhausted to make sure that he is known by everyone.

[29 : 35] Where's God at work? As we tirelessly walk together in what he's called us to. I want us to be that church. I want us to be a church that proclaims him to everyone.

I want to be that church that has the purpose beyond your salvation but to your glorification. I want to be that church that's known for working to the point of exhaustion, karma in the strength of his power.

I guess I want to finish and just tell you that having exalted aspirations are a good thing. And you're going to hear three more as this month goes on.

But I want to stand here as your pastor and tell you today, let us not set our sights too low. The danger is not in failing to succeed in becoming the kind of church that we've talked about today, but it's becoming a church with far lesser mediocre aims.

Helen Keller, the first deaf and blind person to earn a BA and that from Harvard, the first deaf and blind person to earn a BA once said, and I quote, the greatest tragedy is to have sight, but no vision.

[31 : 07] The month of September, the vision of this church, the banner over it all, we want to see the gospel at work and the first characteristic in proclaiming.

Our Heavenly Father, we now turn to the Lord's table for the strength that we so need. In Christ's name, Amen.