

At the Center of It All

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[0 : 00] If you would open up your Bibles to the book of Colossians, we are to page 1168 of your Pew Bible.

We are looking at Colossians 1, 24 through 2, 5 this morning. Hear God's Word. Now, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of His body, that is, the church.

Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the Word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to His saints.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me.

[1 : 12] For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.

In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order in the firmness of your faith in Christ.

May God bless the hearing of His Word. If you're a human being, please raise your hand. If you're a human being, you will face hardship.

This life is hard. There's wonderful things about this life, but it's hard. And if you're a Christian, seeking to live with Christ as the controlling center of your life, the treasured center of your life, you've signed yourself up for more hardship.

Hardship that's unique to being a blood-bought follower of Christ. We've got Christians in this room right now who are discouraged because they've been trying to help other people live for Christ.

[2 : 43] And it hasn't been going the way they wanted. They've met that with resistance. Maybe you're trying to raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and it's not shaken out like you thought.

You might be asking questions like this. Is this worth it? What do you tell a discouraged Christian? Here's what you tell them. Christ is worth it. Or maybe you've come into this building and you are distracted from Christ, and as a result, you're disoriented from Christ.

He's not the controlling center of your life. You know what? Our world, this world we live in, makes a persuasive case that Jesus Christ should not be the controlling center of your life, but you should be the controlling center of your life.

You do you. You be you. Speak your truth. What do you say to someone who's distracted, disoriented from Christ?

[3 : 53] Here's what you tell them. Christ is worth it. To orient your life around him. In Colossians 1, 24 through 25, the apostle Paul gets very personal.

Did you notice all the eyes? And he speaks a word that reorients the disoriented and encourages the discouraged.

I'm going to point you to five words in this passage. Five words. Suffering, church, mystery, mature, rejoicing.

And in those five words, Paul's making a case. And it goes something like this. We suffer together for Christ so that others would treasure Christ.

And if you want to reduce it to just four words, Christ is worth it. So let's look at this first word, suffering.

[5 : 01] Now up until this point, Paul has thanked God for what God is doing among the Colossians. That's chapter 1, verses 3 through 8. Paul has prayed that these Colossians would grow in their understanding of God's will.

What's God's will for your life? To please Christ in everything. In chapter 1, verses 15 through 20, Paul portrays this magnificent Christ.

The firstborn of all creation and the firstborn from the dead. He's the king of all. Verses 21 through 23, he assures these Colossian Christians that they belong to this king.

And here in verses 24 through chapter 2, verse 5, Paul shares about his suffering. Suffering for Christ is when you experience and endure hardship on account of Christ.

It's like this. You're like catching some heat and you can draw a direct line to Jesus for it. I am catching heat because of Jesus. So in verse 24, he says, I rejoice in my sufferings.

[6 : 10] In verse 24, he says, I'm filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions. In verse 29, he says, I toil. I struggle. This ministry of proclaiming Christ is contested.

In 2.1, he tells these Colossian church, he wants them to know how great a struggle he has for them. And then in 2.5, he says this, for though I am absent in body.

What is that all about? Where's Paul? Have you seen those Werewoldo books? Where's Paul? He's in Rome. He's writing to a church in Colossae.

They're far apart. What's he doing in Rome? He is suffering in Rome. What is he suffering? Turn to the end of Colossians, chapter 4, verse 18. And he says something, and he's not trying to be a drama queen.

He's not trying to be dramatic. He says, I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Why is he suffering in Rome?

[7 : 16] Why is he under house arrest, chained to Praetorian guard, and waiting to hear whether he's going to live or die? Well, you could say it's because of Christ.

Christ. Did you notice that interesting verse, that line, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body, that is church?

Here's what Paul's not saying. Paul's not saying here that somehow the suffering and death of Jesus Christ was somehow inadequate to accomplish our salvation.

And so he is adding to what Christ has done in order to kind of fully accomplish our salvation. That is not what he's saying. As though the finished work of Christ needed anybody's help.

I knew what it is.

[8 : 20] I wasn't going to say it. Where was I? You're not helping, David.

Yeah. Okay. We've got to end this right now. Okay. So Paul is talking about suffering the afflictions of Christ. What is this that he's filling up?

Do you all remember what happened in Acts chapter 9? Paul's on his way to Damascus to shred some Christians there. The risen Christ meets him on the way.

Paul is converted on the spot. And then this guy named Ananias kind of houses Paul. Jesus, the risen Christ, shows up to Ananias. And he has some words with Ananias.

And then he says this to Ananias about Paul. For I will show him. I, the risen Christ, will show him, Paul, how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

[9 : 28] Do you know what that is? That's a suffering quota put on Paul. You're going to have to suffer. Paul, you're going to have to suffer so that my name is exalted among the nations.

It's a quota. There's only a given amount of suffering Paul would experience. And by extension, we will experience. These afflictions of Christ are afflictions, sufferings for Christ.

On account of Christ. Paul's saying here, it's like, hey, I have to suffer on account of Christ for you so that you, Colossians, would treasure Christ above all else.

Suffering is necessary to the spreading of the gospel to all people everywhere. If Christ suffered, we will suffer too.

In John 15, Jesus is very explicit about it. He says this to his disciples. If the world hates me, the world will also hate you. Now, that's some encouragement for the church this morning.

[10:43] What Paul is doing here is he's writing these Colossians and he's saying, we're all in this together. We suffer together.

If you look at chapter 1, verse 11, do you remember this verse from a couple weeks ago? Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy. Do you know what that's about? That's an enduring and being patient with joy in the midst of suffering. Hardship, discouragement. Here's what Paul is doing.

He is normalizing suffering for us. Did you know that 2 Timothy 3.12 is in your Bible, Christian? Indeed, if anyone would live a godly life in Christ Jesus, he will suffer.

The question is, is Christ worth it? Church, we suffer together for Christ so that Christ would be treasured by others.

[11:57] Let's look at the second word, church. In verse 24, Paul says, I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body.

That is the church. Don't miss the connection. The apostle Paul is saying, the body of Christ is the church of Christ.

They're one and the same. The body of Christ is a metaphor for God's people and it's one of Paul's favorites. We've already seen it in verse 18 of chapter 1 and he is the head of the body of the church.

It shows up in chapter 2 in verse 19, but he's actually speaking about false teachers in this context. He's saying that they're not a part of the body of Christ.

And here's what he says. And not these false teachers, they're not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows with a growth that is from God.

[12:56] It's a picture of the body. That little phrase, knit together, it's in our passage. If you look at chapter 2, verse 2, that their hearts may be encouraged being knit together in love.

It's body talk. If you flip over to chapter 3, verse 15, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts in which indeed you were called in one body.

We the church, we the body of Christ. And what that is a picture of is interdependence among Christians. We're not all gifted the same way. We're a body.

And we need each other. But we're all dependent on our head, the Lord Jesus Christ. And did you notice it's His body?

Do you know what makes us His? Turn with me to Acts chapter 20, verse 28. This is Paul.

[14:03] He's meeting the Ephesian elders in a place called Miletus. These are his last words to them. He says, Pay careful attention to yourself and to all the flock, which is another metaphor for the church, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood.

The His of His body is a blood-bought His. The church is obtained by the blood of God, by the blood of Christ.

The church is a people. The people who have been purchased by the blood of Jesus were His, and that's whom Paul is suffering for.

There's a couple other references to the church in this passage. At the end of verse 26, to His saints, His holy ones. And then in verse 27, to them, the saints, the church, God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you.

Do you know what He's saying? It's the church, those people who would come to believe in Christ, the elect of God. It's these people that God will give eyes and ears and heart to believe and treasure Jesus.

[15:28] That's who Paul's suffering for. The church. The church. Paul suffers for the church of Christ because Christ died for His church.

Have you ever been around somebody? Maybe you have a friend. Maybe you've said this. You say something like this. You know what, man? What's important to you is important to me. You're like loyal brothers or sisters, and you're like, man, whatever's your priority is my priority.

What is the priority of Jesus? What's important to Christ? Christ, His name among the nations so that all would believe, but also His body, His church, His people.

Because Paul treasured Jesus. Paul valued what Jesus valued, the church. Proclaiming Christ that all those who would one day believe would be incorporated into His body.

How important is the church to Christ? He shed His blood for us. If you're a discouraged Christian, are you growing in your love for the bloodbought of Christ?

[17 : 01] Christ is this person that you're trying to encourage and build into. Maybe it's another brother or sister in Christ. Maybe it's one of your children. Maybe it's your spouse, and you just feel like this isn't going anywhere.

Did you forget that they belong to Jesus? Or maybe you're a fan of Jesus, but you're not a fan of His church.

Guess what? What's important to Christ must be important to us. So how do you grow in your love for the church, for the bloodbought of God?

Even in all of her imperfections, you remember who shed His blood for her. Maybe you're disoriented from Christ because you've been burned by the church.

You were sinned against. You were disappointed. And now you've been adrift. You're going to need, out of a love and treasuring of your Savior, to come to forgive those who've sinned against you.

[18 : 18] Forgive those who've disappointed you. There's no perfect church. Anybody perfect in this church? But we're all united by a perfect Christ.

We suffer together, church. We suffer together so that others will treasure Christ above all.

The next word is mystery. Oh, and I love this word. Three times the word mystery shows up in this passage. In verses 25 and 26, of which I became a minister.

This is Paul speaking. I became a minister, a servant, according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known. The stewardship that was given to him is a sacred trust.

He was given a trust from God for the church. And that is this, this making God's word fully known. What is he talking about?

[19 : 28] Look at verse 26. This, the word of God fully known is the mystery. Hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to the saints. This mystery is not so much of a secret.

It's more like, more like a treasure map. You know what a treasure map is, right? You have like different places you go and there's this kind of dotted line going from one clue to the next and eventually it leads you to X marks the spot where the treasure is.

Think of the Old Testament and all of its law and all of its poetry and all of its narratives and all of its prophecies as one clue after the other.

One hint after another pointing down the line to the treasure. The cross marks the spot. Hidden. But hinted at. Paul's ministry was a making known from God's word.

[20 : 42] The mystery, the plan of God's, for the fullness of time. The scale is remarkable.

Ages and generations. This is getting at God's plan for the fullness of time. God's plan for the fullness of time had everything to do with treasure.

This mystery revealed was the revelation of a treasure for all people everywhere. Just notice all the treasure.

Verse 27. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery. Look it down to 2.2.

That their hearts may be encouraged being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery. Verse 3. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[21 : 45] God's plan for the fullness of time is a treasure plan. Every human heart. There's 8 billion people on the planet.

And every human heart is on a treasure hunt. Every one of us searching for treasure. We want to find fullness of joy and be satisfied.

We want to have fullness of purpose and be satisfied. We want to have fullness of peace and be satisfied. But the problem is with this treasure hunting is our sinfulness. And so we hunt for treasure in all the wrong places.

The places where God is saying very clearly there's no treasure there. There's no treasure there. The mystery that Paul ministry made known reveals the ultimate treasure from God for all people.

What is it? It's not Paul. He's a servant of the treasure. It's not his church. We're not the treasure.

[22 : 56] It's not sex. Sex isn't the treasure. It's not a treasure. It's not marriage. It's not success. It's not a big paycheck. That's not the hidden treasure that God has made known.

You want to see it? Verse 27. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you.

The hope of glory. God's plan was to unite a people Jews and Gentiles all sorts of different people from everywhere and unite them around Christ and Christ would dwell in them as if they are his new temple.

What a plan! The hope of glory. Jesus is our future hope of the glory to come. He's the treasure. In chapter 2, verse 2.

Being knit together in love to reach all the riches of the full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[24 : 14] The first home Jenny and I owned in Kenosha was a ranch on the south side. 15th Avenue was on a cul-de-sac. It was a great place. A lot of memories there. Well, we moved in and we were bringing this place to order like it needed some work and so I was in one of the bedrooms and I was rolling up this old rug and behold, treasure!

\$200 cash money! We're going to McDonald's! No, I think we actually ordered pizza. That treasure was lying there for a while and then it got revealed when I pulled up the rug.

The Old Testament is about hidden treasure and then when Christ is proclaimed in the new hidden treasure, Christ is at the center of it all.

God's plan for the fullness of time is about Christ, our treasure, treasure, the greatest treasure, the only treasure that can satisfy the human heart.

You're discouraged? Christ is your treasure. You're disoriented? Distracted? Stop settling settling for temporary trinkets of this world and set your heart on the timeless treasure of Christ.

[25 : 52] He's the hope of glory. He's the mystery made known. In Him, all of God's promises are yes and amen.

Everything you long for, Christ is your treasure. Brothers and sisters, we suffer for Christ together. Our treasure so that others would treasure Him. The fourth word is the word mature. We see this in verses 28 and 29.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. Paul is giving us the goal of his contested work, his ministry, the toil, the struggle, the suffering to present everyone mature in Christ.

And if you're wondering what is maturity in Christ, here's what it is at a minimum. At a minimum, maturity of Christ is when Jesus Christ is the controlling center of your life.

[27 : 14] He's the treasured treasured center center of your life. What you treasure will govern your life.

You live for what you worship. The question is, how does Paul present people mature in Christ? How do you do that? Well, we're going to be talking about this more at the disciple-making workshop in a couple weeks, but let's look at this passage. Paul, how do you present people mature in Christ?

Verse 28, him we proclaim. Him is the treasure. He proclaims Christ to both Christians and non-Christians.

Him, of course, is the one we just learned about in verses 15 through 20. He's the firstborn of all creation. He's the firstborn from the dead. He's the king of the old creation.

[28 : 18] He's the king of the new creation. He's the king of kings, Lord of lords. He is the greatest treasure ever, Jesus. That's who we proclaim. In light of that, who's the we?

Him, we proclaim. Now, you could make a case, well, that's Paul's apostolic posse. Timothy, Tychicus, Epaphras.

But I've got a hunch she's doing something else here. If you follow the flow of the argument, I think that we, he's talking about the Colossians.

Him, we proclaim. Paul's like, I'm proclaiming Christ here in Rome to this ching, ching, ching, Praetorian card next to me.

You're proclaiming Christ in Colossae. We're proclaiming Christ in Kenosha. Him, we proclaim. It's a uniter. We suffer together for Christ in order that others would treasure him.

[29 : 29] In light of all this treasure talk, it really kind of changes the way you think about ministry. You know, you know, we get to declare treasure.

When we say him we proclaim, we're saying the treasure of every human heart is found in Jesus. So to non-Christians, we say things like this. Hey, I know you're hunting for treasure.

Turn from your trinkets and turn to the timeless treasure of Christ. He forgives you. He welcomes you with open arms. He loves you. To discourage Christians, we say this.

Hey, Christ is the greatest treasure. Don't give up. Press on. We say to disoriented Christians, hey, you're living for trinkets. Treasure Christ and live for him.

Him we proclaim. How we go about proclaiming him involves warning people. Him we proclaim.

[30 : 32] Warning everyone. There's a warning in this passage. It's in verse 4. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.

He say this as a reference to what he just said in verses 2 and 3 that Jesus is the greatest treasure. Don't buy the lies.

Our world makes a very compelling case in a variety of different ways that you should be the controlling center of your life. Not Christ. And here's what happens when you become the controlling center of your life.

You end up living for something. Maybe it's U.S. politics. It makes a lousy controlling center of your life. love. But when we talk about the kingdom of Christ, he's our king.

Oh, that is the controlling center you want. Maybe it's not politics. Maybe it's pleasure. Some kind of hedonism.

[31 : 42] Whether that's sexual gratification. Whether that is like you just love to eat food. Whether it's materialism like purchase buy, buy, buy. You know what? Hedonism makes for a lousy controlling center.

Doesn't satisfy. Pleasing Christ. that'll satisfy. Or maybe it's not politics or pleasure.

Maybe it's you want the praise. You're a people pleaser. You just want to be liked. Oh, the Bible talks about that as a snare.

It's a terrible taskmaster. But what praise in Christ as your treasured center, that burns clean.

We warn everyone. We warn people, don't settle for the trinkets. Center on the treasure.

[32 : 54] people. So we warn everyone as we proclaim him and then we also teach everyone. What do we teach them?

It's what Paul has already modeled. We teach them the glories of Christ. Think about it. He's the creator of all.

He's the sustainer of all. He's the savior of all. He's the lord of all. And he's the judge of all. Do you know what greater than, less than, or equal is? How about you kind of measure him next to U.S. politics, hedonism, or the praise of man? He's always greater. Because he's the greatest treasure. That's what we teach people. How amazing our king is.

And why we can then say, so every day you deny yourself, you take up your cross, and you follow him. Because he's the greatest treasure.

[33 : 57] He is worth it. And then we start to see what maturity looks like. When Christ is your treasure, then verse 10, you walk in a manner worthy of him, pleasing him in all ways, bearing fruit in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with his power for endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father.

verse 23, you are stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel. And chapter 2, verse 5, for though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and firmness in the faith of Christ.

The good order is that Jesus is the controlling center of your life. And you live for him. Paul's like, yes and amen.

Amen. But Paul doesn't labor in this ministry by his own strength, but by the strength that God himself provides.

Verse 29, for this I toil, struggling with all his energy, that he powerfully works within me, Holy Spirit, power in the proclamation of Christ as the greatest treasure to all nations.

[35 : 14] worthy of sea. Not by power, not by strength, but by my spirit, says the Lord. Did you notice everyone?

Warning everyone, teaching one in order to present everyone who believes mature in Christ, rightly ordered, firm in the faith, walking in a manner worthy of the Lord to please Christ in everything.

You see, the scope of Paul's ministry is global. Do you know why? Because the scope of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ is global. Gospel ministry is a work of the new creation.

Every square inch of this planet, the gospel bearing fruit among all people. This past week, I had a brother send me an email reminding me of unreached people groups.

An unreached people group is a definable group of people by their culture and particularly their language. And an unreached people group has no access to the gospel of this treasure.

[36 : 28] I learned that there are 17,300 distinct people groups on our planet today. I learned that 7,300 of those people groups are presently unreached.

They do not have a gospel witness. that's 3.4 billion people. So when Paul talks about him we proclaim, warning everyone, teaching everyone to present everyone who believes mature, he's not just talking about this church in this city, in our neighbors in the city.

He's talking about the unreached hard places in the 1040 window. So if you want to find out more about unreached people groups, Google the Joshua Project.

But that is the scope of what we've been called to. To present everyone, every tribe, tongue, and nation mature in Christ.

Christ as the treasured center of who they are. Brothers and sisters, we suffer together so that Christ is treasured by all.

[37 : 45] Christ's worth it. The last word is rejoicing, and I'll be lickety split.

But this passage begins and ends with rejoicing. Verse 24, now I rejoice in my sufferings. Chapter 2, verse 5, for though I'm absent in body, I'm with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order.

Rejoicing. Time out! How is it that this guy in Rome, shackled to a Praetorian guard, is able to rejoice?

Here's why. Christ was his greatest treasure. Philippians 1, 21, the same guy said, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 3, 8, the same guy says, indeed, I count everything as a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. Treasure.

[38 : 49] Why he was rejoicing? He treasured Jesus. But also, Paul rejoiced in others treasuring Jesus. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.

124, chapter 2, 1, for I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you. Christ is worth it. If you're discouraged, disappointed by others' lack of response, Christ is worth your toil.

He's worth your suffering, your labor. Don't give up. Your labor's not in vain. He's worth it. If you're disoriented or distracted in this rejoicing in suffering is like a foreign language in your ears, you've been distracted by plausible arguments of this world.

You've swapped temporary trinkets for the timeless treasures of Christ. Do you know what you do? You just repent and believe. Say, no, forgive me, Lord Jesus, for pursuing this in your place.

And there you will find joy. what your heart was created and redeemed for. Christ.

[40 : 18] So what would you tell a discouraged Christian? What would you tell a disoriented Christian? You tell them Christ is worth it. I mean, Christ is the center of our sufferings.

Christ is at the center of the church. Christ is at the center of this mystery. Christ is at the center of our maturity. Christ is at the center of our rejoicing.

He's at the center of it all. So we suffer together for Christ so that everyone would treasure Christ. Christ is worth it, church.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, we need to ask you for something now. We confess that we regularly prefer trinkets to you, our treasure.

So we confess that to you. We acknowledge the idolatry of that. We forgive us for the offense that must be to you.

[41 : 27] And thank you for dying on the cross for that too. Father, would you pour out your spirit upon us, your people, that we would endure, we would persist, we would persevere in our treasuring of Jesus and proclaiming him among all people.

Would you help us? Would you strengthen us? Would you unite us? And would you protect our union in you?

And for those who think Jesus is boring, God, would you show them your glory?

In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[42 : 40] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.