

# Full personhood is received through God's gospel

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 14 August 2022

Preacher: David Calderwood

[ 0 : 00 ] So the reading today is Colossians 1, 24, and we'll be reading through 2, 2, verse 5. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, for 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. 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 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 and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Well, it's a massive understatement to say that our world is changing rapidly.

[ 1 : 49 ] We get climate change, political change, geopolitical change, moral, social change, and so the list of changes could go on. It's a bit overwhelming, isn't it?

A bit confusing, a bit scary. Yet at the same time as one author years ago said, it's a case of the more things change, the more they remain the same.

And the reality of life is that, and it continues through every generation, is that every single person continues to ask, what is it to be a full? What is it to be a full or complete?

That is F-U-L-L. What is it to be a full or complete or authentic person? What is it to be true to myself? Or, make it a little bit more modern, what is it to be a masculine man and a feminine woman?

It's very common to hear people say today, look, I want to be the best version of myself possible.

[ 3 : 00 ] That's a very modern way of putting things. I want to be the best version of myself that's possible. And that statement has buried in it a search for meaning and purpose. But all too often, that meaning and purpose is found in my own desires, my own feelings.

And there, what we see is the key to freedom and happiness. So, the best version of my own self possible is allowing my feelings and desires to come to the surface in happiness.

And what that means then is that if I'm going to be the best version of myself, then I'm going to be self-approving, self-promoting, self-governing, self-loving.

Now, formally, this is called therapeutic expressive individualism. I think it's actually a useful term for you to be familiar with.

Many of you won't even recognize the term, but you'll certainly recognize the symptoms of it.

Because it's everywhere around us. It's part of the cultural air we breathe. And so, the best version of self, as our culture states it and thinks it, will be actually, when you boil it down, totally selfish.

[ 4 : 34 ] Self-consuming. And I would even suggest self-destructing. Why? Because if I'm going to find my happiness in my feelings and desires, then I must make my feelings and desires dominate others around me where that's necessary.

Or manipulate others around me to maintain my, another modern expression, my self-esteem, my self-worth. My self-perception.

And then that takes another step. I'll only be willing to express love and commitment to those around me in as much as they contribute to my happiness and my freedom.

Now, we can see that really easily when we look out there, as it were, into our society, into our world. The question I want to ask now is, and it's a big question for you and me as believers, as Christians.

Are we still shaped by therapeutic expressive individualism? Or perhaps a more accurate question is, how much are we shaped by therapeutic expressive individualism?

[ 5 : 54 ] How much is there in our quest to be the best version of ourselves?

Because I think I don't have any trouble saying that's what I would like to be in life. Or are we shaped by who we are in Jesus as we live out what it is to be a full, complete, or authentic person? A masculine man or a feminine woman? We'll be shaped by one or other. We'll be predominantly shaped by one or other of those two options.

So let's ask the question that we've been asking each week in this series in Colossian. What fullness or completeness is ours in Jesus? And we jump into the text now, chapter 1, verse 24. Something we easily forget as Christians is that the gospel is essentially a relationship, not a theological construct.

[ 7 : 05 ] Now, of course, we can helpfully describe the gospel in terms of interconnected theological truths. But in essence, the gospel is not a body of theological truth.

In essence, the gospel is a relationship. And Paul has been really keen to make that clear over and over and over again as he writes this letter to the Christians at Colossae.

He's repeatedly emphasized that. And he says it again in verse 27. Have a read of it. The mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to a sense, to whom God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery.

What is this mystery? What is God's secret that is now revealed? Christ in you. Christ in you. The hope of glory. Now, that's relational language. That's intimate relationship language.

Christ in you. The hope of glory. Him we proclaim. So, for Paul, he's got this concept, if you're following the outline, you'll see that Christ in you.

[ 8 : 24 ] It's a statement of union with Christ. We're united with Christ as Christians. Which is a statement of real salvation based on a real person bringing us into real relationship with him.

And repeatedly through this letter, Paul has emphasized that the identity of the Christians in Colossae is grounded and shaped by being in Christ.

Or in him. We've seen that over three weeks. Together as a church family unit, Paul sees them as a case study of being in Christ.

Relational language. If you look back at verse 2, the very first chapter, verse 2, Paul starts by saying, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ. And if you keep on reading them, in Christ, in him. Repeated, repeated, repeated. Verse 12, 13, 14, I looked at last week.

[ 9 : 34 ] The same idea. To be in Christ is to be a completely new, reformatted version of themselves. That's what Paul's saying to these.

You want to be the best version of yourself? You already are a new version of yourself, reformatted by nature of being in Christ. United with him.

In him, as I said last week, they've been transferred from rebellion, from hostility, from condemnation, from the denial of darkness. From, too, to Christ's kingdom with new and full relationship with God.

Guaranteed to share in Christ's inheritance as brothers and sisters. Then last week again, verse 21 through to 23. Not only have they been transferred, but they've been transformed, renewed from the inside out, qualified for heaven, restored to being true image bearers, perfectly acceptable to God in fullness of life.

Now, Paul, as he moves into these verses, Paul also sees himself as a case study of identity being sourced and shaped in Christ.

[ 10 : 53 ] Look at the very last phrase, verse 23, and of which he's speaking about the gospel.

There only is one gospel. You've benefited from it. You've been renewed, transferred, transformed by it, says Paul, and I have too.

And of which I, Paul, became a minister. The word minister is servant. Relational language again. What's Paul's response to Jesus making him a much better version of himself, something he

couldn't ever make himself?

Well, it's to express that deep relationship and identity single-mindedly as a servant of Jesus. So for Paul, to be authentic as a person is to recognize that he already is a new and better version of himself and to serve Jesus in the light of that.

And verse 5, it even goes more. Paul makes a further connection with that word servant. If you look at verse 25, and he talks about how he's been suffering for the sake of his body, that is the church, of which I became a minister.

That's the same word, a servant. For Paul, a new and better version of himself is something that Jesus has done for him. Response to which he becomes a servant of Jesus, which automatically then makes him a servant of the body of Jesus, the church.

[12:44] So for Paul to be authentic, for Paul to be true to himself, it's to serve Jesus and to serve all Christ's renewed people, helping them understand as clearly and fully as possible their identity, their relationship and their fullness in Christ.

But then Paul takes this beautiful diamond, which he calls a mystery. A mystery is not something that's elusive and unable to be discovered. It's something that God has kept in the past and now brought into full relief.

So it's now viewed and viewable and real. So Paul takes this mystery of the gospel and he just turns it a little bit to sparkle in the light and this is what comes out of it.

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.

The riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you. Even more amazing than being in Christ which is what Paul has been saying right through the letter so far.

[14:12] Even more amazing than being in Christ is Christ being in you. Is realizing that as a believer Christ is in you.

the relationship or identity language could not be any clearer could not be any more intimate. As a believer I am united with Christ both by virtue of experiencing what Christ has done for me through his sacrificial death on the cross and also by taking up residence in me through the Holy Spirit who continues to work in me to make me like Jesus and guarantees to keep me safe to heaven.

I am in Christ and Christ is in me by his Holy Spirit. That is amazing language. If you look back to verses 18 and 19 Paul takes us into sort of different metaphors different picture words to help us understand that.

Look back to verses 18 and 19 of chapter 1 where Paul says talking about Christ the preeminence of Christ is he is the head of the body the church and then verse 19 for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

If you want to talk about being an authentic person and the illustration breaks down here a little bit but just come with me because to be an authentic person you need to be an integrated person you need to have your head attached to your body.

[16:06] Paul's saying just that language in verses 18 and 19 and it works like this it's a since then argument since the fullness of God is in Jesus and since he is the head of the body his church then every believer organically united to Jesus enjoys fullness or true personhood it's not too much to say that in Christ with Christ in me by the Holy Spirit I have the fullness of God that is an amazing statement isn't it that is an amazing identity I have that is an amazing version of myself the best possible version of myself something I could never create under my own steam or through my own desires and yet that's what

I am do I feel like that some days no especially when for the thousands of time that day I've said yes to sin and no to righteousness instead of being the other way around but that's who I am in Christ that's who I am because Christ is in me by his spirit but there's even more to grasp even more to grasp and even more to enjoy because Jesus in you means keep on going that phrase and that's really all I'm going to be doing this morning Jesus in you means the hope of glory now glory is something a word that typically describes heaven it's that final state that time when we'll be at home with Christ and like Christ in heaven forever and that's full salvation so in

Christ here and now we have real salvation but we don't and can't appreciate what it is to be in Christ until we get to heaven then free from sin with completely renewed minds we will for the first time be able to understand what Jesus has done for us and in us so at the minute I think it's going to be this good getting to heaven to praise and honour and recognise what the Lord has done for me given my sinfulness but the truth of the matter is when I get to heaven it's going to be this big

because I don't fully appreciate my sin now yes I try to but I don't fully appreciate either the nature of it or the extent of it but I will then not in a sense of being guilty but in a sense of thinking wow that's what Jesus dealt with in making me the best version of myself that's possible to be a version that's now qualified to be here in heaven with him forever and be like him so relationship and identity with Jesus is the connection is the relationship connection that connects our everyday world experiences with heaven and eternity so I live in grace now knowing that I will enjoy glory then and the two are inseparable because they're part of

God's one movement one salvation movement one salvation purpose we are not yet perfectly like Christ but Christ in you is God's promise that in the future we will be now isn't that a wonderful promise in the day to day struggle with our sin and failings and everything else that life throws at us that is the best version of myself that I love for and Jesus says yes I've created it and I will make it happen so the best version of ourselves fullness of life true personhood the relationship what actually defines masculine men and feminine women is in Christ and Christ in you we start our life reformatted life we start it with

Christ we live it in Christ on a day by day basis and that relationship will continue into eternity where we'll be with Christ and be like him perfectly like him comfortably at home with him forever now it seems like why is Paul emphasizing that well it seems like there are those in the background in the church or on the periphery of the church in Colossae who are suggesting a different pathway in life for them as Christians they're suggesting perhaps that yes it's terrific to start with Jesus in fact that's the only place you can start with Jesus but then you need to move on to some other sort of super spiritual experience some other reality that's above or in addition to Jesus not so says Paul everything

[ 22 : 30 ] God wants his people to know everything God wants his people to experience everything God wants his people to be is summed up by Christ in you the hope of glory that's why Paul says in verse 28 immediately after that he says him we proclaim now he goes on then in verse 28 follow through as I'll read it again him we proclaim warning everyone and teaching everyone all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ and then go down to chapter 2 verse 2 he talks about his struggle for them for people he hasn't even met who might never ever meet him who certainly don't know him but he's been struggling for them why 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 which is

Christ that's it that's all God wants us to know about it that's all we need to know about it that's the experience we need to have Christ Paul Paul only has one message that message shapes defines motivates him every single day in the language we use that's what gets him out of bed in the morning and for Paul to get out in the bed in the morning is walking into a storm of struggling Christ in you the hope of glory all his efforts of teaching of persuading of arguing of challenging and encouraging are for what end well we just read it designed to develop maturity in those he serves what is it to have

Christian maturity you start with Christ what is it to be mature in Christ well very simple not complicated at all for Paul to be mature in Christ is to be so focused on him as to grow to a better understanding a better appreciation of the fullness of life we have in him the full personhood we have in him the life of true freedom we have in him the happiness and satisfaction which is ours in Christ and Christ in you there is no starting with Jesus and then some other like pathway that is for the select few or for those with deeper insight no you start with Christ as you are created into a new and much better version of yourself you live every day of life trying to develop your appreciation of that which you will fully appreciate when you get to heaven

Christ Christ in the past Christ now Christ in the future what is it to be the best version of myself possible well it's looking back in thankfulness that Jesus has taken hold of me and reformatted me into a new complete life united with the one true person who has ever lived in this world who has pleased God in every respect knowing then great thankfulness that I have become in him and him in me I have become a true person pleasing to God in every respect and it's looking forward to the time when I will experience fullness of life in well all its fullness at home in heaven with Jesus perfectly like him a perfect person perfectly worshipping the perfect Lord Jesus and in between those two extremities of life in the meanwhile struggling to reflect who I am in Christ at every point in life and chapter two verse two that might be when I'm struggling to express deep unity with my brothers and sisters in Christ in this local church or it might be suffering like Paul suffering

experiencing suffering in an attitude of joy and passion and endurance you see each context demonstrates union with Christ even though they're vastly different circumstances each is a distinct pathway that Jesus walked suffering and in glory all the while loving deeply those who were in turn deeply offensive and hostile to him that's the pathway and the model of

[ 28 : 33 ] Jesus costly suffering costly love each is hard but each is possible verse 29 if you look at that excuse me for this I toil hear that word toil that's a hard work that's a roll your sleeves up get dirty and sweaty this is a consistent application type word for this I toil day after day struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me why is it possible when's it possible it's possible because of the Holy Spirit within us and it's possible when we utilize the vast reserve of power that God has placed in us for that very end to live as we are to live the very best version of ourselves before the world where there's hostility and among the brothers where there's constant expressions of sinfulness to annoy one another

Paul says he rejoices in suffering now that phrase in verse 24 is a very very difficult phrase I've wrestled with it for hours this week and I'm still not even sure I understand it it's easy to say what it doesn't mean Paul's not saying that somehow or other there was something wrong with Christ's death and he had to make up for it he's not saying that I don't think he's saying he's doing penance for his past wrongs as if God does tit for tat type stuff so it's easy to say what it's not it's a lot more hard to say what it is I think but I'm just going to take the courage way out and just gloss over the surface of it because I don't want us to get stuck on it Paul says he rejoices in suffering now that's an amazing statement itself isn't it when you think of our natural reaction to suffering it's generally to run from it isn't it we don't like it

I know that I'm deeply committed to a hassle free life suffering doesn't fit into my longings for a hassle free life Paul remember was in prison unjustly accused unfairly attacked and quite possibly waiting for a sentence of death waiting to be executed and in that sort of situation it's even worse for us we tend to become really bitter it's not fair we become a bit vengeful don't we we want to strike back we want to validate ourselves be self validating or the other extreme we despair well if we're suffering that must mean God's against us that must mean I've been abandoned that must mean God's punishing me for some wrongdoing or some failure and it seems again like some in the background in

Colossi were exploiting that sort of thinking perhaps suggesting even that if Christians are suffering then they can't be in a healthy spiritual state they can't be where God wants them to be they can't be mature if they're suffering or something like that or maybe the way to approach suffering is to seek some new experience and I think if you look back through the history of the church where people offer new experiences it's always offering a new experience in the context of this is nice it's not usually a new experience of suffering they offer you it's normally something that's easy get out of jail free type approach and suddenly you can just think well okay yeah this is a pathway that's much more preferable to me than suffering and goodness only knows I've prayed that prayer myself a number of times far too many times over the years Lord I know that you need to bring me to maturity in bracket but I'm sure we can work out a pathway that's not going to cost me too much it's not going to be unpleasant to me

I don't think the Lord's heard that bit very well or certainly hasn't paid attention to it and for my own good he hasn't so there's Paul rejoicing and suffering what's the point here Paul's saying well I'm united with Christ and so my perspective on my suffering is that I am standing in line with the pathway that Jesus himself walked the pathway that Jesus said his followers would walk on the way to glory he's not adding to Christ's suffering in any way but extending them in a sense extending them to Jesus people as though Jesus himself was present there with them in the church so Paul sees himself in prison closely closely identified with Jesus if Jesus was still on earth this is the sort of suffering he would take up and walk into for the sake of his people

[ 34 : 00 ] Paul heavily accepts the chance to suffer to carry his share for the sake of Jesus and his brothers and sisters in Christ flipping to the other extreme very different but just as hard is the struggle for believers within a church to be of one mind and one heart in what it is to be in Christ and mature in Christ and servants of Christ we know only too well how hard it is to struggle to speak the truth in love on a constant consistent basis we speak but so often at the wrong time and to the wrong person speaking the truth in love is a confronting challenging model we must take up why because that's exactly what Christ modeled that was his pathway it's even more difficult to live the life of love before one another and towards one another but we must because that is the natural

outworking or the natural overflow of

Christ in you the hope of glory let's go back to my opening question we're not far from being done let's go back to the opening question what is it to be full complete or authentic as a person well I already said that the world says it's about self-seeking but the gospel says the opposite the gospel says to be an authentic person is realizing you are the best version of yourself in Christ and from there you will be self sacrificing since Christ in you the hope of glory defines gives identity to gives fullness of life to and is the best and complete version of yourself then every believer ought to overflow in the natural expression of our union with Christ and the hope of being home with Christ and being like him in the future our true and real self my friends expressed will be self-sacrificing because it is just to be a self-expression of who I am in Christ so I said at the start the world is about self-expression we too as Christians are about self-expression except our self has been reformatted and is a model of

Christ as we express the new reality the controlling power of the spirit within us overflowing through our lips and through our words finally then to the second repeat question of our series what prevents us individually and as a church from experiencing full personhood well this one is really easy I could spend a lot of time on it but it's just really easy to stay put simply it is to take our eyes off Jesus forgetting the essence of who we are thinking as we look ahead to heaven that there are spiritual treasures to be discovered other than

Christ or better than Christ in some new experience or a more immediate than Christ who is in me by spirit chasing after a form of Christian maturity measured by new exciting experiences rather than a greater understanding of who we already are in Christ my friends keep looking at Jesus keep your eyes on him turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in his wonderful things yep and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace

I had forgotten the second two lines I just thought I'll try and elicit that out of somebody so thank you for rescuing me Margaret I hadn't really forgotten if we're to be the man and woman Christ wants us to be then start by understanding what Christ has done for you in the past he's made you a better version of yourself he has brought you into him in Christ and he himself is coming to you Christ in you so look back to that look around for better understanding appreciation and enjoyment of the beauty of Christ and the security of Christ and the fullness of Christ and look forward to a time when you'll actually see all that so clearly about all the hindrances and distractions of our world Paul uses a military strategy in chapter 2 verse 5 it's not immediately obvious in our translation but Paul's very thankful notwithstanding all he says to the

[ 40 : 24 ] Colossian Christians he's very thankful because he rejoices to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ well that good order and firmness two military words is simply standing firm with unbroken ranks as a single minded unit with your eyes focused on your commander looking to the colours and ready for battle convinced that your king is worth dying for and the king is certainly worth fighting for pray with me please Lord these verses like so many in Paul's letters are just chock-a-block full of good things and many of them haven't even come to the service this morning

I pray Lord that what has been said might really take a hold of us that we might understand the richness of the glory of that mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory and may we then Lord follow on as Paul has done as servants of that great Lord Jesus to say him we proclaim both in words where we have the opportunity explaining challenging arguing trying to build one another up in our understanding both in words and in actions of our daily life as we model what it is to be in Christ and for Christ to be in us help us to that end with that power that's reservoir'd within us for your glory Amen God how you are going to us even let's how do..."allen others nah pakai