

The means by which we toil. Colossians 1:28

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: 06 March 2024

Preacher: Jonathan Groves

[0:00] We're taking what Matt has done organically for the past, I don't know, 10 years or so, and making it more formal, more of a formal program.

And I'm actually really excited about the future of the program. We have a few collaborations, I think, that will be coming up hopefully this year. And our hope, our desire is to have a program where people can come and do two things.

Just get theological training and practical ministry experience. So that's what we're hoping to do. Matt and I also host a podcast, Matt's 100th podcast that he probably is on, called the Cranmer Fellows Podcast.

And we talk about everything from biblical studies to practical ministry things, all in the context of Anglicanism. And yeah, so it's fun. But thank you for bringing that up.

And if that is of interest to you and you want to talk more about that, I would love to get in contact with you. All right, so you're in a series on being mature Christians. And I've been tasked tonight with, well, the text is Colossians 128. So if you want, you can turn there. We'll be in various parts of scripture, though, not just Colossians 128.

[1:40] In fact, tonight, I think this talk will probably spark more questions than give answers. And I think that's good. And I get to do that and go home. And you can talk to Father Ife about all of those questions that you have.

But here's the, I guess I should, I should give the scope. And Father Ife already gave a bit of it. But the question tonight that I'm trying to answer is the connection between listening and our maturity as Christians.

What does that look like? And let me start by maybe giving a scenario that I think all of us have been in before. It's Sunday. You've arrived at church. You may have rushed out of your house. Maybe you dragged your kids. Maybe you bickered with your spouse on the way. Maybe you had car problems.

Perhaps you found a leak in your ceiling that morning, like Angel and I did this past Sunday, right before we had to leave. You sit in the pew and you have a hundred things going on in your head. You're thinking about what happened in the morning, what happened over the weekend, what's going to come this next week.

This is where the liturgy is very helpful because you can look at the liturgy. You can say the words that are there in the prayer book. And that that's helpful. And then you get to the sermon. You get to the sermon and knowing where Ife comes from, he probably doesn't preach for 15 minutes.

[3:23] And so you are wondering, how am I with all this stuff in my head? How am I going to get anything out of this sermon for I don't know how long he preaches for?

But surely all of your minds are clear and ready to take in every detail of the sermon. What have you ever like in that moment? Have you ever wondered to yourself?

Like what? What am I getting here? What am I supposed to get here? What am I what am I supposed to get in the sermon right at this point?

What's the point of listening to the sermon right now? Well, that's what I want to I want to talk about tonight. I titled this talk, Harden Not Your Hearts.

And you probably are familiar with that phrase from the Venite, which we say in morning prayer.

[4:25] If you follow the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, you say it every morning prayer that you say the Venite and you say that portion of it. Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation, as in the wilderness when they tested me.

That comes from Psalm 95. And Psalm 95 looks back at Exodus 17. And if you want, you can actually go ahead and turn there to Exodus 17.

In Exodus 17, perhaps you remember, Israel comes to a place called Rephidim. And what's the problem at Rephidim?

Anybody? What? Ramalek. Oh, not yet. Not yet. Water. No water. There's no water.

And they've been going for three days. Well, actually, that comes later or earlier. There's no water.

And it says Israel quarrels with Moses. And when they quarrel with Moses, Moses says this.

[5:39] He says, he asked them, why do you test the Lord? So how are they testing the Lord?

Well, if you look at verse 7, it says that the place was called Massah and Meribah because of the quarreling of the people of Israel.

Because they tested the Lord by saying, is the Lord among us or not? Now, here's why that question is so scandalous.

Because if you just go over a page to Exodus 15, verse 22, you notice that this is not the first place they haven't had water.

Okay? In Exodus 15, they come to a place called Merah. At Merah, the water is bitter. And that's what Merah means. And that's why it's called that. The water there is bitter.

They can't drink it. And so the people complain. And Moses, do you remember what he does to fix the water? Yeah? He stabs the staff.

[6:44] Oh, very good. That's going to come. That's going to come in a minute. But first, what he does, he does something just as weird. He throws a log in the water. He throws a log in the water.

And the water becomes sweet. Becomes sweet. Now, here's the Lord's response. In Exodus 15, verse 26.

He says, If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God and do that which is right in his eyes and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer.

So the Lord's response, if you diligently listen. Now, does Israel diligently listen? Well, no. You get to Exodus 17, and they've forgotten.

And they test him and say, is God really among us? And you think, how can you think that? He just dealt with the water there. How will he not deal with the water here? Well, this Israel, as you know, never enters the promised land.

[7:53] They never get it. In fact, in Deuteronomy 9, 6, Moses concludes this of the people. He says, you are a stiff-necked people. You are a stiff-necked people.

Harden not your heart as in the day of the provocation. Other words for hardening your heart is being stiff-necked. It means to be stubborn.

Israel refusing to listen to God, never getting it for 40 years. That's the very definition of immaturity. Take, for example, say a child.

You tell this child, hey, don't run into the street. A car can come without you seeing it. It might hit you. Don't run out into the street. And they run out into the street, and you discipline them every time they run out into the street.

But they keep running out into the street. And they never learn. And you keep disciplining them.

And they never listen. And then one day, the kid runs out into the street, and right before his eyes, a car zooms past, and he sees his light flash before his eyes.

[9:00] And then he runs out into the street again. Okay, what would you conclude about that child? He's immature. He's not listening. He's not maturing with the discipline, with what I as a parent am telling him.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10.6, says that Israel in the wilderness, not listening, is an example for us not to follow.

How? Well, I want to propose to you that the Bible's number one plea to you is listen to God.

Listen to God. You think about it. Throughout history, God sends messengers to the people.

Prophets, priests, kings, especially the prophets.

They take up a large portion of the Old Testament, going to speak to the people. Think of the greatest commandment. How does it start? Hear, O Israel.

[10:05] Hear, O Israel. How many times do you hear something like this in Proverbs? Hear, O son, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight.

And the fool is the one who doesn't hear, doesn't listen. Jesus, after many of his parables, he'll say something like, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The reality that we have the scriptures, words from God to be heard. Christianity is a religion of hearing, a religion of listening to God.

That's true in the Old Testament and in the church. So you turn over back to Colossians. Just look at the church here in Colossians, and I think we'll see this.

Now before we get to Colossians 1, 28, I want to look at verse 3.

[11:10] I'll read a few verses for us. So Colossians 1, verse 3. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.

Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing, as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God and truth.

Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, he is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. There's just a few things I want to point out here.

Notice, in verses 5 and 6, the Colossians heard. They heard. Now what did they hear? They heard the word of the truth, which is the gospel.

Or another way he puts it, the grace of God and truth. Now, did they just physically hear it? No, there's more going on here, right?

[12:16] Verses 6 and 7, unlike Israel, they understood and learned the gospel. Now, who helped them understand and learn the gospel?

The Holy Spirit. Who did the Holy Spirit use? Epaphras, right? A faithful minister. And the result we see is faith in Christ Jesus, love for all the saints, bearing fruit, and increasing in that.

Increasing in that. So, a faithful minister speaks the word to the people, and helps them understand it with the result of faith, love, and increasing fruit.

Now, we kind of get the idea of progressive sanctification. When I say that, do you know what I mean? Progressive sanctification is, we know that we're justified by faith in Christ alone.

We are made holy in his sight. And now, he is sanctifying us. He is making us look more like Christ every day. This is an increasing experience.

[13:29] But, a mature Christian doesn't progress from everything. Look at Colossians 1, verse 21.

It says, And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he is now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, and this is what I want to look at, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in our creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

So, when the new cultural fad, or the philosophy of the age, the ideas that grab hold of society, come along, are you grounded?

Are you grounded in God's word? Or are you, as James puts it, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine? The Christian message does not progress.

[14:45] In fact, Jude says, We contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. So, we don't progress from the message of the gospel.

Now, here's a question, though. Does that mean that once we understand the gospel, we understand every detail of it, and we'll never learn more?

Once we get the gospel, do we just move on to other things? Now, well, that leads us to verse 24 in Colossians 1. Paul says, 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, 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.

So Paul says, his purpose as a minister, make the word of God fully known. What's the word that needs to be fully known? He says it right at the end.

[16:08] Christ in you, the hope of glory. Now notice, this mystery has great riches. Great riches. Have you fully known the immense riches of this idea? Christ in you, the hope of glory. What does it mean that Christ is in you?

Back up in Colossians 1:19, Paul says, the fullness of God dwells in Christ. Christ is the preexistent God, the creator of all things, the ruler of all nations and kings and people.

He's infinite. Might his riches be infinite as well? the implications of Christ being in you. Like, we haven't even begun to delve the depths of that.

Which leads to verse 28. Him, that is Christ, we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

[17:20] Okay, here in this little verse, Paul lays out the mission of every minister and the mission of every saint.

So, all of us. let's take the minister first. What's the minister supposed to do? He's supposed to proclaim warning and teaching.

When you proclaim, you think declare or preaching. That's what that means. Warn, teach and preach, warn, teach what?

Christ. Christ. What's the point of every sermon? Bible study, Christian education, counseling session, Sunday school, you name it.

What's the point of that? To present Christ to you. Today, if you will hear his voice.

[18:22] Where do we hear his voice? The author of Hebrews tells us pretty plainly. In Hebrews 1, he says, long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

The son. That's the voice you hear. And do not harden your heart to. Jesus' voice, if you think back to Colossians 1:28, through the minister.

But here's the catch. Insofar as that minister preaches, Christ in you, the hope of glory. Now, I want to linger on one word here.

I don't want to look at preaching and teaching specifically right now. I would like to linger on another word. Warning.

Warning. Because I think we get the, oh yeah, a pastor's supposed to preach Christ and teach Christ, but what is this warning all about? Warning.

[19:36] Why is that there? Well, I just mentioned a text in Hebrews, and there's another text in Hebrews, Hebrews 5:11.

And I'm going to read some of this, so you can turn there if you want, or you can just listen. This is what the author of Hebrews says. About this, we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you've become dull of hearing.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food. For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away to restore them again to repentance since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding them up to contempt.

[21:05] Now, we could spend hours unpacking that text, but I'm not going to. I just want to look at a couple things here in relation to the warning aspect in Colossians.

Now, the author here says something interesting. He says, to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ. He's not saying, he's not contradicting me here.

He's not saying that once you get the gospel, you move on from it. Okay? The point here is there are people in the church who are looking a lot like the Israelites in the wilderness.

They keep hearing the gospel, like the basic principles of the gospel, but they don't get it. It'd be like if I'd got up here every Sunday morning and was teaching and people kept asking, well, why did Jesus die?

Why do we have to believe in the resurrection again? And just years and years this goes on and the author of Hebrews is thinking, have you actually listened?

[22:12] Are you actually hearing? Are you actually hearing the gospel? That's what that means there. So, how many times do I have to tell you? Right? This is the gospel.

That's what the author is saying. You can't move on, he's saying, to the deeper things of Christ if you refuse to listen to the basic things of Christ, the elementary things of Christ.

Now, he has heavy words here. This is a warning passage for people who keep hearing the gospel physically but never trusting in it, hardening their hearts as they hear his voice.

They're heavy words, but he has to say them because they're looking, as I said, like Israel in the wilderness. Now, the idea back in Colossians, we see here that in Hebrews, he uses Christ as a warning.

The idea back in Colossians of warning is a gentle rebuke. Now, don't hear gentle and think that that just means, like, nice. It's the rebuke of a father to a son.

[23:19] He loves his child. That's why he disciplines him. It's stern. It's stern. But it's loving.

Discipline's not always fun, but it leads to maturity in a child and maturity in us. In fact, taking the child reference, Proverbs 22, 15 says, folly is bound up in the heart of a child.

And what is it that gets it out? Discipline. Discipline. Discipline is what matures us. So, if you are ever in error doctrinally, you're ever believing something that's false, that's not biblical, or you're in sin and you're not repenting, you should want Father I'd to confront you.

You should want him to do that because if he doesn't, then he's letting you, well, remain in immaturity and foolishness and go down maybe the path of the Israelites.

So, you want a minister to confront you and help you either understand the truth or maybe repent from a sin.

[24:39] Now, is that legalism? Is that just preaching the law? Well, no. Remember, it's him, Christ. Christ we proclaim. It's the gospel that warns us to stay in Christ.

Paul has an interesting connection in 1 Corinthians 10. He looks back to the rock in Exodus 17 that God ends up telling Moses to strike, which our man over here already told us about, to strike and the water flows.

Do you remember what Paul says that rock is? Christ. Yes. Thank you. That rock is a type, is a shadow of Jesus Christ.

We have the true rock in front of us. So, will we test him or will we believe?

And that's why Hebrews 6 is so heavy, actually, because if the punishment for Israel in the old covenant was so severe as for them to not enter the promised land, how much more are those who harden their hearts to Christ?

[26:03] And he even says they're re-crucifying him. This then leads to every saint's mission.

We know that I'd's mission, my mission, Matt's mission, is to preach, to teach, to warn. Every saint's mission, including us, is to hear, to listen to the proclamation, the warning, the teaching.

Now, what are you listening for? Well, I think we've already answered that. Today, if you hear his voice, which is Christ, harden not your heart.

Every sermon, Bible study, counseling session, rebuke, maybe, should be bringing you to the true rock from which flows living waters.

It's at this rock that we want to make sure we don't test, asking, is he really among us or not, but rather we believe, we submit to Christ.

[27:23] Will we be like the immature Israelites, never listening to the word of God, or mature in Christ with our hearts and ears in tune to him. Now, I want to end here by asking, what does that look like practically?

What does it mean for everything to be about Christ? Is it just tagging the gospel on at the end of every sermon? You have a sermon in Proverbs, and it's just all practical knowledge, religion, and then you end with five minutes of, oh, by the way, Jesus died for your sins, and you need to believe in him and have eternal life.

Well, no, I don't think that's what that is. I think a good test to judge every sermon, Bible study, you name it, is Colossians 1.23.

does what I'm hearing shift me from the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ? I think that's a good question to ask yourself.

See, if you don't know what God wants you to hear, you'll fall into the trap of listening to anything, anyone. So, what should you be listening for?

[28:41] What should you be listening for from Father Ife? Should you expect five steps to a healthier life, healthier relationships?

I mean, those are good things. Should you expect funny stories? I mean, you can have funny stories in a sermon, that's fine. What about should you be expecting the law?

Should you be expecting to leave church having something to do? I think we fall into that trap a lot. But all these things will, if you're getting it every Sunday, eventually shift you away from the hope of gospel.

See, the gospel of Jesus Christ is what he's done for you. And that should be the heartbeat of every sermon. It doesn't mean there's not going to be application, right?

We bear fruit and it increases. Jesus. But if that's done in a way without Christ, then you just have legalism. So, the question is, where is Jesus?

[29:51] That should be the perpetual question. You're asking yourself every sermon, every Bible study. If you hear the condemnation of the law, do you go straight to, or does the pastor go straight to, you know, you need to try harder?

or to, Christ have mercy on me, a sinner. Help me. Help me. And then you rest in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Does the sermon make you shift from the hope of the gospel to something else? If so, I would implore you to say with the Greeks in John 12, 21, sir, we wish to see Jesus.

And if you're not getting that from the sermon, which I know you are, because I know Ife, but if you're not, you go to Ife, and you say, sir, we wish to see Jesus.

Jesus. The one who, this is, I think, in all my rambling, is what I'm trying to get at. The one who listens for the gospel in every sermon, teaching, and rebuke, is the one in the process of maturing as a Christian.

[31:10] And that's the only process in which you can mature. And that's because Christ is in you, and you're going to be presented as mature in him.

And you must behold Christ to become more like him. so, this is a Lenten series. We're in the season of Lent, which is 40 days long, which corresponds to Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness, right, and his success against the devil, which corresponds to the 40 years of Israel and their failure in the wilderness, their failure for 40 years to hear his voice.

I would contend that these 40 days of Lent should be a time for us to harden not our hearts and do the opposite. Listen. Listen to God and dig more and more into the depths of the riches of his gospel and what that means for you.

So I want to end by praying Colossians 1, 9-10 over us. So let's pray. Lord, would you fill us with the knowledge of your will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints and light.

And we thank you, Christ, for delivering us from the domain of darkness and transferring us to the kingdom of yourself, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[33:16] Praise Jesus' name. Amen. They have to have you to have to have to have to do lip and is the lip lip lip lip lip lip lip bin lip lip na