

'Church is about....'

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Date: 23 August 2026

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[0:00] So you will have goals for yourselves, for your studies, what you want to achieve in life, where you want to go. Your parents will have goals for you, I'm sure.

Whether they match your goals or not is another question. Here are some three, grade three students who asked what their goals were in life. And one boy said to succeed in herpetology. Does anyone know what herpetology is? I had to look it up. It's the study of reptiles at a zoo. And the fact that he spelt it correctly tells me that he's smart and he's likely to succeed.

He also added to breed dragons. I'm assuming it's not the fire breathing type. But they're very specific goals, aren't they? Although I like the next kid, he kept it simple.

He said, I am seven, I want to turn eight. It's my kind of guy, my kind of guy. But the next one, he said, to get a girlfriend, to kiss her and to rule the world.

[1:01] Very ambitious. The point is, we all have goals in life for ourselves and sometimes even for others. But what about for our church?

If you had to give a goal for our church, what we're to be on about, I wonder what you would say. Is it to be the church with the best coffee?

Or to be a community that provides for various needs like financial advice, mental health seminars, speed dating services, perhaps?

Now, they might all be good goals to have, but as Christians, as King Lee said it tonight, it's actually God's goal that ought to shape our goals, both for ourselves and for our church.

You see, this mini-series is about being on board, not just being on board that boat called HTD, Holy Trinity Doncaster, but also, as King Lee said, on board with God. So, we started last week looking at the big picture and saw that life is about Jesus, the Son.

[2:07] And the reason for that is God has made the Son supreme over this life in this world, because he's the creator and sustainer, and new life, new spiritual life now with God and new physical life later in the world to come, such that all of life ought to be about him, including our lives.

We're to be like rotating planets, where Jesus is at the centre of our lives and his priorities shape ours. And if this is who life is to be about, then it means then it kind of makes sense that our church is to be about Jesus too.

And as we'll see today, church is to be on about working together to present everyone mature in Christ. I'm getting a bit of feedback here.

You getting that? Can we try and fix the sound a bit at the back? That'd be great. Thanks. So, that's to be our goal. Let me show you from God's Word where Paul picks up where he left off from last week.

Firstly, though, with his suffering. So, point one and then verse 24. He says, Here, Paul rejoices in his suffering, which is not quite normal, is it?

[3:30] I mean, when you guys suffer, are you stoked? Are you rejoicing? I doubt it. And so, why does he? Well, the hint is at the end of that first line.

What I am suffering for you. That is, he's rejoicing because this suffering is for the good of the church at Colossae. That's who he's writing this letter to in Colossians.

He says a similar thing in the rest of verse 24. He says he takes on the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, which is, last bit, the church, for their good.

In fact, he's even willing to fill up in his flesh, he says, what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions. What does that mean? Well, the word for affliction here can mean trouble or oppression. And so, to fill up in his flesh the afflictions of Christ means to willingly take on the trouble and oppression that comes from following Christ and proclaiming Christ.

[4:33] And it's still lacking in the sense that there's always, sadly, more oppression and persecution to come in some part of our world. I mean, even right now, there are Christians suffering for Christ in our world, aren't there?

I mean, you just have to think of most of Nigeria, for example. Many parts of Africa, Afghanistan and the like. Christians still suffer for Christ.

In fact, Paul himself is actually in prison as he writes this letter because he's been proclaiming the good news about Christ. And yet he rejoices in this.

Indeed, he's happy to fill up in his body. He says, fill up in my flesh. In other words, take as many hits as possible, like a boxer taking punches.

He's happy to do all that in order to keep proclaiming Christ, whether by word or by this written letter. Even for those he's never met, like those in Colossae.

[5:36] He never met that church in Colossians. And like us here in Melbourne. And I wonder just for a moment if we're willing to suffer for Christ like that. Willing to even rejoice that we might take whatever comes for following Christ.

Whether that's being ridiculed by others at uni or work. Or even being rejected by relatives. I still remember meeting my wife's uncle for the first time.

This was over in the UK. And he said, oh, what are you doing? And I said, oh, I'm actually studying at Bible college. And they said, how much do they pay you to do that? And I said, oh, they don't pay me.

I pay them. And he went, what? And I said, oh, well, have you ever thought about Jesus? And he goes, I need to go to the bathroom. And walked off straight away. He just thought I was nuts for doing this.

There are relatives that reject us because of this. But are we willing to go through this for Christ? Though it probably won't mean as many hits as Paul, given proclaiming Christ was his job.

[6:44] Point to verse 25. He goes on to say, I've become its servant, that's the church's servant, by the commission that God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

God has commissioned him, giving him the job, if you like, of being a servant of the church to work for their good. How? Well, by presenting the word of God in its fullness.

Now, by fullness here, Paul doesn't mean every little bit of it. But rather, he means the fulfillment or completeness of it. And the fulfillment of God's word is Jesus.

He is the one who completes it. You see, until Jesus came, the word of God was just the Old Testament. And in places, well, much of it was still a puzzle, actually.

It was kind of like trying to do a jigsaw puzzle without the crucial missing piece. Like these guys who are looking for a missing piece under the table of their caravan as they try and do their jigsaw puzzle.

[7:48] Only in the Old Testament, it was actually a really big piece like that. And Jesus was that missing piece. But when Jesus came, he completed the picture.

He brought fullness or completeness to the word of God, you see. And so Paul's job was to present God's word in that fullness with that final missing piece of Jesus.

And all the implications that came with him, that is, Jesus being the Messiah, the Christ. In fact, like a missing piece, Paul calls Jesus the mystery that was once hidden but now made known.

So he goes on to say the same thing in different words. Verse 26. The mystery that was being kept hidden for ages and generations in the Old Testament times but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles, that's us, the glorious riches of this mystery which is Christ. In you, the hope of glory. It's like our first reading which spoke of God's servant who would be a light to the Gentiles.

[8:58] Gentiles being non-Jews in whom the nations would find their hope. And at the time, it was a mystery whom that servant was, who it referred to.

But now that mystery has been made known. We all know it's who? Thank you, one person down the front row. It's Jesus, right? It's Jesus.

The one who gives us the hope of glory. And it's here we see how Paul's suffering was for the good of the church. Because it was the message about Jesus that gives us this certain hope of glory.

For Jesus died to pay for our sins so that we can be forgiven and given a place in God's family now. And Jesus rose from the dead to prove that he will one day raise us from the dead to enjoy life

eternal in glory.

Our glory is life with God as perfect people like Jesus in a perfect world to come where there'll be nothing wrong. Wrong. It'll be better than the best day you can possibly imagine.

[10:05] It will be glorious. And this hope is not wishful thinking like the hope that Andrew doesn't preach too long tonight. That's an uncertain hope.

But this glory is a certain hope. And it's for everyone who believes in Jesus. I wonder, have you put your faith in Jesus Christ? The big point though here is that it's Paul's job to proclaim this full picture of God's word that pointed to Jesus.

Who gives us this certain hope of glory. And it's for our good. It's for the church's good, isn't it? I mean, eternal glory is good. Of course it's for our good.

Especially when the alternative is suffering agony in hell outside the new creation. You see, this certain hope of glory is for our immeasurable good.

Which is why Paul is happy to suffer. To proclaim the good news about Jesus. Not just because it's his job as a servant of the church. But because it's for the good of the church.

[11:11] In fact, not just for the good of the church. It's for the good of everyone. Which brings us to his goal for everyone. Point 3, verse 28. He, that is Christ, is the one we proclaim.

Admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom. So that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Do you see Paul's goal here? It's to present everyone mature in Christ. This is his goal. And which ones does he want to present mature in Christ?

Verse 28. It's everyone, isn't it? In fact, the original is even more obvious. It literally says, He is the one we proclaim warning everyone.

And teaching everyone in all wisdom. So that we may present everyone mature in Christ. It's what Jesus said in the Great Commission, isn't it?

[12:13] Remember Matthew 28? Go and make disciples of how many nations? All nations. Yeah. And the way to do that, just as it is in our passage, is at the beginning of verse 28.

It's by proclaiming Christ. Him. He is the one we proclaim. So that they may present everyone mature in Christ. Firstly, by becoming a Christian.

It's hard to become a mature Christian if you first don't become a Christian, right? But as we proclaim the good news about Jesus, people hear and believe in him. They become Christians and receive that certain hope of glory.

And then he continues, Paul continues to proclaim Christ. To grow people into mature Christians. Now you might think that's a little odd.

I mean, if we have already heard the good news about Jesus when we became Christians, why do we need to keep hearing it to grow as Christians? And the answer is because it's God's means to do both.

[13:20] Both to save us and grow us. As I've said before, we never graduate from the gospel onto some new teaching or philosophy as these Colossian Christians were being tempted to do.

Oh sure, we can learn the basics of the gospel and then move on to deeper truths and implications of it. But it's still the gospel. It's a bit like maths.

Anyone like maths here? No hands at all. No one likes maths in the whole room. I bet you can all do some maths. Here we go. Ready? One plus one equals? Two.

Okay, you can all do some maths. So we know that we can learn the basics of maths. And then we can learn on, move on to the deeper or harder truths about maths. Like abstract algebra or advanced calculus.

Is that right, Jetty? That's the hard stuff? Yep. Okay. But it's still maths is the point, right? Whether it's one plus one or advanced calculus, it's still maths. Well, so too with the gospel.

[14:17] And we can learn the basics and then move on to appreciating more deeply or understanding more deeply or unpacking the implications more thoroughly. But it's still the gospel.

And so we never actually graduate away from it. Indeed, it's what continues to move us to follow Jesus and to grow more like Jesus.

Isn't it? Let me ask you, what most motivates you to forgive others? Is it that they'll like you or get more treasure in heaven?

Or is it not that at the cross, God forgave you through Christ? Is that not it? Let me put it a different way. What most motivates you to follow Jesus?

Isn't it that at the cross, Jesus gave all for you? Isn't that what really pulls at the heart and moves you? It's the gospel still, isn't it?

[15:20] The gospel, whether it's the basics or whether it's the unpacked implications, is still God's means to grow us mature like Christ. And so that's why we've got to keep coming back to it, you see.

And so Paul's God-given goal was to present everyone maturing Christ by continuing to proclaim the good news of Christ. And it's not just Paul's goal.

It's actually to be our goal too. Because you notice in verse 28, he changes from I to we. Verse 24, I rejoice.

Verse 25, I have become, but verse 28, we proclaim, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. In other words, this God-given goal was not just for Paul.

It was for his co-workers like Epaphras and others mentioned in the letter too. It was for the churches who supported Paul in this goal. And it's to be for our church as well.

[16:19] For Paul's attitudes and principles, his method and his goal have become part of God's word to us. It's what we're reading here tonight.

That we might share this goal too. After all, it's what Jesus gave us in the Great Commission, isn't it? And so as good as having the best coffee or the coolest community services might be, God's goal, primary goal for us as his church is to present everyone we possibly can mature in Christ. And so perhaps controversially, this means we're not actually meant to be a church that will meet all your needs. Yes, we may help meet some of your needs, whether physical or mental, financial, emotional, even relational, as part of loving you, because that's what part of being a mature Christian is, is loving one another.

But we're not to be about meeting all your needs. And you don't actually want that anyway, do you? I mean, if you suddenly needed surgery, do you really want me operating on you?

The answer is no. But we are to be about meeting your spiritual needs. For church is to be about working together to proclaim Christ so that we may present you and everyone we possibly can mature in Christ.

[17:47] That's the big point. That's what we're to be on board with. But what does this mean for us as individual members at church? Well, a number of things, most of which I'll leave for next week, but let me show you three things from Colossians this week.

Three specific ways to be on board with this goal of presenting everyone maturing Christ by proclaiming Christ. Firstly, we're all to actually speak the word of Christ directly to one another. Later on in Colossians, we see this, chapter 3, verse 16, Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you, church, teach and warn one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, he says.

It's quite similar to chapter 1, verse 28. They're proclaiming or they're teaching and warning with all wisdom, you see. And so when it comes to one another inside the church, it's not just us pastors who are to speak directly to you the word of Christ.

It's actually all of us. We're to let the word of Christ dwell or live richly and deeply amongst us, teaching and warning or encouraging or admonishing, depending on your translation, one another.

[19:03] But we are to do it wisely, with all wisdom. And in Colossians, wisdom is bound up with Jesus, no surprise. Both in terms of the content, what we say, it needs to match Jesus' word, but also how we say it.

It needs to match Jesus' manner. So it needs to be consistent and appropriate for the situation we're in, gracious, if you like. And so if there's a member from 5pm church that you recognize up at Shopping Town, you're in Coles, you're at one end of the Coles, they're at the other end, and you go, oh, I think that person's from 5pm church.

Oh, I can't quite remember their name. I haven't seen them for a while. I should encourage them. And so you yell out across a hall of Coles, hey, don't you go to Holy Trinity 5pm?

Yeah, I think you do. I haven't seen you for ages. What's your name again? You should come back. Do you think that's appropriate? Do you think that's with all wisdom? No, you're all stunned. Of course not.

It needs to be with all wisdom. It needs to be appropriate to the situation. But we can all do it in a couple of ways, like we've already done tonight. The rest of verse 16, he goes on to say, through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your heart.

[20:24] And so we've already done that tonight, haven't we? As we sing to God, we're actually also encouraging one another to live out or to hear these truths that we're singing from the song's lyrics.

Of course, we can do this in conversation after church as well, or Bible study, or growth groups, whatever you want to call them. Perhaps by sharing what has struck you from God's Word, or perhaps what has encouraged you to keep following Jesus, or perhaps sending people text messages if you haven't seen them for a couple of weeks, asking them how they're going, or how's that thing we're praying about.

I was visiting someone in hospital recently who was encouraged by how people sent them text messages with Bible verses and little prayers that people wrote out, which they found really encouraging, not just for them personally, but for their faith.

The point is, being on board with this goal of presenting everyone maturing Christ means firstly, proclaiming Christ directly to one another inside the church. And secondly, it means praying for those whose job it is to proclaim Christ to everyone, inside and outside the church.

So chapter 4 says, Paul writes, Pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am changed. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

[21:47] Notice how Paul says at the end there, as I should, because it's his job to do it. Just like it's my job and Mark's job and others. Or the job of our mission partners.

Or the job of ministry leaders. Or the job of growth group leaders. All those roles ought or should proclaim the word of Christ, clearly.

But Paul knows he needs God's help to do that, to open doors and speak it clearly. And so we ask for prayer. Which we can all do, can't we? We can all pray.

And so we're to pray for God to open doors for those whose job is to proclaim the gospel. Whether church pastors, mission partners, whether ministry leaders, growth group leaders.

I mean, we kind of pray for our mission partners each week. You know, the prayer points are on the back of these things, the bulletins. How many of you actually take this home and pray at least once for our mission partners during the week?

[22:50] It's an easy thing to do, isn't it? That's one way we can help proclaim Christ, by praying for those whose job it is to do so. And thirdly, we're all to speak the word of Christ indirectly to those outside the church.

And so Paul goes on in the next couple of verses, Here to be wise is again to be like Christ.

And this time it's how we act towards outsiders, those who are not Christians. And it involves making the most of every opportunity by, you know, doing good or saying something good that might provoke a comment or a question.

And then verse 6, our conversation is to be gracious and appropriately flavoured so that we can answer their comment or answer their question in a way that points them to Jesus.

Notice how this is more of a roundabout or indirect way here. Whereas when it comes to those inside the church, where it should be easier to speak the word of Christ, it's a much more direct way.

[24:05] Although even those who are outside the church, sometimes the opportunity will make it easy and direct. You know, someone says, what did you do Sunday night? And you say, nothing.

I'll go to church. Thank you. Yeah. Yeah, go to church. I mean, that's pretty straightforward, isn't it? And see what happens there. Or you can start praying for someone who you can invite to Hope Explored coming up in October.

That's some easy first steps. There's other ways, of course. A lady called Doris, who used to come to the morning service, would have a necklace with a cross on it and would always make sure it was out, very visible.

And she would pray for opportunities to use that to speak with others. And it happened. Because I asked her, I said, does that ever work? She said, yeah. I was talking to a lady in a shop, I can't remember which shop it was, who commented on the cross.

And I said, oh, do you know anything about Jesus? And off they went. They had a conversation. If you're really cool like King Lee, you can put it on your earring. I'm just staring at you. I shouldn't pick on you wherever it is.

[25 : 13] That's another way. A lady called Claire from St. John's 830 told me this morning that she tries to do it whenever people ask her how she's going.

She recently lost her husband. And so people will say, how are you going? And she'll always say, well, with God who gives me strength and guides me. In fact, how good is this?

After this morning, she said, you know what? I need to mention Jesus. So I'm going to go home and think of a different line I can say that points them to Jesus. How's that? She misses her husband dreadfully.

He's died. And yet she still wants to use that as an opportunity to point people to Christ. If she can do that, we've got no excuse, do we? Or a guy in my Bible study group last week shared how he met an Iranian man on a business trip.

They got talking and the man ended up sharing how he was anxious. He was kind of involved in a custody battle over his kid with his ex-wife. And at that point, the guy in my Bible study group could have understandably kind of withdrawn and gone, oh, I'm sorry about that.

[26 : 17] I need to go because, you know, that's quite a lot of information to deal with. But he didn't. He leaned into it and he said, oh, I'm so sorry to hear. Can I pray for you? And the man's face just kind of lit up and went, yeah, that'd be great.

He really appreciated it. And it provided another opportunity for the guy in my Bible study group to come back and talk with him more about Jesus and even gave him a Bible before he left to come back home here to Melbourne.

We pray for that Iranian man every week in our Bible study group. Here are just some ways we can be wise in the way we act towards outsiders, provoking opportunities and then making the most of them, appropriately answering their comments or questions in a way that points them to Jesus.

But the big application we're to be on board with is God's goal for our church of presenting everyone we possibly can mature in Christ by proclaiming Christ. In fact, it's even worth working hard to do it.

As Paul says at the end of the passage, to this end, for this goal, I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. The word strenuously here is where we get the word agony from.

[27 : 29] Paul is willing to go through agony to achieve this goal. I don't know if you've ever heard of the Barclay Marathons. It's the toughest race in the world.

It's over in the U.S. in Tennessee and basically they run through the mountains and have to get through different checkpoints and you can do it in any order, I think. There's no actual route and so no one knows exactly how long it is.

People just keep running until they get all the checkpoints. They think it's roughly about 200 kilometers. So that's like three marathons back to back. Hence, Barclay Marathons, plural.

And you've got 60 hours to do it. Can you imagine running for 60 hours? It's insane. In fact, it took 10 years for anyone to finish the race.

And in just 40 years, only 20 people in the world have ever finished it. In 2017, a guy called Gary Robbins collapsed over the finish line in 60 hours and six seconds.

[28 : 29] He was disqualified. How harsh is that? And they even made a documentary about this called the Barclay Marathons, the race that eats its young.

That's how full on it is. And so you've got to wonder, why on earth would you put yourself through such agony? There's no prize. There's no real glory. Except to say, I did it.

Well, here, the prize is eternal glory. And so Paul knows it is worth suffering agony to keep proclaiming Christ.

And yet he also knows he has Christ's strength to help him. He says he contends with all the energy that Christ so powerfully works in him. And so when you come to think about speaking the word of Christ to each other inside the church, sometimes it can be hard.

I mean, it's easier to talk about the week, what you're studying, whatever. And, you know, do those things. But get on to the other stuff as well. It can be hard to keep remembering to pray for gospel ministry during the week as well.

[29 : 39] And it can be hard even proclaiming or sharing the good news with those outside the church. And yet it's worth the agony. It's worth doing it.

Because the prize is eternal glory. And so as a church, we're to work hard with Christ's strength to proclaim Christ. That we might present everyone we possibly can mature in Christ.

And the last question is, are you on board? Let's pray. Our graciously heavenly Father, we thank you for your word to us.

Which points us to the Lord Jesus who died for us. We pray that you would help us as your church here at Holy Trinity. To keep proclaiming the good news of Christ.

That we may present everyone we possibly can mature in him. We ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.