

Colossians 1:24-2:5

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Date: 22 September 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, my name is Eric, and I'm so glad you're here to worship with us and to read God's Word with us and study it together. I pray that this morning we'll be very encouraged by the mystery that is Jesus Christ. We're going to talk about it here in a minute, but I wanted to just give a quick heads up about next week. Next week we get the chance to do what we call Family Sundays here. It'll be our first one, but a Family Sunday for us is a Sunday where we are inviting all of our kids into the service with us for the whole service. And the goal of these Sundays is just simply to get in regular rhythms occasionally where we are modeling for our children what it is when we get together as the body in worship. So teaching them and inviting them into singing, the preaching of God's Word, listening, and to all of the elements of the service. We just want our kids to get in that rhythm of seeing church done and experiencing with us together. So next Sunday we will not have any form of children's classes or nursery, but we ask that you bring your kids into the service, and it's going to be great. But next week also we get to do the heart of the book, which is Colossians 2 verses 6 to 7. That's Paul's sort of climax of the book. It's his thesis of the entire book. So next week we're going to get to dive into that, and I'm excited to get there to that pinnacle, verses 6 and 7. But before that we get this week, and I'm excited because this week is the build-up to that climax. And the reason it's a build-up is what Paul's going to do here for us today is he's going to give us his personal philosophy of ministry.

But what I love about what Paul does here is he doesn't just say, this is my philosophy of ministry, I'm just going to throw it out there, and you guys can hear it as a church, and take or leave, refine it, that's fine if you want to do that. No, no, here's what Paul's going to do. Here's my philosophy of ministry, big M ministry, all church ministry, and then he's going to call the Colossians to that ministry and invite them in to what is the global ministry of all of the church. So I'm excited to do this together, and hopefully we can see this philosophy of ministry for the church. But before we get into that, I want to just ask, what is ministry? This is a really big and in some ways loaded term today. Ministry is used of so many different spheres of Christianity, of Christians doing something with their lives. When you think about ministry, what comes to your mind? Perhaps you immediately think of the many ministries of the church, the local church, kids ministry, youth ministry, adult ministry, men's ministry, women's ministry, outreach ministry, evangelism, on and on. Or maybe when I say ministry, you think of what we call parachurch ministry, a homeless shelter, or refugee aid organization, a soup kitchen, an after-school program, an at-risk youth program, a pregnancy care center, a mission agency, on and on. Maybe when I mentioned the word ministry, you immediately thought of your own personal ministry. Your stay-at-home mom ministry, your co-worker ministry, your providing a meal to others ministry. Regardless of what comes into your mind when you hear the word ministry.

All of those things, I want to state right off the top here, those are all good things. And the Lord uses each and every effort for him, for his glory. But today we're going to take a closer look at this word, and we're going to see how Paul is going to frame Christian ministry. And I think Paul's goal this morning is to convince the church and us that all ministry is about proclaiming the mystery which produces maturity. Yes, I'm a pastor, we like alliteration, so there we go. But in the ESV translation, these are actually alliterated, they're actually words from the text, even though ESV is not the inspired original language, it helps. So I'm going to say it again, all ministry is about proclaiming the mystery which produces maturity. We're going to break this down as we go through the text here. But as we talk about these things, keep these words in mind, ministry, mystery, maturity. You're going to see them in the text as we work through it together. So I invite you, let's turn to verse 24, and what we're going to do is we're going to break down this whole philosophy of ministry that Paul has, and we're going to see it come alive in his progression of idea. And Paul is a very logical,

streamlined thinker. You read his books and you see the flow of the argument he's making.

[5 : 00] It's very streamlined. And he does it in this passage. So what we're going to do is we're going to break this passage down into five sections that are going to help us see that this truth is real. So the first section is going to be the call of ministry, which is going to be in verses 24 to 25.

The call of ministry. Let's read verse 24 to 25 together. 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.

Now here's what Paul does in this first section. He is going to highlight for us how he got into ministry. So there's something we need to recognize about being a Christian, and it's this, that the Lord calls us to ministry. And this is what Paul says. He says this, I have rejoiced in my sufferings for your sake. And then he says this, I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you. In other words, it's a big fancy way of saying this, the Lord took me, blinded me, gave me my sight back, restored me, redeemed me, and then used me, repurposed me for his purposes. That's what it means to be called to ministry. Quite simply, the only call to ministry in existence is a call to Jesus himself. And what I'm trying to say here, the only thing Paul is trying to say here is this, that for each person that has come to Christ and found their identity in him as one who is transferred from darkness to light, from sinner to saint, that person has been called to Jesus in newness of life. And by doing that, the Lord taking us and redeeming our lives, we are in the same breath called to ministry. In other words, this is what Paul is saying. There is no special call to ministry. The Lord doesn't redeem us, wash us, cleanse us, and then say, I want you to wait and I'm going to call you to a specific ministry.

Here's what Paul is saying. I became a minister, listen to this, according to the stewardship from God that was given to me to make the Word of God fully known. In other words, the life that God has redeemed, he calls to steward. And what are we stewarding? We're stewarding the very salvation that we've received. And for Paul, that means to make that Word known. So in this first section, talking about the call of ministry, it's really important for us to understand that if you are a Christian, if the Lord has redeemed you and washed you clean, you have been called to ministry. But I want to focus really quickly. We have to understand what Paul means here with this kind of a shocking statement if we're not careful in verse 24. You notice he says, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. I have been called to minister the gospel and Jesus, the salvation that I've received, back to the church. That's his ministry. But he says this statement, he says, I am filling up, I'm filling up what's lacking in Christ's afflictions. What does that mean?

[8 : 53] Is Paul suggesting that Jesus' afflictions on earth were lacking or inadequate? Is he suggesting, furthermore, that Jesus has not suffered as much as he has? Is there any more brutal affliction than what occurred to Jesus Christ? Here's what happened to Jesus in a really big, small nutshell. Jesus was betrayed by one of his own into the hands of people who wanted him dead. And after going through trial after trial and being falsely accused and falsely, falsely placed under a yoke of offense and finger pointing, innocent as he was, was delivered over to be killed, which meant the following process. Beat, spit, mocked, flogged, which is a brutal way of torturing somebody by whipping them with a incredibly dangerous whip that would rip open the flesh. And then after that happened, they took him and made him carry a giant piece of wood, a cross, all the way to the top of a hill through the city in shame, where then they then took him and nailed him to that very piece of wood, pulled it up. He laid on the cross in the cold of the night and the heat of the day, and slowly bled out and suffocated to death. That's what happened to Jesus.

And in the midst of all of that, Paul would say something like, I'm filling up what's lacking in his afflictions. It cannot be that Paul is suggesting that Jesus suffered, but I've suffered a lot more, and there's a lot that could still be suffered. And he didn't fill that up, so I'm going to fill up what he didn't do. That's not what Paul is saying. It can't be. Instead, what Paul is saying here, likely, is that Jesus, through his suffering, brought completion and full resolution to all suffering through his work. Because of the cross, all pain, all suffering will one day cease. The cross is the antidote to all suffering in this life.

And one day, our earthly afflictions and suffering will come to nothing, when he finally makes all things new. So what Paul is likely saying here with this term is that although Jesus' sufferings paved the way for us to have life and hope for that last bit of suffering to go away one day when he

returns, here's what he's likely saying. Paul is saying that the suffering that Jesus occurred on the cross, that is the same suffering that we are called to until he returns. And that is the portion that Paul is talking about. That when Christ suffered, he called us to identify with him and suffer with him in this life. And here's what Paul says, is the term he uses, I'm filling up that suffering.

From the moment Jesus ascended to the Father to the moment he returns again, there's a period there where Christians, us, who are hidden in Christ and identify with him, will suffer. It's part of living in this broken world. We will suffer. Be it persecution, be it just plain suffering that happens to us who live in a broken world, we will continue to suffer until he returns. Here's what Paul says, I am filling that up.

Paul is boasting, not in himself, but boasting in the privilege of suffering on behalf of Jesus. That's what he's doing here. So here's the call to ministry that we see in these first two verses.

[12:53] The call to ministry is that the one whom God has redeemed, he calls. Our ministry is handed to us by virtue of our saved identity. But not only that, that it is a privilege to minister and to identify even with the sufferings in that ministry. That's the call of ministry for us. Our only call is a call to Jesus himself. And when he calls you, he makes you a minister. This is why in Matthew chapter 4, Jesus, when he called Peter, James, and John, he said this, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

And immediately they left their nets and followed him. What's happening there? I'm calling you, you're mine, and in that calling inherent with that is ministry. You will be fishers of men with me. They're one and the same. So let's move to number two, verses 26 to 27, the message of ministry. So now we're going to go into the message of ministry. Paul says we all have the calling to ministry. I've been given a stewardship of the ministry of the gospel, and I want to make his word fully known. But now what we see in verse 26 and 27, or excuse me, 26 and 27, yes, we see the message. What is this message of ministry that we are to make known? Well, here's where he's going to use this language of mystery. Here it is, 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. Beautiful. Simply put, what is the message of our ministry? Well, it's the mystery. What is going on here, Paul? Just say it clearly. Why are you using terms like the mystery is our message? That's what we're proclaiming. And to understand this, we have to understand the full plan of God the Father. God's mystery is a term for his redemptive plan of salvation from the beginning to the end. God's mystery is the hidden plan for his people that he would draw them back unto himself. And here's the truth of the mystery. Here's what Paul says. That mystery, hidden for ages and generations, is now revealed to his saints. It's no longer a mystery. We now know what the answer is. It's like Christmas. When the Christmas Eve, when you go down, you see the presents, and as kids, we would take them, we would shake them. What is in this box? Paul's saying this, that for ages and ages, the Israelites had the box, and the Lord said, here's what it's going to look like. Here's some hints. But they would shake the box, and they could not figure out, what is in here? We're just so excited to see. And here's what Paul just said. We have received our Christmas morning already, brothers and sisters. And what is that Christmas morning? It has now been 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. Here it is, which is Christ in you. Okay. Christ in you is the present. And us, the church, we have seen this present, we've opened it, and we delight in this present.

All the mysteries of God have been fully revealed in the glory of Jesus the person. And to understand this, and to really see how this all came to fruition, I want to just read, or reference a few passages in the Old Testament. That as God was laying out these breadcrumbs of this mystery that would be revealed one day, here's some of the things that we see. Exodus chapter 12, we see that the Messiah would be, this mystery, this Jesus Christ would be the sacrificial lamb that washes away all sin and causes the wrath of God to pass over his people. That was part of the hidden mystery in Exodus 12. Daniel chapter 2, the Messiah would establish a kingdom that would overthrow and destroy all other kingdoms. Part of that mystery. Who's going to come and when is that kingdom going to come? They're waiting and waiting. Isaiah 42 and 52, the Messiah would suffer on behalf of God's people and bring salvation to the ends of the earth, even the Gentile nations.

[17:40] All nations will come to me and find joy in me. That's what God promised in those chapters. Genesis 49, Jacob blesses his sons and promises that the scepter will not depart from

Judah, which was one of his 12 sons. This was a prediction that God's plan was to establish a king forever from that specific line. His scepter will never depart. Jeremiah 31, the Messiah will establish a new blood covenant for the forgiveness of sins of God's people once and for all. Genesis 3, the earliest mystery hinted. Here it is. The snake crusher will come from the woman and defeat the serpent, reversing the curse and defeating death.

This is the mysterious plan of God that was hidden for ages. And I remember when I was in college, we had the privilege in one of our classes, it was a theology class talking through Isaiah, the teacher brought in a local rabbi.

It was fantastic. He came in and we could just talk with him. Orthodox Jewish rabbi. And we had to talk with him. And I remember asking some questions of him, just an open dialogue. And I quoted two of these stories. I said, Daniel, in Daniel chapter 2, in Isaiah 53, we're told of a suffering servant. We're told of a kingdom that will come that will crush all the other kingdoms and one who will reign, whose scepter will never depart the throne.

I even hinted at the Davidic covenant. There's going to be one that comes from the line of David and his kingdom will go forever and ever and never fade away from the earth. I said, who is this to you? I really want to know. I know that you know that I think it's Jesus because you're in an evangelical Protestant school right now, but I want to know who is this? And the things that you hear from preachers and from podcasts and from scholars when you hear about the Jewish Messiah are all true because here's what he said. Each and every prophecy that you just referenced, they're obviously clearly talking about a person who will come that God sent who will establish a literal kingdom that will reign literally and destroy physically all of the other nations of the earth. And that will be the Messiah.

He will free Israel once and for all from all of her enemies that surround her and he will reign on this earth as a real king warrior. And when I pressed into that a little bit, it was clear.

[20 : 16] Jesus did not fit the bill. Why does this matter? This is really important. Because the big questions that Israel has asked for thousands of years, who is the Messiah and when is he coming, are answered by Paul with one phrase. And here's the phrase, the hope of glory.

This is a phrase that gives a two-part fulfillment of the mystery of God. Christ brings hope to a people who are without hope, but continually in a cycle of obedience, disobedience, rebellion, exile, repentance. That cycle that Israel has gone through for entire history and we also identify with. Here's the reality of this statement, the hope of glory. Jesus is the eternal hope that transcends all of our mess, all of our rebellion, all of our unrepentance. He makes a way once and for all that is faithful and true. And if we repent of our sin and believe in him, that is our calling forever. Saints. That's the hope part. But then he says the hope of glory.

And this is a term that as the Jewish believers would have read Colossians, when he says hope of glory, they would have said, oh, we know where he's going with this. The glory of God that is so incredibly on display in the Old Testament. When the Lord on top of Mount Sinai shines down, radiates down his power through thunder and through an amazing display of lightning.

Over and over again, we see these big brilliant displays of God with power and light and majesty throughout the entirety of Israel's history. They know what the word glory was conveying. Here's what Paul is saying here, that Christ brings imminent to his people the glory of God, which used to be far off, up on the mountain. Don't touch the mountain. You'll die. Now here's what Paul is saying. Jesus is the hope of glory. The full glory of God has come to us, church, and now resides fully within us, but this time without fear of death. Instead of death, we hope.

That is the glorious hope that we have in the mystery being revealed. That is the mystery. Christ in you. Not just Christ, but the fact that Christ is within us.

[22 : 46] The entire Old Testament, the entire plan of God was to send Jesus so that the church would be filled with his glorious presence. That's the mystery revealed. It's Jesus.

Why is it such a big deal? Because God had promised for 4,000 years that he has a plan. And what is a plan? When someone tells you, I have a plan, they say it like that, right? What are we supposed to think? I have a plan. That person is asking you to place trust in them. I have a plan.

It's going to work out. I still say this to my kids sometimes, and I'm looking at them saying, just trust me. It's going to work out. The assumption is when someone says that, that they have premeditated this plan.

Imagine if someone comes to you and says, don't worry, I have a plan for your birthday. It's going to be great, honey. Okay? It's going to be awesome. And your wife's like, oh, I'm excited. Yeah,

tomorrow's, all right. There's a plan for my birthday. This is going to be great. And then the day comes and you're like, I will figure it out. I don't know. How disappointing would that be? But here's why it would be so disappointing. Because the assumption is that when someone says, I've got a plan, they've thought it through. It's premeditated. And they've laid all the steps out. And this is what we see in the Old Testament. This is what God has done. He has told his people, I have a plan. And here's who Jesus is. He comes and he makes the plans of God all come to fruition perfectly in his existence. And that's Jesus. This is the person Paul proclaims so mightily in this book.

[24 : 33] That's the message of ministry. The message of ministry is Jesus, the hope of glory, the one who fulfills all of the promises of God and whom are all of the yeses of God's promises. So now let's move to number three, the goal of ministry. We're going to see this in verse 28. Here's a major verse on the philosophy of the church. If every church in the world were to take a philosophy from the Bible, this is the verse I would hope we would take. Here it is. Him we proclaim. Who? The mystery. Jesus, hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. What is the goal of ministry? To present everyone mature. But how do we do that? By proclaiming Jesus. And here's what's so important. The we is very important. I want you to look back at verse 24. Here's what Paul says, now I rejoice. I am filling up what is lacking. I became a minister according to the grace of God that was given, the message God was given to me to make word of God fully known. I was a minister.

I received the gospel. Here's my ministry. Here's what I aim to do. And now here's what Paul does. This is where we come in, guys. In verse 28, he changes the language from here's my ministry to here's our ministry. Him we proclaim. He just took the whole church and said, you're part of this group, man. Here we go. We're all in this together. All of us proclaim this mystery of God, Jesus. So now we have seen that the ministry goal of Paul is not individualistic, but now it is corporate. The entire church's job, all of us together, is to proclaim Jesus. For what reason? To present people mature. Him we proclaim is perhaps singular, the most singular fundamental description of the church's mission. And I would argue that the Great Commission is summed up in these three words.

The goal of preaching, discipleship, evangelism, taking of the ordinances, on and on and on, is the proclamation of Jesus Christ. It's why we do what we do as a church. And in this verse, Paul takes his personal philosophy of ministry and expounds it to the Colossians for what should be their church philosophy of ministry. In all church ministry, we proclaim Jesus. Another way to put this is there's only one real ministry of the church, and it's to proclaim Christ, period.

Now, all of the ways in which we do that in the church are fantastic and wonderful, and the Lord uses different body parts and different people and different giftings and different areas to do this collective goal. But we have to remind ourselves that that is our ministry. To the point where I would even say, our ministry isn't tech, our ministry isn't even worship, or preaching, or hospitality, or children's, or youth, or on and on and on. Our ministry is proclaiming Christ together.

[27 : 56] But, tech team, you are so valuable and you do a great job. All of you.

Through your work, we have the proclamation of Christ, clearly, audibly, without distraction. Hospitality, you guys do a fantastic job welcoming people and putting a place for the whole body to feel loved and to enjoy communion and fellowship. You help the proclamation of Christ in that ministry.

Security, you keep us safe and allow us to be able to focus here without any worry. You help the proclamation of the gospel. Set up crew. All of this helps the proclamation of the gospel.

We could stand here and just sit on the floor. We could do that with no amplification. Sure, we could do that. But I believe this is a wonderful gift that you have given to help the gospel go forward.

Worship team, children's, on and on. Every single individual effort that we put in as the church builds up this great statue of Christ. That is who we proclaim.

When we hold Bible studies and we admonish one another in the Word by reading it and studying it together, I pray that we would proclaim Christ when we open the Bible. Jesus said in Luke 24, He read all the scriptures in light of Himself.

[29 : 25] And in beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them, these people He's talking to, all the scriptures concerning Himself. In other words, He saw the scriptures as pointing toward the mystery revealed, Jesus Himself. So too, when we open the Bible, I pray every time you open up your Bible by yourself with other people to study it, answer these three questions.

And it will help you proclaim Christ to yourself and to others. What does this passage teach us about God? What does this passage teach us about us and our brokenness? And then thirdly, how does this passage point to the redeeming work of the cross?

I firmly believe that all three of those questions can be answered in any text of Scripture. Because all of it points to Jesus. In our children's ministry, when our children are in class on Sunday mornings, we want them to hear about Jesus and fall in love with Him.

And we're using, to that end, we're using an excellent curriculum called the Gospel Story Bible that takes stories and teaches the truths of them, but then sees them in light of the Gospel.

Who Jesus is. How does this story show us how amazing Christ is? That's what that curriculum does. And that's what our children will be hearing in our children's classrooms. In our singing, in our preaching, in our taking of the ordinances, in our one-on-one member ministries where we come together and we do things.

[30 : 42] I want to meet with you. I want to love you. I want to encourage you. I want to hold you accountable. I want to confess sin to you. And anything we do as the church, Christ being proclaimed to one another and to others, is the goal.

All ministry is about Jesus. That's the goal of ministry. And finally, let's get to four and five. In four here, we see the fuel of ministry.

And here's what Paul is going to say here in verse 29 to 2, 1. Let's go together. 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. This is talking about the fuel of ministry.

Notice what Paul says here. He says, This is what I toil for, proclaiming Christ that people might become mature in him. The goal is to present people mature in Christ by proclaiming Christ. Here's the fuel of ministry.

[31 : 39] I toil for this, struggling with all his energy that he works powerfully within me. There's three words here that are really important. They go together. Toil, struggle, and then struggle again in these two verses.

And this teaches us, Paul's teaching the church this, that ministry, proclaiming Jesus, is actually hard work. It's joyful work.

It's good work, but it can be really difficult. And it requires toughness and resiliency, but not in our strength. Here's what Paul says. We need to be reassured that even through proclaiming Christ, we find our sustenance in Jesus.

The very one who suffered on our behalf and toiled himself greatly for our salvation. He presented us mature to the Father through an amazing energy that he got that was focused on his mission to make God glorified through his work.

So too, our energy is not from us. When we proclaim Christ in the church or outside of the church, he has made us ministers, and therefore he will empower us to do it.

[32 : 51] And this means that we trust in the work of Christ, that we don't look to the successes that we may or may not have in ministry. I remember in youth ministry for nine years, I would preach the gospel every week and week out, and youth kids would come in and there would be amazing moments at camps and whatnot, people, kids responding to the gospel, and it was just like, man, Lord, you are filling up my cup.

You are fueling my ministry by seeing the great work of the gospel go forward. But there are also those seasons where no one's responding to the gospel. I preach this gospel sermon time and time again, and nothing happens.

It just seems like, well, that's great. Anyway, let's go about our lives. Every minister will tell you this is the truth of being a minister of the gospel. And I want to encourage all of us that regardless of what may happen as a result of preaching Christ, he is honored when we proclaim him.

And there is no other message that we should ever devote ourselves to. Because only Christ brings about true life.

Finally, the fruits of ministry, two to five. The goal of ministry is to present people mature in Christ by proclaiming him. The fuel of ministry is to do it with the energy that he provides.

[34 : 13] But then finally, the fruits of ministry to finish the passage, 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.

What happens in our midst when Christ is proclaimed? This. This. Our faith becomes firm. We don't give in to the plausible arguments of the world that we'll see in a few weeks from now.

We encourage one another. Our hearts are knit together in love. We reach the full assurance of understanding and knowledge of God's mystery in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Our unity is ratified. Our hearts are knit together. We feel encouraged. We are filled with the wisdom of God and the knowledge that provides us with a life full of joy and happiness.

[35 : 28] This all happens when we proclaim Christ because He is the very essence of richness, Paul says. So what is maturity in verse 28 that Paul talks about?

It's this, two to five. Firmness of faith, mutual encouragement, brotherly love, discerning mind, truth that saturates our hearts. I want to encourage us to use our compassion and acts of service and love to one another as a gateway to proclamation.

Maybe you're in here today and say, well, I don't talk about the gospel much. I'm not really a proclaimer. It's not really my gift. There are different giftings and we get that. But here's what I want to encourage us with. When one of you serves me in a Christ-like way, you are proclaiming Christ to me.

And when we love one another and treat one another with the same love that Christ has shown us that Paul's talking about here, we are proclaiming Christ to one another. It's possible to proclaim the gospel not just with words, but with our hands and our feet.

But here's what I want to encourage us. There's something called the social gospel. It's a gospel that I saw on my school campus and the social gospel is about loving people with the hands and feet of Jesus, but it stops short of actually proclaiming the good news about Jesus, which requires telling people about their sin and talking about the grace of God to save their soul.

[36 : 59] And there's a famous line that's used in the history of the church and it's called this, preach the gospel and if necessary, use words. Maybe you've heard this. This is St. Francis of Assisi. Great guy.

Read a lot of his stuff. I like a lot of his stuff. This is not correct. The heart and the spirit of what he's saying, I'll give him that charitably. He's saying that we need to be Jesus and act the love of Jesus out, not just talk about it.

And that's true. That point stands. But we need to understand something, that the proclamation of the gospel absolutely requires that we are speaking about Jesus and the truth of the gospel to one another and to the world.

So here's where I want to encourage us this morning. All ministry is about proclaiming the mystery which produces maturity. Do we want to be a church that is mature in Christ? Then we need to proclaim him to one another.

Some of the most encouraging moments in my life when a brother or sister reminds me of the riches of Jesus. When one of you proclaims Christ to me, refreshing my soul in the ever-present love of Jesus. When one of you warns me, as Paul says, warn one another and teach one another, he says, with Christ.

[38 : 18] When you warn me in love of the dangers of sin and entertaining the flesh. When one of you helps my firmness of faith by teaching me anew Christ, the hope of glory.

This is our message. This is our mystery. This is our ministry. To continually put Jesus before one another. That's what Paul wants for the church. And this is where it leads.

It leads to maturity in the faith. So three things I want to call us to do specifically. One, assess where God has given you opportunity to do ministry right now.

This can be in the physical church or outside, but as the church, we go all over. Parents, you have children. That's a ministry opportunity to proclaim Christ.

If you're retired in here today, there are a lot of younger saints that I've seen over the years in church that are just desperate to meet with an older, mature believer. That may be a ministry opportunity for you to proclaim Christ and join in with the collective ministry of the church.

[39 : 18] If you're single in here today, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, I wish everyone was single because, man, so undistracted. You've got time and energy. That's what he says in 1 Corinthians 7. It's his argument. If you are single in here today, you don't have to be a super Christian, not better

than everyone else.

That's not what he's calling you to. But he is saying, you've got a lot of time and energy. That's an opportunity to serve Christ and proclaim him. If you're a member of the church here today, or if you're just visiting, we want to call you to consider what it might be to minister to Christ, Christ to one another.

If you're in a godless workplace, it's a ministry opportunity to proclaim Christ and be a light. If you're a handyman or a handywoman here today, there are church members in need everywhere because we all have homes or places we're living in that are breaking down constantly.

How can you proclaim Christ with your handyman skills? It's possible. It's possible to do that. If you're a gatherer, start a Bible study. Get some people together and say, let's proclaim Christ to one another and dive into his word.

So assess where God has given you ministry, opportunity. But then two, ask this question, how can I proclaim Christ in that opportunity? How can I warn my brothers and sisters and teach them in all wisdom? This is our call to gospel centrality.

[40 : 28] In everything we do as Christians, we have to center ourselves on what Jesus has done that frees me from legalism or the duty to prove myself worthy and instead rest in his work.

And everything we do, we proclaim Christ in that way. And then thirdly, connect that ministry back to the body. Notice what Paul says at the beginning of this. I have worked, he says, for the sake of his body, that is the church.

Paul did not take his ministry and make it individualized or simple on some unique path that God gave me, this special ministry that no one else could possibly do. If that's us in here today, we need to reconsider.

Is your ministry something that only you could do? Or is it something that can be connected back to the body to edify the entire church? If the river of the church is the ministry of proclaiming the mystery, which is Christ, let us make our many unique ministry opportunities be the streams that flow from the mountains but trickle down to join that river.

Connect all ministry that you may have that God has given you back to the bride of Christ. Because together, our proclamation of Jesus goes a million times further than by ourselves.

[41 : 52] All ministry is about proclaiming the mystery, which produces maturity. That is Christ, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, church. Lord, I pray this morning as we consider these words and we consider these truths that you would do this in our midst, Lord.

Lord, as we think about ministering and what ministry is, Lord, I ask that you'd help us to see ministry through the lens of this paradigm.

Lord, that ministry is just proclaiming you. Lord, may our church be filled with this spirit. That in our conversations, our Bible studies, our children's classrooms, our day-to-day interactions, and everything we do, Lord, may there be a spirit of seeing Jesus and proclaiming him to one another. May we never tire of this act, Lord. May we never think that we've progressed beyond the need to return to the simple gospel.

Thank you, Lord, for sending us, Jesus, that beautiful divine present that we have been able to open and see all of your plans fulfilled in. You are true, you are a promise maker, and you are a promise keeper.

[43 : 13] And we see that and know that because of the richness of Jesus. Thank you, Lord, for this mystery. May we be a church that proclaims that mystery. Amen. Amen.