

The Struggle Is Real

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[0:00] So we continue this morning in the book of Colossians. This morning we'll be looking at verse 24 of chapter 1 through verse 5 of chapter 2.

And if you brought your Bible with you, I would ask you to open it and locate the book of Colossians. And that would allow you to read along or to listen along as I read up front.

So as you locate that, I ask if you would, in honor of God's word, stand this morning as we read this passage out of the book of Colossians. Paul is speaking to the church at Colossae.

And we pick up in verse 24 and it says this. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. And in my flesh, I'm 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.

[1:09] 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 the full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

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

[2:30] God, we thank you for your word. And we ask this morning that you would open our hearts to receive what you have for us, our ears that we could hear and understand your word.

God, we desire for you to speak and I pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. You can have a seat. So when we look at this passage this morning, there's three things that I want us to see this morning in this passage.

The first of which is the ministry of Paul. I want you to see the ministry of Paul. Now, Paul received this ministry.

You can see here in the passage. He said, I became a minister because God called me in the ministry. How can he make that claim?

Well, if we were to turn back to the book of Acts, we would read about the encounter of Paul, how he, as a good Jew, was going to Damascus to put in prison or kill those who claimed that Christ was Messiah.

[3:42] Those who believed in Jesus. The Jews hated this heresy, what they called a heresy. And Paul was leading the charge to be on the front lines, to be the one who went and did this.

And so he's going to Damascus. And as he's going, he and his companions are stopped on the road. He sees this bright light from heaven. And he hears this voice that says, Paul, why are you persecuting me?

He's like, who are you? I hear a voice. I have no idea who you are. Who's talking to me? He says, I'm Jesus whom you're persecuting.

And so in that encounter, he meets Jesus on the road. He hears the voice of Christ speaking to him in a miraculous way. And he is woken up from his pursuit of that which is alive.

He's woken up from this pushing against Christianity. And he's given a mission. So if you remember the story in the book of Acts, he was blinded because of the greatness of the light.

[4:53] And so he gropes his way to Damascus. And he's brought into a room. And he can't see a thing. And he begins to pray. Because he's had this encounter that surprised him.

He could not explain what just happened fully. But he knew he heard the voice of Jesus speaking to him. And he knew as accompanied by a bright light, he knew something was going on.

And so he began to pray. He didn't eat. He prayed. And as he's praying, he sees a vision. And in his vision, there's a guy named Ananias that comes knocking on the door.

And Ananias speaks to him. And so God prepped his heart for a message that God wanted to give to him. And so Ananias, sure enough, God says, Ananias, I want you to go.

He said, wait a minute. Whoa, whoa, whoa. To him? He's the one that kills Christians. He said, no, go to him. And I want you to tell him what I want him to hear. And I said, yes, Lord, he goes. And what did God say to Paul?

[5:55] In the book of Acts. The Lord said to Ananias, go. He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. He is a vessel that I'm sending to the Gentiles and to kings and to Jews.

And his particular path is going to be full of suffering. So we look in the book of Colossians and we see that God gave him, this is Paul speaking, he gave me this ministry.

He's the one that gave it to me and I'm walking in this ministry he's called me to. He says that he's given me this call to go.

Where? To go wherever he calls me to go, to go to the Gentile world and proclaim the message of the gospel, the same message he used to go and persecute that he didn't believe.

[7:09] You know what's interesting too? Not only did he send him, but he also empowered him. Do you see that in verse 29? He called him to ministry.

In verse 29 it says that there is this power that he placed within Paul, that God's doing a work in the heart, in the life of Paul that is characterized by powerful, by this word power.

There is a power within that enables Paul to endure the difficulty of this suffering that he's walking into. Do you know that suffering for Christians who take the gospel to faraway places is not rare?

And in Paul's case, it's pretty intense. If we were to read in the book of Acts the things that he endured, he was beat with whips many times. He was beat with rods.

He was attacked because he was taking this gospel message. And we'll talk about that here in a minute. But the ministry he was called to is a ministry to take the message of the word.

[8:28] Where do we see that? Look with me. In verse 25, it says, As God gave him, 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.

To make the word of God fully known. The power of the word is what he was taking.

And I don't know if you've asked this question yet, but how is it that the Colossians are interested in what Paul's saying? Because in chapter two, we just saw that he's never seen them face to face.

Why is it that the Colossians would receive a letter from Paul who's never physically seen them before? How is it that there is any kind of interest to care for that body of believers?

Have you seen the relationship between Paul and Epaphras? In chapter one, it talks about Epaphras is a fellow servant.

[9:33] He's someone that visited Paul in his imprisonment. So Paul writes this from prison. And he's gathering intel from Epaphras, his co-worker in the gospel.

Epaphras is from this area. Epaphras knows this church. Epaphras knows the people in the church and he's sharing it with Paul. What is Paul's link?

Let me share this. When Paul was called by God to be a minister and to take the gospel to faraway places, you know where he went? He went on free missionary journeys.

His second missionary journey took him through Ephesus, but God prompted him to go through Ephesus and keep going. He did not stay on that second missionary journey the first time he was in Ephesus.

But he did share the gospel for a short time and he did have someone else who was a believer stay and share the gospel. But he continued on this second journey and then God called him on the third missionary journey to spend time in Ephesus.

[10:37] Why am I talking about Ephesus? Aren't we studying about Colossae? Colossae? So Ephesus is on the coast. If you were to try to locate Colossians, it's about 100 miles east.

And you know what Acts reveals about this time that Paul spent in Ephesus? He was there in the synagogue, the Jewish synagogue, teaching for three months until they threw him out.

They were tired of hearing about Jesus. They were tired of hearing about this message of Christ being the Messiah and they kicked him out. So where did he land? He landed in a different school of a guy named, according to the book of Acts, Tyrannus.

So he taught in that school for two years. You know what the gospel says about this time? It says all who were in Asia Minor, all, Asia Minor's huge.

If you were to look on a map, it includes Colossae, includes Laodicea, and many, many other places. He said that after those two years of teaching the school, the gospel was heard by everybody in Asia Minor.

[11:44] The message of the gospel started to be talked about. Have you heard? Have you heard what Paul said? That's God's teaching in Ephesus. Do you think that that would have trickled its way to Colossae, 100 miles east?

Yes. That's part of that area that heard the gospel. And I would guess, the scripture does not tell us this, but it would not be a far stretch to think that Epaphras and Tychicus found themselves in Ephesus wanting to hear about this gospel.

But one way or the other, the impact made it. And so Epaphras, who was from this location, he wanted to minister with Paul. He became a companion with Paul.

And so they ministered together where God led them. And so I ask about ministry. What is the content of what God asked Paul to do?

What does ministry look like, Paul? What are you trying to accomplish with ministry? And here's what the passage says. It says this, to make the word of God fully known.

[12:55] We jump to 28. It says this, Him, Jesus, we proclaim warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom. Warning everyone and teaching everyone.

We want to tell you about Christ. We want to tell you, as Paul would say, about this Christian life. How does he share the word of God?

You know, the word of God is powerful unto salvation. Paul is not using some tricky language or some impressive speech to talk about the gospel.

He's using the word of God because he knows the word of God is powerful unto salvation. The word of God is what touches hearts. And yet he says this, he says, there's a warning.

And what would the warning be about? Why would he be warning the church? He's warning them about these false teachers, these false messages.

[14:02] We will talk about that in the next two weeks. If you were to sneak a peek ahead, you would see in verse 8 of chapter 2, see that no one takes you captive with philosophies that aren't in line with the gospel, with tradition, with tradition, human tradition, with empty deceit, with elemental spirits of the world, not according to the gospel.

Paul recognizes the need to clearly share the message of the gospel and to warn the people about lies that are going to infiltrate the church.

And he's warning them not to believe those lies, to embrace the truth. And so he teaches everyone. It says the ministry looks like this. It's a teaching ministry.

Like we said before, he's over two years in Ephesus doing what? Teaching the truth. Teaching the word. Because why? The word changes lives. What does ministry look like?

Beware. Let me share you the truth. Share with you the truth. And we want to see you mature in Christ. So look at, again, 28.

[15:19] Him we proclaim, Jesus, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. Paul's desire was for Christians to become mature.

Paul's desire was for unbelievers to accept the message of the gospel. That's what ministry looks like. It's a ministry to those who are outside of the church, those who don't know the gospel.

It's to share the truth so they can embrace the gospel that they're sinners, separated from Christ in need of Savior, in need of reconciliation, in need of redemption.

And inside the church, he preaches the word day after day after day after day that the believers might embrace the truth and live for Christ.

What does ministry look like in our day and time? Is it similar? Yeah. You know, just to take an aside here for a second, Paul was called to ministry and the ministry was the ministry of the gospel so that Christians would grow strong in faith.

[16:37] It's like the Psalm 1 Christian, when the wind blows, the roots are deep and he does not, he is not swayed. You know, and that's the hope of the ministry here is that we as believers grow mature.

We grow strong in the philosophies and the ideas that aren't according to the word of God, that we see them for what they are and we stand against them and say, no way, I don't receive that.

That's the warning. Beware, there's all these philosophies that are going to come at you and try to disprove the gospel that Christ is who he says he is, the Messiah.

Don't believe them. And you know what happens when we mature in the faith is we begin to understand the word of God. We begin to recognize those things for just what they are, they're lies. Some of them are bold and straightforward. Some of them are subtle and it's hard to catch. But that's what happens as we mature in the faith. So ministry here is a ministry inside the walls of the church, a ministry that helps us grow.

[17:41] helps us understand the depth of God's word so that we're not swayed by the world, but we want to live faithfully with God. Amen? Has God given you a ministry?

You know, we will talk about that in just a second. That's point number three. But point number one is this, that God called Paul to ministry so that the world might be turned upside down by Christianity, so that people might accept him as Lord and Savior, so that people's lives would be changed.

That's ministry. And that's what we hope happens here. Ministry. Number two, point number two, I want you to see this, is that, I don't know if you notice, I think you probably do, if you've read much in the scripture, you recognize that wherever there's ministry, there's opposition.

Paul met opposition every step of the way, it seems. And he's writing this from prison. Why is Paul in prison? You know why he's in prison?

Because he would not step down from the message of the gospel. He continued to share the gospel. And who got frustrated with him? The Jews got really frustrated, right?

[19:07] When he was on the road to Damascus, he ends up in Damascus. He's sitting there for three days blind. He can't see a thing. Ananias walks in and says, brother, receive Christ.

It's him who met you on the road, and he's calling you to be a minister to the Gentiles. You're going to have to suffer a lot. But he's calling you for this. He's going to strengthen you for this. And then he goes in what?

He goes to the tabernacle in Damascus after he gets to see him back. And what does he do? He preaches Jesus as the Messiah. And what did the Jews do? Man, they're throwing rocks at him. They're ready to kill him. They literally chase him, trying to arrest him. And what did he have to do? He had to be let down the wall on the outside of the city wall by a rope, and he took off.

Because they were trying to kill him on almost day one of him accepting Christ as Lord and Savior for who he really is. And what had happened to him as he went on his missionary journeys?

[20:03] He got stoned because they didn't... Who was it? It was the Jews that were so offended at first. It was the Jews. And they were chasing him. I mean, they had a group of Jews trying to track this dude down and kill him.

They thought they'd succeeded. They threw stones at him. He looked like he was dead. They clapped. They cheered. They said, we finally got him. And they go. Why did the Jews...

Why are they so mad against Paul? Why are they so adamant to destroy this thing called Christianity? Are they worried? What's behind all of that?

Let me tell you what's behind it. It's this guy named Satan. He's behind it. And Satan has a lot of people that work for him. They're called demons. The whole demonic kingdom is against anything having to do with Christ.

Satan attempted all along the way to destroy the line that was leading up to the Messiah to destroy David, threw spears at him, all kind of things at him. Everybody was in the line of the Messiah.

[21:14] Guess what Satan tried to do? Tried to destroy him all along the way until the point at which Christ was born and what did he do with Christ? Tried to destroy Christ. Christ, he did ultimately through different means elevate Christ on a cross but God had a purpose in that for the salvation of men.

The gospel story is pictured in Christ on the cross and resurrected, right? Satan hates anything that has to do with honoring God and worshipping God and following God and sharing the gospel message.

He hates the church. He wants to infiltrate the church, water it down, and destroy it. Every faithful church worldwide, Satan desires to destroy.

And what tools does Satan tend to use? We see here, I rejoice in my sufferings. Paul's writing from prison.

He's suffering because he was a Christian because Satan can't stand what's happening through the life of Paul. God is doing amazing, miraculous things. He's bringing people into the kingdom. The gospel's exploding.

[22:32] And Satan can't seem to plug all the holes. He sends the demons up here. He sends them over there. He sends them there. He can't plug those. I've got to destroy this guy. He uses religion.

Do you recognize that Satan uses religion, false religion, to try to destroy the church? The Jewish faith was in chasing hard after Christianity to destroy it.

What else does he use? He uses false teachers. He used the Roman Empire.

Who was it that arrested Paul? Ultimately, he ended up in Rome and he was killed. Executed by Nero of the Roman Empire.

So Satan is able to use many forces against Christianity. It's not surprising that Paul would suffer many things as he took the gospel into these places that Satan had held captive for centuries.

[23:55] Do you think that Satan would do the same thing here? We talked this morning in Grow Class about how Satan loves to try to destroy churches.

How he has a big target on the back of ministers that are genuinely preaching the gospel. Is there suffering here? Yes. Is there opposition?

Yes. Is it quite as straightforward as Paul endured? Probably not. Hopefully not. But Satan desires to destroy the church.

He desires to stop ministry. Third, what's the value of ministry? So first, Paul was called to ministry and you and I are too, by the way.

It's not just the guy who's standing up here teaching. It's not just the guy back there who's teaching.

It's every single one of us. We're called to ministry. But what's the value of ministry?

[24:55] We see it in the passage here, don't we? So Paul is talking to the Colossian church that he feels a pastoral responsibility for.

Isn't it interesting? Paul teaches in Ephesus for over two years. All these people flock to hear what Paul has to say and what happens. They understand the truth. They become Christians and they go back to their communities and what happens?

The gospel begins to impact those communities. And Paul knows these people from these cities.

He knows the representatives from these churches. His heart goes out to these churches.

He loves these churches. People have come into the kingdom. There's a church, this body of Christ that Paul has been called to give his life away for.

The bride of Christ. Jesus came, he suffered, he died on the cross. Why? For the church. Us. For saints. That we might be able to enjoy the eternal kingdom.

[25:57] And Paul's doing the same thing. He's willing to die for the sake of the gospel. He's willing to suffer that he might take the gospel to the far reaches of the world. He recognizes the difficulty the enemy throws at him.

It says this. What is the result of ministry? Verse 27. To them, saints, God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery.

What mystery? Let me stop for a second. Mystery. This concept of mystery. You know all the false teachers says there's that which is mysterious? That if you really want to be high on the spiritual plane, if you really want to be close to God, then you've got to understand these mysteries.

And what are their mysteries? Asceticism. You've got to beat your body and give it no pleasure at all. All these lies that are in this category of mystery.

You need extra knowledge. You need to be enlightened. You hear that? You've heard those phrases in other religions. They're lies. You know what he's saying? Here's what you need.

[27:12] You need one thing and one thing, only Jesus. Let me tell you what the mystery really is, you false teachers. Here's the mystery, Jesus. And it's so mysterious that Jesus is in you if you're a

Christian.

Look what he says. To them God chose to make known how great, to who? Christians, saints. How great among the Gentiles, that is Gentile saints, that this is not a Jewish thing, this is a worldwide thing.

This mystery which is Christ in you. Have you ever pondered that? You know, it's interesting that the scriptures talk about Christ in you, not just the Holy Spirit in you.

Have you ever chased that in the thread in the scripture? You know that the word of God says God's in you, it says Christ is in you, it says the Holy Spirit's in you. The three, the Trinity, is in you according to the word of God.

And don't take my word for it. Let me read a passage or two. So 2 Corinthians 13.5 says this, examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith.

[28 : 22] Test yourselves. Do you not realize that this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless you don't pass the test. In other words, it's saying, all Christians who are born again, who genuinely believe the gospel, accept Christ as Lord and Savior, are indwelt by God, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

You know what that's called? It's called salvation. When we are saved, when we recognize our sin and the fact that our sin has separated us from the Holy God, and we realize why God sent Jesus down, that is, He lived in our place perfectly, which God deserves, and He died on a cross in our place, which we deserved, He gave us His righteousness, He took on our sin.

You know, that's the simple gospel message that apart from Jesus dying on a cross in my place, I have no hope. Apart from the forgiveness of my sins through the sacrifice of Jesus, I have no hope. That's the gospel message. And you know what it's called? It's called salvation. And you know what happens when we're saved? As the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us, isn't that mysterious?

How is it that you can contain God?

It's not like you take God as an entity, God's a spirit, but God somehow dwells in me. Have you ever noticed it being true in your heart and your life?

[29 : 54] Have you ever experienced the change of salvation? You know what it does? It makes you a new person. The old man dies, the new man is able to now walk in newness of life, Romans 6.

We're now in union with Christ. He comes to live and dwell within us. He strengthens us. He leads us into all truth, helping us understand the scriptures.

So what is the value of this ministry? People come to Christ. People come into the kingdom. People are saved. Has it happened here?

Has it happened here? I'm looking at you, brother. I'm so thankful what God's done in your life, in your life, your life, Carl.

I mean, I look around. I don't want to miss out on it. There's multiple people, Savannah. There's multiple people that have come to know Christ as Lord and Savior, and it changes your life, doesn't it?

[30 : 53] It changes your life. It gives you a new desire, a desire to worship and honor God. That's the value of ministry. Is it worth us to step into ministry if that would happen through you?

Have you ever longed to be used by God in that way? Oh, he's ready to use all of us, every single one of us in that way, so that people might come into the kingdom and be saved.

You know another value? Let's look at it here. Paul says this, For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

What is it, Paul, that you're struggling with? What is it that your energy is being used for? It says that everyone might be mature in Christ. Have you ever interacted with a Christian that is just like a rock?

That God has changed his or her life? There is a genuine love of God that kind of seeps out of their pores. There's a gentleness and a quietness and a humility.

[32 : 08] There's a commitment to walk and live by faith. And you can tell that there's just this closeness to God. It's almost like when you're in the presence of somebody who is deeply committed to Christ, who is very mature in the faith.

It is powerful. It's inspiring. It's like we long for that type of depth in our personal walk, in our life, in our Christian life.

And that's what Paul longs for, that Christians would not be tossed like a tree when the wind blows. You can picture even those little palm trees out here.

When the winds blow, man, these things, they're just all over the place. Like a hurricane does that. And what he's saying in the word of God is that there is this Christian life that's like this humongous tree with the roots that are so deep that the wind blows and they don't even budge.

Why? Because they're seated on the rock, Jesus, that they've come to know the truth. They so believe it and they so have been impacted personally that those philosophies and all the junk that the enemy wants to throw doesn't stick.

[33:34] It's like, I see what you're doing. No, no, no. I don't accept that. I see the temptation you're bringing me by the power of God. Get away from me. No. I don't want to step into that. You know what happens when a Christian matures?

Is they're more faithful in their walk with Christ? There's a faithfulness that happens. Let me ask this.

Would you want to be used in that way? Would you want to live that way? Would you want to be mature in your faith? Do you? Are you? Are you hungry to know his word?

Do you invest time in his word? You know, maturity doesn't happen unless you invest time in his word. You know what my longing is for all of you? I so desire that not just you, me, that all of us would be mature.

That all of us would stand for the gospel. That we wouldn't be swayed by all the mess. And boy, there's a lot of mess nowadays, isn't there? We were talking about that this morning in Grove class.

[34:40] Just with the internet and with social media and all the influences that are just flying at us nowadays. It's harder than ever, it seems, to be faithful and to live faithfully for God and really have our hearts set on ministry.

So let me, I'm going to end with this. Fourth, have you ever pondered what your purpose in life is? If you're like me, the answer is yes.

Sometimes I've been in places like, man, I just seem like I'm wasting my life. I mean, what is it?

What am I supposed to do? Especially when I was really, really young. When I had a wife and kids, by the grace of God, that kind of settled me.

And it gave me a reason to invest. And certainly in my kids. And thankfully, God has given Regina a lot of patience.

While he is gradually changing me and shaping me. But there's a purpose in that. But you know what? God showed me a greater purpose. The greater purpose is for his kingdom.

[35:49] You know, and that's what the word of God says. It says that, here's what Christ said. He says, you know, I know you have needs. I know all that. He said, but I don't want you to worry about the needs.

I want you to trust me. Here's what I want you to really focus on. Is my kingdom and my righteousness. As if he's saying, I want to give you your purpose for life.

Here it is. My kingdom and my righteousness. If you will focus on my kingdom and my righteousness. All that other stuff. You're going to watch me provide it in a way that's supernatural. And you're going to say, wow. You know what else he said? He gave us a purpose. You know what he said? After he was resurrected and he met the apostles on the mountain he told them to go to. He said this. He said, all authority is given to me in heaven and earth. You, apostles, go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[36:47] And teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Lo, I'm with you. It's not only with, he's within, right? I'm with you. I will give you the strength to endure whatever suffering comes your way.

I will give you the wisdom to share. I will give you promptings to speak. I will bring up verses in your memory as you interact with people. Go and make disciples. Teach them to obey all that I've commanded you.

And I am with you to the end of the age. You know what our purpose is? Listen, if you're a Christian, God's given you a purpose. God's given us a purpose. You know what it is? It's his kingdom.

What does it look like? It looks like ministry. What does ministry look like? Sharing the gospel with those that are not in the kingdom. Sharing the gospel with those who are in the kingdom so that we all will grow in the faith.

You know what Christ said about his church? That he's doing a work in the life of his church that will be without spot and without wrinkle. You know what he's referring to? He's referring to this concept that even if you think about the Passover lamb, they could only select one lamb.

[37:54] It had to be the most pure Passover lamb possible. There's this concept that he's doing a work in our lives to make us like Jesus. Did Jesus have a spot or a blemish?

Not one. He was the perfect Passover lamb. Not one spot and one blemish. And what is he doing? He's changing us into the image of Christ so that one day, one day when we go home to be in glory, you know what he's going to do?

He's going to give us a glorified body. All the sin that still we struggle with is going to be washed away. No more sin. He's going to give us the glorified body.

He's going to allow us to enjoy him forever in his kingdom. That is what he's called us to live for.

That we would live to know him more, to live faithfully for him, and to make his gospel.

Hold on, let's pray. Father, thank you for the ministry that you sent my way. Father, when I was lost, I did not know you.

[39:09] I thought I knew something, but I had swallowed a lie. You sent someone into my life to tell me the truth. And you changed my life forever.

Lord, I thank you for the times that you use this church to touch people with the gospel. Some that have come to receive you as Lord and Savior.

Some that are continuing to walk in a way that honors you or trying to, God. I just pray that you would do a work here among us that would help us all to grow and to walk in a faithful way in our lives with you.

But Father, I pray that you would stir us to all be ministers, to be ones that take the gospel message and share it with people. God, I pray that you would use this church for your glory, and I pray in your name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.