

Genuine Gospel Ministry

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] Good morning, church. Would you turn with me to the book of Colossians, chapter 1, verse 24. That's page 983 in the Pew Bible.

Colossians chapter 1, verse 24. This fall we've been studying Paul's letter to the church in Colossae, a letter about the greatness of Christ and the all-sufficiency of who he is and what he's done.

And you'll remember if you've been with us the last few weeks that Paul had never met this church before, but we find that he greatly cared about them. And he's going to describe his ministry in the text before us in order to encourage them.

So we're picking up in chapter 1, verse 24, and we're going to read, I'll read through chapter 2, verse 5. This is Paul to the Colossians. 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.

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.

[1 : 36] Him, we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

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

Let's pray together. God, we ask that you would help us this morning as we come to this passage from your word. Lord, help us to hear what your spirit is saying to us, your church.

Lord, give us minds that understand. Lord, we pray that you would give us hearts that receive what it is you are speaking to us today.

[2 : 49] God, thank you that you have spoken to us supremely in your Son. Lord, he indeed is the image of you, the invisible God, and we thank you for the gift of your Son to us.

Lord, would he be exalted as we attend to this passage this morning. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's been said that the best way to identify a counterfeit is by studying the real thing. Whether it's currency or the artwork of an old master, it's best to spend your time learning what makes the real thing the real thing. Then you can spot whatever imitations happen to come along. And apparently, when it comes to money, I've been told, it's not all that difficult. There are certain things that you can look for, the security thread, the watermark, the color shifting ink. These things make spotting the real thing fairly doable.

Of course, it's helpful to know what a fake looks like too, to compare them side by side. But on the whole, if you can know the real thing and what to look for, you can avoid being taken in by the counterfeits.

[3 : 59] That's some of what Paul is up to in this paragraph. He's showing us what true gospel ministry looks like. In order that, he says, no one may delude you with plausible arguments, which is chapter 2, verse 4.

Now, it seems that many of the spiritual options in the ancient world seemed plausible to the Colossians. And there were teachers and there were gurus with seeming authority and wisdom and skill who really seemed to know what they were talking about.

And maybe they had a following, seemingly to prove it. But you see, for Paul to be taken in by these alternate spiritual options was sort of like having a wallet full of counterfeit money without even realizing it.

You may feel rich. Your wallet is seemingly full of cash. But when you finally get to the bank and they run your money through that machine, you realize that it's not worth a thing and that you're actually broke.

The same is true for us. Imagine going through life thinking that you're spiritually wealthy, only to find that whatever you've been believing in and trusting in has been a counterfeit all along.

[5 : 16] Imagine coming to the end of your days and realizing that you're bankrupt. Or to change the metaphors for a moment, imagine to find that what you thought was real medicine was only a placebo.

And those benefits that you felt, only a placebo effect, masking the fact that the real problem, the real sickness remained untouched, as dangerous and as cancerous as ever.

So then it's important that we grasp what real biblical ministry looks like. Counterfeits abound today as then and our spiritual lives are at stake.

We don't want to be deluded, as Paul says, by teachers or ministries or movements that have the appearance of plausibility but are empty in the end. But we need to know what real gospel ministry looks like for another reason.

Not just so we can spot the real thing, but so that we can do the real thing. Later in the book of Colossians in chapter 3 verse 16 we read, What Paul is saying here is that the work of ministry, teaching and admonishing is actually for every member of the body of Christ.

[6 : 32] We're to do this to one another. Some are called to be pastors and elders, yes, but ultimately our job as pastors and elders is to equip you, the saints, for the work of ministry.

So that we can all build one another up in love, as we read in the book of Ephesians. So then we need to know what real life giving gospel ministry looks like so that we can actually do it, so that we can actually put it into practice.

And that's how our text this morning is so helpful. What Paul is showing us here as we look at it are actually two broad aspects, two critical aspects, two necessary components of real gospel ministry. And once you learn to see them, they're pretty easy to spot. Broadly, we'll look at the manner of true ministry, and then we also see here the message of true gospel ministry.

So that's where we're going. Let's look first at the manner of true ministry. Of course, there's a lot going on in this paragraph that we just read. We could probably do a whole seminar on the doctrine of the church out of this passage, but when it comes to the manner of Paul's ministry, three words or three pictures jump out.

[7 : 45] Suffering, stewardship, and struggle. We see suffering in verse 24. Paul says, 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.

Now remember that Paul is writing this letter from a prison cell. He is no stranger to suffering, and yet he can rejoice in that suffering because, as he says, in my flesh I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

Now that probably strikes you as a strange phrase at first, right? What does Paul mean by that? Well, there's one thing that he certainly cannot mean by that. Paul can't mean that there's something lacking in Christ's afflictions for our atonement, for our salvation.

Our reconciliation with God was finished once and for all through Christ's suffering on the cross, and that lacks nothing. The rest of Colossians will say that over and over and over again in a dozen different ways, that what Christ has done is completely and utterly abundantly sufficient for us.

So what is Paul talking about here? Rather than talking about Christ's afflictions for our atonement, for our redemption, he's talking about the ongoing afflictions that Christ experiences because of his ongoing union with his church.

[9 : 14] When the church suffers in this age, Christ himself suffers. Do you remember Paul's Damascus Road conversion? When Jesus appeared to Paul the persecutor, he didn't say, Paul, why are you persecuting my church?

Jesus said, Paul, why are you persecuting me? Identifying himself completely with his body on earth. The church is, as it says here in verse 24, the body of Christ, inseparably united with Christ the head.

And the road to glory for the church, just like Christ our head, the road to glory, the road to the crown of eternal life is by way of the cross.

Over and over again, the New Testament is very clear that the church will experience affliction in this age. We will experience Christ's afflictions, as Paul says here.

That is, we will experience afflictions for Christ. We will experience afflictions like Christ. We will experience our afflictions with Christ. Why is that the case?

[10:27] Why does the church experience such hostility from the world at times? Because the church, as Christ's body, friends, is the birth of the new creation in the midst of the old.

In the midst of the old humanity, in the old fallen way of doing things, the church is God's new thing in the midst of the old. And that makes the church a bit like an organ transplant.

The healthy organ is there to heal the body, to give it life and hope. But as we know, sometimes the old body doesn't recognize this new thing and actually attacks it as a threat.

It's a bit like that with the church, the new humanity in the midst of the old. And what Paul is saying here is that he, in his vocation as an apostle, is willing to step out on behalf of the church and to undergo these Christ-like afflictions to fill up what's remaining of the Christ's ongoing walk along the way of the cross.

He's willing to step out on behalf of the church and to suffer Christ-like afflictions for their sake. And the overtones of this passage are even, in some sense, in their place so that they don't have to.

[11:41] So, this becomes then our first window into the manner of real gospel ministry. Real, true ministry is willing to gladly suffer hardship and loss or even persecution for the sake of the church, Christ's body.

True ministers of the gospel are willing to stand in front, taking the blow of ridicule or hatred or even violence so that the rest of the body might be spared.

We see that over and over in Paul's ministry, and Paul here is in prison. Just like many pastors and church leaders and ministers after him would, in the history of the church, also suffer and also land in prison and also face persecution, drawing the heat and the animosity of the world's hatred onto itself so that the churches might be spared.

In other words, if the church is Christ's body, real, true ministry doesn't lord itself over the body. Rather, it lays itself down for the sake of the body.

Sadly, many ministries today exist to make a minister great. But that is not the way of Christ. Real ministry, true, genuine ministry is just the opposite, a willingness and love even to suffer for those to whom we minister.

[13:14] So, there's our first window into the manner of genuine ministry. We see the second in verse 25. It's not just suffering, it's stewardship. If the theme of suffering is connected to the metaphor of the church's Christ's body, then this idea of stewardship brings with it the metaphor of the church as God's household.

Now, an ancient household was a bit different than ours. It included not just the immediate family, but also at times the extended family, and also the servants and the workers who labored as part of the family estate. The household was sort of a big organization, almost a mini business running. And within the large household, the head of the house would often appoint someone called a steward. And the steward's job was to make sure that the food and other resources of the household were being distributed and managed wisely and fairly on behalf of the rest of the people who made up the household.

The steward wasn't there to act on his own wishes or plans, but to carry out the wishes and plans of the head of the house. So, you can see now the kind of picture that Paul is painting in verse 25.

He says, I became a minister of the church according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you to make the Word of God fully known. See the picture he's painting here?

[14:30] God is sort of the head of this household, the church, and Paul's been appointed as a steward under God's authority to make sure that the Word of God is being distributed to all in the house.

So, this means that the manner of real ministry is not just one of glad, self-giving love for the church, but it's also one of faithful teaching and exposition and unfolding and distribution of God's

Word.

Real ministry is not just expounding our own opinions or theories. Real ministry is a stewardship of the Word of God. What God has stored up in the treasuries of His Word, the Gospel, and preserved in the Bible is what we, like good stewards, want to bring out at the right time in the right way so that the household can be fed and cared for.

So, then if the manner of real ministry is a stewardship, then biblical teaching becomes, in many ways, the central activity. And in His devotion to teaching the Bible as God's stewards, real ministry will be appropriately humble.

After all, we are simply servants working on behalf of the head of the house. This message doesn't ultimately come from us, but from Him. So, there's nothing for us, as we minister as a church, to get sort of self-inflated about.

[15 : 55] This isn't about our own wisdom or our own rescue. It's not our own wisdom or our own rescue that we proclaim. It's God's wisdom, and it's God's rescue. And so, we're humble, exalting God and not exalting self.

But in addition to being humble, real ministry as stewardship will also, at the same time, be appropriately bold. After all, we're not doing this on our own authority.

We are acting in the name of another. It is God's Word that we teach and we hold out. True ministry need not be sheepish or afraid.

It need not be blown and tossed by whatever popular ideas might be trending at the time. As stewards of the Word, we can be humble and we can be bold.

So, those are the first two windows into the manner of real gospel ministry. Paul's suffering shows us that true ministry is about self-giving love for God's church. And Paul's stewardship shows us that ministry is about faithful exposition of God's Word.

[16 : 58] And the third and last thing we see here is that there is struggle. Look at chapter 2, verse 1. 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.

Now, the word struggle here is actually an athletic term. It's a term from the world of sports. It carries with it an idea of striving for a goal or contending for the crown of victory.

And what makes struggling different than the suffering that we talked about earlier? Well, suffering, sort of as part of a body, has to do with bearing external attack. But struggling, like an athlete on a team, has to do with internal desire, with drive.

This is not the first time Paul will use athletic imagery to describe the work of ministry in 1 Corinthians. And in 2 Timothy, he does the same thing. Paul will say in those passages that competing like an athlete, training hard, maintaining self-discipline, striving for the crown of victory. All of these have something to teach us about real ministry. Here in Colossians, the idea of the struggle of ministry is connected to helping fellow believers reach what he calls maturity in Christ.

[18 : 22] Chapter 2, verse 2 describes that maturity that Paul is struggling to bring about in this way. It says, we should be encouraged in heart. And we should be united in love.

And we should be fully assured in our understanding. This is what Paul strives and struggles like an athlete to see happen in Colossae. And in other cities he hasn't even visited yet, like Laodicea as well.

Struggling, striving, training, working like an athlete, no doubt in prayer for these churches. No doubt in his correspondence and in his writing to them, as we see here in Colossians.

And no doubt in his training and in his sending of ministers to these cities. Men like Epaphras that we looked at a few weeks ago who brought the gospel to Colossians. In all these ways, Paul is struggling and striving for these churches he hasn't even met yet.

So the manner of real ministry, how can we spot real genuine gospel ministry when we see it? Well, the manner of it is not just self-giving love, not just faithful stewarding of God's word and preaching and teaching, but also this metaphor would suggest downright hard work.

[19 : 41] Verse 29 uses the word of toil. But lest we get weary just thinking about that, we see that this toil and this struggle happens, as he says in verse 29, with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

As we labor hard, God's power is at work, energizing us for the task. And this means two things. On the one hand, genuine ministry is not lazy or complacent. But on the other hand, neither is it frantic and always on the verge of burning out.

Genuine ministry is not sort of a sitting around, letting go and letting God, nor is it sort of sitting around thinking that everything depends on us at the end of the day, and we get completely stressed out. See, the balance Paul is striking here.

We toil, we struggle, but we do so with his power and with his energy. I think naturally, dispositionally, we tend to tip one way or the other. Can you spot which side you tend to sort of stumble into?

[20 : 52] Are you prone to laziness, or are you prone to burning out? Or do you sort of swing back and forth between the two when you sort of sense that you're getting lazy, and then you speed over this way and start burning out, and then you're like, well, I got to pull back, and then you start, you know, getting all lazy again and binging on Netflix for 48 hours and catching up on all your shows?

How do we get off the hamster wheel? How does one go about struggling with all his energy, as opposed to floundering with all of our energy?

I think the first thing to say here is that this empowerment happens in the act of working itself. There's no good waiting around until you, quote-unquote, feel energized, because God's power meets us in the doing.

The next thing to say is that prayer is vital here. In a couple weeks, we're going to look at Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 4, where Paul tells us to set our minds on things above, that is, on Christ ascended to the Father's right hand.

And the setting of the mind on Christ in prayer throughout the day, remembering where our real identity lies, remembering our real glory in the midst of the world, that is one of the things that will empower us to labor with all his energy.

[22 : 16] So here are three aspects, three windows into the manner of real gospel ministry. So friends, maybe it's worth asking, I wonder, do you perhaps have a desire to be a minister in Christ's church?

Not just an elder or a pastor, but some other kind of ministry. Well, we see here that genuine ministry means to love the body, and to steward the word, and to work hard with all his energy. And again, remember, this isn't just for pastors and elders, or campus ministers, or small group leaders. Every member of Christ's body is a minister. As we've been walking through these three elements, I'm sure it's been tempting to think, man, Pastor Nick's preaching one long sermon about himself up there.

What in the world? Get over it, dude. But no, this is for us, church. We are called to ministry. This is a model for us all to love the church, and to steward his word, and to work hard with his energy. God has given you a sphere of ministry that no one else has. It's there that he's calling you to serve. You have opportunities to minister God's word, and to see his kingdom advance in places, and in relationships that I will never encounter.

[23 : 40] That Pastor Greg, or Pastor Matt, or any of the other elders will ever encounter. This ministry, this call to ministry, is for us all. And this window of real gospel ministry, these aspects, this manner of gospel ministry, it's a good grid for spotting the genuine from the counterfeit.

And we have to be charitable here, I think, but it's worth asking at times, as we consider maybe joining a particular ministry, or being fed by a particular ministry, or encountering friends who are engaged with a particular ministry or teaching.

Task along the lines of self-giving love, is this ministry, a loving ministry? And does it ever speak of suffering as part of Christian experience?

Paul's very clear here that suffering is a pretty normal event in the church life. Or does this ministry only promise health and wealth and worldly prosperity?

Do the ministers lord their authority over the flock, making themselves greater? Do they lay their lives down for the sheep? Or along the lines of ministry as stewardship, we could ask, what about this ministry's fidelity to the Word of God?

[24 : 56] Is the teaching of the Bible central to its life and health? Are there certain aspects of God's Word that seem to be conspicuously absent? Are certain hard passages or ethical demands being twisted or ignored or explained away?

Are other books or other sources of authority seen as equal in authority or greater authority than the Bible? Like the Book of Mormon or the Watchtower for Jehovah's Witnesses.

Lastly, does a ministry struggle with all His energy, with all God's energy? Is there, on the one hand, a bold vision for the growth of the kingdom? Is our very real human responsibility taken seriously to obey the great commandment and to fulfill the great commission?

And at the same time, is there a prevailing sense of joy and peace that at the end of the day, God is in control and His sovereign purpose will prevail?

And does that joy and peace and confidence in God's sovereignty flow out in a rich dependence on God expressed in prayer? That's the manner of real gospel ministry.

[26 : 13] Now, I confess, if we step back, all of this might sound, on the surface, a bit dour. I mean, suffering, stewarding, and struggling. On the surface, that is a downer of a job description, right?

Right? And yet, Paul does it with joy, as he says in the opening of our passage. And at the end, this whole passage is sort of bookended by joy.

How can that be? Well, that brings us to the second big thing we see about real gospel ministry. We've seen the manner of real ministry, and now we come to the message of genuine gospel ministry.

Look with me again at verse 25. Paul says, I became a minister, I became a minister of the church, according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known.

The mystery, hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his saints. Then 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.

[27 : 28] The message of real gospel ministry is what Paul calls here the mystery of God. Now you see what Paul means by the word mystery in verse 26, right?

For Paul, God's mystery is not something incomprehensible about God that we'll never figure out with our finite intellect. That's how we use the term mystery sometimes, right? No, for Paul, God's mystery is what was once hidden, but now revealed.

In other words, God's mystery is the long-awaited unveiling of God's redemptive purpose that he's been planning all along, and now it's finally being unfurled for all to see in all its surprising wonder. I've been thinking about how to sort of capture this idea of mystery, biblical mystery, and in some sense, I think surprise is almost a good word. There's been an anticipation for it, and now it's here. In some sense, we couldn't have predicted how it was all going to play out, but now that it's been revealed, it makes sense of everything. God's open secret for the world of his great redemptive plan, God's mystery.

[28 : 45] What is that mystery? Paul says in verse 27, it's Christ in you, the hope of glory. This once hidden, but now revealed, saving plan of God, this is the message of real gospel ministry.

Christ in you, the hope of glory. Let's meditate briefly on each part of this message. Let's pull it apart and soak on it for just a little bit together.

First, Paul's telling us that our message is Christ. It's easy to think of Christianity as simply a system of rules or religious practices or a worldview or an intellectual tradition, but Christianity, friends, is ultimately Christ, a person.

Verse 28 says, Him we proclaim. The message is Jesus. Jesus. When we tell people what God is like, what do we have to do as Christians?

We have to proclaim Jesus because He is the image of the invisible God. When we tell people what God has done as Christians, we have to proclaim Jesus because He is the one who has finished the work of redemption.

[30 : 05] He has reconciled us to the Father through His cross. And when we tell people what God's goal or what God's desire or what God's future is for us, we have to proclaim Christ.

The rest of verse 28 reads, Him we proclaim, warning everyone, teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. This is what completion looks like.

This is what finality and fulfillment looks like. Maturity. it looks like Jesus. In Christ, chapter 2, verse 3 says, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Anything you could want to know, anything you could want to be, anything that would make sense of our existence is stored up to be withdrawn from the person of Jesus.

Our goal, our ultimate joy and future is Christ Himself. In other words, friends, the Lord Jesus Christ is not a means to some other end.

[31 : 26] He is not a way to get something else that's better or more lasting. Jesus is the end. He is the point. He is the goal. In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Knowing Him is eternal life and boundless joy. And this is what Jesus Himself taught. Engaging with the religious elites of His day, Jesus said in John 5, He says, you know, you guys are searching the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and yet it's they that bear witness about me.

Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. You see what Jesus is saying there? He's saying that the whole point of the Old Testament is Him. You're searching the Scriptures trying to find eternal life and you're missing the fact that it's all about me.

I'm the fulfillment of God's saving plan. I'm the rest that you've been longing for. I'm the peace that you've been hoping for. I'm the protection you've been seeking. I'm the cleanness that you've been trying to find and I'm the justification that you've been slaving so hard to get.

It's me. It's in Him that we find eternal life. This is how you can spot the real message of Christianity.

[32 : 48] Ask yourself, who is the hero of this story? Is it me? Is it my performance? Is it my moral record? Is it my achievements? Is it the work that I have to do? Is it some kind of program out in the world?

Or is the hero of the story Christ? Is He the beginning and the middle and the end? Because, friends, the truth is that the gospel says that we are sinners and we are deserving God's just judgment, but Christ died so that we might live a new life.

Christ is the hero of the story and His cross is the place of victory where God's wrath was satisfied and we're reconciled to Him and the new creation begins.

That is our message. Our message is Christ. But here's where things get interesting. Even more interesting than that, if you can believe it.

Our message is not just Christ over us as our Lord, not just Christ for us as our crucified and risen Savior, but also Christ in us, Christ in you.

[33 : 59] Elsewhere, Paul writes, I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

The message of real Christianity is at least twofold, friends. It is both that we are in Christ and so we have a new status before God, we are justified, we are forgiven, but also that Christ is in us and we have a new nature and a new dynamic of spiritual life pulsing inside.

Again, this is what Jesus Himself taught. In John 14, Jesus says to His disciples, and this probably was so confusing to them at the time, He said, when He had them gathered for the Last Supper, right before He was about to be betrayed and go to the cross, He's teaching them and teaching them and teaching them and He says, because I live, you also will live.

In that day, that is the day after His resurrection, you will know that I'm in my Father and you in me and I in you. Christ in you, the living Lord, the risen Savior, alive in you through His Holy Spirit.

You know, friends, half the battle, spiritually speaking, is remembering who you are and who lives inside of you.

[35 : 25] This is why Paul is always saying things in his letters like he says in Romans, consider yourself, reckon yourself, tell yourself, remind yourself that you're dead to sin and you're alive to God in Christ Jesus because that's true, that's what's true of you and you always forget it.

remember who you are and who lives inside of you and live in line with that great truth. When the besetting sins rear their head again, when you despair about how to handle that tricky parenting issue or that situation at work, when you just look out at the brokenness of the world and just want to give up, remember, the same Jesus who has lived and died and risen again for you as Lord of the whole universe is now alive in you, leading you and empowering you and sustaining you and granting you wisdom to speak when you need to speak and to listen when you need to listen.

Church, you are not left to your own devices. You're not left to just sort of wait until something else happens. Christ is in you.

If anyone is in Christ, there, the new creation, Paul says in 2 Corinthians. And we need no longer be slaves again to fear, fear of condemnation, fear of repeating our worst selves over and over again.

You're God's child now. God lives in you and He's making you new. Do you want to join the adventure of a lifetime? Link your life to the Lord Jesus and find out what happens.

[37 : 19] But there's one more part of this message. It is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Later in Colossians, Paul will say, when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory.

Now, I get a chance to preach that passage in a couple weeks, so I'm not going to steal my own thunder. But do you see what he's saying? If Christ is in you now, then you will be with Him then, raised with Him to imperishable life, reigning with Him in a creation made new.

And friends, we've got to hold these two things together, this Christ in you and this hope of glory. You see, Christ in you now, working, changing, transforming, breaking open this old world with the new creation and the hope of glory.

The very real reminder that the best is still yet to come and that there is more in store. And you see how it's helpful that we have to hold these two things together? Because we need to know that not every besetting sin will simply go away this side of Christ's return.

And not every injustice will be put to rest this side of Christ's return. Now, this doesn't stop us from pursuing God's kingdom and His righteousness above all else with all His energy that He powerfully works in us.

[38 : 49] But it reminds us that in this age we are still waiting for the consummation of Christ's work. We are in the middle of the story, friends, not at the end.

But if Christ is in you, then you have the hope of glory. You will share in that glorious hope. You can face the future with confidence no matter what that future might hold because you know how the story ends.

You may not know all the twists and turns, all the light and dark patches, all the conflict and resolutions that are standing between you and the coming of the kingdom. But you know the director of this drama of creation and He has shown you how the story ends.

The curtain will rise, the King will step onto the stage, and when the King of glory comes in, creation will be set free from its bondage to decay, and our hearts will be set free from sin, and every knee and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.

And those who have repented and believe will reign with Him forever. And the one who is directing this drama of creation to its finale lives in you, giving you wisdom to understand your role to play, giving you the grace and the strength and the creativity to play it, Christ in you, the hope of glory.

[40 : 24] That's our message, and that is the message of real, genuine Christianity. So friends, do you have the real thing? When you look in your spiritual wallet, do you have the real thing?

Or have you been banking on something that's an imitation, a counterfeit? Have you embraced the message of real Christianity? Have you embraced the living Christ Himself?

Not some moral code, not a sort of nice social group to be a part of. Have you embraced Him? And if not, why not? What is it you're waiting for?

And if you have taken hold of Him, then this message comes out at us and says, join the real gospel ministry. You have been shown the manner and the message.

We have been shown the marks and the message of this ministry. And we need not be deluded or taken in by counterfeits. Rather, let us continue the work. Friends, what would happen in our city if we went forth with this message of hope that we've been talking about and we held it forth in this manner of love that we've been describing?

[41 : 41] What if our neighbors saw our self-giving love and an energized labor that they couldn't understand and a joyful stewardship of this message? What if they heard from us not merely a moral code or another religious system or another social program or another political project, but a real message of hope?

Christ in you, the hope of glory. In the early church, we read in the book of Acts that God added to their number daily those who were being saved. That's the power of the real thing.

Counterfeits eventually leave us empty and longing for more, but by God's grace, the real thing catches fire and spreads. And it becomes a movement of hope and joy.

That's what we see in the early church. The word of God goes forth and leaves in its wake joy. It becomes a movement of hope to the glory of Christ.

May God use us as a church for such a ministry. And may our city and our neighborhoods increasingly know these glorious riches of Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[42 : 53] Friends, may this be the message and the manner that we go forth in, Christ in us, the hope of glory. Amen? Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord Jesus, we ask that you would energize us with all of your power so that we might run this race set before us with endurance.

Lord, would you help us to cling to the real thing, to cling to you, and may our hearts be overflowing with such confidence and joy and hope in you that we can't help but simply proclaim you in our words, in our deeds, in our homes, in our workplaces.

And God, would you gather your people from every tribe and tongue and nation in this city and around the world. Lord, bring us to yourself. Help many more to know the hope of glory, Christ in you and our city, Father.

To the glory of your great name we pray. Amen. Well, friends, let's stand. We're going to end by singing the song *Alive in Us*, which is that's Amen.

[44 : 05] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.