

Expository Preaching Project

A Project

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Proclaiming the Bible: PREA5300

In the Division of Church Ministry

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I. Text Analysis and Interpretation

The Text - Colossians 1:24-29 (ESV):

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 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.

Personal Paraphrase of the Text:

I [Paul] am thankful for the chance to suffer for your sake because, just as Christ suffered for the sake of the church, I am getting to partake in the suffering of the church. I became a minister of the church because God bestowed this stewardship upon me so that I can make the word of God known to all, which was hidden for many years and generations but now is revealed to believers. God revealed His greatness and glory among the Gentiles through Christ who gives hope. We proclaim Christ, warning and teaching all people to be wise because we want those who we teach to be mature in Christ. That is exactly what I consistently strive for, doing my best while drawing from the energy which God in his power supplies to me.

CIT:

Because God revealed Christ to everyone, Paul encouraged the church to proclaim Christ to everyone, even in suffering.

Unifying Theme:

God has given all people the ability to hear the Gospel, so we must joyfully do all we can through God's strength, even suffer, to share that Gospel with all people.

Apparent Emphasis of the Book:

Paul says in 1:28 that he desires to warn and teach people to be wise, mature followers of Christ, and in the rest of the book he gives instruction to the church in Colossae to teach them how to do that. The church in Colossae was dealing with heresy and mysticism, so Paul reasoned with them, showing them throughout his letter that Christ is better than all mysticism and philosophies of the world.¹

Initial questions:

Are the members of the church in Colossae gentiles?

In verse 24, what does it mean that Paul is “filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions?” (v. 24)

What does it mean to be “mature in Christ?” (v. 28)

Where was Paul when he wrote this book? What sort of suffering was he experiencing?

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), 321.

Structural Diagram:

Now I rejoice
 in my sufferings
 for your sake,
 [and]
 I am filling up
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 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.

Him we proclaim,
 warning everyone
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 that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

For this I toil, struggling
 with all his energy
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I. Exegesis and Exposition

Phrase by Phrase Interpretation:

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...

The “I” in this phrase is Paul, the author of this letter. The “your” in this phrase is referring to the church at Colossae, the recipients of the letter. The first word, “Now” insinuates a transition of ideas. Paul, up to this point in the letter, has introduced himself and Timothy, who co-wrote the letter (1-2), expressed his thanksgiving and prayers for the church (3-12), and reminded the church to remember Jesus’ work on the cross, the source of their salvation (13-23).

Paul just finished expressing his love for the church, and now he says that it is a pleasure for him to suffer for their sake. Exactly what suffering Paul is enduring as he writes this letter is uncertain, but it is evident in chapter 4 verse 3 of this same letter that Paul is in prison, perhaps in Caesarea, Ephesus, or Rome.² However, though the exact location of his imprisonment is unknown, Paul’s motive is clear. He is not suffering for his own benefit, and he is also not suffering only for the sake of the individual congregation at Colossae, but rather for the church as a whole. In addition, he is suffering because Christ suffered—Paul is pleased to share the sufferings of Christ for the sake of the church, who is Christ’s body.

When Paul writes the phrase “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions, he uses the Greek verb ἀναπληρῶ. This is the only instance where this word is used in Scripture,

² David W. Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), under the heading “Introduction to Colossians.” Google Books.

and the word conveys the concept of “completing in the place of.”³ This word is Present Active Indicative Verb, which means it is a continuous, present action. Therefore, Paul is saying that he is actively, presently, sharing in Christ’s sufferings. He is not saying that Christ’s suffering was lacking or unfinished, but rather that the church, including himself, would continue to experience suffering, just as Christ did.

...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.

Paul became a minister of the church because God gave him that responsibility. God bestowed upon Paul the task of stewarding the church (in this case, specifically the church of Colassae). His main task as steward was to proclaim the Word of God with clarity so that all people will know it. His job was not to teach the people in little bits of the Word, but rather the whole counsel of the Word, the full thing.

Paul could proclaim the whole Word because now the mystery had been revealed to all who have faith in Christ, the saints. The mystery, which is Christ as Paul states in verse 27, was unknowable for many generations because Christ had not come to reveal it yet. However, Paul is writing after Christ, so now the mystery can be known and he is responsible for preaching that mystery to the church.

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.

Included among “the saints” are gentiles, which is different from the past. In the past, God used the nation of Israel to be His witnesses to the world. However, God

³Richard R. Melick, Jr. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, New American Commentary 32 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 238.

commissioned Paul specifically to take the Gospel to the gentiles, and in this verse Paul confirms that the mystery of Christ is now available to the gentiles as well as to the Jews. Gentiles now have access to hope in Christ on their own because God chose to make the Gospel available to all people.

This revelation is specifically important for the church in Colassae because it was composed primarily of Gentiles.⁴ Because of this new revelation, the fact that Gentiles now had access to the mystery of Christ, the church at Colassae could exist. Not only that, but the church could witness to their Gentile friends and neighbors as well.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

This is Paul's "so what" in this section. After encouraging the church, explaining to them that the Gospel is available to all people, including the Gentiles, now the church must take action. Paul includes himself in this action, using the preposition "we," which assures the church that they're doing this task together. Together, they proclaim, and they proclaim by warning and teaching.

The message that they proclaim, that they warn and teach about, is Christ—the Gospel. If the mystery now revealed is Christ, then He is the message that they must proclaim to everyone. Everyone has access to the Gospel, so the church must tell everyone about it. However, the church also must use their wisdom to warn people about what will happen if they don't place their faith in Christ and to teach them what a life of following Christ looks like. The process is not finished with the proclamation. The church must follow through with discipleship, which is when the warning and teaching comes into play.

⁴ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 94.

Paul also describes the end goal of the process: to present everyone mature in Christ. Paul is not merely seeking one-time conversions, but rather he desires to see mature followers of Christ. This word “mature” that Paul writes is the Greek word τέλειον, which means “complete,” “perfect,” or “finished.” This word is repeated in chapter 4 verse 12 of Colossians, where Paul writes that Epaphras is constantly praying for them, “that [they] may stand τέλειον and be fully assured in all the will of God.”⁵ The idea that Paul is trying to convey is that he wants to develop the Colossians to be believers who are confident in their faith, not needing reassurance or lacking in any aspect of their faith. Not only that, but Paul wants the church in Colossae to do the same with others.

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Paul wraps up this section by going back to his original statement of suffering. He once again emphasizes his suffering, but this time he gets more specific. Not only is he suffering on behalf of the church, but he is suffering so that he may teach everyone, especially Gentiles, about the Gospel. His life’s work is to do exactly what he encouraged the church to join him in: to proclaim, warn, and teach all people the hope that they can find in Christ.

In the second half of this phrase, Paul explains how he has the ability to suffer this much for the church. He is able to accomplish everything, not by his own power, but by the energy that God gave him. God gave Paul the energy to share the Gospel to the Gentiles because it was God’s idea all along.

Revised CIT:

⁵ “τέλειον,” Bill Mounce, accessed Nov. 4, 2021, <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/teleios>

God revealed Christ to all, so Paul exhorts the church of Colassae to diligently proclaim Christ to everyone.

Revised Unifying Theme:

God has made the Gospel available to all people, so the church must do all we can to share the hope of Christ and disciple people.

Exegetical Outline:

1. Paul rejoices in his suffering because it is a continuation of what Christ suffered on earth because just as Christ suffered for the sake of the church, Paul is doing the same (24)
 - a. Paul suffers for the church because God called him to be a minister (25)
 - b. Paul suffers for the church in order to make the Gospel fully known (25)
2. The Gospel that Paul is proclaiming is the Word of God, the mystery of Christ (27)
 - a. The Gospel was hidden for ages, but now it is revealed to all His people, including the Gentiles (26)
 - b. This Gospel is within you because the hope of Christ is in you. (27)
3. Because the hope of Christ is within Paul and the church, they proclaim
 - a. They proclaim by warning and teaching (28)
 - b. They do these things with wisdom (28)
 - c. They do these things so that they might disciple people to be mature followers of Christ (28)
4. Paul does all of these things, not out of his own abilities, but through the strength that God gives to him (29)

II. Sermon Development and Design

Major Emphases of the Passage:

- Paul does whatever it takes, even suffers, to proclaim the Gospel to all
- What the church proclaims is the hope that they have in Christ
- The goal of proclamation: develop mature followers of Christ
- Paul proclaims the gospel to all through God's power

Message Implications:

1. One Action: Proclaim. Two Methods- Teaching and Warning. The church of Colossae and the church today have the same command. One Result: Present mature followers of Christ
2. Who do we proclaim to? Everyone. Why? Because the Gospel is available to all.
3. The strength to do this work comes only from God. We cannot do it without Him

Deductive Sermon Brief: (form provided on blackboard)

A. Foundational Elements

1. Sermon Title:
2. Text: Colossians 1:24-29
3. Subject (in one or two words--or as a short phrase): The Church, through God's power, proclaims the Gospel to all people
4. CIT (Central Idea of the Text; state in the past tense): God revealed Christ to all, so Paul exhorts the church of Colossae to diligently proclaim Christ to everyone.

5. Proposition (the Proposition; do not state in the past tense): The church, through the Holy Spirit's power, must proclaim the hope of Christ, the Gospel, to all people.

6. Sermon Objective (state in terms of what hearers will **do** as a result of this sermon):

Hearers will....

- Understand that the Gospel is available to everyone, including them
- Be exhorted to go proclaim Christ to those who are lost
- Know that they are expected to mature in Christ and disciple others to do the same

B. Formal Elements

Introduction:

1. How much would you be willing to do if it meant you got to proclaim your hope in Christ with someone?
2. Would you be willing to suffer, even go to prison, if it meant that you could tell someone about Jesus?
3. Today we're going to study a portion of a letter in which Paul sacrificed nearly everything in order to share the Gospel with people who had never heard.
4. In Colossians chapter 1 verses 24-29, not only does Paul remind the church of Colossae of the hope that they have in Christ, but he also encourages them to share that hope with all people, even if it meant they suffered for it.

5. We're going to look at four things we can learn from this passage: (1) Suffering unites the church with Christ, (2) The church proclaims the Gospel to all people, (3) The Gospel is the mystery of Christ, and (4) God empowers the church to suffer and proclaim

Body

I. Suffering unites the church with Christ (24-25)

EXP: How can suffering be joyful? Paul says in verse 24 that he rejoices in his suffering, but his joy does not come from the suffering itself. His joy comes from the purpose of his suffering: to "make the word of God fully known." God called him to this ministry, so Paul joyfully suffers for the sake of the Gospel.

ILL: When I lived in Oaxaca, Mexico, one of my family's dear friends often shared his testimony with us. He and his family were the first Christian converts in his village, and when the village saw that he no longer followed the village's religious customs, they put him in jail for many years. His family prayed for him, and while he was in prison, he stayed strong in his faith. He was released, and though there is still some hostility toward his family, he is the pastor of a growing church in his village. He and his family endure persecution and prison for the sake of the Gospel, just like Paul did.

APP: I use that example to show you that suffering for the sake of the Gospel is still a reality for the church today. In the United States, we may not be going to prison for our faith, but we also face hostility of various

degrees for our faith as well. But we can rejoice in our suffering because our suffering unites us with Christ, who suffered on our behalf. God calls us to “make the word of God fully known” just as He called Paul, and He calls us to do this even if we suffer for it.

II. The Gospel is available to all people (26-27)

EXP: In verses 26 and 27, Paul tells the church that he strives to make the Gospel fully known because now all people have the capacity to know it. All people, no matter their background or ethnicity, have the capacity to know the Gospel. In this passage, Paul is specifically talking about the Gentiles, those who are not Jewish. Up until this point, the Jewish faith was the gateway to know God, but now, because of Jesus, all people could know the mystery of Christ. This is especially important for the church at Colossae because they were Gentiles themselves. Because of Christ, the Colossians could know God because the mystery was revealed to them. And because of Christ, you and I can know God as well. Not only us, but all people around the world today can know God because of Christ’s work.

ARG: Use Rev. 7:9-10 to show the fulfillment of this idea that all people can know Christ. Not only do all people have the potential to know Christ, but one day all people from every nation, language, people, and tongue will worship around the throne of God together. Because of Christ, this is possible. All people, you, me, the Colossians, and all of the international people all around the world can know God through Christ

APP: So if the Gospel is available to all, and God gives us a picture of people from every nation worshiping Him, what should the church do in response? The church must share the Gospel with all people! As you and I go about our lives, we must be seeking every opportunity to share the mystery of Christ with those around us. We must never look at someone and think it is impossible for them to know the Gospel because we know from this text that God has made a way for them to know Him. Every person has the capacity to find salvation in Jesus Christ, and we must treat every conversation as a potential for sharing the Gospel.

III. The Church proclaims the Gospel to make mature disciples (28)

EXP: But Paul does not stop with just proclamation of the Gospel. In verse 28, Paul tells the church how they should proclaim the Gospel and the end goal of that proclamation. First, the church proclaims Christ by warning and teaching. The church warns unbelievers of the judgment that comes from not placing faith in Christ: eternal separation from God. But proclaiming the Gospel is not only about keeping people out of hell, it is also about teaching people how to live God-honoring lives. Paul describes the end goal of proclamation as “present everyone mature in Christ.” This means that not only does the church proclaim the gospel, but when someone believes then the church also has the responsibility to disciple them—to help the person grow in their knowledge of and faith in Christ even after their salvation.

ILL: Consider a student in college or some other sort of post-high school education. When a student is trying to decide on a major or concentration for study, they devote time to studying that major. I was an English major, so I spent many hours reading literature and practicing sentence diagramming because I wanted to improve my reading and writing skills, and I had many teachers who helped me improve as well. I could not have graduated with my Bachelor's without motivation to learn and professors who taught me. Discipleship is a similar concept. Maturity in Christ comes when Christians teach one another and study God's Word for themselves. It is a process, and it takes time, just like studying and getting a degree. But another important aspect of a student is the fact that the professor must also know what they're talking about. If the professor doesn't know what they're talking about, how can they teach the student? A few chapters over in Colossians 4:12, Paul writes that Epaphras, another servant of Christ, is praying that the Colossian church will mature in Christ as well. If the church is not mature, they cannot teach others to be mature followers just like if a professor does not know his subject, he or she cannot teach students.

APP: As a church, we must proclaim the gospel to all people, and as Paul wrote here, we do that by warning people of the consequences of not trusting in Christ. But we also do that by teaching people how to follow Christ and disciplining them to be mature followers of Him. This takes time and investment on our part, and it is not easy. But if God has made the

Gospel available to all, the church must take part in His mission and proclaim it. And if the church is going to proclaim the Gospel, they must be mature themselves, consistently filling themselves with the Word and growing closer to Christ themselves. They cannot teach what they do not know.

IV. God empowers the church to suffer and proclaim (29)

EXP: As the church suffers and proclaims the Gospel to all people, God is the one who empowers them to do so. In verse 29, Paul concludes this section by giving God all the credit, and the church today does the same. Any time we proclaim the Gospel, God is the one who gives us the energy to do it. As Paul suffered for the sake of the church, God was empowering him to persevere through it because even Paul could not endure the task on his own. Throughout this entire passage, God's hand has orchestrated all of it. It was God who called Paul to ministry; it was God who revealed the mystery of Christ to the Gentiles, and it is God who empowered Paul and who continues to empower us to share the hope of Christ, the Gospel, with all people.

ARG: It is important to note that God empowers us through the person of the Holy Spirit, who, along with the Father and the Son, is the third person of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit is sent by Christ into the world to teach, inspire, and work within people, specifically within the church. The Holy Spirit is the One who dwells within Christians and helps them to proclaim Christ to all people, which, as we've been talking about

throughout this entire passage, is the task God has given us. The Holy Spirit empowers us to share the Gospel today, just as He empowered Paul to minister to the Colossians.

APP: So what does that mean for the church? It means that we can trust that the Holy Spirit will give us the power and perseverance to accomplish this task He's given us: the task to share the gospel with all people. He calls us to do all that we can, even if it means suffering and struggling, to tell all people about the hope that we have in Christ, and that can be a daunting, overwhelming task. But just as the Holy Spirit empowered Paul, He will give you the energy as well.

Conclusion

1. So how far would you go to share the Gospel with someone?
2. God commands us to sacrifice as much as is necessary in order to proclaim the hope of Christ with people—with all people.
3. But God doesn't leave us to this task on our own because He promises to empower us through Himself by giving us the Holy Spirit.
4. Therefore, I exhort you to go with confidence, proclaiming the Gospel to all people no matter what it takes, knowing that God will empower you as you go.

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