

3. Genuine Christian Ministry

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to begin our service today by reading from Paul's letter to the Colossians. If you're joining us today, we're in the middle of a series, a seven-sermon series in this letter to Paul.

This is my last one today. My colleague Rupert Hunt Taylor will be on next week, clearing up all the mess that I leave. I'm so glad he's back from America.

But we will read together Colossians chapter 1 verse 24. To verse 5 of chapter 2. Let us hear then the word of God.

Now I, that is Paul, I, Paul, 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.

[1 : 0 3] 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 has 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 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 the body.

[2 : 0 3] Yet I am with you in spirit. Rejoicing to see your good order. And the firmness of your faith. In Christ. Amen. And may God add his blessing to this.

The reading of his word. Let us pray together. Amen. Father we thank you for the privilege we have. Of meeting together in the middle of this week.

To read and study your word. We are drawn from many different backgrounds. Many different situations. And many different circumstances. But we come together as one.

To call upon your name. And for you to speak to us from your word. For we know that no matter how different the background. Or how different the situations or circumstances that we face.

We know that you are able and sufficient. To work for our good. And your glory amid these things. So speak to us Father. Turn our hearts once again to the.

[3 : 0 1] The wonder and the majesty of the gospel of your son. Our Lord Jesus Christ. And cheer us. And send us on our way rejoicing. That we are yours. And you are ours.

For we ask this. In Jesus name. Amen. Why is it.

That Christians can be open to. And taken in. And deluded by. Plausible arguments. Chapter 2 verse 4. Teaching that.

That sounds right. That sounds right. And sounds plausible. But in reality is sinister. And will delude us. And draw us away from Jesus.

How is it that we can be open to teaching of that sort? I think part of the reason is that. Genuine Christian living seems well. So ordinary. So unimpressive.

[4 : 03] And we can naturally. And sinfully. Be attracted to the weird and the wonderful. We can be attracted to the religious world of ceremony and secret.

The inner circle of a superior spirituality. In this part of the letter. Paul tells the Colossians. To compare the ministry of Apaphras.

Who planted the church. Chapter 1 verse 7. And Paul. Compare our ministries. With the clever talk. And plausible arguments of the false teachers. Whose aim is to take you away from Jesus.

In this passage. Paul speaks personally. And he deliberately takes the false teachers. Head on. By reclaiming all the language.

That the false teachers were using. The language of fullness. Verse 25. Of mystery. Verse 26. Wisdom. Verse 28.

[5 : 01] All the riches. Chapter 2 verse 2. And wisdom and knowledge. Chapter 2 verse 3. Paul uses all these buzzwords of the false teachers.

To show the Colossians. That all these things are already theirs in Jesus. They already have the things that are being promised. But the reason though.

We can get duped. And taken in. Well it's because that. The lives that Paul and Apaphras live. Well. They seem so disappointing.

So unappealing. So ordinary. We can so often get confused. Between the spectacular. And the significant. We can lose sight of faith.

And be dazzled by plausible arguments. Let me show you. The most significant. And striking features. Of the kingdom of God. On this earth.

[6 : 01] Says the Bible. Here he is. An apostle. Who has stuck to his gospel. And he is now sitting in prison. In chains.

Paul is saying here to the Colossians. Don't you be put off. By what seems to be ordinary. And unimpressive. But realize the massive.

Massive significance of such things. In genuine. Christian ministry. So Paul begins. Firstly. In verses 24. To 27. Paul's joyful suffering.

Paul's joyful suffering. There are many. Who. Who entertain the notion. That real Christianity. Should have no suffering. That real Christianity.

Should be. Devoid of suffering. Verse 24. Puts it so plainly. Doesn't it? As Paul thinks. Of the false teachers. And all that they are peddling.

[6 : 58] Paul says. What I rejoice in. What I rejoice in. Is what Christ suffered for you. And what Epaphras suffered for you. And what I will. Continue to.

Carry on. Suffering for you. I will fill up in my flesh. What is still lacking. Do you hear the language? Can you imagine the contrast.

Between the false teachers. The elitist false teachers. Who were saying to the Colossians. You're lacking something. No. No says Paul. The only thing that is lacking.

Is that I've got some more suffering to do. For the gospel. As we serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Who suffered for us. Paul is saying to them. If you are willing to suffer.

Like the Lord Jesus Christ. Like Epaphras. Like me. If you are willing to. Suffer joyfully. For the gospel. Then you have grasped.

[7 : 53] What it means. To be a follower. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. What they promise you. Mysterious fulfillment. Spiritual knowledge. Special understanding.

The full experience of God. What they promise you. These things already. Belong to you in Christ. Verse 26 and 27. And I've served the church.

As you know. To make the word of God. Fully known. All of it. Paul says that to be. Commissioned by God. To make the word of God. Fully known.

Is an extremely. Costly. Commissioning. Remember. This is the same Paul. Who persecuted the church. And who is now. Persecuted.

For the church. And so walking in the. The footsteps of Christ. Paul knows full well. That any kind of gospel. That offers to Christians. The prospect of.

[8 : 47] Moving to a. Higher spiritual plane. Where suffering is removed. And suspect indeed. Paul is saying to the Colossians. That joyful suffering.

Is part of. Real genuine. Christian living. Not that we go. Looking for suffering. Or enjoy it in some. Masochistic way. When it comes. But when it comes.

We recognize. The significant. Work of God. The significant. Work of God. Maybe in the life of. Grieving parents. Who have lost.

Their child. Who should be. Celebrating. The child's. First birthday. But still. They praise God. For his goodness. In the midst. Of their suffering. That's distinctive.

Isn't it? We see it. In those who. Go on. Serving the Lord. Jesus Christ. Even when the love for him. Is mocked. Sometimes by those. That are closest to them.

[9 : 45] Think about those. Who. Share Jesus with us. And continue to do so. Even when we blanked them. Even when we ignored them. And mocked them. We see what Paul is speaking about.

And those Christians. Who never tire of seeking. To present the word of God. To others. Joyful suffering. Is an extraordinary. Real evidence.

To consider. When being attracted. By people. Who have never suffered. And whose whole ministry. Is wrapped up in. Self-promoting. And self-protecting. Trappings.

If you're looking for. Genuine Christianity. Says Paul. To the Colossians. Be very careful. About the hallmarks. Poised.

Paul's joyful suffering. And secondly. In verses 28. To 2. 1. Paul's hard labor. Paul's hard labor.

[10 : 43] Something he is explaining. Is inextricably linked. To proclaiming Jesus Christ. Verse 28. Him we proclaim. We proclaim Christ himself.

We don't teach a theory. Or promote a way of life. We are not selling. Spiritual techniques. No. We proclaim Christ himself.

We present you publicly. With the person of the son of God. We proclaim him. Can you sense the. Single mindedness.

And stickability. To the task in hand. As Paul writes here. 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.

[11 : 40] I have for you. For those at Leora. As here. That's just the simple truth. Isn't it? That for all of us. To proclaim Jesus Christ. With our lives.

Through our witness. And our teaching. Or our leading. Or our parenting. Or any aspect. Of our Christian service. To proclaim Jesus Christ. Is hard. Hard work.

To move people. From immaturity. To maturity. Is hard work. Which is what Paul says. He is wanting to do. Isn't that hard work?

If you're given a child. Or maybe two. Who are aged maybe. Four and two. And you're told. Could you look after these children. But only until they're mature.

Some would say. I should still be with my parents. But bringing children to maturity. To have that as your job.

[12 : 37] If that is your job. Then selfishness. Carelessness. Laziness. Can never feature in the equation. It's a job of working.

Day and night. Week after week. Year after year. So that somehow. These children. Will grow to be. Responsible mature adults.

In the midst of the joy. And the privilege of this task. There is enormous amount. Of sheer. Relentless. Hard work. That is what Paul is speaking about.

Spiritually. Paul is saying. I'm trying to teach the church. And lead Christian people. And what I am trying to do amongst them. Is to make the word of God. Fully known. So that one day.

They will be presented. Mature. And fully grown. Believers in Jesus Christ. Christ. And in amongst the. Fulfilling joy.

[13 : 35] Of serving one another. In the church. There is a massive amount. Of hard work. And when you see. Christian people. Like Paul. Working. Struggling.

Laboring. To present. Jesus Christ. To proclaim. The Lord Jesus Christ. And to. Keep doing so. Well that's when you know. The power of almighty God.

Is at work in the church. We don't see the. Power of almighty God. At work in the church. When. When Christians sit down. And do nothing. And say.

Oh. The Lord will work. He'll build his kingdom. No. We know that the power of God. Is at work. When the people of God. Are prepared to toil.

And slog. And proclaim Jesus Christ. And his word. To a watching world. Do you imagine. That the. The new teachers. With. Their improved.

[14 : 29] Self-advancement. Gospel. Were. Perhaps. Just a little bit lazy. I think they were lazy. Work shy. And I think. Their promises. Of comfort. And ease.

Were. In many. Many ways. Much more appealing. Than Paul's testimony. Of struggle. But comfort. At what cost. Joyful suffering.

The hard labor. And Paul says. Thirdly. Paul's hope for them. Paul's hope for them. Paul hopes. It will be.

Orderly faith. That will keep these believers. Resistant. To plausible arguments. Look at chapter 2. Verse 2 onwards. Where Paul says. What he is hoping for.

He's already said. What he has experienced. On behalf of the Colossians. Now he says. What he is hoping for. For as a result. In their lives. Look at the list.

[15 : 27] This is what. Hard work. In the gospel. Produces. People who are. Encouraged. In heart. Knit together. United. In love.

That they may have. That they may have. A full knowledge. Of Jesus Christ. Paul says. That he rejoices. Even though he is not with them. He rejoices.

To see how in. Good order. And firm. Their faith in Christ is. Aren't these strong words. Encouraged. Knit together.

Full understanding. Orderly. Firm. Not very exciting. Not very impressive. To the world. But boy.

Are they fruitful. In the church. If you want. A grand. And impressive. Faith says Paul. To the Colossians. If you want. Faith that will be. Admirable.

[16 : 21] And enviable. Don't go chasing after. The latest. Spiritual bandwagon. That comes rolling. Into town. Just make sure. You stand. Firmly.

With Jesus Christ. Go for solid. And lasting. Rather than glitzy. And short lived. That's what he's saying. Beware.

Of short termism. Jesus is not. Faddish. And that's hard. To remember. In a faddish culture. Short term.

Relationships. Fuller culture. With all their. Short term. And short lived love. Ever changing. Commitments. The easy buy. Cheapskate.

Imitation. Goods. That. Full up our houses. And then. Full up our skips. So much. About the. The way we communicate. To one another. And express. Care to one another.

[17 : 19] Is short lived. And shallow. And therefore. So much. About our love of Christ. And our love of one another. Should. And can appear.

As incredibly distinctive. And attractive. To a world. Which is at sea. In a mess. Without an anchor. Look at the kingdom of God.

And look at the glorious beauty. Of Jesus Christ himself. As you get a glimpse. Of a Christian believer. Teaching the same thing. For 20. 30. 40 years.

Get a glimpse. Of God's mighty power. As you see someone. Loving their friend. Whom they've maybe loved. Perhaps. For many years. Without any thanks.

Get a glimpse. Of the. The real fruit. Of God's grace. In this world. When a Christian. Puts his shoulder. To the cross. And says. I will share. With a sense of privilege.

[18 : 17] And destiny. And pride. And joy. I will share. In the selfless. Sufferings. Of my savior. For the sake. Of my fellow believers. I will deliberately.

Put them first. Because I believe. The hard work. Of doing so. Will yield. Eternal fruit. In the new creation. Look at Paul.

An apostle. In chains. How very disappointing. Paul. Were you not wise enough. To tweet your message. When the authorities. Were listening. Are you so foolish.

To land. In prison. In disgrace. Oh says Paul. Pleasing the authorities. Was never really. My aim.

Well not once. I met Jesus. It wasn't. I was presenting. The word of God. To the people. That I may present. The people. To the savior. And there's no other way. Of doing that.

[19 : 16] Other than hard work. And the risk. Of unpopularity. Costly. Selfless struggle. Mixed with the joy. Of the Lord.

Jesus Christ. Alongside. As every step. Of the way. That is a fruitful. Undeniably beautiful. Thing in this world. But it's so disappointing.

To look at. So unimpressive. So ordinary. Is that really. What we are called to? Is that all. You have to offer?

I was looking. For something. A bit more. Interesting. I was looking. For something. A bit more. Me centered. Were you? The Lord Jesus Christ.

Loved the church. And gave himself. For the church. The apostle Paul. Loved the church. And gave himself. For the church. You love the church.

[20 : 11] Don't you? Will you give yourself. For the church. Let us pray. Therefore.

As you received. Christ Jesus the Lord. So walk in him. Rooted. And built up in him. And established. In the faith. Just as you were taught.

Abounding. In thanksgiving. Our loving. Heavenly Father. We ask that you would. Grant us your grace. And your strength. And your power.

To do this. We ask this. In Jesus name. Amen.