**Series Slide**

**Colossians – Keeping Christ in Focus Series**

 “Finding Hidden Treasure”

Colossians 1.24-2.5

**Introduction**

Currently we are going through the epistle of Colossians. Paul wrote the as he was imprisoned in Rome for preaching the gospel. Paul’s close friend and founder of the church at Colossae, Epaphras, visited Paul while he was in prison. Epaphras brought good news about the church’s growth in Christ but he also brought bad news about a group of false teachers who were causing believers to get their focus off of Christ. Basically, these false teachers were teaching that Christ was not enough for a person to enjoy the fullness of God. Christ wasn’t sufficient. These false teachers taught that a person needed mystic insights from angelic visions and to follow religious rules and regulations in order to receive the full knowledge and blessings of God. Even though these false teachers diminished the person and work of Christ, the Apostle addresses this heresy head-on and calls for the supremacy of Christ in all things. (Col.1.15-23) Now Paul becomes very personal in his letter, explaining the nature of his work and his reasons for doing it. These false teachers had probably spoke ill of Paul saying something like, “If Christ is supreme and controls all things, then why is Paul in jail?” “Maybe God is mad with Paul for teaching a false gospel and not keeping the rules and rituals.” In this next portion of Scripture Paul shares his heart by explaining the motivation behind his ministry as an Apostle. Today’s text is Colossians chapter one starting with verse twenty-four through chapter two verse five. Hear now the Word of God.

***24****Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.*

***25****Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,****26****that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,****27****to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.****28****We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.****29****For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. 1For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,****2****that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself,****3****in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.****4****I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.****5****For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.*

**Faithful Servant**

Two times in first chapter Paul mentions that he *“was made a minister*.” (1.23, 25) The word “minister” that is used in Colossians is actually the Greek word “servant” and truly Paul was a faithful servant. As anyone called to the ministry knows it’s something that cannot be ignored. Before Barbara and I got married I told her that I wasn’t going to be a minister. I was going to be a businessman, make a lot of money, and drive a canary yellow Corvette. Only for the Lord to call me into the ministry a few months later becoming a preacher man, eventually making a decent wage, and driving a ruby red Mustang. My point is that the Lord’s call into the ministry cannot be ignored. And this was especially true for the Apostle Paul.

As you recall, Paul was a violent persecutor of the church before his dramatic conversion recorded in Acts chapter nine. Paul’s pre-conversion name was Saul and the Bible tells us that he was *breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*. But one day as he was nearing the city of Damascus *suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,**but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”* Remember Saul was persecuting the church. He was *breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*. But the Lord asks why Saul was persecuting Him. *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”*  *“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*.” You see the relationship of Christ and His church is so united that if a person persecutes a Christian it is the same as they are persecuting Christ Himself. The Church is Christ’s body. Christ and the church are one. This will be an important truth as we seek to understand Paul’s words in verse twenty-four.

Three days after this dramatic encounter on the Damascus Road the Lord sent a disciple by the name of Ananias to go to Saul saying, *“Go, for he is a chose instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”* And suffer he did! He writes in Second Corinthians, “*Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;**I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.* (2Cor.11.24-27)

Paul writes to the Colossians, “*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.”* Paul considered his many sufferings to be a small price to pay for the privilege to share the riches of Christ to the Colossians and the Gentile world. Paul certainly did not believe that any was lacking in the atoning work of Christ’s sacrifice.

Paul understood that personal acts of persecution against him were really acts of persecution against Christ Himself. This was something the Lord taught Paul on the Damascus Road. Therefore Paul could rejoice in his suffering because he knew the Lord’s teaching when Christ said, *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* (Mt.5.10-12)

**Faithful Servant**

Yes, Paul was a faithful servant but what motivated him to endure such hardship? Most of us quit serving the Lord when we experience a spiritual hangnail. We decide to stay home from church if it’s raining. What motivated Paul faithful service? Paul found the treasure hidden in Christ.

**Found the Treasure**

“*Of this church I was made a minister* (a servant) *according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.* (1.25)

Paul writes, “*Of this church I was made a minister* (a servant) *according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.* (1.25) Paul had discovered the treasure of the riches of Christ and he had to share this treasure with the world. This reminds me of the parable Jesus taught, *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”* (Mt.13.44) Paul had discovered the treasure of the Gospel and he was willing to give up everything to make sure others would enjoy the riches of the glory of Christ.

Paul tells the church of Colossae the reason why he can endure such hostility was because God had bestowed on him a stewardship of truth that could only be dispensed through the preaching of the Word of God. He continues by explaining actually what this preaching entailed,

**Found the Treasure**

*that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,**to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*(1.26-27)

God had appointed Paul to be the administrator of spiritual treasures. Paul had discovered the greatest treasure and he was not going to hoard these riches. He would spend his life sharing the riches of the glory of Christ to the Gentiles. As it has been said, “Christianity is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread.” And in this case it is one pauper telling another pauper where he found an endless treasure.

Paul uses the word "mystery" not as we do in our day. Today a mystery is something that cannot be solved but in the Bible the word "mystery" is a truth undisclosed except by divine revelation. It is a fact that cannot be understood in detail without divine assistance. The mystery cannot be known by natural abilities and mental powers.

On that day when Ananias share the Gospel with Saul God revealed the mystery of His grace through Christ and Saul (Paul) got born again. Paul was a highly educated and politically powerful Pharisee but he couldn’t see the treasure of the Gospel of Jesus Christ until God lifted the scales from his eyes. *Immediately Saul began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?* *But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.* (Acts 9.17-22) God had revealed the riches of His grace to Paul and Paul would spend the rest of his life sharing those riches to the Gentile world.

**Found the Treasure**

“*which is* *Christ in you, the hope of glory*.”

Paul summarizes the riches of God’s grace when he writes, “*which is* *Christ in you, the hope of glory*.” On the surface this phrase *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* might sound anticlimactic but maybe it is because we have become desensitized to the Gospel. Maybe we have grown so accustomed to the message of the Gospel that we aren’t shock by its beauty. Paul says that this is the treasure chest of God’s grace, *“Christ in you, the hope of glory,”* and we look at it as a dirty penny instead of rejoicing that we found the greatest treasure of all.

**Found the Treasure**

“*Christ in you, the hope of glory*.”

Let’s unpack this treasure trove of grace. First, “*Christ*.” The One who is the image of the invisible God, the radiance of the Father’s glory, and the exact representation of the Father’s nature. (1.15; Heb.1.2) Christ, the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (2.3) Christ, the One in whom all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. (2.9) Christ, the One who disarmed all powers by triumphing over them by the cross and is seated at the right hand of God. (2.15; 3.1)

*“Christ in you.”* Not among you but in you. This means all the accomplishments of Christ are ours because we are in Christ! The righteousness of Christ is ours because we are in Christ. The obedience of Christ is ours because we are in Christ. We are holy because we are in Christ. We are alive to God because we are in Christ. We have a radical solidary with Christ. In God’s eyes we are one. In Christ we enjoy an abiding relationship. Christ abides in me and I abide in Christ.

*“Christ in you, the hope of glory*.” When the Bible talks about “hope” it is not talking about a “hope so” or “maybe so.” It is not like, “I’m going to ask this girl to the prom and I hope she says, ‘yes.’” Hope in the Bible carries the meaning of confidence, security, and full assurance. The writer of Hebrews says it like this, “*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast.”* (Heb.6.19) And the word “glory” is the Greek word “doxa” where we get the English word doxology. Glory is the beautiful splendor of God. Glory is the absolute perfection of God. And Paul tells us in Second Corinthians that we behold the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2Cor.4.6)

So lets put it all together. When Paul summarizes the riches of God’s grace as *“Christ in you, the hope of glory*” what he is saying is that, “the riches of God’s grace is found in the discovery that Christ is the Father’s “all and all” and by His grace you have been placed in Christ to share in all He is and all He has done. This magnificent truth gives those in Christ full assurance to know for certain that we have received the beautiful splendor of God’s glory through Christ and will eventually enjoy God’s perfection in eternity.

This full Gospel reality – this treasure trove of truth was Paul’s driving force for faithful service to Christ and His church.

**Faithful Service**

*We proclaim Him,* *admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.*(1.28)

*We proclaim Him,*Paul writes, *admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.*(1.28)

Presenting every person complete in Christ was the reason Paul would strive with all of power God would give him. Presenting every person complete in Christ was the reason Paul would struggle on their behalf so that their hearts may be encouraged and to see them knit together. Paul knew all the wealth that comes from the treasures of wisdom and knowledge discovered in Christ Himself. Paul wanted to see the Colossian’s stability of faith in Christ and Christ alone so that no one would delude them with persuasive arguments that would get their focus off of Christ. (1.29-2.5)

**Closing Thoughts**

Brothers and sisters, we must keep Christ is focus. Christ must be our greatest treasure. Christ must be our motivation for service. Sharing Christ with others must be our highest purpose. Maybe we don’t have false teachers trying to delude our faith but there are many things in this world that can get our focus off of Christ. A problem you are facing. A new opportunity that is confronting you. A new relationship that has come into your life. There are many things that can cause us to get our focus off of Christ. But its days like today when we can renew our focus and make Christ preeminent in our lives.

**Transition to the Table**