

ROMANCING THE SAINTS AT COLOSSAE

Studies in the Book of Colossians

*“If Ephesians can be labeled the epistle portraying the ‘church of Christ,’
then Colossians must surely be labeled ‘the Christ of the church’”
unknown*

Text
Colossians 1:24-29

Topic
The apostle Paul describes his ministry of revealing
the mystery of God to the Gentile nations

Title
“Apostle Paul: International Man of Mystery”

Introduction

At the end of every wedding I perform I get to say, “It is my privilege to present to you for the first time Mr. & Mrs.” so and so.

With most couples I’ve had little to do with getting them to the altar. I’m just there to officiate. That started to change as I got older.

More couples started getting married with whom I’d had a lot of personal contact in my twenty-three years here in Hanford. They grew-up in this church, sat under the teaching, served under the leadership. When I presented them there was a great deal more personal involvement and investment.

When my daughter, Mary, married John I wanted to be her dad, not the pastor. Plus she for years had wanted Dennis Davenport to officiate at her wedding. It was cute watching Dennis, our family friend, officiate at their wedding because he was extra-nervous due to his personal involvement with our family.

When Geno married Kelly, well that was huge from the standpoint of presentation. As his parents Pam and I had a great deal to do with getting him to that point in his life. When I for the first time presented Mr. & Mrs. Gene Pensiero it was very personal and filled with emotion.

What does any of this have to do with our text? Look with me at verse twenty-eight in chapter one of Colossians.

Colossians 1:28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, **that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.**

Paul believed that in Heaven he would have a hand in presenting the believers he had evangelized and edified. He thought of himself as having a personal involvement in getting believers to their face-to-face meeting with the Lord.

We should think more about both being presented to the Lord and presenting others to the Lord in that glorious future day in Heaven. Truth is, if you are a Christian a lot of people were involved in bringing you to Jesus and a lot more are involved helping you to grow. And along that path you become a person who will present others at some level of personal involvement.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Are Going To Be Presented By Those Who Serve You, and #2 You Are Going To Be Presenting Those You Serve.

#1 You Are Going To Be Presented
By Those Who Serve You
(v25-27)

Two words jumped out at me in the opening verses of this small section. They are the words "for you." In verses twenty-four and twenty-five Paul described who is was and what he was as being "for you." He reinforced it by saying what he did was "for the sake of... the church."

While the Colossians were yet sinners, having no knowledge of Jesus Christ or the good news that they could be forgiven their sins, Paul was serving the Lord. In fact there was a vast network of servants whom God

had prepared and provided for many centuries that each, in their own way, contributed towards that moment in time when a Colossian would hear the Word of God and received the Lord as his or her Savior.

These verses tell you a little about how much God loved you and loves you to go to such great lengths to seek you and save you.

Colossians 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

Paul was in prison in Rome on account of his preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. Still he could say “now,” right now, “I rejoice” in the midst of “my sufferings” because they were “for you.” In other words, his preaching had the effect of bringing to them the knowledge of eternal life and that greatly outweighed any amount of personal suffering he must endure for it.

Someone suffered for you to bring you the Gospel. A lot of people did, but you know some of them more intimately. In my own life there was a coworker, Loren Faulkner, who suffered to bring me the Gospel. We were friends and would party together a little outside of work until he and his wife got saved. Then I began to ridicule them in private but also in public. So did everyone else at our office. But some time later when I was struggling Loren was the first in line to take me to breakfast, share the Lord with me, and lead me in the sinners prayer.

And that is, I think, the kind of thing Paul meant when he said he “[filled] up in his flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.” The “afflictions of Christ” refer to the earthly sufferings of the Lord during His ministry. Things like ridicule and slander and hatred. They don’t refer at all to His sufferings on the Cross which were complete and final.

Think of all the Lord endured prior to the Cross in order to bring the message of God’s grace and love to lost human beings. After His resurrection it is you and I who carry on that work for the sake of reaching others. We will in some small or great manner be afflicted for it.

Colossians 1:25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

The word “minister” can be used formally or informally. It’s the Greek word *diakonos* from where we get the word “deacon.” It can refer to an office in the church or simply describe a Christian in his or her service to others.

Every believer is a “minister” either formally or informally. You might be called into full or part-time vocational ministry. You might be a lay-leader of some ministry or one of the volunteers in a ministry. But even if you have no ‘official’ function you are still called upon to serve others.

Paul was a servant whose particular calling was “the stewardship from God... given to [him].” A steward is the chief servant in a household and is responsible for the overall management and administration of its affairs.

How God gifts you has everything to do with how you minister. Christians often miss out because they go to extremes. Either you want to minister in a way you are not gifted or you think you’re not gifted in any way to minister. The truth is that every believer has a gift or gifts from the Lord and is called upon to use them to serve others.

Paul’s stewardship was to “fulfill the Word of God.” He will expand on what he meant in a moment. First we are reminded that we must remain grounded solidly upon God’s Word. We must find the basis for our ministering in the Bible and nowhere else.

OK, so what exactly was Paul’s stewardship with regard to the Word of God? It was,

Colossians 1:26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

In the New Testament a “mystery” is something previously concealed and unknown which is now revealed. This particular “mystery” was hidden “from ages and from generations.” “Ages” refers to the periods of history prior to the first century; “generations” refers to all the people who lived in those periods.

Something amazing “now has been revealed to His saints” and it is this:

Colossians 1:27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

After the big build-up it seems a letdown. But that's only because we don't fully understand how amazing it is. We would if we had been alive in the first century.

From the time of Abraham until the first century, if you wanted to know God and have a relationship with Him you had to either be a Jew or convert to Judaism. Paul was going around preaching Jesus Christ to Gentiles with no requirement that they first convert to becoming Jews. It was for that message of grace the Jews had him arrested and for which he was in prison in Rome.

What a rich and glorious truth this is! That you can come to God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from any works of righteousness and certainly apart from any and all religions, rites, and rules. More than that: You have "Christ in you," you have the presence of Jesus via the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit.

And you have "the hope of glory." The blessed hope of the church is the return of Jesus to resurrect the dead and rapture the living to take us home to Heaven to the place He's been away preparing for us.

All of this, what we call the church and the church age, is the mystery revealed to each and every "saint." We need to see it in its historic perspective and regain a sense of awe and wonder at its majesty.

Sitting there, under house arrest, Paul could reflect on this plan of God and it gave him much cause to rejoice. No amount of affliction against or upon him could begin to dampen his enthusiasm for the work God was accomplishing. Afflictions were to be expected. The more he suffered for the sake of the Lord the more effective he must be in his presentation of the Gospel.

We are reading Paul's letter to the church at Colossae. It's our letter, too. Paul was writing to us. He was suffering in that imprisonment for you and I every bit as much as he was for the Colossians.

Paul is an extreme example but an example nonetheless. “For you” God raised-up and gifted saints throughout history. “For you” God raised-up family members or friends or co-workers who were willing to suffer at some level to let you know they were believers in Jesus Christ. God saw you and set things in motion from the Garden of Eden forward to your very particular circumstances in order to save you.

As if that isn’t enough, something follows from it which is equally precious. Once you are saved, you become a presenter of others.

#2 You Are Going To Be Presenting Those You Serve (v28-29)

It is award season in Hollywood. Whether it’s the People Choice Awards, or the Golden Globes, or the big show, the Academy Awards, they all have one thing in common. The presenters are lured to the event by the promise of an amazing gift bag of merchandise!

It’s called “swag” and in 2006 the one given to presenters at the Golden Globes had gifts totally \$62,000.00.

You can expect some swag once we get to Heaven. We will each stand at the Reward Seat of Jesus Christ to be rewarded according to our work.

In the mean time, however, the work itself is quite intense. Paul talked about just how intense in verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine.

Colossians 1:28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

“Preach” is another word that can refer to something formal or informal. One commentator said it refers to both our lips and our lives. While some are called to a formal ministry of preaching from God’s Word, all of us have lives and lips that should be wholly dedicated to serving the Lord at all times.

Notice Paul said “Him we preach.” Though we preach the Word, we are never to preach a system. We preach a Person. It’s an important distinction because we are so given to want to reduce things to something we can easily understand. We can miss the depth and breadth of His love for us by creating systems within which there is just no room for it.

We are to be “warning every man.” This involves, first of all, evangelism. People need to be warned that they are sinners headed deserving of death and of judgment after death. Believers, too, need to be warned from time to time to continue in the faith and to live set apart, holy lives on earth.

“Teaching every man in all wisdom” is the verse-by-verse, book-by-book exposition of God’s completed Word to believers. The Amplified Bible defines “wisdom” as “comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God.” I like that! We need more than definitions and details. We need insight into the Person and work of our Lord. Facts and figures are the important framework upon which we must build the understanding of Who God is and what He is doing.

Paul’s goal was to “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Notice the repetition of the words “every man.” As you are by now aware from our previous studies, the Colossians were being influenced by false teachers. They were being told that there was a deeper experience or knowledge that was only available to a select, super-spiritual few.

Paul over-emphasized that the true riches of the Gospel of grace were for any and every single believer.

In Heaven, when you stand before the Lord, you will be “perfect.” On earth you are being perfected. God is moving you toward maturity anticipating your arrival in Heaven.

We’re talking about your serving others as a presenter who is interested in helping to perfect the saints while on the earth. Paul lets you know it is hard and demanding work.

Colossians 1:29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

The work of a presenter requires “labor” and “striving.” They seem both to be athletic terms:

- “Labor” is a term that describes the training of the athlete behind the scenes and before the contest. Think Rocky or any extreme training sequence.
- “Striving” is the word we get agonizing from. It refers to the intensity of the contest itself.

These words indicate a joyful, voluntary serving but one that is nevertheless filled with physical and mental weariness, toil, and even exhaustion.

It’s become fashionable, Christian chic, to talk about things like “burn-out” and our need for sabbaticals and such in our serving the Lord. I want you for a moment to imagine yourself telling the apostle Paul you are feeling a little “burnt-out” in your ministry. Remember you’d be looking at a man who surrendered everything to serve his Lord whose body had hundreds of lashes and had been in many imprisonments and in multiple shipwrecks. A man who had deep mental exhaustions thinking about the welfare of the people of God. Someone who wished he could be cursed to Hell if it would mean the salvation of his physical people, the Jews.

Now go ahead and tell him how tired you are!

Paul is an extreme example but still a good one. We almost certainly will not be called upon to suffer the kinds of afflictions he endured for our sake. But thinking about them puts our own afflictions into perspective. We must be willing to labor and strive in order to serve others. We are each of us part of that vast network of servants God has raised-up to share His grace and love.

You’re not left to your own strength to accomplish any of this. “His working,” Paul said, “works in me mightily.” You surrender and suffer, but God supplies the power. You thus grow stronger in Him as you get weaker in yourself.

Every believer is a presenter at some level. You may not think of what you do as significant but it is.

Ever read all the credits at the end of a feature film? It's incredible how many people are recognized. I used to chuckle at some of the services they perform that seem so insignificant. They list catering, bookkeepers, assistants and assistants to the assistants. One day it struck me that every one of those names was there because they contributed, however slightly, to the overall project.

You are I are God's closing credits in the lives of others. In some lives you're like a director or a producer. In others you're an assistant to an assistant or a janitor. But your contribution is, in fact, significant.

There is also a sense in which you can become more significant if you want to. It has to do with how important spiritual things are to you. It has to do with how much you are willing to suffer now for the swag later on, in Heaven.

As Griffith Thomas said, "Sacrificial disciples are needed to proclaim the sacrificial work of our Lord." Many suffered for you and for me so we would hear the Gospel and be saved.

Can we do any less - especially as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit as we await the blessed hope of the appearing of Jesus any moment?