

Treasuring Christ Together | Colossians 2:1-5

Introduction:

- Every fall semester reminding us of who we are, why we do what we do
- Why do we do church? Why do we gather in our various forms?
- If we can pray, read the bible, listen to worship CDs, download sermon podcasts, and take the Lord's Supper all in the privacy of our home, what's the point of church?
- The text we're looking at today ruined me...

1 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,

- Paul struggled greatly for people he didn't even know!
- But how?
 1. **A Friend of a Friend?** Encouraged Epaphras while in prison who, in turn, is encouraging his little flock of believers?
 2. **A Picture of Christ's Love?** Paul's sufferings in prison for the advancement of the gospel provide a window into the nature of Christ's sufferings for their sake.
 3. **Messianic Woes?**
 - Clue - Colossians 1:24: *"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"*
 - "Suffering" and "afflictions": were commonly viewed among the Jews as signposts that the Messiah was coming (hence "Messianic Woes").
 - Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah: "We're still suffering?" (Remember June 28 message: Mountain Range analogy — Christ's two-pronged coming which the prophets could not clearly foresee)
 - These afflictions had a predetermined limit: Paul possibly viewed his own sufferings as *"[reducing] the tribulations of other believers...the more of these sufferings he absorbed...the less would remain for his fellow Christians to endure."* - Peter O'Brien¹
- "all who have not seen me face to face": Echo of relational longing...Paul, the world's premier theologian, the most prolific missionary-church planter in history, longing to do life with ordinary, nameless people.

¹ O'Brien, Peter T. Colossians, Philemon. Word Biblical Commentary. Volume 44. 80.

- **To what end is Paul struggling for them?...**

2 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,

- "hearts may be encouraged"
 - Paul wants their hearts to be encouraged, or better said, strengthened.
 - In preparation for some threat.
- But **How will their (our) hearts be strengthened?**
- "Knit together in love": It doesn't say theological formation will strengthen them, but becoming one piece of fabric whose lives are woven together. This grounds us in an unbreakable assurance of God's love for us. It is crucial that we fully embrace one another, warts and all. It's a holy unity, not just of ideas ("we all believe in Jesus"), nor just a unity of affection ("we all love Jesus"), but a unity of heart, mind, lives, and mission. We belong to Jesus, so we belong to one another. We serve Jesus so we serve one another, we've been forgiven by Jesus and Jesus bears with us daily, so we forgive and bear with one another daily. We enjoy Jesus so we enjoy one another.
- "To reach all the riches of full assurance"
 - ...of God's love for me
 - ...of conviction so I'm no longer wobbly in my believing
 - REMEMBER, this comes through being relationally knit together
- "and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ"
 - No one expected God's redemptive plan to include a crucified peasant-Jew. The Jews expected a militaristic Messiah who would crush all who opposed God. The Greek world had its myriad of gods.
 - But Paul is stepping on our individualistic, isolated, privacy-fenced souls. He's telling us that **To perceive the riches of the glory of God requires that we be woven together in enduring, loving relationships.**

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

- He is not saying that Christ is a means to the mysterious, hidden treasures of God. The treasures are *in* Christ, in his being. Christ isn't merely a liaison of God's treasures; God's middleman, or a dealer of God's treasures. He's not a curator of God's treasures. He's not the way to the treasures of God. **Christ is the treasure!**
- But our language often says otherwise. We far more often talk of needing God "to show up"...of needing God "to do something." What we need is for God to be God in our lives.

We need God as the person he is - the glorious, supreme, uncontrollable, hurricane of a soul-lover that he is. We need him. His face. His heart. His mind. His will. His affections. We need to die in him and be raised up in him.

- One writer said it this way: *"We can't stress often enough that Paul didn't see the human plight like so many do today, that people need to have some kind of spiritual experience and that Jesus the Messiah could supply it if they wanted. It was that King Jesus himself was the center of the cosmos, the key to life and the universe, the image of the invisible God, the clue to genuinely human existence."*²
- **How does imbedding oneself in church community help to accomplish this?**
 - Doing life within a community of people in which I am faced with the prospect of learning to forgive and love, and to receive forgiveness and love, will help us all grasp the forgiveness and love that God has given us in Christ Jesus.
 - Christ's love must connect not only with my mind and my confession, but my lifestyle. I cannot claim to have grasped God's love and forgiveness for me if I am not growing in his love and forgiveness for others.
 - Community is the laboratory of love. It is the heart of church as it is imagined in Scripture.
 - Learning to love each other, for all our warts and repelling behaviors, will help us to grasp just how rich Jesus' love is for us.
 - **We all crave loving and forgiving community in order to taste the love of Christ and to give the love of Christ.**

4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.

- How are our believing communities and, thus, our grasp of the riches of God's love deluded in our culture?
 - **Moralism: Jesus is a means to make me a better person;**
 - **Individualism: Jesus is a means to make me happy, fulfilled;**
 - **Dualism: Jesus belongs on the sidelines...until I need a miracle.**
- These dominant ideas in our society all but render Christian community useless.

5 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.

² Wright, N.T. Paul For Everyone: The Prison Letters. 162.

- "With you in spirit": Not like God is omnipresently with us. Paul's heart is with people he doesn't know, but those to whom is he bonded by Christ.
- "good order": A "military formation."³ Believers entrenched in the foxholes of loving community is the good order that Paul has in mind.
- **Strength comes from treasuring Christ together.**

Implications:

- 1. This necessarily requires close, informal proximity and time spent together.**
- 2. Experiencing the deepening riches of Christ means building a long history of love and reconciliation with the people of your church.**
- 3. Be okay with having no control over your relationships.** You will do life with people who bring joy to your heart and you will do life with people who try you relentlessly. Remember the big picture: To love all like Jesus and experience his love for you. To mine the treasures of Christ is to imbed myself in community, seeking to enrich that community - even if my path takes me to trying relationships and positions me to have to learn to forgive.
- 4. This doesn't work without disciplined, consistent leadership on our part and consistent, intentional participation on your part.**

Imagine... Spiritual gifts caveat — we hunger to love and serve beyond making Sunday morning a success.

³ Wright, N.T. Paul For Everyone: The Prison Letters. 163-64.