

How Can a Minister Be So All-Fired Important?

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Colossians: Christ Above All

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Bible Text: Colossians 1:24-29
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Our Scripture this evening comes from Colossians 1:24-29. Colossians 1 and beginning to read in verse 24.

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and I fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of the Messiah in my flesh on behalf of his body which is the church. 25 Of which I became a minister in line with the management plan of God which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God, 26 the mystery which has been kept hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now has been put on display to his saints, 27 to whom God wanted to make known how vast are the glorious riches of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 He is the one we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, in order that we might present every man complete in Christ. 29 Unto which I also toil, struggling with his energy which he powerfully works in me.

What happened on a Sunday morning before apparently a morning service in the 19th century Britain in London, a young man just had to see Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He wanted to be admitted to Spurgeon's pastor's college and so he insisted on seeing the minister and he said he wanted to enter Spurgeon's pastor's college at once. Spurgeon said, "Well, there is no room at the present but your case can be considered." He said, "But mine is a very remarkable case, sir. You have probably never received such an application as mine before." "Well, very good," Spurgeon said, "we'll see about it. The secretary will give you one of the application papers and I can see you on Monday." So on Monday he came bringing with him the questions answered in a most extraordinary manner. As to books, he claimed to have read all ancient and modern literature and after giving an immense list he added, "This is merely a selection. I have read most extensively in all departments." As to his preaching, he could produce the highest testimonials but he thought those would not be needed as a personal interview would convince Spurgeon of his ability at once. So how great was his surprise when Spurgeon said to him, "Sir, I'm obliged to tell you that I cannot receive you." "Why not, sir!" "I will tell you plainly: you are so dreadfully clever that I could not insult you by receiving you into our college where we have none but rather ordinary men. The President, tutors and students are all

men of moderate attainments and you would have to condescend too much in coming among us." He looked at me, he said, very severely and said with dignity, "Do you mean to say that because I have an unusual genius and have produced in myself a gigantic mind such as is rarely seen, I am refused admittance into your college?" "Yes, for that very reason."

Oh yes, he seemed to think he was an all-fired important candidate and you may say, "Well, you know, it seems like Paul has some of that arrogance too in the passage before us because you notice what he says in verse 24, he talks about, 'my sufferings on your behalf.' He hadn't even met the Colossians. How can he talk about his sufferings on their behalf?" Then he talks about his ministry being rooted in what he calls in verse 25, "the management plan of God," and what was that? God's scheme for him to declare and to put...Paul was to declare and to put on display a new element in God's saving plan to bring about not just the admission of Gentiles into God's people and into God's kingdom, not just the admission of Gentiles into the freshly constituted people of God, but to stress the fact that these Gentiles were received on equal terms with Israelites. You get a taste for this special ministry in the Lord's words to Ananias back in Acts 9 at Paul's conversion when the Lord says to Ananias, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." And, of course, Paul talks about this mystery and part of the mystery was not just the fact that Gentiles would be brought into the kingdom of God and so, the Old Testament Scriptures were very clear that that was going to happen, but there was a little twist that wasn't so clear in the Old Testament and that was that the Gentiles would be brought into the same body and on the same level and on equal terms with Israel as Ephesians 3:6 says, "This mystery is that through the Gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."

So basically the Gentiles were welcomed, you might say, were first brought into the people of God through Peter in Acts 10, you might say, but it was Paul who was to establish this as a program in his ministry and Paul was aware of this. Paul was the one who was to put shoe leather on the program of Isaiah 49:5-6 and this is the sense that he has here of his special ministry; it was an all-fired important ministry which means he was an all-fired important minister. Not because he was arrogant himself but because God had chosen him as his instrument and so his ministry was a major point in what we might call salvation history. Paul's ministry was a crucial hinge point in God's kingdom plan in not just bringing the Gentiles in, but seeing that they were understood to be on equal terms and in one body with Israelite believers. Well, that may not excite you too much but I just want to defend Paul. He's not like the guy that came to see Spurgeon. No, he senses the importance and the huge significance of his ministry but it was because God laid that on him and gave him that calling.

So he is an all-fired important minister but we're concerned more about what makes up an all-fired important ministry. Let's pick away at that in this text tonight. What makes up an all-fired important ministry? And Paul tells us. First of all are the afflictions of Christ, verse 24, the afflictions of Christ. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and I

fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of the Messiah in my flesh on behalf of his body which is the church." Notice Paul talks about his "sufferings in my flesh." These are physical sufferings. These are attacks. This is persecution. These are dangers he endures. This is imprisonment he suffers. All these things.

Now, when he says that he does this "to fill up the things that are lacking of the afflictions of the Messiah," we must understand what these afflictions are not. They are not referring to the atoning sufferings of Jesus on the cross. In fact, the word here used is, as I have translated it, "the afflictions." Some translations use "sufferings," that's okay but it's really "afflictions or tribulations" as it's usually translated; "the hardships" and so on, and these come to Christ's people. Of course, the problem is too, are these the afflictions of Christ, actually it's the afflictions of the Christ and it's always difficult or often difficult to know whether that's a proper name, Christ, or whether it's the title, the Christ, and I tend to think it's the latter here so it's the afflictions of the Christ, that is, the Messiah. So you're talking about the afflictions of the Messiah; the afflictions and the hardships and the tribulations associated with the Messiah. There was apparently some reference in Judaism and in Jewish circles of the afflictions, the birth pangs of the Messiah that would come on God's people before the Messiah came and this phrase may be related to that. But whatever the case is, this is at least the sense, these are the afflictions associated with the Messiah in which his people have a part. Now, it's as if Paul talks about what is lacking of the afflictions of the Messiah. As I said, these are not the atoning sufferings of Jesus, these are those afflictions and hardships and tribulations associated with the Messiah and as being of his people.

Now, what does this mean? What is lacking of the afflictions of the Messiah? Well, it's as if Paul is saying that there's a certain tally, there's some total amount of afflictions that has to be met. It's almost as if he's saying there's a certain quota of afflictions that has to be made up. I don't want to trivialize this in any way but sometimes in a church, you may have a poster that has a thermometer and maybe there's a special cause that there is giving, they want to make a certain goal and so they have increments as they go up and as funds come in for that project they color in the red part of the thermometer until they reach their quota or their total tally. That's sort of the idea here. You might say, "That sounds unfamiliar to me." Well, you can find it in Revelation 6:9-11, you have this same idea. Don't bother turning to it but let me read it to you. It talks about it's the fifth seal, when Christ opened the fifth seal. "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' Then each of them was given a white robe and they were told to wait a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed." You get the idea in verse 11 there, it's not yet time to avenge and bring justice, Jesus says, for your sufferings. That time will come but the time right now is there are a number of your fellow servants and brothers who are to be killed as you have been and that number has to be completed. You say, "That's bizarre to me." I don't care if it's bizarre to you, it's what the Scripture teaches. There is a certain tally of sufferings and afflictions that Christ's people are to fill up and

until that time and at that point then, Jesus will see that things are put right. It's that quota, you might say.

That's what marks both Christian ministry and Christian discipleship, the afflictions of the Messiah, and filling them up. You find it all across the world, don't you? You have it all through the centuries from the first century on and so on. It's always been God's people suffering the afflictions of the Messiah and filling up what's lacking in them. Just to think of the 20th century, the last century, the sufferings of Christian martyrs across the world. You can pick up a book like Jim and Marty Hefley's "By Their Blood," 650 pages of survey around the world of Christian martyrs dying for their faith and suffering for their Savior in places that we don't usually think about. You go to Chad, for instance, in Africa in the 1970s and you see that they had thrown a pastor in the stocks; they had broken all his fingers and so on. Many other believers there were put in stocks or beaten or killed. Why was this? Well, because they refused to drink chicken blood that had been offered to idols because that was part of a pagan initiation rite and they were pressuring Christians to undergo these pagan initiation rites and it was contrary to their confessed faith in Jesus and they wouldn't do it. So they even buried them alive, sometimes. They would bury them and leave a leg sticking up out of the ground as a warning to others who might try to be as steadfast. Or they would bury them alive and leave just the head above the ground so that the insects and the heat could finish it off. That kind of cruelty. They were filling up what was lacking of the afflictions of the Messiah.

And, of course, you come to our own time and so on, and you come to northern Nigeria, for instance. Here's a man by the name of Habila and some fellows from Boko Haram, a terrorist group, came into his home one night late at night, told him they wanted him to become a Muslim and he said, "I'm a Christian and I'll remain a Christian even to death." They told his wife, "If your husband doesn't cooperate with us, you'll watch him die." He still refused and so the one with the AK47 put it up next to Habila's mouth and said to him, "Since you refuse to become a Muslim, this is your reward," and he pulled the trigger. Habila fell to the ground, blood coming from his face. They were sure they had wiped him out. They left after threatening his wife that she should not go for help or she and her child would be killed as well. Finally after some time, she realized that her husband was gasping, he was still alive, but it took until 6 o'clock the next morning to get him to a hospital. He actually recovered eventually but there were 30 believers in their congregation that refused to convert to Islam and all of them were slaughtered. It happens over and over again in Nigeria, 4,000 this year have been killed by Boko Haram. They are filling up what is lacking of the afflictions of the Messiah.

But others, on and on. In the countries of Pakistan and Egypt, on and on it goes. Christian girls will be kidnapped, often they will be raped and then they will be forced into a marriage with one of their Muslim captures and no one ever does anything about it. Injustice usually never takes place and they are filling up what is lacking of the afflictions of the Messiah.

And in Iraq, there was a town, mostly a Christian town, and there were some 40,000 people who when the ISIS troops or horde came near fled. They are filling up what is lacking of the afflictions of the Messiah.

Several years back there was about a ten year old girl in North Korea and she got a good grade and she told her teacher that it was by the grace of God. Well, the teacher reported her and her parents and they were never heard of again. They were flushed down the North Korean sewage system and they were filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of the Messiah. That's part of what an all-fired important ministry is. That's part of a ministry that perhaps we ourselves will have to face.

So there are the afflictions of Christ, but secondly in this ministry, there is the mystery of Christ. Verses 25 to 27, the mystery of Christ. You know, as you look there, notice the terms that Paul uses. He's talking about the word of God, to fulfill the word of God, the last of verse 25. What is that word? Well, the first of 26, it's "the mystery that's been hidden from the ages and generations," so it's a hidden mystery, but that word is also a disclosed mystery, the last of verse 26, "but which has been put on display to his saints." Then he says in verse 27 that this mystery is something that God "wanted to make known to his saints," to his people. And what is the mystery? It's Christ in you. But he wanted "to make known what are the vast riches, the vastness, the vast glorious riches of this mystery among the Gentiles."

There are two things here that I think we need to look at or notice in this mystery of Christ, especially in verse 27. One is the sheer marvel of it and that's this phrase particularly, this "mystery among the Gentiles." Now, you probably get tired of seeing that in the epistles. It seems so old hat and so on; all this ethnic stuff and so on. Why do we have to get ethnic in the New Testament? Why all this Jew and Gentile stuff and so on? Well, because you won't really appreciate the Gospel unless you get into ethnicity and maybe it's hard for us to grasp but most of you are not ethnic Israelites, that's for sure, and historically if you were back in the first century, if you were back in the first century, Ephesians 2:12 would directly fit you, wouldn't it? When Paul said to the Ephesians, "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, separated from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world," that's where Gentiles were, pagans were. They weren't part of the covenant people. They were beyond hope. They were beyond privilege. They seemed to be beyond truth. They were born on the wrong side of the tracks but God wanted to make known how vast the glorious riches of this mystery is, this Christ in you mystery, among the Gentiles of all people. Who would have thought? That's what Paul says in Ephesians 2:13, you know, right after he says, "you were without God and without hope but now in Christ Jesus you who were far off have been brought near in the blood of the Messiah." Who could have dreamed it?

What a privilege. It must be a privilege, that racial religious chasm in the first century between Jew and Gentile. It must have seemed almost impossible. Believing Gentiles if they felt this privilege, must have felt something like the family of Sergeant John Rice back in the days when Harry Truman was President. He was reading the newspapers one

August morning and he happened to see a notice about Sergeant John Rice who had been killed, an American soldier killed in action. He had been brought home for burial in the States in Sioux City, Iowa, his hometown. It so happened that as the casket was ready to be lowered into the grave, officials of the Sioux City Memorial Park stopped the ceremony because Sergeant Rice was a Winnebago Indian. He was not a member of the Caucasian race, they said, and burial was therefore denied. Truman read that and seemed to go ballistic. He reached for the phone, he sent telegrams and so on, and it was arranged that Sergeant John Rice would be buried in the Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors and he sent an Air Force plane to Iowa to bring the widow and her children to Washington. How privileged? Yes, grief but what a privilege of one who wasn't born right, you might say.

You catch something of that privilege, of this insistence that seems so foreign to us to show how vast the glorious riches of this mystery are among the Gentiles. That's the point for Paul. Folks you wouldn't think would have any part in it or any possibility of it, there's a marvel of that. You yourself ought to be able to marvel even at this point in time that you have been allowed to piggy-back on Israel's privileges and have a place with them on equal terms among God's people. There is a certain marvel here and it was the apostle's work of going out into the highways and hedges and bringing them in and giving them equal standing.

Now, that's the marvel of it, it's the Gentiles that have this privilege as well, but the thing that we especially need to notice here is the intimacy of it, isn't it? What is the mystery, the glorious riches of this mystery? Well, the mystery is Christ in you, the hope of glory. I can't deal tonight with the hope of glory a lot, I just want to try to focus you on the intimacy of this which is Christ in you. Nothing less, as one writer said, nothing less than that word "in" does justice to the closeness of this relation Christ has with his people. It's not Christ among you here, it's Christ in you. It's particularly individual.

Now, this isn't vague, that Christ in you is not some strange, warm, fuzzy feeling, but Paul has already told us what Christ he's talking about. What does he mean when he says Christ in you? In the context, he's told us, hasn't he? He says it's the Christ above you, verses 15 to 17. It's the Christ who created all things, verse 16. He's the one who in him all things hold together. So this is the creating Christ and the Christ in whom the whole universe coheres. It's this Christ who is above you. It's this Christ who is in you. It's the Christ that is beyond you. Verse 18, "he is the beginning, the firstborn from among or out of the dead." He's the one who blazed a trail in conquering death by his resurrection and that's still beyond you but Christ has been beyond you. He's already conquered that foe even though you yet have to face it. So he's the Christ above you and he's the Christ beyond you and he's the Christ who is for you because in verses 20 to 23 he talks about making peace through the blood of his cross. Christ has been for you as well. He has taken care of your guilt problem. He is the Christ above you, he's the Christ beyond you, he's the Christ for you and now he's the Christ in you. Christ in you. It's that Christ who is the hope of glory.

There is almost too much to take in, glorious riches indeed, that that Christ indwells his people and it really shouldn't surprise us too much. Apologies to those who were in a Sunday school class not long ago in which I ran over this. You can just tune out if you want to but some of you weren't there and it's the book of Exodus, for instance, that ought to have cued us that this sort of thing would happen. You remember in the book of Exodus the way it takes place and the way it reaches its climax. It begins, doesn't it, with the God who delivers, chapters 1 to 18. They get to the sea and he rescues them, takes them through the sea safely and so on, but then it goes on in chapters 19 to 24 and you have the God who demands. You have God speaking to Israel at Mount Sinai and so here's the smoking mountain as the Lord lays down the requirements and the way of life he wants his people to follow. So you have the God who delivers in chapters 1 to 18 and then the God who demands in chapters 19 to 24. But the deliverance at the sea isn't the climax of the book and the law, the covenant law given at the mountain is not the climax of the book, the climax of the book is in chapters 25 to 40, it's in all the ram's skins and the curtains and the boards and the furniture and the priest's garment and all that detail. That's the climax of the book of Exodus.

He's the God who dwells. He said in chapter 25, verse 8, "They shall make for me a sanctuary and I shall dwell in their midst." And you see the picture of that then put together in the last paragraph of the book in chapter 40, verses 34 to 38 where you have God's tent, tabernacle, erected with the pillar of cloud and fire above it. You see, that's the climax. It's not deliverance at the sea. It's not the law and the mountain. It's God's big tent, God's tent in the midst of his people's tent because God wants to dwell among his people. God simply can't get close enough to his people so Colossians 1:27 shouldn't be that big of a surprise, Christ in you, the hope of glory.

I don't know if you know what it's like to just, you can't possibly be apart from someone. There was a time when we were in college, a friend of mine and myself formed a plan. We both had girlfriends and this was during the summertime and I was working on a farm in Kansas and getting letters and sending letters every other day and so on, but that's not the same. And my friend had a girlfriend in western Kansas and so we picked out a Sunday, I was preaching at a country or a village church every Sunday while I worked on the farm this summer, and we made a decision that we would try to go see our girlfriends. So after church, after I preached one Sunday, I left immediately, went about 30 miles and picked my friend up. He was a youth minister in a church but didn't have any duties that Sunday night. I picked him up and off we went about a three hour trip into western Kansas, and no snide remarks about how desolate you think it is, the beauty grows on you. But we went about three hours. He dropped me off and he went on, his girlfriend lived 25 miles further out into western Kansas and he took my car and went to see her. So I was dropped off. I got to go to church with my girl. I got to have supper with her family and with her. I got to spend the evening with her and then when her parents and the whole family went to bed, it was very very late, I sat or slouched by the front door of my future in-law's house waiting to hear and soon I heard it about 2:30 in the morning, a light tap of a horn and I knew my friend had come back from seeing his girlfriend. I ran out, hopped into the car. We drove all the way back. I dropped him off and then I went the 40 miles further to where I was working on the farm and drove into the lane of the farm

about 6:15 in the morning just in time to get into my work clothes and go out into the field.

Now, you may hear that and you may say, "That is insane! Normal people wouldn't do that." Oh yes, normal people would. You just don't understand. It's not the same as getting letters and it's 100 days from the time you get out in the spring of the semester until the next semester takes up in the fall and I just had to be with her. There is something that's sort of just a dominating desire. It doesn't matter how foolish it seems, how sleepless half your week is or how it takes half a week to recover, you have to be with her. That's what you see with you God here. Christ insists on being as close to his people as he could possibly be. Christ can't stand to be separated from his people. It is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Those are glorious riches indeed. That's the mystery of Christ.

But then there is one more matter and that is our maturity in Christ, verse 28 and 29. Our maturity in Christ is another component of this all-fired ministry. Now, you notice Paul's design here and this is his purpose in his ministry, "he is the one we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom in order that we might present every man complete or mature in Christ," and so on. Now, this presenting every man, he's talking about presenting at the last day before Christ. We want to present every believer complete and mature in Christ at that point.

Now, what's the focus of that? Where does that all begin? Well, it begins right at the first of verse 28 when he says, "he," Christ Jesus, "he is the one we proclaim." How do you get there? How do you get to maturity, to Christian maturity? Well, you keep proclaiming Jesus. You keep unpacking what we call the person and the work of Jesus. This is not some elementary level that you somehow leave behind for deeper things. What is deeper than the Lord Jesus Christ? No, no, this isn't something you leave behind as a late friend of mine might say, I would paraphrase him but he would say something like this: the road to Christian maturity does not take you beyond Jesus but ever more deeply into Jesus. That's where you get Christian maturity.

So some may tell you that you're at the ABC level in that, "Well, you know Jesus. That's good but that's just very very basic, you see." And they will say that you need to advance and you need to receive the mysteries and the secrets and the extra-special experiences of the Holy Spirit and so on but it's all cockeyed. It is Jesus who gives the Holy Spirit, you know, and the Holy Spirit keeps the focus on Jesus. John 16:14, "He," the Holy Spirit, "he shall glorify me," Jesus says, "because he will take what is mine and declare it to you." The Holy Spirit simply shows you the splendor and wonder and depth of Jesus. The focus is always on Jesus. He is the one we proclaim. You don't get beyond that.

Now, notice the scope of this maturity here. Notice that Paul almost sledgehammers the whole thing, "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom in order that we might present every man complete in Christ." Now, that's literal. I know the "man" there is generic; he's talking about every Christian person and so on. But just stick with how we've translated it: every man, every man, every man. Why does Paul hammer at that?

Why does he hit that so hard? Well, probably because there were teachers at Colossae who were pushing a kind of spiritual elitism. They were holding that the mature were a special breed who had a grip on further, more extensive knowledge that not everybody knew about; more than the run-of-the-mill believer. But, no. Paul says Christian maturity is blue-color stuff. It's for Joe Schmoe Christian and for his wife, Janet Schmoe. It's for every man, every woman in Christ. Christian maturity is not the playground for some snotty intellectual Christian clique. Every man.

You see how basic it is, the scope of it, but then the manner of it. How is it exactly that this Christian maturity is helped along? Well, he said, "He is the one we proclaim," and then you notice how Paul unpacks that verb "proclaim," "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom." Now, what's going on there? Well, he's trying to develop what it means to proclaim Christ, I think. And what does that proclamation involve? It involves a warning note. It involves exposing wrong and exposing wrong thinking and wrong practices and that calls to repentance and there is that negative side of the Christian message and of Christian teaching that Paul's not afraid to bring to the Colossians, for example.

But then there's also teaching every man, that's the positive aspect, teaching them in all wisdom. That's the constructive teaching, applying Christ to the whole range of the Christian life and Christian thinking.

The big point I want you to see here is in the proclaiming, warning and teaching, is that these are proclaiming verbs and therefore maturity is carried out and driven and brought about through a word-centered ministry. The importance of that, by the way, in last day Jerusalem, I don't know if you ever noticed, do you know that passage in Isaiah 2:1-4 that speaks of the kingdom in all its luster and brilliance and so on at the last when the nations come and so on, have you ever noticed what it says in Isaiah 2:3 when it says, "And many people shall come and say, 'Come on and let's go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and we will walk in his paths.'" Then the explanation from Isaiah, "For from Zion teaching will go forth and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem." Have you ever thought about that? If last day's Zion is going to have as the heart of it the teaching from the Lord and the word of Yahweh coming from Jerusalem, if that's going to be true for last day's Zion, shouldn't it be true for present day Zion? Shouldn't our ministries be primarily word-centered in the congregation of the saints?

They can be much else than that sadly. Now, I know I never got to visit a lot of other churches because lots of times I was committed and even in the pastorate. Of course, when I was in the pastorate, it was the one day in the week I worked, you know, and I couldn't visit other churches and so on unless I was traveling somewhere and I might come back and in coming back and so on, I would stop and worship somewhere along the way and occasionally I would get to see it. You can be gathered there and there's a congregation of, well, let's say 200 people, it wasn't a large church, but it was a nice congregation size wise of about 200 people. And this was probably, I don't know for sure, I don't know, I was just trying to guess from what seemed to be the make-up of the

church, this was probably, the morning worship was probably about the only time when there would be an exposition of the Scriptures when an opportunity, 200 people and you have the opportunity to explain and apply the Scriptures and it wasn't being done and that might be the only time in the week. What kind of people are you going to be producing? Unless they're getting it from somewhere else, you're not going to get mature or maturing believers out of that. It's sad.

There are all sorts of extraneous matters that come creeping into the church that we tend to think are very critical and so on. Please understand, I don't care. I don't care if you have a ski trip for youth to Colorado. If you want to do that, you can do it. I don't care if you a trip for seniors to Branson, Missouri, just don't ask me to chaperone. I don't care if you go to Fargo, North Dakota, just stay out of the casinos. All of that stuff, but there is something that matters, there's a reason why there's an exposition of the Scriptures in Sunday morning worship here; there's a reason why we have an evening service with the exposition of the Scriptures; there's a reason why there's preaching at Wednesday noon; there's a reason why there is teaching Wednesday night; there's a reason why there are many Sunday school classes in which the primary focus is working through and teaching biblical books and people labor at this and it does take work and it does take sweat but there's a reason for it. It's a deliberate commitment. It's not because the church is larger in this case and can do these sorts of things, no, no, it's a deliberate commitment for a specific purpose. You might say, "Well, isn't it dangerous to have something that top-heavy in teaching and learning?" Only if we fail to live it out in the home and in the shop and in the office and in the school and in the dormitory. But there's a reason for that: only a word-centered church will produce Christ-seasoned disciples. Our maturity in Christ.

So that's the ministry of an all-fired important apostle and I think that if we had to underscore any element here, probably the chief desire of his ministry would be that you know and enjoy the glorious riches of the Gospel, that is, Christ in you, the hope of glory. I like the story of the, I believe it was an Englishman, that was showing one of his visitors his estate. They went out to the front of the house or the manor and he was showing his visitor, he said, "Now, this is my estate. Do you see that farm down there?" He said, "Yes." "Well, that is mine." Then he said, "Do you see that house out that way?" "Yes." "That's mine also." And his visitor said to him, "Do you see that little village just down that way?" He said, "Yes." He said, "There's a poor woman in that village that can say more than all of this." The householder said, "What can she say?" "She can say Christ is mine." Glorious riches indeed. She can say, "Christ is mine." Can you?

O, our Father, we thank you for the glorious riches of the Gospel and we thank you, our Savior, for the boundless privileges of your table and we pray that as bread and wine come to us, it would be received with both awe and thankfulness. Amen.