

Him We Proclaim

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Bible Text: Colossians 1:28-29
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The following is a sermon preached at the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi.

Amen. Please be seated.

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Colossians 1:28-29. I asked David if he would pick the text that he wanted the message to come from tonight and this is a text that reflects his heart for ministry among you, and it is a great text. It's one of those passages where Paul summarizes his pastoral purpose and I love it when Paul does that. He does it in the very beginning of 1 Timothy 1:3-5, he sort of sums up in three verses what he's trying to do in Gospel ministry and this is one of those summarizing passages and I take it as a challenge to me for what I ought to be doing in the ministry, and I offer it as an encouragement for David for what he aims to do in the ministry here at First Presbyterian Church, and for all of us to think about what Gospel ministry ought to be like in the local congregation. We will study this word together tonight, so before we read God's word, let's pray and ask for his help and blessing.

Heavenly Father, thank you that we can be together as a church family at the end of your day, in your house, with your people, singing your praise, lifting up our hearts in prayer and hearing your word read and proclaimed. What an enormous privilege this is. What an unfathomable blessing it is to be under your word as a means of grace. So we pray that you would use your word precisely as it is, a means of grace, something that is inspired and profitable. Use it for our good and your glory, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

This is God's word. Hear it in Colossians 1:28-29.

28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy inspire and inerrant word. May he write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

Now in this passage that we've just read, we find a motto and a mission for Gospel ministry. Paul is explaining what he is aiming for in his ministry amongst the Colossians and, indeed, wherever he goes, and I know that this is David's heart to minister according to these priorities in your midst, and so I want us to be encouraged by six things that we see in these two tiny little, but very full and deep verses.

The first thing I want you to see is this: we proclaim Christ by preaching all Scripture. Paul is giving his motto, his mission for ministry and at the heart of it you see in verse 28, "Him we proclaim." Paul is saying, "I proclaim Christ," and the first thing I want us to see is that when we proclaim Christ, we proclaim Christ by preaching all the Scripture. You say, "Now where do you get that in the passage?" Well, let your eyes scan back to verse 25 and notice what Paul says there, he says that it is his aim "to make the word of God fully known." So when he starts talking about his proclamation in verse 28, that is the proclamation that he is talking about, making the word of God fully known. So to preach Christ, to proclaim Christ, is to preach the full truth about Christ and you cannot preach the full truth about Christ without preaching all of Scripture. We as Christians cannot get to know Jesus better unless we know the Bible better, and so expository ministry is essential for the full proclamation of Christ and for our becoming acquainted, coming to know better Jesus Christ. It's only through the study, the hearing, the proclamation of the whole counsel of God from the whole word of God that Christ can be fully known.

So that's the first thing that I want to say, that's one reason why we are committed to expository ministry, we proclaim Christ by preaching all of Scripture, but the second thing I want you to see is this: we proclaim Christ clearly, repeatedly, and urgently preaching his person and work. "Him we proclaim." Now whenever you find Paul or Timothy or the other New Testament writers summarizing what it is that they preach, no matter what they call it. Sometimes Paul will say, "What I proclaim is the Gospel," like he does in 1 Corinthians 9:14. Sometimes he'll call it "the testimony of God," 1 Corinthians 2:1. Sometimes he'll call it "our message." But whatever else he calls it, it is ever and always Christ himself that Paul is proclaiming.

One of the favorite passages of mine in all of the Bible is Acts 9. After Paul's conversion, we have the theme of the Apostle Paul's first sermon and do you know what it was? "He is the Son of God." That was the theme of the Apostle Paul's first sermon. Can you imagine hearing Paul's first sermon and it zeroed in like a laser beam on the person of Christ, who he was, and of course, later Paul will say, "I preach Christ and him crucified," and of course, as Paul speaks there, he's talking about preaching the person and work of Christ. Christ, who he is, and him crucified, what he did for us, and this is in line with what Jesus himself did on the road to Emmaus. Do you remember when he's walking with the two disconsolate disciples? It's recorded for you in Luke 24, on the way to Emmaus, and finally he bursts out and he says to them, "Haven't you read your Bibles? Don't you know? Don't you know that the Christ had to suffer?" And then he tells them that he is going to explain himself from all of the Scriptures and he's going to focus on his humiliation and his exaltation. So even in Luke 24, we see Jesus preaching from the

Bible about his person and his work, and so when we proclaim Christ, we proclaim him clearly, repeatedly and urgently preaching his person and work.

The third thing I want you to see is this, and you'll see it again in verse 28, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone." The third thing I want you to see is that we proclaim Christ by admonishing and teaching. Paul did not hesitate to admonish, to exhort, to urge, to plead, to beg, to warn in his teaching and preaching and proclamation, and those warnings as urgent as they may be, as startling or sobering as they may be, are essentially positive in their intention and in their result and they are indispensable to a balanced Bible-preaching ministry. If you ignore the exhortations, you're ignoring the Bible. If you ignore the admonitions, you're ignoring the Bible. If you ignore the warnings, you're ignoring the Bible. So Paul taught with admonition and he admonished with teaching.

I love the way that William Hendrickson puts this, "It should be stressed that there was no wide gulf in Paul's teaching between admonition and teaching. For him, abstract doctrine did not exist neither did Christian ethics exist suspended in mid-air. On the contrary, Paul's teaching was done with a view to admonishing and his admonishing was rooted in his teaching. Accordingly, the apostle never proclaimed a Christ who was a Savior but not an example, nor a Christ who was only an example but not a Savior. Christianity, for Paul, was indeed a life but it was a life based on a doctrine."

So there's a beautiful example here of Paul's proclamation entailing exhortation, warning, admonition, and teaching, and those things going together. So we proclaim Christ by preaching all Scripture, we proclaim Christ in his person and work, and we proclaim Christ by admonishing and teaching. The fourth thing I want you to see is this: we proclaim Christ to everyone. Have you noticed it here? Three times we get "everyone, warning everyone, teaching everyone, that we may present everyone." There is an emphasis that Paul, whoever he can get to with the Gospel, is going to hear it. Whoever is within earshot is going to hear the admonition, they're going to hear the teaching, they're going to hear the proclamation of the Gospel.

We had John Blanchard here with us two weeks ago and it's always a blessing to have him here with us. He's 81 years old now. He's been in Gospel ministry for 52 years and do you know what he said to us? He said, "You know, someone asked me, John, why are you still traveling all over the world and keeping this just horrid schedule?" And he said, "I want to preach as long as I can to as many as possible." And I think that's such a Pauline sentiment here. Everyone, everyone, everyone. John wants to preach the Gospel for as long as he can, to as many as he can, and that ought to be our aspiration. By the way, not just David's aspiration, not just my aspiration, not just the aspiration to the other ministers and staff, not just the aspiration of the elders and the deacons and the leaders and the women of the church, but it ought to be the aspiration of the whole congregation. We want to bring the Gospel to everyone in our neighborhood, in our larger community, to the whole city of Jackson, to the key institutions of our city, to Hinds County, to the whole state of Mississippi.

I love what our dear friend and colleague, the Professor of Missions at RTS, Dr. Elias Medeiros often says that we are to take the Gospel across the street and around the world. That is a Pauline aspiration, to everyone. We proclaim Christ to everyone.

Fifth, if you'll look with me again at verse 28, the Apostle Paul there says here's what he's aiming for in his teaching, "that we may present everyone mature in Christ." So he proclaims Christ by preaching all of Scripture; he proclaims Christ by preaching his person and work; he proclaims Christ with admonition and teaching; he proclaims Christ to everyone; but his goal is to proclaim Christ with a view to personal and congregational sanctification.

I love Dick Lucas' outline of this passage. Dick Lucas, the marvelous pastor from London who served so many years and also has taught some of the other ministers through the work of Proclamation Trust. He outlines this passage by saying that Paul's aim is to make the word of God fully known and to make the people of God fully mature. Isn't that a great outline of this passage, to make the word of God fully known and to make the people of God fully mature.

It's clear here that his aim is not just that we will barely be saved. His aim is not to bring some truncated Gospel message that will save you by the hair of your chinny-chin-chin from the pains of hell and condemnation but leave you nowhere in your growth in the Christian life. His aim is that Christians would be fully mature.

Listen to what Kent Hughes says about this passage, "Paul says, 'We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ,'" and Hughes goes on to say this, "Paul's goal is nothing short of presenting to Christ complete, mature, full-grown Christians." That's what he's aiming for. His attitude was not, "I'll save them, you sanctify them." In other words, he didn't say, "My job is to evangelize, you disciple over there." For Paul, the proclamation of the Gospel aimed at discipleship of believers into full maturity and his great joy was the thought of presenting to Christ believers who had reached their maximum earthly potential.

So we proclaim Christ with a view to personal and congregational sanctification. We want to grow in grace. We want you to grow in grace. We want to preach Christ in such a way that you depend entirely upon Christ for your salvation, but also in such a way that Christ is powerfully at work in you to grow you in grace so that you become more like him, so that the image of the Father which has been placed in you will shine to all those around you. So we proclaim Christ with a view to personal and congregational sanctification.

Then sixth and last there is this. Look at verse 29: we proclaim Christ with everything we have, dependent upon every thing he works within us. Look at what Paul says, "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." Now Paul loves to use labor and toil metaphors for ministry. He does it all the time. This is not the only

time he does it. He does it in 1 Thessalonians. He does it in 1 Timothy. He does it in 2 Timothy. When Paul starts talking about ministry, he talks about hard work.

For instance, remember what he says in 1 Thessalonians 2:9? I bet you can't even remember back that far when we were going through 1 Thessalonians together. He says this, "Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship. We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the Gospel of God." Do you hear that language here? "For this I toil, struggling." In Timothy, he'll speak about those who preach the Gospel as laboring, using metaphors like being a farmer or a soldier or an athlete. Paul loves hard work metaphors and he's saying that we proclaim Christ with everything that we have. We spend ourselves and are spent in Gospel ministry.

D. L. Moody upon one occasion was so worn out in ministry that he rolled into his bed and he only had the energy to lift up this prayer before he fell to sleep, "Lord, I'm tired. Amen." Alexander Maclaren, the famous Bible expositor, would go to his office in the morning when he knew the workmen were going to their jobs so that he could hear them tramping in their boots outside his office, and then do you know what Maclaren would do? He would put his boots on while he worked at the desk so that he could remember that he was called to be a workman and to work hard like those men were working outside. G. Campbell Morgan who ministered in the town that David ministered in for some time, G. Campbell Morgan kept a newspaper clipping for 20 years at his desk where he studied and the article headline was, "Sheer Hard Work," and he would read sections of it to himself to remind him that he was called as a minister to work hard. Spurgeon often said this, "I work myself to death and I pray myself alive again."

Paul is saying here that he is going to proclaim Christ with everything that he has and his ministerial drive is a model. We are not apostolic in our attitude towards ministry unless we are ready to work hard, and it's not just that, it's not just working hard, it's working hard in dependence upon what God is doing in us. Look at the language again, "struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." I toil, I struggle with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Does that remind you of another passage in Paul? It does me, it reminds me of Philippians 2:12-13. Do you want to turn there in your Bibles? In Philippians 2:12-13 we read, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence," listen to this, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," he's talking about sanctification, "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." So in the area of sanctification, Paul says, "Work out your sanctification with fear and trembling and remember it's God who is at work in you for your sanctification."

Well, he's applying the same principle to ministry. Toil, struggle in ministry, but do it remembering that it is God, it's God's energy that's powerfully at work in you. Would you allow me to paraphrase sort of a combination of Colossians 1:29 and Philippians 2:12-13? It would go something like this, "Labor and struggle to do the work of ministry, spend yourself and be spent in the blood, sweat, toil and tears of pastoral ministry but do

so in the strengthening and encouraging consciousness that when do so, you are doing it by God's energy powerfully at work in you to will and work his good pleasure."

Now Paul says all of that in those two little verses and I really could go on but I'm not because I love you. But what a motto, what a mission for ministry. Studying this makes me excited about serving the Lord in ministry. I hope it encourages David in a new ministry because these reflect his own aspirations. We've already talked and dreamt about these things together, my friends, but I want this to be all of our aspiration together for God's praise and glory. Amen.

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