



The Sermon

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Colossians 2:1-3

"A Model for Ministry"

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TRANSCRIPT

So, we are in the book of Colossians, Colossians chapter 2, and today we're going to look at the first three verses of Colossians chapter 2. And I'm enjoying so much being in this book. I taught this my first pastorate, the first book I preached through over 40 years ago; I haven't preached through it since, and so this is kind of like a high school reunion for me to be back with Paul in Colossians, and I'm loving it; so different from Genesis. We spent two or three years going through Genesis, maybe it was three years; and you take larger sections of Scripture, because it's narrative to tell the story. But Paul can put so much in just a verse or two, that we really have to slow down as we go through the book of Colossians, and take fewer verses, because there's so much that is packed into these verses.

So, I want to begin by reading what will be our text for today. If you're new to our church, we preach verse by verse through books in the Bible, because that's how God wrote the Bible, that's how He gave us the Bible, and we want to study it in context. And so we find ourselves in chapter 2, and I'm going to read the first three verses. The title of this message is "A Model for Ministry. A Model for Ministry."

So, beginning in verse 1, Paul writes, "For 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, 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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." This is the reading of God's Word. Let's go to Him in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, these words are just music to our ears. These words are a lamp unto our feet. They are sweeter than honey. They are more valuable than gold and silver. These words are milk that satisfies us. They are meat that strengthens us. These words are, really, our life. And so I pray that today as we look into these words, that You will look into us and apply them to our lives. Meet each and every one of us at our point of need. We come as needy people, none of us have arrived. and we are all in need of Your ministry. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. [End]

In these verses that I have just read the apostle Paul provides for us an outstanding model for ministry. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then this picture is worth a million words. Paul exemplifies what it is to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is of extreme importance, because "the greatest among you," Jesus said, "shall be the servant of all."

Arguably, the apostle Paul was the greatest Christian who ever lived. Who could dispute that? That being so, the case can be made that he is also the greatest servant whoever lived, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And so as we look at verses like this we really see what is the mindset for ministry, what is the heartbeat for ministry. And each and every one of us as believers are to be servants of the Lord. "Jesus came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." And this is the example for us. We exist not to be served, but to serve; and the more we serve and give our life away, the more it comes back to us, with great encouragement.

Now as Paul writes these words, there is a note of authenticity about this, because he's living out what he says here. He's not sitting in the lap of luxury, Paul actually is being held captive against his will in Rome as a prisoner a Caesar. He is confined to house arrest; he is chained to Roman

soldiers 24 hours a day, seven days a week; and he is awaiting trial before Caesar, who has the power of life and death. And yet in the midst of this, he is more concerned about serving others than for others to serve him. What an example he sets for us. And so as you think about your Christian life, as you think about how God is using you, just know that Paul is setting an example here for us; and ultimately, Christ is setting the example, that we are to be a servant of other people.

So, what does that look like? Well, Paul gives us some indication of this with his own life as he serves during one of the most difficult periods of his life. He's held here for two years under house arrest; and yet, rather than being focused upon himself, he's focused upon others. And I trust that will be your focus in your Christian life.

Well as we look at these three verses, I have three headings to set in front of you as we walk through these verses, and the first is "Paul's struggle." It's in verse 1. In fact, the very word "struggle," you find it in the middle of verse 1, and Paul begins by saying, "I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf." As he says this, he's not drawing attention to himself, he is actually saying this to encourage them, "that you are this important to God, and to me; and I am laboring on your behalf."

They are struggling in their Christian life, and Paul does not come across as one who is an elite, who is in an ivory tower disconnected from them. No, Paul wants them to know, "I have a great struggle on your behalf." And all ministry does require struggle. There is no easy place of ministry; understand that. All ministry requires sacrifice and self-denial and submission, and that's exactly where we see Paul.

Now you need to know this word "struggle." It's a Greek word, as Paul wrote this. And just to remind you, the New Testament is written in Greek, what's called Koine Greek; and as Paul wrote this, he uses the word *agōn*, and you hear it in the English language as agony, agonizing, this struggle. And it's an athletic word that comes from the Olympic Games and comes from the Isthmian Games, and it pertained to a race that was less than the

marathon, but longer than a sprint, and it was known as the *agón*; and it pushed the runner to his very limits. It was just short enough that he had to run at full speed, but long enough his lungs were ready to burst; and it involved pain, and it involved agonizing effort. And that's the word that Paul uses here, "I have a great struggle on your behalf." This word *agón* means affliction, and distress, and pain, and sorrow, and grief. And so Paul wants them to know that he's not lighthearted in his ministry toward them, but that he's wholehearted.

Now this struggle that he has for them, we have one of two possibilities. It is either in his preaching, or in his praying. And he has just discussed it in his preaching, if you'll note, in verse 29, "For this purpose" – of the previous chapter, I'm sorry – chapter 1, verse 29, "For this purpose also I labor, striving." And this word "striving" is the very same word that is translated "struggle" in verse 1; it's just that it's in a verb form in verse 29, it's in a noun form in verse 1. And so Paul is agonizing in his preaching.

And I tell you, preaching is demanding. They have hooked up a monitor, a heart monitor on a preacher to measure the exertion of energy as he would preach a 45-minute sermon – it's interesting – and it was the same stress on his cardiovascular system as a demanding 8 to 10-hour work day for someone else, just compressed down into 45 minutes, as it pulls everything out of a person that they have – mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually. I mean, after our service today, I'm going to go home and just crash, okay, crash. You're welcome to come crash with me if you would like.

And I understand what Paul is saying here. When I was in Australia I preached 12 times in just a few days, and it just pulls the life out of you. But in verse 1 here, when Paul says, "I have a great struggle," he's not talking about his preaching, because he's never been to Colossae, he's never met the Colossians, so therefore he's never preached to the Colossians. So when he says, "I have a great struggle on your behalf," he cannot be talking about his preaching, because he's never been there to preach. So the only other option is his prayer life. As he is confined in this one house for two

years, he pours himself into intercessory prayer for the churches; and the church at Colossae is one of those churches.

He's talked earlier in Colossians 1, verse 3, and in verse 9 – I won't read those verses – but he's already told them that he's praying for them: "I'm praying for you. I'm praying for you." And there are other letters that he wrote at this time: Ephesians, Philipians, Philemon. And he says in those letters, "I'm praying for you always." And so Paul, the reference here, "how great is struggle I have on your behalf," the reference is to intercessory prayer.

And you know as well as I know that prayer is a great struggle if you pour yourself into it. I mean, prayer is a wrestling with God. Prayer is laboring with God and pleading with God. It is asking and seeking and knocking relentlessly on heaven's door until you knock the door down and you get through to God. Jesus said in Matthew 7:7, rightly translated, "Keep on seeking, keep on asking, keep on knocking." So prayer is not something that's just once lightly lifted up to God and that's it; no, it is relentless, coming before God again and again and again. Jesus said in Luke 18:1, that "we are to be praying at all times and not losing heart."

So we understand for Paul to say, "How great a struggle I have on your behalf." He's doing the only thing he can do on their behalf, as he is confined under house arrest; but he is doing the best thing that he can do is to pray on their behalf to God. I mean, Paul is like Jacob wrestling with the angel of the Lord and saying, "I will not let you go until you bless me."

And what Paul is praying on their behalf, I think if we look back at chapter 1, verse 28, at the end of verse 28, it's the goal of his preaching; it's also the goal of his praying. The goal of his preaching is "that he might present every man complete in Christ." And what that means is to present every man mature in Christ, spiritually developed in Christ. And if that's the goal of his preaching, that's the goal also of his praying for the believers in Colossae, that they will be becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. And

that's really the essence of the Christian life; it's you and me becoming more like Jesus Christ, and that involves labor.

In Galatians 4:19 Paul writes, "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." You mothers here today can understand that, to go into labor, and the pain that is involved, the expenditure of energy that is involved in giving birth to a child at that nine-month mark; it's an extraordinary, extraordinary sacrifice. And that's the very words that Paul uses here, that he's "laboring in prayer until Christ is formed in you."

So look at verse 1 again. This is all under the first heading: Paul's struggle. "For I want you to know how great a struggle" - note the next words - "I have on your behalf, I have." It would be easy just to pass over this word "have." It's kind of an average-sounding word in the English language. But in the original language with which Paul has written this, it means to hold fast to something. It means to have a strong grip on someone or something. And that's what happens in prayer. In intercessory prayer Paul is laying hold of God and laying hold of the throne of grace, and with the other hand he's laying hold of the Colossian believers, and he will not let go of either one, and he is interceding, and he is mediating on behalf of the Colossians before God, that they will become more like Jesus Christ.

He says, "How great a struggle I have on your behalf." Paul's focus is away from himself, it is upon others. And so there's really three groups that are that are mentioned here in verse 1 for whom he is praying. He says, "on your behalf" - that's referring to the Colossians; and then he says at the end of verse 1 - "and for those who are at Laodicea." Now Laodicea is just right down the road. It's 9-12 miles away, depending on which encyclopedia you look at, and it would be like a sister church.

It was an important city and probably founded by the same pastor who founded the church in Colossae, Epaphras. And you'll remember Laodicea is one of the seven churches in the book of Revelation that Jesus issued a letter to the church that was lukewarm, that He says, "I spew you out of My mouth. I'd rather you be hot or cold." Well, that will be a few decades later.

At this point, they are a vibrant church. And so Paul says, "I pray on your behalf" - the Colossians - "and for those in Laodicea," - second group, and then the third group. And this really gives us some perspective of the breadth of Paul's prayers, not just the depth of them, but the breadth of them. He's praying for multiple churches. And at the end of verse 1 he says - "and for all those who have not personally seen my face."

Now that's not to be understood as every person in the world, that's to be understood as those who are in this region, in this area which is known as the Lycus River Valley. And so there would be some smaller little towns, we would call them today bedroom communities, that are just on the outskirts of Colossae and on the outskirts of Laodicea. And Paul's just putting his arms around this whole region and interceding for them to become more like Christ. He's deeply agonizing for them.

And as I thought about this this week, I think one reason that Paul was so filled with joy - and he expresses that in the book of Philippians written at this same time while he's imprisoned in Rome, his first Roman imprisonment - is because his Christian life is so looking outward to others, he's not looking inward at himself. And I know something about myself. If I have a trial, if I have something that's not going right in my life, if I look inward, it can really multiply; and the more it rolls over in my mind, the worse it becomes, and the more I sink down into a sinkhole.

But Paul's not doing that. He's continually looking out and praying for churches that are removed from him. But because of that, I believe that's why he has such joy. I remember when I was in college hearing the acrostic J-O-Y (Jesus, others, and you) in that order. And joy comes when we're focused, number one, on the Lord Jesus Christ; and then number two, on others; and we're last. And that's what's going on in Paul's life here as he is struggling and interceding for them.

So let me just make this word of application for you in your Christian life, as you are walking with the Lord to stay focused on others who are around

you and praying for needs in their lives. You can even be praying as you're driving in a car. You can be praying as you're walking around the neighborhood. You can be praying while you're in the kitchen making a meal. You can be praying wherever you are and to be constantly focused upon others and interceding on their behalf. So that's Paul's struggle.

Well, this leads now to verse 2, "Paul's specifics," and Paul now explains for what he is praying for them more specifically. And our prayers need to have some specifics. And he says in verse 2, "that their hearts may be encouraged." That's very important.

Several things that I want you to note. First of all, he's praying for their hearts. I think we have a tendency to pray for actions, pray for results, pray for the outcome, don't we? But here's Paul praying actually for their hearts, because the reality of your Christian life is really your heart. Everything's flowing out of your heart. And for your heart to be right, then your Christian life is going to be right. But if your heart is not where it needs to be, then everything else is going to be skewed and out of sync and out of order.

The word "hearts" here is to be understood as, really, your entire inner being, the depth of your soul, we could put it; your mind, your emotions, your will, everything you are on the inside. And this is I think a great example for us, to be praying for the hearts of other people, to be strengthened, to be changed, to be bolstered.

And so please note, he says, "that their hearts" - what? - "may be encouraged." Every one of us needs to be encouraged, don't we? There's not a one of us here today who does not need to be encouraged. None of us are Superman or Superwoman. You need to be encouraged, I need to be encouraged.

It's always funny when people come up to me after a worship service, and they'll say this - I wish I had a nickel for every time someone says this:

"Now, Pastor," or, "Dr. Lawson, I don't want you to get the big head, but that was a good sermon." I want to say, as if I don't need to be encouraged, like if you think if you encourage me you're going to lead me into sin. It's okay to encourage the preacher. And I'm not saying this so you'll come up to me after. Okay, well maybe a little bit. But we all need to be encouraged.

What does it mean to be encouraged? It means here to be built up, to be lifted up, to be strengthened, to be fortified. And the opposite of being encouraged is what? To be discouraged. And let me tell you, when you're discouraged, everything falls apart in your Christian life. I mean, discouragement is such a negative influence in our spiritual life. It reminds me of a parable I heard years ago of the devil was having a garage sale – now underscore, it was a parable – and he had all of his devices out in the driveway, and they all were marked, and they had a price tag on them, and they were for sale. And here is a price tag on lust, and here's a price tag on worldliness, and here's a price tag on covetousness, and a price tag on slander.

And so a man came walking up and thought, "Well, these prices are pretty low; maybe I'll buy one." And he came across one tool that had a price that was so extraordinary that it exceeded the sum of all the other tools. And so the man picked it up and walked it over to the devil, and he said, "This price is exorbitant. Why is it so high?" And the devil said, "Well, this is discouragement; and when I use this tool, I can use all the other tools, because discouragement will pry open a man's heart, it will pry open a woman's heart, and any other tool will work very easily once they're discouraged."

I know that could be true in my life. There have been times when I've needed to make major decisions on what I would do in ministry and where I would be. And I remember one time a wise man told me, "Do not make a major decision while you're discouraged, because you're inevitably going to make the wrong decision."

And so Paul is very wise in his prayers, and the specific is he's praying that their hearts may be encouraged. Now, we all bear responsibility to be encouraged, okay. So it's not just that someone else is praying for me to be encouraged; what should be your responsibility to stay encouraged? Well, I just have a short list here, let me just share this with you. I'm glad you asked.

To be encouraged, you've got to be in the Word. You've got to be in prayer. You've got to be under strong Bible preaching. You've got to be in corporate worship. You've got to be in fellowship with other believers. You can't become a Lone Ranger, you can't become disconnected from other believers, or you're going to implode. We have a responsibility to be aware of answers to prayers – that encourages – and to be witnessing, and to see others come to faith in Christ.

Sometimes in ministry when I have been the most discouraged, just to see one person come to faith in Christ and be soundly converted, I'm good for the next year; it doesn't matter what happens. I am so encouraged. And so that's the responsibility that we all have. And Paul is praying that they will be encouraged.

Now continue to read this verse, verse 2. And I must tell you, there's a lot in verse 2, and it's hard to divide it out. Let me just give you this comment. When I teach on expository preaching in seminary and hold conferences for pastors, I do tell them this, that when you're an expositor of the Word of God, you are modeling for your church every Sunday how to study the Bible. You're discipling the whole church in how to read and understand the Bible. And if you play fast and loose with the Bible, when they go home and read their Bible, they're going to play fast and loose. But if you actually give care with precision as to what the text says, when they go home and read their Bible at night or in the morning, they're going to have a very observant eye, because they've seen that modeled in your preaching ministry.

And so as I look at verse 2 part of the challenge is, if you have a New American Standard Version as I do – and, after all, this is what Paul used, okay. So he is a model in ministry for me. Paul was an American and he used a New American Standard Bible. But if you do have such a translation, you will notice that some of these words are in italics, and what that means is they're not in the original text that Paul wrote. But to go from one language to another language you have to supply them, or there's just going to be gaps in the sentence as it comes into English. And so it is a reasonable assumption that is reasonably implied that these words need to be included to make this be a coherent sentence. So if you don't have a New American Standard, you're, seriously, at a little bit of a disadvantage, because you can't see what's not in the original text. But I'm going to draw to your attention what Paul did not write; but when it's translated into English, it has to be added, or it will be a sentence that is incoherent.

So as I look at my Bible in verse 2, here are the words that have been added in the middle. It's the word *attaining*; and then toward the end, the word *resulting*; and then at the end, the two words *that is*; and at the very end of the sentence, *himself*. So that's one observation to make of this. The second observation, just to help you see this verse, is the two words, *be encouraged*; that's the main verb. And then the words *having been knit together*, that's actually just one word in the original language, it's four words in English, and that is what we call a participle.

Now when I was in high school, if you had told me about a participle, I would have been asleep before you finished your sentence. But now that God has called me to preach and to teach His Word, if I'm going to rightly interpret this and read it for what it says, I have to now know things that I never wanted to know about, okay. And so a participle modifies the main verb. So the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing; that's the main verb. And the action is always in the verbs, especially in these Epistles, as you read through them.

So the main verb is, "Paul's praying that you will be encouraged." So the question is, "How will they be encouraged? The participle modifies or describes the manner by which they will be encouraged, and it is these

words that follow immediately, "having been knit together in love." It's talking about their fellowship. It's talking about their mutual ministry one to another. It's talking about how they interface with one another. And this again underscores - and this is a very important point for your Christian life - that if you're all by yourself, you are going to be weak in the faith, that you need the body of Christ, you need other believers and other sisters in the Lord, which almost serve like bookends on a bookshelf to keep the books in the middle upright and strong. You need bookends around you to keep you strong in the faith.

And so he says that "they are to be encouraged," - By what manner? - "having been knit together in love." Now this means more than they're in the same room at the same time. It means more than they just look across the room, they see another person over there. What it means is that there is an interfacing of lives, some more than with others, because we can't know everyone at the same level, that there will be concentric circles of people around us in our lives, some very close, then some a little bit moved out, and then out on the perimeter; but we all need these other brothers and sisters in Christ if we are to be strong in the faith.

And so what would that look like? Well, I woke up this morning at two o'clock because I'm still on Australian time, and I just went through the New Testament and made this list; I'm just going to read it rather quickly. And you've heard this before, the one another passages in the New Testament. So this really describes what it looks like to be knit together in love. That love becomes the glue.

Love for God and love for one another becomes the glue by which we are knit together. And this is what it requires: to be devoted to one another, to give preference to one another, to be of the same mind toward one another, to love one another, not judge one another, accept one another, admonish one another, greet one another, care for one another, serve one another, bear one another's burdens, show tolerance for one another, be kind to one another, forgive one another, speak to one another, be subject to one another, regard one another as more important than yourself, to not lie to one another, to bear with one another, to comfort one another, to encourage

one another, to build up one another, to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, to not speak against one another, to not complain against one another, to pray for one another, to be hospitable to one another.

I've got all of the scripture references next to that, it would take too long to detail each one of those, but all of those are literally just taken word for word out of verses in the New Testament. That's what it looks like to actually be glued to one another. And when you're in this kind of a church, when you are in this kind of a circle of fellowship, yeah, you're encouraged, you're built up, because others are ministering to you and are affirming you; and it becomes contagious, and it rubs off on you.

So the point is that you cannot live in isolation your Christian life, that we need one another. I need you, you need me; we all need each other. The Puritans used to put it this way, that Satan will come after the one ship that sails alone without a convoy. But when we sail together in formation, there's a strength in numbers. And so that's how vitally important what Paul is praying actually is.

So look at it again in verse 2, "that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love," – and we need to keep this difficult sentence going – "and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding." Now what does that mean? And if you're like me, I want to get to the bottom of this. I mean, it sounds great, but what does this mean?

Well, attaining is not in the original, it's supplied by the translator, but it gives the idea that the encouragement being knit together in love results in, it points us in this direction, that all the wealth – and the word "wealth" here means vast riches, vast wealth – "that comes from the full assurance of understanding." What does that mean? Well, full assurance means – and it's one word in the original language, two words in your English Bible. It means deep conviction, firm confidence, that there is an anchor for your soul, that your feet are nailed to the floor, that you're not tossed back and forth, but that there is a wealth of full assurance.

Now he says, "of understanding." Now this understanding refers to understanding spiritual truth. It refers to understanding sound doctrine. And when you put this together, it means that there is a wealth of assurance that understanding of sound doctrine brings to your life, that there is the full assurance in your soul that is derived from or comes from understanding the Word of God and who God is and what God is doing in your life. You've got to have this concrete, objective truth deposited in your mind and in your soul. And you just cannot live by your emotions, and you cannot live being tossed back and forth because of changing circumstances; there has got to be a stake that is driven into the ground, and you are attached to that stake, and it is your understanding of the truth of the Word of God. You've got to have that. And so what this is teaching is sound doctrine builds strong believers, that the understanding of sound doctrine theology produces strong Christians, and how critically important it is that you be well-doctrinally taught in the Word of God.

There are ten major areas of doctrine that are taught in the Bible, I'll just quickly hit the headings. It's the truth about the Bible itself; truth about God; truth about Christ; truth about the Holy Spirit; truth about angels, Satan, and demons; truth about man; truth about sin; truth about salvation; truth about the church; truth about last things, last days. And under each of those ten areas of theology, sound doctrine. And these are all the - it's really like the steel girders that are running through the Bible that cause you to stand strong, that as you come to a true knowledge of this, it's giving you a spiritual backbone and enabling you to stand strong, even in times of disappointment and trials and difficulty. You have an anchor for your soul. Your boat may be being tossed back and forth in the storm, but there is an anchor that is attached to the bottom of the ocean, and you will not be moved away.

So look at this again. There's so much packed into verse 2 it's almost like peeling some kind of a fruit just a layer at a time. He says, "all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding," - now - "resulting in" - so here's one more layer - "in a true knowledge of God's mystery." Now, "true knowledge" is one word in the Greek - you knew I was going to say that - and it means not just knowledge, but a deep personal

knowledge, that you own this, and you have drilled down in it, and you don't have a superficial, shallow knowledge, but that you have a true knowledge - "in a true knowledge" - please note now - "of God's mystery."

Now a mystery is a truth that was previously hidden and you could never know it, but the curtains have now been pulled back, and it's been revealed. So what it's referring to: a truth that was previously hidden in the Old Testament, but is now revealed in the New Testament. And so what is this mystery? Well, he says, "that is" - which is not in the original - "Christ." Christ is the revelation of this mystery.

Now you may be thinking, rightly so, "But Christ was revealed in the Old Testament: Genesis 3:2, Psalm 2, Psalm 22, Isaiah 40, Isaiah 42, Isaiah 49, Isaiah 50, Isaiah 53, Isaiah 63, Isaiah 66, even Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 7 and Isaiah 11. I mean, Christ is all through the Old Testament. So how is this mystery, which is Christ, now revealed when He's already been revealed?" And the answer to that is two aspects about Christ that were hidden in the Old Testament. But these two aspects are now made known to us in the New Testament. And this is what we call progressive revelation, that as you go through the Bible, certain truths become brighter and brighter and brighter and brighter as you reach the end of the Bible.

So these two truths that are now made known to us that in Old Testament saint would not have known is, number one, that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man, that Jesus Christ is God in human form. Now we knew that a virgin would be with child, and we knew that a virgin would have a child named Immanuel, which means God with us. But that's still not enough truth disclosed to us for us to come up with the incarnation.

And so as we come to the New Testament, it becomes crystal clear, John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Verse 14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This mystery now is made known to us, that the

Son of God would become the Son of Man, and that God Himself would step out of heaven and enter the human race through the portal of a virgin's womb, and eternal deity would be joined to sinless humanity, and He would become the God-Man. This is the first aspect of this mystery that is now made known to us.

The second is that this God-Man will now indwell us and live inside of us. In the Old Testament we knew the Messiah was coming, and that He would come and bring salvation and He would come bring judgment on the earth; but we had no idea He was going to live inside of us. And so if you look back at chapter 1 and verses 26 and 27, you'll see it right there, "that the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to the saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is" - here it is, here's the mystery now made known - "Christ in you," - not just Christ coming for you, and not just Christ living among you, but Christ living in you. And by His living in you, "He will bring to you the hope of glory." And the word "hope" here means a steadfast assurance of future glory, that He will take us all the way home. And not a one of us will fail to arrive in glory, but He lives inside of us.

And so, verse 2, it's like trying to put your arms around the Pacific Ocean. I mean, there's just so much packed into this one little verse, or one big verse. But it's the specifics of what Paul is praying for the Colossians, that they will be encouraged, as they're being knitted together in love; and this will lead to in this fellowship together, it will lead to "an understanding of the mystery, which is, Christ," that Christ would be the very center of your life.

And so this really underscores, doesn't it, the centrality of Christ in the Christian life, the priority of Christ in the Christian life, the primacy of Christ in our Christian life. Our Christian life is Christ: it's to follow Christ, it's to serve Christ, it's to love Christ, it's to adore Christ, it's to obey Christ. Everything in our Christian life is about Christ. I mean, your Christian life is like a wheel, and He's the very hub of the wheel, and all

the spokes coming out of the center is some aspect of Christ at work in your life, in a part of your life; but Christ is the epicenter of your life.

Well, this leads, finally, to verse 3, and then this completes this long sentence. Third, and finally, I want you to see, "Paul's Savior," because Paul has mentioned Christ in verse 2. He's the mystery that's now made known to us. And Paul wants to drill down on this and add some commentary. He just can't speed past saying Christ, he's got to pull over and tell us more about Christ.

And so, verse 3 begins, "in whom" – and the whom refers to Christ – "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and understanding." That means outside of Christ there is no wisdom to be had. Outside of Christ there is no true knowledge to be had, that it's all found in Christ. Now when he says, "are hidden in Christ," that does not mean that they cannot be known, that this wisdom and knowledge of Christ cannot be known. No, the word "hidden" here carries the idea of, really, something being safely deposited in a storehouse, such that you can't see it, because it's deposited, and it's locked up, and it's stored up in Christ.

It's all in Christ, "all the treasures." And this word "treasures," it's interesting. I use a thesaurus as a word finder. That's the actual word in Greek, thesaurus, and it just means a great collection, in whom are hidden all the treasures of this great collection. It's just like a bulging treasury. It's like this vast vault, and all of these treasures are in this one vault. You don't need to go look in any other vault, it's all in this one vault, "the treasures of wisdom." The word "wisdom" here means practical knowledge, or knowledge put into practical application. And this wisdom is in Christ, by the example of His life, by the teaching that He gave to us. There is a height and depth and breadth and length of wisdom put on display as we look at His life, and wisdom being taught to us as we study His doctrine.

So I want to say again, there is no wisdom apart from knowing Christ. Apart from knowing Christ a person is rendered a fool who has no wisdom. Christ is our wisdom. He possesses all wisdom. He is the only source of wisdom.

He is the giver of wisdom. He is the teacher of wisdom. He is the example of wisdom. He is the personification of wisdom. He is the Alpha and the Omega of wisdom, the A to the Z and everything in between. He's everything on wisdom on how to live your life in the manner that glorifies God.

And then Paul adds, "and knowledge." I mean, this is an extraordinary statement that Paul is making. "Knowledge" here means spiritual knowledge, specifically, spiritual knowledge about who God is, and what God has done for us, and what God is doing, and what God will do. Christ is the treasure house of all the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:15 says, "Jesus is the image of the invisible God." John 14:9, "He who has seen Me has seen the father." So if you know Christ, you have access to all the knowledge that you need to have. Christ is the very key that unlocks any possession of wisdom and knowledge that you will have.

So this is a breathtaking statement, and I had intended to include verses 4 and 5, and there's just no way, unless you're willing to have dinner with me - you're laughing - to be able to get this all in. But I want to know what all of it means. I want to know what all of this requires of me. And this should tell us, that as Paul is a model for ministry, it's going to involve struggle, it's going to involve sacrifice, it's going to involve pain. It's going to involve expenditure of effort to go the second mile and the third mile to continue to serve Christ. It's going to require prayer and praying for others. It's going to require being focused upon praying for the encouragement of people that their hearts will be encouraged. This is what we're for one another. I need you to do this for me, you need me to do this for you. We've got to stand together.

And I'll conclude by simply saying this as I bring this message to a close. I must say that those among us here today who have not yet come to faith in Christ, please hear one more gospel invitation to your heart, that all forgiveness of sin is in Christ, and all acceptance with Holy God is in Christ, and all peace and all joy is in Christ, and all love and all strength is in Christ. All wisdom and all knowledge of God is in Christ.

Do you not see how much you need Christ in your life? And if you've never come to faith in Christ, if you've never believed in Christ, if you've never taken that step of faith and entrusted your life to Christ, then I am inviting you, I am calling you, I am summoning you this very moment in your heart to take that decisive step and to commit your life to Jesus Christ. You don't have to walk forward, you don't have to raise a hand, you don't have to repeat anything after me; you just have to in your heart do business with God this very moment, and confess your sin to God, and repent of your sin, and turn to the Savior and embrace him by faith. And He will receive you. He will forgive you, and He will clothe you with His perfect righteousness. But you must believe in your heart. And that is something that no one else can do for you; you must commit your life to Christ. May today be the greatest day in your life. May today be the day you leave the darkness and you enter into the light. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father in heaven, how we bless Your name, that You have done so much for us in Christ. And, Father, I pray that Your blessing, the fullness of Your blessing will rest upon everyone here today, and that as we all leave and go back to our places where we live, that we will be carrying Christ with us in our hearts. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

I leave you with this closing benediction: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen."