



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Colossians 1:24-29

"Paul, the Church and the Mystery"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for this morning is found in Colossians chapter 1, and we are reading verse 24 through 29. Colossians 1:24 through 29, the apostle has just said in the last clause of verse 23, "Whereof I Paul am made a minister;" preaching the gospel of Christ, and that's the reference of it in verse 23. And he continues in verse 24 with, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." That word, "Fill up that which is behind," is literally "fill up that which is lacking." And so that will form the basis of a few comments when we come to the message, but notice the expression, "Fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ." Verse 25 continues,

"Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."

May God bless this reading of his inspired word. Let's bow together in a prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we come to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We thank Thee, and praise thee for the apostle's words which we have just read, reminding us, again, that the message of the Christian church is properly the Lord Jesus Christ, and as the apostle puts it, "Whom we preach," admonishing and teaching. We pray, Lord, that we may follow in the steps of the apostle in preaching him, admonishing and teaching in the wisdom that Thou doest give.

We ask Thy blessing upon each one present in this auditorium today, and we ask, Lord, that through the ministry of the word of God, as well as, through the experiences of life, the believers may be brought to the full conformity to the Lord Jesus set out in holy Scripture. The apostle said that he labored in order to present men to Christ perfect, or mature. May that, Lord, be the experience of every individual in this auditorium. If there should be some who do not know now the salvation in Christ, and do not have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, Lord, we pray for them. We ask for Thy blessing upon them. May, through the preaching of the word of God, they come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon the ministry of the word, not only here, but wherever the word of God goes forth today. May the whole church be built up, and may the church be increased by the salvation of individuals through that preaching.

We thank Thee and praise thee for this country of which we are apart. We pray for the United States and its leadership.

We ask also, especially for the leadership of the chapel here, the elders, and the deacons. We pray, Lord, that Thou will give them wisdom and guidance as they seek to exercise oversight over us.

And we pray, especially, for those who have expressed their concern over the problems of life, some physical, some other questions that are troubling, some difficulties, bereavements. Lord, we especially bring before Thee the names upon our calendar of concern. We ask Thy blessing upon them. Give healing where asked, if it should please Thee. And answer, Lord, out of the riches of the glory of the name of our triune God.

We pray Thy blessing upon this meeting and the meeting this evening. May the Lord Jesus Christ be lifted up in them and exalted. We remember the apostle's words that Christ is all and in all. May he be that in our lives. We pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject in the continuation of the exposition of Paul's letter to the Colossians is, "Paul, the Church and the Mystery." In Elijah's day King Benhadad of Syria gathered his great host of men together and besieged Samaria. Perhaps you remember the story in 2 Kings, chapter 7. The famine became so desperate in Samaria that an ass' head was sold for eighty pieces of silver so the Scriptures say. The prophet of God, Elijah, however was untroubled in the midst of it all and calmly promised the king of Israel a bountiful deliverance. "Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." Marvelous prophecy, certainly seemed an impossible one, at that time. There were four lepers who were sitting at the gate. Evidently, if they had known of the prophecy, they were unmindful of it, but probably ignorant of it. And thinking of their condition and realizing that the famine was so great that they would probably die of the famine itself, for lack of food, and then thinking of the Syrians, who were in camp there by and realizing that if they didn't die from the famine they would probably die from the soldiers of the King of Syria, Benhadad.

They decided that they would risk everything and just throw themselves on the mercy of the Syrians. After all, that at least was a chance of deliverance and so, they

decided that that was what they would do. They rose up. They made their way to the camp of the Syrians, and arriving in the Syrians camp, they were startled to discover that the Syrians, who had panicked over the noise of chariots and horses of a great host, which the Lord had caused them to hear, had fled for their lives and had abandoned their supplies. I'm sure that there must have gone through their minds the thought, "This is simply a trick in order to lure the Israelites out." And then after they had been lured out from the city of Samaria, then the Syrians would attack them. But seeing all of the things lying around, the lepers wasted no time. They began to stuff themselves with the rations of the Syrians and wash the food down with greedy swigs of wine. Clothing and silver were hidden for later recovery until suddenly their consciences awoke, and they remember the starving desperately needy inhabitants of the city of Samaria, their city. And one of them said, "We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings," a kind of gospel day, "And we hold our peace."

Mildred Cable, one of the great missionaries of a couple of generations ago said, "The greatest crime of the desert was to know where water was and not to tell it." Well if it's possible to make an analogy then let me suggest that the experience of the leprous men is a faint shadow of the experience of the apostle Paul. The apostle had found great riches in the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, he speaks of the mystery as being the riches of the glory of the mystery among the Gentiles. He was not only introduced to it, but he had the marvelous privilege of preaching it. He had found these riches unsearchable and he couldn't rest until the rest of the world had come to know what he had come to know by the grace of God. Professor James Denney, of the University of Glasgow, used to say that he didn't care anything for a theology that did not help a man to preach. Well Paul's theology not only helped him to preach, it compelled him to preach. And I think that finds illustration in these words that we are looking at today as we consider, ""Paul, the Church and the Mystery."

The apostle has moved in these opening verses of chapter 1 of the letter to the Colossians from Christology with stress upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible God, the creator of all and sovereign over the church by virtue of his resurrection through what we would call soteriology and particularly his ministry of reconciliation not only of individuals but of the whole created universe a striking cosmic presentation of the influence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And now he comes to what we might call a very practical aspect of the doctrine of the church or ecclesiology. The theme of the section is stated in the last clause of verse 23. The apostle wrote, "Whereof I, Paul, am made a minister."

Now he is talking about the ministry of the gospel and so he calls himself a minister of the gospel. The apostle was struggling, as we've been trying to point out, with a view of doctrine generally associated with Gnosticism and Judaism. A Judaism, of course, that is not the pure Judaism of Scripture, but nevertheless, associated with things that come, ultimately, from the Old Testament but out of their proper use. Gnostic Judaism, the Gnostic Judaists, are who are in the background of this letter to the epistle, had false views concerning the Law of Moses. They had false views concerning Jesus Christ and they had false views concerning the spiritual life. But they leaned upon things that were related to the Revelation of God, the Law of Moses, the truth concerning the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the truth concerning the Holy Spirit and the Christian life. But like so many who propound false doctrine, the closer you are to what the Bible says, the more difficult it is for an individual to discern that which is erroneous. Well if you think about the ones that Paul has in the background, that is the Gnostic Judaists, then you'll realize that this epistle is a plea for continuance in and loyalty to the apostolic gospel.

In fact, in the background of practically everything the apostle writes is that. The problem with the Colossians, as Epaphras has made known to him, is the fact that they are listening to alien teachers, and alien teaching. And they're not examining the things

that they are hearing in the light of the things that the apostle had set forth to them. That, I'm sure you realize is essentially the problem with the Christian church today. In fact, it's the problem of the Christian church in every age, the failure, of those of us who are believers in Christ, to compare the things that we hear with the things that are found in holy Scripture. Now, I'm sure that probably many of you feel exactly as I do as you look around at your fellow Christians and your fellow believers, you probably notice that the greatest lack in our life is the lack of constant pondering of the word of God. It is so easy for us to read other things than to read the Scripture. It's so easy for us to think about other things and not to think about the things in the word of God. But if we do that we make ourselves prey to all kinds of false teaching.

Mr. Spurgeon said that it was the duty of Christian preachers to expose error even when it was held by saintly believers. I believe that to be true. And I know that it's a very distasteful task for an individual to expose the error of saintly believers, but that's something that we must do. In fact, Mr. Spurgeon went on to say, to make this extreme statement in order to underline a point, certainly a shock method of saying it, but he said he wouldn't preach error if the whole world should be converted by it. Well of course, that's an impossible thing, but he was just trying to say that he would never preach error, no matter what appeared to be the consequences of doctrine that individuals might, ostensibly at least, be pleased with. That's one of our problems. We listen to so many things today that are not really harmonious with the word of God, but they sound good to us, and we never really, like the Bereans, check the things that we hear with what Scripture says.

And so, when individuals tell us that God intends for us all to be always healthy, that sounds good and we don't check that with the word of God, and we do not check it with the experiences of godly believers down through the years, from the prophets and the apostles on through the history of the Christian church. Or when we hear individuals tell us that God desires us all to be prosperous, surely God would want us all to be

prosperous, would he not? Don't you think that God is the kind of God who would want us all to be prosperous? That appeals to us, and we like it, and we don't compare that with the teaching of holy Scripture, and so we become prey to the false teachers and false doctrine. And finally discover, as a result, that your pocket book is also affected by that in a negative way.

So how important it is for us to read the Bible? We keep saying it, and people keep avoiding doing it. But that, really, is the solution to most of the problems of our lives. If you would read the Bible, you would save a great deal of money, simply, by not having to call the psychologist and the psychiatrists to start with. That would be one thing on which you could save a whole lot of money. Now I don't deny that there are some extreme cases in which we might have need for a psychologist or a psychiatrist. I don't want to be too extreme. But I will say this, my experience has been that individuals who really study the Scripture, I don't mean carry one to the church on Sunday morning, but I mean really study the Scriptures, are those who really come to experience, what Paul talks about when he talks about the fact that God has given us, a sound mind, almost every case, in which we have problems of the mind, or other problems, are cases where we have neglected the reading of the word of God. There are some exceptions, of course. Some physical problems are such that they affect our minds, but ordinarily, ordinarily the one who loves the Bible, reads and studies it, comes to understand and appreciate and love our Lord Jesus Christ, will find that God will be the solution to most of his everyday problems of life.

Now, Paul in this brief section that we are looking at will talk about his task. He will talk about his goal as he proclaims the word. And then he will describe his labor and, I think, give us a bit of an insight into why he was successful in his activity. So let's look at his task in verse 24 through verse 27. Then, we'll look at his goal in verse 28, as he expresses it that we may present every man, mature in Christ. And finally, we'll look at his labor, briefly, in verse 29, which we see is located in the power of God. The

apostle begins this section with perhaps the most controversial verse in the entire letter. "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." How is it possible for us to fill us that which is lacking in the afflictions of Christ? After all, do not the Scriptures, themselves, say that when the Lord Jesus was hanging on the cross, he cried out, "It is finished"? So that would seem to denote a note of finality about the work of Christ to which we can add nothing. The Christian church has, from its beginning, sought to preach the finality and the completion of the work of redemption in the blood that was shed on the cross at Calvary.

Now, certain aspects of the Christian church have sought to deny that by the things that they do. Some large religious organizations offer a sacrifice every Sunday in their churches. But the Christian church, and particularly, its evangelical church, down through the centuries, has laid great stress upon the fact that when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, he finished the work of redemption. There is finality about it. How, then, can Paul say, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake"? Well, of course, there are different kinds of afflictions. Some afflictions are atoning afflictions, such as our Lord suffered on the cross. Other afflictions are non-atoning afflictions. Perhaps I should use the word sufferings because, as we shall see right now, this term, *thlipsis*, which is used here, is a term that refers to sufferings as afflictions and never is this term used of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. So that, so far as the term itself is concerned and its usage in the New Testament, we're given a hint there that Paul is not talking about atoning sufferings. He's talking about non-atoning sufferings. A Simon, of Cyrene, may carry the cross, but only the Lord Jesus Christ is nailed to the cross. And only he cries out, "It is finished."

There are others that have suggested that this expression means the afflictions of Christ filling up that which is lacking, is that the sufferings of the saints through the years

which are pleasing to God and the excess of them in individual's lives may be put together in what is called a treasury of merit. Again, a large professing Christian organization, in their doctrines, teaches a treasury of merit. That is, our Lord Jesus had a surplus of merit, and that is kept in a treasury, and individuals like Paul, by their faithfulness, may contribute to the treasury of merit, and then, when you have need for some merit, you, by the payment of money in indulgences, may have some of those treasuries reckoned to your account. That, of course, is something not taught in Scripture at all.

And Paul is not talking about that here when he says, "Fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake." What Paul is talking about -- and I don't want to labor the point anymore -- what he's talking about is, simply, the identification of the apostle with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember on the Damascus Road, we've referred to this once or twice already, recently, remember on the Damascus Road when the apostle came into contact with the risen Lord, he heard the words, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" from the Lord? Now he didn't say this, but it's easy to see how Paul might have thought this. He might well have said, "I'm not persecuting you, Lord. I'm persecuting them." That is, those who are the followers of this imposter, Jesus of Nazareth.

What the Lord said, however, was something that could well have worked on the apostle's mind, and would have worked on the apostle's mind, had he thought about it, and Paul was a thinking man. When Jesus said, "Why persecutest thou me?" the apostle, reflecting upon this, reflecting upon the fact that it was not his intention to persecute the Lord, but the Christians, could easily, by the simplest kind of reasoning, come to the conclusion, evidently, to persecute them is to persecute him. And so out of that concept suggested by our Lord's remark, "Why persecutest thou me?" comes the apostle's understanding, existentially, in his experience of the union of the risen Lord, with his body, the church, or individual members. So, when Paul speaks about, "Filling up that

which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ," he means, merely, that his sufferings, on behalf of the church of Lord Jesus Christ, represent an identification with the risen Lord who has suffered, and still suffers through his saints, for the church of Lord Jesus Christ, not for their atonement but for their spiritual edification and deliverance and the various other ways in which he ministers to them.

Well Paul's figure of the believing leader in Christ is not the kind of figure that is characteristic of the Christian church today. Characteristic of the Christian church today is a concept of a Christian leader as a charming, popular preacher who is able to sway multitudes by the pleasantness of his doctrine and the entertaining characteristics of his message. The apostle never presented himself in that way; and furthermore, the context of this particular book indicates that the Gnostic Judaists did present themselves that way, for in the 2nd chapter in the 4th verse, the apostle says, "And I'm saying these things, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." Evangelical's, because they don't read their bibles, are the prey of many, many people who are, "Beguiling them with enticing words." That's why we hear all of these strange doctrines that float up and down. One of the ridiculous is the New Age Movement and actually the impact that it has had upon some Christian men. I don't have time to talk about that now, but that's just a kind of symptom of what characterizes evangelicalism today. Men are not preaching the solid doctrines of the word of God, and in fact, go out of the way to avoid them. Men who claim to acknowledge the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle, you know, was not a fellow who cut much of a figure anyway. As he expresses it in 2 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 10, this is what they were saying about Paul, "His letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." But the apostle was man faithful to the message, and when it involved suffering for the doctrines of the word of God, the apostle did not, for one moment, feel that he should, in any way, trim his sails as he preached the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He would have agreed with Spurgeon that, "It is our duty to expose

error even when it is held by saintly believers." So he says, "I'm filling up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ." It's almost as if to say, in the experience of the Christian church as it reaches its maturity through the centuries. There is a certain amount of suffering that the whole of the church must go through. And Paul says I'm doing my part. And every one of us, as believers in Christ, may have to do some of our part as well.

Now Paul, having said that, goes on to say that he is doing this for the church, and in the 25th verse he adds, "Whereof I am made a minister." Now in verse 23, it is said that he is a minister of the gospel. In verse 25, he says that he is a minister of the church. Well both of these are true. He is a servant. That's what the term diakonos, the term used here, from which we get, incidentally, the term deacon. This noun, some have said, comes from a word konos that means dust. So that you can think of a deacon or a servant as one who stirs up dust. And someone said to me after the 8:30 service, "Well you also could say that someone who doesn't let dust gather on him." Well that's a deacon. That's a servant. And Paul calls himself, simply, a servant of the church, and he's a servant of the word. He's a servant of the word, and he's a servant of the church because you know you can never be any really good servant of the church of Jesus Christ if you're not a servant of the word. For the blessing of the Holy Spirit can only come through the word of God. The things that God blesses are the things that are wedded to the word of God. If an individual is unable to attach his Christian experience to the teaching of the word of God, you can say it is a doubtful Christian experience. Christian experiences must be wedded to the word of God. The word of God is our standard, and Paul is a servant of the word, and he's a servant of the church. That's, to my mind, an ideal kind of servant.

Now he says that he's a servant of the church according to the dispensation of God given to him for them to fulfill the word of God, to preach it fully. So he regards himself as an individual who has a call from God to minister the word of God to those

who will form the church to fulfill the word of God. Now the Book of Acts says that he was called to be a minister of the Gentiles, so we're not surprised that he explains his particular part in the ministry of the word of God. He is a servant of the church. He is fulfilling the word of God, and he identifies it as the secret, "Which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints." What is this secret of which Paul is the servant? What is this secret that means so much to him, this mystery? Not something mysterious, but something revealed and which could only be understood through Divine Revelation. Well he says it's a secret, "Which hath been hid from ages and from generations," so it's not the gospel because he tells us in his other letters that the gospel is made known in the Old Testament Scriptures. This is something different from the gospel.

Some students of the word of God have suggested that perhaps he's referring to the church. Well surprisingly the church is never called a mystery in the New Testament. And so while the Old Testament is largely absent, if not entirely absent, in any references to the church, per say, that's a New Testament term, and largely a term that comes into use after the day of Pentecost, mentioned only three times previously in two verses in the Gospel of Matthew, and mentioned there as a future entity. But still nowhere is the church called a mystery. I think, occasionally, we have gone astray in calling the church the mystery. Is it Gentile salvation? Well, no it's not Gentile salvation because in the Old Testament, Gentiles were said to be the object of the preaching of the message, however, Gentiles, in order to be saved and come into fellowship with the Lord, not only had to receive the message, but they also had to become a part of Israel. So can it be that the mystery is Gentile co-participation in covenantal blessing? That would satisfy the apostle's ministry, minister of the Gentiles, and at the same time, it would stress the fact that this co-participation, that is, Gentiles saved as Gentiles, that would satisfy this reference to the mystery, "Hidden from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest." So it's not

the church that's the mystery. It's the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the church that's the mystery.

Now if you'll turn back a few pages to Ephesians chapter 3, we'll read a verse or two which, I think, will help us to understand what Paul is talking about. There are other verses too, but these two, I think, are particularly appropriate. The apostle in Ephesians chapter 3, well perhaps we'll read Ephesians 2:12 and 13, or 11 and 12,

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

But then read verses 4 and 5 and 6 in the next chapter. He's talking about how the gospel has been made known, or how the dispensation of the grace of God is made known by revelation. In verse 4,

"Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel."

That's the thing that is new. That's the mystery, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, fellow members of the same body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel. The apostle regarded this as a tremendous step forward in God's history of divine salvation that a Gentile can now be saved as a Gentile and does not have

to go through the door of Judaism to become a member of the family of God. So this is what Paul is preaching out among the Gentiles. You may be saved as a Gentile through the gospel of the grace of God. And he linked it, as he often did in his other letters, with covenantal blessing through the covenantal program that began with Abraham. So we'll call it, the mystery is Gentile co-participation in the covenanted Abrahamic blessing. "So rich with glory," he says in the next verse, that God took the initiative and manifested it to us.

Gentiles were helpless to discover this. They were without God. They were without Christ. They were strangers from the common wealth of Israel, but now, by virtue of the initiative of the Lord God and the calling of the apostle, by divine initiative to the ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles, the Gentiles are able to enter into the blessing that had been reserved, primarily, for the nation Israel, as he says in chapter 11 of Romans, a chapter we've referred to so often. The Gentiles have been grafted into the olive tree and have become fellow partakers of the fat root of the olive tree. How one can miss that? I do not know. And I don't think you would miss it if you read and studied the Scriptures.

Now the mystery religions with which the apostle was contending in Colosse stressed the exclusiveness of the relationship to them, and through them, to the truth of God. As you can see, the true gospel stresses the inclusiveness of the gospel message. It is inclusive of, not only Jewish people who are faithful to the ancient promises, but of the Gentile world. So Colossians, why are you yielding allegiance to individuals who preach a kind of exclusive way of salvation for a favored few, when I am a representative of what God is doing in this age and the gospel is going out to all of the Gentiles that all of the Gentiles may have opportunity to come into the family of God? The apostle was not like one of the false prophets of the Old Testament of whom Jeremiah says, "They are individuals who preach, but they have not been called to preach." He was one who had been called by God to minister as the apostle of the Gentiles.

Now, he says in verse 26, "But now is made manifest to his saints." The truths of the hidden counsels of God cannot be stolen from heaven by inspired guesses of religious geniuses. We have a lot of them today who like to stand up, and some of them write about how they've had new experiences which give them a little status above everybody else in the Christian church. Have you noticed in the New Testament that the Apostle Paul does not reveal the intimacies of his secret experiences with the Lord God? As a matter of fact, when he was caught up to the third heaven, he says, "I saw and heard things that are not lawful to be uttered," but if you want to find out what the experiences are of people claiming today, they'll be happy to tell you all of the things that they have experienced, providing, of course, you buy their books. But they are happy to evangelize themselves and talk about themselves. The apostle was one who had the greatest of all experiences and wouldn't say anything about it. That's the difference often between a true servant of the Lord and one who is trading on things for personal gain.

So, "Made manifest," what is this mystery in more detail? Verse 27 says, "Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory," that is, in you Gentiles, the hope of glory. They who had been without Christ now are in Christ. Ones who had been without hope now have him who is the pledge of glory, the hope of glory. What comfort that is, to have him. Do we have everything now? Well, there are certain movements in evangelicalism today that will tell you that if you don't have everything now that you are not living the kind of life you should be living, and if you will listen to us, and again, read our books, and support us, we'll tell you how you can have everything now.

Now when you read the New Testament again, you discover that we don't have everything now. We read here, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," the pledge of glory, in other words, when people tell you that you should be healthy, always healthy, that's what God intends for you to be, always healthy, they are preaching false doctrine. If they tell you that God intends for you to be prosperous and wealthy and to drive around in your Cadillac or your BMW or your Mercedes, or your Jaguar – that's what Martha would like, a

Jaguar, [laughter] she's shaking her head yes [Laughter] – well you know when we have that concept of Christianity we're far from the truth of the New Testament. When people tell you, you can have it all now, they are, simply, disobedient to the teaching of the word of God. It's Christ in you the pledge of glory. Well certainly the time is coming when we're going to have all, but it's not now. And all of the experiences of the centuries should have taught us that simple truth. But, it's so hard for some people to grasp it. Full salvation at the last day, real salvation now, but full salvation at the last day, that's what the Scriptures set forth, and set it forth plainly. We don't have everything now.

Well, I was in the morning service. We had about five doctors here, and we have some doctors here now. So, in a burst of enthusiasm I said I was going to devote a story to the doctors who were here, Dr. Ben Howard, Dr. Charles Howard, Dr. Harold Mims, Dr. Swinesburg, I didn't know whether he was here or not, but I see some are here, Lee Radford's here, so I was going to dedicate this story to them. And I started to tell the story and forgot the punch line. [Laughter] So they all had a good laugh on me. And several people came up afterwards and said, "What was that story that you intended to tell?" Well, I hated to admit that I'm getting so old I forget these punch lines, but I like this story. It was a story about a bunch of thieves who met a doctor, and they held him up. And they said, "Your money or your life." And he said, "I want to thank you for your moderation. I usually get both." [Laughter] Well, when it comes to spiritual things, [Laughter] when it comes to spiritual things we have some now, but the full experience of our salvation is to come. Now I timed that perfectly because this is the one that will go out over the radio, as you understand. [Laughter]

Now notice the apostle's goal in verse 28, and we'll say just a few words about that and just a sentence or two about his labor in verse 29. The apostle speaks of, "Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach," that that was hidden, that has been manifested, that has been made known to the saints, Paul says, he proclaims, he preaches. And notice the theme of his ministry. It is the person of Christ. Now it's a person, not

simply a system, but mind you, you cannot talk about the person of Christ without a theology of Christ. For if you should talk about the person of Christ and say you're not talking about theology, I would, simply, say to you, "Who is Christ?" And then you would have to tell me your theology because all of your explanation of who he is and what he had done is nothing more than Christian theology.

So Paul is stressing the personal side of the truth as it is contained and headed up and found preeminently in the person of our Lord understood by the theology of him. But he didn't preach a system of theology, as if we were to say every Sunday morning, "Now turn to book 2 of our dogmatics, and we will look this morning at the doctrine of such and such." He preached Christ, and he preached a person, not simply a system. He preached a world view, but it was bound up in the way in which he understood the Lord Jesus Christ. He says he proclaims Christ. He doesn't discuss him. He proclaims him.

And he says furthermore, it's not simply I, but others are associated with me in this. He says, "Whom we preach." One may dissociate Buddha from his teaching and Confucius from his, but Christ cannot be dissociated from the teaching concerning him. He is his teaching, and the teaching of Christ is really an explanation and an exposition of who he is and what he has done for he is the truth. He says, incidentally, "Whom we preach," not whom we sacrifice as that large Christian professing organization does every Sunday, sacrifice Christ. "Whom we preach," he says, not sacrifice, not do anything. He says we don't work miracles at any altar. We don't impart grace by any rights. We preach the Lord Jesus Christ. And his method is very simple, he admonishes a moral stress. He teaches a doctrinal stress. He gave plain warnings that the end of sin is death. He spoke plainly about plain duties that Christians were expected to do in the light of the teaching of the word of God.

Notice how personal it was too, he said, and watch the emphasis on the expression, "Every man," it occurs three times in verse 28. "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect

in Christ." John Wesley used to say, to describe his ministry, he said, "I came in to town and I offered them Christ." Well, the apostle, I think, could have appreciated that. And he did it in all wisdom. That is, he studied the whole of the Divine Revelation as it was available to him, and he didn't hesitate to preach any of it.

You ever looked at people's bibles? I remember my grandmother. She was a Christian lady in the Methodist church in the days when the Methodist church was beginning to drift, lovely Christian. My family was in it. My mother was in it to. Until she married my father, and he thought he was leading her in a different way and, a better way, and she became a Presbyterian. And so I grew up a Presbyterian. But when my grandmother, who loved the Lord, was dying, I visited her in the little town in which she lived, and I took up her Bible to read for her, and it was dog eared in the Psalms, but in other passages, while she had read other passages, you could tell a great deal of difference. Some people's Bibles are dog eared in the Psalms and clean in Romans. That's bad – dog-eared in the Gospel of John and clean in Galatians and Hebrews and so on. The apostle taught in all wisdom, all of the word of God was his text, and he expounded it all.

And finally, his aim was to present every man mature, more than evangelism. The idea that the highest aim of Christian ministry is to get people saved is not apostolic. Listen my friends, it's not apostolic. The idea that the aim of Christian ministry is to get people saved, that's only one step along the way. What Paul said was his aim was not simply to get people saved, it was to present men mature in Christ. Think like Paul, and live and work as believers, like Paul. Realize that this is what the word of God says, and you'll be a happier and more fruitful Christian. It's a daunting task, tremendous conception, to be a part of presenting men mature in Christ.

And finally, he says in verse 29, "Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." With such a magnificent goal as that, who could possible accomplish it? No one, apart from the power of God working within them,

and Paul acknowledges that he labored, but so does God. And in fact, the measure of Paul's power is the measure of the divine working in him, and the measure of our fruitfulness is the measure of the divine working in us. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." So the secret of Paul is not education. He had a great education. Not culture -- he had all of the culture, having been brought up in Judaism with a life devoted to their conception of spiritual things, a magnificent advantage that most of us have never had.

It wasn't his methodology, for that was learned by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It wasn't his shrewdness. It wasn't even his hard work. The solution and the answer to the question, "Why was Paul faithful and fruitful?" may be put very simply. It was Paul's companion. He's the secret. He's always the secret, the Lord God, who worked mightily in him. Incidentally, that verb used in verse 29 is one that, almost always and so far as I know always in the New Testament, refers to supernatural activity, sometimes Satanic, but most of the time, God's activity, but always supernatural. God worked supernaturally, and the apostle, to the Gentiles, accomplished his work. And we, today, are still learning from him. How thankful I am for Paul, but most of all, for Paul's companion, the Lord Jesus himself.

If you're here and you've never believed in the Lord Jesus, we invite you to rest yourself upon him and his saving work for time and for eternity. It's very simple, renounce your trust in your trust, your good works, your culture, your education, all of the things that you think might commend you to God. Acknowledge you have nothing with which to commend yourself. Look deep down in your heart and see yourself as the sinner that you are and realize that that means divine condemnation and guilt and flee to Christ and receive, as a free gift, eternal life. Come to Christ, believe in him. May God, in his marvelous grace, draw you to him and to that decision. It can only be made by you in the recesses and depths of your own heart. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, how marvelous it is to think Paul's thoughts after him. We are grateful. We are grateful for the example of a faithful man, but we're especially grateful to Thee that Thou didst manifest the truth of the mystery through the apostle to us, preserve it in the word of God, and have it preached to us through faithful men in our day.

Lord, if there are some here, who have never believed in Christ, may, at this very moment, their thoughts, the thoughts of their hearts, be turned to Thee to receive the blessing of eternal salvation. For those of us who are believers, help us, Lord, to listen to Thee through the word, follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and take part in Paul's task in presenting every man mature in Christ.

Go with us now, for Jesus' sake. Amen.