October 1/2, 2022

Complete in Christ

Rooted in Christ Series

Colossians 1:24-2:5

Pastor Bryan Clark

So, if you listen to TV commercials, radio commercials, one of the common phrases you hear repeated is, whatever it is they're selling they tell you, "You deserve this." Not just that you need this. You deserve this. You deserve a new house. You deserve a new car. You deserve a big vacation. You deserve to retire early. You deserve to look better, to smell better. Whatever it is, you deserve it. What's funny about that is, it's mass marketing. So apparently, if you have a pulse, you deserve all this. Quite a contrast from the words of Jesus when He called people to follow Him. The message was not, "Follow Me because you deserve this, this, this, and this." The message was, "If you're going to follow Me, there's a price to be paid, and you'd better count the cost." So this morning, if you would say in your heart of hearts, sincerely, you really want to be a Christ follower, you want your life to make a difference, you have to understand there is a cost to that. And that's what we want to talk about this morning.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to Colossians, chapter one. If you're new with us, we're working our way through the book of Colossians. We pick it up in chapter 1, verse 24, that begins with the word **Now**. Now is the reference to now that we have established the supremacy of Christ. It's what Ryan talked about last week, this absolutely magnificent view of Jesus. Now that we've established that, the message gets more personal. Now what are we going to do with that? He says:

> **Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.**
>
> (*NASB, Colossians 1:24)

Now for what it's worth, chapter 1, verse 24 is one of the most debated, discussed, analyzed verses in the entire book of Colossians. We're going to try not to get lost in all of that. I'm just going to give you what I think makes the most sense. I don't want to create unnecessary confusion. It is likely that the false teachers were focused on the fact that Paul was in prison. And the message probably went something like this. "If Paul is telling the truth, if he has the favor of God on him, why is he sitting in prison?" So Paul is responding to that, and says he's actually **rejoicing** in his sufferings **for your sake**. It's good to remind ourselves, Paul isn't sitting in prison because he robbed the local U-Stop. He's sitting in prison, specifically, because of his commitment to take the message of Jesus to the Gentiles. That was really the point of conflict. That's the point of tension. So, Paul tells them that, "Hey, I'm sitting in prison because of my commitment to deliver the message of Jesus to you." But he rejoices in that because he understands the message and the power of that message to transform their lives.

When he says, **And in my flesh,** (I think what he's saying is, in my heart I'm joyful that I've been called to do this, but in my flesh, it is hard; it is suffering. He acknowledges that.") **And in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church.** That little phrase there, **I do my share**, was a little Greek phrase that was used to describe an athlete that was representing his

or her city at what would have been the Greek Olympic Games. So, in a sense Paul is saying, "Yes, I'm sitting in prison because of my commitment to team church, to be faithful to present the gospel.

This is, then, where it gets debated: **in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions**. So what does that mean? Well, let's start with some of the terms. The term **afflictions** does not refer to the work of Jesus on the cross. As a matter of fact, there's never a time in the New Testament where this word ever refers to the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross. There's nothing **lacking**. There's nothing that wasn't finished by Jesus on the cross. We refer to the *finished work of Jesus on the cross*. Jesus Himself, when He hung on the cross said, "It is finished." Tetelestai. It was a banking term that means "paid in full." Nothing more needs to be done. That's not what it's referring to.

What it is referring to is the fact that because God became flesh, because Jesus was the light of the world, in Jesus' own words in John chapter 3, he says, "***When the light came into the world, it shined into the darkness, and exposed people's sin.***" So people in the darkness hate the light, because they hate having their sin exposed. So all through the earthly ministry of Jesus, it was full of conflict. It was full of trials. It was full of persecution. It was full of afflictions. Some people seem to think that if Jesus once again came and walked on this earth as a man, everyone would love Him. Social media would love Him. The culture would love Him. He would rate really high in the Gallup polls. It's just not true…it's not true! Read the Gospels. That's not what happened the first time. Jesus stirred up a lot of stuff. So the idea of afflictions is, if you're going to represent the light, if you're going to represent righteousness, if you're going to be faithful to represent Jesus, there's going to be afflictions.

When it says, **in filling up**, I think the best understanding of that is basically the idea of *to supplement* or *to continue*. Or probably the phrase I like best is *to take my turn*. When it says, **filling up what is lacking**, the word **lacking** is an interesting Greek word that has multiple definitions. But the one I think fits the best is also the way Paul used this same term in writing to the Corinthians and to the Philippians. So we have biblical support for this, and it's the idea of representing someone who is absent. So it's the idea of what's lacking is they're not there, so someone represents them. So, you put all that together and there's the reality that Jesus has gone back to the Father, and now it is His body, the Church, that represents Him here on earth. So it's our turn, as the body of Christ, to share in His afflictions. It's our turn, then, to experience those trials, and the conflict, and the difficulties that come with representing the Light, with representing truth and righteousness to a dark and confused world. So that's what verse 24 is saying.

All through this part of Colossians, you'll see a lot of the words in italics. Whenever they're in italics, it tells you that it isn't actually in the Greek. It's kind of filled in to help make sense. I'm going to leave those out because I think the text reads more clearly without them. So he says, **Of this I was made a minister"**. Now when he says a **minister**, that's a really misleading term because typically what we hear is *clergy*. "I was made a *reverend*." Sometimes people introduce me as, "*This is our minister*." It's an office. It's a title. That's not what this word means. This is a very ordinary term that just simply means a slave or a servant. He's been made a bond servant or a slave of Christ.

> **Of this I was made a minister** (a servant, a slave) **according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit,** (Vs. 25)

Stewardship is a word that refers to a *manager*. The most common in the first century would have been a household steward and almost all of those stewards were slaves. So, the language really lines up here. It's the idea of the household steward to manage the household for the master. So in this case, it's not a household, it's a message. **I was made a minister**, (a servant) **according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me.** We might call this: a calling for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the Word of God. So Paul is saying that, "Yes, he's sitting in prison because he's taking his turn to represent the message of the gospel and it comes with afflictions." But this is his calling. He has been called to be a steward of the message of the gospel as a servant of Jesus. So up to this point in the text, it'd be easy to say: I'm not sure I really like that. I mean, what kind of an advertisement is that? You know, as consumers, we want to hear what's in it for us? What do I deserve?

But starting then in verse 26, the reason this is so significant is because of the message, which is absolutely glorious. Verse 26:

> **That is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested** (unveiled) **to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery** (here's the key) **among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

In the Bible, **mystery** is not like mysterious, creepy, weird. Mystery simply refers to *something that was previously unknown, that has been made known by God*. The veil has been pulled back and it has been revealed. It's not something anyone could ever learn by investigating. It's something that had to be revealed by God. And that's what he's talking about here, that Paul lives in the generation that is experiencing the fulfillment of the promise of a Savior. And part of the message, then, the pulling back of the curtain, is this amazing truth that all along God's heart has been for the Gentiles too, that they too might experience the magnificence of the riches of Christ. **Christ in you, the hope of glory**. **Hope of glory** is a reference to *eternity*. It's the idea of Christ in you both now and forever.

It's just hard for us to appreciate the level of tension and prejudice and hatred in the first century between the Jews and the Gentiles. But also understanding that these people understood that for hundreds and thousands of years, there was overwhelming evidence that there was something unique about the God of the Hebrews. These stories were passed on from generation to generation, that the God of the Hebrews, unlike any other gods, had done amazing things in history. And if there is one true God, it would have to be the God of the Hebrews. But to the Gentiles, you're on the outside, looking in with no hope. So they're up to their eyebrows in all these pagan religions, and multiple gods, and all these myths, and all these futile attempts to somehow find what they're looking for to satisfy their souls that are searching for God. But it's hard to imagine what this would be like, knowing that there is one true God, and we will never have access to Him because we're Gentiles. And then along comes this amazing message, as the curtain is pulled back, and Paul announces to the Gentiles, "*Hey, guess what? Christ died for you. And you are invited. You have a seat at the table to experience all of these magnificent riches**, Christ in you, the hope of glory**."* So Paul says, *Yes, I rejoice. Is it easy? No!* He's suffering in his flesh. Prison was no fun. Was it hard? Yes! Did it cost him? Absolutely! Was it worth it? Absolutely yes! That's what he's saying.

Now, for us today, we don't have all this conflict with Jews and Gentiles in the sense of who's in and who's out. For us, the wonder of the message would be that Jesus offers salvation, the forgiveness of sin, the riches that are ours in Christ, the hope of glory to absolutely everyone. In that sense, it's the most inclusive message ever. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor. It doesn't matter if you're successful or homeless. It doesn't matter what the color of your skin is. It doesn't matter if you're male or female. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter what's been done to you. None of that matters. Every single person has been offered the opportunity to experience the *riches in Christ, the forgiveness of sin, the hope of glory*. This is the amazing message of the gospel.

Now stop and think about it. Right now, this morning, there are people all over our community who have no idea this is true. How many of them have tried and tried and tried every religion imaginable? They're probably hung over this morning, trying to somehow escape their belief that no matter what they do, there's no way they could ever stand right before a holy God, and they are doomed forever. And they have no idea this is what Jesus did for you. Our calling as the church is to take this message of hope into the darkness and tell people this is what Jesus has done for you. No matter who you are, simply by receiving God's gift by faith, you can stand right forever before a holy God. That is an absolutely amazing message. Paul says we've been made a steward of this message. Verse 28:

> **We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.**

So he says in verse 28, we've proclaimed the message of the gospel which includes **admonishing every person.** That's a term that means *to warn*. It means *to correct*. Understanding the message of the gospel must include the light shining into the darkness and exposing sin. John Newton was the great slave trader that encountered the resurrected Christ, and his life was radically transformed. He's the writer of the lyrics of the song, "*Amazing Grace*". At the end of his life, he said his mind was failing but there were two things he knew to be true. "I am a great sinner and Christ is the great Savior." But here's the deal. No one needs a great Savior if they do not realize that they are a great sinner.

Jesus and the message of the gospel is not compelling if we aren't willing to acknowledge that there is such a thing as sin before a holy God. So the gospel, the light shining into the darkness, exposes sin. So the message includes admonition, warning, correction, as well as instruction, **…teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.** Hopefully that language sounds familiar because that is the verse from which we get our mission statement: "*To glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ."* You can't miss the fact that three times in that verse it says: every person, every person, every person. Every person means every person. Every person is someone made in the image of God with dignity and value. Every person is someone Jesus died for: Seeking to present **every** person.

So what does that look like? As you think through your grid, I'm going to really shock you this morning, so hang on. But this even includes people who have differing political views than yours. It really does. Anything you say or do that makes it less likely that the people around you are going to listen when you talk about Jesus, is a major strategic error. We as Christians have to make up

our minds what matters most. Is it the message of the gospel or is it our political views? I've said it before. God's heart is not for America; it's for Americans. His heart is for the people that He died for. Every person means every person, every person **complete in Christ**. We've talked about this before. What does that word **complete** mean? It's a little bit slippery. *Complete, perfect, mature,* the Greek words translated in different ways in different passages. But at the end of the day, the idea is *reaching fulfillment*. It's why the word *perfect* works pretty good, because it's all the way to completion of what God started. Here's the reality of it. We can't complete anyone. God completes them, and I think He knows the definition of the term. So it's going to be okay. The New Testament is very clear. He starts it and He finishes it. He's going to complete what He started, bringing people to the fullness of whom He intended them to be in Christ. But what's so amazing about this passage is that somehow in God's sovereign plan, He has invited us to be part of the story. He has invited us to be stewards of the message of the gospel, to be proclaimers of the message of new life in Christ, this message full of hope, this message of forgiveness. Our job is to be proclaimers. His job is to save them and complete them. But the reality is, in this short amount of time you have on planet Earth, you've been invited to be a part of something that will matter forever. And that's remarkable! Verse 29:

> **For this purpose also I labor, striving…**
> (That word striving is the Greek word from which we get our word agony. It was typically used to describe an athlete agonizing all the way to the finish line or to win the contest.)
> **For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.**

Back in the early 2000s, we launched what we called the "Purpose Campaign". Guess what verse we used for that idea? Well, it's right there, verse 29. It was the idea of seeking to be as effective as possible, to accomplishing this mission that God has given us. So the campaign was the "Purpose Campaign: For This Purpose I Live." It included this auditorium; it included the youth complex; it included planting a church up north—North Pointe Community Church—and planting churches in India. It's amazing now, some 14 years since we've been in this facility, it'd be interesting to know what only God knows, and that is what has been the impact that has gone out from this place into our community and around the world? What has been the impact, the lives changed through the youth complex, through North Pointe, through the amazing things that God has done in India?

When people ask me what makes Lincoln Berean special, and I've told you this before, I always have the same answer, "It's her people." For 60 years, it's been her people—amazing people. God has faithfully, over the years, brought us amazing people who are willing to make the commitment to the gospel, who are willing to sacrifice, who are willing to serve, who are willing to count the cost, to take a stand for righteousness, to take a stand to rightly represent Jesus to the world. And God has done amazing things. But we are always praying for God to keep raising up the next generation of people.

When I say *next generation*, I don't just mean age. I'm not just talking about young people. We're talking about people that have come to Christ and are passionate about wanting to give their lives to something that will matter forever. You might be 50 years old and have just come to Christ, and you are so excited about pouring your life into something that will matter forever. It's the next

generation of people that say, "*Yes, I understand there's a cost. I understand this isn't going to be easy. But this message is absolutely glorious, and I want to be part of something that will matter forever."* But here's the deal. Just before you sign up, I just want to be clear. It will cost you. There will be afflictions. There will be trials. We don't fit in here. People don't like it when the light exposes their stuff. Jesus couldn't have been clearer about this. They persecuted me, they're going to persecute you. So count the cost. The only alternative, and please hear me on this, the only alternative is to compromise, is to water down the message, is to blend into the culture and to present a weak, watered-down Jesus who has no power to set people free and becomes the Jesus of our own making. If we're going to tell the truth, if we're going to stand for righteousness, if we're going to rightly represent Jesus to the world, there is cost. Paul's concern then is voiced starting at chapter 2 verse 1:

> **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** (super knowledge, what we called it in chapter 1) **of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** (Chapter 2:1-3)

So here's what he said in simple terms. Paul is agonizing over these people. He wants them to be encouraged, he wants their hearts to be welded together in love. He wants them to have a full understanding of the amazing treasures and wealth that is ours in Christ. But: verse 4:

> **I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.** (Vs. 4-5)

What is Paul's concern? What is he agonizing over? That the false teachers will **delude** them. That doesn't mean denying Jesus. It means *watering down Jesus*. How do they do this? Through persuasive argument, through smooth talking. And if they come to believe in a watered-down Jesus, they will fail to understand the treasure of the riches that are ours in Christ. Next week, we'll talk a little bit more about the specifics of what is that, that the false teachers are talking about? He ends verse 5 with two terms. He's **rejoicing to see your good discipline** and **stability**. Those are both military terms. He says I'm rejoicing in the fact that you're still holding your ground; you're still taking your stand. So far, so good. But he is concerned.

So here's the deal this morning. If you don't really care about Jesus, you really don't care about following Him, you really don't care about the gospel, you're just kind of like: what's in it for me, this is probably of no real interest to you. But if you're sincere about wanting to be a Christ follower, if you're sincere about wanting to be a good steward of the message of the gospel, if really deep in your heart of hearts you say, "*I do want to be part of something that will matter forever*," then you just have to understand it will cost you. There is a price that has to be paid. If you're going to stand for truth, if you're going to stand for righteousness, if you're going to rightly represent Jesus as the light of the world, don't expect the culture to love you and embrace you. If you're going to be a real Christ follower, you have to care more about the applause of heaven than

being loved and accepted by the culture around you. That's the decision you have to make. But for those who are willing to count the cost, say, “I get it. I’m in,” we link arms with our brothers and sisters around the world, many of whom for decades have paid a price we can't even imagine as Americans. But with courage and faithfulness, they have paid that price every single day. So, we link arms as we seek together **to present every person complete in Christ.**

> *Our Father, we're thankful this morning of this absolutely amazing message so full of hope in a culture so full of darkness and despair. Lord, may we be faithful stewards of this message as we leave this place out into our neighborhoods and around the world. Lord, may we rightly be Your church. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

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FALL 2022 // WEEK 4

Life Group Questions

Colossians – Rooted in Christ // Oct 1-2, 2022

Complete in Christ // Colossians 1:24 – 2:5



October - Love Your Neighbor Month

All month we are focusing on loving our neighbors, one way to do this is to **Slow Down**. This can look like choosing to do less, in order to be more available to meeting and knowing your neighbors. Slow down and think through some activities that you could pause this month to be more available to love your neighbor!

Take a few minutes and discuss together how you could Love Your Neighbor either as a group or individually. There are ideas on the last page of this document.

Introduction

In our passage this week, Pastor Bryan highlights a verse that is central to the mission of our church, Colossians 1:28. And we notice through Paul's firsthand account that carrying out this mission comes at personal cost. Living a life of surrender to King Jesus carries similar impact and urgency for us today.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Share about a time you felt a sense of accomplishment for a job well done. What made that time so memorable for you?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:

    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth

    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives

    c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group. *Consider reading* ***Colossians 1:21 – 2:5*** *to keep the flow of thought of the letter from the previous week.*

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) What part of the sermon inspired or challenged you this week?

2) Paul's perspective on suffering echoes the words of Jesus to His followers in the gospels. Read Matthew 5:10-12 and John 15:18-21. If they had been written, how might those passages have encouraged Paul as he sat in a prison cell?

    What words or themes are repeated in those passages?

    How does the world we live in show it's antagonism toward Jesus and His followers today?

3) The Greek word for "mystery" is "musterion" and differs from the way we commonly use mystery in English. In the New Testament, rather than being something strange, a mystery is something that was hidden, but has now been revealed, as described in 1:26. The mystery Paul is referring to in this passage is something that was previously unknown but has now been revealed. In verses 1:25-27 and 2:2, what is the mystery that Paul is discussing? Is there more than one mystery or is he talking about the same thing in both places?

How does this "mystery" relate to the previous week's passage (Colossians 1:15-23)?

Think about areas of struggle, fear, anxiety, or insecurity in your life. How does the assurance that Christ is IN you, encourage you in those areas?

What habits can you begin to build now to grow towards a more consistent awareness, "the full assurance of understanding" (2:2) of your completeness in Christ?

4) According to the mission Paul describes in Colossians 1:28 (which is also the basis for our church mission statement), what activities in our church fulfill the mission?

If Paul were to participate for a week in various activities you enjoy through our church, what might he point out as extraneous to this mission?

(question 4 continued on next page)

If Paul were to stay in your home for a week, what might he point out in your lifestyle as being irrelevant to the mission of the gospel?

Spend some time discussing how you can encourage each other within your group to be about the kind of mission Paul describes.

5) Throughout this passage Paul underscores his purpose for living on mission while using words like "suffering", "labor", "striving" and "struggle". What does this indicate about the feelings he has for those to whom he is writing?

To what does he attribute such a passionate response?

Think of the words you would use to describe your commitment to carry out the mission of the gospel. If you feel comfortable, share with your group how they compare to Paul's words.

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.

Sitting With God: Plan for 10 minutes each day this week to be present to God. Set a timer if you need to, but don't bring anything else into this quiet space. Your body will want to fidget, and your mind will wander, but each time it does, redirect back to being present to God. Saying a phrase like "My soul is quiet before You, God" or "Christ be all around me" might help to focus on Him. The exercise is not so much about conquering 10 silent minutes as it is about redirecting your focus each time it wanders.

Meditating on Scripture: Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. As you read, try to put yourself in the scene Paul's describing. What does God want you to learn about His nature through this passage? What does He want to teach you about purposeful living? Close with a prayer of gratitude for this example to follow.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?

Next Week: Read Colossians 2:6-15

(Love Your Neighbor Ideas on next page)

Loving Your Neighbor

Ideas & Resources

Loving your neighbor doesn't have to be complicated or hard – it can even be fun!

All it takes is a willingness to change our patterns or plan ahead.

Here are some ideas and resources to get you started.

As a Life Group

A great way to build community as a Life Group while also impacting your neighborhood is to serve your neighbors together. We know that many of you will not live in the same neighborhood, and that's okay! Pick a neighborhood (perhaps the one you meet in) and love those neighbors.

1. As a group, take a prayer walk around the neighborhood.
2. Drop off treats (baked goods, candy, etc.) at 5 neighbor's houses on the street.
3. Hand out candy together on Halloween.
4. Fill up the neighborhood pantries in your area.
5. Pick up trash and debris around the neighborhood or in the neighborhood park.
6. Write uplifting Scripture in chalk in the driveway together to encourage those who walk by.
7. Throw a neighborhood block party/backyard party – click here for resources

Individually

If you're not in a life group, or if you want to serve those in your own neighborhood, here are some ideas!

1. Offer to mow a lawn or do some other outdoor/household chores.
2. Chat with your neighbors while outside doing chores.
3. Pray for your neighbors individually.
4. Meet a tangible need.
5. Give holiday gifts (Halloween is coming up!)
6. Take walks outside in the neighborhood – stop and say hello to your neighbors.
7. Check to see if there's a Facebook Group or join the Next-Door App & interact with your neighbors there!
8. Learn about your neighbors – Are there elderly or disadvantaged people that need help or community?