

Colossians 1:24-2:5 — What is the most powerful force in the world?

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Welcome to CrossWinds. If you are new, it is great to have you. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. As a church, we are studying through the book of Colossians.

Last week we covered the most famous verses in the first chapter. In these verses, Paul pulled back the curtain to reveal Jesus' true identity. We learned Jesus is the very image of God. While Jesus and God the Father are separate, they are in such lockstep with one another that to see Jesus is to see God. Jesus represents his father so flawlessly that looking at Jesus is to see the image of God like he was looking in a mirror. Jesus reflects an image of God as perfectly as the image you see in the bathroom mirror every morning that represents you. That is why the Bible says to see Jesus is to see God the Father.

We also learned Jesus existed before anything was created. Jesus created everything. While it was God the Father's will to create everything in Genesis, in John 1 and Hebrews 1, we learn it was Jesus who carried out his father's creative decrees. Jesus made everything on this planet, every insect and every animal. News flash: Nothing evolved. Jesus created everything.

Jesus also made the rest of the universe. He made every star in the sky. Every star was created by Jesus and placed in the sky by Jesus. That is a lot of work. There are more stars in the sky than grains of sand on our planet.

Jesus didn't just make every visible thing but he also made every invisible thing. Every angelic being in the universe was made by Jesus. You can't go higher than Jesus in this creation because Jesus made all of creation.

In addition, just as it was God the Father's idea to create this world but Jesus carried out the creation of the world, it was God the Father's idea to redeem the world from sin. Yet, Jesus is the one who carried it out by taking on a human body forever, dying on a cross for our sin and then rising from the grave.

Jesus' death and resurrection doesn't just forgive our sin and bring our spirits to God when we die, but one day we will get a resurrection body like Jesus' body. One day the power of Jesus' resurrection will not just restore our bodies from the grave but it will remake the earth and the entire universe to be free from sin. Jesus is No. 1. Jesus is No. 1 in creation because he existed before creation and he made creation. Jesus is No. 1 when it comes to restoring us to God, because the power of Jesus' resurrection is the only way for us to be restored to God, and Jesus' resurrection will ultimately restore the universe to be free from sin. This means Jesus is not a second-class deity or a good teacher or prophet.

Why does the good news of Jesus always appear to be losing ground?

We will spend a little extra time on this point because it is so important. The gospel of Jesus often appears to be weak. In fact, it often looks like it is losing ground. There are plenty of statistics describing the growth of Islam and the decline of the American church. It also appears that messengers of the gospel, like the apostle Paul, pastors, missionaries, plus you and me end up losing ground or suffering when we talk about Jesus. If the good news of Jesus is so powerful that it changes lives, why doesn't it appear to make better progress?

[Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I](#)

became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known... Colossians 1:24–25 (ESV)

The Colossians, who heard about the apostle Paul, had a question. Why was Paul in jail? They thought Jesus was in charge. It appears the Jews and Romans were more powerful than Jesus or Paul wouldn't be in jail.

Paul then made a very important point.

God spreads the gospel through the suffering of the servants of the gospel. God has chosen for the good news of Christ to spread through the suffering of those who preach Christ, not their victory. When Christians suffer, especially for talking about Jesus, that is normal. It is to be expected. Leaders in the ancient church suffered when they talked about Jesus. Leaders in the modern church should expect to suffer when they talk about Jesus. Let's look at how Paul explained this.

Paul said he rejoiced in his suffering for their sake because he was filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions for the church. What does that mean? Some people think it means Jesus' death on the cross was not sufficient to pay for our sin. Jesus didn't pay 90 percent, then Paul was filling up with his own sufferings for the remaining 10 percent of suffering that is needed to know God. Just so you know, that cannot be true. Paul just said in Colossians 1:21-22 that God reconciled us to himself by the death of Jesus. Jesus paid for all of our sin to present us holy and blameless before God.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him... Colossians 1:21–22 (ESV)

What was Paul talking about when he said he was filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions for his church? *Just as Jesus suffered to defeat sin and create the gospel message, his servants will suffer to defeat sin by the spreading of the gospel message.* Just as suffering was part of Jesus redeeming the world from sin, suffering is part of the spread of the gospel in the world. As Christians, especially when we are talking to other people about Jesus, we should expect to suffer. That is part of the way the church grows.

Let me show you a few more insights on this. As many of you know, Paul grew up as a Jew hating Christians. Then named Saul, he went out of his way to round them up and persecute Christians. In Acts 9, Jesus had a little appointment with Saul on the Damascus Road. The resurrected Jesus showed up and knocked Saul to his butt and said:

And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Acts 9:4–5 (ESV)

Saul was persecuting Christians, not Jesus. Why did Jesus take Saul's persecution so personally? Jesus so closely identifies with us that when the people of Christ are persecuted, Christ is persecuted. When Christians in the church are suffering, Christ is suffering. These sufferings of Christ are not suffering for salvation but if refers to the total amount of suffering Christ will experience through the lives of Christians in his church as they share about Jesus and spread the good news.

This is what Paul meant when he said he was filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions for his body, the church. Suffering for Jesus because we are talking about Jesus is what we call growing pains in the church.

The other thing to see is a little later in Acts 9 Jesus said this to Ananias, about the apostle Paul.

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” Acts 9:15–16 (ESV)

As God’s chosen servant to spread the gospel, in a big way, Paul needed to know he would suffer in a big way. We know Paul was shipwrecked, beaten with rods, five times given 40 lashes to bring him within an inch of death, stoned and left to dead. There is a long list in 2 Corinthians 11.

So the Bible tells us if you are going to do a lot of spreading of the gospel, expect to do a lot of suffering for the gospel. That is called Christian growing pains.

It has always worked this way.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Acts 5:41 (ESV)

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake... Philippians 1:29 (ESV)

The suffering we face as we share about Jesus won’t just be direct physical persecution. It may be physical sickness. It may be family breakdown. It may be a financial meltdown. Paul had a thorn in his flesh. Sometimes the suffering we face for sharing about Jesus may be indirect, instead of direct.

While we are on the topic of suffering, since it is an important topic in each of our lives, let’s take a minute to talk about how it is misunderstood. One of the things that gets me extremely frustrated is something called the prosperity gospel and prosperity preachers. They tell you that if you have faith and love the Lord, you’re going to have lots of money, health and everything is going to go well for

you. If you are sick, it must be because you are outside of God's will. You just need to have enough faith for God to cure you. If you are not cured, it is because you didn't have enough faith. It is your fault if you die of cancer.

That is such a terrible trick to play on people. If someone is sick, you turn to God and plead for his mercy, but he may not heal you. God has reasons why he lets us suffer, even if we can't understand them. Sometimes he lets us suffer to grow us in Christ. Sometimes we suffer to get us places we normally wouldn't be without our suffering. Paul shared the gospel in Rome because he was brought there in chains. The whole palace guard in Rome heard about Jesus because Paul ended up in Rome in chains. You see, God had a good plan for Paul's suffering.

Our suffering may even end in death if God has decided that our time on the chessboard of life is up. Remember that for Christians, death is the better end, not the bitter end. It is hard for those left behind but for those who die, they pass into the arms of Jesus which Paul says is better by far.

Sometimes when people suffer, they think God is discipling them. They start to go through their lives to try to find anything God may be discipling them over. It is true that God sometimes uses suffering to break us from sin, but many times the suffering we face is not for our discipline, it is for our good. One of the most terrifying things out there is what is called the passive wrath of God. God's passive wrath means he will leave you healthy and content with everything going perfectly in your life all the way up to judgment. That is God's passive wrath. When everything goes well, we don't turn to Christ. We don't grow in Christ. We

may even fall away from Christ. God, in his grace, will allow suffering into our lives to tear out of our hand the myth that we are in control and we can handle life on our own. Suffering teaches us to depend on Jesus. Suffering is sometimes the most merciful thing God can do. Suffering teaches us to seek God's mercy and depend on him every day.

Don't be discouraged. As a Christian, expect suffering. The more we tell people about Jesus, the more suffering we will face, but that is the way the church grows.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted... 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

Why is this gospel a new thing not an ancient thing?

...the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:26–27 (ESV)

Paul called the good news of Jesus a mystery.

What is this mystery? When we see the word mystery, it bring to mind the program, Unsolved Mysteries. That is not what mystery means in the Bible. *A mystery is something that was always part of God's plan in the Old Testament but it was hidden from people. No one could figure it out until God revealed it.* In the New Testament, God revealed many of his Old Testament mysteries. That is why it is called a mystery. A biblical mystery is something nobody can figure out unless God tells them.

A great example of a mystery of God hidden in the Old Testament but also revealed in the Old Testament is seen in Daniel 2. In this chapter, Daniel was in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a massive statue with a head of

gold, chest and arms of silver, middle and thighs of bronze and feet iron mixed with clay. In the dream, a stone not cut out by human hands that struck the base of the statue, destroyed it then expanded to fill the earth. Nebuchadnezzar demanded his wise men interpret the dream but he refused to tell them the dream. Things were not going well because God was the only one who knew the dream.

Finally, Daniel heard of the situation and sought God in prayer asking that God would tell him the dream and the interpretation of the dream. God did. Look at what language was used.

Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel 2:19 (ESV)

God revealed this mystery to Daniel in a dream. A mystery is something only God knows and no man can figure it out on his own.

This is why Paul said Jesus was the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. Just as nobody could figure out Nebuchadnezzar's dream unless God intervened, in the same way, nobody can figure out the significance of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done unless God intervenes to tell us, like he did for Paul. Just as Daniel was chosen by God to know the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Paul and the apostles were chosen by God to know the mystery of Jesus' life and death and to share that mystery with the ancient world. That is because nobody can figure a mystery out on his or her own.

Today, we are chosen by God to share the mystery of Jesus with the world. Nobody will figure out the significance of Jesus unless we speak, just as

nobody would understand the mystery of Jesus unless Paul spoke and Daniel spoke.

Nobody will know about him and become a Christian unless we tell them. Next Paul is going to talk about the contents of this mystery.

Jesus is not just for the Jews but the Gentiles.

Today, we have racial tensions. Black football players won't stand for the anthem as a way of protesting white cops. We have the KKK and the neo-Nazis hating the blacks. We have Black Lives Matter groups hating the whites. If we think black and white tensions are tough, the tensions between the Jews and the Gentiles were much worse in the ancient world. There was deep hatred between them. In 70 A.D. the Romans became so frustrated with the Jews they ransacked Jerusalem and killed 1.1 million Jews in the city, most of them unarmed ordinary citizens like you and me. The blood ran in the streets like a river. Why did they do this? They hated the Jews.

Here is what makes this story such an amazing mystery. God's plan was not just for Jesus to die to be the savior of the Jewish people but to be the savior of all people. This was not something that was obvious in the Old Testament. This was a mystery revealed by God. Nobody will know this unless we tell them.

The other part of the mystery is that Jesus didn't just die to save Jews and Gentiles but Jesus died to live in us and be with us. Nobody could guess this. The one who made the world, the one who holds the world together every day, the one who will redeem the entire world's desires to live inside of us, irrespective of our ethnic or racial background. Think about this. The one who created and

sustains the universe is inside of you when you trust in Jesus. He changes your thinking. He changes your desires. He changes the way you parent. He gives you patience when you are tired and life feels overwhelming. He gives you peace when life is filled with anxiety. The spirit of Jesus Christ is alive in you! This is a mystery. Nobody could figure out that God wants to come live in us on our own. God needed to tell us. We need to tell other people.

How should we treat the gospel message?

As a servant of God entrusted with this mystery, he tells us how we treat this mystery. This is the way Paul lived and it is a challenge to us who are now servants with the same message.

...Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. Colossians 1:28–29 (ESV)

We are to proclaim him.

The word proclaim means to publicly declare a completed event. This is what Paul did with Jesus. He publicly told people about Jesus. Remember that Jesus is a mystery of God. You can't figure it out any other way than somebody telling you. This is what we are to do not just in the church but in the community, tell people about Jesus.

We are to warn everyone.

This is not popular today but it is necessary today. We need to warn people about the consequences of facing the day of judgment without Jesus. This is not because we hate them but because we love them. The Bible has a lot of warnings.

We teach everyone to mature them in Christ.

This is opening the Bible and helping people learn about Christ and what God has done for us through him. Paul said he works hard to teach people about Jesus so they don't stay continual baby Christians.

Paul's goal is to present everyone mature in Christ. That is our goal. Like Paul, we are stewards of the good news of Jesus.

We are to work hard at telling others about Jesus.

How much energy did Paul put into teaching, warning and telling people about Jesus? He didn't work casually. He worked really hard. He literally said he worked to the point of weariness and exhaustion. The word strives means he struggled like an athlete. It is used to describe the kind of struggles that takes place in winning an athletic competition. You give it your best. Paul said that is the kind of effort he put into sharing Jesus.

So we are servants of God, like Paul, and we are entrusted with the most powerful force on the planet. The good news of Jesus is not just for Jews. It is for all people. It is that the God of the universe wants to come and live in you and make you into a completely new person that is like Jesus. Since we are entrusted with this message, we do our best to tell it to people publicly and privately. We warn people, and we teach people with the goal of presenting them mature in Christ. The more mature anyone is in Jesus, the happier they will be. So we work really hard knowing we will one day answer to God for how we have done with the mystery he has entrusted into our hands.

What are the results of maturing in Christ?

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2:1-5 (ESV)

Then Paul moved from the general truths he taught us about what it means to be a servant of God entrusted with the mystery of Christ and he applied them to the Colossians as he told them what would happen in their lives as they matured in Christ. These are the same things that will happen in our lives when we mature in Jesus too.

Our hearts will be encouraged by Christ.

Has anybody found life to be hard? Life is hard because we lose those we love. Life is hard because work is long and the money often doesn't seem to be enough. Life is hard when it comes to raising children. They say everyone needs a little encouragement. The most encouraging thing any one of us can experience is to mature in Christ. Having Christ living inside of us transforms our character to be more like Jesus so when we get depressed, we can call out to God in prayer and the Holy Spirit gives us peace that surpasses understanding.

I love you. I know many of you face hard circumstances. I want to encourage you. The best encouragement I can give you is to grow in knowing Jesus better by reading his word, prayer and through the church. You will find Christ encouraging you through the tough times in life. They will not overwhelm

you but Christ will carry you through as you understand more about how much he loves you and you have peace in your heart from his presence in your life.

We will be knit together in love.

Everybody needs somebody that loves them. They say we are the most connected generation with technology but we are the most disconnected in genuine relationships. Everybody desperately wants a family. They want a group of people that genuinely care about them.

I have good news for you. There is a family that really cares about you. It is your church family. Is the church family perfect? Of course not. Does the family occasionally mess up and prove unloving? Yes. Those offenses are rarely intended. When Christ lives in us and starts to remake us, the spirit of Christ in us knits us together as Christians into a family. The best day of the week becomes Sunday because you love hanging out with other Christians. This incredible sense of family across age lines, racial lines, gender lines all because of Jesus is a result of Christ in us and maturing in Christ. This is why it is important to mature in Christ.

We gain true riches.

Some people are financially wealthy. Some people are wealthy with children. One of the greatest riches of all is a full understanding of God's mystery in Jesus, who we are in Christ and what God has done for us in Christ. The more we understand how much God loves us and how nothing can take us out of God's hands, the richer we are. God's plan for us in the future is to bless us beyond our imagination. It is not because we deserve it but because we are to be

a grand demonstration to the entire universe of what it looks like for God to give the greatest amount of mercy, kindness and blessing to the most undeserving and wretched beings in the universe. For all eternity, our purpose is to be a grand demonstration of God's undeserved love. The more we grow in understanding who we are in Christ, the richer we become. Everyone else runs around in fear of eternity. We have no fear of eternity, because we have Christ who takes away our fear, because he takes away our sin.

We are filled with wisdom and knowledge.

This is a swipe at some of the false teachers in Colossae who said you needed special knowledge and insider passwords to know God. Paul said all of God's secrets are no longer secret. They are all found in Christ. There is nothing else after Christ. There is another way we should understand this. Who in this world wants to be wise? Who in this world wants to make good decisions? I don't think any of us like to act like fools. One of the great benefits of knowing Christ and maturing in Christ is God helps us live wise lives. Christ helps us think clearly and see things wisely. The more we pursue knowing Jesus by reading God's Word, by prayer and by corporate worship, the wiser we become as parents. We become wiser in raising our kids. We become wiser in how we spend our money. We become wiser in how we spend our time. We become wiser in trying to make wise decisions for our future. The best thing we can do to be wise in this life is pursue Jesus.

[The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge... Proverbs 1:7 \(ESV\)](#)

[For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding... Proverbs 2:6 \(ESV\)](#)

While growing in Christ is full of benefits, the danger is letting yourself be deceived away from Christ.

Watch out for persuasive sounding arguments that take you away from Jesus.

Remember that Jesus made the world. Jesus' resurrection is the only way to eternal life. Our only hope for this life is Jesus. Whatever you do, don't let anyone take you away from him no matter how smooth his or her speech sounds. Anything that takes you away from pursuing Jesus, his Word, prayer and growing in understanding of all that God has done for us is not good. How does this work? Satan loves to use persuasive speech to create doubts in our minds.

In the Garden of Eden, this is how Satan worked. Satan said to Eve, "Did God really say you can't eat of the fruit from the tree in the center of the Garden?" He also said, "God is just holding you back because he knows that when you eat of the tree you will become like him knowing good and evil." Satan used persuasive speech to create doubt in Eve's mind about the truth of God's word and the goodness of God's intentions. Satan does the same thing today. We will constantly hear "You can't trust the truth of the Bible and the full forgiveness you have through Jesus."

Conclusion

This morning, we looked at how the amazing truth of Jesus spreads. It spreads by our words, because nobody can figure it out on his or her own. The truth of Jesus is a mystery of God that nobody can discover on his or her own. When we tell others about Jesus, expect we may suffer. God has always chosen

to spread his Word through the suffering of his servants, rather than their power and victory.



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