

The Ministry Mindset That Changes Everything

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Date: 10 September 2023

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[0 : 00] Our reading this morning is from Colossians chapter 1, starting to read at verse 9, and it's on page 1182 in your pew Bibles. Colossians chapter 1, and beginning to read at verse 9.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And at verse 24, now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you. I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end, I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Chapter 3, verse 15. So let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace, and be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and through psalms and hymns and songs from the spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. This is the word of the Lord.

Good morning, St. Silas. Thanks, Ruth, for reading that for us. And my name is Martin Ayres. If we've not met, I'm the lead pastor here, and we're going to look at Colossians. That's why we had a few readings there. It'd be really helpful just to have your Bibles open at Colossians as we look at that together. Our regular diet as a church is to take books of the Bible and work through them chapter by chapter. At the moment, in our morning sermons, we're in a series in 1 Corinthians. But actually, from time to time, it can be helpful to look at a theme in the Bible, and we're doing that today with this idea of Vision Sunday. So we're just going to have a one-off sermon this morning, and likewise this evening, thinking about what God calls us to as his people. So that's where we are in Colossians. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful.

[5 : 00] Let's pray, and let's ask for God's help. Heavenly Father, we praise you for your big plan for the world, for your wisdom, for your deliberateness in your creation and redemption. And we ask, Lord, that you would open our ears to hear your voice this morning, open our minds to understand and know you better, and open our hearts to respond rightly. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

So for lots of us, this time of year is a new start. Lots of us think of this as a new year. Maybe you've had a time over the summer where you had an opportunity to reflect a bit on how you're spending your time and where your life's going. Maybe you went up a mountain, and you were looking down from a mountaintop. Or you were on a paddleboard, drifting out to sea, and it was a chance to take stock. Maybe you were lying on a beach, thinking, what's my life really all about? What am I aiming for? I spoke to a friend some time ago who had done that over the summer, and said, I've realized that I'm really busy, but I'm not busy doing the things that I really want to be aiming for in life.

I need to recalibrate where I'm spending my time and energy. It's good to ask, what's my real purpose in life? And also, how does church fit in with that purpose? Is church something that I feel a sense that I should really go to, but actually is on the periphery of what I'm really driving for in life? These are big questions. And today on Vision Sunday, we're thinking about God's agenda for his people. We're going to be based in Colossians most of the time, this letter written by the Apostle Paul to a church that he'd never met, but he'd heard about, that they'd become Christians.

And we've got some questions on the sheet to help us as we think about our vision for this season. The first is, where are we in Christ? Where are we? What Paul says of these Christians in Colossae is wonderfully true this morning for each of us who was turned back to God through Jesus. He says in chapter 1, we are secure in Christ. Secure. Have a look with me at verse 13.

For he, Jesus, has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Maybe you're here this morning and you think you're not a very good Christian. You're making a mess of it. Paul writes to say, if you're trusting Jesus, secure. Secure in him. Formerly, before you heard about Christ, he says to them, and for us, if there was a formerly in our life, before we knew Jesus, it was like a hostage situation.

[8 : 02] You were in the dominion of darkness and there was no way out. Now, rescued. Jesus grabbed you and he pulled you out of that dominion and into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of the Son.

Verse 14, redeemed in Christ. Maybe you're here this morning and you feel worthless. Secure in Christ, Colossians says, that Jesus bought you and to him you were worth the price of his own life to buy you back, redeemed. Maybe you're here this morning and you just feel rubbish.

You look at how you're living and you think, it's rubbish. He says, verse 14, forgiven. Forgiven in Christ, the forgiveness of sins. Jesus wipes everything away. God sees you as clean, without blemish. Reconciled in Christ. Verse 21, he says, once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. Then two big words, beginning of verse 22, but now, but now, he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. From enemies to friends with God. He's made everything right, secure in Christ. And no one can accuse you because Jesus has paid for everything. Maybe you're here this morning and you feel overwhelmed, too busy. How can you get through what you face? Too much going on this week. The gospel messages, the one verdict on your life that really matters, God's verdict, does not depend on your to-do list this week, on your achievements. The gospel message is, you are holy, a friend of God, forgiven, redeemed, restored in Christ, secure. It's extraordinary.

He goes on to describe the mystery now revealed in the gospel, the news about Jesus. At the end of verse 27, he says, it's Christ in you, the hope of glory. So maybe this morning you feel pessimistic. You feel in despair. You've not got anything to look forward to. Well, today is a great day if you're a Christian because it's a day with Jesus, a day when Christ is in you. And it's a great day because you're a day closer to the hope of glory, the day one will be with Jesus forever.

Guaranteed earned by Jesus. Maybe you're here this morning, you're just looking. You're figuring out for yourself what you think of Jesus. Well, the gospel message is that all of those benefits can be yours if you trust him. Would you do that this morning if you've not done that before and find security in Christ? Today would be a great day to do that. So folks, this is where we are. It's who we are.

[11 : 08] It's extraordinary good news. So how did we get here? That's our next question. How did we get here? Well, Paul the Apostle says it's through hearing the word of God about Jesus. Chapter 1, verse 5. He writes to these Colossians. He's heard about their faith. He's thankful for it. He says it's the faith and love, verse 5, that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who was a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf and who also told us of your love in the spirit.

So the gospel is the momentous news about who Jesus is and what he has done. It's momentous. And every Christian needs an Epaphras. The news about Jesus reached Epaphras. We don't know how.

Maybe he heard Paul sharing the news about Jesus. But that news, it just flowed out of him. He went to Colossae. He told people about Jesus, that he died for sins and risen to rule. And some people received that news with faith in the gospel. And they became who Paul says they now are, raised with Christ, reconciled to God through him, citizens of the kingdom of light. It's so simple, isn't it? The way people are given new life by God, resurrection life, is they meet an ordinary believer in Jesus, an Epaphras. And the news about Jesus flows out from them and they receive it. And as they receive it, Jesus in his resurrection power transfers them from the dominion of darkness into his kingdom, the kingdom of light. How did we get here? Someone brought the word of God about Jesus to us.

That's how we got here, to be secure. What happens next? Our third point this morning, third question, where are we going? Where are we going then? As St. Silas, we love the news about Jesus. We love a good baptism, don't we? When there's a baptism, we love that. Someone comes to the front, they usually share their story with Jesus. They're like a trophy of God's goodness, as we hear how they came to know Jesus for themselves. We love that. But a letter like this, Colossians, reminds us that the Christian life is actually an ongoing story with Jesus that just begins with what baptism portrays. It's about growth to maturity. It's why our vision statement on our banner up there, reach, grow, send, it's not just reach, send. It's not just, are you saved? Great, now go and tell more people. Are they saved? Great, let's send them. It's about growing. Jesus wants his people to grow.

And so once Paul has explained in chapter one how he's thankful for the Colossians, thanking God, he moves on from verse nine to tell them what he's praying for them. And the transformation, have a look at verse nine. The transformation starts with knowing God's plan. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we've not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.

[14 : 44] And the result of growing in that spiritual wisdom and understanding starts with a headline in verse 10. The result, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way. So that's what maturity looks like as a disciple of Jesus. We are filled with knowledge of God and we let that truth reshape our lives so that we live a life that pleases God. And Paul then gives a description of what that looks like. He kind of adds color to this idea of living to please God from verse 10. Bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. So it's a fruitful life. And then Paul describes the kind of mature Christian character behind that fruit from verse 11. Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience. So not that the Christian life becomes easy. There will be affliction. There will be suffering. There will be sin.

Endurance and patience marking the mature Christian. They're not shaken by affliction. They endure. But it's not stoic. It's not kind of grim faced until heaven. Because look at verse 12.

And giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. So this is the TJ Maxx verse. In the UK you might have been to the shop. TK Maxx. In America it's actually even called TJ Maxx. Okay. So TK Maxx. We think TJ Maxx. As a Christian. Thanksgiving and joy. Maximum thanksgiving and joy. TJ Maxx. Here in Colossians. The mature Christian Christian. TJ Maxx. If the Apostle Paul heard your story with Jesus. If he heard how you came to know Jesus. I take it this is what he would start praying for you in your life. He'd be ambitious.

He'd say I'm going to pray this for you now. Chapter 1 verses 9 to 12. He wants the church in Colossae transformed to maturity in Christ. And this is God's purpose for our lives. It's his agenda. What's God's will for my life? Here it is. So the natural next question is. Well what do we need to get there? We were rescued. We were transferred into the kingdom of the Son by hearing the word of Christ. What do we need now?

To grow. And the answer is more of Christ. In Christ we have everything we could ever need. Chapter 1 verse 28. Paul describes his ministry. He's talking about Jesus here. He Christ is the one we proclaim.

[17 : 33] Proclaim. Admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. I expect him in verse 28 to say Jesus is the one we proclaim so that everyone may be saved. He says he proclaims Jesus so that everyone may be presented fully mature in Christ. That's what we need.

to grow to maturity. And then look at the ways that he emphasizes. The beginning of chapter 2 how the word of God about Jesus is everything we need. He says verse 2 of chapter 2.

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now when Paul talks there about a mystery, it's like an Agatha Christie novel after you've finished it. When Paul talks about a mystery, it means something that was a mystery, but it's now been revealed. And when you read, before Jesus came, as you read the scriptures, there was mystery. And then as Jesus comes and we look back and we read God's word in light of Jesus, that mystery has been revealed in him. So that mystery is Christ in the scriptures. And here, did you see the lavish generosity? If we were to ask ourselves this morning, do you want to be rich? How about fully rich with the full riches of complete understanding?

Verse 2, Paul says, go to Christ. Do you want to find treasure? Wouldn't it be good to find treasure? I'd love to find some treasure. Well, not just any treasure, full treasure. Verse 3, he says, go to Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So the way on in the Christian life is the same as the way in, growing up in the word of God about Jesus. And this is where the language comes from our vision statement that we're focusing on this year of helping each other learn Christ. Learning Christ, Jesus called his followers his disciples. And a disciple is just a learner, a student of Jesus. To learn Christ is to see truth in him and learn truth from him and to be reshaped in our lives by that truth. It's not kind of just head knowledge learning, it's transformational learning. So we could picture everyone in our church and everyone around us as somewhere on the journey in the diagram on the sheets. It's on the screen as well, hopefully, coming on the screen.

But on the sheets there, that people are in the domain of darkness without Jesus. At some stage, they are engaged with a Christian who speaks to them about Jesus. They hear the gospel.

[20 : 32] If they believe the message, they are transferred into the kingdom of the Son. And from then on, our lives are a journey towards maturity in Christ. And God's agenda, by his spirit at work in our lives, is that as we hear the word of God about Jesus continually, we will grow. We have what we need.

So our fourth question then, how do we get there? How do we go through this process of transformation? Well, one essential way of growing to maturity is through prayer, because it's the Spirit's work.

And let's remember that it was the Apostle Paul's prayer that we read out from chapter one. He's praying that the Spirit will bring about that growth to maturity in Christians.

But the Holy Spirit uses means for his purposes. And wonderfully, the means we see in Colossians are other Christians who draw alongside us, and they speak God's word to us. So in chapter one, we've seen Paul did that in his ministry, verse 28. Christ is the one we proclaim. And look at the words he uses, and let's just keep them in our heads for a moment. He says, Christ is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. And then let's just turn over the page to chapter three, and look at what he calls every believer in the Colossian church to do in verse 16. He says, let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. So there's the TJ Maxx, the kind of the thanksgiving and joy overflowing in song. How does it happen? Well, as well as Paul the Apostle proclaiming Christ and teaching and admonishing with all wisdom, he urges them and calls them to do that for one another in the Christian life. Not just the church leader, Christians, brothers and sisters for one another. So folks, this is the vision. We want to be a church that reaches out and grows in our knowledge and love of God and is sent out as God's people. And our focus today is on how good it is that we can all be involved in that project, God's project, God's agenda to grow his people. As we speak to each other about God, helpfully and relevantly, so that people around us look to Jesus more and they trust him and they listen to him and they let their lives be reshaped by him, we are being used by God for his agenda for his people. Now some of that will be formal. We might ask someone at church if they want to meet up with us regularly to open the Bible one-to-one. And in August we had midweek meetings looking to equip more people to do that. We want you to feel confident to be able to do that with a friend. Lots of this though will be informal as we aim in coffee time after the service to get beyond the conversation about the weather, the football, the rugby and cross the pain barrier and ask someone, so what did you think of the sermon this morning? Or suppose someone says in a conversation that they're struggling with parenting, their children are driving them crazy, they keep messing it up, or they're worried about something at work. And in the midst of sympathy and care and concern, could we ask them, well what can I pray about that? What are you praying? How are you praying about that? Or someone says they're worried about something at work and later that day we text them to say thanks for sharing that with me, I'm praying for you. And we share a Bible verse with them that we find encouraging for us when we're worried. To see the Holy Spirit at work through you in this year, to be involved in God's big agenda of growing disciples. You don't need a formal title at church, you just have to be willing to speak to people in ordinary conversation about the Lord.

And I hope that you've experienced that in your own life personally and how helpful that can be. I was at the Keswick Convention this summer, week three, next year week three, that's the week to be there. And I was there and I bumped into a guy that I haven't spoken to for at least 10 years. But I can remember, and I reminded him, I can remember lunch with him nearly 20 years ago in London, I was struggling with something as a Christian. He just shared with me something about his own faith in Jesus.

[25 : 40] I would say it was life-changing. It was so encouraging for me. Just a guy in the church, just ordinary conversation about how it works for him as a Christian. So helpful.

This is being called the ministry mindset that changes everything. Here in Colossians 3, in Ephesians 4 tonight, in Hebrews 3, in Hebrews 10, there's various parts of the New Testament where God calls us, invites us to move from the ministry of the few to the ministry of the pew.

Now apparently in Cantonese, there is difficulty with what a pew is. Joanne has put a picture on your sheets. So a pew, you know, because we don't have pews anymore. No, not you guys. People who are Cantonese speaking have Joanne's sheet. So a pew, you know, we used to have pews in here before my time, okay? And everyone would come and they sit in a pew and they, at its worst, I'm not saying it was the pew's fault, that people would come and it was all about the ministry of the few. And what we want in church life is to move from the ministry of the few to the ministry of the many, the ministry of the pew, that we come to church knowing that every member is involved in ministry. It means, it's an unfortunate thing in Scotland that we often call the church leader the minister. There's a good reason for that because the word minister just means servant and it's to remind everyone and them that they're not there to kind of lord it over people. They are a servant. At the same time, the danger is we fall into thinking that the minister is the one guy who does all the ministry around here.

And it means as well, this mentality, this mindset, that for a church to be healthy, faithful sermons on a Sunday are necessary but they're not enough on their own. We don't go to church to get a sermon hit and then head home on our own. I remember a guy who used to come here regularly and he stopped coming and he drifted and I met up with him to try and work out what was going on and see if I could encourage him. He said to me, I just don't see the need to be at church on a Sunday in this day and age. I can listen to better preaching on a podcast at a better time in the week for me. What would you say to that if that was someone's attitude towards church so they don't think they need to come? Sometimes we can think of being part of a church a bit like going to watch a football team, a match, and it's as though we as the congregation are in the stands. We're the spectators and we've come to watch the staff team. They're the players and they just run around looking increasingly exhausted as we kind of cheer them on with a bit of singing. But the Bible's picture of the pastor teachers of a church is much more that they're just like player coaches and that the people playing the Christian life, that's everyone. Everyone is engaged in the work of ministry, serving Christ together. And an obvious reason why this is such a good thing is that I am limited as a pastor. I am weak and that is true of everyone on our church staff team. We are limited and weak. We are inadequate to, on our own, help everyone learn Christ. Sometimes I wake up in the night worried about one of you, about someone here, or maybe someone who's not here. What's going on spiritually in someone's life? And I can't get back to sleep. You know, someone's, I know they've made foolish choices or they've not been to church recently. They seem to be drifting. What does someone in that situation need? Well, me praying for them at five in the morning may well help them because God is a big God who answers prayer. What they need though is a church where the culture is we're helping each other learn Christ. So they've got a mate who actually catches up with them. Not me, someone in their small group, someone who's met them on a Sunday, drops them a line and says, do you want to meet up? I've not seen you for a few weeks. Is everything okay? What's going on?

The Christian writer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote a book called Life Together and he said this, I've put, it's a long quote this, but I've, I've put it on the screen for us to follow. He, he wrote this mid-20th century, early 20th century. He said this, the Christian lives wholly by the truth of God's word in Jesus Christ.

[30 : 23] But God has put this word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the word, he speaks it to others. God has willed it that we should seek him and find his living word in the witness of a brother in the mouth of a man. Therefore, a Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged. For by himself, he cannot help himself.

He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother.

And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community. They meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. You see what he's saying? By ourselves, we hear God's word and we doubt.

But a Christian friend shares what's encouraging them and Christ in them encourages us. By ourselves, we read God's word and we disobey. We ignore it. But then a Christian friend lovingly holds us to account and brings correction and we grow. So as we think about a new year in the life of our church where new people are arriving in Glasgow, new people are visiting, how helpful to be reminded of our role and our value, how helpful to be reminded of our lives.

Some of us might feel daunted about new arrivals. We're conscious that we've just got used to a few people naturally moving on over the summer to different places. But it's wonderful that we can be concerned to see others grow and God is pleased to involve us in his agenda for their lives. And as we look to help other people mature, it's one of the best things we can do for ourselves as well.

[32 : 27] Christian maturity is looking more and more like Jesus. And Paul reminds us of the pattern of Jesus' life just back in chapter 1 verse 19. Let me just read that for us again. Chapter 1 verse 19.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ, in the Son, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. As we reflect on what the God-man gave in order to reconcile people to God, surely we never look more like him than when we use our time and our resources and our gifts and our words to serve others so that they can be saved and they can grow. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your agenda for our lives in your goodness and generosity, full riches through the full wisdom from the Lord Jesus Christ. We praise you for him.

We ask that your spirit will equip us for all you call us to, that the peace of Christ will rule in our hearts and the message of Christ will dwell among us richly in the weeks ahead as we teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and that whatever we do, we will do in the name of Christ.

Lord, would you grow us to maturity in him, for we ask in his name. Amen.