

How to Have it All

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Preacher: Jack Strain

[0 : 0 0] Right, hello again. My name's Jack, I'm a ministry trainee here at St Silas. Let me pray for God's help as we start.

Father God, thank you that we can gather to listen to your word this evening. Please help us to be listening carefully to what you have to say, and please transform us more and more into the image of your son Jesus.

Amen. Here is our question for this evening. What do we need to grow as Christians? If we want to be full, healthy, mature Christians, what do we need?

Maybe this is your very first Sunday at St Silas, and if it is, welcome. Perhaps you've been settling into halls or into a new flat. You've been meeting colleagues or housemates, figuring out who you're going to be friends with and how you're going to spend your time.

All of the decisions that come with moving to a new place and shaping your new life. When it comes for deciding for the sort of church you want and for the sort of Christian things that you want to do, what are you looking for?

[1 : 1 9] What do you need to thrive and flourish and grow as a Christian while you are in Glasgow? Or maybe you're in a completely different situation to that.

Maybe you're not new. You've been here at St Silas for a while. And you've been coming along on Sundays for years. You're in a roots group or a growth group. And lately you've just been feeling just a bit flat as a Christian.

It feels a bit mundane, a bit stale. You feel like you've stagnated. And it's all become a bit boring and a bit samey. And sometimes you might catch yourself thinking, what if there's something I'm missing?

Is this it? What do I need to continue to grow? The Colossians, who have been reading about Paul's relationship with them in the past few weeks, the letter we're in, the Colossians, they are new Christians.

They have heard the gospel, the good news about Jesus and his death for them, and they have believed it. And since they have started as Christian, it appears like there's all sorts of Christians, there's all sorts of options for them to start to choose from.

[2 : 3 1] People are offering them all sorts of things that are going to take them further on, going to make them better Christians. Christians who have a kind of richer, a fuller experience.

Christians who are more mature. People who will be saying to them, well, you've made a great start with this Jesus thing, but now you need something more if you really want to experience God.

If you want to be really spiritual, you need to move on to the next thing. Jesus was great when you started, but what's the next step? And Paul is writing to them.

He hasn't met them in person. He's only heard about them from someone else. And he's writing from hundreds of miles away. And he's writing from hundreds of miles away to make a case that the Jesus that they have heard about, he is the option that they need to stick with.

If they want to grow, they need to stick with the Jesus they have already heard about. Because in that Jesus, they have absolutely everything.

[3 : 41] And how is he going to convince them about this? Well, that's a passage we're in tonight. He wants them to know about his ministry. So we're focusing on verses 24 to 29.

He wants them to know about his ministry so that they know that they have everything. And they don't need to go anywhere else. So we're going to see three things about Paul's ministry and think about why we need to stick with it as well.

And so the first thing I want us to see is that Paul is completing Christ's work. If you have a note, take a type. It's our first heading. Paul is completing Christ's work.

Paul, he's a man with a job. And he describes himself there in verse 25 as a servant by the commission of God.

Paul's job is to complete Christ's work. He is finishing what Jesus started. But I think we should just take a minute there because if you're a believer in Jesus with any sense, I think that will immediately sound wrong.

[4 : 51] In fact, I'd almost be worried if you were not immediately suspicious of that statement. Because do you see what it says about Jesus's work? It says that Jesus's work is not complete.

That Jesus's work was not finished when Jesus died and was resurrected and taken up into heaven. It wasn't done. It wasn't complete.

So before you start writing worried emails to Martin about employing loose cannons, or before you leave St. Silas because we've clearly gone off the rails and lost the plot, bear with me for a moment.

And let me try and show you that from the Bible. We always hope that you're checking what we say by the Bible anyway. Have a look at verse 24. They're on the sheets. Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and 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.

Do you see what he says there in verse 24? Something is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions. The word afflictions just means suffering. Perhaps we wouldn't be using the word afflictions.

[6 : 11] You know, I was really afflicted at university today or really afflicted at work. But something is lacking in Christ's suffering for his people. And Christ suffered on the cross.

And why did he suffer? He suffered to do something for us. You can see that there in the verse as well. Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body. Christ suffered to do something for people.

His suffering was not without purpose. It was not wasted. Well, I guess we need to ask ourselves the question, what is his work that Christ did for his body?

Because we won't understand what Paul is doing unless we understand what Jesus does. So we've included verses 21 to 23 on the top there. So just take a look. Grab the sheet of paper again.

Look at verse 21. Actually, I mean verse... Yeah, I mean verse 21. Yeah. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

[7 : 15] But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight without blemish and free from accusation.

So what was Jesus' work? Jesus' work takes us from being God's enemies. Enemies of God because of our evil behavior to being his friends. That is what the word reconciled means.

And he has washed us. Washed us clean from all of the things that we have done wrong. To offend God and that brought his right anger against us. And he makes us completely blameless and completely clean.

That is what Christ suffered to do for people all over the world. People like us who were God's enemies to make us right with him. But without Paul, Christ's work is unfinished.

I've been in Scotland for about a... Living in Scotland for about a year. I grew up in the south of England. And in the past year, I've basically come to realize, I've come to accept that I am a foreigner.

[8 : 22] And the way that I know I'm a foreigner is that the bus drivers can't understand what I'm saying. So what do foreigners do when they're in other countries? They become tourists, I think.

It's like a tourist phase that you have to get through. And the tourist capital of Scotland, and someone could correct me afterwards if I'm wrong, seems to be Edinburgh. It's more like the tourist shops are where you can go and buy your...

buy a tartan or whatever. And one touristy thing to do in Edinburgh is to walk up hills. That seems like a genuine kind of Scottish pastime anyway, but it's also a touristy Scottish pastime.

And there's a hill in Edinburgh which has a half-finished bit of kind of Greek-looking architecture on the top of it. I'm sure if you've been to Edinburgh, you've seen it. It's literally just some pillars with a bit of stone on top of it.

A bit like these ones here. Yeah, I'm sure you'll know the thing if you've been there. Anyway, I went there, I saw it, I had no idea what it was. I did some Googling and discovered that it's called the National Monument of Scotland.

[9 : 23] Pretty cool National Monument. It's got quite a weird story behind it. Apparently, it was supposed to be like a kind of, to look like the Greek Parthenon on top of the Acropolis in Athens.

To be a Scottish Valhalla for Scottish troops who died in the Napoleonic Wars. And to commemorate for the rest of history the sacrifice of Scottish soldiers and sailors who bravely laid down their lives for their country.

So anyway, when they started building it, they said they only needed like 42,000 pounds. This was in the 19th century. They had a big ceremony, laid the foundation stone and then promptly ran out of money three years later and stopped building it when all the cash had run out.

So yeah, it's called Edinburgh's Folly or something or a disgrace. I think people called it at the time. So instead of being a stirring piece of patriotic architecture, an incentive for future heroism, it's really just a monument to poor planning.

And without Paul, that is kind of what Jesus' work was like. A great idea. The work was started, it should ultimately be finished and it's a terrible shame the job wasn't done because the initial plan was fantastic.

[10 : 42] I'm now going to quickly clarify what I don't mean by saying that Christ's work wasn't complete. I feel that's important when saying this. What I don't mean was that Christ's death on the cross to take God's anger, God's anger is our sin, that was, in a way, it's not enough to ensure that we are completely forgiven by God and to bring us peace with God.

Christ's death does forgive us our sin and brings us, makes us, makes peace between us and God. It was completely enough for that. That's not what I'm saying. But there is something that Christ hasn't done and which Paul needs to do.

So what isn't complete? What is the missing piece? What hasn't Jesus done yet? Well, that's our second point. Paul is finishing the job by making Jesus known.

Paul is completing Christ's work by making Jesus known. Paul's job is to show something, to reveal something, to make it available for absolutely everybody to see because this is what Jesus didn't do.

Jesus didn't get up on the rooftops, he didn't rent out billboards, he didn't take out an advertisement in a newspaper, he didn't travel to Scotland or to England or to Wales or even Northern Ireland, despite what you may think.

[12 : 08] In fact, he never left a small corner of the Middle East. And you could say that for someone who was supposed to bring salvation to the whole world, he had a pretty limited scope of ministry.

So Paul, Paul is the one who has the job of writing the blog posts, phoning the local papers with a story, uploading the video to YouTube, flooding Twitter. Paul is the messenger.

Paul is the one who's getting this message out, getting this message about Jesus out there. Look at how he describes what he does in verse 25. And there again on the sheets.

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness. Paul's job is to present the whole word of God, the complete message, the full message.

Look again about how he describes this message, this word of God in verse 26. It's very unusual, I don't think we'd say it this way. The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

[13 : 22] Imagine it, it is the longest running TV show in all of history. It's been running for thousands of years, for ages and generations. It's a TV show that your parents and your grandparents watch, and their parents before them and their parents before them all curled up on the sofa together or whatever they sat on before DFS started their sale, which means it's running for a very long time indeed.

It's been showing it's been running on for ages and ages and ages but has never had a finale. Nothing has been resolved, none of the loose ends have been tied up, no one knows how it's going to end.

But Paul's message is the season finale, it's a finale of all of history. And what is that message? What is the mystery that Paul is making known?

Look at verse 27. 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.

The mystery is the message about Jesus. The glorious, rich mystery, all of God's plans for all of eternity is the man Jesus and his death.

[14 : 43] This is the greatest revelation, the greatest mystery. Finding out about Jesus isn't like a small mystery, like remembering where you left your car keys or finding out who really ate your sister's piece of birthday cake which she left out on the side and you know Dad always blamed the dog.

No, it's God's plan for the whole world's. It covers absolutely everything, all of creation, all of the new creation. It's not a disappointing mystery.

It's not like Game of Thrones season 8. I didn't watch Game of Thrones. Apart from, I actually watched one episode of the final series, season 8, episode 3. And even then, having not really watched the entire thing, I could see that it was a hastily done, unsatisfactory ending that fails to give the series the ending it apparently deserves.

Jesus is not like that. Jesus is a rich and glorious mystery, deeply satisfying. The end that we knew we all wanted, even if we could never articulated it or predicted it.

And it's not an incomplete mystery. Jesus isn't an incomplete mystery. It's not as if it's something that God kind of, you know, just forgot to say through Paul.

[15 : 54] Because what you're saying, if you're saying if Paul's message isn't enough, if you say that there's something other than Jesus, you're basically saying that God isn't very good at his job, that he's a failure when it comes to getting his message out.

No, Jesus is the final, complete revelation from God. The Jesus we heard about last week from Robbie in verses 15 to 23. Jesus is the final chapter and Paul is the final messenger.

He's the messenger who's making it publicly available for everyone to see. Paul is making Jesus open access, worldwide knowledge. I mean, if you imagine for a moment that the national monument was complete, Paul's role is the role at the grand opening to gather the crowds together and to kind of to pull down the red curtain.

Ta-da! And to show you this amazing piece of architecture. There are no special passes or secret invitations needed. There is no other mystery.

This is it. Jesus is the sum total of all that God has been planning. Paul's ministry of speaking words about Jesus is a ministry that reveals absolutely everything that God has been doing.

[17 : 17] Why does he do this? What is he achieving by doing this? Well, that's our third point. Paul makes Jesus known to present everybody complete in Christ.

Paul wants to present everyone complete in Christ. Paul doesn't just think that he's writing a definitive textbook on who Jesus is.

We saw at the beginning that Paul is working on a project. It's the same project that Jesus started with the same goal. And Paul has successfully done part of that.

He has completely revealed the mystery of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. But there's more. There is a final finished work. Let's look at that final goal.

Look at verse 28. He is the one we proclaim admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

[18 : 29] That mature word is just a word that means complete. And then look back. That's what Paul does. Paul wants to present everyone mature in Christ. Look back at what Jesus' work was.

Look at verse 22 again. He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation.

And if you're to go through the passage and look for repeated words, you need to underline present in verse 22 and you need to underline present in verse 28. Paul is doing the same thing.

His aim is to tell people about Jesus so that they can be what Jesus died for them to be. It's a presenting work to present people holy and blameless before God on the final day.

It's a reason he does what he does. He is the one we proclaim admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

[19 : 33] And what I want us to see, I want us to see the scope of what Paul thinks, his ministry of speaking words about Jesus is able to do. How massive his goal is.

It's going to present everybody mature in Christ. I think this addresses our fears. I think, or sometimes my fear can be that if we only listen to what Paul says, if we only listen to what the Bible says, that somehow that is going to make us kind of shallow Christians.

Christians who might have the basics right but are lacking proper meat on the bones. But as God's appointed messenger, does Paul think that his ministry of proclaiming Christ is going to make puny Christians or immature Christians or Christians without depth ignorant Christians or weak Christians?

Is Paul's ministry only really good as a start to keep you going until you move on to the deeper stuff? No, he is convinced that his ministry is going to produce Christians who are going to be complete Christians.

Christians who do not lack anything. He wants to present everyone complete. Christians who are completely like Jesus, completely holy, completely pure, completely blameless and completely perfect before God.

[20 : 58] They will be exactly what Jesus made them to be in his death. I can only imagine the stress that comes with being a teacher.

I guess, and partly that would be because what you do isn't dependent on you. It's dependent upon the kind of 20 to 30 maybe slightly uninterested teenagers in front of you actually wanting to do the work to get the work done for their exams to get the grades.

You try to persuade them, you've taught them the entire syllabus, you try to do everything you can, but at the end of the day you cannot go into the exam room with them. I guess that might make you question your teaching techniques.

Am I doing the right thing? Maybe if I do it this way then it will be much better and I'll get better results. Paul doesn't have any of those doubts.

He knows he has a complete method, a complete ministry, that is going to produce people who lack nothing. Imagine as a teacher you had a system that was going to produce straight A students every single time, students who always got 100% in their exams.

[22 : 15] And what would you do if you had that? You'd just use it every single time, wouldn't you? All year, every year, with all of your students. confidence. And that's the sort of teacher that Paul is.

He is completely confident in what he is doing. He is completely confident because his message is so complete. His message about Jesus is the full, complete word of God.

And so it is able to make full, complete Christians who will be made perfect and will be completely transformed if they don't walk away from his message.

So it's time for us to take ourselves back to Colossae, back to the Colossians. They've just become believers in Jesus. They've heard the gospel from some guy called Epaphras who came back to them one week to tell them about this Jesus.

And they believed him. And then all around them are all sorts of tempting alternatives, alternatives which promise knowledge and revelation and wisdom and fullness.

[23 : 23] Alternatives which look like they might help them grow. People are saying, you know, come over here, come and see this, come and try this. And Paul is desperate to make sure that they don't give in to that, that they don't drift.

He wants them to stick, to stay with the gospel, not to shift away from it. And this is the gospel that has come to them through the teaching of Paul. So, for the Colossians, to abandon Paul's teaching is to abandon Jesus.

It would be to move away from the gospel. So, no Paul, no Jesus. You can't separate the two. But I think there is a positive flip side of this, which I'd like to spend a bit more time on.

What does this have to say to us if we know that we like the Bible, we love this message about Jesus and want to continue believing it. But what we need to know is that in Paul's words about Jesus, we have absolutely everything we need to grow.

And that was our question at the start, what do we need? And if we have Paul's words about Jesus, you know, we don't have Bibles on the chairs, but on the sheets of paper that are in front of you or on your phone or at home, you have everything, all of God's wisdom, a glorious rich mystery, the complete and full word of God.

[24 : 54] Like the Colossians, we will never ever, well, you know, until heaven or something, and we will never meet Paul, and all the other apostles like him. But we have what he gave to the Colossians.

We have this message that he wrote down and that we can read. So, if you're here and you've ever been insecure as a Christian, if you have ever thought there might just be something else over there, something else which might give you that edge, give you that spiritual experience, take your Christian life to the next level, give you new power or knowledge or understanding.

If you ever look at someone and think, I wish I had what they have, you know, a bit like when you try and read celebrities or sports persons, autobiography, you know, what makes them special, how do they get there, what's their secret?

And if you ever wanted more as a Christian, and I hope we all do want more as Christians, then we don't need to worry about missing it because if we have Paul's words about Jesus, then we have absolutely everything.

if you want to grow up as a Christian, to become more and more like Jesus, to be transformed, and that is going to happen through the words about Jesus from the Bible, you will lack absolutely nothing.

[26 : 20] It's amazingly simple on the one hand, I think yet a profound and exciting challenge on the other because now that you know that you have got everything or you know where to get everything, how would you not want to get more?

It's all there. So let's accept the challenge from Paul to listen to his words so that we might all become more and more complete as we come to know the amazing mystery of God that is completely revealed in Jesus.

Let me pray. Father, thank you that through Paul you have revealed to us and to people all over the world the rich and glorious mystery that is Jesus.

Thank you that we don't need to guess about you and about what you are doing but that we can know for sure through the words you have given us about Jesus and his death for us.

Please let all of us continue to listen to you so that we might be presented before you holy and blameless without blemish and free from accusation on the final day.

[27 : 32] Amen.