

# Full-fat gospel for fully-fledged Christians

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 November 2024

Preacher: Jonathan Middleton

[ 0 : 00 ] is from Colossians chapter 1 verses 24 to chapter 2 verse 5 and you can find it on page 1182 of your Bible.

Paul's Labor for the Church Now I rejoice in what I am in 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 servants 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 my energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

[ 1 : 24 ] 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.

Thanks so much. Matt. Thanks so much Matt. Let me add my welcome to Martin's. Great to see you all today.

Let me encourage you to keep your Bibles open at Colossians. Let's pray and ask for God's help. Father in heaven thank you so much for your word to us and we ask that the Holy Spirit would impress it on our hearts and help us to hear what you're saying to each of us here today.

Would you encourage our hearts would you unite us in love as we seek to grow together as Christ's body as we meditate on your word.

[ 3 : 07 ] Amen. Well how do Christians grow? How do you grow? Where is the best place for you to grow?

Where's the best place for you to make progress in your Christian life? That's what we're thinking about today. And there's a novel by Gunther Grass called The Tin Drum and don't worry if you've never heard of it.

Asked in the staff team this week nobody's heard of it in the staff team nobody's heard about it in the 930 service either. It's supposed to be one of the defining novels of the 20th century.

It doesn't matter if you've not heard of it though. But The Tin Drum is seen through the eyes of Oscar the main character the narrator who at the age of three decides to stop growing simply refuses to grow.

He doesn't like the look of adulthood with all its pressures and stresses and strains and anxieties and he decides well thank you but no thank you I'm not having that and so at the age of three he's given a tin drum by his parents and at the age of three Oscar resolves to stop growing.

[ 4 : 23 ] It's an act of defiance on the part of Oscar but actually it's an act of folly and in all sorts of ways the novel is a tragic novel a classic case of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face but we don't want to do that as Christians we don't want to remain as spiritual infants don't want to be stuck in a rut like that in our Christian lives as Christians we want to grow and actually there's people that would say that St. Silas churches like St. Silas are fine to begin with but if you really want to grow you need to move on from the gospel people like that might say I used to be an evangelical too but then I discovered X Y or Z your place is a good place to begin in the

Christian journey but if you want to move beyond the first rung of the ladder you need something else sooner or later they say you're going to have to go deeper than that and if you push back and say to them well look our church is growing then they just say well of course it's growing right next to the university it's full of students and young people full of spiritual infants they say and it's a good thing it's a good thing to want to grow it's good to want to grow deeper every Christian should want to grow and there might be some of us here today who feel like that's something that you've been lacking in lately spiritual growth who feel that one way or another your spiritual growth has become stunted or stagnated and we can all go through seasons like that in our spiritual journey and when we feel like we're stuck in the spiritual shallow end we need an answer to that question how do

Christians grow because otherwise we're at risk of falling for the first thing that sounds impressive or deep or wise and none of us want to miss out on things like that and our ears can prick up when we hear of some new teaching some new trend or personality claiming to offer spiritual depth to us and so that's why Paul's writing here to the church in Colossae it's a warning letter at least in part and the main Colossian danger Martin showed us that last week is the spiritual salesman and they have a sales pitch offering you what every keen Christian should want offering you more in the Christian life and we've seen it again in our reading today in 2 verse 4 I tell you this writes Paul so no one may deceive you and then in 2 verse 8 we'll come on to next week see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and empty philosophy so it's a warning letter to a church in danger a warning letter to a church under threat so what

Paul's doing in our passage is Paul's defending Paul's ministry and saying that's the way you grow in Christ so Paul's here clarifying for us what genuine Christian ministry looks like and he's writing to a church that's under threat and so the answer to the question how to grow Paul gives us and he gives us it in verse 28 can be summed up there that's the key verse for us today verse 28 he Jesus he is the one we proclaim admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom why so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ and we're going to be thinking about that today we're going to be thinking about that under three headings in the notice sheets

Paul's message Paul's motive Paul's warning message proclaiming the fullness of Christ what does Paul's ministry involve let's just take another look down at verse 28 first half of the verse Paul proclaims Jesus admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom that's what he does it's not complicated not rocket science he's got a message that he proclaims that just means he preaches or announces and it's a message about Jesus Paul proclaims Jesus this involves admonishing that just means warning and teaching proclamation warning teaching that's all there is to it and if those three things are too much he wanted to simplify it further he could sum it up in one word talking

[10:11] Paul talks about Jesus in fact that's all he seems to do Paul talks about Jesus his ministry is about talking about Jesus well surely that's not how you grow surely there must be more to it than that and so let's just back up and look at the bigness of the claims that Paul's making for his talking about Jesus ministry and he starts off and it's maybe a little bit surprising but he starts off by saying that Paul's ministry brought him the joy of suffering for Christ's church verse 24 now I rejoice writes Paul in what I'm 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 so throughout the New Testament Paul is opposed and suffers for his ministry of preaching and teaching about

Jesus he's even writing this letter to the Colossians from prison and that verse is also can be just a little bit confusing and fast reading what can possibly be lacking from Christ's afflictions well Paul's not saying he's not saying there's anything incomplete about what Jesus has done on the cross he's not saying there's any suffering left to be done for our sins we've seen that last week rather God has granted Paul and by extension us the church the privilege of being able to suffer just a little for Christ who suffered for us on our behalf and Paul emphasizes his struggles on their behalf in verse 29 of chapter 1 to this end I strenuously contend and then in verse 1 of chapter 2 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and he's emphasizing this because he wants to show them that he is suffering for him and this ministry of suffering is to vindicate his authentic gospel ministry likely in contrast to the religious salesmen who are offering fullness without the suffering and by the way there's churches like that today in

Scotland preaching from the pulpit a culturally inoffensive gospel that's easier to stomach easier to palate for our secular society a watered down version of the gospel that avoids confrontation well Paul's not having any of it he was commissioned by God himself verse 25 to present to you the word of God how much of it not as a pick and mix not as a take what you want and leave behind what you don't like sort of thing no the word of God in all its fullness and verses 26 to 27 show us Paul's not gone rogue Paul's not gone rogue this was God's plan all along and God made Paul his servant and commissioned him to make known the gospel among the nations make known the gospel among nations like our own so verse 26 there was a big secret the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations there was a mystery but now it's been disclosed to God's people and these include

God's holy people in Colossae that's how they're described in verse 2 of chapter 1 and includes us today in Glasgow through Paul's talking about Jesus kind of ministry that's how we access Christ and that was God's choice verse 27 to them God has chosen to make known among the nations the glorious riches of this mystery and so it's not that Paul's got a bit of a mystery and now we've got to go and hunt for the rest of the mystery Dan Brown kind of thing we've got to go and find out what the rest of the mystery is all about mysteries been disclosed fully and what is it what is this secret it is Christ in you brothers and sisters the hope of glory and so look down to verses 2 to 3 of chapter 2 that they may know the mystery of God namely

Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and so if this is a treasure map from treasure island and X marks the spot sort of thing Paul says X is Christ all the treasure is hidden in Christ so if you go hunting elsewhere for spiritual experiences or practices or podcasts that offer an alternative to Paul's ministry then you're going to miss the mark you're going to be barking up the wrong tree you're not going to find the thing that you need in order to grow in your spiritual life if you have Jesus you have everything all the riches all the treasures of wisdom and depth all the treasures divine you want the full riches of the Christian life Paul's saying you go to Jesus and that's what we access when we open our

[ 16 : 14 ] Bibles that's what we access when we're hearing faithful Bible teaching about Jesus you're opening the treasure trove opening glorious vistas onto what God has revealed and the more that we gaze at that view that we're given the more that we realize that we meditate in God's word the more we realize how much more there is to see how much more treasure there is to be found how much more depth there is to be found as we study God's word so that's what Paul thinks his job description is preaching warning teaching about Jesus to make the fullness of Christ or the treasures of Christ fully known to everyone and so the Christian life begins with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Christian life continues with the gospel of Jesus Christ and to grow you don't go beyond that you go deeper into that now you're not going to remain spiritual infant you're not going to remain stunted or immature baby

Christian if you're rooted in the Bible rooted in solid teaching about the Lord Jesus Jesus and so Paul to prove his point he goes on to tell us what kind of Christians his talking about Jesus kind of ministry produces so that's our second point Paul's motive presenting fully mature Christians in Christ and for us to get what Paul's saying here for us to get the bigness of what

Paul's saying we need to get our heads around the word mature properly because sometimes we equate the word mature today with old or dull or boring it can have negative connotations like oh Jonathan would you stop being so immature would you act your age stop drawing on your brother's face like that that's what I was in trouble for last Christmas in my defense my brother had fallen asleep after too much plum pudding and it was too good an opportunity to miss but mature can be positive too you only need to pop around the corner to IJ Mellis to discover that mature cheese is incredibly exciting so mature is a positive word in the Bible it's a growth word a house plant or a fruit bearing tree grows to maturity when it's established and rooted and nourished and a mature plant is one that flourishes and is fruitful that's the idea in psalm one where the person who delights in God's law and is rooted in God's word is compared to a fruitful tree that is planted by streams of water how do

Christians grow how do we become mature how do we become psalm one Christians how do we avoid being stuck in a rut as spiritual toddlers well Paul is saying proclaiming Christ preaching and teaching about Jesus produces mature Christians and by the way it's not an accident that our midweek Bible studies are called growth groups and roots because we want to be producing here fully mature Christians that's Paul's motive for doing ministry like Paul's ministry and Paul's goal here corresponds to God's purposes in verse 22 of chapter 1 we looked at that last week God's purpose to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation so that's what it's going to be like that's what it's going to be like on the day we're presented if we're in Christ as fully fledged

Christians so if today you're feeling spiritually immature or wilting or malnourished if you feel like lately your growth has been stunted where do you go for that you go to ministry like Paul's that proclaims Christ Christ and one of the cool things about Colossians is chapter 2 verse 1 most of Paul's letters are written to people he knows to churches that he's personally planted but in this letter he's writing to a bunch of people that he's not met personally they only have access to Paul's ministry to Paul's gospel through his letters and through the faithful ministry of Epaphras who's come to visit Paul in prison and tell them about them we know what that means it means that they're in the same boat as us basically the people that Paul's writing to are in the same situation as us we have not met

[ 22 : 13 ] Paul personally we only have access to Paul's ministry to Paul's gospel the gospel of Jesus through Paul's letter and through faithful ministry like Paul's that proclaims Christ but if you have that kind of ministry you already have everything you need to become fully mature and if we ever doubt that you can go to verse 2 of chapter 2 and read that he writes his goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love these are not the marks of spiritually immature Christians but this is what Paul is strenuously contending for them there's going to be times when we feel discouraged or confronted or face opposition for our faith and feel disheartened but Paul wants us to share in his joy for struggling for the church his joy for suffering for the church and as

Christians we're united in love the issues out of that growing together as a church family in community towards maturity in Christ a group of people committed to learning Christ together and our hearts should be encouraged in doing so and Paul wants us to know that same soul strengthening joy that he has of knowing that we're being knit together in a loving church family that seeks to grow together kind of ministry that Paul's on about here that we would trust too that that kind of ministry here at St.

Cyrus will produce fully mature believers so last point Paul's warning don't be fooled by fakes so this is verses four and five we said at the beginning Paul's defending Paul's ministry and he's defending his ministry because of a very real threat he's defending his ministry so that no one may deceive you by fine sounding arguments Paul's saying again watch out for these religious salesmen and last week Martin showed us the folly of buying some dodgy bootleg CDs of the Ababac catalogue when you already have everything on Spotify but it reminded me of an incident from my childhood and we're probably talking late 1980s early 1990s here when a door-to-door salesman turned up at our family home salesman trying to flog some kind of newfangled vacuum cleaner the reason it stuck in my mind was that usually these salesmen wouldn't have been given at the time of day but this time for whatever reason there was a prolonged discussion at the front door and then eventually he was invited into the house and he came in and he brought out his wonderful contraption he proceeded to demonstrate its incredible suction power and I was asking my mum about it this week and first she completely denied any memory of it denied all accusations sort of thing but as her memory started to come back to her she did sort of yes

I do have a sort of vague recollection of that so I asked her why had she let this salesman into our house I suppose I must have just wanted the stairs hoovered was her slightly unconvincing reply but in the end common sense prevailed it was way too expensive they already had something that did the job and who ever heard of a bagless vacuum cleaner anyway absolutely ludicrous idea it's just possible that my parents in turning away this salesman had tarfed out James Dyson himself in any case they didn't become early adopters of the Dyson Hoover well they may well have turned away the real deal but Paul's point here is that the spiritual salesman he's on about are definitely not the real deal they are selling you fake gospels which are not just substandard not just inefficient to save but seriously positively dangerous stuff and enticing too see their sales pitch isn't for an alternative religion it's not

Jehovah's witnesses coming around to the front door it's people deceiving with fine sounding arguments that's what makes it so dangerous it sounds plausible superficially it sounds plausible but that's how frauds and scams work they need to appear convincing enough for you to fall for it in reality they're peddling false gospels dressed up in Christian lingo home and it can happen to us at any stage of our Christian life so that's why we need to watch out I was speaking to a fine Christian lady over the summer catching up with her not from St Silas she'd be well into her 80s but as we spoke it transpired that she had given up in the past year going to church and instead had started to meet midweek with a sort of breakaway group that had come under the thrall of a false teacher from America who was basically peddling a form of kind of eastern mysticism eastern meditation dressed up in Christian lingo and she'd become obsessed with this false teacher her enthusiasm seemed to be for his writing and she'd gone off the boil it was really sad so that's towards the latter stages of life

[ 28 : 27 ] Von Roberts is a Christian minister and he talks about a spiritual crisis that he had early on in his Christian journey and he'd become a Christian shortly before leaving school shortly after leaving school he'd attended a summer camp where he was volunteering as a helper and he'd got to know some believers of a similar age but from different church backgrounds and he was getting on well with them and all was going well until his new friends began to describe some experiences that they'd received and urged him to ask God to do the same for him they told him if only that he'd open up himself to these other experiences then he'd go far deeper in his walk with God and Von Roberts describes being a bit confused about what they were saying but he certainly didn't want to miss out he didn't want to remain a spiritual toddler he wanted to grow so he prayed about it when he prayed about it nothing happened eventually he became filled with deep spiritual insecurity and later on he was grateful to a mature

Christian who came alongside him and encouraged him and pointed him in the right direction he said that this mature Christian told him not to focus on these dramatic experiences not to focus on clever arguments or the personalities of his well-meaning friends but rather to look to the teaching of the Bible the kind of Bible teaching about Jesus that Paul's commending here to the Colossians and Von Roberts came to realize that God may well have given his friends these experiences praise God that he did but that God had given him Jesus and everything he could ever want or need or desire could be found in him and so that's the remedy in verse five we should aspire to stand firm in the firm foundation of our faith in the

Lord Jesus and be disciplined about that right at the heart of Paul's ministry is proclaiming the gospel of Christ that's what's needed in order to grow so we need to guard against anything that might distract or deprioritize Christ in our lives and the conversations that we entertain in the books we read in the media that we expose ourselves to we need to be careful about who we're inviting in so how are you going to grow how are you today going to resolve to grow in your faith in the Lord Jesus you don't want to be like Oscar with his tin drum you don't want to choose to remain a spiritual infant you don't want your spiritual life to be stunted but you don't want to go to the wrong places either if you truly want to grow in your

Christian life you need to get stuck into ministry like Paul's talking about Jesus kind of ministry because if you're in a church that proclaims Christ you already have everything you need to grow to maturity because in Christ we have one in whom all the treasures and all the riches of treasures divine are dwelling so let's give thanks to him and pray Father we we praise you for your desire that we should know you that we should have fullness in Jesus that together as a church family here at St.

Silas we should grow to maturity in him and so we pray that you would open our eyes and wonders we open our Bibles to access the treasures of who Jesus is and we pray that you would help us to remain rooted and stand firm and never move away from the teaching about Jesus that gives us growth in him for we ask it in his name amen to to end sem but we we could ask it but him will have his resume