

Jesus is our TREASURE of wisdom and knowledge

Colossians 2:1-5

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Introduction

Jesus is our treasure, overflow, fullness, everything, all in all. The apostle's purpose is clear. He wants to enrich lives, encourage hearts, and enable love throughout the congregation. There is an incorrect chapter division here. Paul says, "To this end I labor [or, I toil], struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me. And I want you to know how strenuously I am exerting myself for you..." He calls attention to his efforts to bring the Colossian Christians into vitality. 2:2-3: in him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

December brings articles to highlight events of the past year: "The Most Boring People of the Year." A group calling themselves "The Boring Institute of New Jersey" picks the most boring people of the year.

Points out one of the major problems of life---boredom! Have you ever asked yourself, what is boredom? Why do people grow bored? Boredom comes from looking to something outside yourself to keep you excited. We blame our boredom on everything else. "There's nothing to do," is a frequent complaint of children. Boredom is really an internal problem. There is something wrong inside us. There is no inner resource from which we can draw. Boredom comes when we find ourselves demanding satisfaction from something or some person outside ourselves. It indicates there is emptiness within us.

The letter to the Colossians deals with the problems of boredom, apathy, and lack of vitality. That is why the apostle Paul seeks in this letter to reveal the true secret of a rich life: **the discovery of a Person who can live within us.** That is the great mystery, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Christians who have discovered this--not merely in an intellectual sense, but in practical living--are seldom bored. To them, everything is exciting. Even difficulties and trials are regarded as adventures and they look forward to how the Lord will work them out. They may feel a sense of risk, perhaps even danger, but they also have a sense of excitement and anticipation as they look for God to act. They key: FOCUS ON CHRIST.

The Scriptures often use the word "riches." Paul makes mention of the "riches of the gospel." He says his greatest joy was to declare "the unsearchable riches of Christ." The gospels make frequent mention of "treasures." Jesus talks about "laying up treasures in heaven." We have "a treasure in earthen vessels so that it may be evident that the power is not from us but from God" (2 Cor. 4:7). The inner treasure is what makes the Christian life rich and worth living. Paul seeks to create knowledge of this treasure in the church in Colossae, to help them understand that the answer to the problem of boredom and apathy springs up from within." That is what will refresh our spirits, and rescue us from perpetual boredom.

ILLUS: If you want to get to the proper destination, it helps to know where you are going. The church cannot be effective unless it knows where it is headed. If we want to be what God has called us to be, we need to know His vision for us. If we want to become mature, we have to know what maturity means.

The Point: it is not enough to talk about Jesus—we must live out in our lives his reality. We escape boredom when we look to Jesus, but two other things happen when we keep our eyes on Jesus.

1. We face the struggle-- All of us struggle; we need help in our struggles. We struggle when we take our eyes off Jesus. We need the support of one another. I want to stress the tremendous importance of praying for one another. You can do all the right things to help someone, but if his attitude is wrong nothing you do will serve to assist him. What can change that? It is your prayers! Prayer can change the heart and mind, the inner attitude. It is a powerful force to transform an atmosphere and make something acceptable when otherwise it would appear to be dull and uninteresting.

2. We come to unity-- Is your local church fused together as a body, absolutely knit together by the love of the Lord Jesus Christ? Or are there factions, divisions, and separations? Where do those come from? Somebody with their eyes not focused on Jesus! Somebody who does not allow love to work in the heart, without a commitment to the spiritual benefit of others! It is only Christ and His love that UNITES the body of Christ.

God wants the church to grow—what will help is focusing on Christ, what will not is focusing somewhere else. Notice about Paul's purpose for the church what is not on his list. If we were trying to describe a strong, mature and vital church, we might include:

Diverse Programs *Spacious Buildings* *Plenty of parking*
Large Worship Attendance *Dramatic Experiences* *Certain Worship Styles*

These are the things that we are told are the keys to vibrant congregations. These are the things the church growth "experts" point to as leading to successful ministry. But Paul doesn't include any of these! Our focus is almost exclusively external....Paul's is internal. So, at the very beginning of our discussion we are alerted to the fact that we must change our thinking. We must change the way we define "success".

When we focus on Christ as the source of genuine abundance, we see four things—Fellowship, Faith, Facts, and Fullness. There are four results—Unity, Courage, Truth, Christ.

When we focus on Christ, we find....

I. Fellowship—a Spiritually Mature Church is united in Love

A casual reading of Scripture quickly convinces that one of the hallmarks of the church is a love uncommon in the world. Paul prays we might be "united in love". Sittser writes,

Diversity strengthens a church only if mutual love first unites it. Without such love, diversity will divide and destroy the church every time conflict erupts. . . . This unity of love will protect us from becoming prisoners to ourselves--to our pet doctrines, rituals, causes, programs, movements or methods. It will also keep us from using the faults, errors and excesses of other believers to excuse our own. (Gerald Sittser, [Loving Across Our Differences](#) p. 20, IVP)

Love within a church is a magnetic power. All of us long to find a place where we are loved....not for what we can contribute but for who we are. This is what the church is to be. In order to "get the picture in my head" True love in the body of Christ means,

- We treasure each other
- We spotlight gifts and abilities rather than faults and failures
- We truly celebrate the gifts and blessings of others without feeling resentment
- We rally around each other in times of sadness and loss
- We allow people to have "bad days"
- We are quick to forgive
- We act in kindness toward each other
- We defend each other
- We are willing to do things differently than we would prefer....for the honor of Christ.
- And we listen to a list like this and wonder how we could love better rather than moaning because we are not better loved.

II. Faith—a Spiritually Mature Church Has Courage in Difficult Times

Paul says, "My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart"(v. 2). Sometimes this word means to comfort, sometimes to exhort, but it is always has the sense of helping someone meet a difficult situation with confidence and strength. One of the indications of mature faith is strength when the times are difficult.

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights." (Hab. 3:17-19)

Habakkuk determined to hang on because of his confidence in God! He knew God's character. He knew that He is sufficient for every need. He knew that God loved him. He knew God was faithful. So, no matter what the outward circumstances . . . Habakkuk trusted what he knew to be true. That's the kind of faith Paul wants from the church--a group of people who see by faith and not by sight.

The apostle delights to see in the Colossians the firm faith in Christ. They understood clearly that it was Christ who held them, not they who held Christ. When they strayed, he would send someone to them to point it out to them, to stop them by some circumstance that would make it difficult for error to take root among them. A strong faith in the presence of Jesus is a powerful bulwark against being misled. Paul admonishes: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

What helps against deceit? A courageous, well ordered, disciplined life. The spirit of our age says, do whatever you feel like doing, respond to whatever you like. Deny yourself nothing. Paul is pleased that the church is orderly and disciplined. They make themselves do right whether they feel like doing it or not.

Three things have happened. They are "rooted" in Christ. (These are passive participles, meaning these things have been done to you.) Like a deeply-rooted tree, they have been planted in Christ and those strong roots will hold them. Secondly, they are "built up" in him. Not only are the roots going deep, they are growing up as well. They are increasing in faith and experience. And, third, they are "strengthened" in the faith. They have tested it; put it to work in their homes, in their neighborhoods. They have had to face problems which were tests, and their faith was strengthened.

As these three things take place, we add one more "overflowing with thankfulness." Be grateful to God for everything he has given you, no matter what it is. Have you learned yet to be thankful in everything? That means you do not grumble, complain and criticize. You cannot have it both ways. To be thankful means to find something in every situation for which you can genuinely be grateful.

Always in any audience there are some who are going through agony, facing physical, relational, professional, financial, spiritual struggles. Some are not sure how much longer they can hang on. They are exhausted. They have tried to be faithful but have nothing left to give. If this is your experience then you are on the verge of a great discovery! Your strength for the difficult times does not reside in your ability . . . but His! You may be weary, but He is strong. The Lord knows what He is doing . . . trust Him.

III. Facts (not Fiction)—a Spiritually Mature Church Uses Truth to Face Deceit

A second reason for Paul's concern is that he is very much aware of how easy it is to miss these hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ by being misled by false teaching. In these verses we have the first clear hint of what was threatening the Colossian Christians. *"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 orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is."*

"Fine-sounding arguments" reveal Paul's concern lest they be easily deceived. This is one of the major problems all Christians must face. If the target is the truth, there is something alongside it that looks very much like the truth, and one begins to focus upon that, rather than the truth. That is one of the favorite weapons of the devil. To be deceived is to think you know that something is right, but it is really wrong. Truth and error look almost the same, but one is a counterfeit. In these days when we have so many counterfeit and imitation things around we are used to being deceived and do not feel alarmed about it any more. Plastic looks like metal. Flowers are made of silk. We are daily touching things that are but imitations of the real thing. But imitations have obvious limitations. If you start regarding them as real you are in trouble. That is what Paul is worried about. A quotation from J. I. Packer puts this very well:

Sad experience shows that bad theology infects the heart with misbelief and unbelief, the spiritual equivalents of multiple sclerosis! Many who ran well have been progressively paralyzed through ingesting bad theology, and the danger remains. Theological expertise can feed intellectual pride, turning one into a person who cares more for knowing true notions than for knowing the true God, and that is disastrous, too.

Churches are filled with people who are being misled in this very way.

IV. Fullness—a Spiritually Mature Church Finds Firmness in the Fullness of Christ

I wonder what the apostle Paul would say if he were to visit our churches today. What beehives of activity: committees, programs, entertainment. But worship is often downplayed, services are cut back, prayer

meetings are eliminated. Some call these improvements. There's a story about a woman who became seriously ill and was taken to the hospital. In the evening her husband asked how she was doing, and he was told that she was improving. For several days her doctor gave the same report. Then one day she unexpectedly died. When the man saw the doctor, he asked, "Well, what did she die of-- improvements?" I know of a church that died of "improvements." The first was to hire a minister with unbiblical ideas. Then the prayer meeting was changed into a literary debating society. Finally, the minister stopped praying from the pulpit. The church is now dead. (The only remnant of the church at Colossae is a plaque with the name "Epaphras".) I suggest that someone put a tombstone in front of it with these words: "Died of Improvements." There's always room for the right kind of improvements in our churches. But let's make sure they are guided by the life-changing principles of God's Word, not the deadening philosophies of this world." God put the church in the world; Satan tries to put the world in the church.

Summary and Conclusion