Woods Chapel Bible Fellowship

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A PASSION FOR MINISTRY—Colossians 1:24-29
An expositional message from the Book of Colossians—State of the Church

INTRODUCTION

The Christian consensus in our land is gone. Across America there is a growing feeling in the church that we as evangelical Christians are up against formidable odds. Our secular society has been flexing its muscle. Just when we thought secularism was a toothless tiger it rose up to dominant the American scene.

David Jeremiah clearly expresses this reality in his book, **I Never Thought I Would See the Day**. He writes about how our secular culture is changing American and impacting the church. He addresses several developments that he never thought he would see in his lifetime. He lists them:

- When Jesus would be so profaned
- When marriage would become obsolete
- When morality would be in a free fall
- When the Bible would be marginalized
- When the Church would be irrelevant
- When a Muslim State could intimidate the world
- When American would turn her back on Israel
- When atheists would be angry and intimate believers in God
- When Christians were unaware that a battle is raging all around them

Because of this tide of secular domination there is a growing sense of despair and defeatism in the evangelical ranks, and many are not showing up for duty.

We must refocus our strategy as the church. It is time to start reclaiming the most powerful weapon we have against the darkness. We need to reclaim the weapon that seems to have suffered as we have picketed and politicked, as though revival comes through governmental power. The weapon is the weapon of an individual Christian becoming a light to this world—penetrating, revealing, and living an unquenchable and personal force of truth and righteousness. We personally need to be growing followers of Christ who are encouraging others and building into others to be growing followers of Christ.

As we refocus our strategy of being and making disciples that are effective lights for Christ there must be a commitment and passion for ministry. Jesus said we are to be like this:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp, and put in under a basket, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

New Testament Christianity was that light in a dark world. Churches were planted in desperately wicked cities, such as Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. Paul ministered in intensely antagonistic, apostate settings and in environments ruled by the decadent Roman Empire. When it came to Colossae he was additionally challenged by false teaching that wanted to dethrone Christ and integrate Christianity with false beliefs.

God's answer for Colossae is the same answer He has for us today. God's answer was to make Paul a minister. Both in verse 23 and 25 Paul says *I was made a minister.* According to the New Testament, MINISTRY is what all Christians do, because we are all MINISTERS. It is not an office; it is a lifestyle devoted to helping others grow in faith and holiness. In this sense, the only life that counts for anything is a life of MINISTRY. In fact, fulfilling your MINISTRY is more important that staying alive. This PASSION FOR

MINISTRY is what makes the lives of believers so inspiring to watch. Many speak the way Paul did about his ministry in Acts 20:24: *"But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.* Doing the MINISTRY that God gives us to do is more important than life.

God's answer today is to make us ministers—gifting us and empowering us to be involved in ministry. The State of our Church is the state of our hearts and the measure of our PASSION FOR MINISTRY. In our passage, Paul defines a PASSION FOR MINISTRY which God uses to impact the church and a secular world. We have to show up in the lives of both unbelievers and believers.

Paul defines a PASSION FOR MINISTRY in two ways. First, it is a passion to make the Word of God fully known. Second, it is a passion to make the people of God fully mature.

I. . . . to make the Word of God fully known. (24-27)

Verse 25 – *Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God.* In preaching the Word of God Paul was fulfilling of a stewardship that God had given to him. His charge and ours is to take the Word of God to our neighbors and friends and to the world. By preaching and teaching the Word we offer Christ, the hope of glory and call them to faith.

A. In making the Word of God fully known there may be suffering.

Verse 24 – *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.*

Paul clearly said he rejoiced in his sufferings. From a secular perspective, what he says is incomprehensible; it is like a "baptized pleasure in being abused." But Romans 5:3 speaks of exulting in tribulation; 1 Peter 4:13 says that if you suffer for Christ rejoice; Acts 5:41 tells of the apostles rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer. Why?

First, suffering brought good to the Church—to fellow believers—and to the individual Christian. Without Paul's willingness to suffer there would have been no church in Asia. The gospel is always spread through missionary hardship. Suffering can result in the salvation of others. Can you imagine how that frustrates the enemy? Satan wants suffering to harm the impact of the church, but God brings good out of it.

Suffering brings a future reward (Romans 8:17-18); it assures the believer belongs to Christ (John 15:18; 2 Timothy 3:12; and brings believers closer to Christ. Paul rejoiced in his suffering because it brought good to the church.

Second, Paul described his suffering as *filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.* This is one of the most debated verses in all of Scripture. We know it does NOT mean that Paul made up that which was lacking in the atoning sacrifices of Christ. Jesus paid it all. The writer to the Hebrews says that He *offered one sacrifice for sins for all time* (Hebrews 10:12). His sacrifice was completely sufficient to pay for the sins of the world and to secure my eternal salvation—the book of Colossians and the rest of the New Testament teach that truth—the absolute sufficiency of Christ's atonement (2:13, 14; 1:12-14; 19-22). Paul did not help with the Atonement; that was Christ's solo work.

Paul was receiving the persecution that was intended for Christ. Jesus had ascended to heaven; He was out of reach. But His enemies have not filled up the injuries they want to inflict on Him. It was in that sense that Paul, who was now in prison when he wrote Colossians, filled up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions.

Christ is calling us in this text to live for the sake of the gospel and be passionate in making the Word of God known, and to do that through suffering. Christ chose suffering; it didn't just happen to Him. He chose it as a way to create and perfect the church. Now he calls us to be prepared to suffer. That is, he calls us to take up our cross and follow Him and deny ourselves and make the sacrifices necessary to make the Word of God fully known to the world and in ministry to the church.

Romanian pastor and mission leader Joseph Tson said it this way: "Christ's cross was for our propitiation; our cross is for propagation." He was saying that Christ suffered to accomplish salvation; we suffer to spread salvation. And our willingness to endure hardship for the good of others is a filling up of Christ's afflictions because it extends them to others and makes them visible.

J. Oswald Sanders tells the story of an indigenous missionary who walked barefoot from village to village preaching the gospel in India. His hardships were many. After a long day of many miles and much discouragement he came to a certain village and tried to

speak the gospel but was driven out of town and rejected. So he went to the edge of the village dejected and lay down under a tree and slept from exhaustion.

When he awoke people were hovering over him, and the whole town was gathered around to hear him speak. The head man of the village explained that they came to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet they concluded that he must be a holy man, and that they had been evil to reject him. They were sorry and wanted to hear the message that he was willing to suffer so much to bring them.

So the evangelist filled up the afflictions of Jesus with his beautiful feet.

We are to take those sufferings to the world and show the loving sacrifices of Christ through the loving sacrifices of His people. So we sacrifice time and money and energy to make the Word of God fully known to others.

B. In making the Word of God fully known the message will center on Christ and the gospel.

Verse 26-27 – *that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known, what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

These verses define more clearly what Paul proclaimed and what we are to teach. It's called a *mystery* in verse 26, not because it can't be understood, but because it had been hidden for ages and had now been revealed by divine revelation.

Verse 27 describes *the riches of the glory of this mystery.* It is *Christ in you, the hope of glory.* What was not revealed fully in the past ages was that the Jewish Messiah—the Christ—would actually reach out to non-Jewish nations and indwell non-Jewish people—that He would actually live in them and give them the promise of Abraham, the hope of glory in the kingdom of God with all the saints. When Christ came the wall that separated Jew from Gentile was broken down. They were to be one in Christ. Christ, by the Holy Spirit, takes up permanent residence in all believers (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20)--*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

This is a truth no religion can offer. This is a truth that Old Testament saints didn't understand. It is the truth that we can enjoy the presence and power of the eternal Christ in our lives.

Our ministry is to show up in the lives of unbelievers with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are to declare all that God is for us in Christ Jesus and all that He has accomplished by His work on the cross. People cannot know Christ better without knowing what the Bible teaches about Christ. What makes the gospel attractive is not just that it promises present hope and help, but that it promises eternal hope and honor and glory. His presence in us is the anchor of the promise of heaven (Ephesians 1:13-14). Turn over a page to Colossians 3:4 – *When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.* That is the hope of the believer—sharing in the indescribable glory of our Savior.

Sometimes we get this idea that we have to win the entire world and just the thought of it discourages us and we do nothing. Paul was led by the Lord to make three missionary journeys—maybe four if he made it to Spain, but they were mostly all in the same area. Yet few people in history have affected the world the way he did. Jesus never left Palestine. He was infinitely effective because He limited Himself to doing what God wanted. God made you a minister and has given you a specific passion for ministry that needs to be according to His will, in His timing, for His kingdom. If you haven't discovered what God wants you to do, I trust 2012 will be the year that He ignites your fire and passion for ministry.

This is beyond belief living. This is a passion for ministry living. It is all about the very nature of Christ being formed in us and expressed through us as we learn to live more intentionally, more generously, and more sacrificially. It is a biblical ideal modeled by the apostle Paul who chose sacrifice to make the gospel known to those without Christ. It is a challenge for us individually and for the church to do this together. A passion for ministry living is also to be a community-driven enterprise that is magnified when we commit to experiencing God's power together.

Look for opportunities made available this year for intentional impact ministries.

Second, the PASSION FOR MINISTRY is the passion . . .

II. . . . to make the <u>people</u> of God fully <u>mature</u>. (28-29)

A. The Goal

Verse 28 – *We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.* Paul's passion for ministry was to present everyone he reaches *complete in Christ.* He does this by proclaiming Christ, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone. The word *admonishing* means to encouraging counsel in view of sin and coming punishment. If there is sin in the life of a believer, we have the responsibility to lovingly and gently admonish them to forsake that sin.

The word *teaching* refers to imparting positive truth. This too is everyone's responsibility to fellow believers. We are to impart *with all wisdom* the doctrinal truths of the Word followed by practical life application.

That is Paul's ceaseless and passionate ministry which Christ energizes. He would settle for nothing less than maturity—that God's people would be *complete in Christ.* The word *complete* means to be mature, to be like Christ. The goal of ministry is the maturity of the believer. A mature believer walking in the light is the only weapon that can penetrate the darkness of our secular culture.

We are asking everyone in the church to make this the focus of your ministry. We are asking you to answer this question: How can you encourage, teach, model, pour into someone's life that help them toward becoming more *complete in Christ*?

Our church will have little hope of making a dent in other people's lives unless we are passionate and committed to making disciples. If we are going to make inroads as a church for God's kingdom work in the next five years, we must support each other in deeper and more personal ways. Our adult ministries of community groups, men's and women's ministries must be focused on building disciples. Our youth and children's ministries must be passionate in building up our young people toward maturity. That is our goal.

In **Alice In Wonderland,** Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The Cat replied, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." "I don't much care where," answered Alice. "Then," said the Cat, "it doesn't matter which way we go."

It does matter where we go. The passion to present every man complete in Christ gives and establishes direction for our lives and ministries.

Notice that Paul ends by emphasizing the power to carry out this ministry.

B. The Power

Verse 29 – *For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.* Paul says the purpose for which he labors—presenting every man complete in Christ—is not merely his own energy, but it's the power of Christ mightily working in him.

He uses graphic language: *labor* – means working to the point of exhaustion *Striving* – means to agonize, strain, toil, suffer

Paul exerted maximum effort, but he adds a crucial phrase—*according to His power which mightily works within me.* At every moment, God's power enabled Paul to labor and strive to present every man complete in Christ. The apostle wants to exalt that moment-by-moment power of God that is available to work within us in such a way that it is clear that he himself was not the decisive doer of ministry work. He is a doer of the work—he labors and strives, but *according to His power which mightily works within.* The end result is this: It is by God's power that passionate ministry is energized. Passionate ministry demands that we commit our lives and energy to the service of Jesus Christ, but it is a ministry according to His power that mightily works within us.

I think that as Paul faced each day of ministry, he bowed his head and prayed for God's enablement, for God's power, recalling the words of the Lord Jesus, *"Apart from Me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5). Then he acted with all his might and when he came to the end of the day, he called his might the might of *His power*.

The bottom line is that we can be more. We can move beyond what we know in our heads and express with our words into arena where we do something in His power. We mature from the inside out, becoming more and more like Jesus, and then take the next step of faith with Him.

The next step is different for all of us, but whatever that step may be, living with a passion for ministry is the challenge set before us by God Himself. For some, it will mean committing to a community group where you do life together. For others, it will mean stepping out of your comfort zone to minister to your neighbor, or going to the mission field in the city or out of the country. For some, God wants to ignite in you a life of generosity.

LIFE APPLICATION

There is no higher calling than the calling of ministry. You serve the eternal God of the universe and His everlasting kingdom. Many people serve in what is useful today but antiquated tomorrow. Think about those aerospace engineers that work on the booster stage of our trips to outer space. That project takes thousands of men and women and millions of dollars to produce the booster stage of our space rockets that have a lifespan of about two and a half minutes. Those people pour their lives into a project that lasts two and a half minutes before plummeting back into the earth's atmosphere and destroyed by fire. That is an example of millions of things we do that have temporal significance—sometimes lasting no longer than two and half minutes.

Even a doctor, who makes a breakthrough in finding a cure for some dread disease prolonging human life, only prolongs it temporarily because his patients ultimately must die. God appointed it to be so.

But you, a minister of the gospel, deal with matters of eternal value—life and death issues. No wonder we can be passionate about ministry.

I want to close with our ministry leaders sharing their passion for ministry. This is the State of Our Church*! [The leaders come on stage and hold up signs that represent what "their" ministry has a passion for.]*