**Study Notes on Colossians 1:24-2:7**

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NOTE: These notes are not intended to read as an article or well-rounded written work. Rather, this is a collage of different research and resources that will assist in the preparation of a sermon.

**Working Sermon Title**: God’s Secret Plan to Save Your Soul

**Summary of the Passage**: Knowing the person of Christ and the power of the Gospel is the believer’s best protection against deception. In this passage we see the mystery of God revealed as His plan to give us the hope of glory, Christ in us.

**Outline of the passage:**

**Paul’s Service to the Church (1:24-29)**

1. His suffering for them (24)
2. His ministry efforts (25-29)
   1. A stewardship of declaring the Gospel (25-27)
   2. Striving to present everyone complete in Christ (28-29)
3. His care for them (2:1-7)
   1. His concern defined and wishes expressed (1-3)
      1. That they be knit together by love (1-2a)
      2. That they understand God’s plan (2b-3)
   2. Reasons for his concern what to do (4-5)
      1. Guard against theological deception (4-5)
   3. Exhortation to be firm in Christ (6-7)
      1. Continue to grow in Christ (6-7a)
      2. Rejoice and be thankful (7b)

**The Main Point of the Passage:**

**Exegetical Idea**: The idea that we can only be saved by special knowledge is debunked as Paul makes the case that God has always had a secret plan to reconcile people to Himself and had now done so through Christ, our hope of glory.

**Theological Idea**: The plan of God’s redemption was made plain through Christ. Proclaiming this truth will come with suffering, which is also part of His plan.

**Applicational Idea**: Knowing Christ and the power of the gospel is our greatest protection from deception so that we may grow mature in Christ.

**Possible Preaching Outline**:

It’s all worth it: Suffering for Christ Sake is a part of God’s Plan (24-29)

Knowing the person of Christ and the power of the Gospel is the believer’s best protection against deception. (1-2)

Jesus cannot be ignored and adored. (3-4)

To Walk in Him requires growing roots in a firm foundation. (6-7)

**CONTEXT BEFORE AND AFTER THIS PASSAGE:**

BEFORE: The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims that Christ is our creator, sustainer and redeemer. By Him only we find purpose, comfort and acceptance.

AFTER: “In Him” is a growing theme within this book and Paul’s writing (172 times it is used in Pauline literature). The work of Christ in us is made clear in the next passage.

**Exegesis and Commentary:**

**[24] Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,**

In light of the previous passages, it is clear that Paul saw all things as part of God’s plan for His glory. He counted his **sufferings** as a partnership in Christ’s suffering:

**“For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too” (2 Cor 1:5)**

Paul had the understanding that his suffering was part of his ministry to believers. This is a great way to see suffering, especially for those of us that serve the church full-time. Our work for the Lord and the suffering that comes with it is a gift to the saints.

Ministry is going to involve suffering. It will aim at maturity in believers and it is hard work. Paul had the attitude was that Jesus took the blows for Him, so he was willing to take the blows for Christ.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Remember that Paul was writing this letter from Prison, so he was very aware of what it meant to suffer for Christ.

When Paul says that he is **Filling up what is lacking in Christ’s affliction** he is not insinuating that we add anything to Christ’s atonement. Rather, he understood that there would be a predetermined amount of suffering to be endured by God’s people before Christ returned again (see Rev 6:9-11). Therefore, he saw his suffering as adding to the sum total of the suffering needed for God’s will to be fulfilled. We know that Christ foretold of suffering that would have to happen on his behalf for the world to know the truth.

Another way to understand this is to say ***there will be suffering for the sake of Christ and this is all part of God’s plan.*** This is called **Christ’s suffering** because it is on His behalf for His greater purposes.

Paul described this future suffering needed in 2 Cor. 1:8-10:

**[8] For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. [9] Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. [10] He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.**

**(2 Corinthians 1:8-10 ESV)**

Notice the sweet request for prayer and the way that he declares their suffering was so that they would **not rely on themselves but on God who raises from the dead.** This is a great call for anyone facing affliction.

APP: at times I play down suffering spiritually – I never want to be accused of over spiritualizing anything. However, Paul was quick to point out that his pain was for the greater good of the church. That God may be known in his suffering.

**[25] of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,**

Paul was keenly aware that when he was **became a minster** that suffering was a part of that commissioning. He accepted it as a part of the call.

Paul saw his life as a divine **stewardship**. He knew that he was called to serve God and to do anything else would be throwing away what God asked him to use wisely. He used the word *oikonomia* which means “administrator” and was used in the roman world as a title for the one that was over a household. He was administrating what God had given.

In its general sense the term (οἰκονομία and its cognates) occurs frequently in the NT. In the early Church, though the word itself was rarely used, it was widely taught that the Christian ought to regard the holding of property as a trust to be administered on behalf of the needy.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Making the Word of God fully known** was the responsibility Paul felt that he had within the church. I like this; I feel the same.

**[26] the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.**

**The mystery** is referring to the fact that now gentiles are a part of God’s plan for salvation. On the broadest scale, it is the plan that he had to reconcile the world through Jesus Christ. This was a **mystery** to us until it happened. Although there were parts of the mystery that were revealed to the prophets, for the most part this was unknown to the people until Christ was born and lived a faithful life through death and resurrection.

**Revealed to all the saints** was a key phrase to refute what the false prophets were teaching, that special knowledge of God was only revealed to some. Now it is revealed to all people through Jesus Christ.

**[27] To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

The **mystery** that was revealed was the glory of Christ in [you] us, which is the hope of glory. Christ is God Himself and our *elis doxa –* **hope of glory** now richly in our life. He is personally present and assures of a hope or expectation in the future when we will dwell with Him. He does not only reside in Jewish believers, but now is residing in **gentile** believers as well, making His people one **body** unified under the **head** of Christ (cf. Eph. 2:11-22).

Simply stated: Christ’s secret [mysterious] plan was Jesus in you, the holy of Glory.

**[28] Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.**

It was not enough for Paul to simply see converts. He wanted to see them presented complete in Christ, mature and growing in their faith. The idea of **perfect** (Gk. *Mature* could also be translated *perfect*) carries the idea that we will all be presented as perfectly complete in Christ when he returns. Until that time, we are to pursue Christ-likeness and maturity as contrasted to spiritual immaturity as found in Ephesians 4:14.

**[13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.**

**(Ephesians 4:13-14 ESV)**

**[29] For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.**

Paul was giving himself fully to the mission of presenting them complete in Christ. This was not just his human energy but with the spiritual energy and sustenance that Christ was supplying for him, which was **powerfully working within him**.

We must never do anything, but especially striving for spiritual maturity, without the power of Christ in us working **powerfully.** This is the only ample source of strength to help us fight the powers of darkness and see lives transformed.

**2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face**,

Here me mentioned another church, group of believers in Laodicea. That was a larger city, also on the trade route, about 9 miles away to the northwest. Because these two cities were so close it is presumable that the two Christian churches had a relationship. They also probably shared a relationship with the church at Hierapolis (4:13). All of these towns were in the Lycus valley along the Lycus river.

Later, in Revelation, Jesus called out Laodicea for the lukewarm-ness (Rev. 3:14-22).

It is likely that Paul hoped this letter would make its way to Laodicea too as he was probably counting on the fact that the false teachers were having influence on that church too. He was having a **great struggle** in prayer and energy hoping that they would stay faithful to Christ. This can also be translated as ***“my deep concern for you…”.***

**Struggling** can also be understood as **agonizing** to the point of exhaustion. Yet it was energized by Christ’s power.

We are sure that he had never been to either of these churches because he states that he has not **seen them face-to-face.** Most likely these churches were planted by converts that went back from Ephesus in Acts 19:10.

**[2] that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ**,

**The knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ** was a direct statement that there is no other mystery to be revealed to only specially gifted people. This is flying in the face of the false prophets who claimed a special knowledge of God’s mysteries. Christ had been revealed and this was God’s mysterious plan, now for all people.

**[3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**.

Christ, being the exact imprint of God (Acts 17:27) embodies all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

**[4] I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments**.

The **plausible arguments** Paul was referring to was Gnosticism. That is that they needed to have special knowledge of God to gain salvation. This heresy undermined Christianity in several ways:

1. It instead that there was secret knowledge that most believers in Christ couldn’t access.
2. It taught that the body was evil.
3. It taught that Christ was just a human, not divine, because God would not take on a body. Not true: Christ was God and man.

Gnosticism was on the rise in Paul’s time. It became popular in the second century. People who didn’t know the truth of God’s Word well could be easily seduced into believing this false teaching. The lesson for us is that we must stay grounded or we too will be easily swayed by false teaching.

Paul didn’t want them to be swayed by smooth words or convincing (possible) arguments. He wanted them to be presented **complete in Christ.** He was reminding them now of there foundations of faith. Though the philosophy may sound good (Plausible) they had everything they needed in the revelation of Christ (2:8-10; 2:3).

**[5] For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ**.

Because two people believe in Christ, they are presumably together **in spirit.** Geography didn’t keep the hearts of Paul and the Colossians from being knit together in Christ’s.

Two military words are used here to exhort the Colossians – **good order** and **firmness**. The Colossians were to be like troops drawn up in a battle formation, standing firm and resisting the enemy.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**[6] Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him**,

He is calling them back to their foundation in Christ Jesus the Lord. **Walk in Him** is using the Jewish metaphor to live a life of steadfastness in Him.

Giving your life to Christ begins at salvation but is a continual submission to His leadership. This results in being **established in faith, rooted** and **built up.** This is a great picture of being sustained by Christ (cf. 1:19-23).

In *A Joyful Christian*, C.S. Lewis said that we see three rations to Christ in the Gospels: Hatred – Terror – Adoration. He said, “There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

When we follow Him, it is an all-out surrender and adoration of Him as Lord of our life. It is often the good things in life that nudge Christ aside in our life. Our ministry or even our activity in the church can move aside Christ from His rightful place in our life. When we make Jesus stand beside or behind things in our life, we are giving him “mild approval”.

**[7] rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving**.

He uses the image of being **rooted** like a try or being **built up** like a building. This is to say, do not be swayed by the false teaching they were hearing.

We live out our **established faith**, **walking in Him**, by:

1. Committing to be submitted/surrendered to His will (Romans 12:1-2)
2. Seeking to learn from Him, His life and his teaching (cf. 3:16)
3. Recognizing the Holy Spirit’s power working in us (Acts 1:8; Gal 5:22)

John 15 comes to mind here when then word **rooted** is used. As a plant draws nourishment from the ground (or the branch from the vine) we too draw out life-giving power from Christ. When Christ is our strength, we are not bound by human boundaries.

We are to **abound in thanksgiving** because we cannot stay rooted in our own strength but need to work of God to sustain us and guide us away from disaster.

1. Holman new testament commentary [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cross, F. L., & Livingstone, E. A. (Eds.). (2005). In *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed. rev., p. 1553). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ESV Study Bible [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *The Joyful Christian*, C.S. Lewis, New York: MacMillan Publishing Co.; 1977, 72, 74 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)